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The Zohar is a Forgery

By Reuben Hayat

Introduction

The following is the main text of the book HaMafteah, which I wrote in my youth. Now I am much older, and I am finally translating it into English (with the help of Grok). I wrote the book long ago, and I called it, “The Key” because its introduction centers around the concept that we must accept the truth from ANYBODY, regardless of fame or status. This is, indeed, a very important principle, and the introduction was translated separately; if there's interest, I'll publish that as well. It is rather long.

Here you will find a collection of proofs/rebuttals regarding the origins of the Zohar (the main book and source of the so-called Kabbalah) and related matters of interest.

Defenders of the antiquity of the Zohar have incorporated this belief into their core tenets of faith. This is why they so desperately defend it, resorting to extreme, and absurd, arguments to that end. This human defect manifests itself in many other areas. My hope is that you find this phenomenon, practiced over the course of centuries, interesting and entertaining.

I spent a long time researching this topic, poring over hoary tomes at Hebrew University and elsewhere, searching for obscure books that were no longer in print, photocopying some whose owners didn't want to lend me their copies. This research was quite controversial, to say the least. It almost cost me my marriage and made me enemies. The person who first brought the forgery of the Zohar to my attention was none other than Ben Zion Cohen – who authored the previous Hebrew book that I translated (in part).

Several books were composed in defense of the Zohar. From the perspective of Orthodox Jewry, these books are not meant to be read, but to be pointed to. If somebody were to raise doubts about the origin of the Zohar, a rabbi needn't do any research, or have any expertise, to respond. All he has to do is use the “Thick Book Method;” he points to a thick book, which he never read, and tells the troublesome fellow that the matter has been dealt with – by men far more knowledgeable and

intelligent than him. The Thick Book Method is not restricted to religious circles. It is a common, and lazy, tactic to defend the status quo in various human societies.

I actually did read these books. I read them from cover to cover, and I checked their sources. Not surprisingly, it turned out that none of them can be taken seriously; the authors were mostly either intentionally deceptive, grossly ignorant or both. Some wrote what they believed was required of them, all the while knowing the truth – and hinting at it in subtle ways.

As mentioned, the Zohar is the most important source for the Kabbalah. It became known in Medieval times and was attributed to the great sage of the Mishnah, Ribbi Shimon ben Yohai (“Rishbi” for short), who lived in the Land of Israel during the second century.

Here are some terms that will help you understand this book:

Zogoth (sing. Zog): “Pairs.” Sets of two authorities, in each generation, who had different approaches to Jewish law. The most famous of these were Hillel and Shamai. About 150 BCE. to about 10 CE.

Tanna (pl. *tannaim*): Sages of the Mishnah who lived from about 10 CE to 220 CE in the Land of Israel.

Amura (pl. *amuraim*): Sages of the Gemara who lived from about 220 CE. to 500 CE in Babylon and up to around 400 CE in the Land of Israel. The ones in Babylon composed the Babylonian Talmud (commentaries on the Mishnah) and the ones in the Land of Israel composed the Jerusalem Talmud.

Savura (pl. *savuraim*): Sages of the transitional period of about 500 CE to 600 CE in Babylon when the Talmud had its final editing and some later amendments.

Mishnah, Gemara, Talmud: A Mishnah is a brief interpretational account, usually involving quotes, about Jewish law. It is an oral tradition that was written in Hebrew in ancient times in the Land of Israel. There are six orders of the Mishnah. Each order is further divided into tractates. The *Gemara* is a more lengthily Aramaic commentary on the Mishnah; There are two versions, the Babylonian *Gemara* and the Jerusalem (Yerushlami) *Gemara*, the latter being from the Land of Israel. Each has separate sets of sages and different dialects of Aramaic. The *Talmud* is the sum total of the Mishnah and the *Gemara*. We refer to the Babylonian Talmud and the Yerushlami Talmud.

Toseftah (pl. *Toseftoth*): A supplement to the Mishnah from slightly after the Mishnaic period. A Toseftah tends to be longer than the Mishnah and it is also in Hebrew.

Baraithah (pl. *Baraithoth*): Similar to a Mishnah, but with less authority – often because of dubious authenticity. The name comes from the Aramaic word “*Bara*,” which means “outside,” since it is outside the Mishnah.

Midrash/Aggada (sometimes “*Haggadah*“): The broad term for the non-legal material in rabbinic literature. It includes stories, legends, parables, historical anecdotes, ethical teachings, theological reflections, maxims, and imaginative expansions of biblical narratives. Aggadah appears throughout the Talmuds and in dedicated Midrashic collections. It is traditionally contrasted with *Halakhah* (Jewish law).

Targum: The word literally means “translation.” In traditional Judaism, it refers to the classical Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible. Specifically:

- (1). Targum Onkelos on the Torah (2nd century CE)
- (2). Targum Jonathan on the Prophets (about the first century BCE to the first century CE).

They originated in the period when Aramaic was the everyday language of many Jews and were recited in the synagogue alongside the Hebrew text. Beyond being literal translations, they often include brief explanatory or midrashic expansions. They remain authoritative sources for understanding the plain sense of Scripture and are frequently cited by later commentators.

Masorah/Masoretes: The body of tradition that pertains to vocalizations, cantillations and anything else connected to the reading of Scripture. Jewish scholars who codified all this are called “*Masoretes*” or “Masters of *Masorah*.” They thrived roughly in the 6th to the 11th centuries. The most influential school of *Masoretes* was in Tiberias, the Land of Israel, but there was also a Babylonian *Masoretic* school. Their finished work, which we depend upon today, is called the *Masoretic Text*.

Halakhah: The body of Jewish religious law, based on the Talmud. Only a small portion of the Talmud (usually, the Babylonian version) is considered to be *Halakhah*. The word means “path.”

Gaon (pl. *geonim*): Heads of the academies of Sura and Pumbedita in Babylon from around 600 CE. to 1040 CE. Rav ‘Amram Gaon, Rav Sa’adia Gaon, Rav Sherira Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon (d. 1038) are the best-known. The term is sometimes used informally for later rabbis to show great respect, such as “The Vilna Gaon.”

Rishbi – Acronym for “Ribbi Shim’on ben (or “bar”) Yoḥai” to whom the Zohar is falsely attributed.

Rishon (pl. *Rishonim*): Rabbis who lived from around 1050 CE to 1500 CE.

Tosafoth: Medieval commentaries on the Talmud written mainly by the *Tosafists* — French and German scholars of the 12th–13th centuries.

In traditional Judaism, there is a hierarchy of generations, with the earlier authorities being of higher status than the more recent ones. Hence, an *amora* cannot disagree with a *tanna*; he can only interpret the words of the *tanna* and decide which *tanna*’s opinion is applicable to practical Jewish law (when there are disputes among them). Technically, a modern authority may disagree with a *Rishon*, but this is not done in Orthodox circles. If a modern authority finds the opinion of a *Rishon* to be shocking or clearly mistaken, he will politely state that “it is not applicable to Jewish law” or that “we follow the opinion of another *Rishon*.” Deference is the rule, even when it is obvious that the *Rishon* is wrong. In practical terms, the words of a *tanna* or *amora* are respected almost as if they were written in the Torah.

This is why the Zohar was attributed to a *tanna*; nobody would dispute it, nobody could challenge it, and nobody could override it. The cloak of esoterica (concepts that are so lofty that our mortal minds cannot fully understand them) gave it an even higher status. Hence, only the Zohar is referred to as “The Holy...”. Even when an esoteric (i.e. “Kabbalistic”) concept is so clearly contrary to traditional Judaism, or so absurd that it should be worthy of ridicule, religious Jews will attribute the defect to their own limited understanding and defer to the Kabbalah’s higher authority (“secrets” that we can neither understand, nor reject).

In practical terms, this amounts to a rejection of our own intellect, or at least its demotion to secondary status, subject to the whims of some Medieval mystics. This can lead to much harm – even to the point of suicide, insanity and a devotion to absurd rituals. Though the same can be said of religion in general, the Kabbalah takes it to a different level. It should be noted that “The Kabbalah” is not a monolithic school of thought. There have been several versions of the Kabbalah, some worse than others. All of them, to the best of my knowledge, take great inspiration from the Zohar.

Regarding transliterations, I leaned toward the Yemenite reading of Hebrew/Aramaic, but not to the point where it would be cumbersome. I also relied, for the most part, upon traditional Yemenite vocalization. I did this partly because the Yemenite Hebrew/Aramaic traditions are typically the most authentic, and partly out of respect for certain Yemenite authorities.

Not all editions of the Zohar are equal. Since it was first printed in 1558-1560, it has been subject to censorship by Christian authorities, revisions done in good faith and the inclusion/exclusion of addenda.

Not only was the Zohar a forgery, but it is largely contrary to traditional Judaism. I am not claiming that everything within the Zohar is false, only that it has no religious authority. Rather, it is a historic curiosity. A collection of books written in Medieval Spain, for either money or fame. If you find this distasteful, I am not to blame.

The Book *Mitpahath Sefarim*

R. Ya'aqov Emden (18th century Germany), in his book *Mitpahath Sefarim* ("The Book-Cover"), lists two kinds of problems: a) Problems that come from the actual ideas and methods that were common in later generations. b) Problems of language and expressions that appear in the Zohar and that, in his opinion, do not belong to the time of the *tannaim* or even to the time of the *amuraim*. Because my purpose is only to examine the book itself, I have not dwelt on the first type of problem much. I have collected all of Emden's claims that belong to the second kind — the ones that look like solid proofs — and these are the ones that appear in *Mitpahath Sefarim* as completely decisive. I have added a few new comments of my own, and in a few places, I have cited a slightly different version of the wording that I found in another source. I then copied the pages from the Livorno printing (a more recent, corrected, edition). Quoted text is from the Zohar and associated works. Plain text, in this chapter, is the words of R. Ya'aqov Emdin, unless otherwise noted. Text in parentheses is my own except for sources that the original authors included.

(1). Page 8. *"From this, they called a synagogue esnoga." In Sephardic Hebrew a synagogue is called beit kneset – house of assembly. (The author is pointing out that the word "esnoga" is Spanish, a language that didn't exist in the time of Rishbi. "Rishbi" is short for "Ribbi Shim'on ben Yohai, to whom the Zohar is falsely attributed). (Zohar III 282a).*

(2). Page 10. *"Creation, attack, and need, etc." This comes from the explanations of the Mishnah that appear in the introduction to the Talmud by R. Shemuel Hannagid. He was a Spanish scholar, a friend or student of Rabbeinu Hananel, from the first generation of the later rabbis (of Medieval times – the copyist). Most of these sections are mentioned here only to explain them according to the esoteric teachings. (Tiqqune Zohar 16a).*

(3). Page 13. *"The hidden precept — and from this branch, it split into two other nations, who are close in unity to Israel." It seems clear to me that this is talking about two nations — Edom (Christianity) and Ishmael (Islam) —*

and it says this in reference to people who believe in the Torah of Moses... Behold, you can plainly see that in the days of the author of the Zohar the religion of Ishmael already existed in the world... (Islam was invented in the 7th century – the copyist) because before that time all the Ishmaelites were complete idol-worshippers, like all the other nations of the world. (Zohar I 13a).

(4). Page 17 *“Have they, according to her cry, which has come to Me, committed destruction? (Genesis 18:21).” to whom did God say this? If it was to the angels, we have not seen them... therefore, it was directed at Abraham...” This statement is shocking and strange. It goes against the plain meaning of the verse and against its context. In this book of the Zohar, without any doubt, he piles words upon words without thought, to say that left is right... but this author doesn’t realize what a fool he is making of himself, and he is oblivious to the fact that this verse is not a command, but it is past tense. (Zohar I 105b).*

Even though the style of the Zohar is often confusing, and it does look like the author of the Zohar thought this verse is a command... it’s not much of an issue. The only point here, which R. Ya’aqov Emdin apparently did not notice, is the confusion between the vowels Qomeṣ and Pataḥ — and that implies that the book was written in the Middle Ages, specifically in Spain whose traditional reading of Hebrew did not make this distinction.

(5). Page 19. *“Ezra said, ‘Remember me, O my God, for good.’” We do not find in Scripture that Ezra said this, but rather Nehemia said it, and because the book of Nehemiah is not named after him, but is included in the Book of Ezra, this is not good enough reason to attribute the quote to somebody else, for he brings salvation to the world. (Zohar I 96b).*

(6). Page 20. *“Ribbi Hiya and Ribbi Yose were sitting before Rishbi. Ribbi Hiya said: We have learned that any dream that is not like a letter is not interpreted.” This is a statement of Rav Hisda, an amura of the Babylonian Talmud. And what he wrote further on — “Even though prophecy is not permitted, scholars are preferable to prophets” — is a statement of Ameimar. It is not reasonable that early tannaim would say this in his name. That is not the way of the Talmudic sages; they always attribute a saying to the one who said it, even when there is doubt about the exact wording of the text. (Zohar I 163b).*

(7). Page 21. *“That this is what was said to Uba Tamia... .” This wording is the language of the Gemara in the chapter “The Seer,” where Rav Qatina (an amura) said it in the time of Rav and Shemuel. From here it is also clear that the names of tannaim mentioned here are not real tannaim. It is impossible that they spoke of something that only happened much later, in the days of the later Babylonian amuraim and quoting the very last of the amuraim... This is a problem – unless we say that the souls of the tannaim appeared in a later generation to the author of the Zohar. (Zohar II 19b).*

(8). Page 21. *“Ezehu Meqoman” in the portion of “Sau.” (“Where is its place”) etc. It is known that the liturgical piece “Ezehu Meqoman” together with the section of the sacrifices comes from Rav ‘Amram Gaon (9th century CE). He arranged and edited this, and there is no hint of it in the Talmud... one of the last geonim — he is the one who instituted it. (Zohar I, additional notes, paragraph 50).*

(9). Page 23. *“I found this in the secret of the blowing (of the ram’s horn) of Rav in Babylon.” This too is reliable testimony about this holy composition, that it does not belong to Rishbi the tanna (Rav was the first generation of the amuraim, and he lived later). (Zohar II 52a).*

(10) Page 25. *“They came and asked Rav Hamnuna Saba... .” This is surprising, because according to what appears in the Zohar in several places, he lived in the same generation as Rishbi. And it also appears that even Rishbi the tanna was not alive at the time of the destruction of the Temple, because in the days of Ribbi Yehuda the Temple was destroyed, and Ribbi Yehuda and Ribbi Yose were students of Ribbi Yohanan ben Zakai. And Ribbi ‘Aqiva their teacher is the one whose Mishnah “Whoever has studied Torah...” belongs to Rishbi and his colleagues the tannaim. If so, it is far-fetched that he saw the Temple standing. And at the time they were close, as is seen here, even though Rav Hamnuna Saba is mentioned several times in the Talmud as a student of Rav. And at the end of chapter “The Great Heart” (Baba Mesia 85a) he is called a student of a student of Rav. Also, at the time of the Temple they were not yet using the title “Rav” at all, and Ribbi Yehuda’s place was in Sippori, in the region of Ashur, which is close to Babylon, and he was called by the title Ribbi Kahana, and in his days the event mentioned here happened, as is seen in Rosh Hashanah and Pesahim. (Zohar II 24a).*

(11). Page 26. *“And Ribbi Ya’aqov bar Idi was standing with him.” He lived in the time of Ribbi Yohanan and Resh Laqish (amuraim). (Zohar II 122b).*

(12). Page 26. *“Rav Safra.” It is far-fetched that he lived in the days of Rishbi the tanna. (Zohar II 165b).*

(13). Page 27. *“Tannaim and amuraim.” From this, it is very clear that this holy composition is a later work, mixed together. Also, it was composed at a time when the amuraim were known in the world, as I have proven and shown in several places with the ultimate clarity. (Zohar III 142b, and many more places).*

(14). Page 27. *“And in the book of Rav Hamnuna Saba, it explains very well, that the entire inhabited world rotates as a sphere like a ball.” This whole subject is according to the style of the later scientists, not according to the style of the sages of the Talmud. (The Talmudic sages believed that the Earth is flat, as I demonstrate on pages 65 and 66). (Zohar III 10a).*

(15). Page 28. *“Ribbi Shamlai.” Ribbi Shamlai is not found anywhere in the six orders of the Mishnah. There was only one and there were no others by that name, and he is Ribbi Shamlai who lived in the days of Ribbi Yohanan the amura, who came to learn before him... And he was the one who heard the words of Yehuda haNasi, and from this it sounds as if he lived in the time of Rishbi — this is a surprising thing. (Zohar III 75b).*

(16). Page 30. *“They also mentioned both of them, Rav Yeba and Rav Hamnuna Saba.” They were both students of Rav (a later amura). And how is it possible that Rishbi and his son, tannaim, quote the words of amuraim? (Zohar III 155b).*

(17). Page 30. *“When the Holy One is in a dispute among the members of the academy, and they say, ‘Who will decide? Behold, it was So-and-so, who decided the matter.’ This hints at what is written at the beginning of chapter ‘The Workers,’ in The Story of Rabba. (Baba Meşia 83b) it is known that it is from the third generation of amuraim. (Zohar III 185b).*

(18). Page 30. *“And even so, Ribbi El’azar ben Pedath pushed him away... .” He is an amura, a student of Rav and Shemuel, and this is also found in the Gemara in chapter “My Pious Ones.” (Zohar III 216b).*

(19). Page 30. *“In the exile of Ishmael.” From this it becomes clear that the author of Ra’aya Mehemna lived after the amuraim. (He refers to the Islamic expansion). (Zohar III 142b).*

(20). Page 31. *“And it is not the way of the world for geonim to hide words.” This is a clear and strong proof about the composition of Ra’aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim, that they were written in a later generation, at a time when it was already customary to use the title “geonim,” which is after the time of the Talmud and the amuraim. (Zohar III 243a, Tiqqunim, page 70).*

(21). Page 31. *“He took revenge from Ishmael” And so, he said in the next line. This too testifies to the truth of what we have said several times (that it refers to the Islamic expansions), and so on at length. (Zohar III 246b).*

(22). Page 31. *“The remembering soul, the thinking soul, and the commanding soul, which are three brains” These expressions are from the later naturalists, as is well known. (Tiqqune Zohar 126a).*

(23). Page 31. *“It was called Yosef Shida.” This is found at the beginning of chapter “The Oath,” that he studied with Ribbi Hiya and Rabbah, who were amuraim. (Zohar III 259a).*

(24). Page 31. *“And he said, I retract.” This expression is only found among the amuraim. (Zohar III 264a).*

(25). Page 31. *“And because of this, they enacted to recite Kol Nidre.” This enactment was from some of the later, unqualified, geonim, because the last of the geonim in time, and the first in greatness, was Rav Hai Gaon, who abolished this and instructed that it not be recited, as is explained in Tur Oraḥ Haim (section 619). (Zohar III 265a).*

(26). Page 31. *“As it is written that everything in heaven and on Earth, and Targum Yonatan son of Uzziel.” It is known what our rabbi, the Rosh (R. Asher ben Yehiel c. 1250–1327), said, that Yonatan son of ‘Uzziel did not translate the Writings. (Zohar III 267a).*

(27). Page 31. *“And the masters of the Mishnah taught from the testimony of the time of hameṣ to the testimony of the searches of the witnesses.” This is from a dialogue between Abbaye and Rava that we see here; it is from the period of the Gemara and it is being attributed to the period of the Mishnah, etc. (Zohar III 275a).*

(28). Page 31. *“The poor one who is there with the sign of the Talmudic tractates ‘Eruvin, Niddah and Yevamoth (acronym ANI, which means poor).” He built an “esoteric secret” upon a play of words that is commonly used*

among those who study the Talmud in yeshiva... Is it possible that words like these came from the mouth of a tanna? How much more so that they came from the mouth of Moses our teacher or from the rest of the souls of the hidden world. (Zohar III 275b).

(29). Page 32. *“In the later Haggadah of Rabbah bar bar Hana.” Who is the one who arranged this and did not notice that it is impossible that this came from the mouth of Rishbi, from his soul — I do not know. (This refers to a series of tall tales from an amura who lived in the second half of the 3rd century. Rishbi lived in the 2nd century). (Tiqqune Zohar 2b).*

(30). Page 32. *And I saw the glory of the Creator.” This is the language of the Semag (R. Moses ben Jacob of Coucy, 13th century France). (Tiqqune Zohar 5a).*

(31). Page 32. *“Furthermore, the masters of grammar established the vowel ‘Qomes,’ which is a long vowel.” This language also testifies with clear evidence that this composition does not belong to Rishbi the tanna. It is well known that the Hebrew Grammarians were very late, and not even close to the days of the tannaim. Even among the amuraim and geonim, there is no mention of them. Rather, these arose and came into being after the geonim, in the West, the first one who brought out the wisdom of precise language being Ribbi Yehuda Hayyug of Fez. (Tiqqune Zohar 7b).*

(32). Page 32. *And everything written in this book of the Zohar regarding the details of tefillin is taken from the Midrash Rabbah. (the earliest parts were composed around the 5th century).*

(33). Page 32. *“And they are included in the 248 [words] of the Reading of Shema’, which are 248 together with ‘El Melech Ne’eman’ (‘God, faithful King’). And because they do not pause between the words, they enacted that the prayer leader should repeat ‘Hashem Eloheichem Emeth’” (Tiqqune Zohar 25b).*

Who would not realize that these are not the words of a tanna, that he cited a stringency of later tradition... Why would the author of Tiqqunim defer to a later authority unless he, himself, was even later, and he copied from the books of legal authorities that he happened to come across? He was well versed about their opinions (see Tur Oraḥ Haim section 61)... And he did this often, for example with the two pairs of tefillin, and likewise with the two

blessings of the tefillin, that he took doubts of legal authorities and attributed to them esoteric secrets, as is his habit in many places.

(34). Page 32. *“And because of this the masters of the Mishnah established it: honor your women, etc.” Rava is the one who said this to the later scholars. (Tiqqune Zohar 32b, 126b).*

(35). Page 32. *“And this is the secret of potential to action.” This is the language of the (later) philosophers among our people. (Tiqqune Zohar 9b).*

(36). Page 32. *“And because of this it is forbidden to pray toward the West.” Look, besides the fact that this contradicts the opinion of the Talmudic Sages... And Ribbi Shimon said to his attendant, “they may be set up toward any direction except the East.” (Tiqqune Zohar 56b).*

(37). Page 33. *“And to designate for them the middle path.” He copied this from the laws of the sanctification of the new moon of Maimonides (R. Moshe ben Maimon 12th century), because we do not find any hint of this from the sages of the Talmud. (Tiqqune Zohar 59a).*

(38). Page 33. *“But Ribbi Meir, he ate the inside and discarded the peel,” These are the words of an amura — Rav. (Tiqqune Zohar 69a).*

(39). Page 33. *“And in the exile we have only four.” Ribbi Yoḥanan is the one who said this (in the Gemara – citation needed). (Tiqqune Zohar 85a).*

(40). Page 33. *“And this is Ribbi Pedath (and Ribbi El’azar son of Pedath, may his memory be a blessing).” Behold, it’s clear that he’s quoting the words of an amura who lived several generations after Rishbi the tanna. (Zohar III 216b).*

(41). Page 34. *He explains the names of the vowel points according to esoteric secrets (and also in the introduction of this book) and also the names of the cantillation notes (also called tropes)... and even though this is certainly a legitimate Jewish tradition... in any case, these vowel points are not called by these names, and they were not known to either the tannaim or to the amuraim. They were not used at all by the Talmudic sages. Therefore, we must not attribute these explanations to Rishbi the tanna.*

(42). Page 34. *“And the Cause of causes.” (many times throughout the Zohar). This term is also found in the introduction to the Zohar. And the*

philosophers (starting in Medieval times) among our people used it; we do not find it among the Talmudic rabbis, not in the Mishnah, not in the Gemara, and not in the Midrashim.

(43). Page 34. “And your mnemonic is ‘petuhei hotam’ (‘engravings of a signet’).” This is a common expression among the (later) grammarians, who gave it as a sign for the five long vowels — we do not find it elsewhere. (Tiqqune Zohar 135b).

(44). Page 34. “The speaking form, the growing form, the intellectual form.” This is the language of the outsiders (non-Jewish or later philosophers), not the language of the Talmudic Sages — even if it were mentioned by a tanna or amura, they themselves regarded it as secular. (Zohar Hadash I 11b).

(45). Page 34. “The Earth stood in its strength and its nature.” The word “its nature” (טבעה *tiv’ah*) is common in the mouths of the philosophers and the natural scientists — it is not found in the words of our Sages. (Zohar Hadash I 37b).

(46). Page 34. “Esau and Ishmael... that they are all in tranquility,” “that they will be subjugated by their children in exile.” The kingdom of Ishmael (Islam) had not yet become famous or widespread in the days of the tannaim and amuraim, because at that time it was still a lowly, small, and weak kingdom. (Tiqqunim 30a, 52b).

(47). Page 35. “The masters of the Jerusalem Talmud, etc., and concerning the testimony — this is the Jerusalem Talmud.” This, too, is clear proof that it was composed after the Talmud. (Tiqqunim 9a, Zohar Hadash I 49b).

(48). Page 35. “By this name Rabbah was an uprooter of mountains.” This matter is at the end of tractate Horayoth. This, too, Rishbi certainly did not say. (Tiqqunei Zohar Hadash 65b).

(49) Page 35. “A donkey carrying books.” This expression is not found in any book in the world except in Hovoth HaLevavoth (“Duties of the Heart” composed in the late 11th century by R. Bahya ibn Paquda), in the chapter of the Service of God. And its author, of blessed memory, was a Spanish author. (Zohar Hadash II 69b).

(50). Page 35. “And because these of the later generation are not experts, they instituted two pairs of tefillin.” Here too is decisive proof about the

composition of the Tiqqune Zohar, that it is among the very latest works. (Tiqqune Zohar Hadash 69b).

(51). Page 35. "That it was a worn vessel of the rabbis." This is the language of the Gemara at the beginning of Berakhot; Rava said it. (Zohar II 113b).

(52) Page 35. "And they established that whoever occupies himself with the Gemara is as if he occupied himself with everything." These are the words of Rabbenu Tam in the Tosafoth (in 'Avodah Zarah 19b. 12th century France) on the statement "A person should always divide his years into three." (Zohar Hadash II 78b).

(53). Page 93. For the sake of the truth, which I love more than all Earthly treasures, and all the vanities in the world, I will not withhold the words of one holy man who speaks about the discovery of the Zohar and its origin, which he learned from the pious scholar, the author of the book Yuhasin, in the name of the great Kabbalist Rabbi Y^ushaq of Acre, of blessed memory...

In the year 1293 Ribbi Moshe de Leon lived in Avila at that time. And in order that this can be told to the end of time, I will inform you what I found written, that Ribbi Y^ushaq of Acre, went to investigate the book of the Zohar, because it appeared that its text was fantastic, that it came from a higher source, and that it was in the language of the Jerusalem Talmud. It seemed that it is words of Kabbalah and truth, but the parts that were written in Hebrew were forged. He said: I asked the students who had the book of the Zohar in their possession, 'From whom did it come to them?' and I did not find their accounts to be consistent.

There is someone who said that the Rambam found it in the Land of Israel and sent it to Catalonia, and it found its way to Aragon, and it fell into the hands of Ribbi Moshe de Leon. And there are those who say that we never heard that it was a composition of Rishbi, only that Ribbi Moses knew the name of the author, and from his own initiative, he would write wonderful things, and in order to get a high price for them, he attributed it to a great man, which is Rishbi and his son Ribbi El'azar and his colleagues. And I came to Guadalajara and there I found Ribbi Moses of Leon. And he swore to me that the book was written by Ribbi Shimon ben Yo^hai and that it is in his house in Avila, and he will show it to me when I got there. And when he returned to his house he died in Arévalo. And I came to the city of Avila and I found there an old scholar whose name was Ribbi David Rapan, his relative. And I found favor in his eyes, and I made him swear to tell me if he knew

the authenticity of the book of the Zohar, whether it is authentic or not. And the scholar said that it has now become clear to him with certainty that Ribbi Moshe is the writer, and he would attribute it (to Rishbi), and the reason he knows this is because Ribbi Moshe, the aforementioned, was writing esoteric secrets and wonders for rich people who were in that kingdom. And he would take from them many gifts — gold and silver. And that one day, everything that was in his possession was scattered. Until the day of his death nothing remained for him, not even a penny. His wife and his sons were in hunger and thirst and nakedness and lacking everything.

And when I heard of his death, I arose (and I went) to Rabbi Yosef of Avila, who was a great rich man, and he had taken a large sum of money from (R. Moshe) when he was still alive. And I said to him: “Now, here is a good opportunity; give a gift for a great book.” And he immediately sent a beautiful gift to R. Moshe’s widow, by way of his wife. And this is what he did, and he sent gifts in the hand of his wife to the wife of Rabbi Moshe, of blessed memory. And the widow of Ribbi Moshe, of blessed memory swore: “He never had such a book, and the writings were from his own mind and imagination. And I asked my husband, why are you attributing your research to another scholar? Is it not better for you to tell them that this is your own work, and they will honor you, and they will give you more gifts for it? And my husband answered me: ‘If I were to say that they are from my own mind, they would not pay attention to them at all, and they would not give me gifts for them. Therefore, I am attributing them to Rishbi and his colleagues.’” And after I spoke with her in this way, I found her words correct. These are the things that I found from the old scholar Ribbi David.

And I traveled from Avila and I came to Guadalajara. And I found there a wonderful scholar whose name is Rabbi Joseph HaLewi son of Ribbi Todros the Kabbalist. And I questioned him about what he knew concerning the book of the Zohar. And he said to me: “Know in truth that the true Zohar was in the possession of Ribbi Moshe of blessed memory. The book of the Zohar is authentic, and the reason I know this is because he used to give me booklets, and I, in order to test this doubt, took from him one booklet, from among the booklets. And I said to him that the booklet was lost from me, that he should give me a replacement.” And he said to me: “Show me the end of the previous booklet and the beginning of the next one.” He wrote the (missing) booklet, and I saw that there was no difference between them at all, not even one letter. They were the same language and identical words. It was a great test. After this I came to Toledo, and they told me that the test of Ribbi Yosef HaLewi is not a good test, that perhaps he was writing from his own imagination, and he kept the originals for himself, and he was

supporting himself from his own work. And after that, from among those pamphlets that were in his house, he was writing for others.

General Statements and Conclusions by R. Ya'aqov Emden

Page 3. Many things from very late authors have been absorbed in this book, even though, aside from myself, others have not noticed it.

Page 8. Because we have found in it many books that attribute themselves to an earlier source, even though they were composed only in a later generation... so it is in the matter of the composition of the book of the Zohar.

Page 12. That the books of R. Yish'aq of Acre and the Tiqqunim of the Zohar are one composition (this is certainly one language and identical words... and their language is the same).

Page 12. The authors of (Ra'aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim) are from the works of the later Kabbalists who composed many things. If it was R. Moshe DeLeon, as suspected, this is according to a lot of evidence, and the probability that he named his work Ra'aya Mehemna ("faithful shepherd," a reference to Moses) after himself. In any event, there is suspicion of this, and it is not a trivial matter, and if so, who could oblige us to accept, as true esoteric secrets, these things if he came up with them of his own accord?

Page 36. However, that all the rest of the book is very sacred without doubt... that it is all attributed to Rishbi — would that it were justified in some of it, for I truly have a divided heart about this, and I cannot believe with certainty that any of it is from the tanna who is known by the name Rishbi, in the entire Talmud, as we have already written above, because it is not so. In any event, also the main things that are in it, and the things that appear more true and more fitting to attribute them to him in the first place, they are based on the names Rav Hamnuna Saba and Rav Yeba Saba, as appears in several strategic places that he quotes their words in his name, especially in the introduction of the Zohar and in the Idrot and in Saba deMishpatim and in many other places. And Rishbi of the Zohar is the one who quotes Ribbi Hamnuna Saba and Ribbi Yeba Saba, and also Ribbi El'azar his son says many things in their name. Not only that, but he also quotes the son of Ribbi Hamnuna Saba, who had already passed away to his heavenly reward, they quoted deep secrets in his name as is known (see the

introduction of the Zohar, 7a). And not only from his son, but even from his grandson (as the Ra'aya Mehemna wrote in the portion of Wayehi).

They even quote the son of Rav Safra (Terumah 169b) and Rav Safra himself was a later amura, and he is not a tanna at all, and there is no doubt in this, that Ribbi Hamnuna Saba and Ribbi Yeba Saba were amuraim and they are known in the Talmud. They were students of Rav (therefore, we are forced to admit that this is not the Ribbi Abba who is mentioned in the Zohar, even though many believe him to be the same one). The real Rishbi preceded them by several generations, and he died before our holy teacher (Rabenu haQadosh) – who was his student who learned from him. (Rabenu haQadosh) lived to a ripe old age that until after Rishbi, and Rav learned from Rabenu haQadosh, and lived many years after him, and the students of Rav, Ribbi Hamnuna Saba and Ribbi Yeba Saba of blessed memory, buried him, as is mentioned in chapter “How much” and in chapter “The owners.”

The entire chain of these generations is explained in the Talmud. And how, if so, can Rishbi say, and even Ribbi Eliezer, his son, things from Ribbi Hamnuna Saba and his son and his grandson, after they already passed away... contradictory things? This is something that has no basis in truth. Also, Rishbi the tanna, he lived only in the Land of Israel, and these amuraim are known and established in Babylon (as is explained in the Talmud), and so in the book of the Zohar itself it is explained in the portion Wayehi 85a, Rishbi said: “These Babylonians whose speech is stammering,” etc. They knew the praise of Rav Hamnuna Saba because he lived among them. Check there carefully, for there it is explained that Rishbi was in Babylon, and also the colleagues of the Rishbi of the book of the Zohar were found there, like Ribbi Yehudah who was in Mata Mehasia (see Niddah 70a) known to be in Babylon, and see the end of the portion of Lekh Lekha (72b). We must also conclude that Ribbi Abba was found in the village of Tarsha, and it is explained in the hidden Midrash that the village of Tarsha is Mata Mehasia — and they are far from each other.

Page 38. And already the words of Rabbi Yisḥaq of Acre (late 13th century) have been mixed into the Zohar itself — and it is very hard to distinguish them.

Page 57. But regarding the author of the composition of the Tiqqunim and the Ra'aya Mehemna... that he was, without any doubt in the world, later than the main author of the body of the first book of the Zohar, in time and in stature... by the hand of a Spanish scholar at a very late time.

Page 58. It's recognizable, from its language, that Midrash haNe'elam is a forgery. Its content and the names of the amuraim and tannaim, Babylonians and Jerusalemites, are randomly mixed, and in a stammering language he speaks. Half of it is in Hebrew and its context is Aramaic from the Zohar, and they differ from one another greatly. So testified Rabbi Yis^haq of Acre, that what is found in the book of the Zohar in the holy language, they are the words of Zohar, but there is also in it a clearly mixed Aramaic language.

Page 59. The third book (Midrash haNe'elam) is called 'the hidden Midrash' and its worlds have no number. Its content and its essence are distant and separate from the first two, together with the fact that it too seeks to imitate the language of the other two, and like a monkey in front of a man, it stumbles upon its language many times — a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic that are incompatible with each other, and its appearance is bad. That it's a forgery is also recognizable from the strange concepts, and from the invented names, that it attributed to them bizarre and foreign things, in order to take advantage of the fame of others — this is clear to me, and to everyone who has eyes in his head, and a brain in his skull.

Page 94. And R. Moshe de Leon did not swear that these are also included in Rishbi's book. But he attributed the entire thing to Rishbi (and in any case, he also hinted at his name through its title, in that he named the book by the name 'Ra'aya Mehemna') and he did well, as Ribbi 'Aqiva said to Rishbi, of blessed memory, 'It is better to hide your own name, and to attribute your words to a higher authority.'

R. Emdin's Statements Against the Concepts in the Zohar

Page 2. Behold, he did not escape from including things that have no basis in reality.

Page 25. God forbid that one should believe this, and it is forbidden to listen to such things, which our fathers and our rabbis of blessed memory could never have imagined.

Page 26. God forbid! Let there not be like this in Israel, a holy people, to entertain such thoughts, and it is not known from whose belly they came forth. In truth they appear, in my eyes, like words of heresy, or something a severely deranged person would invent, words that are strange, difficult and

of evil appearance, and they have been included in the midst of the book of the Zohar.

Page 31. This language — it is a duty to erase it.

Page 33. All of this statement is strange and reprehensible.

Page 33. It appears to be according to the opinion of sorcerers.

Page 34. This opinion is foreign to Judaism.

Page 34. And already the obligation for accuracy has been discarded by the author of the book of the Zohar.

Page 35. But this language is entirely nonsensical. Certainly, it is not from the words of a sage at all, that he corrupted both language and faith — and I am ashamed of these words, woe to the eyes that see this, and happy are the simple and the blind, and blessed is the Lord who has struck the enemies of the religion with blindness. Please tell us, those who seek the Lord, whose souls love the truth, is it fitting for us to leave every stumbling-block that they have placed for us with these foreign esoteric books?

My main purpose in citing the above quotes is to refute the claim of the author of *Zohar haRa'qia'*, who wrote (page 157) that R. Ya'akov Emdin “did not have any suspicions or doubts about the authenticity of the book of the Zohar...” And he wasted a lot of ink on baseless arguments to say that what R. Emdin wrote in *Mitpaḥath Sefarim* was not as it appears, and that he did not actually believe these things – but he wrote them only in opposition to the Sabbateans, a 17th century messianic cult based on the Kabbalah.

We find printed, together with the book *Mitpaḥath Sefarim*, a collection of rebuttals by the name “*Itur Sefarim*.” They were written by R. Reuven Cohen Rapoport (1930 to 2017, Ukraine and USA). The author of “*Itur Sefarim*” wrote at great length, and most of what he wrote is not relevant to the matter at hand. Because R. Emdin was brief in his words, I have quoted them as they are; this is not possible regarding R. Rapoport’s rebuttals. Therefore, I will only paraphrase his words, including only the essence of his responses, with their contradictions, and I will not omit anything that is relevant to our topic. In one or two cases, the author succeeded in resolving the issues that R. Emdin brought up, more or less, and accordingly I have omitted those errors, together with the corresponding responses.

R. Rapoport, and R. Kunitz (author of the *Ben Yohai*, which we discuss later), both ignored many of R. Emdin's points, mostly having to do with references to later authorities, later terminology or later enactments. For the sake of brevity, I will not list these omissions.

Responses of 'Itur Sefarim

(1). *[Use of the Spanish word esnoga for synagogue]. R. Rapoport wrote extensively to prove that our sages, of blessed memory, were accustomed to explaining verses by means of words in Arabic, Greek and Persian.*

It doesn't take much contemplation to understand that there is no rebuttal here. The languages that R. Rapoport lists were in existence in the days of the Talmudic Sages, but not Spanish, and we find the author of the book "Ben Yoḥai" raising the same objection to R. Rapoport.

(3). *[Hints at the dichotomy of Christianity and Islam]. He answers that this is an addition from the days of the savuraim, or the geonim, and there are such later additions in the Talmud. Just as they added to the Talmud, so too did they add to the Zohar.*

This is actually R. Emdin's claim in all of these (I have quoted him on this above). And in truth this "answer" is a multi-purpose one; how many "later additions" can one book contain, until we say that the entire book is a "later addition?"

(4). *[Misinterprets the verse in Genesis regarding Abraham and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah]. This is the way of the Aggadah of the Sages, to expound a homily contrary to the plain meaning of the verses, and he spends many pages citing such examples.*

But the style of the language in the Zohar (presenting a difficulty with the verse and then solving it by way of esoteric explanations) shows that this is intended to be interpreted as the plain meaning, and it does not imply that it's intended as Aggadah; this is a far-fetched answer.

(5). *[The confusion between the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah]. He brought one incident, in the commentary of Bahye (Bahya ben Asher ibn Ḥalawa c. 1255–1340, Zaragoza, Spain) on the Torah, that he was not precise in writing "in Ezra" but wrote "Ezra," and similarly in the Pesiqeta Zutratī —*

This is like saying, “the suffering of many is half a consolation,” and what does he hope to accomplish by equating the style of Medieval rabbis to the style of the Sages?

(7). *[Relates a story that we know, from the Gemara, occurred during the days of the Amuraim]. “The authors have already explained this at length.”*

What a disappointing answer!

(25). *[Refers to Kol Nidre as if it's an ancient enactment, but it was enacted by geonim, and Rav Hai Gaon abolished this custom]. The intention is not the famous Rav Hai, but rather Rav Hai the son of Mar Rav Nahshon, as is explained in Rishba, end of Yoma. And he goes on to argue that this is not a bad custom.*

R. Emdin's difficulty is twofold, and the main point of his difficulty is not that it is a bad custom, but that this is a later enactment, and in any case, this is what is relevant to us. And behold, between Rav Hai and Rav Hai there are only about a hundred years, and even the earlier Rav Hai was in the second half of the period of the geonim, and if so, what does he hope to accomplish with this rebuttal?

(29). *[Refers to the Haggadah or Rabbah bar bar Hana]. The simple meaning of the words is that it is a later Aggadah of Rabbeinu Bahye, a note added to the margins.*

Another “late addition.”

(42). *[The Zohar offers explanations for the names of Hebrew vocalizations, which were invented centuries after the end of the Talmudic era] He cites evidence for the antiquity of the vocalizations, from the book “Hanniqud HaGadol” of Rav Ashe, and then he went back and admitted that it is not from Rav Ashe of the Talmud, but rather it is from a later scholar of that name. And then (after much wasting of ink just to say this) he writes “But, in any event, it is explained that Rav Hai Gaon already referred to these (the names of the vocalizations) a great deal, and so it is found there, and since the matter is complicated and needs a lengthy explanation, I am being concise here.”*

I do not know what he thought to solve by this, by pointing out that the last of the geonim already knew of the vocalizations; it is possible to go even further — that Rav Sa'adya Gaon, who preceded Rav Hai Gaon, also wrote about the vocalizations, and this is not surprising, because the vocalizations were invented in the middle of the days of

the geonim, but, as far as I know, Rav Sa'adya Gaon was among the first to mention them.

(45). *[Gives an esoteric meaning to the term “speaking form, growing form and intellectual form”, whose origin was in Medieval times]. He quotes similar language from Midrash Rabbah (Numbers), and then he wrote, “And even according to those who consider this Midrash to be of late origin (this includes Rabbi Shlomo Buber, Maharas Hayot and the entire world of academia – the copyist), they admit that it is, in any event, of early origin, and from Rabbi Moses the scholar (11th century Narbonne, Provence) they copied. Go and study it. The author had no qualms with the Midrash, and seized upon the Tiqqunim for nothing, but certainly, the ancient sages wrote of such things.*

It looks like R. Rapoport makes no distinction between “the early ones” in the generation of Rashi and “the early ones” in the generation of Rishbi. He also should have supported his “certainty” with some examples from the literature of the sages, and he did not.

(52). *[Discusses a quote from Rabbenu Tam regarding the study of the Gemara]. The illustrious author did not know that it is not Rabbeinu Tam who invented this idea or reinforced it, for Rav Hai Gaon already wrote about it and cited the words of the Sages in Midrash Mishle (Proverbs, paragraph 10) in his explanation.*

If you look in *Midrash Mishle* you will see that it is saying that the ultimate study of the Torah is the Talmud; it is not saying that the study of the Talmud includes everything. And this idea came from Rav Hai Gaon, and he sought to support his idea from that Midrash, and therefore there is no real answer in this.

From what I have quoted, one might get the impression that the author of “*Itur Sefarim*” spared his pen and was concise in his language. In reality, the opposite is correct; it was R. Ya'aqov Emdin who was concise with his words, and the author of “*Itur Sefarim*” was exceedingly long-winded, but R. Rapoport spent most of his words and effort in answering the errors that are included in the first category that we mentioned. As for the main difficulties, the remaining ones, he passed over them in silence.

It is written in the book “*Ma'amar Zohar haRa'ia*” (page 152):

The illustrious R. Ya'aqov Yisrael Emdin, known as Ya'abetz, was a genius and a righteous man and a Kabbalist, a wise man and a scribe, a researcher

and an investigator... but despite his being a strong Kabbalist... he wrote the book Mitṭpaḥath Sefarim, and in it he arouses suspicions and doubts about passages in the book of the Zohar, that they are not actually from the book of the Zohar, only later additions, because of the difficulties and the strangeness that he found in them (hundreds of these later additions. What's more, he explicitly wrote in the commentary, in several places, that by his estimation, the entire thing was a "later addition." – The copyist). In opposition to this book, the illustrious Rabbi Reuven Cohen Rapoport wrote the book 'Itur Sefarim' in order to respond to these objections, and it was printed together with the book Mitṭpaḥath Sefarim. Also, Rabbi Moshe Kunitz composed a large book, 'Ben Yohai,' to respond to all his objections."

If so, we must examine the above work; perhaps there are words of reason within it. I am arranging the answers of "Ben Yohai" according to the order that I arranged the objections. In many of the objections, "Ben Yohai" relied on the words of "'Itur Sefarim" which he dealt with in other objections, and so will I arrange his answers likewise and therefore I will not note the objections that he did not respond to if they were dealt with elsewhere. The words of Ben Yohai are in italics while my own words are plain text. When necessary, I'll include a brief reminder of R. Emdin's original claims in brackets.

Responses of Ben Yohai

(1). *[Use of the Spanish word esnoga for synagogue] Esnoga. R. Kunitz explains, that this is a compound Aramaic word (ash + noga): "Ashen" — a fixed place, like the Jerusalem Targum, "and Jacob went out," "and it was evening for him that the sun did not set in 'ashuna' (a set place)." And "Shenog" means "subservience and constriction." It is like the translation of, "and the Lord shook off" As "The Lord 'Shanig'." and similarly did he translate "trouble and distress," "the time of 'Shenoka'." It is not a problem that it is not found in any other place, because there are many unique words in the Bible and the language of the Zohar is unique, and in the Zohar the synagogue is called "esnoga."*

R. Kunitz goes on to write: "and what is called in Scripture 'house of prayer,' you'll find in the Babylonian Talmud 'house of assembly' and in the Jerusalem Gemara and in the Midrashim 'Bei Kenishta' and in the Zohar 'esnoga'... according to what we have found in several places in the Zohar, from its beginning to its end, that it referred to the house of prayer as "Bei Kenishta," except in these two instances, where it is referred to by the name "esnoga." But all this (that they used later languages) is found only in the languages that were known in their times, and it is not a Spanish word,

according to which the illustrious author responded (a hint to the answer of “Iur Sefarim,” the copyist), and this (Spanish) is a later language, which is composed of a mixture of old languages, of which they had no knowledge and they did not include any of it in the six orders of the Mishnah or in the Midrashim in any place, and this is the main point of the responding illustrious rabbi, and in his answer there is nothing at all, and according to what we have correctly written.

Concerning his quote from Targum Yonathan, 'and it was evening for him that the sun set in esnoga,' this word appears in the 'Arukh (entry “Ashen”) and this is what he wrote, 'This is what “Ba’ishun hoshekh' means, as if to say, 'in (the dark room) of a bathhouse.' And in the German translation, it is 'Tunkeli Shtub,' which is 'a room of darkness.' And in the book of Shorashim, by R. Yosef Qimḥi, the root 'ish' is like 'ishon' of his eye, that is to say, 'the pupil of his eye.' He called it so because the form of a man appears within it... And my father wrote that he used the form 'ishon' as a diminutive, because the form appears in miniature within the eye. This is the way of the Hebrews to add letters to a word to indicate its diminutive form. For example, 'shabbath — Shabbaton' etc. And Rashi's commentary on Psalms 17:8 'like the ishon — It's called ishon to indicate darkness.' So in the Concordance, he wrote that the root ashen, along with the roots ishon and ashen and their diminutives connote black and dark.' Similarly, Ibn Janah explained in his book of Shorashim (“roots”), under the root 'ish,' the same as R. Yosef Qimḥi, and he wrote 'Bi'ishon, for night and Afilah, darkness of night, and it is to emphasize its darkness because the blackness of the night is similar to the blackness of the ishon...'.

The first few lines of the previous paragraph fit well with the Jerusalem Targum, because the Sages believed that at night the sun enters its chamber (a “room of darkness”) by way of windows (365 windows corresponding to the days of the solar year), and accordingly, we find the prayer for Sabbath, which states, “that opens, each day, the doors of the gates of the east and splits the windows of the firmament,” and also in the evening prayer, “in wisdom he opens gates...” And see the chapters of Ribbi Eli’ezer, chapter 6, the matter is explained at length, and also in Numbers Rabbah 15:22; and so, when the sun sets to this place, it brings night and darkness, they called it “ishoniah” — “its night” or “its darkness.” However, after all that has been said, I do not know how this author came up with this etymology, a new interpretation, which is in opposition to all the other opinions.

Regarding the word “Shenog” that appears in Targum Onkelos, Exodus 14:24, “and the Lord trapped the Egyptians in the sea,” the ‘Arokh explains this as, “trouble and distress.” On this point, author of “Ben Yohai” admitted, himself, and it’s shocking that

he does not know the distinction between “submission” and “trouble and distress.” It is true that someone who is found in trouble and distress, sometimes will also be subjugated, but not necessarily so, and will he therefore claim that trouble and subjugation are one and the same? It appears that this author insults all of the synagogues, that he calls them “a room of darkness of trouble and distress.” What a bizarre way to describe a synagogue!

In truth, his interpretation is so far-fetched that there is no need to waste time on the rest of his words in this matter, but for the sake of completeness...

He tried to redeem himself that even though this is the only place, in all the holy books, that a synagogue is called esnoga (and even in the Zohar itself it appears only twice), we shouldn't be shocked, because we find many unique words in the Bible. And in truth this explanation has no substance, because the Zohar did not use this word in passing or casually, but he mentions it in order to give a reason why the synagogue is called “esnoga” — as something that is known and famous, and there is nothing similar to the unique terms that we find in Scripture. Also, the literature of the sages is much more extensive than Scripture, and you will hardly find, in the entire Talmud, an expression that has no companion. It turns out that, in his entire composition, the only statement of substance is what he said about the answer of “Itur Sefarim,”

(2). *[Quotes Medieval author Shemuel Hannagid, “the Creation, the attack, the need, etc.”]. Also, we have found amuraim in Babylon, who said things without attribution, and those same things were said, in the same language, in the Jerusalem Talmud, and from the mouths of tannaim (and they are Ribbi Simai in Baba Mesia and Ribbi Shesheth in Hullin, that Rishbi said the same things). And so, Ribbi Shemuel Hannagid only collected these things from ancient traditions.*

To this I'll respond that the similarity between the language of the Zohar and the book of the introduction of Ribbi Shemuel Hannagid, and the Kuzari is very clear. It is obvious that one of them copied from the other (either from written records or from an oral tradition) from the others. And on a matter like this it is hard to bring clear proofs one way or the other, but the matter is up to our discretion. Which is more likely: a) that the medieval author copied from a tradition that nobody else wrote before him, and that his source was a book that had been buried for almost a thousand years before him, and remained so until after his time, or b) that the author of the Zohar copied from a known and famous book, that was composed about two hundred years before his time, with some change of language?

(5). *[The confusion between the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah]. This is nothing new in our eyes, because we find exactly the same thing in the*

Gemara as well (Sukkah 37a): “And so with Ezra he says, ‘Go out to the mountain and bring back olive branches...’” And it is a verse in Nehemiah 8:15, but it is not found in the book of Ezra. Our luminary and great teacher Rashi followed the same principle, writing (Besah 27b) “buying and selling on Sabbath and on the holidays is forbidden,” in the book of Ezra, and the verse that Rashi meant is that very verse in the book of Nehemiah... And similarly, Rashi commented on a verse in Nehemiah (Sukkah 12a) that is actually in the book of Ezra. We find Rashi writing similarly (Megillah 3a). Also the Rosh wrote, (end of chapter 5) “and also in the book of Ezra’ etc.” and it is actually in the book of Nehemiah, that it is a holy day for our Lord.

We have seen that our rabbis in the Gemara, in Yoma, and also our rabbis in the Zohar, refer to Nehemiah by the name Ezra, and the reason, as they said (Sanhedrin 93b), is so that all the words of Ezra were said by Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah, and as for Nehemiah, what is the reason his book is not named after him? Ribbi Yirmiyah said in the name of Rav, because he spoke well of himself when he said, “Remember me, my God, for good,” etc. And from this we see that there is nothing unprecedented at all in the words of our rabbis in the Zohar.

He spilled a lot of ink on a matter that is quite simple, that R. Emdin himself mentioned in the same section of his book, and it’s famous that the ancient sages switched between the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah, and there is no surprise in this. And after reading this “rebuttal,” go back and read R. Emdin’s claim and review his words, and then you can decide if there is a rebuttal here or not.

(7). [Early tannaim quoting Amuraim speaking about Uba Tamia]. The amura Ribbi Qaṭina received the words of the tanna Ribbi Eli’ezer that are written in the Zohar, that we pay no attention to the words of a necromancer concerning the cause of an Earthquake, for we have received a correct reason of our own — it is given as two (or “ten crowns”), etc., as above.

Now it happened that Ribbi Qaṭina was walking on the road. When he reached the doorway of the necromancer, etc., Rabbi Qaṭina remembered the tradition he had received and said: ‘The necromancer is a liar and his words are lies...’

In the Gemara the same incident happened to Ribbi Qaṭina, and there he recalled the law he had received from that tanna. But the actual story of the incident in the Gemara — which took place in the time of the amuraim — is not mentioned at all in the Zohar. The only way it could have gotten there is if the answering scholar saw it in a dream or heard it from someone.

He ignored the main difficulty and dealt with a side issue, because in reality, R. Emdin's objection had nothing to do with the words "Ribbi Eli'ezer... we don't believe the necromancer etc.", but only from that which is said beforehand, "this is what happened... that he said, 'We pay no attention to the necromancer...'" that these words hint at a story that is already known. And according to this, the author labored in vain as he humored his own imagination.

(8). [Ezehu Meqoman – Where is its Place, discussed in the Zohar, was a liturgy that was instituted by Rav 'Amram Gaon, who lived in 9th century Babylon]. "In the days of Rishbi they were accustomed to say this, and therefore Rishbi said (Menahoth 75b), "the recitation of Two Loaves and the Show Bread was baked etc."

R. Kunitz then goes on, at length, to prove that the names of the chapters of the Mishnah were always known and they were instituted very long ago.

Here are sources he cites as evidence that the custom of reading Ezehu Meqoman ('where is its place') is an early enactment: Yoma 68b, and in the order of the five books he calls it by this name, and in the Jerusalem Talmud (ibid.) it says, "Because it was the order of the day." Tosafoth ('Avodah Zarah 19b) in the section that begins with, "they divide in three," they write, "and therefore they enacted" (the implication being that it was the men of the Great Assembly - the governing body of sages who thrived from the 6th to the 4th centuries BCE, or other very ancient authorities, who enacted this, as this expression implies in several other places in the Talmud). Similarly, see Tosafoth Sanhedrin 24a, and Qiddushin 31a in the section that starts, "that there is no need."

What is the relevance of the Mishnah, in Tractate Menahot, to the liturgy of Ezehu Meqoman ("where is its place")? This Mishnah deals with the Show Bread, and in the chapter Ezehu Meqoman there is no mention of the Show Bread. Also, what Rishbi said, "he was accustomed to say," means, "he would explain the law in such and such a way in contrast to Ribbi Yehudah. This is proven from the Mishnah itself, and this Mishnah does not refer to prayer and it is not Aggadah.

The author spent a lot of time proving that the names of these chapters were already known, and we readily admit this. What novelty is there in this (that he spent so much time explaining it that most of his rebuttal is wasted on it) and how is this relevant to R. Emdin's claim?

Also, I was not able to understand his proof from the Mishnah and the Jerusalem Talmud in Yoma, because there it is speaking of the reading of the portions of the Torah, and the chapter ‘Ezehu Meqoman’ is a Mishnah, and if he wants to reach a conclusion, by focusing on precise language, that they were expert in that same portion of the Torah, because it was the order of the day. As for “Ezehu Meqoman,” it is not even mentioned.

He cited Tosafoth in ‘Avodah Zarah, that “therefore they enacted,” and this solution has no foundation. How does this imply that the men of the Great Assembly or the Talmudic sages enacted it? It is far simpler to accept that the geonim enacted it for us, for this is well known. His conclusion, from the words, “they enacted” has no basis. The Tosafoth on Sanhedrin add nothing to our matter. Only there, instead of “therefore they enacted,” the wording is “we read.” In his zeal to list many sources, in order to impress the reader — he damaged his already weak claim, because the Tosafoth actually supports R. Emdin’s understanding – that these recitations are later customs. Anybody who delves into the books of Germany and France will see that they frequently used the terms “they enacted,” “they established,” etc., for later customs.

And behold, at the end of his words, he dismantled everything he had written by citing Tosafoth on Qiddushin, because there it is written explicitly as R. ‘Emdin claimed. I quote: “This is what Rav ‘Amram Gaon instituted, as is our custom every day...”. With this Tosafoth, we understand the Tosafoth on ‘Avodah Zarah, where he wrote “therefore they enacted.” This refers to Rav ‘Amram Gaon — it would have been better for him to hide from us these last Tosafoth, as it seems that he himself never saw them and only relied on a note somebody wrote in the margins.

*(10). [Mentions Rav Hamnuna Saba, who is known as a student of Rav].
 “Know that there were two Rav Hamnuna Sabas who were amuraim, one a student of Rav and one a student of Rav Hisda, as we will explain. And so, there were two Ribbi Hamnuna tannaim, one in the time of the Temple and one in the days of Rishbi...” And his proofs that the two latter were Amoraim are: Tosafoth Kethuboth 52b, “We find Ribbi Yosef sitting with Rav Hamnuna, and it sounds as if he was younger than he,” and in Qiddushin 25b, it sounds that Rav Hamnuna was a student of Rav Hisda, and Ribbi Yosef was a colleague of Rav Hisda, but we must conclude that there were two Rav Hamnunas.” Furthermore, in Tosafoth (‘Eruvin 63b): “There were two Rav Hamnunas”. He (‘Iṭur Sefarim) wrote, “Now lend your ear and listen, because these proofs that forced our rabbis (into this conclusion), the authors of the Tosafoth, to say... these and those we have also forced them to conclude that there were two tannaim by the name Ribbi Hamnuna Saba. And it is written in the Zohar... and also from the words of the Zohar... and*

we have found it written in the Zohar...” And he goes on at length to show that sometimes there were two tannaim by the same name.

It is obvious that there were two Amuraim with the name R. Hamnunas because, if not, why did they use the title “Saba,” (“the elder”) except to distinguish from the other R. Hamnuna, “the younger.” And this has nothing to do with R. Emdin’s claim at all. Either way, what he wrote about the two Rav Hamnuna Sabas tannaim is laughable. The difficulty of R. Emdin is that the author of the Zohar mixed people from different and distant generations, one from the other, and he has them speaking with each other – and this man wants to solve it by citing the very same contradictions in the Zohar, that also the two Rav Hamnuna Sabas were tannaim — and this is the same exact difficulty we’re dealing with! Can a crime suspect bear testimony to clear himself?

(13). [Refers to “tannaim and amuraim”]. “This is an easy matter for us, that the older amuraim such as Hamnuna and Ribbi Yeba Saba, Rav or Ribbi Abba and Rav Shim’on ben Laqish and Ribbi Shamlai, were already alive in the days of Rishbi as explained in the Talmud. We thank the grace of God, that he put this answer in our mouths, on every question there is a unique answer. Also in this case, his kindness will not end, and his mercy will not expire, and in this it is fitting for you to know that this R. Shim’on, who is mentioned here, is not the R. Shim’on who is mentioned elsewhere, who is Rishbi. Instead, he is R. Shim’on the son of Rabbi Eli’ezer, and he is the son of Rabbi Eli’ezer the son of R. Shim’on, who is mentioned respectfully in the Talmud (Baba Meṣia’ 84b). He lived at the end of the tannaim and the beginning of the amuraim. And this is exactly how the Tosafoth explained it (Baba Meṣia’ 85a) in the way that R. Shim’on who deals in golden dinar, that this R. Shim’on is not the usual R. Shim’on in all the Talmud, who (we refer to as) Rishbi, but he is R. Shim’on the son of Ribbi Eliezer.”

Everything he wrote up to “that this R. Shim’on” lacks substance and even he knows this, and therefore he continues to try to calm himself and to say that this R. Shim’on is not Rashbi. Know that I have counted how many times the phrase “tannaim and Amuraim”, appears in the Zohar and in the Tiqqunim, and I found it more than ten times – and this is what I found in passing, without looking very hard. And in any event, anyone who delves into Tiqqunim (43b; 44b): will realize that it’s impossible to interpret that it’s referring to R. Shim’on the grandson of Rishbi. because if this were so, he would have been grossly impudent, that he commands his father, “Arise, Eli’ezer, and we will throw dice...” (44a). Furthermore, it would be strange that tannaim and amuraim of the Land of Israel would arise and call him “Ribbi” and I quote: (44b) “the tannaim and amuraim of the Land of Israel arose and said, ‘Ribbi! How many times will your dice numbers go up and down endlessly?’” Furthermore, if we interpret portion Pinḥas (223a) according to him, we find that R. Shim’on the son of

Ribbi Eli'ezer lived long enough to converse with Ra'aya Mehemna (the author of this book). If this were the case, why have we not heard of such a great righteous man except for a handful of times in all the writing of the Sages? And there is no doubt that if I were to dedicate more time to search for the term “tannaim and amuraim” in the Zohar, I would find a lot more evidence that the one who uttered it is Rishbi, and not his grandson. Also, look at the words of the Tosafoth that he himself cited, and you'll see that it says the opposite of what he claims.

(14). [The author of the Zohar reveals that the Earth is a sphere, but this was not known by the sages of the Talmud]. I found it written in the Midrash (Numbers Rabbah 13), “The world is similar to a silver bowl, which is made like a ball...”. Furthermore, in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, this is explicit (‘Avodah Zarah 41a) “like a ball that holds...,” and the Tosafoth wrote ‘the world is a circle like a ball as is seen in the Jerusalem Talmud, “Alexander of Macedonia went up...” — and so they taught in Beraitha (‘Eruvin 56a) “the sun comes out...” and Rashi’s commentary there. We also find in Baba Batra 25a, Ribbi Eli’ezer says and Ribbi Yehoshua’ says...

What he brought as a proof from *Midrash Rabbah* Numbers is not a proof at all, nor does it clarify the opinion of the Talmudic sages, because this Midrash is very late (see the introduction to Tanhuma haQadum 8b and the introduction to Midrash Rabbah, of Ribbi Hayyoth), and specifically this passage is an addition from the editor (see the introduction to Tanhuma haQadum 19a). Even so, the intention is not that the whole Earth is a ball, but only one specific land, and this is what it says, “the Earth is like a silver bowl, which is made like a ball, and that was the territory of Issachar...,” and the Radal (R. David Luria 1798–1855) explains it the same way.

Regarding what he cited from the Gemara of ‘Avodah Zarah, behold, from the Gemara itself there is nothing that implies what he wrote, and this is what it says:

A staff — that it rules itself under the whole world like a staff. A bird — that it holds itself under the whole world like a bird. A ball — that it holds itself under the whole world like a ball.

If we want to conclude from here that they thought of the Earth as a ball, we must also say that they thought Earth has the form of a staff or of a bird. For context, here is a more comprehensive explanation of the Talmudic passage:

The Mishnah (‘Avodah Zarah 3:1) says a statue is forbidden as an idol only if it holds a staff, a bird, or a ball (orb). The Gemara on 41a explains why those

three objects count as signs of worship: They are emblems of rule over the whole world:

- (a). Staff — the idol is pictured as driving/ruling the whole world the way a person drives an animal with a stick.*
- (b). Bird — the idol is pictured as holding the whole world the way a person holds a bird in the hand.*
- (c). Ball — the idol is pictured as holding the whole world the way a person holds a ball in the hand.*

The wording is deliberately upside-down and mocking (“it rules itself under the whole world like a staff”) so as not to speak as if the idol really rules the world.

In his interpretation of the Tosafoth there, he granted himself liberties to twist the words of others, to add, or to subtract as he wished. And he added to the words of the Tosafoth a word that is not in the source, and it is “like a ball.” For in the Tosafoth it is written only “that the world is a circle, as is seen in the Jerusalem Talmud...” And that passage from the Jerusalem Talmud was explained by the Tosafoth “like a ball,” which is a circle, because the ball, when one looks at it, he cannot see the whole thing, only one side, which is not so with the circle (it is clear that one side of it is habitation, wilderness and ocean, while the other side is emptiness and chaos). Aside from this, the Jerusalem Talmud goes on to say, “and the sea is like a basin” — clearly implying that the sea is not included in “the world,” and “the world,” means “dry land.” The Tosafoth explained, “The sea is the Atlantic Ocean, which surrounds the whole world.”

And what he cited from the Gemara in ‘Eruvin, the absolute opposite is the case, for there it speaks of “The squareness of the world”! And all the “rotations” that are mentioned there, are of the heavenly bodies. Similarly, in Baba Batra it is mentioned, as a self-evident matter, that the world has a “western corner.” Are we to believe that a ball has corners? And see Rashi there. And in the matter of the opinions of the Sages about the shape of the Earth, I have included a dedicated chapter.

R. Emdin quoted the Zohar and objected that this scientific knowledge was not available to the sages of the Talmud, let alone a tanna:

In the book of Rav Hamnuna the Elder it is explained further that the entire inhabited world revolves in a circle like a ball, some below and some above... Therefore there is a place in the world where, when it is light for some, it is dark for others—day for these and night for those. And there is a

place that is entirely day, with night only for a brief moment. (Zohar Wayiqra 10a):

Here is the response of the Ben Yohai:

In Bereshith Rabbah, ch. 6, Ribbi Shim'on said, "We do not know whether they fly in the air (that is, the stars) or whether they glide on the firmament and are fixed in the sphere, etc." Behold, this is a new opinion, which the philosophers of our time received, discovered by the scholar Copernicus and his school... We have also found ('Eruvin 18b), Tosafoth, "Rabbenu Hananel reads the word 'haNeshamah (breathing or soul),' in the Gemara, with a dagesh (a point that doubles, or hardens the letter). The word dagesh, which was coined by the grammarians (if we judge by the standard of this illustrious rabbi who is answering) more than a thousand years after the close of the Talmud — and the word dagesh, in the sense the grammarians give it, is not found in the Babylonian Talmud, nor in the Yerushlami, nor in the Midrashim. And how then did the sage, the author of Tosafoth, Rabbenu Hananel, of blessed memory, slip this reading into the language of the Gemara?

But the truth is that no secret is withheld from the sages of the Talmud, of blessed memory, and they already knew, in the breadth of their heart, many of the innovations of the philosophers, new and old, which were only new to us, and before them there is nothing new... And before Rishbi's eyes the heavens were rolled out like a scroll, and he saw all that is done, from the height of heaven to the bottom of the Earth.

Rishbi clearly stated that he had no opinion on the matter. Only, while declaring that he does not know, he mentioned several possibilities. Therefore, there is no room to attribute an opinion that was not stated to anyone at all. Further, I do not know what connection there is between the possibilities Rishbi proposed and the innovations of Copernicus; for Copernicus only taught us that the Earth is not in the middle of the spheres, but the sun, and that system is called by his name. Further, it appears that this author was blind to the obvious, for only a moment ago he quoted Rishbi clearly stating that he did not know how the stars stand in the heavens (and in this he revealed that he did not know the law of gravity, something no man had imagined in his days). Yet here he is testifying in contradiction of Rishbi himself, writing that no secret is withheld from him — while Rishbi said that he does not know. And this man writes of him that he **Did** know, and all this in the same breath!

Regarding the Tosafoth that cited Rabbenu Hananel, he made crude and serious errors. First, I'll point out that even though the word "dagesh" was indeed not known to the

sages. The words “dagesh” and “rafeh” (“hard and soft letters”) were not known to the ancients. For example, in the Book of Yesirah 2:2, the words dagesh and rafeh are badly needed, yet they are not used. In fact, these words are not mentioned anywhere in the works of the sages at all. However, when this author wrote that it was coined “more than a thousand years after the close of the Talmud,” he revealed that he did not even trouble himself to look it up before writing. For the Radaq and Ibn ‘Ezra (11th – 13th centuries), and others among their contemporaries, all knew what a dagesh is, and they lived only some six hundred years from the close of the Talmud. Even before that, R. Sa’adya Gaon, in his commentary on the Book of Yesirah 2:2, used the term “dagesh”, and he lived only some four hundred years after the close of the Talmud. And what shall we say of an author who thinks that Rabbenu Hananel (11th century North Africa) lived more than a thousand years after the close of the Talmud? He himself quoted his words that mention dagesh — or does he suppose that Rabbenu Hananel too was a prophet? For the life of me, I have not yet seen ignorance like this in a person who fancies himself an expert.

Still more serious than all this – if we examine that same Tosafoth, you will see how far the cowardice of R. Kunitz goes. It is not written that Rabbenu Hananel read thus in the Gemara, but that he **explained** it thusly — and there is an enormous difference between “read” (*gires*) and “explained” (*piresh*). One cannot judge him charitably, to say that that is how it is worded in the Tosafoth; for if so, he should have told us of this variant. And more than that, he himself quoted the language of the Tosafoth, according to our reading, in another book that he himself composed, *Ha’oyen* (p. 80).

As for knowledge of Hebrew grammar, we will grant him that the sages were expert in it — but not in the same terminology and vocabulary that were coined centuries later. And let us ask one simple question: According to this author’s claim, the sages knew, by the Holy Spirit, even the terms of the scholars of later generations, and did not refrain from writing in those terms, to the point that Rishbi argued and parsed and expounded according to the names of the vowels and accents, which were coined long after his death — if so, when he reached the science of astronomy, why did he refrain from mentioning Copernicus by name? After all, a good many wicked men of the nations (according to some versions, even Muhammad) are mentioned in his book. Is Copernicus worse than them? In the end, only one thing in this reply is correct: that the sages did not know of the term “dagesh.”

(15). [Refers to Ribbi Shamlai, who was a later amura]. But all this is difficult, if the illustrious rabbi’s assumption is correct, that there was only one Ribbi Shamlai, and there was no other. Yet we have found in the Talmud Yerushlami in two places, and also in Midrash Rabbah, yet another, an earlier Ribbi Shamlai, who was a tanna in the days of Ribbi Yosi bar Hilpatha. And he is this Ribbi Shamlai. They said (Wayiqra Rabbah 22): “Said

Ribbi Yosi ben Hilpatha... Ribbi Shamlai said to him, the Holy One, blessed be He...” And this statement is repeated in the Yerushlami (Ta’anith ch. 2 and Megillah ch. 1). Indeed, what appears to be the case here is that the Ribbi Shamlai mentioned in the Zohar is not Ribbi Shamlai the tanna, and this Ribbi Yosi as well... A sound piece of advice is to emend in the Gemara and in the Zohar “Rav Asi” in place of “Ribbi Yosi.” Even if these famous holy amuraim added from their received traditions and their expositions onto the midrashim of Rishbi and his son and his companions in the book of the Zohar, we have no objection...

After I wrote this, it was revealed to us that in truth all these amuraim – Ribbi Abba, Ribbi Shamlai and Ribbi Asi, spoke with Rishbi and his companion Ribbi Yosi ben Hilpatha, as is evident from the plain reading of the Zohar mentioned above. And here is a clear proof for this: We have seen in two places in the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 35 and Midrash Tehillim 36, the incident of Ribbi Yehoshua’ ben Lewi) ... And behold, Ribbi Yehoshua’ ben Lewi and Ribbi Shamlai were contemporary, as they said (Bekhoroth 36b), “Ribbi Shamlai and Ribbi Yehoshua’ ben Lewi said in the name of R. Yehudah the Prince.” Also, Ribbi Abba... was in the days of Ribbi Yehoshua’ ben Lewi and Ribbi Yohanan, according to what we found that he was a companion of Lewi, as they said (Yerushlami end of Horayoth) and in Midrash Rabbah (Qoheleth, “a man who gives”) “Ribbi Abba found Ribbi Lewi.” Ribbi Yehoshua’ ben Lewi and Ribbi Yohanan were contemporary. And it appears that this Ribbi Abba is the amura Rav, for there Rav’s name was Abba, as Ribbi said (Hullin 137b) ... Behold, in Babylon they called him Rav, and in the Land of Israel they called him Ribbi Abba; therefore, he is called in the Babylonian Talmud ‘Rav’ and in the Talmud Yerushlami and in Midrash Rabbah, which is the aggadah of the Land of Israel... And likewise in the Zohar, which was composed in the Land of Israel, he is called by his name Ribbi Abba...

Afterward I found written in the responsa of the illustrious rabbi Hawwoth Ya’ir (R. Yair Hayyim Bacharach, 1638-1702. Paragraph 152) in the name of R. Menahem di Fano (Italy 1548-1620), that the Ribbi Abba found in the Zohar is Rav. And I found the same thing written in the book Kanfei Yonah (part 3, end of paragraph 62) and I found written in Shittah Mequbbeset (Ketubboth, “the woman who aborted,” 88b) in the name of Maimonides, that Rav lived for three hundred years; see there.

When I reached this answer, I thought to myself, “If only! Has R. Moshe Kunitz, the author of Ben Yohai finally provided an answer of substance?” But when I opened his source materials and compared their language with the way he quoted them in his

book, I was forced to acknowledge that they bear no similarity to each other. This is the actual wording of Wayiqra Rabbah 22:9:

Said Ribbi Yosi to Ribbi Hanina, “A high place (of sacrifices) is permitted only on the authority of a prophet.” What is the reason? As it is said... “Ribbi Shamlai said, the Holy One, blessed be He, told him (Elijah to build an altar and bring a sacrifice despite the prohibition against it outside the Temple) to do it. ”And in your words, I have done.” (We interpret this to mean) “according to what you have said, I have done.” Ribbi Yohanan bar Meri...”

Go back to his “version” of the midrash and compare it to the original. He has no shame!

As for the Yerushlami, Ribbi Yosi is not even mentioned. This is what it says, (Ta’anith ch. 2 h. 8 and Megillah ch. 1 h. 11):

Ribbi Shamlai said, “By Your word I have done it, and by Your utterance I have done it.”

From here we see why this deceitful author (Ben Yohai) refrained from providing exact citations, and he only wrote the chapter and did not note which part of the chapter—so that the reader would have to search through the entire chapter – despairing and relying on him.

In the midst of his writing, he feared for his honor, lest his lies be revealed, and he thought to save himself with another deception—to manipulate the source material, both the Gemara and the Zohar, and to change what is written; what a brilliant solution this is! For with this solution, one can solve every difficulty that might arise. After he wrote this, he realized how far-fetched and forced his explanation actually is, and he understood that one cannot escape the fact that the Zohar was composed long after the period of the tannaim, he fell back on the excuse that there are “later additions,” and that it really doesn’t matter, because they are all holy.

Look how far-fetched this author’s answers are, until even he himself understood how insulting his explanations truly are. And at the end of his writing this “answer,” he awakened to what R. Ya’aqov Emdin himself pointed out, that these are merely whispers in the world, and thus, lacking any alternative, he girded his loins to uproot the creations and to mix up the generations.

And now we shall discuss his proofs that Ribbi Yose was in the days of Rishbi. And if so, Ribbi Shamlai as well. First, we shall admit to what he says, that according to the

plain reading of the aggadah, which appears in Bereshith Rabbah and in Shoher Tov it sounds as if Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi and Rishbi lived at the same time; and this is difficult according to the order of the generations. I will copy the language of haSemah Dawid on Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi, and you will understand why: "Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi lived in the days of Rav and Shemuel. Some counted him with the tannaim and some counted him with the Amoraim... and he was the teacher of Ribbi Yohanan..."

The author of Semah Dawid fixed a date for Rav and Shemuel - 219 CE. And in the aggadah of Rav Sherira Gaon it sounds as if Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi lived after Rav and Shemuel. Rishbi died around the year 140 CE. It is possible, with difficulty, to say that Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi lived a long life and saw both Rishbi and also Rav and Shemuel. But in truth it seems one should understand that aggadah as a parable, and so the style of its language implies, for there it implies that the generation of Rishbi is not the generation of Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi. In any case, it would not be shocking if Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi saw Ribbi Shamlai, the student of Rabbenu haQadosh (Ribbi Yehudah haNasi, late 2nd–early 3rd century), and at that time Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi was already old, and Ribbi Shamlai was young. In any case, it does not follow that Ribbi Shamlai saw Rishbi. And this author wants to chronologically equalize all the generations by means of Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi, viewing him as a bridge between two or three generations. And by his method one could claim that Hillel the Elder lived in the days of Moses, as it is in Avoth: Joshua saw Moses, the elders saw Joshua, and so on until Hillel.

As for what he wrote about Ribbi Abba, that he lived in the days of Ribbi Yehoshua' ben Lewi and Ribbi Yohanan, the Ribbi Abba who lived in the days of Ribbi Yohanan, mentioned in Qoheleth Rabbah, is Ribbi Abba bar Kahana. Ribbi Kahana, his father, is known to have lived in the days of Ribbi Yohanan. Regarding the Ribbi Abba in the Yerushlami, this author himself claims that he is Rav, who was called Abba by the Jews of the Land of Israel. If so, according to his own words, an incredible revelation comes to light – That Rav and Ribbi Abba bar Kahana are one and the same!

As for what he wrote in the name of the Shiṭah Mequbbeseth, that Rav lived three hundred years, this comes from a copyist's error. I will quote here the language of Tequfath haSavuraim weSifruthah (The Era of the Savuraim and its Literature) by R. Ya'aqov Efrati, p. 88, on a similar matter:

One error therefore caused a further error; in Seder tannaim we'amuraim it is said 'Ribbi Yohanan lived long, up to eighty years' (and in Sefer haQabbalah, 80 years), but one of the copyists shortened the word and wrote (the letter) shin, that is, eighty years (the Hebrew letter Shin can be shorthand for "*shemonim*," which means "eighty," but

it has a numeric value of three hundred), and a later copyist interpreted the shin as three hundred.

In Sefer haQabbalah of the Raavad (and likewise in HaSemah Dawid) it is written explicitly that Rav died in the year 242 CE. If we assume he lived three hundred years, it would mean that he was born in 58 BCE — in the days of the Zogoth — and was older than Ribbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, Hillel, and Shammai, and lived through the entire period of the tannaim, and yet he is mentioned only at the end of his days, as a student of Ribbi, and as an amura. A healthy mind cannot bear all this. And behold what the Radak (Rav Dawid Qimhi) wrote (Judges 10:4) on Hawwoth Yair: “If they are the ones mentioned in the Torah, and this Yair is Yair ben Menasheh, the matter is astonishing, for if so, Yair lived more than three hundred years; and we can say that this Yair the Gil’adi is not Yair ben Menasheh.” See the Mesudoth there.

If, in the days of the Judges, it is astonishing that someone should live three hundred years, how much more so in the days of the sages of the Talmud! Rather, this is certainly a copyist’s error. It is also difficult from what is found in Zohar Hadash vol. 1, 20a, “Ribbi Abba asked Ribbi Hiyya.” And Ribbi Hiyya was a student of Rav; and according to the “Ben Yohai”, this Ribbi Abba is actually Rav — and a master does not ask his student (see Pesiqetha Rabbati on the Ten Commandments).

(16). [They also mentioned both of them, Rav Yeba and Rav Hamnuna Saba. They were both students of Rav, a later amura]. It is not so. Indeed, we have found in the Gemara that the students of Rav treated these two elders with great honor, and received from them the words of Rav, their master, for they had not heard them from his mouth, as they said (Pesahim 105a), ‘Ribbi Hananya ben Shemuel and the students of Rav...’ And they used the same language also of Ribbi Yeba Saba (Pesahim 103a and Hullin 86b): ‘Rav and Ribbi Hiyya, students of Rav, were sitting...’ And it appears that these elders were colleagues and students of Rav, and Rav was a student of Ribbi Yehudah the Prince, and Ribbi Yehudah the Prince and Ribbi Eli’ezer bar Ribbi Shim’on (who is the unspecified Ribbi Eli’ezer in the Zohar) were contemporaries. And these two sages were exceedingly elderly in their generation, and there is no doubt that the holy Ribbi Eli’ezer bar Ribbi Shim’on read and studied in the book of Ribbi Hamnuna and Ribbi Yeba Saba, when he found precious things in them, as is written in the Zohar.”

What he accomplished with this reply I do not know. He brought Gemaras that show us that Ribbi Yeba and Ribbi Hamnuna Saba lived in the time of the students of Rav — which we already knew. The rest of his words are only very remote conjectures, with no sources and no support. His evidence is so weak, that even he doesn’t trust it –

because according to his words, in the previous reply, those students of Rav could have lived in the days of Hillel and Shammai. He also erred in the name of Rishbi's son, who is Ribbi El'azar, not Ribbi Eli'ezer.

In order to make it even more obvious how far-fetched his theories are, let us set out the relevant dates. Rishbi died around the year 140 CE. Rav went down to Bavel in the year 219 CE, and there is no doubt that it took him some years to found his academy and establish a group of students. It also appears that those meals mentioned in the Talmud with the students of Rav were after his death; for if not, why should they rely on the reports of these elders? They could have asked their master directly. Rather, by then he was certainly no longer with them. And Rav lived twenty-four years after his descent to Babylon, that is, until the year 243 CE. And as if this chronological gap were not enough — in the Zohar it appears that they were greater than Rishbi, to the point that Rishbi, and Ribbi El'azar his son, were debating out of their books. All this can exist only in the imagination of this author.

(18). [And even so, Ribbi El'azar ben Pedat pushed him away... .] He is an amura, a student of Rav and Shemuel]. And you should know that R. El'azar ben Pedath was a colleague-student of Mar Ribbi Yoḥanan, as is explicit in the Yerushlami (Sanhedrin ch. 1) ... and it is explained further in the Yerushlami (Berakhoth ch. 2; Sheqalim ch. 2). See Rashi (Kethuboth 25b). See also (Yevamoth 72b), "Ribbi Yoḥanan said to Resh Laqish, I have seen ben Pedath..."

He answered nothing here — he only strengthened R. Ya'aqov Emdin's objection. We have already seen that Ribbi Yoḥanan lived eighty years, and that he was born around the year 163 CE. If so, a few years elapsed between the death of Rishbi and the birth of Ribbi Yoḥanan. And if Ribbi El'azar ben Pedath was a colleague-student of Ribbi Yoḥanan, he was presumably younger than him. And even if he was older, in order to be mentioned in Rishbi's book he would have had to already be a great Torah scholar twenty-three years before Ribbi Yoḥanan was born. If so, how can he be a colleague-student of Ribbi Yoḥanan?

(21). [Hints at the Islamic invasion]. Some claim that the Zohar foresaw future events. They point to a passage that says, "The sons of Ishmael are destined to rule in the Holy Land," and similar statements. They also argue that Ribbi Shim'on ben Yoḥai (Rishbi) knew the future through the Holy Spirit. They support this with older rabbinic sources written long before the Zohar was discovered:

(a). In Bereshith Rabbah ch. 45: "Three were called by their names... and some say also Ishmael among the nations."

(b). *In the Jerusalem Talmud (Shevi'ith ch. 9): "Rishbi foresaw by the Holy Spirit..." and "Rishbi swore that he had heard from Heaven that Tiberias is destined to be purified."*

(c). *In the Babylonian Talmud (Me'ilah 17b): "Let Rishbi go before us, for he is experienced in miracles."*

It is well known that the sages used the term "Holy Spirit" in more than one way:

- (a). Sometimes it simply means "the truth itself is speaking" (as when they say "the Holy Spirit cries out...").
- (b). Sometimes it means actual prophecy.
- (c). Sometimes it means a strong, well-founded intuition or conjecture that later turned out to be correct.

Here, the third meaning is the correct one.

What he cited from the Gemara in Me'ilah has no bearing at all on our issue. Did R. Emdin come to deny that the Holy One does miracles for those who fear Him?

More importantly, the Zohar itself declared that prophecy had already ceased. Here is what it said (Part 1 238a), *"And they would know and look, to know the supernal glory; once prophecy had ceased from them, they would avail themselves of lesser audible revelations — now prophecy has ceased and lesser audible revelations have ceased."*

(25). *[Explains the enactment to recite Kol Nidre, a geonic decree]. He brought proof from Nedarim 23b that the enactment of Kol Nidre (an Aramaic liturgy that absolves one of past oaths and vows, recited on Yom Kippur) is ancient, and that Yom Kippur is also called Rosh Hashanah, as we find in Tractate 'Arakhin 12a. See further Tosafoth on Gittin 35b, in the paragraph that starts, "And for the pedigree."*

This is the language of the Mishnah (corrected according to the Gemara): "And he who wishes that his vows not be binding all year should stand during Rosh Hashanah and say, 'Every vow that I am going to make shall be void.'" From its language it is clear that:

- (a) There was no enactment at all (just as there was no enactment for "vows of encouragement," when one promises to eat at his fellow's table).
- (b) The wording that the Mishnah proposes is not even similar to the text of *Kol Nidre*;

(c) The Mishnah did not propose that it be said in Aramaic, but rather in Hebrew. In contrast, here is the language of the Zohar:

And therefore they enacted that one should say (on that day) “Let all vows and (voluntary) prohibitions be released and abandoned, not binding and not standing.”

There is no doubt that this Mishnah influenced the later sages who enacted *Kol Nidre*. And the Tosafoth on Gittin added nothing to this subject; they only mentioned a dispute whether one must specify his sins on Yom Kippur or not, and that among the sins there are also vows, and that because of shame some say he does not need to specify, even in a case like this, lest they suspect him of other offenses as well.

(47). [Refers to the “masters of the Jerusalem Talmud]. R. Kunitz tells us to look up Hagigah 10a, Baba Meši’a 85a, and Sanhedrin 24a.

This is the language of the Gemara in Hagigah, “Even from Talmud to Talmud” (the words of Ribbi Yohanan, an amura). And Rashi explained: “from the Jerusalem Talmud to the Babylonian Talmud.” And in the Gemara of Baba Meši’a we find that the amura Ribbi Zeira, when he went up to the Land of Israel, sat a hundred fasts to forget the Gemara of Babylon. And in Sanhedrin we find that the amura Ribbi Yirmiyah said, “This is the Talmud of Babylon.” And on that same page they discussed the differences between the sages of the Land of Israel and the sages of Babylon, and they cited sayings of Rishbi and Ribbi Ush’iaya and Ribbi Yishaq (tannaim, or first-generation amuraim). Not one of these earlier sages mentioned two Talmuds ; only the amuraim discussed two Talmuds. From this it is not clear what he meant to resolve; on the contrary, R. Emdin wrote that from this there is proof that the Zohar was composed after the Talmud. And the respondent simply did not understand that objection (or pretended not to understand). For where do we find in the words of the sages that they said “Jerusalem Talmud”? Among them it is called “the Talmud of the Land of Israel.” And even in the days of the geonim they called it so. Only in the days of the Rishonim, or the last of the geonim, did they begin to call it “the Jerusalem Talmud.”

As for knowledge of Hebrew grammar, we will grant him that the sages were expert in it — but not in the same terminology and vocabulary that were coined hundreds of years after their death. And let us ask one simple question: According to this author’s claim, the sages knew, by the Holy Spirit, even the terms of the scholars of later generations, and did not refrain from writing in those terms, to the point that Rishbi argued and parsed and expounded according to the names of the vowels and accents, which were coined long after his death — if so, when he reached the science of astronomy, why did he refrain from mentioning Copernicus by name? After all, a good

many wicked men of the nations (according to some versions, even Muhammad) are mentioned in his book. Is Copernicus worse than them? In the end, only one thing in this reply is correct: that the sages did not know of the term “dagesh.”

The Ben Yohai did not respond to any more of R. Emdin’s objections.

The book Ben Yohai is entirely a work of fraud. Its author added, cut, and swapped words and names in order to manufacture “sources” for himself with which to cancel R. Emdin’s arguments, and he treated R. Emdin as if he had never studied Talmud in his life. In the places where he changed the wording, he did not give detailed references, so as to make it hard for the reader to find that passage, and he relied on the reader’s laziness. But for anyone who has seen his original sources, his distortions are obvious. If you wish to acquire his book in order to verify what I’m saying, it will be difficult, for it was printed only once, in the year 1815 in Vienna, and never again. Just as they took care that *Mitpahath Sefarim* should not be printed again, because of the force of its arguments, so they took care that Ben Yohai should not be printed again, because it is an embarrassment to those who hold the Zohar to be authentic and holy. The fact that Ben Yohai cannot be obtained is a great comfort to the author of Zohar ha-Raqia’ — for (since he omits all of R. Emdin’s strongest arguments) he can write that a “great book... which responds to all of his objections, was composed.”

Observations Regarding Mitpahath Sefarim

The author, R. Ya’aqov Emdin, kept these insights about the Zohar in his heart for forty years before he wrote them in a book (p. 11), and that was at the end of his life. It is not known why he composed this book. The Hida wrote (Shem haGedolim) that his goal was to weaken the power of the Sabbateans, and therefore we need not be alarmed by the arguments found within. It’s possible that this is so, for he mentioned them several times with contempt, however, it’s more reasonable to say the opposite — that his true aim was to expose the forgery of the Zohar, and that in order to protect himself, and to make it easier for others to accept his words, he made it appear as though his main intent was against the Sabbateans. Either way, it’s not a valid reason to ignore the arguments. What do we care why he wrote them? If his objections are legitimate, we should judge them on their own merit. Furthermore, is it possible, if R. Emdin believed that the book of the Zohar was entirely from the sages, that he would invent a heresy for Jews to stumble upon in order to save them from another heresy? Surely, passivity would be a better option in such a scenario.

It is clear to me, after having read the book, in what state of mind its author was in. I will reveal that state after I note a couple of strange features of the book:

(1). He contradicted himself in a glaring way. For example (p. 7): “Heaven forbid to suspect R. Mosheh de Leon of doing such a thing, of inventing esoteric secrets entirely from his own heart... and attributing them to Rishbi.” And afterward he wrote (p. 12): “that the books of R. Mosheh and the Tiqqunim... are from the later kabbalists of Spain – probably R. Mosheh de Leon as is suspected, according to many demonstrative estimates” (and likewise on p. 94 he decided that R. Mosheh de Leon was its author). Likewise, after he presented 281 oddities in the Zohar — he wrote of them that they are all “late additions,” and that the essence of the Zohar retains its status. And afterward he wrote (p. 72) of two books attributed to Rav Sa’adya Gaon that they are forgeries, without citing any evidence — only that in his opinion they are not consistent with his style in *Emunoth weDe’oth* (Beliefs and Opinions).

(2). After he devoted the first part of his book to proving the forgeries of the Zohar, he goes on, in the second part, to claim that the Guide for the Perplexed (by Maimonides) is also a forgery and is not the work of Maimonides (a suggestion that no reasonable person can tolerate). Additionally, he wrote that two letters of Maimonides are forgeries (pp. 71, 72), and likewise, as above, of two books attributed to Rav Sa’adya Gaon (the commentary on Daniel and the commentary on the Book of Yesirah). And he also poured scorn on Ibn Ezra and his commentary on the Torah, and wrote that there is no wisdom in it (p. 71).

(3). He praised the Kabbalah and the kabbalists at length and took this to an extreme – to the point where he denied, explicitly, creation from nothing, and wrote that it is impossible (pp. 51,52). He was very dismissive of the Jewish philosophers, and of intellect in general. He wrote that whoever rejects the Kabbalah is a heretic — and this after he wrote that Rav Sa’adya Gaon and Maimonides rejected the Kabbalah outright. And toward the end of his book, he began to attribute the Zohar to later authors, but in a subtle way. At the end of the book he wrote, “for there is no obligation to believe everything found in the printed book of the Zohar, nor even everything that came in the writings copied from the Ari (R. Isaac Luria, 16th century Land of Israel, a prominent kabbalist). ... Rather, believe what your fathers and your teachers believed, and the authors of the Mishnah, which was arranged and composed by Rabbenu haQadosh (Ribbi Yehudah haNasi, late 2nd–early 3rd century), a student of Rishbi the true tanna...”

In the end, R. Ya’aqov Emdin, being at the end of his days when he wrote this book, was in confusion. He knew the truth about the book of the Zohar. He also knew that no one would believe him. Even so, he did not want to die without revealing the secret. He found himself longing for truth in a world of falsehood. We find him writing (pp. 3–4), “there is no truth in the world; all the more so now, when the world has been handed

over to fools, who go after the opposite — truth does not stand; falsehood stands... and truth is missing...”. It was not enough that the whole world was against him, but he was wracked by inner conflict. He was not sure how to deal with this revelation. On the one hand, he obligated himself to write the truth, and on the other, “truth does not stand; falsehood stands,” and therefore he mixed far-fetched ideas into it as a form of camouflage, “so that they would accept it from him.” He was also afraid for his own well-being, since he wrote what he wrote about the Zohar. He tried to protect himself by casting doubt upon the books of Maimonides and Ibn ‘Ezra (who are viewed as typifying the antithesis of the Kabbalah) at least to the same degree that he cast doubt upon the Kabbalah. He claimed that there were many other “forgeries” in order to blur the matter, in the sense of “the trouble of many is half a comfort.” And at the very end of his book, he surmised that even his readers would end up being confused, and so he advised them to remain faithful to the beliefs of their forefathers, and that is sufficient – and happy is he who does not see.

The Book Ari Nohem

The book Ari Nohem, like *Mitpahath Sefarim*, was composed by a distinguished and famous scholar: R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena. And his purpose was not only to argue that the Zohar is a forgery, but also against the Kabbalah in general. Even so, he did not oppose the Zohar as such; he only claimed that it is a pleasant, late, midrash. His arguments about the Zohar are very general, and these are his main points:

- (1). *Since the Zohar was not known, and not mentioned at all, until after the death of Nahmanides (R. Mosheh ben Nahman, 13th century Catalonia), and since even the kabbalists admit that it is not known who composed it, nor is it mentioned in either Talmud or in any midrash — one must say that it was composed only in later generations (after the death of Nahmanides). (Chapter 16).*
- (2). *If the author of the Zohar were Rishbi, and we see his greatness and depth of thought in the Zohar, Jewish law would certainly have to follow Rishbi — and Jewish law does not follow Rishbi. (Chapter 18).*
- (3). *There are matters in the Zohar that are against what we know to be clearly true in Jewish law. (Chapter 20).*
- (4). *They barely permitted the writing of the Oral Torah of the revealed part. How, then, would they permit writing, even before that, the secrets of the Torah? Chapters 17 and 21.*

(5). *It is not possible that Rishbi would write a book containing so many great titles and endless praises of himself. (Chapter 21).*

(6). *If it had been written in the days of Rishbi, they certainly would not have written the secrets of the Torah in Aramaic, for their custom was to write lofty things only in the Holy Tongue. Further, the Aramaic language then was understood even by gentiles, women, and children; and its being written in Aramaic is proof that it was composed only at a time when not everyone understood that language, and in order to blur its forgery. (Chapter 22).*

(7). *He cited the story of R. Yishaq of Acre, which I have already included at the end of the chapter on Miṭpahath Sefarim. (Chapter 23).*

Several books were composed against Ari Nohem. The most famous of them, and the main one, is Magen weSinah, by R. Yishaq Aizik Haver. And before we discuss his entire book, I will present the gist of his replies to the arguments of Ari Nohem.

The Arguments of Magen weSinah

(1). *[To Ari Nohem's point that the Zohar was never mentioned until medieval times – so it must be a forgery]. “And I say... we are forced to admit that its author (of the Zohar) was, at any rate, great and a master in Torah, righteous and pious, whose intent was to prepare generations... If so, how can we entertain the notion that such a great and pious man would speak in the name of the Lord with things invented from his own heart and imagination? And all the more so since the Zohar itself said that it is a great sin for one to invent esoterica of his own that he did not receive from his teachers.” (Chapter 14).*

There are two good replies to this.

a). It does not appear that the author of the Zohar invented any law from his own heart. Rather he received them from his teachers or colleagues or found them in old books. But many of these laws are in conflict with the views of the sages, and they were innovated in the days of the geonim, or perhaps they were from the days of the sages, and they did not want to mention them or to support them, because they did not mesh well with their attitudes; and the author of the Zohar was not technically inventing them on his own. Also, regarding the Ra'aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim, the language is so different from the language of the ancient sages, and they are so full of transparent hints that

they were composed much later — it's possible that their author did not imagine that anyone would be foolish enough to think they came from the ancient sages. And in this he was similar to R. Yehudah haLewi, who attributed his views to the tale and dialogue (between the king of the Khazars and representatives of the major faiths in his book, *The Kuzari*) that happened four hundred years before his time; and since it is clear to all that he is the author and that these are his views — he is not a forger, but a reputable author.

b). One who comes to mislead a religiously observant public so that they will accept his book must certainly project an image of religiosity, piety and encouragement to keep the commandments, in order to win the readers' hearts. For if he does not do so, and if he belittles keeping the commandments, or tries to persuade people that they need not keep them — no one will take his book seriously; on the contrary, they will burn his book. This should be obvious.

(2). *[To Ari Nohem's point that the halakhah should always be according to Rishbi if he was as great as the Zohar portrays him]. This is no refutation, because in every single commandment there are many explanations, and Rishbi used to expound them all, and therefore they seized upon and ruled only according to one view. And we also find that Ribbi Yohanan ben Zakkai was expert in the secrets of the Chariot (This is a body of esoterica that was mentioned by the sages of the Talmud), as it is written in the second chapter of Sukkah, that he did not omit (any aspect of Torah or human wisdom) and R. 'Aqiva and his colleagues, and Rishbi, R. Meir, and R. Yehudah, and R. Nehemyah, were all his students; and also R. El'azar ben 'Arakh, and R. Yehoshua', and the four who entered the Pardes (discovered esoteric secrets) — all of them knew the secrets of Kabbalah and knew that there is support for every view. And as they said in the first chapter of Hagigah, that R. El'azar ben 'Azariah said, "the words of the sages are like ox goads, etc., they were given from one Shepherd, one God said them even though they seem to disagree, etc." (but see there Rashi's explanation, the copyist). Behold, even in Jewish law, the tannaim and amuraim disagreed. So too regarding the explanations for the commandments, which are many. Rishbi expounded the explanations for the commandments and their secrets, and his words are the words of the living God. And as they said in the second chapter of 'Eruvin, "and he spoke three thousand proverbs," etc. — this teaches that he would sit and expound and recite three thousand insights for every matter of Torah. (Some of this is paraphrasing – the copyist). (Chapter 18).*

This does make sense, and if only the later authorities took them to heart. For today the words of the Zohar have become more authoritative, in Jewish law, than the words of the Talmud. See for example Mishnah Berurah 3:6. And in any case, the difficulty has not been reconciled at all. For if we found in the Zohar only positive matters and explanations for the commandments alone, the difficulty would be settled. But we find in the Zohar also very strong opinions against certain positions in Jewish law, for example, tefillin on the intermediate days of a festival. And from many phrases in the Zohar, we understand that the other sages of his generation were dwarfed by his authority. If so, they would certainly have had to rule explicitly according to his view, in those matters in which he expressed himself against his opponents so forcefully.

(3). *[To Ari Nohem's point that the Zohar contradicts established Jewish law]. I did not find that he replied to this; and R. Emdin also raised this difficulty.*

(4). *[To Ari Nohem's point that it makes no sense that the sages would commit the esoteric parts of the Torah to writing even before it was permitted to do so with the Oral Law]. The sages of Kabbalah permitted themselves, like the tannaim and amuraim, to write the wisdom of Kabbalah. In earlier times they wrote it only a little in a book... and the main prohibition (against committing the Oral Torah to writing) was publishing it in public, in order that they not study from the book but only from the mouth of a master. True, the medieval authorities did not write in explicit terms, but with brevity, hint and concealment. We see this in the Book of Bahir, Yeşirah, and the Zohar, where the secrets and the principles of the wisdom of Kabbalah are expressed only in fine, subtle hints (This is the gist of what he wrote in chapter 15; and in chapter 21 he explained it clearly: That the Zohar is a hidden scroll, known as megillath setharim).*

Let us examine this claim that the Zohar is a hidden scroll. He himself wrote (in chapter 15) the definition of a hidden scroll, as follows: "They did not write them out clearly, but with great brevity, with exceptional innuendo and great concealment." It seems to me that the book of the Zohar does not fit this definition at all, for it has a long introduction, stories of deeds and polemics, and it is on all twenty-four books of Scripture (so they claim, though today, some of it is missing). It is thoughtfully edited, and refers to itself as, "the book of the Zohar" and "the composition of the Zohar." It contains several poems according to meter, prayers and blessings, and so on.

It is not only I who thinks so, for the first rabbi who permitted it to be printed (in the first edition, he is called "His excellency, the erudite and exalted sage, our teacher R. Yishaq De Lattes," and the Hida, in *Shem haGedolim* ("Names of the Great Ones"), referred to him as, "His excellency, our teacher Yishaq son of R. Immanuel De Lattes")

wrote the following in his ruling: “The secrets of Kabbalah were written in the Zohar explicitly and not by way of parable and riddle... explicitly, as they came in the Zohar....”.

That is the first difficulty. The second difficulty in this claim is this: If we found hidden scrolls in the revealed Torah, can one extrapolate from that to the hidden Torah, which they forbade to pass even from mouth to ear, with the exception of the head of a rabbinical court, and then only if he had specific concerns? The example that he provides bears no resemblance to the matter at hand – and that itself is the argument of Ari Nohem. Even the author of Magen weSinah admits this, for he wrote (in chapter 29): “That in truth it (the writing of the Zohar in the days of the tannaim) is in violation of what the sages required, to hide these matters, even when transmitting them orally, except to those worthy individuals.”

Furthermore, the claim that he makes here contradicts his own words. For he wrote (chapter 21) that Rishbi and his colleagues hid it for the last generation, and that they knew (by their Holy Spirit) that it would be revealed in the last generation — that it would then be permitted to write Oral Torah, because of “it is a time to act (meaning that there are times when the needs of the hour override legal technicalities).” They knew that the last generation would need these secrets. However, even if this were not the case, that many other books would be written on this subject in explicit terms – somehow, they did not know? And why, according to his words, would they have written the Zohar as a “hidden scroll”? For by the time it would be revealed, it would already be permitted to possess and publish actual full-scale books.

The Zohar was “found” over 800 years ago, and forgive me for pointing out the obvious, but if the “last generation” was that long ago, how would we describe our **own** generation?

In the end, the Zohar is not a hidden scroll, and with his own words, the author of Magen weSinah excluded this possibility.

(5). *[To Ari Nohem’s point that Rishbi would never praise himself to the extent that we see in the Zohar]. In truth, Rishbi did not write the book of the Zohar... for in the Idra Rabba it is explained that Rishbi commanded his student, Ribbi Abba, to write it; and these things are clouded in mystery. The Zohar was written several generations after Rishbi, from what was in writing, and from what was orally transmitted in his name and in the name of the rest of his colleagues and students who were his contemporaries. And even this version was subject to very many additions that were made by the last of the later authorities. After it was written down, and was allowed to be copied, many hands ruled over it; each one, whatever seemed right in his*

opinion, and whatever was new to him, wrote on the margin of the book of the Zohar as notes. His successor would copy it without much contemplation and thought that these notes had been missing in the book, and he put the words into the body of the book. From additions like these came passages on matters of (medieval authorities) Rashi and Rabbenu Tam, and many more such things would occur. And we find in the writings of the Ari, of blessed memory, that he said of several things that they are not from the Zohar at all. And likewise, the arrangement of the portions was done at a later time. And hence the objection of R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena, regarding the praises said of Rishbi, is solved (This is the gist of what he wrote). (Chapter 21).

If you read his words carefully, you will see that they are the very words of R. Ya'akov Emdin (according to the plain sense of his words — which in truth he himself was not so naive as to believe). And I will not be long-winded here. I will only ask one simple question. We have many books, from the sages and from the geonim and the rishonim, which passed from hand to hand and from generation to generation in a continuous way. We have not found any book that suffered so much from late additions that entered from the margins. In contrast, the Zohar, from the time of its revelation until its printing, there were only 260 years in all, and the printers possessed manuscripts that were not written the day before. It is nearly certain that among several dozen manuscripts that were in their possession, some of them were written close to the time of its discovery. If so, perhaps somebody could explain to us how they accidentally included so many “late additions” in such a short period of time, as this author described?

In any event, by his admission that Rishbi did not write the Zohar, nor was it written in his lifetime, this objection of R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena is indeed solved.

(6). *[To Ari Nohem's point that, even if they did allow themselves to write down esoterica, they would not have written it in Aramaic, which was the language of common people in those days]. Behold the end (days) of the Messiah, concerning which the duty of concealment is from the mouth of the angel: “the things are closed and sealed,” etc. How did they write it in the Aramaic language, “until a time and times and half a time (Daniel 7:25 and 12:7)”?* (Chapter 23).

The respondent's answer is null and void. Who can explain to us clearly what “a time and times and half a time” is? No one knows its meaning, as he himself admitted. If so, what difference is there to us whether it is Aramaic or the Holy Tongue? No one understands it. And if you ask, why then did he write thus? I say: in order to stress to

the people that there is an appointed time for redemption. And if you find another explanation, so much the better.

(7). *[To Ari Nohem's reference to the story of R. Yishaq from Acre, which details how the Zohar was forged]. One should not bring testimony and proof from the talk of women. And perhaps some erring person or opponent put these things into The Book of Yuhasin, or into the source where the author of Yuhasin found this — and perhaps for this reason it was omitted in the other printings (of the Zohar). Chapter 23.*

After we have seen all the above testimonies about the Zohar that it is a forgery, and even so, people stubbornly insist that it's authentic — compare this attitude of theirs with their attitude regarding the report in Yuhasin. There is no reason at all to suspect that it is a forgery – yet they question its authenticity. The double standards are glaring. Also, let us ask him how, if one may not rely on a woman, did not Joshua's spies rely on Raḥab the harlot? They didn't know her from before, and she had motivation to lie to them (to save her own people). Furthermore, in Raḥab's case people's lives were at stake. In contrast, we know of no interest that would cause R. Moshe de Leon's wife to lie; on the contrary, the subject is her husband, the righteous man, the godly kabbalist. And in this case, nobody's life is at stake. Furthermore, in Jewish law, a man who continues to cohabit with his adulterous wife is guilty of a serious sin. If the author of Magen weSinah has no faith in women, did he abstain from his wife? We should question whether he ever touched her.

In summarizing the above text, I availed myself of the work of Neḥemiah Shemuel Leibowitz, in his edition of Ari Nohem.

Other Arguments of Magen weSinah

Page 45b. Set your heart upon what your eyes shall see... the greatness of the revelations and the awesome things that are attributed to him... and go out and see what a great man it is who is being testified about... either the Vilna Gaon (R. Eliyahu Zalman, 18th century Lithuania), of blessed memory, was wrong, or his student, R. Ḥayyim, lied about him...

The gist of his argument is that great, trustworthy and righteous men firmly believed that Rishbi composed the Zohar – and that we should not entertain the possibility that such men might be wrong – that the Vilna Gaon was so great that he could not have been mistaken about the Zohar's authenticity.

In fact, impressive spiritual phenomena, even among people regarded as righteous, have never been a reliable guide to the authenticity of a text. A recurrent theme in the

Bible is that no man is perfect. Even the greatest of all men, Moses, erred, and his burial place was kept secret so that Jews would not come to worship him. Moses wasn't perfect – and neither was the Vilna Gaon. It is my position that if, for all practical purposes, you consider a person to be infallible and too great to be mistaken, then you are worshiping that person. I will now illustrate that even “words of prophecy,” or “heavenly announcements,” must be discarded if they contradict logic. Logic reigns supreme, even against “heavenly voices” and “divine revelations.” How much more so, against the opinions of a mere mortal.

I'll quote the editor of Magen weSinah (p. 27b):

His intent is to say that from heaven they will force him to accept what our mind agrees is the opposite — like the case in Baba Meši'a of Ribbi Eli'ezer, where most of the sages agreed to declare the oven impure, and heavenly miracles forced them to accept what was against their view — but that the heart understands it one way, and the heavens say otherwise — the truth can come through anyone.”

His words ring true, and this is the explanation: If we are in doubt about a certain matter, and we have nothing with which to decide (for example, whether the law follows The House of Shammai or the House of Hillel), we may accept the arbitration of a lesser heavenly voice, or of signs from heaven, for in any case we have no decision this way or that. But in our case, since we have a great deal of evidence that the Zohar is a forgery — even if we were to witness heavenly wonders and voices telling us the opposite — it is forbidden to accept them, for “it is not in Heaven.” And if the matter were left in doubt, then we would accept them for arbitration; but since the matter is not so, we must explain these phenomena in other ways. How great is the power of imagination! Especially in people who deprive themselves of sleep and long for visions and sights of prophecy and the like. The force of imagination is known even in men who are entirely sane and upright, who can be completely convinced that they saw Elijah and that he revealed to them such and such, or that they prophesied a prophecy. And I know myself that it is hard to accept these answers when the subject is famous great men of Torah. But what can we do? There is no escape and what has been proven has been proven. Even so, here I will copy the words of one scholar who saw a prophecy:

Behold, anyone who knew me, or saw me, or knew of me, can bear true and faithful witness that from my childhood until this day no trace of unfitness has been found in me; and I kept the Torah in my poverty, and I meditated on it day and night, thanks be to God. And I never pursued bodily desires; and even at a time when I had the means to indulge myself in the way of all the Earth, I added afflictions and sufferings with all my strength, and I took

no bodily pleasure at all... and there are several faithful witnesses who will testify. Still more than all this: I studied Torah in purity until I was twenty years old, and I performed the Tiqqun Kelali (rites of penitence) that the Ari, of blessed memory, said for anyone who had sinned much — even though, thank God, no willful sin was found in me; I did it on the chance that my soul was soiled from another incarnation, Heaven forbid. And in my twentieth year I began to study the book of the Zohar and a little of the writings of the Ari, of blessed memory; and one who comes to be purified, they assist him from heaven, and He sent His holy angels and His pure souls and they made known to me many of the secrets of the Torah.

In that year, after my spirit was awakened in visions of angels and holy souls, when I was in the portion of Wayaqhel, and I was shut in a special room in holiness and purity, after I had prayed the silent prayer with great weeping, while I was occupied with supplications — behold, a spirit passed over my face, the hair of my flesh stood up, and my knees knocked one against the other; I gazed at the Chariot and I saw visions of God all that day and all the night; and then I prophesied a complete prophecy like one of the prophets, ‘Thus said the Lord,’ etc., and it was engraved in my heart with complete clarity...

On the face of it, if such a great and pious man saw a vision like this, there must be substance to it. But not so, dear reader; he prophesied concerning Shabbetai Sevi that he is Messiah, and the man spoken of here is Nathan of Gaza. You might claim that the man was simply lying — and this is possible; but it is also possible that he truly thought he had received a prophecy. Here is a story about another vision, from a man you may have more respect for. Namely the head of the kabbalists in Jerusalem, R. Yehudah Fataya, in his book *Minhath Yehudah*, “The Spirits Speak” (Jerusalem, 1957), p. 75:

...I come bearing news. For in the year 1910, Monday night, 26 December, while I was telling my household the story of the miracle of Hanukkah written in the book Hemdath Yamim, I dozed a little in the middle of the study, and I saw a man about forty-five years old, of beautiful form and beautiful appearance, and he was a smooth man and had no beard, except some twenty or so hairs, one here and one there on the face, far from one another. And he stood behind my left side, and he brought his face near my ear and whispered to me, “I am the author of the book Hemdath Yamim, and now hear my voice and conduct yourself according to my custom (that is, that he believed in Shabbetai Sevi, may the name of the wicked rot, that he is the Messiah of the Lord (Heaven forbid), and I will teach you all four parts of Hemdath Yamim in a single moment.” I said to him, “How can such a thing be, that I can learn the four parts of Hemdath Yamim in a single moment?”

(even though it was not my intent, in the dream, to conduct myself according to his custom, Heaven forbid). He said to me, “For when I composed the book Hemdath Yamim, I was already attached to Shabbetai Sevi, and I conducted myself in humility according to his custom; and because it was my will to draw the hearts of the children of Israel after him as well, I judged in my mind that they would certainly not listen to my words.

Therefore I devised a great stratagem, and I composed the book Hemdath Yamim, which is entirely full of morals and piety and fear of the Lord, so that if afterward I should entice Israel to follow after Shabbetai Sevi, they would accept my words with no protest, saying, ‘how could a pious and holy man, such an expert in the revealed and the hidden things, create a stumbling-block for Israel, Heaven forbid?’ (This is the argument of Magen weSinah above, which he copied). If they are not sure that Shabbetai Sevi is the Messiah of the Lord in truth, then by this they will nullify their own opinion in favor of my opinion. And that is what I said to you, ‘If you do according to my custom, I will teach you in a single moment all four parts of Hemdath Yamim, because the whole essence of the composition of the four parts of Hemdath Yamim is only so that those who study it will agree to follow after my opinion and my will. And if you are willing to agree, then you are as one who has already learned all four parts. For why should you still study them, once my request has been done without studying it? And the result is as if you learned, in a single moment, all the purpose of the composition Hemdath Yamim.’”

At that point, the vision ended, and I woke up. Later, on the night of the fourth day, the 28th of December mentioned above, I had a vision as if it were Sabbath afternoon, and I was wrapped in a wool cloak because of the cold, and sitting on wool cushions in a special room, and sitting and studying the book Eṣ Hayim, and about twenty other books... in order to research some urgent matter that was hard to understand... and my heart was very troubled, and confused in understanding that subject. And in the midst of this I saw one very large raven, twice the size of other ravens, that was greatly confused and turning over in its flight, as if it had been struck on the head by those chasing it; and it came and hid under my cloak from great fear. And I turned my face backward in order to see who it was who was chasing it, and behold, I saw three men with large sticks in their hands, with which they were beating that raven with cruel blows; and indeed, they did not see where the raven had escaped from their pursuit. And they were looking in anger and rage this way and that, to find out where the raven had fled, in order to chase it further and beat it. And behold, there appeared to my eyes one man who was an officer over those three men, and this is what

he told them, “Say to the Gazans: Nathan has come — here he is!” And he pointed with his finger at the raven hidden under my cloak (and from this I understood that the raven is Nathan of Gaza)... and I awakened, and I slept again, and dreamed a second time, and behold it was a weekday, and I was praying the morning prayer in the synagogue called “The Egyptian House”... and Nathan of Gaza came and stood outside the doorway of the synagogue, and spread his hands toward me and was pleading and saying: “And it shall be charitable for you before the Lord” — that is, I shall be grateful if, in your kindness, you make a rectification for my soul, to save it and give it rest from the hollow of the sling, in which I am tortured...

Stories like these have greatly proliferated, including among the nations of the world; and from here it is understood that one should not use visions as evidence for anything.

Page 52a. And besides this, the truly intelligent man will see that it is impossible to say, in any way, that all the things mentioned in the book of the Zohar came from the heart of R. Mosheh de Leon...

I do not know what he meant to tell us here that we didn't already know. I have not yet heard of anyone who claims that R. Mosheh de Leon composed the entire Zohar, and this is a simple matter — R. Ya'aqov Emdin also testified to this, and all the academics in our own time. Even a casual observer, with nothing more than a superficial glance, can see that there was more than one author of the Zohar, and that other authors composed the Ra'aya Mehemna separately, the Tikkunim separately, the Zohar separately, and the Zohar Hadash separately.

Page 52a. Behold, even according to his own claim, that in truth Ribbi Yishaq of Acre testified that the book of the Zohar... R. Mosheh invented from his heart — if so, why did he himself give so much credence to this discipline (the Kabbalah), as is known that he was a student of Nahmanides?

This response is not relevant to the matter at hand. Nahmanides was a firm believer in the Kabbalah without even knowing of the existence of the Zohar. And what has belief in the authenticity of the Zohar to do with belief in the Kabbalah? R. Ya'aqov Emdin did not believe in the authenticity of most of the Zohar, and even so he was very diligent in Kabbalah; one does not depend upon the other. You should also know that in that same period R. Yishaq of 'Akko himself composed a commentary on the Torah according to the Kabbalah (*Me'irath 'Enayim*). And perhaps he feared that through a forgery like this (that people would believe there is a commentary on the Torah, according to Kabbalah, from Rishbi), no one would want to read his own book; and after all his hard work on his commentary, it is no wonder that he longed to clarify the

truth of the revelation of the book of the Zohar, and to publicize its forgery, if it was indeed a forgery.

Page 52b. But the expositions (of the Zohar) and the interpretations of the Writings (one of the three sections of Scripture, which also includes Torah and Prophets), and who arranged them according to the order of the portions — in truth it is not known to us.

Now we will quote nearly all of chapter 21 of his book, and the intelligent reader will see, from his own words, the refutation of his arguments (and my words are in parentheses):

He returned to what he claimed in the beginning, that Rishbi did not compose the book of the Zohar, for it is forbidden to write Oral Torah. And I have already debunked his words above, by what we find also in the Talmud: That even before Ravina and Rav Ashe (he accepts the French version of the letter of Rav Sherira Gaon, that the sages considered it forbidden to write down the Mishnah until the closing of the Talmud, by Ravina and Rav Ashe in the 5th century) they permitted, with the agreement of the sages of their generation, to write it down, because of “it is a time to act for the Lord (i.e. we sometimes compromise legality for the greater good).”

We also find, in several places, that they had hidden scrolls, which Rashi explained as writings they hid because it is forbidden to write Oral Torah. If so, should it shock anybody if we claim that in the days of Rishbi, and the generation after him, things were written in a book so that they would not be forgotten? And in truth it was a hidden scroll and was not revealed to any man; rather, they were hidden in a cave, as will be explained in coming chapters — until He, may He be blessed, agreed to the revelation of these things, according to the time and the season fit for the repair of the world (Tiqqun ‘Olam), as the Ari, of blessed memory, said about this. And this too was because of “it is a time to act for the Lord,” as Ravina and Rav Ashe intended when they wrote the entire Talmud.

In truth, the holy Zohar was revealed several generations after the time of the amuraim; so too it was from Heaven that these writings should be revealed in a later time, after the days of Nahmanides. So it is written in the holy Zohar itself, in several places, that it is destined to be revealed at the end of days. For this was necessary according to the season and the time; and who has stood in the counsel of the Lord and His thought, which is deep and lofty? And hence, his argument is entirely nullified.

In truth, Rishbi did not write these things in a book, and he was not the one who arranged them according to the order of the portions of the Torah as it is before us today. For also in the Idra Rabba it is explained that Rishbi commanded his student, Ribbi Abba, to write them, because he knew in his heart that he could hide the lofty things and the awesome secrets in a concise and discreet way, so that only one who is worthy would understand them. For in truth the things are sealed and hidden very much. And in truth the book of the Zohar was written several generations after Rishbi (this is astonishing; he just wrote that Ribbi Abba wrote it per Rishbi's instructions) from what was written and received in his name and from the rest of his colleagues and students who were in his days... And in truth the arrangement of the holy Zohar according to the order of the portions was in the time of the geonim.

It's impressive that they succeeded in writing these secrets down during the time of the geonim, even though it was not revealed at all until after the death of Nahmanides, as he wrote above, explicitly; and he wrote this even more clearly in chapter 29:

Rishbi and his colleagues, who composed the Holy Zohar and hid them... for the last generation.

It's no wonder that almost all the arguments of the author of Magen weSinah are illogical, for he scorns the intellect, as he wrote (p. 4a):

Only what limited intellect attains; if so, the entire Torah depends on this shaky foundation, and it is known that the human intellect is not secure in the truth of a matter, for it changes in quantity and in truth and falsehood.

And (p. 10a):

For there is no knowledge and attainment in the world that depends on the human intellect which is fit to be called by the name "truth."

And (p. 17a):

To distance a man from human inquiry and from wisdom other than... the wisdom of the Torah.

If so, since this author does not believe in "the human intellect," we must ask how he knows anything and on what does he rely? The answer is found on page 5b:

Our great master (the Vilna Gaon) ... there is no wisdom and knowledge in the world which he did not fully master; all who praise themselves and boast in the secular sciences, and the wicked, did not reach his ankles, even like a lapping dog.

He attached so much importance to the Vilna Gaon that even the Ari could not stand against him, as he wrote (p. 37b):

And the main thing is as we have written, that sometimes even the famous kabbalists did not fully understand the depth of the words of the Holy Zohar, as is known to us from the words of our great master the Vilna Gaon, of blessed memory, that they did not fully understand the depth of the holy Zohar in this....

R. Hayim Vital (the main student of the famous kabbalist, the Ari, lived in the 16th and 17th centuries and codified his teacher's kabbalistic insights) too was dwarfed by the greatness of the Vilna Gaon, as he wrote (p. 5b):

Things which no ear has ever heard, and which were not revealed even by R. Hayim Vital, of blessed memory.

From here it is clear that the author of *Magen weSinah* relied on the Vilna Gaon with closed eyes and subjugated himself to him completely. His entire book (since he does not believe in the intellect — evidence is not relevant to anything) is only baseless arguments and a profusion of empty words to calm himself and others that “there are answers.”

The Book Zohar haRaqia'

Its author, R. Yeruham Leiner (1888–1964 Poland and US), did not compose it as a response to Ari Nohem; even so, I decided to discuss it here because it does address some of the arguments of Ari Nohem that we have not dealt with up to now. This book's purpose is to provide a basic background to the various sections of the Zohar and their history. On the title page it is written: “Proofs and demonstrations from the geonim and the rishonim for the antiquity of the book of the Zohar.” The book is well produced and printed in attractive, large letters (in contrast to *Mitpahath Sefarim*), and it is presented as a continuation of the essay “*Qadmuth Sefer haZohar* (The Antiquity of the Book of the Zohar)”. It starts from p. 111.

And he quoted the words of Nahmanides in his commentary on the book of Job: “...and over a sin you complain... a hint in the word tith'onen (you complain), to Onan, the king and the queen, Judah and Tamar his daughter-

in-law; you look forward to his redemption, Boaz who was a redeemer...” And I found the source of Nahmanides’ words — in Zohar Hadash, portion of Tese, in the Hidden Midrash (Warsaw printing, 59a): “And further we have learned from Onan etc.”; and another proof: “‘A child was born to Naomi’ — but was he born to Naomi? Was it not Ruth who bore him? etc.”. (Page 121, in a note)

On the contrary — from here we have proof that the Zohar Hadash was composed after Nahmanides, for it copied from his words in his commentary on Job. And to say that in the days of Nahmanides, the Zohar Hadash was already known — this would be an enormous novelty, and we will discuss this further in our critique of the essay “*Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*.”

He quoted Maimonides, in the introduction to his Codex of Jewish Law, that the prohibition of writing Oral Torah only applies if it’s for teaching in public, but not for an individual; and therefore, it was permitted for Ribbi Abba, or for Rishbi, to write the Zohar. (Page 123).

His inference from Maimonides is correct — but it will not help him. For there the subject is specifically the revealed Torah, and here we are discussing esoterica; and regarding esoterica, Maimonides wrote in the Guide for the Perplexed (introduction to part three) that the esoterica of the Torah were never written in a book. And if we say that it was permitted to write the revealed Torah in hidden scrolls — how can we assume that this also applies to its secrets? Did not R. Moshe Hayim Luzzatto (18th century moralist and kabbalist) also write (in his commentary on the Aggadot of the sages): “For regarding the explanation of the commandments and the laws, there is no harm at all if they are written in explanatory books that are available to all. But the esoterica are not fit to be delivered thus before anyone who wishes to delve into them...”.

He cited the objection raised by some that it is not reasonable that the sages would write secrets in Aramaic, for it is more honorable to write them in the Holy Tongue; and he brought evidence that one may teach in whatever language he wishes, from the words of Rav Sherira Gaon in his letter, and he called him “a faithful witness.” (Page 125).

He does not address the main argument at all. It’s simply easier for him to respond to the low hanging fruit than the main difficulty. The main difficulty of Ari Nohem is: Why would they write the secrets of the Torah in a language that everyone speaks — even Gentiles, women, and children? They should have written in the Holy Tongue, which only disciples of the sages understand. Therefore, his answer is not an answer. Furthermore, if this author admits that Rav Sherira Gaon is a “faithful witness,” let us

cite other things that he wrote in that same letter: “And there was not one, from among the ancients, who wrote anything, until the end of the days of our Holy Teacher (Judah the Prince, died around 217 CE)” (French version: “and until the end of the days of the sages, there is no one who wrote anything at all”). If Rav Sherira Gaon was faithful — then R. Leiner was not faithful.

He solved the difficulty of the mention of amuraim in the Zohar with the claim that “the books of the Zohar were arranged by the students of his students, who were amuraim.” (Page 124).

This answer might seem like a valid one — but it does not explain to us how Rishbi himself is described as sitting with, and speaking with, the amuraim, as R. Ya’aqov Emdin and haWikuaḥ (which we shall discuss later) clearly pointed out in their books.

He cited the objection that the cantillation marks and the vocalizations are late; and according to his version of this objection, he cited the following ancient sources:

Nedarim 37b, “and they understood the Scripture — this is the punctuation of the accents”; and the Ran (R. Nissim of Gerona 1310-1376) and the Rosh (R. Ashe ben Yehiel, about 1250-1327) explained it as the vocalization (vowels) of the accents, as it says in the first chapter of Hagigah (6b), “the difference is for the punctuation of the accent”; and Rashi explained, “to punctuate the accents with the melodies... with an ethnaḥa... or with a zaqef qatan (these are the names of two of the traditional cantillation marks)....”

Bamidbar Rabbah and Avoth de Ribbi Nathan 34: “when Ezra wrote the Torah, he made points.”

Sifrei on Beha’alothekha, paragraph 69, enumerates the pointed words in the Torah.

Qoheleth Rabbah 7:1: “Rav Osh’iaya taught: Even a single point.” (Page 130).

If you have read R. Ya’aqov Emdin’s argument, you would know that he did not think the ancient sages had no tradition of the chanting of the Torah and no tradition of vocalization — only that they were not written, and that the cantillation marks and the vocalizations were not known by their names. This is very clear from R. Emdin’s words; look there again. Therefore, what he quoted from Tractate Nedarim is irrelevant to R. Emdin’s objection or to that of haWikuaḥ.

As for what he cited from Bamidbar Rabbah, Avoth deRabbi Nathan, and Sifrei, it is not possible, in any of these, to explain that the intent is the vowel points. If so, what sense is there in counting all the pointed words in the Torah? Are they not all pointed? And it is obvious that the intent in all of these is the letters that are dotted above them, such as “for us and for our children,” “and he kissed him.” As for the quote from Qoheleth Rabbah, we will explain it later among the arguments of the book *haWikuah*.

he claimed that the very fact that the book of the Zohar contradicts the words of the Talmud is evidence of its antiquity, for if not, he wouldn't dare do so. (Page 133).

This claim of his is built on a conclusion he fixed for himself — that one of the sages composed it and conducted himself according to the rules customary among them. But for one who maintains that it is a forgery, the matter is easily understood: Its author pretended to be one of the sages and permitted himself to disagree with them.

He discussed the question why the Zohar is not mentioned in the Talmud. He wrote that this is “an argument of fraud,” for they were sternly warned to hide the Work of Creation and the Work of the Chariot (esoterica). And Rashi explained that “they are baraitoth (similar to the Mishnah but with less authority).” (Page 134).

This is an answer of fraud. Was the Book of Yesirah not mentioned in the Talmud, and the Work of Creation and the Work of the Chariot? And why did they refrain from mentioning the Book of the Zohar, without revealing its secrets, as they did with these other compositions? Furthermore, today there are collections of stories, collected from the Zohar, that women and children read, and no one interprets them according to their literal meaning as esoterica. Bearing this in mind, why do we not find, in the words of the sages, any deed or law from the book of the Zohar that is not (according to its plain sense) esoterica? What evidence does he have that the very mention of the name of a book that contains secrets is considered “revealing secrets”? If this were the case, why was it permitted for them to mention “the Work of Creation” and “the Work of the Chariot” and the Book of Yesirah?

All the rest of his book, on this subject, is dedicated to convincing us that the geonim and the rishonim used the Zohar as a source — even though “they completely refrained from mentioning it explicitly” (p. 139). And below (in our critique of the book *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*) we will discuss this further. And in any case, it appears that he has concealed from us the fact that the geonim and Maimonides (whom he repeatedly claims drew from the Zohar), disagreed with the views of the Zohar and the kabbalists in most cases, as is well known – except to him and to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. In any event, according to his own words, he is forced to admit that the letter

(“The Scroll of Secrets”) which they claim Maimonides wrote when he discovered the Kabbalah at the end of his life — is a forgery. For according to him, Maimonides was familiar with the Kabbalah for most of his life.

The Book Arze Levanon

Its author was R. Yishaq Ber Levinsohn of Kremenets (1788–1860 Poland), and he was a Hebrew grammarian. At the end of his grammar book is an essay on the origin of the Zohar. In a sense, it would have been proper to quote everything he wrote on this subject, for he wrote it concisely and thoughtfully; but for the sake of my own brevity, I have copied only his arguments which I did not find in other places, and which I consider especially forceful. And they are these:

*... I thought it would be proper to list, for the benefit of the reader, many examples from the language of the Zohar, to support what we've been saying (that it is of very late origin). I have refrained, for this subject would grow long. Inspiration will come, God willing... And in any event, I will present here one example: In the Zohar Aḥarei (65b), “Moses knew the esoteric secret... and comprehended (ואתדבק) **Ithdabeq** what the rest of the world did not comprehend (**ithdabequ**).” The intent is that he comprehended what others did not comprehend — and every reader knows that this use of the word Ithdabeq as “comprehension” came about among later authors, in the fields of ethics and spirituality. For example: A person attained in his intellect a fine matter in some wisdom, and his attainment is higher and greater than the attainment of his fellow, etc. This is taken from the Hebrew root nasag, which is borrowed from the word for “reaching” a place and a situation, as is known. And because the Aramaic translation of nasag is dabaq, we translate “and he overtook him,” we'adbeqinnun, and so we also find in Scripture the root dabaq in the sense of reaching a place, exactly like the root nasag, “and he pursued him and clung to him at Mount Gilead.” The author of the book of the Zohar took the root dabaq in the later Aramaic sense of hasagah, and this use of the word does not exist in the Talmuds and the midrashim in this sense. They used different words, for example: “it rose (‘aletha) into his hand,” “it was revealed (nithgaleh) to R. so-and-so what was not revealed to Moses,” “a maidservant saw (raatha) on the sea...” etc. (Page 242).*

It seems to me that he did this (forged the Zohar), without doubt, for another reason, and out of great necessity, in the spirit of “it is a time to act for the Lord.” For it is known that in the time of Nahmanides and those who followed him, in the time of his students, the Rishba (R. Shelomoh ben Avraham ibn Adreth of Barcelona 1235–1310), many men arose and allowed

themselves to be influenced by foreign studies, in the philosophy of the Aristotelians, and as is known from the excommunications that were then decreed.

This sage, R. Moshe de Leon, feared lest the foundations of the religion fall by their hands entirely. Then he rose and clothed himself in zeal and composed the Zohar, a book that is founded upon the ancient philosophy (collected and founded upon the books of Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates, and the Greek sages whose view was close to the view of the sages of Israel, as the Zohar wrote explicitly, Exodus 237a, “which has no defect, that is the kingdom of Greece,” that they are close to the faithful path. R. Recanati (R. Menahem Recanati late 13th–early 14th century, Italy), explained that this refers to the philosophers we mentioned) ... And diligently look this up in the Zohar, portion Teṣe, in the words of the Ra’aya Mehemna, there are 408 demons, and aligned against them, the philosophers of Israel,” etc. (Page 244).

The casual reader might conclude that I’m not being even-handed – since I do not include refutations against those who argue that the Zohar is a forgery; my only refutations are against those who claim its authenticity. The reason I do not include such refutations is very simple: There are none. Religious Jews are taught that they are not allowed to question the authenticity, or authority, of the Zohar; any such doubts are considered “heresy.” Hence, the rabbis spent very little energy in defense of the Zohar. “Faith” was all they needed. In the rare instances when somebody did question it, the rabbis would use the “Thick Book” method, pointing to one of the books I have critiqued and claiming that “the matter has been dealt with.”

Believers in the Zohar are spiritual cousins to certain political “progressives;” they seem to believe that if they repeat the same lies over and over again, eventually, they become “facts.”

The Book HaWikuah

The author of *haWikuah* (The Argument) is R. Shemuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865 Italy). He, apparently, identified as a “maskil” (a modern intellectual); even so, he respected the rabbis. He was a grammarian and a great scholar, and he used all his strength to encourage the observance of the commandments. He wrote his book on two subjects, like *Ari Nohem*: To oppose the Kabbalah, and to prove the late date of the composition of the book of the Zohar. In my opinion he succeeded, in the last matter, more than all the other authors; and there is in his words enough and more than enough to prove it to the point where only the most stubborn would not be convinced after reading his book. There are many stubborn people.

A majority of his effort was to prove that the vocalizations and the cantillation marks did not exist in the days of the sages at all; and to this end, he poured a lot of ink. This is important because the Zohar refers to these marks many times by name. The suggestion that all these references are “late additions” would be absurd. I will quote the headings of his chapters, and then my own commentary.

These are his sources on the subject of the late origin of the vocalizations and the cantillation marks (the written ones):

- (1). Ibn Ezra in his book *Saḥoth*: “from the sages of Tiberias we received all the vocalizations.”
- (2). *R. Eliyahu Baḥur, Masoreth haMasoreth, introduction 3, proved that the vocalizations did not exist and were not invented until after the close of the Talmud. (He reviewed all the writings of the sages and did not find any mention of a vocalization or cantillation.)*
- (3) *The gentile, Hieronymus (who lived in the time of Rav Ashe), who translated and interpreted Scripture into Latin, never mentioned in any of his many books, neither vocalizations nor cantillation marks.*
- (4). *In at least in two places the sages would have needed to mention the vocalizations (if they had had them). 1) Why did they not inform us that a vocalized Torah scroll is unfit? 2) In the matter of writing on the Sabbath, how did it not occur to even one of them to ask (when discussing the minimum two letters required to violate the prohibition of writing on Sabbath), “two letters with their vocalizations, or perhaps even without their vocalizations? And if you conclude that he’s culpable even without the vocalizations, what if he writes two vocalizations, one next to the other, what is his status? Do we consider it to be one sere (a vocalization written with two points side by side) so that he is exempt, or perhaps it is two hiraqs (each hiraq is only one point, so that it would qualify as two symbols) and he is culpable? After all, don’t we find many such far-fetched questions in the Talmud? Regarding the cantillation marks, there are thousands of places where they should have mentioned them, in order to derive from them the interpretations of the verses.*
- (5). *The masters of the Masorah were after the Talmud. Here are three rishonim who confirm this:*

a) *Hovoth haLevavoth*, introduction, “I have studied the books of the ancients who were after the men of the Talmud... in the book of R. Yonah ibn Janah and the masters of the Masoreth.”

b) The Ibn ‘Ezra, at the beginning of his book *Me’oznayim*, “and after that (after the men of the Talmud) there arose... the men of the Masoreth.”

c) It appears from Maimonides, laws of Torah scrolls chapter 8: “and so the masters of the Masorah (whose version of the Torah we depend upon) are according to the corrections of ben Asher (who was a great master of the Masoreth).”

(6). *The “Masoreth”, which is mentioned by the sages of the Talmud, refers to whether words of Scripture are written in their full form or abridged form (with or without auxiliary letters that can indicate a vowel). So wrote the Rosh (R. Asher ben Yehiel c. 1250–1327) and the Tosafoth, Nedarim 37b.*

(7). *The writing of the cantillation marks is a late innovation — Qiddushin 30a: “We are not expert in the verses either. For when Rav Aha bar Adda came, he said: In the West they divide this verse into three verses — ‘And the Lord said to Moses, Behold I come to you in the thickness of the cloud...’” And do not object by saying, “Behold, they were even unsure about full forms and abridged forms of spelling, and this is in the written text; if so, why should they not have doubts about vocalizations and cantillation marks?” This is not so, for full form and abridged form spelling is a very difficult matter, that all the scribes spent a lot of effort to get right. And the fact is that even in this exile, there arose disputes about this, between the various communities. However, from the time the Masorah was founded, we do not find any dispute about the division of the verses. And how, if in the past thousand and four hundred years there has been no such dispute, then among the sages (who were far more expert and precise) would there be doubts from the time of Ezra until the sages of the Talmud, that this period was much shorter? (These doubts could only have arisen in the absence of written cantillation marks).*

(8). *Menahoth 29b (or Yoma 52b): “Speak to Aaron your brother, that he not come at every time into the Holy Place, from within the veil, before the cover that is on the Ark, so that he does not die.” Rabban Gamliel reads “into the Holy Place” without “he shall come,” and “from within the veil... before the cover” without “he shall die,” which is the sense of the cantillation we have today. If they had a written Masoretic tradition, how did a dispute like this begin?*

(9). *(Mekhiletha of Rishbi on Shelah 17): Five verses in the Torah whose parsing is in doubt:*

- (a). *se'et (שֶׁ'עֵת) - “shall be lifted” / “sin offering” (Genesis 4:7)*
- (b). *meshuqadim (מִשְׁשׁוּקָדִים) - “almond-shaped” (Exodus 25:34)*
- (c). *maḥar (מָחָר) - “tomorrow” (Exodus 17:9)*
- (d). *arur (אָרַר) - “cursed” (Genesis 49:7)*
- (e). *wegam (וְגַם) - “and he will arise” (Deuteronomy 31:16) (Yoma 52b).*

And in Bereshith Rabbah (portion 80) R. Tanḥuma adds one more:

- (f). *keShom'am (כְּשָׁמְעָם) - “as they heard” (Genesis 34:7).*

Since the days of the geonim, we have not had such disputes. And do not object from the dispute of “halleluyah” (Pesahim 117a) and “kasiyah” and “yiddidiyah” and “umerḥavyah,” whether they are one word or two words (the final “yah” means “God” and be either a suffix or its own word), because this depends on the written text; if so, the books were also faulty — this is not a valid objection, for the joining of a word to its fellow, or its distance from it, is a thing that a man might err in. And further, this objection actually includes our own objection (that is, if you raise this objection, we’ll agree – and it only strengthens our own objection), for in the Masorah every word has a cantillation mark, and if some men sometimes erred in distancing a letter from its fellow, that is possible; but to claim that they also did not see if there is a cantillation mark on every instance of the word “Yah” or not — and in all the Psalms?! That is not possible.

(10). *Ribbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon was executed by burning, because he would pronounce the Name of God by its letters. And according to the explanation of Tosafoth (and the rest of the commentators, except for Rishbi), the intent was that he would read the Name with four letters, as it is written, in order to teach students; and if there were then vocalizations, he certainly would have spared himself from this offense, and would have said to them “Yod with a shewa, the letter Heh with a ḥolem” etc. (Avodah Zarah 18a).*

(11). *Hieronymus also wrote that he feared to translate the book of Chronicles, lest he err in the many names in it. He already knew the Holy Tongue and did not approach this work until he read it from its beginning to its end with a Jewish sage from among the sages of Tiberias (this letter is found in the book “the Bible” in the introduction to the translation of Chronicles). (This man was “a Gentile recounting something without bias” – making him more trustworthy” – the copyist.)*

(12). The author of *Me'or 'Enayim* (chapter 59) cited “evidence” for the antiquity of the vocalizations from the words of Hieronymus, and his proof is no proof, for it is based on a corrupted translation. On the contrary, his words are decisive proof that in the days of Rav Ashe there was no vocalization.

Here is the original text of what he wrote:

VOCABULIS IN MEDIO LITTERIS PERRARO UTUNTUR HEBRAEI ET PRO VOLUNTATE LECTORUM ET VARIETATE REGIONUM EADEM VERBA DIVERSIS SONIS ATQUE ACCENTIBUS PROFERUNTUR

Translation: “The Hebrews almost never write extra letters (vowels) in the middle of words. As a result, the same words are spoken with different sounds and stresses, depending on the reader’s preference and the region they come from.”

(13). *Who reads it qodesh?* ‘Qadosh’ is how we read it.” They did not say who WRITES it ‘Qodesh’, or who VOCALIZES it ‘Qodesh’. Similarly, in Yevamoth 75b, “Rabbah said, we read it ‘Paṣua’ (a shawa with the letter Peh), and we do not read it poṣua’ (a Qomeṣ with the letter Peh).” He did not say, “As it is written Paṣua’,” (Qiddushin 54b and similarly in many places).

(14). He said to him, Ishmael my brother, how do you read: ‘Ki tovim **dodekha** (for your breasts are good – Song of Songs 1:2),’ or ‘Ki tovim **dodayikh**’?” And he did not say to him, “how is it written,” or “how is it vocalized?” Aside from the fact that had their books been vocalized, there would be no possibility of such a question. If you object that they forgot or that some of the vocalizations were rendered difficult to read, they would not have had to discuss it from logical deduction; they would have counted the books and gone after the majority (as it is in tractate Soferim, chapter 6). (Avodah Zarah 29b).

(15). We will make you circlets of gold, with points of silver (Song of Songs 1:11). With points of silver — Ribbi Abba bar Kahana said, “these are the letters”. Ribbi Aḥa said: “these are the words”. That is, we shall make you ornaments of gold, “this is the written text”; with points of silver, “this is the (Aramaic) translation.” – And how did it not occur to anyone to expound the points of silver as the vocalizations? (Shir haShirim Rabbah on the Tore Zahav). And on the verse and his banner over me is love (Song of Songs 2:4), the author of Matenoth Kehunah wrote in his commentary that their books were not vocalized.

This what he wrote: “For their books were not vocalized, and we know this from Joab’s master and how he misinterpreted the words Zekher ‘Amaleq (reading it,

instead, as Zakhar ‘Amaleq). The only difference being in the vocalization, which was clearly not written; Zekher would mean, ‘the memory of...’ and Zakhar would mean, ‘the males of’; and in old books the name Moshe was written with an extra letter Waw to indicate the vowel O, and Aharon was written similarly with an extra letter Waw. However, they did not add an extra Waw to the name ‘Ephron (because unvocalized manuscripts can be inconsistent with vowel letters).”

These are the sources that can be mistaken as evidence that vocalization did exist in the days of the Talmud, and their explanation:

(1). How is this verse written? *And he sent the youths of the children of Israel, and they offered burnt-offerings, and they sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen to the Lord* (Exodus 24:5). What is the difference? To punctuate the accents. – On the contrary: from here we see that the cantillations were not written; and this comes to strengthen the correct reading of the verse, which is Oral Torah here. (*Hagigah* 6b).

A more comprehensive explanation:

The last word is *parim* (“oxen / bulls”). The question is what it belongs to.

- a. Only the peace-offerings were bulls:
they offered burnt-offerings, and they sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen.
- b. Both were bulls:
they offered burnt-offerings of oxen, and they sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen.

That is a pause-problem. A written *athnaḥa* or similar mark would fix whether *parim* reaches back over both clauses or only the last one. The Gemara says the difference is *le-fasuq ta’ame* — “to punctuate the accents,” i.e. to fix that parsing.

(2). One who reads (scripture) without chanting according to the cantillations, of him Scripture says, “And I also gave them statutes that were not good.” This is to encourage the preservation of part of the Oral Torah, which is the chanting of the verses. (*Megillah* 32a).

(3). A (Torah) scroll whose verses they had divided and vocalized. That is to say, they would make a mark at the beginning of the verses. And this, in itself, is proof that they did not have vocalization and cantillation marks; for if this were

not so, why did they not mention that as well? (*Tractate Soferim*, chapter 3, halakhah 7).

(4). It is written *and in the seventh year...*, and R. Yehoshua' of Benveniste (R. Yehoshua' Raphael ben Yisrael Benveniste 17th century Constantinople) explained: "In the *Shevi'ith* (the seventh year) it is written with a *pataḥ*, and not in *Shevi'ith* with a *hiraq* (the names of two vocalizations); and if so, that is *Shevi'ith* of *sale*." And behold, they say *written* and they did not say *we read*. Hence, it seems to imply that their books were vocalized. If the explanation of the commentator is correct, we shall say they were simply not precise in their language, and they said, "we write" instead of "we read." However, it is certainly more reasonable to say that the Talmud was not referring to the letter Heh as a definite article, but upon the *waw* that joins the end of the verse with its beginning. (*Yerushlami*, beginning of *Qiddushin*, and in *Shevi'it*).

A more comprehensive explanation:

Exodus 21:2: — "and in the seventh (*uvashevi'ith*) he shall go out free."

Two readings of וּבִשְׁבִיעִית:

(a) *uvashevi'it* (pataḥ under the *shin*) — the seventh year of this sale

(b) *uvishevi'it* (hiraq) — the Sabbatical year of the calendar

The *Yerushlami* (start of *Qiddushin*, and the parallel in *Shevi'ith*) says: "It is written *uvashevi'ith*" Benveniste takes that as: Written with a *pataḥ*, not a *hiraq*, therefore it is the seventh of the sale, not shemīṭah of the world.

(5). Is it written *yimseh*? *Yimseh* is written." Since in most places they used the language "we read" (*qarinan*), we must say that here they were not being precise — just as they said in *Berakhot* 54a: "One who comes upon his mother should look forward to (an increase in) understanding (*binah*), as it is said, *for it (ki im) you call to understanding*." They ought to have said, "Do not read *ki im* but *ki em*" (*em* meaning "mother") — they were not always precise in their terminology.

(6). *And he said, Moses, Moses*; you find in *Abraham, Abraham* there is a break in it; *Jacob, Jacob* there is a break in it; *Samuel, Samuei* there is a break in it; but *Moses Moses* — there is no break in it. (*Shemoth Rabbah* 2:6). Similarly, in *Midrash Qoheleth*, (on the verse, *a good name is better than good oil*). We find this also in *Midrash Shemuel*, portion 23. It is also cited in *Yalquth Qoheleth*, hint 973. This is what it says: (the names of the tribes are engraved on Aaron's heart), "If they were missing even one letter; they would not bring atonement." Ribbi

Hosh'iyah taught, 'even if it was missing one dot.' – The word “*break*,” which is in *Shemoth Rabbah*, might be referring to an oral pause, that one must pause with the voice and not in writing; that is to say, that it was received in the Oral Torah that one must pause between Abraham and Abraham, etc., but not between Moses and Moses.

Regarding the “one dot,” mentioned in *Midrash Qoheleth*, it is possible that the intent in it is the dots that the letters are made of, such as the three heads of the *shin*. And so, they expounded in *Shir haShirim Rabbah*, “points of silver,” these are the letters, for even if we accept the antiquity of the vocalizations, we have not yet seen anybody who claims that the names of the tribes that are engraved in the stones of the ephod were vocalized (this is why I translated the word “*niqqud*” here as “dot” even though I translated it elsewhere as “vocalization”). Another answer: not all the midrashim are as ancient as the Talmud (especially this passage, which from a midrash that is well-known to be late, and it is an anonymous saying — indicating that it is an addition of an editor).

A Few of My Own Conjectures

(1). If the vocalizations were Torah to Moses from Sinai, and accepted among the people of Israel from the days of the tannaim and the prophets, if so, how did several different systems of vocalization arise — that of the Land of Israel, Tiberian, and Babylonian?

(2). In many places we find “do not read thus, but thus,” and the sole difference between the two forms is in the vocalization. The one who says it to his fellow verbally does not need to explain which difference there is in the vocalization because it can be clearly heard — but the copyist would have had to explain it because readers cannot hear the difference from the text. Here are some examples where the ancient sages make plays on the words of Scripture where the difference is not detectable from the script; had the vocalizations existed in their time, they would certainly have referred to them in these cases:

(a). “Can a woman forget her nursing child (*olah*), and have no compassion on the son of her womb (Isaiah 49:14)?” Ribbi Abbahu says, “Can a woman forget a burnt-offering?” — You have forgotten those offerings that we used to bring before You.” The only difference is the vowels: *ulah* / *olah*, which is not reflected in written Scripture. (*Berakhoth* 32b and also *Pesiqetha de Rav Kahana*).

(b). “And He will bless (*u-verakh*) your bread and your water (Exodus 23:25).” Do not read *u-verakh* but *u-varekh*.” (*Berakhoth* 48b). Both

versions have the same letters, וברך: *u-verakh* = “and He will bless”; *u-varekh* = “and bless.” and the only difference is in the vocalization.

(c). “And all the congregation saw (*weyir'u*) that Aaron was dead (Numbers 20:29).” *Do not read weyir'u but weyera'u.*” (*Rosh Hashanah* 2b). Similarly, both versions are the same letters, ויראו: *we-yir'u* = “and they shall see / fear”; *we-yera'u* = “and they shall appear.”

(d). “Have I been a wilderness/desert (*midbar*) to Israel ... (Jeremiah 20:31)?” *Do not let it be read midbar but medabber.*” (*Tanḥuma*, Masse 9). Again, the same letters: מדבר: *midbar* = “wilderness”; *medaber* = “speaking.”

(e). “I shall comfort you: And a shoot shall come forth (*weyasa*) from the stock of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).” He only says *weyasa*.” (*Pesiqta Rabbati*). See Radal (R. David Luria 1798–1855). The midrash never states the alternate vocalization.

(f). “And He said to him, where are you (*ekhah*) (Genesis 3:9).” *Ayekah is written.* (*Ekhah Rabbah* Preface 4). Same letters, but different vocalization. איכה: *ekhah* = “how,” a reference to the Book of Lamentations; *ayekah* = “where are you?”

(g). ““he treated [God] with contempt (*weyinabel*) (Deuteronomy 32:15).” *Do not read weyinabel but weyinbal* (*Sifre, Ha'azinu* 318). וינבל: *weyinabel* = “and he treated as vile”; *weyinbal* = “and he became a fool.”

(h). “His vigor had not waned (*lo nas lehoh*) (Deuteronomy 34:7).” *Do not read lo nes lehoh but lo nes lehoh.*” (*Sifre Ha'azinu*). נס can be read “nas” = waned or “nes” = miracle. Same letters; only the vowels change the meaning.

(I). “The writing was the writing of God, engraved (*haruth*) on the tablets (Exodus 32:16).” *Do not read haruth but heruth.*” (*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 2). The verse is Exodus 32:16, חרות: *haruth* = “engraved”; *heruth* = “freedom.”

(j). “I will pursue, I will overtake (*Exodus 15:9*).” It does not say *we will divide* (*nahaloq*), but rather *I will divide* (*ahaleq*) the spoil; *I will divide my enemies, and my foes are mine.* (*Midrash Tehillim* 24). The alternative reading is not specified.

(3). Conversely, when there is a difference between two versions in the letter of the written text, even though there is no need to explain (since the difference is both heard and read), we sometimes find them explaining anyway; ‘*Eruvin* 53a: “Ribbi Yoḥanan said, I grew up for 18 days with Ribbi Osh’iya the son of Ribbi, and I learned from him only one thing in our studies: How they extend the cities (for the purpose of carrying on the Sabbath) — with an *aleph*.” The difference between the two versions is that one is said with the letter Aleph, while the other is said with the letter ‘Ayin – and the letter difference is specified.

(4). *These are written with the letter Waw, and they are read without the letter Waw: Waya’alu, ameru etc. (Tractate Soferim 7:1) And there, halakhah 2, These are written with the letter Heh and they are not read (with the letter Heh): We’ere, wa’avi etc. — It would have been more accurate to say, And they are read with a Shureq or with a Holem, (the names of vocalizations) or And they read them without a qames, because these are the actual vowels that they were referring to – but clearly, they did not have the terminology to do so, since it hadn’t been invented yet.*

(5). If a vocalization or a cantillation were to be found in a midrash — it would not constitute evidence of the antiquity of the vocalization or the cantillation marks, for many midrashim are of late origin. But if even the later midrashim have no mention of them — it does present a measure of proof that the vocalizations and cantillation marks are not ancient. And even though at the time the later midrashim were composed, vocalizations already existed, their editors perpetuated the habits and style of the sages in most cases, and most of their sayings too, they took from more ancient sources.

It is reasonable that the full spelling (liberal use of the letters *Waw* and *Yod* to indicate vowels) that was customary in the days of the geonim (to which *Mattenoth Kehunah* alluded above) sprang from the lack of vocalization at a time when the Holy Tongue had ceased to be a spoken language — and one may ask why Israelis, in our own time, are accustomed to write this way, even though we have vocalization — this is due to the influence of European languages.

Additional Arguments from *HaWikuah*

(1). *The Minḥath Yehudah, in the introduction, admits that the book of the Zohar was not known in the days of the geonim, Rashi, the Ra’avad, Maimonides, Nahmanides, and the Rosh (remember this when we discuss the essay “Qadmuth Sefer haZohar”).*

- (2). *“Animal soul,” (Zohar 1 79b) (a term that belongs to the Middle Ages).*
- (3). *“The desirous soul,” (Zohar 1 109b) (as above).*
- (4). *Use of the term “Hasagah” to denote “comprehension.” (Zohar 1 126a (as above; and see above, my comments on the book Arzei Levanon).*
- (5). *“Pituhei Hotam,” Tiqqunim 4b (as above, this is a mnemonic used by yeshiva students in Medieval times; and see R. Ya’aqov Emdin’s comments on this, chapter 43).*
- (6). *“Rishbi said in the name of Ribbi Yose in the name of Rav...” (Zohar 1 126b). Rishbi would not say something in the name of Ribbi Yose, who was his colleague, and Ribbi Yose would not say something in the name of Rav, who was a student of his student. And so “Ribbi Yose said... and this is what R. Hizqiyah said in the name of Ribbi Hiyya (Zohar 1, 91b). And Ribbi Yose was one of the teachers of Ribbi, and Ribbi was the teacher of Ribbi Hiyya, who was the father of Hizqiyah. Ribbi Yosi cites evidence from the words of one who had not yet been born, and who was a student of the student of his student. And so “Ribbi El’azar said to Ribbi Yisa” (Zohar 1, 87a). And in the Yerushlami of Kil’ayim, Ribbi Yisa fasted 80 days to acquire a vision of Ribbi Hiyya Rabbah, of blessed memory, after his death; and if so, he did not see him in his days. And Ribbi Hiyya was a student of Rabbenu haQadosh (Ribbi Yehudah haNasi, late 2nd–early 3rd century), who was a colleague of Ribbi El’azar. And if Ribbi Yisa did not see Ribbi Hiyya — how did he speak with Ribbi El’azar, who died before Rabbenu haQadosh?*
- (7). *“This is Ribbi Hamnuna Saba, who came to us from that world” (Zohar 1, 7a). This implies that Ribbi Hamnuna Saba passed away before Ribbi El’azar son of Rishbi. And in the Talmud (Gittin 26b) “Ribbi Hamnuna Saba said, Ada bar Ahavah said, Rav said,” that Ribbi Hamnuna Saba was a student of Rav Ada bar Ahavah, who was born on the day Ribbi died, and Ribbi was seeking to marry the widow of Ribbi El’azar. How is it possible to say that Ribbi Hamnuna Saba preceded Ribbi El’azar in death? And do not answer that this Ribbi Hamnuna Saba is another. Firstly, there is no other, by this name, mentioned at all in the entire Talmud. Further, if there were two, how would they refer to the younger one as “Saba (“The Elder”)?” at least they would call the first “the elder” (as they did for Rabban Gamliel the Elder), so as not to cause confusion. Also, the sages of the Land of Israel were called “Ribbi,” and not “Rav,” and Rav Hamnuna Saba was in Babylon. And in the Idra we find that Ribbi Hizqiyah bar Rav was with Rishbi.*

- (8). *Our sages said (Sanhedrin 97b): “Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the ends (end of the world).” However, the author of the Zohar predicted nine different ends, and they have all already passed (I 117b, I 119a, I 139b, II 17a, II 227a, III 252[?], Zohar Hadash I 48b, Zohar Hadash II 60a, Tiqqunim 4b). And not one of them fell between the time of Rishbi and the year 1240 CE; they are all from the year 1240 CE onward. We find that the Talmudic sages hoped for redemption very close to their own time.*
- (9). *On the story of R. Yishaq of Acre (about how R. Moshe De Leon forged the Zohar) he wrote, “This story is found only in the book of Yuhasin (by R. Avraham Zucato, 15th century Spain), first printing (Constantinople 1566)... and the first printer as well, who is Shemuel Shulam, wrote a note beside it with accusations against whoever slandered the book of the Zohar as a forgery. If so, that the first printer was not at ease with that story, and if he was not confident that the story was actually from the book of Yuhasin, and had he any suspicion that it was added to the book of Yuhasin, then he would certainly have not printed it. Rather, he would have omitted it as those who came after him did. The author of Yuhasin was a great sage, and not a fool who believed everything. Therefore, he certainly found it in a reliable source.”*
- (10). *For in truth it is not the language of Onqelos and Yonathan (two Aramaic translations of Scripture), nor the language of the Jerusalem translations, nor the language of the Babylonian Talmud, nor the language of the Yerushlami Talmud, nor the language of the midrashim, nor the language of the geonim, nor the language of the commentators, nor the language of the Medieval authorities, nor the language of the philosophers — but a defective language, mixed from all the aforementioned languages. It is the language of default that flows from the lips of anyone who wants to write in the language of the Talmud and has not occupied himself with it enough. I actually know a man who learned a little bit of the Talmud and when he wants to write in the language of the Talmud, all that his hand produces is the language of the Zohar.*
- (11). *“And the heavens, to include (לִּאֲסַגְאֹה leasga’ah) the lower heavens” (Zohar I 39b)” — leasga’ah is meant as “to include / add.” It is corrupt language. Our sages did not say leasga’ah; they said lerabbuyei or leatosfei (“to increase” / “to add”).*
- (12). *“When they take (דִּנְסְבֵי denasvei) a remedy (Zohar I 40a).” Drinking a medicine is not called “taking” in the language of the sages, only in a foreign tongue and in the language of later writers.*

(13). “From here we learn (אוליפנא *olifna*)” (Zohar I 49a) — “from here I have learned.” That is a *hif’il* (causative) form. He should have said *mehakha yalfinan* (“from here we learn”).

(14). “And if not, he shall not sleep (בית’ *yavith*) with her’ (ibid.).” The intent is intercourse. But the root bath does not mean lying with a woman, only lodging in general. So too *malon* (“inn”) is rendered in the Aramaic translation as *mabatha*.

(15). “And they become pregnant from three sons (מתלת’ *mitelath banin*)” (Zohar I 73a) — “pregnant from three sons.” He should have said *be-thelath banin* (“pregnant **with** three sons”), as they said (Sotah 46b) “that their mother became pregnant **with** them,” and so (Bamidbar Rabbah 3) “how heavy was their mother, pregnant **with** her.” The *mim* after “pregnant” goes back to the one who impregnates, not to the child who is born, as they said (Bamidbar Rabbah 9) “from you I am pregnant.”

(16). “For the dead know in the world to come from the glory (מיקרא’ *miyeqara*) of the righteous and from the lower world’ (Zohar I 81b)” — “they know **from** the glory...” This *mim* too is a corruption. It is only in the manner of a foreign tongue. In the Holy Tongue and in Aramaic one says, “he knows **in** it,” not “he knows **from** it.”

(17). Wherever one finds “thirteen measures (מכילין’ *mekhilin*) of mercy” — “thirteen measures of mercy” — it is a complete corruption. *Mekhilin* is from “and all in a third”; it is the translation of “measure” in its first sense: a vessel to measure with. The word “measure” also has a transferred sense in the language of the sages, as in “that is the measure of Sodom,” and then it does not mean a measuring-vessel. In that transferred sense they never said *mekhiletha*. The translation of that word is *orah* (“way / custom”), as in “this one according to his *orah* and the other one according to his *orah*.” They never said, “this one according to his *mekhiletha* and the other one according to his *mekhiletha*.”

(18). “He escorted (אוזפודה’ *uzfuha*) Ribbi Abba three miles’ (Zohar I 96b).” *Uzfuha* means lending money, not an escort.

(19). There was a story in Spain in the year 1242: A Jew, in the city of Toledo, while digging in a mountain, allegedly found a book inside of a boulder written in three languages... according to the book, the son of God would be born of the virgin Mary... and that that book was destined to be revealed when Ferdinand would reign in the kingdom of Castile....” It is very plausible that the author of the Zohar was inspired by this story. The aforementioned story is found in the

Latin book Proofs of Faith Against the Jews, year 1494, and it is also mentioned in the book Diotamundo, book 2, chapter 27.

The Book *Addereth Eliyahu*

Addereth Eliyahu was composed to counter the claims of HaWikuah, and it was written by R. Shelomo ben Eliyahu Nissim (19th century Italy). And these are the main points of his counter-claims, according to the order of his book:

Page 18. [On the testimony of the wife of R. Moshe de Leon, quoted in Yuhasin]. They included it in the book by deceit, so that (it was inserted into) the first printing of the book of Yuhasin. The story was invented out of thin air.

We have already countered this retort in the chapter on *Magen weSinah*. So long as he does not cite evidence, or at least a grounded conjecture, that the passage is forged, this does not rise to the category of a rebuttal at all. It is merely a complaint.

Page 20. He grudgingly admitted that the Zohar includes “later additions,” and wrote, “And since it has been established that innovations of the later generations were added to it...”

Page 21. He claimed prophecy for the author of the Zohar, by citing a passage that reveals future things. Here is what that passage says, (Zohar I 117a): “In the six hundredth year of the sixth [thousand] (this is the year 1840 CE) the gates of wisdom above will be opened and the springs of wisdom below.” And he wrote on this “that it has been fulfilled, wonder of wonders, in our days, in many exalted new sciences that astonish every heart.”

“Wisdom,” unspecified, in the words of our Rabbis, is the wisdom of the Torah (thus, almost all the commentators explained, for example, the words of the book of Proverbs). And even the colleague of this author, the author of *Ta’am leShad*, wrote (p. 114): “the word ‘wisdom,’ unspecified, refers to it (to Kabbalah).” And precisely in the generations in question, there occurred an enormous decline in the wisdom of the Torah. Behold, the intent of the author of the Zohar here is precisely the wisdom of the Torah, and it is obvious, from the context, that it refers to the coming of redemption through an increase in the wisdom of the Torah. Here is the second part of that same passage, which *Addereth Eliyahu* omitted: “And the world will be prepared to enter the seventh, like a man who prepares himself on the sixth day from the time the sun sets to enter the Sabbath — so too here... Ribbi Yose said to him: “All of that stretches the time out farther than what the colleagues already fixed. They fixed that the exile of the

Congregation of Israel is one day (a day of God, which is a thousand years), and no more.”

Page 38. [On the matter of the vocalization]. But how is it possible that from the days of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, until the sages of Tiberias, that is two thousand years... they had no cantillations or vocalizations and signs and their associated names? Did not our sages teach us that the verse “and teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouths,” means to make signs (for them)? And the beginning of study is the correct reading, and without them they would have had no way to learn and to teach and to instruct pupils in the ways of the language and of Scripture...

Perhaps, to most of the people of our generation, this argument might seem like a strong one. But if you investigate, you will find that several hundred languages not only had no signs for the vowels, but they had no writing at all, until one or two generations ago. Some of them are spoken by tribes (like the Eskimos) who lived in isolated settlements that were very far from each other. These tribes had been separated from each other for thousands of years, and yet the Eskimo from Alaska, for example, can still somewhat understand his fellow from Greenland — and all this by the power of the sense of hearing. The child hears how they pronounce every word and every syllable, and thus the tradition is maintained. Similarly, traditional songs were preserved over many generations among the tribes in Africa, Australia, and so on, without any written letters or vowels. And all this by the power of oral tradition. Does he believe that Israel is less capable than one of these tribes, that one would think it impossible to preserve a tradition without writing? If so, by this argument, the Oral Torah should have been forgotten long ago.

Page 38. [Also regarding symbols for vocalization and cantillation]. It is found in chapter haRo’eh 62b, “Why does one not wipe with the right hand, but only with the left? Rav Naḥman bar Yishāq says, ‘because with it he indicates the notations (ṭa’ame) of the Torah.’ And Rashi explained there, Ṭa’ame Torah — the cantillations and the punctuation of Scripture... he leads his hand according to the flow of the cantillations.” Behold, for Rashi it is clear that the cantillation and the punctuation existed in the time of the sages of the Mishnah and the Gemara.

There is no evidence for his claim here at all, for the explanation of, “He shows the punctuation of the Torah” is that in places that one must pause, he makes a motion with his hand to pause, to go on reading, a motion with his hand to go on. And this tradition can be seen in every Yemenite synagogue when they read from the Torah. The prayer leader directs whoever is reading from the Torah by means of known hand gestures.

Page 40. [Also regarding vocalization and cantillation symbols]. And so, what was decreed... that Ribbi Hanina son of Teradyon did not know the vocalizations in any way, shape or form, since he found no method of teaching his pupils the correct pronunciation of the ineffable name without actually pronouncing it with his lips. His evidence debunks itself, for if this were the case, then it was forced and compelled — for there was no way around it. If so, how could his sin have been so severe that he suffered execution by burning?

The reply to this is very simple — he could have taught them syllable by syllable, without putting forth the whole word at one time, as they do today.

Page 41. He wanted to prove that the vocalization system is ancient on the basis of the testimony of a certain Karaite, whom he called “one of the greatest of their sages, the sage....” His claim is that the Karaites began before the close of the Talmud (against what is well known among us: That ‘Anan ben Dawid, founded this movement in the days of the geonim), and that even so we find their tradition in Scripture to be identical with ours. And if the vocalizations were a late invention, how would they have agreed to accept it?

Afterward, he proposed an explanation of “do not read thus but thus” that is not worthy of the paper it is written upon, and it is contrary to traditional Jewish beliefs. And from the continuation of that chapter, it becomes clear that his entire argument is based upon the words of that Karaite. It turns out that this Karaite is not a sage, as his words are nonsensical, in addition to their opposition to traditional Judaism. And whoever researches the Karaites, even a little, will discover that they “stole” many things from Rabbinic Jews, very many things, and therefore how shall we rely on them that their tradition in Tanakh is not among the “stolen” things?

The Book *Ta'am leShad*

Its author is R. Eliyahu Benamozegh (1823-1900 Leghorn, Italy), and he also composed his book in order to refute the arguments of R. Shemuel David Luzzatto. He loved and admired R. Luzzatto very much, and he wrote in his introduction (p. VI, Leghorn printing 1863, and so too all the citations that I mention here), “And now to the researcher, the sage whom I have made a target, I have heard you with my ears, but until now, I have not seen you with my eyes, and I know you by name, and also you have found favor in my eyes, for the love of wisdom is a constant fire that burns within your heart, and it shall not be extinguished...”. He also wrote, (Pg. 2), “the nature of this man, and his conduct in all his books and investigations, that he never makes a claim, either small nor great, unless that claim has been sifted 13 times like fine flour, and

then he fastens it with nails so that it cannot budge. The sages shall praise him.” Also, R. Almozeg conducts himself with the utmost integrity, and he speaks calmly throughout his entire book, so that he will not insult the honor of any scholar.

Regarding the question of the antiquity of the Zohar, this author takes a unique approach:

(pg. 34) . How they murmured, and how much ink was poured, and how many pens were broken, to know whether this book is ancient by virtue of its inner traits and its syntax. Yet they did not pay attention or contemplate on the concepts presented within it, whether their forms testify to its antiquity and its veracity or not. For as the heavens are high above the Earth, so is this investigation loftier than the previous one. If because the wisdom itself is wonderful and exalted over other books, or if from another perspective, because when the antiquity of the wisdom itself is made clear, the books that teach it will be elevated with it and be sanctified in its holiness.

(p. 32). For even if it is not right or proper to believe that the things mentioned in the Zohar were spoken by the sages that they're attributed to, even if this were so, and we were to assume that there never even existed a book called the Zohar, nevertheless, we cannot escape the fact that this faith was kept by the people of Israel. For the Kabbalah does not depend upon the foundation that the author imagined. We do not believe things because of whom they were attributed to, but we believe them on their own merit.

That is to say, once we have proven the antiquity of the wisdom of Kabbalah, together with it, we have proven the antiquity of the concepts that are expressed in the book of the Zohar. Therefore, most of his book is dedicated to collecting all the sayings of our sages and the geonim that imply a belief in mysticism, the faith of heavenly palaces, angels, amulets, and so on, to prove that the wisdom of Kabbalah in the Zohar is ancient.

He calmed the reader that we needn't worry about the great period of time that elapsed between Rishbi and the composition (or discovery) of the Zohar, for it was exactly the same with the Mishnah and the Gemara, that the words of those tannaim and amuraim were arranged and written only a long time after their death (pp. 42, 37). And the fact that we have not seen any of the sages of Israel speaking of the secrets of the Zohar most of that period, is no wonder at all, since they were secrets, and only a few individuals merited to be privy to them. Little by little, they revealed those secrets

until they gathered everything together in the book of the Zohar, and until then everything was an oral tradition. I quote:

(pp. 43, 44). They were not widespread at any time among the general population of Israel, whether due to their quality, their depth or their lofty concepts, that they should be reserved only for the sages of the heart, deep thinkers who delved in hidden treasures and in the divine investigations, or due to external factors that were attached to them, that they became associated with the desire for concealment and hiding... they would study them and teach them in secret

(pg. 50). This is the reason that the publication of the Zohar, in its current form and structure, was delayed so much. In my opinion, before it acquired the form that we see today, there was an extended period of time when its existence was only in oral form, without being written down or recorded in a book, just as happened to every form of the Oral Torah — and after that they began to write isolated pamphlets by various disparate individuals.

To the argument of R. Luzzatto, that the language of the Zohar is not suitable to any kind of Aramaic or Hebrew, not Talmudic and not midrashic, not halakhic and not philosophical, he replied thusly:

(Pg. 151). For this judgment which he has issued against the books of Kabbalah — is applicable and appropriate for all the remaining books of the early Talmudic sages, for is not the language of the Mishnah mixed with the language of Scripture, with the language of the (Aramaic) translations, with the Greek language and the Roman language, and perhaps also Persian, and perhaps other languages. Regarding the Talmud, one can see that besides these languages that we have mentioned, still more were added upon them, such as Arabic and Syriac, and perhaps also others — and so regarding the midrashim and the Yerushlami this same judgment is very fitting. There is not one of the compositions that we have mentioned that doesn't look like it's mixed with something... The Zohar is just like these other compositions... To what is this similar? To the language of an author whose style and habits are such that we can't avoid detecting impressions of other authors who preceded him or followed him — but we cannot conclude from this that he plagiarized from other authors.

These are his conjectures on this matter, and I shall first reply to them, and then I'll discuss his arguments in detail.

I have not been able to understand the foundational assumption that he laid out for us in the introduction, that the antiquity of the book of the Zohar is linked to the antiquity of the wisdom of Kabbalah. If all the kabbalists in all times and places agreed on every matter, with one unified approach and one monolithic opinion, without any dispute, perhaps then it would make sense. But this is very far from what we find, for we have seen that the kabbalists disagree with each other frequently. They have many different points of view. If we were to attempt to count the disputes of the kabbalists we would never finish, but this is not our goal.

At any rate, who can obligate us to accept the words of the author of the Zohar as the Torah of Moses from Sinai. How much more so since there are various opinions even within the Zohar itself. For example, if one desecrates the Sabbath in this life, he has rest in it in Gehinnom), and the opinion of the author of a Zohar Hadash contradicts his own opinion.

His reasoning is flawed to the core; we are certain about the antiquity of the concepts within the Talmud. Does this oblige us to embrace the opinions of whoever composed a book about Talmudic ideas and Halakha, even if he lived many generations after the close of the Talmud? By his logic, we would be obliged to accept the antiquity of the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Qodashim*, which we shall discuss near the end of this book – and it is a known forgery.

Regarding what he wrote, that the secrets of the Zohar were oral traditions until the time of its writing, we shall discuss this at length in the chapter on *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*. If it were as he claims, how could it be that Kabbalists hold opinions that are contrary to those of the Zohar — written by Rishbi, king of the kabbalists? The very existence of contrary opinions is proof that the secrets of the Zohar were not oral traditions at all from the name of Rishbi, or from the time of any other tanna. And do not answer me that the other kabbalistic opinions also have sources in words of our sages, for anyone who delves into the Zohar will see very clearly that none of the other sages can disagree with Rishbi on matters of Kabbalah, and they all bow and submit to him. This being the case, how could those who came after the sages hold kabbalistic opinions that differ from those of Rishbi?

Even if we grant him that there were traditions in Kabbalah that were handed down by word of mouth from Rishbi until the compilation of the Zohar, who will testify that all these traditions arrived at the writers of the Zohar as they were given? Over the course of a thousand years, a thousand corruptions could have taken place. If you want to argue that they stand in their strength until a reason is found to cast doubt upon them, I shall reply that those opinions that oppose those of the Zohar (which the author of *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar* hinted at in section one of his book) prove that we have reason to suspect corruptions, and who will oblige us to believe the book of the

Zohar more than we are obliged to believe any other kabbalist after the time of R. Moshe de Leon?

It is not clear what he wanted to teach us from his long-winded argument that the languages of the books of our sages are mixed from different languages. This is obvious and apparent to everyone — more than this, the Torah itself is written with a few Egyptian and Aramaic words, and certainly this fact was not lost on R. Luzzatto. But anybody who contemplates the words of R. Luzzatto, even a little, will understand that he is not referring to the inclusion of foreign words, or the quoting of other compositions, but rather the inclusion of words from languages that weren't even invented until long after the sages of the Talmud, or of quotes from books that were written long after the sages of the Talmud — that these are clear signs that the author of the Zohar came after them. There are expressions that we can explain their appearance in two different periods, or two different authors in a source, as coincidence, and there are expressions that cannot bear this explanation — how much more so when there are many, and when they are repeated hundreds or thousands of times, and when the same book appears in the place and in the time that matches the use of those expressions (that is, Spain 800 years ago). Who is so foolish as to believe that the same book was composed a thousand years earlier. And that the presence of these contemporary words and expressions, within the book, is merely coincidence.

As is the custom of the rest of those who defend the antiquity of the book of the Zohar, this author also made it easy upon himself in his admission that the Zohar we have today is not exactly what Rishbi wrote, and he also admitted to the existence of later additions, and this is what he wrote:

(Pg. 41). *For we do not believe at all like the multitude of kabbalists that the entire book of the Zohar, in its form, in its name, in its stories, and in its place came out, complete in body and complete in teachings, from under the hand of Rishbi.*

(Pg. 57) . *Behold, I have presented evidence that the Zohar was known by various names before it was known within Israel by the name “Zohar”, and who is arrogant enough to say that from the day of its compilation, this was its name and it was only referred to this way, and this name was not applied at a later date? And also, if there is found in the body of the book a small hint or a great one to the title Zohar (this is explicit, not a hint, in the books of the Zohar at least 11 times, the copyist), behold, it never arose within my heart to say that the book of the Zohar also was not vulnerable to (copying mistakes and additions) by later hands, like the rest of the ancient books. How many things were added in it through the passage of time which are*

obvious in their various locations, and in their various languages (here, he assures us that all of the later additions are obvious, the copyist).

Additional Arguments by Ta'am leShad

(Pages 51, 52). *Behold, here are two strong and valid explanations (for why the sections of the Zohar, arranged by portions of the Torah, often don't seem to match the portions in content). The first one is that not every section fits neatly into the portion it was assigned to. The second is that many of the sayings of the Zohar are not given to assignment to particular places; they cannot be pigeonholed in this way. And I shall add two additional good explanations for you.*

(I shall elaborate on the first explanation). You will find expositions and sayings in the Zohar that are assigned to a particular portion, and your eyes will see that they do not fit in any order of the portions of the Torah... and I will educate you about the truth, and that is that you will not find in any nook or cranny in the Zohar a matter or half a matter that one can point to and assign to a particular Torah portion – and that portion is explicitly mentioned. For example, we don't find it saying, "in portion such-and-such," or "in this portion" or in verse so-and-so (this is fairly strong evidence that there are no "later additions," the copyist). That is to say, that they do not hint to that order and portion in the book, and all this points to the fact that it was not arranged and edited from the day of its inception as it is before us today... for we have proved in the straight path that the arrangement before us is a later arrangement, and before it there was another arrangement, as it appears from the text of the Zohar itself... for if we have clearly proven that the arrangement that we see today was later editing, and that an earlier version preceded it, as we can see from the Zohar itself, then we have faithfully found a clear sign and wonder for what we seek – that the origin of the Zohar was long before its publication, and it lay buried and hidden until then.

It is absolutely possible that the arrangement of the Zohar into Torah portions was done generations after its composition. It is also possible that this was the author's style, to not concern himself with writing only about matters pertaining to the portion that he assigned that chapter to. Be it as it may, the author made the same mistake that the author of *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar* made; that there are only two possibilities: That either R. Moshe de Leon composed it, or that it dates back to the tannaim. It is very possible that R. Moshe de Leon collected and arranged the sayings of the Zohar, which were composed decades before his time, and certainly it was not he who composed the

main body of the Zohar. We should not be surprised that its author was careful with certain things – as is the habit of all forgers.

(Pg. 53). *Certainly, you have seen what Nahmanides wrote in his commentary to the Torah in Shelah, and I quote, “And I saw in the Mekhiletha of Rishbi that Ribbi Yonatan ben Yoḥai asked Rishbi, ‘Why is it always written, the angel of the Lord, but here it says, the angel of God? He told him that wherever we find the name Elohim (God), it means judgment, etc.’ And who knows what else might have been written. You see with your own eyes a book attributed to Rishbi, by the name Mekhiletha of Rishbi that we only know of its existence from Nahmanides mentioning it — and this means that it was kept discreet and hidden.*

The things mentioned in his name, and the recognition of his name, all bear testimony that they sprang from the kabbala and its sources. And a third great proof is that in the book of the Zohar the things were cited with minor differences (Zohar pt. 2, 52b) in the name of Rishbi... And he goes on at length that we have not found a sage by the name Ribbi Yonatan ben Yoḥai in any other place, and that this is a trait of the Zohar, to mention sages who are not known elsewhere.

The rebuttal to this argument is simple, for even if he had never heard of the *Mekhiletha of Rishbi*, we have seen it. It has been printed in two different editions based on two different manuscripts, and from what was collected from Midrash haGadol. It is in Hebrew, and it contains the passage that Nahmanides cited. This is not consistent with the Zohar, which for the most part is in Aramaic. Also, that passage isn’t even found in the Zohar, and in the spot that R. Luria cited, it only says that the name “Elohim” indicates judgment. The passage does appear in the *Mekhiletha of Rishbi* in that location. There, instead of Ribbi Yonatan ben Yoḥai, it says Ribbi Nathan, and so it appears in the *Midrash haGadol*. That appears to be the correct reading.

After that (on the same page) he quoted another passage from Nahmanides’ commentary on the Torah where he quoted from the *Mekhiletha of Rishbi*, and this time he admitted that he had not found the same passage in the Zohar. He was also pressed to explain why, in Nahmanides’ commentary, the passage appears in Hebrew, when most of the Zohar is in Aramaic – and I see no need to elaborate on this, when this same passage appears in the *Mekhiletha of Rishbi* in exactly the same place and form as in Nahmanides’ commentary.

From the difficulty just mentioned (that the passage was quoted in Hebrew) he arrived at the conjecture that the early authorities were in the habit of translating passages of the Zohar into Hebrew. He also found additional passages from the *Mekhiletha of*

Rishbi that appear in other Medieval commentary on the Torah, where the Zohar has similar passages that appear in Aramaic — of course the author of the Zohar copied either from one of these commentaries or from the *Mekhiletha of Rishbi*. By means of this conjecture he wanted to solve the issue of the defective language of the *Midrash haNe'elam* (The Hidden Midrash), that somehow, these translations, by the early authorities, were inserted into the Zohar itself and got mixed with the original. Of course, there is no evidence for any of this.

Even though most of R. Luzzatto's efforts were to prove the lateness of the vocalizations and the cantillation marks (which appear in great number throughout the Zohar — and thereby the lateness of its composition would be proved), R. Benamozegh did not devote even one word to confront this issue. Instead, he selectively addressed what he imagined to be the weakest of R. Luzzatto's arguments, spilled a lot of ink upon them – and even so, he failed to demonstrate anything of consequence.

The author of *Ta'am leShad* does not bear much responsibility for not knowing of the lateness of the composition of the Zohar. He apparently relied on the only stable proof he had for its antiquity — those passages from the *Mekhiletha of Rishbi* — and since in his days it had not yet been published and was not known, we cannot blame him for this. But today, any educated person will admit that we have seen no evidence of substance in his words. And if so, even he, judging the matter objectively, would admit to our opinion, as he wrote:

For it never arose in our mind to say, "Receive the Zohar with closed eyes," if not from faithful witnesses and correct proofs upon which the perfect intellect will rely (p. 58).

The Book *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*

Qadmuth Sefer haZohar was written by R. David Luria of Bykhov (the Radal), 1798–1855, and he paid no attention at all to the objections of R. Emdin, or to any other critic of the Zohar. Also, he did not claim that he had evidence for the antiquity of the Zohar, but only conjectures. Part of the arguments of *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar* have already been refuted among the arguments of *Magen weSinah*, and here I'll try to be more brief. In truth, when I began to review this essay, I hoped that I would find valid arguments, but here too, I was disappointed.

This is a popular "thick book" that rabbis refer to when confronted with doubts about the authenticity of the Zohar – possibly due to its name, which literally means, "The Antiquity of the Book of the Zohar."

These are the five sections in which he promised to clarify the following claims for us in his essay:

- (1) It is impossible that R. Moshe de Leon composed the Zohar, for some of his opinions differ from those of the Zohar.
- (2) In every place where R. Moshe de Leon quoted the Zohar, either he cited a corrupted text, or he did not understand its explanation.
- (3) There were authorities who preceded him, or who were older than him, already quoted the Zohar.
- (4) In the Zohar, there are references to historic events without exact dates, such as the conquest of Jerusalem. If R. Moshe de Leon had written the book, he would have followed the dates known in his own day. The inexactness is therefore evidence that he is not the author, and that the book was composed before those events.
- (5) Regarding the Zohar's corrupted Aramaic, it was written in the Aramaic of its own generation, and this language shows it is not a later addition to the literature of earlier generations.

The First Section:

Regarding the basis of his argument, he is partly right; only the *Ra'aya Mehemna* and the *Tiqqunim* were composed by R. Moshe de Leon, as R. Emdin wrote. The body of the Zohar was composed, in all likelihood, a little before him.

The *Midrash haNe'elam* and the *Zohar Hadash* were composed after him. All this is known to researchers, and there is nothing revolutionary about it at all. In any event, the fact that his opinions are sometimes contrary to those of the Zohar itself does not constitute evidence that he is not its author. It is possible that, in order to avoid suspicion, he inserted occasional statements that are contrary to his own opinions.

Page 29. *In most of his opinions and attitudes, he (R. Moshe de Leon) is consistent with the kabbalists of his own time and with those who preceded him, of blessed memory, and he built most of his compositions according to their opinions (only in a few places are his opinions the same as those of the Zohar).*

This plainly means that the opinions of the kabbalists of the generations shortly before R. Moshe de Leon are not the same as the opinions of the Zohar – but the entire second

section is devoted to proving that the Zohar was in the possession of the geonim and the Medieval authorities, and that they copied from it. If we assume that his words are correct, how can one entertain the notion that they would abandon the words of the living God, the words of Rishbi, to search broken cisterns, at the very time when they have the book of the Zohar. If his words here are correct, then we have canceled the whole premise of the second section. And according to what he is saying here, they certainly would not have chosen opinions that conflict with what they had received from Rishbi.

He continued and wrote:

And in a number of places, it appears that he inserted a little of the beginnings of paragraphs from the words of the Zohar into his own words, without stating the Zohar as their source, and perhaps this too is a sign that he wanted to be brief...

It was not my intention for this book to be a comedy, and yet, here we are. How naive this author is! This in itself is an indication that he is the author of those passages in the Zohar (which, in all likelihood, are in part from the *Ra'aya Mehemna* that were swallowed into the Zohar, as R. Emdin wrote).

Page 30. *He continues to highlight contradictions between the words of R. Moshe de Leon and the Zohar itself.*

We have already written that this is nothing to be astonished about, since R. Moshe de Leon composed only the *Ra'aya Mehemna* and the *Tiqqunim*.

Page 31. *And it (the verbiage of R. Moshe de Leon) is from the words of the Tiqqunim, Tiqqun 10... and it is not mentioned here (in the Zohar itself) at all, (and see the Ra'aya Mehemna... that perhaps it can be reconciled with the words of R. Moshe de Leon).*

Again, according to our perspective, this is very understandable, for the author of the *Tiqqunim* is the author of the *Ra'aya Mehemna*, and he is R. Moshe de Leon. Therefore, it is clear that their words will be similar to one another. (Do not object that I am contradicting myself because of what I wrote above, that their words being opposed is not evidence that he is not its author. This is true. On the other hand, their being similar does support the claim that he is the author.)

Page 31. *He cites a contradiction between the Ra'aya Mehemna and the Zohar Hadash.*

This too is not difficult, for they are two different authors. And the same applies with all the other examples he lists; every one of them supports our position.

Page 33. *...in the history of the authors, some innovations that the historians never could have imagined ...*

In order to even entertain the possibility of his theories, we are forced to corrupt much of history.

Pages 33–34. *After he built flimsy theories that the author of Yalquth Shim'oni (a midrashic anthology on the whole Bible, arranged by verse. 13th century Germany) quoted from the Zohar without mentioning its name, he proposes a further theory (that Recanati lived before the accepted date, around 1310) in order "to prove" that the Zohar was before this. And in order to arrive at all of this, he had to claim that the date written in the handwriting of the author of the Yalquth Shim'oni is not exact.*

Page 34. *In the book Berith Menuḥah (a kabbalistic work of unknown authorship and origin) many passages are cited in the name of the tanna Rishbi, in Aramaic that is similar to the language of the Zohar... and even though they are not found in our version of the Zohar, we have learned, in any case, that there were before him passages in Aramaic on matters of Kabbalah in the name of the tanna Rishbi (and as it is known that the book of the Zohar before us is missing a great deal...).*

He himself wrote a few lines earlier:

According to the many midrashim that were available to him, which have been lost to history... for they still had many midrashim that were since lost.

This is correct, and how can we know that his source was the Zohar? It is just as likely that his source was one of the lost midrashim, and there is no evidence that his source was the Zohar. Additionally, according to his own words, which he wrote a bit later, his "theory" gets even weaker. He wrote:

The author of the book Berith Menuḥah, in my opinion, is Rav Hammai Gaon (There is no evidence that such a Gaon even existed, the copyist), and even according to the opinion of those who say that its author is Ribbi Abraham of Rimon in Spain (Granada, 13th-14th century), behold, he too was in the days

of the Rishba (Ribbi Shelomoh ben Abraham ibn Adereth, Barcelona, about 1235–1310) ...

The Zohar was “revealed” in the days of the Rishba, after the death of Nahmanides. If so, what has he gained from this?

He then quoted kabbalists who were older than R. Moshe de Leon, and who cited statements found in the Zohar. He wrote that these sages would not have cited the words of R. Moshe, who was their junior, for they were greater than him. Had R. Moshe de Leon published these works under his own name, then R. Luria might have had a point. But since he claimed that they were written by Rishbi, why would they refrain from citing them?

He went on to cite kabbalists of the generation of R. Moshe de Leon himself, and he spent many paragraphs doing so. Through the whole of this section, he did not find a single person, who lived before R. Moshe de Leon, who quoted the Zohar. What of his promises?

The second section:

(Page 38). *That the geonim, of blessed memory, already quoted passages, on matters of Kabbalah, in the name of a “Jerusalem Midrash,” in the language of the Zohar, and even though most of them are not found before us in the book of the Zohar and the Midrash haNe’elam...*

Page 69. *That many of the early authorities, of blessed memory, referred to such midrashim as “Jerusalem Midrash”...*

If so, he is saying that their source was another midrash, or perhaps several of them. This is what a reasonable person would conclude. But for R. Luria — the fact that these passages are not found in the Zohar does not trouble him at all. This is what he wrote:

For if all the passages were found before us today in the book of the Zohar, there would be fodder for deniers to claim that scribes took the passages from the Zohar and then plagiarized them into the responsa of the geonim. But since the passages are not found in the Zohar, there is no longer any room for such suspicions...

Such statements might be suitable as a joke, not to be taken seriously.

Then he listed examples, one by one, and most of the volume of this section is nothing but explanations of the answers that are cited. The examples he brought are not many. Out of all of them in this section he wrote “a conjecture,” or “one might theorize,” or “it is possible,” eight times, and he wrote “(this is) also not in the Zohar,” “also not in the *Midrash haNe’elam*,” and the like, six times — until he was ashamed to continue writing this, instead writing:

(p. 64). *It is from the Zohar and the Midrash haNe’elam — in the version of the geonim which was hidden and concealed from those who came after them.*

And he continued:

Based on the style, it is from the version of Midrash haNe’elam which the geonim had in their possession.

In the end, he found only one Gaonic responsum in which a matter is mentioned that is also spoken of in the Zohar. The responsum in question is that of Rav Hai Gaon (p. 46), and this is what it says:

And we have seen in a Jerusalem text, “The sanctifications that the ministering angels recite, Israel also recites. There is, however, an extra teaching — that Israel below is to sanctify itself with a further sanctification, because it is written, ‘You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy.’ By this sanctification, Israel is sanctified in its own holiness, as the ministering angels look on. We say it in Aramaic, because they pay no attention to what is said in Aramaic. They have only two sanctifications; we have an extra one in this extra sanctification (of ourselves).

The author wrote much about this responsum, which has no relevance to the issue at hand. And this is the language of the Zohar (which the author did not quote, only noting its location: *Terumah* 129a):

When Israel reaches the Qedushah de Sidra (in the morning prayers), this hidden pride comes forth, for this is the sanctification that Israel recites. The pride shines more than the upper angels, who join them (in prayer). It shines and rejoices at the moment Israel recites the sanctification, because Israel finishes as the upper angels look on. They are punished above, and they do not make accusations against (Israel).

Rav Hai mentioned (a) an equality of sanctifications between us and the angels; (b) a preference on our side, because we sanctify ourselves; (c) that we say it in Aramaic, because the angels do not attend to Aramaic; (d) that before they pay attention to us, we say the sanctification prayer; (e) that we have more sanctifications. In contrast, only these are mentioned in the Zohar: (a) the preference of our sanctifications; (b) that before they pay attention to us, we say the sanctification prayer. Of the matters that Rav Hai mentioned, some are mentioned only by him and not by the Zohar, and some are mentioned by the Zohar and not by Rav Hai. There are only four or five words in common between them, where the difference is only in syntax and they are otherwise the same. It is therefore clear that he was not using the Zohar as his source. On the contrary, this is evidence that he did not have the Zohar — for if he had, he would have quoted it. Rather, one must say that Rav Hai and the Zohar each drew from other sources.

Further, in connection with the second section, the author wrote that the geonim wrote “concerning matters of the Kabbalah.” But among all the responsa that he cited — and also among all the responsa of the geonim that we have — there is no mention of the ten sefirot, nor of the union of sefirot, nor of the drawing down of divine flow, nor of reincarnation, nor of combinations of letters, names, and so on. If so, how is it possible to describe them as “concerning the subject of Kabbalah”? It is more accurate to say that they are concerning the subject of *Aggadah*.

Furthermore, this approach of his — and this is the main point — to prove, according to his imagination, that the geonim had the book of the Zohar, is against the opinion of all the kabbalists, against the writings of *Magen weSinah*, and against the words of the Zohar itself in several places. We shall begin with the Zohar:

1. *And how many people will be sustained from this composition of yours, when it is revealed below in the last generation, at the end of days; and because of it, ‘you shall proclaim liberty in the land.’ (Tiqqunim 23b).*
2. *And even though I arrive early, during the exile, before the end of fifth millennia, for this is the secret of the letter Heh, and at the beginning of the sixth millennium. (Here he explained to us when “liberty in the land” will be: Roughly in the year 1240). (Zohar I 116a).*
3. *This is the verse “and now my head will be lifted”... Ribbi Yosei said, “behold, a ‘time’ has been said, and it is an upper level; and what is that time? It is the (letter) heh (which has a value of 5, hinting at the fifth millennium, ending in the autumn of 1239), and it is called ‘now.’” (Zohar I 198a).*

4. *It will grow dark for Israel until the (letter) waw (which has a value of 6) is awakened for a time of sixty years... which are the thousand and two hundred years of the exile. (If the exile started at the destruction of the Temple in the year 70, then this is the year 1270). (Zohar II 9b).*

5. *When this composition is revealed in the world, many will gather to it... (Tiqqunei Zohar Hadash 148b).*

The Zohar proclaimed of itself that it will be hidden and revealed only in the last generation, which is the beginning of the sixth millennium of the Hebrew calendar (1240AD), yet R. Luria denies it in order to support his theories. Even if his theories were correct — that the geonim too had the Zohar — this is not evidence that it was written by the sages of the Talmud. And it is not enough that he denies that it was hidden; he also thinks that only select individuals had access to it until after the days of Nahmanides. Perhaps his understanding of “it will be revealed” is its publication, and this is not the implication of the Zohar at all, for it is written explicitly that when it is revealed, many will gather to it.

I’ll repeat what I wrote earlier, that there is a difficulty in the matter of the “discovery” of the Zohar. We have seen that the authors of the Zohar wrote that it will be revealed in the last generation. Even without the theories of the essay *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*, nearly 800 years have passed from the death of Nahmanides until now, so by what definition would that be “the last generation?” As if this were not enough, this author wants us to believe that this “last generation” was already in the days of the geonim — for even then, the book of the Zohar was revealed. He is adding insult to injury, to say that we missed the “last generation” by over a thousand years – since that would be when the Zohar was revealed.

Here is a quote from R. Yosef Hayim of Baghdad (the *Ben Ish Hai*, 1835 to 1909), in his book *Da’ath uThvunah*, in the preface:

Why was the holy book of the Zohar not revealed to the amuraim, the sages of the era of the savuraim, the geonim and the great rabbis? And how is it that it was revealed afterward, in lesser generations?... It is possible that, since the decree of the destruction was for a thousand years, and all the saints were within those thousand years, the Holy One did not want the book of the Zohar to be revealed, for it contains many stringencies and punishments — as a father has mercy on his children. For in that period there were religious persecutions and intense suffering, and Israel was in great sorrow. If the words of the saints, Rishbi and his companions, and all the punishments had been revealed, there would have been room for the

Other Side to accuse... Therefore, about a thousand years after the destruction (of the Temple), the light of the Zohar was revealed.

Know that the *Ben Ish Hai* copied all of this from the words of the Rashash (R. Sar Shalom Shar'abi, 1720–1777 Jerusalem). He continued to quote another passage from the Rashash:

And when Rishbi and Ribbi El'azar and all that generation died, the wisdom of the Kabbalah was lost, until the Lord had one of the kings of the East start an excavation in a certain place for profit, and a chest was found there with the book of the Zohar inside it. He sent for the (gentile) sages of the Holy Land and the sages of Europe, and they did not know (what it was) and did not understand it. He sent for the Jews. They came to him and saw the book and said to him, "Our lord the king, this book was composed by a certain sage, and it is deep, and we do not understand it." He replied, "Is there no Jew in the world who understands it?" They responded, "There is one in the city of Toledo." The king sent the books with his warriors to the king of Toledo, and when the sages of Toledo saw it, they rejoiced with a great joy and sent the king many gifts, and from there the Kabbalah was publicized in Israel.

The above story is told by the *Hida* (R. Hayim Yosef David Azulai 1724–1806), in his book *Shem haGedolim*, entry "Zohar." If we rely on the Rashash and the author of *Yuhasin* (R. Abraham Zacuto about 1452–1515, Spain) and the *Ben Ish Hai*, it is certainly impossible that the geonim copied from the Zohar, or even from oral traditions included in the Zohar, for this is the "wisdom of the Kabbalah" which the Rashash wrote was lost.

If you want to claim that those sages of Toledo lived in the days of the geonim — this also cannot be so, for we have already learned that when they saw the book "they rejoiced with a great joy," and from then the Kabbalah was publicized. If so, how is it possible that it remained hidden, even from the eyes of the great kabbalists, until after the days of Nahmonides? R. Moshe de Leon was from Toledo. He was not one of the geonim. If so, it was upon them, the sages of Toledo, to reply with responsa on these matters, and not upon the geonim. Furthermore, the Rashash explicitly wrote that the Zohar was revealed only several generations after a thousand years from the destruction (after the year 1070), and the last Gaon, Rav Hai Gaon, died in the year 1038.

From the words of R. Yosef Karo (1488–1575, Spain), the *Beth Yosef*, the same is implied, in *Even ha'Ezer* 25, the gloss *Bedeq haBayith*, he writes:

And if R. Ya‘aqov (son of the Rosh 1250–1327) had seen what is written in the Zohar... he would not have written what he wrote.

He said this even though the Zohar was “revealed” some forty years before his father’s death, and he certainly could have seen it — I shall elaborate on this later.

From R. Yehudah Hayyat (15th-16th century Spain), in his introduction to *Ma‘arekheth haElohuth*:

Certainly, the book of the Zohar was not revealed in the days of Rav Hai Gaon and all the geonim, and Rabbenu El‘azar of Worms, and the Raavad, and Nahmanides, and the Rashba did not see it.

So too, it is implied from the language of the book *haBerith* (R. Pinhas Eliyahu Hurwitz of Vilna 1765–1821), part I, essay 20, chapter 15:

That every place where Ibn Ezra (1089–1164, Spain), of blessed memory, wrote that it is a secret, it is not of the secrets of the Torah, such as the work of Work of Creation or the work of the chariot... Not so in our time, which is close to the season of love; there was light for the Jews, and the books of the early sages were revealed to us, which speak of the secret of the Lord and the mysteries of the honored names.

And so wrote the Vilna Gaon (R. Eliyahu ben Shelomoh 1720–1797) in *Addereth Eliyahu* (p. 13):

And when it was revealed at the end of the days of Nahmanides.

I’ll remind the reader what the author of *Magen WeSinah* wrote, regarding the Vilna Gaon, which we quoted above (pg. 32). It would be interesting to ask the authors of *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar* and *Zohar haRaqia’* how they dare disagree with the Vilna Gaon.

Similarly, we find in the rulings of the Maharis (Ribbi Yihya Salih of Sana‘a, Yemen 1713–1805), part I, page 4, and this is what he wrote:

And I saw in the book ‘Atereth Rosh (need citation), page 18, that he took pains to prove that the opinion of all the halakhic authorities — the Rif (R. Yisḥaq ben Jacob AlFasi 1013–1103 Fez, North Africa), Maimonides, the Rosh, the Tosafoth, the Iur (sic. composed by the Rosh, above), and all the later authorities — is the same as the explanation of Rashi (R. Shelomo Yisḥaqi 1040-1105 France). And the reason is because of the honor of the Holy

Presence. But in the correspondence of the Rama' (Menahem 'Azariah da Fano 1545-1620 Italy), in responsum 5, he wrote, in the name of the Zohar, the opposite opinion. And the book 'Atereth Rosh listed several quotes from the Zohar that agree with the opinion of Rama', and that this is the explanation of the Talmud in Tractate Berakhoth. He wrote that the halakhic authorities (listed above) differed from the opinion of Rama' because they did not see the splendor of the Holy Zohar. He is shocked at Maran, the Beit Yosef, that he did not notice this.

And this matter, that the book of the Zohar was not “revealed” until after the death of Nahmanides (or shortly before), and that even the Rosh did not see it, is explicit in *Sefer Yuhasin*, *Seder haDoroth*, *Semah David* (R. David Gans of Prague 1541–1613), and all the history books of our people. And in that he chose as the name of his book “Zohar,” he hinted at this (see Daniel 12:3, 4).

At first glance, it might seem plausible to claim that the geonim were in possession of pamphlets, representing small portions of the Zohar that were not hidden, and afterwards, after the death of Nahmanides, the rest was revealed – and then most of these older pamphlets were lost, leaving us with only what was revealed later on, along with the fragments from the aforementioned pamphlets that were transferred into the book of the Zohar that was revealed, and the occasional quote from the geonim when they cited them in their responsa. To this, we shall reply that it might be so; all of the evidence we have cited applies only to the Zohar that was “revealed” after the death of Nahmanides. Therefore, if you wish to claim that the passages cited in the essay *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*, from the geonim, are also from the Zohar — very well; Those passages have the authenticity of primary sources, and it is proper to rely on them as we would the rest of the aggadoth of the sages. But the rest — which is everything printed in the Zohar, the *Tiqqunim*, the *Ra'aya Mehemna*, and *Zohar Hadash* — we have already proved the lateness of their composition. In other words, your conclusion would be that the Zohar (the true one) is ancient, but it has been lost from us. What would you have gained by this?

There is a further difficulty in this theory of the R. Luria in his book *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*. He claims that the geonim quoted passages from the Zohar, which are in the category of secrets, despite the fact that the name “Zohar” is never mentioned by the sages of Israel (until a number of years after it was “revealed.” We should note that the Zohar refers to itself as “the Book of the Zohar” at least twelve times — why did they refrain from mentioning the true name of the book from which they quoted?

In a note (pp. 28–29 of *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*) it is written “that the early geonim used to conceal the existence of the book of the Zohar.” Would any reasonable person accept such a proposition, that it was considered acceptable to copy what is written in

the book, and to send it to the ends of the world, but to reveal the name of the book is not acceptable? We must conclude that if they did not mention the name of the book, and they did not quote anything from the book, it means that they did not have the book. This is much more plausible than the castles in the air that he builds.

As for the one or two places where R. Luria found a similarity of language (in part), or a similarity of subject, between a statement of a Gaon and some passage in the Zohar, this proves nothing at all. The books of the Zohar together include about a thousand pages of various ideas, and all kinds of expressions from ancient sources; many of those sources have been lost to us (to this he himself admitted). And the number of responsa of the geonim also reaches several hundred or thousand. They include many concepts, and drew from many ancient sources, many of which have been lost to us. If we had not found several similar expressions and concepts between the books of the Zohar and the responsa of the geonim, it would be astonishing. If you find similar things, for example, in *Midrash Rabbah*, to what is written in a random novel from this century, would you conclude from this that the authors of the midrash copied from the novel?

It seems that this new idea, that the ancients copied from the Zohar without mentioning its name, found favor in the eyes of some of the later authorities, to the point that a certain Hassidic rebbe believed that even Maimonides studied the Zohar and that he was a kabbalist. What was obvious to the early authorities, that Maimonides knew absolutely nothing of the Zohar, is not at all obvious to some of the later rabbis.

It is worth mentioning here that Ben-Zion Krinfiss, who edited the commentary on Pirquei Avoth (Chapters of Our Fathers), (Jerusalem edition of 1991, printed by Makhon haKethav) *Midrash David* on *Pirquei Avoth*, by R. David the Nagid, grandson of Maimonides, composed an index in which he listed all the statements of R. David the Nagid that appear in his book, along with their sources. Among the sources, he wrote “the Holy Zohar and the books of Kabbalah,” and he listed eleven items. In two of them it becomes clear that the Ari (R. Yisḥaq Luria 1534–1572) wrote something similar or had the same idea. Did R. David foresee, by the Holy Spirit, that the Ari would later come up with this idea, and shall we therefore consider the words of the Ari as his source? In four of them, the same statement is also found in other midrashim, and the editor found a version in the Zohar that more closely matches the words of Ribbi David. Based on this, he decided that his source must have been from the Zohar. However, it is equally possible that this was his version in that midrash, and that the author of the Zohar drew from that same source — or copied from his version. One of them does not appear in the location he cited.

This leaves four passages by R. David, that appear (according to Mr. Krinfiss) only in the Zohar in that language, but nowhere else. After this, he listed “statements whose source is not known,” and there he listed 17 passages that fit this category. If so, it is clear that R. David had access to sources that have been lost to us. I propose the following correction: There are 25 statements whose source we do not know. Of these, four also appear in the Zohar. It appears that the authors of the Zohar also drew from these unknown sources. Either that, or the authors of the Zohar drew from R. David’s commentary itself.

The third section:

He argued that the content of the Zohar proves that its author was a pious and God-fearing man. Then he listed halakhic opinions that appear only in the Zohar, and that are not mentioned anywhere by the sages or by the rishonim. He quoted the Zohar itself, which condemned anybody who expresses such opinions without a received tradition. Upon this foundation he concluded that surely the author of the book of the Zohar lived before the sealing of the Talmud, for if not so, he is found transgressing his own words, and this cannot be – since he was a righteous man.

Regarding the foundation of his first argument, we have already replied in the chapter on *Magen weSinah*, that anybody who forges a book, and wishes for it to be well-received in the religious community, must enthusiastically praise the fulfillment of the commandments, and condemn the committing of sins. Otherwise, nobody would accept his book. There is no evidence here that the authors of the Zohar were righteous and pious men. However, by expressing halakhic opinions that have no precedent in the words of the sages, the authors of the Zohar did violate their own words at all. This is because the exact language of the Zohar, which he quoted, is: “Anybody who says words of Torah that he is not familiar with, and that he did not receive as tradition...”. I am fairly certain that the authors of the Zohar received their teachings from their teachers, and they were familiar with them. That is to say that, by their own reasoning, they were justified in manufacturing the laws – and they didn’t consider themselves to be included in this condemnation. It’s also possible that they received them from ancient sources that have been lost to us, and we can give them some benefit of the doubt.

The fourth section:

He cited several historical events that are mentioned in the Zohar that R. Moshe de Leon surely would have known their exact dates. The fact that the Zohar mentioned them without giving their exact dates is evidence that it was composed before these events occurred. He was mainly referring to the

conquest of Jerusalem by Muslims. He then presented the argument that if this were a forgery, why was he not careful when he quoted statements from the Talmud or with other matters? Hence, it is surely not a forgery.

The response to all this is very simple, and it is that the authors of the Zohar were careful with these matters up to the limits of their ability, however, sometimes they stumbled, forgot or didn't know to avoid using language that revealed the late date of their work. In contrast, the authors of the *Ra'aya Mehemna* and the *Midrash haNe'elam* practically used no caution at all, and you find on every page, evidence that they are of late origin. In fact, as I have already mentioned, it is possible that the author of the *Ra'aya Mehemna* had no intention to forge. He simply used a historic context in which to frame his ideas (like R. Yehudah haLevi in *The Kuzari*), and it never occurred to him that somebody would be so foolish as to believe that the book is ancient. Regarding the *Midrash haNe'elam* that is included within *Zohar Hadash*, we shall dedicate a special chapter.

The fifth section:

Here, it was not his intention to defend the faith in the antiquity of the Zohar, only to refute one of the difficulties that are raised against it, and it is the subject of the language in which the Zohar was written — corrupted Aramaic. His argument is that it was written specifically in Aramaic “to make known that it was not intended to be revealed until after the passing of many generations...”

This claim is rather difficult for me to fathom. If this is the case, what will he say about the *Midrash haNe'elam*, that most of it is in simple Hebrew? And what will he reply about the rest of the compositions that (according to most of the kabbalists) are also in esoterica, such as *The Book of Yesirah*, *haBahir*, the *Heikhaloth*, *Pirquei Merkavah* and *Pirquei Ma'aseh Bereshith*? According to him (p. 89) they should have all been written in Aramaic – yet they're all in Hebrew.

After thus, near the end of his book, he unintentionally presented an argument that destroys most of his claims in the second section of his book. There, he relied upon the similarity of the style of a few geonic responsa, to the style of the Zohar, and he claimed that they are from sections of the Zohar that have been lost over time.

(p. 95) I shall return to the matter of the language of the book of the Zohar... we see that it is in the style of the later authors rather than in the style of the tannaim and the amuraim... and so I found, quoted passages from the language of the Gemara, Tractate Kalla that are exactly the same as his style in Midrash haNe'elam.

His claim is that there is nothing unique about the language style of the Zohar. Now would be a good time for us to remember what this same author, R. Luria, wrote earlier that many midrashim were lost from us, and in section two, he claimed that their source was the Zohar, even though “we find them neither in the Yerushlami nor in the Zohar, since their style is more typical to that of the Zohar and the *Midrash haNe’elam*” (for example on p. 61). According to his own words, his theory cannot be correct, since there were other compositions in the same style (according to him, the entire tractate *Kalla*), and some of them have been lost to us.

And so, we have reviewed all of the main arguments of the book *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*, and I’ll conclude with a few final thoughts. I did not make the effort to reply to every single detail of this essay — not because it contains robust challenges to my own opinions for which I lack good answers. On the contrary, most of the essay requires no response, and I have focused on his strongest arguments. In any event, you needn’t rely upon me; the book is found in many Hebrew bookstores for a reasonable price. Read it yourself and draw your own conclusions.

All his claims and theories are so weak that they collapse under the weight of any scrutiny.

He contradicts himself, and his own sources contradict him, on several occasions (as in section two).

However, we should realize that R. Luria was not stupid. How can we reconcile an intelligent man composing such an illogical book? There is something about this book that sets it apart from all other such books that support the antiquity of the Zohar — in most, or all, of the book, R. Luria was **honest**. Every claim that he made came with its debunking right next to it; it is the author himself who debunks the claims. Therefore, it appears to me that the R. Luria was very much aware that the Zohar is of late origin. It looks like somebody of influence requested that he compose the book — and so he did, but without any deception. Since he had no desire to deceive, he wrote the book in such a way that it would not be convincing to anyone but fools.

The Secular Scholars

The secular scholars have no vested interest in proving the antiquity of any religious texts. Therefore, they tend to be more objective. There was a time when secular scholars seemed to have a preference for claiming that religious books, in general, are of late origin — in more recent times, that bias seems to have gone away for the most part. Therefore, we find the secular scholars to be more honest than the religious ones (whose primary goal is to bolster a creed that’s already dear to them, and not to reveal the truth for its own sake). Even though the secular scholars do not believe in the

Torah, it appears that most of them take a keen interest in the Kabbalah and its books, either because it's interesting subject matter or because it quells their boredom and provides a livelihood at the same time. In the absence of religious conviction, it's so obvious to them that the Zohar was composed in Medieval times that we do not find them wasting time to prove it. However, they do sometimes debate who, from among the medieval kabbalists, composed the book of the Zohar, R. Moshe de Leon, R. Abraham Abul'afia, or perhaps somebody else.

Similarly, I have not spent much time delving into their books, and here I shall discuss only three of these books: "Investigations on Kabbalistic Literature," by Ephraim Gottlieb (Tel Aviv 1976), "The Grammar of the Aramaic of the Zohar," by Menahem Sevi Qadari (Jerusalem 1971), and the Hebrew Encyclopedia, in which Gershom Scholem wrote a short summary of his opinions. I'll note that Mr. Qadari might actually be observant – but I'm counting his book as "secular" because it seems to fit that body of literature.

The Book *Investigations on Kabbalistic Literature*

Page 209. Statements that appear in the Zohar as if they are Mishnaic or from the Baraita that appear in the Zohar have their origin, or usage, from Medieval times.

1. "Emsa'uth–'emsa'i" (אמצעות) "*by way of an intermediary*" — "*for the rest of the prophets, it was **by way** (Be'**emsa'uth**) of a messenger*" (Vatican manuscript); "*the Holy One loves him (Moses) more than all the prophets of the world, with no intermediary at all*" (Zohar III 152a)." Regarding prophets other than Moses, Maimonides says: "*Know that the true essence of prophecy is the flow that flows from God, blessed be He, by way of (Be'**emsa'uth**) the acting intellect*" (Guide for the Perplexed II 36). However, regarding the prophecy of Moses, he says, "*That he speaks with God, blessed be He, without an intermediary*" (introduction to chapter Heleq, the seventh principle).
2. "Aglimu beSiyura (אגלימו בצורה) "*They materialized in a form*". Aglimu beAwira (*they materialized in the air*)" (Zohar Mathnithin, I 121b); "*materialized and took form*" (Zohar II 159a). "*For they materialized and took a spiritual form,*" "*and by the force of this second form, the six corners of the Earth materialized and took shape, they materialized in a spiritual form and shape*" [a responsum dubiously ascribed to Rav Hai Gaon, from the circle of the Masters of Iyyun (a thirteenth-century kabbalistic group), quoted in Pardes Rimmonim (R. Mosheh Cordovero 1522–1570), (gate 11, chapter 1)]; "*and when they enter there, they at once take on form from the upper air*" (Seder Gan 'Eden – *an anonymous kabbalistic work that*

circulated in the fourteenth century and was later printed with Zohar Hadash).

3. “Davaq” (דבק “cleave”/“attach”) — *in the sense of “comprehension.”* “Even thinking about the matter does not help one comprehend it” (Zohar Hadash 121, column 4, manuscript); “and behold, the souls of the righteous look out from within these shining ones when they cleave (comprehend) that place” (Zohar I 232b, Tosefta). From his footnote: “They cleaved (ithDabaqu),” in the Zohar, in the sense of comprehension, appears countless times.

4. “Laḥutha” (לחותא “moisture”) — “It is dry, without any moisture” (Zohar Mathnithin I 155). Laḥuth (for “Moistures,”) was a term from Medieval times — “and that is that no man has seen heat by itself nor absolute moisture (laḥuth)” (R. Sa’adya Gaon in Emunoth weDe’oth, Leipzig edition 1859 p. 35).

5. “KeMan deHame bathar kuthla” (כמאן דחמי בתר כותלא) “Like one who sees behind a wall”— *in connection with Moses and prophecy. This formula is found in the Tosefta (Zohar I 232b, and also in Zohar II 69b), and it appears to be taken from Maimonides in the Eight Chapters, chapter 7: “Moses our master, peace be upon him, saw the Lord, blessed be He, from behind one clear partition,” and also in the introduction to Pereq Heleq (the fourth principle): “no screen remained that he did not tear.” His note below explains that the saying of the Zohar, in part two and in the “Tosefta,” are referring to the breaking of husks, in connection with revelations and prophecy.*

The Book *The Grammar of the Aramaic of the Zohar*

This book contains 180 pages of comprehensive investigations, and a survey regarding every aspect of the grammar of the Zohar. It is not known to me which edition his citations refer to.

Page 14: Also, the oldest manuscript (of the Zohar) is the Cambridge manuscript #1023, from the 14th century.

Page 15: That the primary influence upon the formation of the language of the Zohar is known to be the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud, of the Translation of Onqelos, and the Hebrew language in its various stages, including the language of Medieval times; only in a few places do we find the

influence of the language of the Galilee (from the Jerusalem Targums, and less so, the Jerusalem Talmud).

Page 15. One should distinguish between the study of Tiqqune Zohar and in the Ra'aya Mehemna... the study of the language of the main body of the Zohar.

Page 16. The fact that the language of the book is mixed from Aramaic and from Hebrew. Furthermore, the Aramaic portions are a mixture of several dialects of Aramaic proves that this language is not a natural language, of living speech, but an artificial language, drawn from literary sources whose styles differ and do not agree with one another. (This is exactly what R. Emdin wrote on page 59 of his book. — the copyist.)

The greater part of it is Babylonian Aramaic, and the smaller part Galilean Aramaic... They cast doubt on the possibility that the book was composed in Galilee... And clear translations from Hebrew also teach that the base language of the composition was Hebrew. The author thought his thoughts in the Hebrew language, and translated them — with varying degrees of success — into his literary Aramaic.

The fact that the Hebrew styles of the Middle Ages appear in equal measure in the Aramaic parts of the Zohar, and also the presence of terms peculiar to the rabbis of Spain (and especially of the thirteenth century) in the text of the book, help us narrow down the time and place of the Zohar's composition to thirteenth century in Spain.

Medieval Hebrew; Medieval philosophical Concepts in their Hebrew Dress, Which the Translators Created:

- (1). *Until their deeds were transformed from **potential to action**" (Zohar I 110b, Midrash haNe'elam)... "but they do not have **in their potential** to do evil (Zohar I 137b).*
- (2). *Everything that the Holy One created in His worlds, apart from Him, was in **partnership** (בשותוף beshituf)... the angels who were created from the Holy Spirit itself — shall one say that there is partnership in them?" (Zohar I 136b, Midrash haNe'elam).*
- (3). *The way and the **nature** (טבעה Tiv'ah) of the world has not changed' (I 138b, Midrash ha-Ne'elam).*

(4). "Ithpash_tutha" (II 76a).

(5). "Istakelutha" (*ibid.*).

Here is an explanation of these two terms:

Both are abstract nouns built on the reflexive stem, with the ending -utha: אִתְּפַשְׁטוּתָא from "to spread," אִסְתַּכְלוּתָא from "to look, to contemplate."

Talmudic Aramaic has the verbs. It does not use these nouns as technical terms. The nouns belong to the medieval habit of coining an abstract in -utha to match a Hebrew or Arabic philosophical term — "extension," "contemplation." That is why the page lists them with the Hebrew of the translators, not with the Aramaic of the Talmud.

Terms of grammar that were not known before the Middle Ages (one must distinguish here between the *Tiqqunei Zohar* and the *Ra'aya Mehemna*, and the body of the Zohar):

1. "Two letters (*Terein tevin*)". *Tevah* = "the written letter," perhaps under the influence of Arabic *ḥarf*, which means both "word" and "written letter" (Zohar II 68a).

A more comprehensive explanation:

The Zohar says תְּרִין תִּיבִין, "two tevin," at II 68a. In the Talmud a teivah is a word. Here the author takes it as a written letter.

He bases this upon the Arabic word ḥarf. That word means a letter, and it is also used for a small unit of speech. He thinks the Zohar's author, writing in Spain, let ḥarf pull teivah from "word" over to "letter." So תְּרִין תִּיבִין would mean "two letters," not "two words."

2. "The body is the letters and the spirit is their (vowel) points; all of them were set in their places after the vowels...".

We have already explained that the vowel points (vocalization) were invented centuries after Rishbi.

Use of Language and Concepts From the Middle Ages:

- (1). “And with all this, since the male waters were completed in the female waters” (Zohar I 18a). “With all this, they are one” (Zohar I 32a). The issue is *ועם כל דא*, “and with all this,” a medieval Hebrew expression copied into Aramaic, and *מיין דכורין / מיין*, “male waters” and “female waters,” a kabbalistic pair not found in the Talmud.
- (2). “One must look” (Zohar I 109b). The issue is *אית לאסתכלא*, “there is to look,” a late way of saying “one must contemplate.”
- (3). “For the guarding of the Holy One has not departed from her at all” (Zohar I 166a). The issue is *מכל וכל*, “at all,” a medieval Hebrew idiom set into the Aramaic sentence.
- (4). “They occupy themselves with the Torah” (Zohar II 71a). The issue is *משתדלין*, “they occupy themselves,” a medieval Hebrew verb used as if it were Aramaic.
- (5). “To know in it” (Zohar I 30a), meaning “to know it.” The issue is *למנדע ביה*. Talmudic Aramaic would say “to know it,” not “to know in it,” which follows the Hebrew *לדעת בו*.
- (6). “For there is no god there but Him” (Zohar I 104b, *Midrash haNe’elam*). The issue is *תמן*, “there,” used as a filler in a sentence where classical language would not include it.
- (7). “And that time was set for prayer, for there was no accusation there at all” (Zohar III 193a). The issue is *תמן*, “there,” again used as a filler, and *קטרוגא*, “accusation,” a medieval legal word.
- (8). “All those who come in the reincarnation of souls” (Zohar II 98b). The issue is *גלגולא דנשמתין*, “reincarnation of souls.” The Talmud does not use this noun for the return of a soul into another body.
- (9). “To you it is fitting, and to you it is proper” (Zohar III 170a). The issue is *יאותי*, “to you it is fitting”. A late coinage beside the ordinary *יאות*.

The Hebrew Encyclopedia (Gershom Scholem)

Since Gershom Scholem did such an excellent job in this article, I’ll simply quote the relevant parts:

(Here is the evolution of) the opinion of the kabbalists on the composition of the Zohar and its editing. In the beginning, the widespread view was that this book was composed by Rishbi in the years that he hid in the cave, or at the very latest, by the generation that followed him, by the kabbalists of Safed. Generally speaking, they believed that the entirety of the Zohar was of ancient origin. Abraham Galante believed that it was compiled during the days of the geonim from the writings of Rav Abba, who was Rishbi's scribe, even acquiring its present form at that time. This theory came about to reconcile striking difficulties with the chronology of the sages mentioned within it. From the 16th century, a popular legend spread – that the Zohar before us today, which contains some two thousand pages of print, only represents bits and pieces of the original composition, whose volume was enough to fill forty camel-loads of books.

Of particular importance is the question of the unity of the body of the Zohar. The unity of this composition is recognized from a literary perspective. A unity both in language style and concepts; the differences that exist within it are superficial and artificial, such as in the choice of a concise style with riddles on the one hand, or the choice of a more loquacious, even long-winded style on the other. When criticism arose, concerning the origin of the Zohar, a variety of opinions became popular, according to which the Zohar is a combination of ancient pamphlets and more recent ones, which were not compiled together until the Zohar was made public, and that in any event, it has characteristics of a legitimate midrash. That is to say, it is a collection from many generations, and not the work of one author. Eliaqim Milzahagi, Hillel Zeitlin, Ernst Müller, and Paul Vulliaud claimed that, in any case, the Sifra diSeni'utha, the Mathnithin, or the Idroth are ancient sources of this kind. A. Stern tried to distinguish ancient layers also in the homilies of the Zohar in the rest of its parts. A detailed examination of these claims proves that they are very weak...

It does not follow the style of midrash, the author of the Zohar is fond of hinting at what is already known or is yet to be known in another place, and this is typical of the style of Medieval preachers. An examination of these connections reveals that the body of the Zohar as a work of literary tapestry.

To the unity of the composition belongs also the unity of the general framework and of the operative soul. The Zohar always sets up a fixed, organized group of 'companions,' whose number it deliberately fixed at ten: Rishbi, R. El'azar his son, R. Abba, R. Yehudah, R. Yose, R. Yishaq, R. Hizqiyah, R. Hiyya, R. Yisa, and R. Aḥa. Most of them are only supernal figures. Some of them are amuraim, whom the author transferred to the time of the tannaim,

using the stories that the Talmudic sources tell of those amuraim. There are no unknown historical persons here. To these principal figures are added a few sages, who appear for the most part only incidentally, or as figures from the generation before Rishbi. R. Pinḥas ben Ya'ir, the son-in-law of Rishbi (Shabbath 33b), was mistakenly turned by the Zohar into his father-in-law.

The father-in-law of R. El'azar ben Rishbi is called in the Zohar, by mistake, R. Yosei ben Shim'on ben Laqonia, instead of Shim'on ben Yosei ben Laqonia. Besides the fixed companions, other men appear here and there with the title 'Saba,' which indicates that they belong to an earlier generation, such as R. Nehorai Saba, R. Yisa Saba, R. Hamnuna Saba, and R. Yehudah Saba. One can recognize a tendency to create the framework of a romance without regard to anachronisms, and with a confusion of the times. Against this — and unlike the literature of the Hekhaloth and the Merkavah (other kabbalistic works of Medieval times – the copyist)— there is no mention here of Ribbi 'Aqiva or of Ribbi Yishma'el as bearers of a secret tradition, and Ribbi 'Aqiva is mentioned only in stories and in quotations from the Gemara. The Land-of-Israel frame of the book is also, in the main, romantic and unreal. The Zohar relies on geographical and topographical knowledge of the Land that it found in the known ancient literature.

However, at times it did not understand its sources and invented places that never existed, such as Cappadocia — as the name of a village near Sippori (on the basis of a statement in the Yerushlami, Shevi'ith 9:5, which was joined to another statement in the Tosafoth, Yevamoth 84). It also invents a village in the Galilee named Kefar Tarshi, which it identifies with Mata Mehasya, and tells of a custom of circumcision that was practiced there, on the basis of things brought in the literature of the geonim concerning the known Mata Mehasya in Babylonia.

There are also names of places based on a corrupt reading in a manuscript of the Talmud from the Middle Ages, such as Migdal Sur, at the beginning of Saba deMishpatim. Several times the Zohar uses the expression "he went up there," which is used in the Babylonian Talmud of those who go up from Babylonia to the Land of Israel, and the frame of the Land of Israel is exchanged for the frame of the exile, which would not have been possible if the words had been written in the Land of Israel.

From the perspective of the framework and of the acting persons, there are close ties between the main Zohar and major portions of the Midrash haNe'elam, which follows the same method of mentioning imaginary places. Alongside Rishbi and his companions, the masters of esoterica, other persons

are mentioned, and in particular later amuraim, or bearers of invented names, who are never again mentioned in the Zohar.

From the literature of the Middle Ages the author of the Zohar uses the commentaries on Scripture — Rashi, Ibn Ezra, the Radaq, and Leqah Tov of R. Iuviah ben Eli'ezer. It appears that he was also familiar with the commentaries of the Tosafists. To a recognizable degree, he was influenced by the allegorical midrashim from the school of Maimonides, mainly in the Midrash haNe'elam, but in a few homilies also in the body of the Zohar. The latest commentator who served him as a source is Nahmanides, in his commentary on the Torah and on the book of Job. The use of several words in the Zohar can only be understood as they are explained in the 'Arukh and in the Sefer haShorashim of the Radaq. An important homily in the portion Balaq is based on the joining of three statements from Sefer haKaduri of R. Yehudah the Yerushlami. Regarding several traditions, the Zohar relies on Sefer haManhig of Abraham ben Nathan haYarhi (about 1155–1215, Spain). Rashi's commentary on the Talmud, and not the language of the Gemara alone, is also found as the basis of several of the words of the Zohar. The Zohar draws from the books of Maimonides, in his commentary on the Mishnah and the Guide for the Perplexed in a few instances – and much more from the Mishneh Torah.

The term “the sharp point,” in the sense of a center, is taken from the book Ginnath Egoz (R. Yosef Gikatilla, 1248–c. 1325 Spain), which was composed in 1274. Terms that are scattered in several places, such as En Sof (“without end,” to describe God), the primordial air, Ayin (“nothingness”) in a mystical sense, the source of life, the desire of thought, the world of separation — their source is in the development of the Kabbalah after 1200. The term haluq, or haluqa derabbanan (“Cloak of the sages”), as a term for the garment of the souls in the Garden of Eden, and the concept of using the word “cloak” in this sense is taken from Hibbur Yafeh min haYeshu'ah by R. Ya'akov ben Nissim (1050). Often the Zohar draws not from the midrashim directly, but from the commentaries on them by the kabbalists who preceded him.

The culture and zeitgeist of the Middle Ages is also recognizable in the Zohar in many further details. Historical hints of the Crusades and of Arab rule in the Land of Israel join matters based on customs of manners and of laws that were practiced in the author's surroundings in Christian Spain. At the same time, he offers a rebuke against certain breaches in the life of the public is tied to his period. The opinions of the Zohar in the field of medicine are also those of that period, in which the views of Galen ruled.

The Zohar has no clear concepts of the nature of idolatry, and it depends on the conceptions of Maimonides, which for their part are founded on the fictional literature of the Sabian sect in Harran. The cultural and religious surroundings to which most of the words of the book refer — and also the words of polemic in it — are Christian and monogamous, except that here and there we also find hints of Islam and of relations with Muslims, which fits Castile, in the place where the book was composed. Even the views of the Zohar on Satan and the systems of the forces of impurity, the demons and the harmful spirits, and also the wisdom of sorcery and the sorcerers — insofar as they were not copied from Talmudic sources — are characteristic of the Middle Ages, such as the covenant of the sorcerer and Satan and the cult of the sorcerers to Satan. Hints of these matters are scattered through all the parts of the Zohar, but they are uniform in their nature.

The order of the prayers, explained in the portion Terumah and in the portion Wayaqhel, is not the ancient order of prayers that was practiced in the Land of Israel, but the rite of Spain and France that was practiced in the Middle Ages. The literary dress of things that were supposedly said in the days of the tannaim is external only. The author of the third layer — the book Ra'aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim — hardly conceals his surroundings and his concerns in his polemical words on the social and religious state of the communities of Israel in his time, a subject very dear to him and treated differently from the main generation. The social circumstances pictured here are not at all those of ancient communities in Babylonia or in the Land of Israel but fit in every detail what is known to us of the situation in Spain at the end of the thirteenth century. The author is also familiar with a fierce polemic between the masters of the Kabbalah, who are mentioned only in these parts by the name “masters of Kabbalah,” and their opponents, who deny their claims to the existence of secrets in the Torah and to their knowledge of them.

An examination of the language of the Zohar does not reveal any ancient layers. This language is divided into three blocks: (a) the Hebrew in the Midrash haNe'elam; (b) the Aramaic in it and in the body of the Zohar; (c) the imitation of (b), found in the Ra'aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim. The Hebrew does indeed imitate the language of the aggadah, but it is revealed in all its deviations from its literary sources as the Hebrew of the Middle Ages; it is from the period of the rule of philosophical terminology. The writer uses philosophical and later terms with no disguise at all, mainly in the first portions and in Midrash Ruth. Nevertheless, the transition from this Hebrew to the Aramaic in the Midrash haNe'elam itself and in the body of

the Zohar is clearly recognizable, and from a linguistic perspective, they are one block.

The natural Hebrew of the author was translated here into artificial Aramaic. This Aramaic has no linguistic parallel, since it is mixed from all the Aramaic dialects that were known to the author, as a foundation for his artificial construct. The very name that he uses to describe this Aramaic as “the language of the Targum (translation)” (Zohar I 89a), instead of “the Aramaic language” used in the Talmud and the midrash, is a custom of the Middle Ages. These dialects are mainly the language of the Babylonian Talmud and the language of Targum Onqelos, and especially the Galilean Aramaic of the other translations – but very little of the Jerusalem Talmud. Forms from different dialects are used side by side with no distinction, even within one paragraph. This phenomenon is conspicuous both in the system of the pronouns of their various kinds, and in the system of the verb stems.

*Sometimes the Zohar adopts for itself a straight Babylonian use of a traditional form, and sometimes it prefers Targum (traditional Aramaic translations of Scripture) forms. Likewise, the Zohar creates new nouns in accordance with the customary means of formation found in other nouns, and thus words such as *nehiru*, *nešisu*, *qattu* came into being. In the adverbs, words from biblical and Babylonian Aramaic, and translations from the language of the Middle Ages, are mixed together.*

*This mixing of forms has in it a method and a consistency, and thus a kind of uniform language is created in all the Aramaic parts of the Zohar. Among the special traits of this language: The *qal* is used in place of *pi‘el* and *hi‘il* (*le-madkhei* instead of *le-daka’ah*, *le-mi‘al* instead of *le-a‘ala’ah*, *le-maḥdei* instead of *leḥada’ah*), and the reverse — *hi‘il* in place of *qal* (such as *alifna* instead of *yalfinan*). Likewise incorrect forms of *itpa‘el* pass in it, such as *itsaddar*, *it‘ayar*, *itdakkei*, *it‘arif*, and the like. In several cases the *itpa‘el* stem is used as a transitive verb, such as *it‘annena milli*, *le-istadqa* (in the sense of “to attain”). The Zohar introduces a new meaning into words, matching their use in the Middle Ages, such as *istaleq* for the death of righteous men; *it‘ar* — under the influence of *hit‘orer* — in the sense of “he discussed a matter”; *ithdabquta* in the sense of intellectual comprehension; *ashgaḥuta* in the sense of providence; *shoresha* in the sense of a root principle. The joining of the connective words *‘im kol da*, used in all the parts in the sense of “nevertheless,” comes in the wake of the language of the translators from Hebrew, and so *remez* (“hint”) as a term for “allegory.” We also find a great number of misleading analyses of grammatical forms and of semantic elements. Thus, the word *palterin* is considered a plural form and so too*

galgelei yamma, “the waves of the sea.” The Zohar writes bar anan instead of bar minan. It invents an artificial meaning of “limb” for the word shaifa, on the basis of a mistaken guess in the explanation of a statement in Makkoth 11b, and from the verb gamar in the sense of “he learned” it renews this meaning also for the verb hatam. There are words whose original meaning the Zohar did not understand, and to which it assigned a new and incorrect meaning, such as ta’an in the sense of “he drove after an ass” — an Arabism, according to the Sefer haShorashim of the Radaq; tiyya’ for a Jew who drives after an ass; toqefa in the sense of “a palate,” (an error according to Targum Onqelos on Numbers 11:8); bošina de-qardinuta, “a very strong light,” on the basis of a misunderstanding of a statement in Pesahim 7a.

There are words, mainly names, that have no known source, and for the most part no clear meaning either. It is possible that their source is in corrupt readings of manuscripts in the literature of the sages, or in an invention of the author out of imitation of the foreign words in this literature. The influence of Arabic is recognizable only in very few words, whereas the Spanish influence is conspicuous in words, in uses of expressions, and in uses of certain prepositions: Gardini in the sense of “guards” (Spanish guardianos); basas in the sense of “he sweetened” (Spanish endulzar, and from here the regular expression “the sweetening of the judgment,” which comes from the Zohar); haqal in the sense of “battlefield,” and also kos in the sense of “the calyx of a flower,” under the influence of their use in the Romance languages; egoz ha-qeshet in a military sense (Spanish la nuez de ballesta); “they take another way,” “it stands in question,” istakem instead of hiskim, “confessions,” qayama of a flower, yatva be-reqanya in the sense of “being empty” — all of them are borrowed translations from Spanish. In the Tiqqunei haZohar there is added to this also the use of the word esh nogah for “synagogue” (esnoga, sinagoga).

In many places the prepositions come as min instead of “of,” be instead of “with,” le-gabe instead of “to,” under the influence of the uses of language in Spanish. From the side of syntax, the uses of the infinitive are conspicuous also for the opening of a sentence whose subject is different from the subject of the main sentence — mainly in place of relative clauses and purpose clauses — such as “the righteous are fit that the world be obligated by them,” “it is the palace of love, that the male cleave to the female.”

These syntactic and stylistic traits are characteristic of the language of the Middle Ages, and mainly of the Hebrew of the Jews of Spain, under the influence of the philosophical style, and the author of the Zohar uses them without noticing their late formation. The language of the give-and-take in

the debates of the sages is taken almost entirely from the Babylonian Talmud specifically, with the addition of a few expressions from the homiletical language of the Middle Ages, such as “one must look,” “one must awaken.” Compared with the language used in the rest of the parts of the Zohar, the language of the Ra’aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim is poor both in vocabulary and in the structure of its sentences. The writer already imitates the Zohar itself, but without the literary talent of the author of the main Zohar. The number of Hebrew words that were transferred here into Aramaic is much greater than in the main Zohar. The author writes the Hebrew of the Middle Ages with almost no disguise. The terms “Kabbalah” and “sefiroth,” which are not used at all in the main body of the Zohar or in the Midrash haNe’elam, who were careful, using various alternative expressions in order to get around them, are found in abundance in this layer.

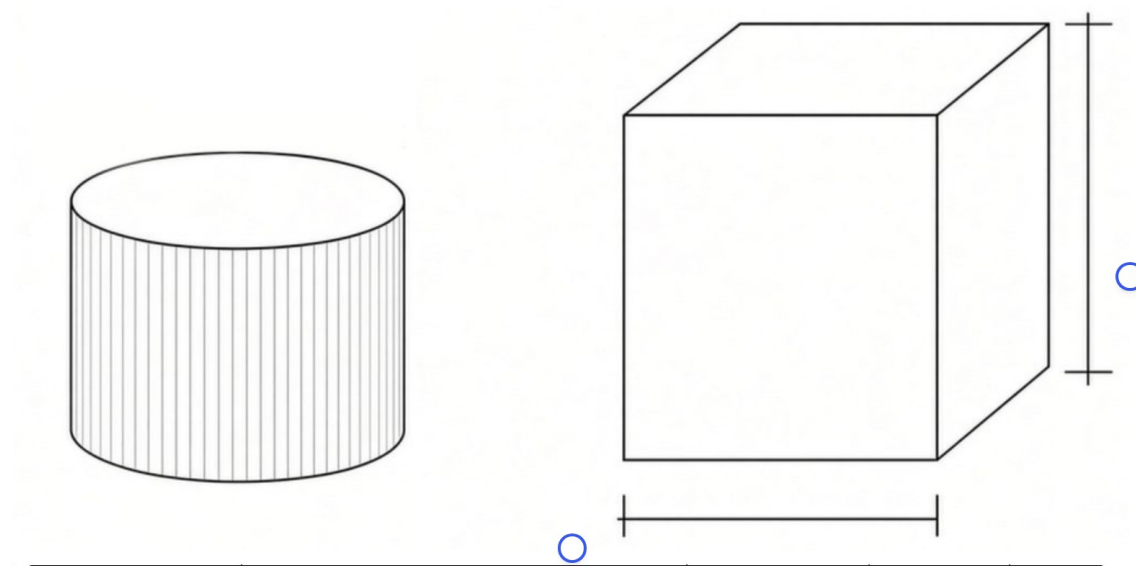
The calculations of the end (of days) in various parts of the Zohar confirm the conclusions about the time of its composition. These calculations promise, in different forms and from different homilies and supports, the beginning of the redemption from 1300 on, and they explain various stages of this redemption up until the resurrection of the dead. Regarding the details, there are differences in the exact dates according to whatever motives are required. In the opinion of the Zohar, 1,200 years have already passed after the destruction of the Temple, 100 years against each of the tribes of Israel, and Israel is in the transition period before the beginning of the redemption. On the basis of these dates (Zohar I 119–147, 139b; Zohar II 9b) it is plausible that the main Zohar and the Midrash haNe’elam were composed between 1270 and 1300. Similar calculations are found in the Ra’aya Mehemna and the Tiqqunim. Here, the base year is always 1268, and after that begin the pangs of the Messiah and the second appearance of Moses, as preparation for the arrival of the messiahs, the son of Yosef and the son of David. Moses even reveals the Zohar at the end of days. This transition period ends here, as a rule, in 1312, and after that, begin the various stages of the redemption itself.

The Flat Earth of the Talmudic Sages

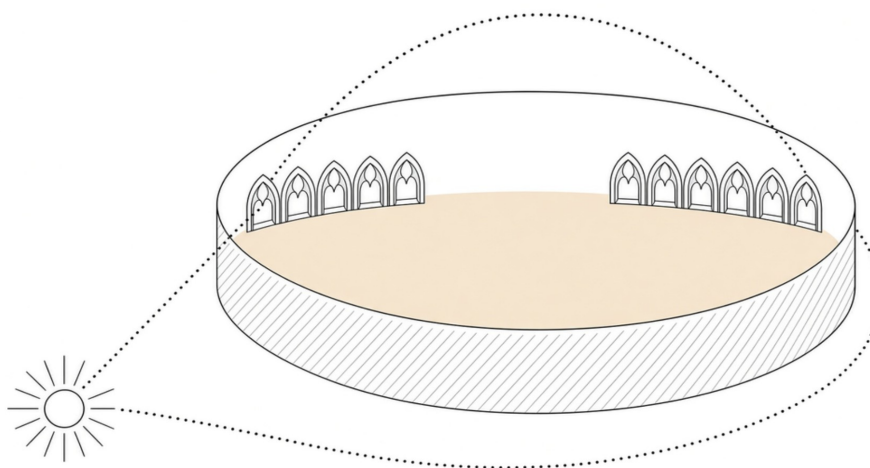
In several places in the Zohar, it is clear that the authors knew that the Earth is a sphere. Nowhere, in the Zohar, is a flat Earth implied. In contrast, the predominant view of the sages of the Talmud (perhaps of all of them) was that the Earth is flat, regardless of whether they thought it was square-shaped or circular, it was always flat in their eyes.

None of the following statements, except the first (which can be interpreted either way), can be easily explained with a spherical Earth.

The length of the world is a journey of five hundred years, and the width of the world is five hundred years, and its thickness is five hundred years, and some say that it is round. (Seder Rabbah deVereshith 14).



The Holy One created three hundred and sixty-five windows in the firmament, one hundred and eighty-two in the east and one hundred and eighty-two in the west. Some of them, He created for the sun, and some of them, He created for the moon. (Shemoth Rabbah 15:22 and chapter 6 of Pirke deRibbi Eli'ezer).



How so? Sometimes it turns its course northward, and that is the long way, and sometimes it turns its course southward, and that is the short way. (Baraitha deMazzaloth 8 and chapter 6 of Pirqe deRibbi Eli'ezer).

Explanation: the Sun, in any case, is fixed in its firmament, and the firmament is like a dome covering the Earth. If so, at the short ends of the Earth the firmament is much lower. Therefore, when the Sun circles the Earth close to the edge (which is only in the south, for they did not know that there are places where it inclines to the north) it has a shorter path. The closer it comes to the center of the firmament, the higher it is.

Ribbi Lewi said: every single day the Holy One sits in judgment on the wheel of the sun and the moon, that they do not seek to go out to give light to the world. (Wayiqra Rabbah 31:9).

One must be precise: From where do they need to go out? The sun always gives light to the world without a break. But for those who believe in a flat Earth, it makes sense.

The bolts of the heavens are held in the waters of the ocean. The heavens of the ocean are between the ends of the Earth and the ends of the heavens. And the ends of the heavens are spread upon the waters of the ocean... The content of the heavens goes upward. Their ball is like a spread tent, its ends below and its inside above, and all human beings dwell under it. So are the heavens; their ends are below and their inside is above, like a tent. (Pirqe deRibbi Eli'ezer, chapter 3).



When the sun inclines to set in the west and bathes in the waters of the ocean... so the waters of the ocean extinguish the flames of the sun, and it

has no brightness and its flame is not there all night, until it comes to the east and bathes in the river of fire. (Pirke deRibbi Eli'ezer, chapter 51).

This is not like the opinion of Ribbi, in *Pesaḥim*. For if so, it does not heat the springs. And the proof from this, for one who believes in a flat Earth, is simple to explain.

And the sages say: "from when the sun sets until the entire orb is filled with it." (Midrash Shemuel 31).

From here it is implied that there is an orb on only one side of the Earth. For if not so, the orb would never be filled with the light of the sun, since one side would always be dark.

It was taught: Ribbi Eli'ezer says, "The world is like a courtyard, and the northern side is not enclosed" (In the version of Sa'adyah Gaon, "is not covered") — and when the sun reaches the northwest corner it bends and rises above the firmament." Ribbi Yehoshua' says, "The world is like a dome (Rashi explains, wholly enclosed) and the northern side is enclosed. When the sun reaches the northwest corner, it circles and returns behind the dome, as it is said... it goes toward the south and circles toward the north, and so on, at night." (Baba Bathra 25b).

The firmament is made like a dome, wide like a tent, its length... from the north side is not covered, and it is square like a courtyard... and from the south it is round like a furnace... east and west are like a building upon the Earth. (Baraita deShemuel haQatan, at the beginning).

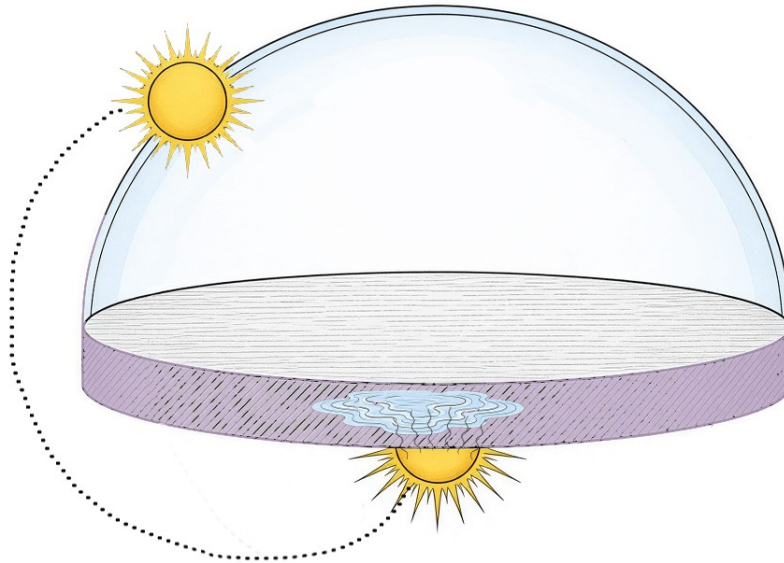
The sages of Israel say, "By day the sun is below the firmament, and by night above the firmament." (Pesaḥim 94b).

Explanation: The firmament is not transparent, and therefore when the sun is above it, it is dark for us, and when it is below, there is light. But according to this, there would never be light on the other side of the world, and this you will see in the drawing of *Baba Bathra* above.

And the sages of the (gentile) nations say, "By day the sun travels below the firmament, and by night below the ground." Ribbi said, "Their words appear better than ours, for by day the springs are cold and by night they are hot." (ibid.).

Let us consider well the words of Ribbi. He felt that, since the waters of the springs are hotter at night, this is a sign that the Sun passes under the ground and heats those

waters, which is not so by day, when it is the heavens, just below the firmament and far from the waters of the springs. Therefore, by day they are cold. The thought experiment I propose does not require much consideration, only a comparison between the globe of the Earth and of the planet Mercury, which the sages called simply “a star”:



Mercury is very close to the Sun compared to Earth. Its diameter is only a fraction of Earth's diameter. It keeps one side facing the Sun for about half a year – and yet, even under these extreme conditions, the heat of the Sun cannot penetrate its diameter, with its night side remaining at a frigid -150 (C). How much less so the Earth's diameter.

It is not hard to understand from this, that for there to be a situation that allows the heat of the sun to have any effect on the waters of the springs, the Earth would have to be very thin, and so close to the sun that even the stones of the day side of the Earth would melt. Such thinness can be pictured only if the Earth is flat. If so, how did Ribbi perceive this temperature difference in the spring water? One must understand that in his days there were no thermometers, and when the air is cold outside, those waters seem hot by comparison, and when the air is hot outside, those waters seem cold. A modern researcher has already measured the waters of the springs by day and by night with a thermometer and found that there is no difference.

It was taught, “Ribbi Nathan says, in the hot season the sun travels in the height of the firmament, and therefore the whole world is hot and the

springs are cold, and in the rainy season the sun travels in the lower edges of the firmament, and therefore the whole world is cold and the springs are hot.” (ibid.).

Understand this by means of our drawing on the *Baraita deMazzaloth* above.

How do the disk of the sun and the moon set? Ribbi Yehudah ben Ribbi La'i and the sages (disagree). Ribbi Yehudah says, “behind the dome and above”. The sages say, “behind the dome and below”. Ribbi Yoḥanan said, “the words of Ribbi Yehudah ben Ribbi Il'ai seem correct, and he said (the Sun is) behind the dome and above in the hot season, when the whole world is hot and the springs are cold, rather than the words of the sages, who say (that the Sun is) behind the dome and below in the rainy season, when the whole world is cold and the springs are lukewarm. Rishbi said, “We do not know, etc.” (Bereshith Rabbah 6:8).

The opinion of Ribbi Yehudah is the opinion of Ribbi Eli'ezer and Ribbi Yehoshua' above. The opinion of the sages is the opinion of Ribbi.

So far, we have seen the opinions of the ancient sages, the tannaim and the amuraim, all of whom believed that the Earth is flat, and not spherical. Now let us try to figure out when Jewish scholars began to believe in the sphericity of the Earth.

Rav Sa'adiah Gaon (892-942) knew that the Earth is spherical, for he wrote in his commentary on *Sefer Yesirah* 2:4, “The matter that is agreed upon by all is that the firmament and the Earth, each of them, is like a ball.” But his attribution of this opinion to Ribbi is an error, as we saw above.

Ribbi Shelomo ibn Gabirol (about 1021-1058) knew that the Earth is spherical, for he wrote in *Kether Malkhuth*, “Who can recount Your mighty acts, in Your making the globe of the Earth divided into two?”

Maimonides (1138-1204) knew that the Earth is spherical, for he implied this in the *Guide for the Perplexed* several times, and in more detail in his writings on astronomy. He wrote in the *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:72, “Its center is the globe of the Earth.”

From all the above we have learned that in the Middle Ages they were well aware of the sphericity of the Earth. But until the days of the Radaq (1160-1234) there were still various opinions regarding the climates. Some believed that the cold increases more and more toward the north, while the heat increases more and more toward the south, and they did not know that in the south too there is great cold. Here is a quote from the

Radaq, commentary on the book of Psalms 89, “the north and the south, You created them”:

North, in my opinion, because he mentioned the world and its fullness, and it is from east to west, on the equator, along the length of the world, which is fully inhabited, from the beginning of the east to the end of the west. Therefore, he said, “and its fullness,” for it is wholly full. And afterward he mentioned north and south, which is the width of the world, and it is not wholly inhabited, for on the north side much of the world remains desolate from the abundance of cold, and on the south side even more because of the heat, and very little of it is inhabited.

But Ribbi Abraham bar Hiyya (about 1070-1136 Spain) wrote in his book *Surath haAreṣ* (meaning “geography”), middle of section one:

And those who dwell on the line distant from the equator by 65 degrees, which is the end of the inhabited region in the north, their longest day will be twenty-four hours, the measure of a whole day, and there is no night in it. And the shortest day is all night, and there is no day in it.

In light of all the above, let us now see one statement from the Zohar, *Wayiqra* 10a:

And in the book of Rav Hamnuna Saba he explained further that the whole inhabited region turns in a circle, constantly, like a ball, some on top and some on the bottom. And therefore, there is a place in the inhabited world where, when it is light for some, it is dark for others; for some it is day and for others it is night. There is also a place where it is always day, and there is no night, except for a short duration. This secret was given to the masters of wisdom, and not to the dividers of boundaries... (geographers).

In the commentary on the Zohar, *Qeseth haSofer* (R. Aharon Marcus, 1843–1916), we find, on Genesis 1, page 25:

And already all the astronomers, from the dawn of history until about the year 1490, no hint of this was known among the observers of the heavens, of any people or tongue. We find that the Zohar is the first to reveal this knowledge to the world.

If his intention, in saying “this knowledge,” is the difference of the hours of the day in the lands of the world, this was already known, as we have seen. Even Maimonides knew this, as he wrote in his book *Tekhunath haShamayim*, section 34:

This (time) difference continues to increase, and it grows until those two countries... have a (time) difference between them that equals 12 hours. At that point, one of them will be midday, and the other will be midnight and if in one it is the time of evening, then in the other it will be the time of morning, and so all the other times of the day.

It is possible that he is referring to the concept that the Earth rotates, while the heavens remain stationary. However, this would be extremely unlikely, as it was in opposition to all expert opinions at the time.

Though it's not directly relevant to our topic, I'll point out that there might have been great advancements in the field of astronomy in precisely the place and time where the Zohar was "revealed." That is, in 12th and 13th century Toledo, Spain. It is no wonder that the authors of the Zohar heard astonishing new ideas compared with other times and places. Here I'll quote Ribbi Yisḥaq ben Yosef the Israelite (about 1300 to 1330 Toledo), a student of the Rosh, in his book *Seder 'Olam*, article 4, chapter 4:

...until the time of the scientific scholars who flourished around the year 1140, such as the sage ben Sa'ad and his companions, who were in the city of Toledo and in other places in Spain, about twelve men. Some of them were Jews, and most of them Muslims, who set their heart to investigate and to examine... the signs of the host of heaven, and they did not slacken their hands until they became very enlightened in this wisdom, and they clarified many of its principles...

Many of their insights and discoveries were probably lost during the chaos of the Inquisition.

In any case, we have seen that this opinion of the Zohar does not belong to the period of the Talmudic sages, but to Medieval times.

Words in the Zohar that Came into Use in Medieval Times

- (1) The names of the vocalizations (vowels), very many times in all the parts of the Zohar.
- (2) The names of the cantillation marks, as above.
- (3) *Sibbah* (סבבה), in the sense of "cause": The *sibbah* in I Kings 12:15 means "a pretext that was made in order to turn a desired end," and the word is not used the

same way it is in the Zohar – which is borrowed from Arabic. (Zohar I 145b, II 189b, III 110b, III 243a and b three times, III 244b, III 295a, III 307b, *Tiqqunim* 14a).

- (4) *Serakhoth* (סרכות): III 224b, (*Tiqqunim* 59b, and there 70a).

A more comprehensive explanation:

In the Talmud a (serakha) סרכא is an adhesion on the lung. A slaughtered animal with one is not kosher. That is the old usage of the term.

In contrast, the Zohar's use of it, at III 224b and in the Tiqqunim, is the later one. In medieval medical Hebrew, taken from Arabic, sirkha became a general term for any adhesion, not only the lung of a slaughtered animal. In the Zohar it is used in that wider sense, for things clinging or joined, not for the laws of kosher.

- (5) *Ate marḥiq* (אתי מרחיק). (Zohar III 234b).

A more comprehensive explanation:

Ateh marḥiq is a grammarian's term, not a Talmudic one. It means "it comes distancing," or "it comes and separates."

Medieval Hebrew grammarians used marḥiq for a form, or an accent, that stands apart from the next word, as against one that joins to it. The pair belongs to the same craft as the names of the vowels and the cantillation marks. The Talmud has no such term. Its appearance at Zohar III 234b is why the page lists it with the words renewed in the days of the early authorities.

- (6) *Esnoga*, "synagogue." This is a Spanish word. (III 282a, *Tiqqunim* 7a twice).

- (7) *Gilgul* (גלגול). Reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls. The ancients called this belief "transference," or "copying" (ha'taqa). Ibn Tibbon (about 1120-1190 Provence), in his translation of *Beliefs and Opinions* 6:8, translated it as "transference." R. Hisdai Crescas, who lived about two hundred years later, at the end of his book *Or haShem*, wrote, "if the soul of a man is transferred or emanated, which is what a group of the sages call *gilgul*..." And in the responsa of the Rishba, 408, the fifth benefit, only the word *gilgul* is mentioned.

In any case, whether they called it “transference” or *gilgul*, in all the midrashim and the Talmud of the sages there is no mention of this belief, or of its name. And it is interesting that a little time before the “revealing” of the Zohar, they began to call it specifically *gilgul*, and afterward they found a book, buried for a thousand years before, that uses this word with complete regularity. This word appears around a hundred times in the Zohar.

All the evidence indicates that the belief in reincarnation was either unknown to the ancient Jews or rejected if the suggestion came up. It was not a part of traditional Judaism. The term “*gilgul*” (literally, “rolling”) only comes up once in the ancient sources (*Kethuboth* 111a) and there it refers to the physical rolling of bodies, not of souls.

The first recorded mention of reincarnation is from R. Sa’adya Gaon (10th century Egypt). He wrote (in his book *Emunoth wede’oth* Pt. 6):

Yet I must say that I have found certain people, who call themselves Jews, professing the doctrine of reincarnation which is designated by them as the theory of ‘transmigration’ of souls. What they mean thereby is that the spirit of Reuben is transferred to Simeon and afterwards to Levi and after that to Judah. Many of them would go so far as to assert that the spirit of a human being might enter into the body of a beast or that of a beast into the body of a human being, and other such nonsense and stupidities.

He systematically refutes the idea on logical, philosophical, and scriptural grounds, including the problem of the suffering of children (which proponents explained via previous lives) and the incompatibility with the doctrine of the resurrection of the specific body. He notes that he would not have bothered to refute such “crude and superstitious notions” except for fear of their influence on others.

Yet the Zohar considers the belief in reincarnation as an established, and integral, doctrine of Jewish faith, for example: Zohar III, 88b, Zohar II, 99b, Zohar II, 94a. There is no need to elaborate, since it is already well-known that Kabbalists embrace this belief.

(8) ‘*Illah* (עלֵה), in the sense of “cause” — mentioned at least a hundred times in the Zohar. This usage was borrowed from Arabic.

Expressions That the Tannaim Could Not have Used

- (1) *The Holy Land*. The sages say, “The Land of Israel.” “The Holy Land” is a later name, and this is not the terminology of a tanna. It is found at least 60 times in the Zohar.
- (2) *Reṣe and modim*. In the ancient liturgy these two blessings are ‘*avodah* and *hoda’ah*. Renaming them is a later shorthand.
- (3) *Tag* (תג). The three small crowns on a letter are a scribal and masoretic detail. The Talmud speaks of crowns on letters, not of this technical *tag* as a standing term.
- (4) *As they translated*. This is Rashi’s formula when he cites a Targum. A tanna does not quote “as they translated” in Rashi’s voice. Rashi died in 1105.
- (5) *The homiletic name Shem doresh* (שֵׁם דּוֹרֵשׁ). This is a later way of saying that a name is expounded rather than historical. The Rishba, in the thirteenth century, already treats it as a known device. It is not tannaitic phrasing.
- (6) *Tannaim and amuraim*. The tannaim did not call themselves tannaim, and they did not speak of amuraim, who came after them. The pair is a later label for two finished ages.
- (7) *The intellectual soul* (נֶפֶשׁ שִׁכְלִית). “*Nefesh sichlith*” is a term of the medieval philosophers, from Aristotle by way of the Arabic and Hebrew translators. It is not in the spirit of language of the Talmud.
- (8) *The ancient books exaggerated*. A book that calls other books “ancient,” and accuses them of exaggerating, is looking back on a closed library. A tanna does not speak that way of his own sources.
- (9) *Root and principle* (שֵׁרֶשׁ וְעֵקֶר). “*Shoresh we’iqqar*” is a medieval pair, common in the codes and the philosophers. The Talmud does not use it as a formula.
- (10) *Principle and foundation* (עֵקֶר וְיִסוּד). The same. “*Iqqar wiyesod*” is the language of later books, not of the sages.
- (11) *And thus we read in Nega’im*. “Thus we read” is the formula of a medieval reader of a written mishnah. A tanna does not cite *Nega’im* as a book that he reads.

(12) *To make a calculation* (). *La'asoth heshbon* in this sense, a reckoning of dates or of hidden numbers, is a later idiom. The Talmud calculates. It does not use this phrase as a heading.

(13) *The 'amidah prayer*. The sages say “the prayer,” or “the eighteen (blessings).” *Tefillath ha'amidah*, as the name of the service, is later.

(14) *Kabbalah*, as the secrets of the Torah. In the Talmud *kabbalah* means tradition, or the Prophets and Writings as opposed to the Torah. The sense “secret doctrine” belongs to the Middle Ages. In the book *The Authors of Jerusalem in Jewish Thought*, volume 4, pamphlets 1–2, 1985, Magnes Press, where he cites the writing of one of the important kabbalists of the Middle Ages, the author of a commentary on *Sefer Yesirah* and of the book *Bahir, Or haGanuz*. This is what he wrote:

We are obligated to investigate the matters according to our understanding, and to follow the path of those who are called, since two hundred years ago, “kabbalists,” and they call the wisdom of the ten sefiroth and some of the explanations of the commandments ‘Kabbalah,’ and in the year 1324 I saw...

We see that they began to use the word “Kabbalah” for the esoterica of the Torah only from about the year 1124. I found the word Kabbalah being used this way in twenty-one places, most of them in the *Ra'aya Mehemna* and the *Tiqqunim*, whose author is one, and a few in the *Zohar Hadash*.

(15) *Intellects*. *Sekhalim* is the philosophers' word for the separate intelligences. A tanna does not speak of them.

(16) *Masters of grammar*. Grammar as a named craft, with masters of it, is medieval. The sages have no such guild.

(17) *A large vowel*. “Large” and “small” vowels are a classification of the later grammarians, not of the Talmud.

(18) *Vowels*. The word in this sense, the written vowel signs, is taken from Arabic *ḥarakāt* in the Middle Ages. The sages had no names for vowel points.

(19) *Simḥath Torah*. The sages call the day *Shemini 'Asereth*. The name *Simḥath Torah* is a later custom. The author of *Kether Shem Tov* (R. Shem Tov Gaguine, 1884–1953), treats its appearance in the *Zohar* as remarkable, which is the point.

(20) *Masters of the Jerusalem Talmud*. No one in the age of the tannaim is a master of the Jerusalem Talmud. The Talmud was not yet a book, and the name is later.

- (21) *Foundation and root* (יסוד ושרש). The same medieval pair as “root and principle.”
- (22) *Foundation and principle* (יסוד ועקר). Again, the language of the codes and the philosophers, not of the sages.
- (23) *It is the knowledge* (היא הידיעה). *Hi hayedi'ah* is a philosopher's identification of a thing with knowledge. It is not a Talmudic formula.
- (24) *Hazan*, as the leader of the congregation. In the Talmud a *hazzan* is a minor synagogue officer. The sense “cantor,” the leader of prayer, is later.
- (25) *Cause and cause*. *Sibbah wa-'illah* joins two medieval words for “cause,” one of them from Arabic. The Talmud has neither as a pair.
- (26) *The soul of every living thing* (נשמת כל חי). “*Nishmath kol Har*” is the opening of the Sabbath morning hymn, used here instead of the old name “the Blessing of the Song” (*Birkath haShir*). The hymn is later than the tannaim.
- (27) *El adon* (אל אדון). This is a specific hymn of the Sabbath morning service. Citing it by its first words is the habit of a medieval prayer book, not of a tanna.
- (28) *Something from nothing* (יש מאין). Creation *yesh me'ayin* is a formula of the medieval philosophers and kabbalists. The sages say that God created. They do not use this pair.
- (29) *Composition* (חבור), as a book. *Hibbur* for “a book” is the usage of the geonim and Medieval authorities. The sages do not call a work a *hibbur*.
- (30) *And we found it in the Gemara*. A tanna does not search the Gemara. The Gemara is later than he is.
- (31) *For I have heard several opinions*. This is the voice of a later arbitor, weighing views already given. It is not the voice of a man in the debate.
- (32) *Primordial air* (אוויר קדמון). *Awir qadmon* is a kabbalistic term for a first emanation. It has no place in the language of the sages.
- (33) *The beating of the grave* (חבוט הקבר). *Hibbut haQever* is a later belief about the punishment of the dead. The Talmud has the grave and judgment. It does not have this name.

(34) *And I also saw (fit) to add another proof.* This is the formula of a medieval author adding a proof to a book. A tanna does not write that way.

Mismatched Frequency or Appropriateness of Terms in the Zohar

(1) *“Green bile, black.”* R. Emdin objected that the sages did not use these terms, and ‘*Itur Soferim* (R. Re’uven haKohen Rappaport) answered that they are found in *Midrash Temurah*. To this, I ask, “How does he know that *Midrash Temurah* is as ancient as the Talmud? And even if so, why did the sages not mention this in the Talmud? They surely would have used this term in *Tractate Hullin*. III 224b.

A more comprehensive explanation:

The old physicians divided the body into four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. מרה ירוקה is the yellow, or green, bile. מרה שחורה is the black bile. Too much of the first was said to make a man hot and angry. Too much of the second was said to make him sad. That is the source of the word “melancholy.”

(2) *“The four elements.”* No mention of them is found anywhere in the Talmuds, and once or twice in the late midrashim, in *Bamidbar Rabbah*. Philo mentioned them in his commentary on Genesis, and there is no doubt that they were commonly used among Greek philosophers. As for the Talmudic sages, they did not use this term. I found nine occurrences of this term in the Zohar.

(3) *“Sukkoth,” “Shavu’oth,”* instead of “the Festival” and “*Asereth*.” You may find them once or twice in the words of the sages, when they were quoting Scripture. However, only in the generations after the closing of the Talmud did these names, that is, in the language of Scripture, become common usage among Jewish authorities. In the Zohar, the opposite is the case; only once or twice is “the Festival” or “*Asereth*” written, and in all the other places it is in the language of Scripture, as was the custom in the Middle Ages.

(4) *“A righteous convert.”* In the literature of the sages they almost always say simply “a convert,” and in a minority of cases “a righteous convert.” In the Zohar it is exactly the opposite, and as is the custom of the later generations.

In the Days of the Zohar, its Author is Within the Exile of Israel

I found Israel mentioned in the Zohar as being in exile one hundred and ten times. Of them, sometimes it’s written that all of Israel is in exile, and sometimes, it explains that

the intention in “exile” is “outside the Land of Israel.” Thus, we find Rishbi explaining, in the Midrash, that “exile” means specifically outside the Land of Israel:

Rishbi taught: “a man, when he is exiled from Judah to the Galilee, or from the Galilee to Judah, is not called an exile. When he is exiled from the Land of Israel to outside the Land (of Israel), he is called an exile.” (Midrash Shemuel, portion 8).

And so, in the Zohar, Part I 214b:

It is not called exile except for one who dwells in a foreign land.

And in Part I 184a:

Within the exile, that he is in another land.

It is also implied in Part III 235a.

Here are places where the author of the Zohar wrote that he is in exile, which is outside the Land of Israel:

(1). *The ancient ones decreed (that it be recited): May it be Your will that You bring us, in joy, to our land, and establish us in our border, and there we shall do... (Zohar III 109b).*

(2). *...but in the time when Israel dwells in the Holy Land, for there... (Zohar III 118a).*

(3). *“Until he goes to the Land of Israel and is established there.” (Zohar III 216a).*

(4). *By his wounds (the word can also mean “company”) we were healed; by the company that joined with us in exile, we were healed. (Zohar III 280a).*

(5). *When Israel used to pray, all these palaces would open before them, and now in the exile it is said of them that all the gates are locked. (Tiqqunim 26a, twice in similar language).*

(6). *All these signs will be in the Land of Israel, because there Hebron is, there the fathers are buried. (Tiqqunim 28b).*

(7). *In the exile, we have only four creatures. (Tiqqunim 85a).*

It should be noted that in the aggadoth of the Land of Israel, the people of Israel are always described as being in “subjection,” and not in “exile.” The author of the Zohar knew that Rishbi was in the Land of Israel. But from the abundance of his enthusiasm, or his absorption in his ideas, he usually forgot to adapt his narrative to this fact. And even so, once or twice he remembered and wrote “and here in the Land of Israel,” as if to discharge an obligation.

The Zohar was Composed After the Death of Rishbi

The Zohar does not only put words in Rishbi’s mouth. In places it speaks of him as already gone, and one whole section is told by a student who remained after him.

The explicit account is the *Idra Zuta*, III 287b–296b. Ribbi Abba is the narrator. He says that he was writing while Rishbi spoke, that Rishbi stopped at the word “life,” and that he, Abba, did not raise his head because the light was too great. When the light departed, he saw that Rishbi had died. A man who is writing the account of his teacher’s death is writing after that death. The section cannot be a work finished by Rishbi himself.

Other places where this is implied are: Zohar I 15a, Zohar III 79a and 105b.

In the Days of the Zohar, the Oral Torah Was Already Written

These are places from which this is implied: Zohar I 79b, 180b, 184a, III 10a, 18b, on secrets, 68b (Exact quotes needed).

These are the two most conspicuous places:

(a) *It is written in the Mishnah. (Zohar III 83b).*

(b) *It is written in the prayer. (Zohar I 228b).*

A tanna does not say “it is written” of the Mishnah or of the prayer. The Mishnah was oral in his day. The prayer was a form recited, not a text one opens. “It is written” is the phrase of a man who has a book in front of him.

Hints that the Zohar Was Not Written in the Time of the Sages

(1). “When they used to sanctify the new moons by court.” It is well-known that until close to the closing of the Talmud, they continued to sanctify through the court. Here is what Maimonides says about it, Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon 5:3:

From when did all Israel begin to calculate (the new moon) by this calculation (the calendar)? From the end of the sages of the Talmud, at the time when the Land of Israel was destroyed and no fixed court remained there. But in the days of the sages of the Mishnah, and so in the days of the sages of the Talmud until the days of Abbaye and Rava, they relied on formal announcements from of the Land of Israel.

The Zohar agrees with Maimonides on this matter (Zohar III 248b, in the *Ra'aya Mehemna*).

(2). “The exile of Ishmael and the exile of Esau” (Zohar III 242b). This implies that there was already a dichotomy between the Christian world (Esau) and the Muslim world (Ishmael).

(3). “They established the sacrifices in the prayer.” In the days of the Talmud, “the prayer” referred only to what we call “The Eighteen”. (Zohar III 304a).

(4). “And if you say, in the last exile there is no idolatry.” (Zohar III 274b). Such a suggestion only makes sense when half the known world is Muslim and half is Christian, but not in the days of the Romans, in any way at all.

(5). The detailed law of breaking bread. See *Sanhedrin* 102b, that Rav Ashe did not know this law until King Manasseh told it to him in a dream.

(6). “(Ta’awan *aharon*) The last error.” (Zohar II 91a). טעוון אחרון is incorrect. Both words are Hebrew, or half-Hebrew. The Aramaic is טעותא בתראתא: *ta’utha bathra’ata*, “the last error.” טעותא is the noun. בתראתא is “last.” אחרון is Hebrew, and טעוון is not an Aramaic form at all.

(7). “This exile is much longer than the exile of Babylonia.” Let’s do the calculation. The exile of Babylon was seventy years. Rishbi died about 90 years after the destruction of the Temple. It is implied in several places in the Zohar that the destruction of the Temple is reckoned as the beginning of the exile. (Zohar I 219b, II 9a, III 134a, 279a, *Tiqqunim* 70b, 62b).

- (8). A “mishnah” that the Gemara would have quoted had it existed. See *Makkoth* 20a. (Zohar III 49b).
- (9). As above. See *Sotah* 38. (Zohar III 115a).
- (10). The name of God with three yods. Only in the Middle Ages was this the custom. (*Tiqqunim* 44b, 51b).

A more comprehensive explanation:

Two yods are older. Three are medieval.

The Talmud abbreviates the Name by the first letter, the last letter, or the first and the last together. It does not write three yods. Two yods already appear in late antique magic, on a silver amulet from Sepphoris and on Aramaic incantation bowls, and they became the ordinary substitute in prayer books. Three yods, as a standing way of writing the Name, show up in Hebrew manuscripts of the later Middle Ages. A fourteenth-century Passover haggadah writes the Name as three leaf-shaped yods, and the same mark is common in the kabbalistic books of that age.

- (11). He is precise with the language of the Mishnah. *Tiqqunim*, in at least eight places. This implies that the Mishna was already codified and written when the Zohar was composed.
- (12). “Write us down for life.” This is an addition from the geonim. (*Tiqqunim* 88b).
A more comprehensive explanation:

It is an insertion of the geonim, not a line of the Talmud, and no one man is named as its author.

During the Ten Days of Repentance four short requests are added to the ‘amidah: “Remember us for life” in the first blessing, “Who is like You” in the second, “And write for life” in the thanksgiving, and “In the book of life” at the end. Later books of law, including the Shulhan ‘Arukh of Ribbi Shneur Zalman (1745–1812 Poland), say that the geonim instituted them. The geonim themselves already argue about whether they may be said in the first three and last three blessings, which shows that the lines were new enough to be disputed.

The earliest full prayer book that carries this order is the siddur of Rav 'Amram Gaon of Sura, compiled about 870 for a community in Spain. "Write us down for life," the form the page quotes from Tiqqunim 88b, belongs to that same geonic addition.

(13). The letter Heh used in place of the four-letter name of God. ה', or ה'', is the substitute a scribe puts in its place. The Zohar uses that substitute as if it were the Name itself – which is a Medieval convention. (Zohar II 94b).

(14). The law, that states "he who breaks the bread and recites the benediction, eats from the bread first," is mentioned as established and well-known practice. But in the Talmud, (*Tractate Berakhoth* 44a), this law is attributed to Rabbah bar bar Hannah – an amura who lived in the third century (Zohar III 245a).

(15). He informs us how far the "Work of the Chariot" goes. Work of the Chariot, is the vision in Ezekiel 1, the living creatures, the wheels, and the likeness on the throne. The sages forbade expounding it in public, and even to one student unless he is wise and understands of himself. The Talmud, in *Tractate Hagigah* 13a, asks how far the permitted exposition goes. Ribbi says, until "and I saw." Ribbi Yish^uaq says, until "the electrum." Both limits are verses in Ezekiel 1.

If the *Ra'aya Mehemna*, stated its extent as established fact, how can there be a dispute between Ribbi and Ribbi Yish^uaq, both of them students of Rishbi according to the Zohar? (Zohar III 230a).

(16). The tradition of circling the altar seven times on Shemini A^usereth. This tradition started in Medieval times. (Zohar III 256b).

(17). Ribbi Hiyya Rabbah with Rishbi. Ribbi Hiyya Rabbah lived about two generations after Rishbi. (Zohar II 14b, 15a).

(18). "And a new king arose (who did not know Joseph). Ribbi Hiyya said: Literally, a new king. Ribbi Yosei said: that he renewed the decrees." But in the Talmud, *Tractate So^uta* 11a this is a dispute between Rav and Shemuel, who lived about 60 years after the death of Rishbi. (Zohar II 7a).

(19) "With it you were sanctified, bride... (with) a ring on your finger." This custom is mentioned for the first time in the days of the geonim, in the siddur of Rav Sa'adiah Gaon. (*Tiqqunim* 25b).

(20). “Ten orbs (*galgalim*).” This is the language of the *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:4: “Rather he said that they, the intellects, are as the number of the orbs... but what the later philosophers said, that the separate intellects are ten...” (*Tiqqunim* 24b).

(21). I’ll quote from ‘*Ammuq Dawid*, part 1, page 22:

Onkelos the convert translated the Torah in the days of Ribbi ‘Aqiva, from the mouth of Ribbi Eli‘ezer and Ribbi Yehoshua’, as it is in the first chapter of Talmud, Tractate Megillah, and he lived many years. For the author of Me’or ‘Einayim (R. ‘Azariah de’ Rossi of Mantua, about 1511–1578), chapter 45, cites proof from the Zohar, Aharei Moth, from the verse ‘you shall do My judgments,’ that Onkelos converted in the days of Hillel and Shammai, and that Onkelos saw Yonathan ben ‘Uzziel, who translated the Prophets.

And so, we have seen Onkelos in the days of Rabban Gamliel the Elder, in the Tosefta, Shabbath, chapter 8. And in the first chapter of ‘Avodah Zarah, where it is also mentioned, and he quotes it In Yuhasin, page 54: A story that when Rabban Gamliel the Elder died, Onkelos the convert burned for him seventy Tyrian manehs (a weight of silver, used in Tyre)... And it has already been explained above that Rabban Gamliel the Elder did not see the destruction, and also according to Yuhasin, page 54, he died eighteen years before the destruction.

Therefore, know that Onkelos the convert mentioned in the chapter HaNeziqin, who raised his uncle Titus by necromancy, is without doubt not this one who is mentioned. For that Onkelos did not convert until after the death of Titus and the destruction of the Temple, since it says there, “he sought to convert, they raised Titus by necromancy,” and so on. This Onkelos, of whom we have spoken here, is a tanna of a baraita in the chapter HaMokher Peroth. And the author of Sefer Yuhasin wrote, on page 52, that the Onkelos who translated the Torah is the son of the sister of Titus. This is not clear to me, for it is better for us to say, as the author of Me’or ‘Einayim, that there was another Onkelos, than to say that they are conflicting aggadot.

And now, let us analyze the chronology. These are the dates, according to his book, that are relevant to this matter:

Hillel and Shammai — about 30 BCE, to 10 CE.

Rabban Gamliel the Elder died — about 50 CE.

Ribbi 'Aqiva lived — about 50 CE to 135 CE.

Ribbi 'Aqiva returned in repentance — about 90 CE.

The Tosefta puts one Onkelos at the death of Rabban Gamliel the Elder, about 50 CE, and has him burn seventy Tyrian manehs for him. *Megillah* has Onkelos translating from Ribbi Eli'ezer and Ribbi Yehoshua', in the days of Ribbi 'Aqiva. The chapter *HaNizakin* has an Onkelos who raised Titus by necromancy, and who did not convert until after Titus and the destruction. *Yuhasin* treats the translator as the son of Titus's sister. *Me'or 'Einayim* would rather say that these are two men than that the aggadot are in disagreement.

The Zohar, as *Me'or 'Einayim* reads it, adds a third date. It puts the conversion in the days of Hillel and Shammai, about 30 BCE, and has him see Yonathan ben 'Uzziel. That is the only real difficulty. A man can mourn for Rabban Gamliel before he converts, and the necromancer of Titus need not be the translator. He cannot also have converted under Hillel, a generation before Rabban Gamliel was born.

(22). *Sanhedrin* 97b: "Rav said, all the (predicted) ends (of days) have passed, and the matter depends only on repentance and good deeds."

How does this fit in with the nine ends (of days) that the authors of the Zohar predicted, which the author of *HaWikuah* noted? And the author of this statement, Rav, is himself mentioned many times in the books of the Zohar.

(23). Here is a quote from 'Eved haMelekh, portion *Lekh Lekha*:

Maimonides wrote that Abraham our father sinned by leaving the land (of Israel), which he had been commanded to settle, because of the famine, for God would save him from death during a famine. We find in the Zohar, "Ribbi Yehudah said, come and see, since Abraham went down to Egypt without permission, his sons were enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, for it is written, 'and Abram went down to Egypt ("Misraima" – to Egypt),' and it doesn't say Egypt (Misraim) – and he was pained all that night because of Sarah." Look up Maimonides, and you will see that his words were derived from the words of the Zohar.

Indeed, it is correct that the author of the Zohar copied this passage from the commentary of Maimonides. But to claim, as he does, that Maimonides copied from the Zohar makes no sense, for the reason that I expanded on in the chapter on *Qadmuth Sefer haZohar*, the second section. Furthermore, the fact that Maimonides didn't

attribute this to anybody else shows that this is his own opinion, and that it is not taken from any midrash.

About the Book *Raziel haMal'akh*

(1). It is not the book called “Adam haRishon (The First Man)”, which is mentioned in the Gemara. For in the Gemara, and so in other places, it is explained that this “book” is only a list of the leaders and the righteous of the generations, and no such matter is found in book *Raziel haMal'akh*.

(2). In the book *Raziel haMal'akh* that exists today, it is explicit that it was given to Adam (the first man), and this is against the Gemara in ‘*Avodah Zarah* 5a:

And did not Resh Laqish say, what is the meaning of what is written, ‘this is the book of the generations of Adam’ — and did Adam, the first man, have a book?

Here are some expressions, from the book *Raziel* that we have today, which show the lateness of its composition:

(3). “And we have found in the midrash” — page 15.

(4). He quotes *Midrash Shoher Tov* (A Midrash on Psalms, first known by that name in the 12th century) — page 17.

(5). He mentions Rav (54), and the Tractate of *Pesahim* and the *Yerushlami* (150). Rav was a Babylonian amora of the third century, after Ribbi Yehudah haNasi had closed the Mishnah. The *Yerushlami* is the Jerusalem Talmud, closed in the fourth or fifth century. A book that names Rav, and cites the *Yerushlami* as a finished work, must have been composed after the age of the Mishnah.

(6). “Hataf patah” (חטף פתח)— page 22. This is the name of a vowel, the reduced patah. The names of the vowels, and the habit of speaking of them, belong to the Masoretes and the grammarians – who were in the Medieval era.

(7). He mentions the Chapters of the Palaces — page 44. *Pirgei Hekhaloth* is a later mystical book, which was first composed, at the very earliest, in the times of the amuraim.

(8). The Alphabet of Ribbi ‘Aqiva — page 46. This is a late midrash, using Ribbi ‘Aqiva as a literary tool. He did not write it. A book that quotes it is later than the midrash.

- (9). “This is a Torah sign, known and understood by the kabbalists” — page 79. “Kabbalists,” in the sense of masters of secret doctrine, is a medieval word. In the Talmud, kabbalah means received tradition, not a school of esoteric thought.
- (10). “And they hid it, this book, within the secrets of the Talmud” — page 99. The Talmud is spoken of here as a finished book, with secrets already stored in it.
- (11). “Which the kabbalists explained” — page 100. The same word as in (9). The book knows a class of men called kabbalists and treats their explanation as already given.
- (12). “The active intellect” — page 104. This is a term of Aristotle, as the Arabic philosophers used it, and as the Jewish philosophers adopted it in the twelfth century. It is not a word of the Bible, the Mishnah, or the Talmud.
- (13). “The sages of blessed memory said” — page 108. The formula treats the sages as a closed company of the past. A book from before them does not speak of them in this way.
- (14). “The sons of Rav Pappa” — page 142. Rav Pappa was a Babylonian amura of the fourth century. His sons are later still.
- (15). “And in our Talmud” — page 150. “Our Talmud” is the phrase of a man who has the Babylonian Talmud as complete composition, and sets it against the *Yerushlami*. That distinction is geonic and medieval.
- (16). “Tosafoth” — page 143. The Tosafoth are the glosses of the French and German schools, from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Naming them dates the page after those schools.

Once, I sat down to gather all the proofs that the book *Raziel* is entirely a forgery, and I reached fifty proofs. In truth there is no need for all this, for everyone who opens it will sense it at once, and there is no part of it that was composed by the sages of the Talmud, still less by the prophets or given to Adam, the first man. It is a collection from about seven hundred years ago. Here I will not expand on this, for I have already composed a special and fundamental work on it. Ibn Ezra mentioned a book *Raziel*, in his commentary on the Torah, *Beshalah* 14:19, and he did not mean our *Raziel*, but the *Book of Razim* (“secrets”), which is truly ancient. The book *Raziel* is mentioned in four places in the books of the Zohar: I 37b, 55b, *Tiqqunim* 31b, and *Tiqqunei Zohar* *Hadash* 62a. From the descriptions of that book, as in the *Zohar* *Hadash*, it is clear that the intention is our book *Razi’el*.

As a matter of interest, I'll point out that the Book of *Razim* is unabashedly pagan; it mentions the ancient gods of Greece, Rome and Egypt numerous times (as "angels") and recommends bowing down, toward the Sun at dawn, and reciting a prayer to Helios. *Raziel* seems to have replaced *Razim*, and it is a bit less obvious about its paganism. The book of *Raziel*, in tiny format, is still used as a charm in some Jewish circles.

The Zohar was Composed at the Start of the Sixth Millennium

Apart from the ends of days that it predicted, which show the time of its composition, and which we have already discussed in the arguments of the book *HaWikuah*, there are further hints: I 116b, 198a, *Tiqqunim* 6b, 25a, 77a.

Here I will point out that the Zohar's enthusiasm for predicting the end of days is in stark contrast to attitude of the sages, who vehemently opposed it. From this, one may ascertain the time of the composition of the Zohar from the dates that it fixed for the redemption. The sages said in *Wayiqra Rabbah*, *ki Tov*, and in the *Tanhumah*, *Toledoth* 2:10, "And that of Edom came up, and it is not known how much," meaning that they did not know until when the servitude of Edom would last. And the Zohar fixed an end for the exile of Edom.

General Notes and Observations

- (1). The very fact that it is written in Aramaic, and as the claim of *Ari Nohem*. See above. And we will reinforce his point, that it is not fitting to write the secrets of the Torah in the Aramaic language, because it is too despised a language, for they said in *Sanhedrin* 21b, "They left for the ordinary people the Hebrew script and the Aramaic language."
- (2). In the literature of the sages, "kabbalah" typically means the Prophets and the Writings (parts of Scripture), and this is found in many places. In the Zohar the word is used in that older sense only once, "kabbalah (tradition) to Moses from Sinai." The author had adopted the newer meaning so completely that he would not use the old one even where it belonged. He calls the whole of Scripture "Torah," which is rare in the words of the sages. The author of the *Ra'aya Mehemna*, who was apparently unaware that this meaning was new, kept no such consistency.
- (3). Not one of the books of the sages includes an "introduction." Only in the *Mekhiletha*, the Midrash of Song of Songs, Ruth, and Lamentations is there an "opening," and who knows from which period these openings came to us? In any case, an "introduction" we have not found. Of course, the Zohar has an introduction.

(4). Here is an excerpt from the letter of Rav Sherira Gaon, (which the author of *Zohar haRa'ia* called “a faithful witness”) page 18 of the Levin edition:

And so too they did not all speak unanimously, before the end of the days of Rabenu haQadosh, with one version, but each had his own tradition... and they did not have standard editions or an agreed-upon mishnah, which all recited in agreement with the same language...”. (According to the French version of this letter, this state of affairs continued until the closing of the Talmud).

It is interesting that almost every mishnah known to us from authoritative sources is quoted in the Zohar in the exact language we have today. He even draws conclusions from their precise wording and speaks of them as a known thing. But the mishnahs, or the baraitas, that he himself invented, appear in Aramaic. This rule holds through the whole Zohar, and it calls for study.

(5). He mentions the aggadoth of the sages as a known thing, which there is no need to repeat, even if they were not mentioned nearby. For the most part this is not the style of the sages at all, except when the matter happened in their own generation or close to it. They did not rely on the reader having already learned the aggadoth.

(6). There is a conspicuous difficulty in the very language of the Zohar. On the one hand it claims to be an ancient midrash of the Land of Israel, and on the other there are almost no features of the Aramaic of the Land of Israel in it. For example, we don't find: *Ribbi Le'zar* for Ribbi El'azar, or *mar* instead of *amar* (“said”). Also, the word the Zohar uses for “child” is *ravya*. We find in *Tractate Sukkah* 5b, “Rav Abbahu said, like a *ravya*, for so in Babylonia they call an infant *ravya*.” There are some exceptions in the Zohar, but for the most part, this is the case. This is the intention of the author of *The Grammar of the Aramaic of the Book of the Zohar*, which we cited above.

(7). Since the sages suffered greatly from the decrees of the Romans, you will find them regularly denouncing them. Some of these statements were censored, but they can be recovered. The nations of Edom (Christian Europe) and the Ishmaelites (Arabs) had not yet subjugated Israel, and so you will find the sages denouncing them only a little. The authors of the Zohar, on the other hand, almost never mention the Romans, perhaps two or three times in all their literature, and they denounce Edom and Ishmael at great length. In their period, Israel suffered from those two nations, that is, in Spain, where both of them ruled. See for example Zohar III 282b.

About the *Zohar Hadash*

As it appears, the *Zohar Hadash* (literally, “New Zohar”) was composed at a very late time, and its name is accurate in this regard. There is a hint of this in that it fixed an end for the year 1610 in the portion *Wayese*. Most of it is the *Midrash haNe‘elam* (“The Hidden Midrash”), and most of our discussion here pertains to it, and to the *Midrash haNe‘elam* that is in the Zohar itself.

Its author made no effort at all to imitate the style of the Talmudic sages, and there are several conspicuous differences, apart from its very language, which is Hebrew, between the *Midrash haNe‘elam* and the rest of the Zohar. They are:

- (1). He uses a wide variety of the names of the sages of Israel, without attending to the times, or the places, of those sages. And many sages who were not mentioned in the Zohar, or who were mentioned only once or twice, are mentioned many times in the *Midrash haNe‘elam*.
- (2). He freely mentions the *Sefer Yesirah* and *Razi’ei*, which is not the case in the Zohar, where there is almost no mention of them. *Razi’ei* is mentioned only two or three times.
- (3). He mixes forms of the names of amuraim from the Land of Israel with the Babylonian forms (Ribbi Bo, Ribbi Bon, Ribbi Ba). Apparently, he did not know that they refer to the same people, only that they appear in a different dialect. In the Zohar, there is no trace of these forms from the Land of Israel, as we have mentioned.

The fact that this composition was composed in a late period is abundantly obvious, without any need for investigation, from its very style and the cast of its language. This is so much so that, if not for our religious status quo, it would not occur to any sane man to think it ancient. If someone were to claim that a random contemporary book is from the period of the sages, he would be more convincing. Apparently, since the Zohar itself was accepted as an ancient composition, the *Zohar Hadash* also benefited from the same status.

Now I will set before you several expressions and names that clearly indicate the lateness of this composition, and that it cannot be from the tannaim, or from the period of the sages at all. There is some repetition of items that we have already discussed earlier.

- (1). The *Nefesh Sikhlith* (נפש שכלית). “The Intellectual Soul” is a term of medieval philosophy. The Intellectual Soul was distinguished, by the philosophers, from the

Animal Soul and the Vegetative Soul. The sages do not speak of the soul in this way. (Zohar Hadash I 12a).

(2). “When He put the Sun in the middle of the heavens.” The system of Copernicus. (Zohar Hadash I 12a).

(3). “Separate and intelligible.” (מוֹבְדִּלִּים וּמוֹשְׁכִּלִּים). “Separate” (“*muvdalim*”) is the philosophers’ word for an intellect that is not a body, and “intelligible” (“*muskalim*”) is their word for what the intellect grasps. Both belong to the Arabic Aristotle, not to the Mishnah. (Zohar Hadash I 15a).

(4). “For Ribbi Kruspedai taught, ‘The comprehension (“*hasagah*”) of the angels is a great comprehension... the second comprehension is the comprehension of the heavens, that they comprehend a comprehension” — Aside from the clearly medieval use of the term “*hasagah*” for intellectual comprehension, this passage is taken straight from the *Guide for the Perplexed* — “they do not comprehend as they do... it is the Intellectual soul... it is the Speaking soul.” (Zohar Hadash I 15a–16a).

(5). “*Kelomar*” (כלומר). “That is to say” is the ordinary gloss of a later commentator, the word a man uses when he stops to explain a phrase. A tanna does not gloss his own Aramaic with this Hebrew expression. (Zohar Hadash I 20b).

(6). “Jewish men, and Ishmaelites and the sons of Esau.” This reflects the world of the men of the Middle Ages. (Zohar Hadash I 35a).

(7). “Jews, and Ishmaelites and Christians, and the greatness is to the sons of Esau and Ishmael.” In the mouth of the sages it is “sectarians,” not “Christians,” as above. (Zohar Hadash II 32a).

(8). “Ishmaelites count by the moon.” This appears to be referring to the purely lunar calendar of the Muslims, instituted by Muhammad. (Zohar Hadash I 54a).

(9). “Its points, its vowels and its cantillation marks” (נקודי, תנועי וטעמי). The vowels and cantillation marks were novelties of early Medieval times. Zohar Hadash II 9b, and another twenty-six times in these expressions).

(10). “As its translation” (כתרגומו). This is Rashi’s formula when he cites the *Targum*. A tanna does not have Rashi’s gloss. (Zohar Hadash II 40b).

(11). “On the testimony; this is the Jerusalem Talmud... in the Land of Israel, **there** they were called the study of the Lord, and **there** they were, and not outside the Land of Israel... this is the Babylonian Talmud, upon which they expounded.” Since he refers

to the Land of Israel as “there,” it’s clear that the author lived somewhere else. The two Talmuds are named as finished books, and “outside the Land” is the later phrase for the exile. Neither is the speech of Rishbi. (Zohar Hadash II 49b).

(12). “Primordial Air” (אֵוִיר קדמון). A term of the later kabbalah, the air before the worlds. It is not a word of the Mishnah. (Zohar Hadash II 61b).

(13). “Masters of kabbalah,” “kabbalah,” (secrets of the Torah). Among the sages, kabbalah typically refers to the Prophets and the Writings (from Scripture), or a received tradition. “Masters of kabbalah,” as a school of esoterica, is medieval. (Zohar Hadash II 61b, 62b, 74a, 91a).

(14). “The masters of the Mishnah who were in the Land of Israel.” The Mishnah is spoken of as a finished book, with masters, and set in one land. That is a later description of the tannaim, not their own. (Zohar Hadash II 56a).

(15). “Rulings of Jewish law... collections” — Rulings of Jewish law (*Halakhoth*) gathered into sections and collections are the books of the geonim and after. A tanna does not cite them. (Zohar Hadash II 64a).

(16). “*Pisqe halakhot*” (פסקי הלכות). “Rulings of Jewish law” is the reference to a later code, a book of decided laws. The sages debate; they do not cite a code by this name. (Zohar Hadash II 64b, 65a).

(17). “*Pisqe dinim*” (פסקי דינים). As above. ““Rulings of judgments,” A book of decided cases, not something a tanna would refer to. (Zohar Hadash II 65b).

(18). “The implication of the Jewish law.” A term of later legal study, the conclusion one draws from a ruling. It is not the language of the Mishnah. (Zohar Hadash II 65b).

(19). “Movement, feeling, walking.” Technical terms for kinds of motion, as the philosophers and the later grammarians divide them. They are not the words of a tanna. (Zohar Hadash II 65b).

(20). “Mishnah, baraita, Tosefta.” Zohar Hadash II 66a. The three are named as types of composition. The Tosefta, as a cited composition, is after the Mishnah, and the habit of listing the three is later still. (Zohar Hadash II 68b).

(21). “*Iqqar ha’emunah*” (עקר האמונה). “A principle of faith” is the language of the medieval books of faith, from Sa’adyah Gaon and Maimonides on. The sages of the Mishnah do not speak of a principle of faith. (Zohar Hadash II 68:b).

- (22). “And because of this, it is called the ‘*Amidah*’ (עמידה). “Standing Prayer,” as a name for the Eighteen Blessings, is a late custom. The sages call it The Prayer, or the Eighteen Blessings. (Zohar *Hadash* II 69a and 79b).
- (23). “This composition.” The author speaks of his own book as a composition. A tanna does not refer to the work he is in. (Zohar *Hadash* II 59a, and another sixteen times).
- (24). *Gufaniim, Sikhliim* (גופניים, שכליים). The division of “Bodily and intellectual” is the distinction made by the philosophers, as in (1) and (2) of the previous page. (Zohar *Hadash* II 74a).
- (25). *Illath ha’illoth* (עלת העלות). “The Supernal One.” Zohar *Hadash* uses these terms at least twenty-four times. ‘*Illath ha’illoth*’ is the philosophers’ name for God, the cause that has no cause. It was introduced into Hebrew from the Arabic Aristotle.
- (26). “The Holy Land.” Zohar *Hadash* uses this term at least sixteen times. The sages say the Land of Israel. “The Holy Land,” as a set name, is later.
- (27). “The master (*ba’al*) of the Book of *Yesirah*.” The usage of the term “master” (*ba’al*), as the author of a book. Also, the Book of *Yesirah* is treated as a book with an author one can name. Citing it so is later than the book, and later than Rishbi. (*Tiqqunim* 61b).
- (28). “And the Supernal Mother, she is the great eagle, master of wings... and in her is the praise of Moses, ‘then Moses sang.’” The supernal mother is a kabbalistic figure, and the eagle with the song of Moses is a clear reference to Maimonides, whose nickname was “The Great Eagle” and whose first name was “Moses.” Neither belongs to the second century. (*Tiqqunim* 59a–b).

In connection with the chronology of the sages, I will note several of them who are mentioned many times, who do not regularly appear in the Zohar, and who lived after Rishbi:

- (1). Ribbi Yohanan — mentioned twenty-four times. He was the amura of Tiberias, in the third century, a student of Ribbi Yehudah haNasi. He did not sit with Rishbi.
- (2). Ribbi — mentioned twenty-four times. This is Ribbi Yehudah haNasi, who closed the Mishnah about the year 200 CE, some forty years after Rishbi.
- (3). Rav — mentioned at least sixteen times. Rav, Abba Arikha, died in 247. He is the first generation of Babylonian amuraim.

(4). Ribbi Huna — mentioned at least nine times. He headed the academy in Sura after Rav and died in 297. He is two generations past the close of the Mishnah.

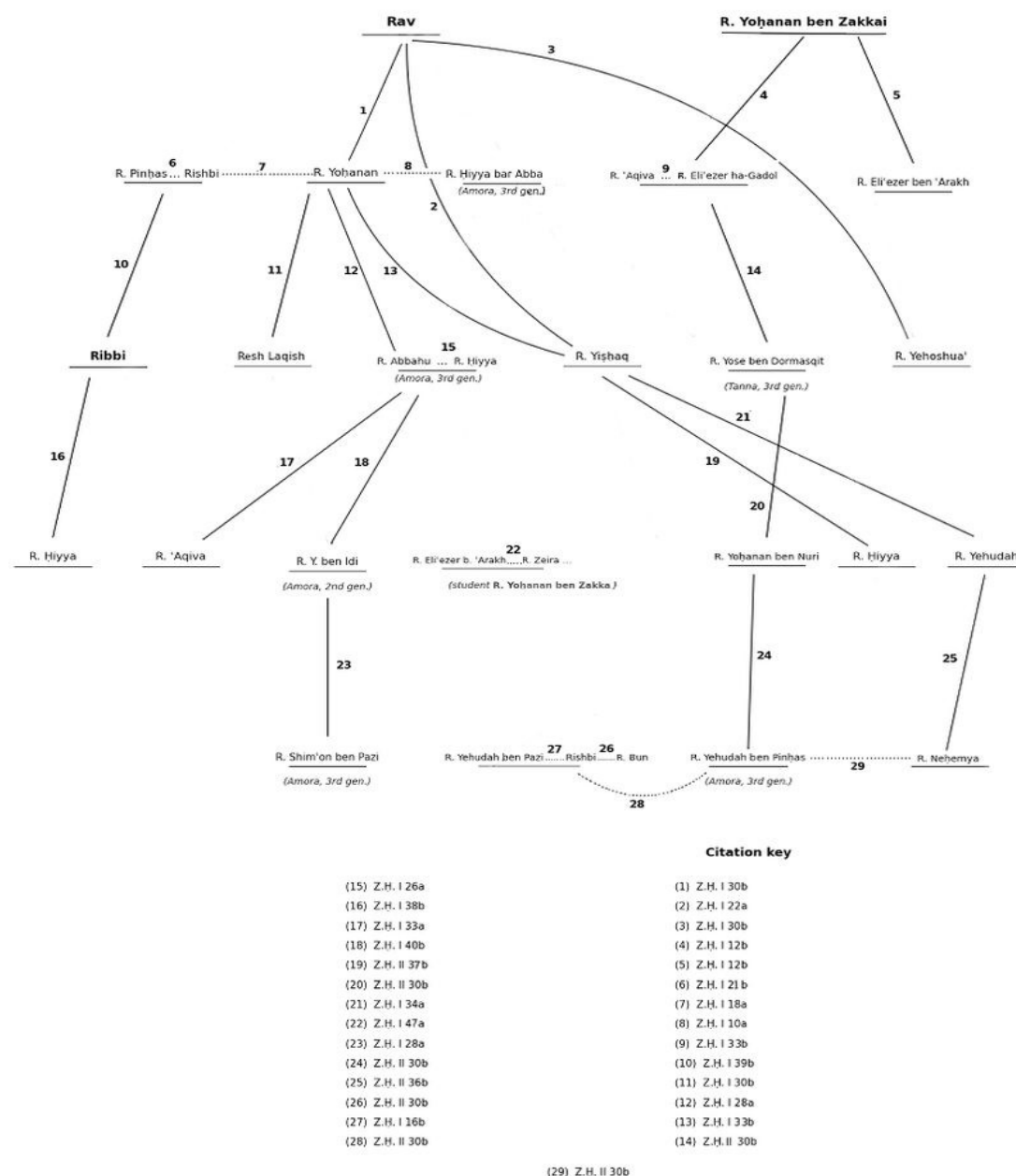
Likewise, the following are mentioned: Rava (Part I, 28b), R. Shim'on ben Laqish (Part I, 34b), and R. Adda bar Ahavah (Part I, 20b). The formula “R. Yehudah said that Rav said” appears at least eleven times. From this it follows that the R. Yehudah of Zohar Hadash is the amura, and that “Rav” is the Rav known to us by that name from the Babylonian Talmud.

The unspecified R. Yoanan of Zohar Hadash is not R. Yoanan ben Nuri, because that sage is cited by his full name (Part I, 30b). Nor is he R. Yoanan ben Zakkai, who is likewise cited by his full name (Part I, 12b). Further, this R. Yoanan appears together with R. Hiyya bar Abba (third generation of amuraim). Also, since Resh Laqish is mentioned, and since the formula “R. Yoanan said that Rav said” occurs (Part I, 30b), it should be said that this R. Yoanan is the amura.

“Ribbi,” as mentioned in Zohar Hadash, should be understood as referring to Rabbeinu haQadosh (Ribbi Yehudah haNasi), since he appears together with R. Hiyya (Part I, 38b) and with R. Naman (Part I, 29a).

R. Huna and R. Abbahu were students of Rav, and no tanna named R. Abbahu is known to us. So too we find in Zohar Hadash, “R. Huna said that Rav said” (Part I, 22b).

In this table one can see the chain of transmission of the Oral Torah according to Zohar Hadash. What appears in parentheses is what is known to us from the sources of the sages. A solid line marks the transmission of a teaching from teacher to student in Zohar Hadash. A broken line indicates that they appear together in Zohar Hadash.



One needn't be especially perceptive to discern the terrible errors that exist in Zohar Hadash. Among other absurdities, we find that Rav taught Ribbi Yohanan (who was also in the time of Rishbi). Ribbi Yohanan taught Ribbi Abbahu. Ribbi Abbahu taught Ribbi 'Aqiva (who was of the generation of Ribbi Eli'ezer the Great) and also Ribbi Ya'aqov ben Idi (an amura of the second generation). Ribbi 'Aqiva taught Ribbi Yose ben Dormasqit, who taught Ribbi Yohanan ben Nuri. Ribbi Yohanan ben Nuri taught Ribbi Yuda ben Pinhas (who was in the time of Rishbi). Likewise, Rav (a disciple of Ribbi) taught Ribbi Yishaq. And Ribbi Yishaq taught Ribbi Hiyya and Ribbi Yehuda. Ribbi Yehuda taught Ribbi Nehemya, who was of the generation of Rishbi—who is the

teacher of the teacher of Rav, with whom we began! And thus you will find many such wonders.

When the believers in the antiquity of the Book of the Zohar saw these severe problems, they found themselves without an answer. They therefore sought and found an excuse that disposes of all the problems, without any need for thought: All this was “in heaven.”

It's unclear what they mean by this. Who wrote these compilations and when? Moreover, in the *Midrash haNe'elam* there is language that indicates explicitly that the subject is this world. For example:

For the world to come... who will strike them in this world, and it will be good for them for the world to come (Zohar I, 15b).

In the *Midrash haNe'elam* of the Zohar:

Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to revive Moses, so too is He is destined to revive the generations (Zohar I, 110b).

In the days of Ribbi Yose, there were those licentious ones who were... (Zohar I, 118b).

Ribbi Bo said, Ribbi Yohanan said: in that world, which is day, and not in this world, which is night.” The reader will find much more there (Zohar I, 126a).

Does being “in heaven” allow the author to scramble the generations and to employ words and expressions that were coined a thousand years after the death of Rishbi? If so, then why did the Ari (R. Yisḥaq Luria, who lived in the 16th century), not merit to be mentioned in the *Midrash haNe'elam*? Is he not equal in weight to all the sages of Israel, and is his soul not attached to the generation of the tannaim, and so on and so forth? Certainly, in that the author of the *Midrash haNe'elam* and of the Zohar Hadash did not trouble to mention the Ari, he falls into the category of those who insult the angels of God.

With this claim of “it was in heaven,” one could override the law of false witnesses. For the later sages of the Gemara, who are mentioned in the Zohar together with tannaim who lived long before them, might tell the tannaim, “you were with us,” rendering the Zohar effectively a “false witness.” If so, whenever we encounter false witnesses, they can claim, “this testimony was ‘in heaven,’” and we shall acquit them. However, we do

not concern ourselves with outlandish claims... and yet, as I translate this, many years later, I find myself embarrassed to even address such claims.

Defenders of the antiquity of the Zohar will not give up so easily. This belief is, for them, a foundation of faith, and so they claim... that the author of the Zohar, in his infinite wisdom, grasped that he was forbidden to mention the names of people who lived after the sealing of the Talmud. Words and terms that were coined much later are permitted, but human beings are not—why, I do not know. It also requires investigation as to why he relied on the sealing of the Babylonian Talmud; was he not in the Land of Israel? The main point is that there is an “excuse”—and a fool can believe anything.

Was the Zohar Written With the Holy Spirit?

We have already seen how hard-pressed the advocates of the antiquity of the Zohar have been to account for its author's use of terms invented only some time after Rishbi. They have gone to great lengths with far-fetched explanations, excusing these anomalies as “scribal errors” and “later additions.” Nevertheless, we have yet to find any of them suggesting a single solution that would cover all the offenses and straighten out every difficulty. No one wrote that Rishbi used a Spanish word, for example, for the benefit of “the last generation” using the Holy Spirit. We do sometimes find them resorting to Rishbi's “Holy Spirit” to resolve difficulties – but only with regard to historical or scientific knowledge, not with regard to the very words in which he expressed his ideas.

Why would there be a difference between an anachronistic concept versus an anachronistic expression or word? If, by the Holy Spirit, one may be given knowledge before its time, why not words as well? It appears that not one of the defenders of the belief in the antiquity of the Zohar wished to ascribe to its author a prophetic rank greater than that of the authors of Scripture. Although the books of Scripture are full of prophecies, you will not find anywhere that a prophet expressed himself in a language that was coined a thousand years after his time.

However, even this line of reasoning does not hold up under scrutiny. Regarding the names of human beings, they said (Yalqut, Bereshith 45), “Six were called by their names before they were born.” If this is so rare in Scripture – among the tannaim, how much more so. Furthermore, if we truly say that the author of the Zohar mentioned human beings before they were born, he ought to have mentioned far more than merely six, for in the Zohar, Ribbi Yohanan, Rav, Ribbi Simlai, Ribbi Hamnuna, Ribbi Yiba, and others are also mentioned before they were born. But there is not, in the whole of Scripture, a single case of the use of a word that had not yet been invented, or

that had not yet begun to be used in that sense. How, then, shall we say that the author of the Zohar performed such feats of prophecy hundreds of times, when the prophets of Scripture were not granted it even once?

At first glance one might answer that the prophets of Scripture did not wish to use words unintelligible to the people of their generation, for they composed their books also for the people of their generation—which is not the case with the author of the Book of the Zohar, who buried his book, and knew that it was destined to be revealed only in the last generation, and therefore he did not refrain from using such words. This solution contradicts the opinions of all the defenders of the belief in the antiquity of the Zohar. For some of them wrote that the Zohar was written, or arranged, only three hundred years after the time of Rishbi (they were compelled to say so, since there are places in the Zohar where it is explicit that it was written after the death of Rishbi; I listed those places in the chapter, “The Zohar was composed after the Death of Rishbi” Pg. 73). And some of them claimed “later additions,” which is impossible unless it was in the possession of later amuraim and geonim.

Did the sages of the Talmud have the Holy Spirit to a degree that could be considered “prophecy?”

(1). *Ribbi Shim'on ben Gamliel says, “The ancient ones, because they made use of the Holy Spirit, would give a name according to the event; but we, who do not make use of the Holy Spirit, give a name according to our fathers.” Ribbi Yose ben Ribbi Hilpetha said, “Ever was a great prophet, for he gave a name according to the event (that is, Peleg). (Bereshith Rabba 30:7).*

If for a single name ‘Ever was called “a great prophet,” what shall we say of one who brings forth hundreds of names?

(2). *Ribbi Yishaq said, “Now we have no prophet.” (Tanhuma, Wayishlah 9).*

(3). *Ribbi Yishaq said, “In these generations there is no prophet.” (Wayiqra Rabba 30:3).*

(4). *“And you shall take for yourselves.” Ribbi Yishaq interpreted the verse as referring to these generations, which have neither king nor prophet. (Pesiqetha deRav Kahana).*

(5). *It was taught, “And one who inquires of the dead”—this is one who starves himself and goes and lodges in a cemetery so that a spirit of impurity may rest upon him. When Ribbi ‘Aqiva would reach this verse, he would*

weep, “If one who starves himself so that a spirit of impurity may rest upon him has it rest upon him, then what of one who does so for a spirit of purity? Our sins have caused this for us.” (Sanhedrin 65b).

From this it follows that Ribbi ‘Aqiva was not a prophet and Rishbi said (Gittin 67a), “Repeat my teachings, for my teachings are a small fraction of the generation of Ribbi ‘Aqiva. Clearly, Rishbi also was not a prophet.

(6). *And they would know and look to know of the supernal glory. Once prophecy ceased from them, they made use of a heavenly voice. Now, prophecy has ceased and the heavenly voice has ceased. (Zohar I, 238a and II, 251a).*

If the author of the Zohar himself proclaims that in his time there is no prophecy, who will dispute him in order to defend his book?

For further insights into this matter, and the nature of the “Holy Spirit”, see above in the arguments of Magen weSinna.

“We Have Not Seen it is Not Proof”, But in What Context?

Several of my claims have been based upon the premise that, if we do not see any mention of something in the words of the sages, but we **do** find it in the Zohar and in the words of later authorities, we can conclude that the Zohar was written by later authorities. For example, the names of the vocalizations, reincarnation, Arabic loanwords and the jargon of later philosophers. To one who does not know the rules of logic, these do not count as evidence, for to him anything is possible. He will accept no evidence, for example, that the Talmudic sages lacked vocalization symbols — unless he finds them saying so explicitly, which is, of course, not possible.

Such people have no issue with the fact that the author of the Zohar expresses himself in a style unknown to the Talmudic sages, and belonging only to the Middle Ages. Nor does it trouble them that he made much use of words and terms that we do not find among the sages. They will answer all of these with, “Perhaps the sages were familiar with these expressions, but they only found occasion to use them in the Zohar; we have not seen it is not proof!” In his imagination, with this statement, he has solved all the difficulties. Those amuraim who are mentioned together with Rishbi, were tannaim who bore the same names as the later amuraim, and the fact that they are not mentioned anywhere else does not trouble them; “We have not seen it is not proof!” The words that entered Hebrew from Arabic in the period of Ibn Tibbon? The Talmudic sages also knew them, and the fact that they are found only in the Zohar does not trouble them, for “We have not seen it is not proof!”

We say “we have not seen it is not proof” when we’re dealing with a specific time and a specific event; it may occur during that time, or it may not — and therefore one cannot conclude anything from the absence of a response to the event, when it might, or might not, have occurred in their presence. Here are some examples illustrating my point:

(1). *Ribbi Hanina, the deputy of the priests, said, “In all my days, I have not seen the hide go out to the place of burning” (that is, if that firstborn was found to be not kosher, and had to be burned). And the sages say: “We have not seen it is not proof; rather, it does go out to the place of burning” (‘Eduyoth 2:2 and Zevahim 103b).*

A more comprehensive explanation:

A male firstborn of the herd or flock was holy and given to the priests. If it was sound, it was offered and the priests ate the flesh and kept the hide. If it was found to be not kosher — so badly blemished or injured that it was unfit to eat — the flesh could not be eaten and was taken out to be burnt. The question was only about the hide: did it go to be burned with the flesh, or could the priests still use it?

Ribbi Hanina, the deputy of the priests, said that in all his days in the Temple he had never seen such a hide taken out to the place of burning. Ribbi ‘Aqiva treated that as evidence: if the hide had been burned, a man who served there would have seen it, so the priests may use the hide. The sages rejected that step. In the Mishnah their words are: “We have not seen is no proof; rather, it does go out to the place of burning” (‘Eduyoth 2:2; the same ruling is cited at Zevahim 103b). Non-observation can mean that the case was rare, that he was not present, or that it was handled out of his sight. It does not prove that the thing never happened, and it does not establish the law. On the law itself they held that the hide is burned.

(2). *And I say that if (the women) had said they wished to perform the slaughter, and he did not permit them, we could then say that it is proof (that women are not allowed to slaughter). But proofs of ‘we have not seen’ — do not constitute proof. (Beth Yosef, Yoreh De‘ah 1:).*

(3). *And likewise, we do not say in such cases, “We have not seen it is no proof” ... And I have written that when it comes to a custom, “we have not seen’ is proof ... precisely when one is speaking of when an opportunity arose, and they refrained from doing it on account of tradition ..., R. Yosef Karo (author of Hoshen Mishpat, which is part of his greater Code of Jewish*

Law) considers “we have not seen it” as proof. It is obvious and plain that those who say and testify that they never saw or heard, from time immemorial, any hint of it ... is considered proof ... How can one say, “we have not seen it is no proof” when this is as if we had seen it? For once such an act occurred and they refrained, you have no greater proof than this.”
(Sifte Khohen, Hoshen Mishpat 37:22, paragraph 38:)

A more comprehensive explanation:

Sifte Khohen is commenting on the laws of testimony and custom in Hoshen Mishpat 37. His point is that “we have not seen it” is sometimes valid proof and sometimes not, and the difference is whether the act had a chance to happen.

In an ordinary one-time case, not seeing something proves nothing. The event may simply never have come up. That is the rule of ‘Eduyoth: Ribbi Hanina never saw the hide taken out to be burned, and the sages still would not treat his silence as proof of the law.

Custom is different. If a practice is the sort of thing that would have arisen again and again, and the early authorities had every occasion to do it, mention it, or allow it, and they never did—and people who knew that practice testify that they never saw or heard anyone so much as raise it—then the silence is evidence. The act was available, and they refrained. R. Yosef Karo counts that kind of “we have not seen” as proof of the custom. Once the opportunity occurred and they held back, not seeing it is as good as seeing that they rejected it.

Similar to this is the reply of Ribbi Moshe Feinstein, in a responsum (Orah Hayyim, paragraph 8), concerning the pronunciation of the people of Ashkenaz: that since we have not seen anyone who ruled that the ritual for the release of Levirate marriage (halisah) of one community is invalid for another, it is a sign that both read with a valid pronunciation (because the Torah calls for the reciting of exact wording). And we have already explained (in the arguments of the Wikuah) that many occasions arose among the sages where, had they had the names of the vowel-points and the accents, they would have had to mention them — They refrained and did not mention them, and this is proof.

As for the phantom “tannaim,” whose names just happen to match those of known amuraim (according to some defenders of the antiquity of the Zohar), it is very far-fetched to say that they never merited to be mentioned in any other place in the writings of the sages. For it is stated in the Zohar Hadash (I, 12a): “One does not reveal

the secrets of the Torah except to a wise man who reads and reviews, whose learning stays with him, who is God-fearing and is expert in every matter”; and in the Tikkunim (33b): “For one does not expound the Work of the Chariot unless he is wise.”

If so, these “tannaim” (whose names match the names of amuraim) who are mentioned many times in the Zohar were certainly outstanding sages—and how is there no memory of them in the Talmuds and midrashim? I am astonished. Since their names are identical with the names of amuraim, the amuraim at least ought to have added some epithet (such as “Zagen,” “Saba” or “Rabba”) so as to distinguish between them and avoid confusion. This is not similar to the divorce laws, where there is concern that two men, living close to each other, share the same name – “the case of two men named Yosef ben Shim’on who live in the same alley.” For anyone can divorce his wife; but only a few merit to be counted among the ranks of the tannaim; not many become wise.

To our point, there is an entire genre of aggadah built upon the principle “We have not seen it **is** proof,” namely their saying: “We have gone over the whole of Scripture and have not found it, except ...”

(1). *We have gone over all the places and have not found any place named Hobah, to teach you that Dan is called Hobah. (Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha 13).*

(2). *We have gone over the whole of Scripture and have not found a place named Pethah Enayim (“opening of the eyes”) ... rather, it teaches that she hung her eyes on the opening ... (Bereshith Rabba 85:4).*

(3). *We do not find that there is a wilderness named Shur; and what is the wilderness of Shur? Ribbi Yishaq said ... (Shemoth Rabba 24:4).*

(4). *We have gone over the whole of Scripture and have not found a vessel named a semikhah; and what is a semikhah? It is ‘my name is thus’ ... (Wayiqra Rabba 22:10).*

(5). *We have gone over the whole of Scripture and have not found that Bath-Sheva’ made a crown for Solomon her son; rather, “crown”— this is the Tent of Meeting. (Bamidbar Rabba 12:8).*

(6). *For we have gone over all the places in the Torah, and they are not place names — rather, they were called by the name of an event. (Sifre Devarim 1).*

(7). *We have gone over the whole Torah and have not found ... (Zohar Hadash I, 24a).*

We find many other examples of this formula. For example, in Pesiqetha deRav Kahana (on “And it was on the day of his wedding,” “Parah,” “My offering, my bread,” and “I, even I”); in the Yerushlami (Ta’anith 4:2 and Megillah 3:6); in Midrash Tehillim 8; in the early Tanhuma (Terumah 4, Pequde 8, and Huqqath 14); in Midrash 3 and 4, paragraph 12; and in Pesiqetha Rabbathi (on “Parah” and “My offering, my bread”). If the sages could survey Scripture and treat what they did not find as proof, then the same line of reasoning would apply all the more so to their own writings, which are far more extensive.

Later Additions

We have seen one catch-all excuse to solve the problem of the anachronistic language of the Zohar — whether in the concepts or in the expressions it uses — namely, that all of these are “later additions.” This solution has a couple of difficulties.

(1). I have already mentioned that from the time of the “discovery” of the Zohar until its printing, only 260 years had elapsed, and that the printers had dozens of manuscripts. There is no doubt that these were not new, and that among them were some at least a hundred years old. If so, one may suppose that the period in which those “additions” were added was only about a hundred and fifty years. Furthermore, we have today a manuscript of the Zohar from the fourteenth century, and in it there are no appreciable variations from what we have today. Here I’ll quote *The Aramaic Language of the Zohar*, who conducted a comparison between that manuscript and the printed version today (pg. 169):

We can learn more from general agreement between them than from the differences in grammar and in syntax. All the unique characteristics and traits that typify the language of the Zohar in grammar, and especially in syntax and in the use of language, are confirmed by the precision of this manuscript.

If so, the “period of later additions” is reduced (even if we suppose that this manuscript was written at the end of the fourteenth century) to only a hundred years. That is to say, several hundred, or thousands, of “later additions” occurred in this book, during the time it was in the hands of a limited public, over only a hundred years — something that did not happen to any other book, even over a thousand years.

(2). Later additions are not always plainly recognizable as such. It is very far-fetched to say that most of the “later additions” that occurred in the Zohar consist of words or expressions that are easily recognizable as not belonging to the period of the Talmudic

sages. Rather, only a few of these additions would be easily recognizable, and the majority of them would pass as being integral parts of the Zohar, and no one would suspect a thing – for if all the additions contained anomalies, it would be a source of great wonder.

If so, who knows how many “later additions” there are in the Zohar that we have not uncovered? Perhaps a thousand, or ten thousand — or the whole Zohar. The defenders of the belief in the antiquity of the Book of the Zohar, by using this claim, cast doubt on the entire Zohar. For any passage you may wish to cite is suspect; perhaps it’s a “later addition.” Therefore, it is impossible to assume that anything in the Zohar is ancient – except, of course, items that the Zohar quotes from truly ancient sources.

The Solution of Hillel Zeitlin

Here is a quote from the end of the edition of Neḥemyah Shemuel Leibowitz (Jerusalem, 1971) of Ari Nohem (reviewed above):

...The truth of the matter is this. R. Moshe gathered and collected, with wonderful diligence, all the said pamphlets. But he was not merely a collector and an editor. He also introduced into them his own spirit and carried further the holy and great ideas that he found. He expounded upon them (and shaped them) like clay, turned them over and over, and at times found in them many gems, which yielded in his hand many discourses ... which he strove to write in the same wording as the pamphlets he had collected. Sometimes the said wording came to his hand, and sometimes it did not. Therefore, there are places where we find, as R. Ya‘aqov ‘Emden already noted, Spanish words and the like.

...While he was arranging the pamphlets of the Zohar, he was wholly under their sublime influence. He lived entirely, in his spirit, in the company of Ribbi Shim‘on ben Yoḥai, his colleagues and his disciples. He stood wholly among those holy and pure men, and in their teachings, he meditated day and night. He labored greatly to understand and grasp every single one of their words. He then believed, truly and sincerely, that he was standing in the company of these holy watching (angels), and that everything he innovated was according to their dictation; all his teaching was theirs. Therefore, he conversed with Eliyahu, Moses, Ribbi Shim‘on ben Yoḥai and his companions, as with the men of his own generation.

According to this there was no deceit by R. Moshe de Leon, and all of it is true: both what he said to R. Yiśḥaq of Acre, that everything he wrote in the Zohar was not his at all, and what he said to his wife, that he was writing

from his own heart. For the most part, what he wrote was from the ancient pamphlets that he had collected and gathered and taken with him when he wandered from his home. And there is no wonder at all that his wife was not able to give the original Zohar to the nobleman, who wished to buy it from her...

It goes without saying that all of this is merely conjecture. Even if it is correct, it does not give the Zohar the authority of the books of the Talmudic sages, and it does not turn it into an ancient work. That is to say, this is not relevant to our subject at all, and we do not care what R. Moshe de Leon believed when he wrote what he wrote. If I write strange things, for example, and I sincerely believe that you said them, is there any substance to my words? Would you be responsible for what is written in your name?

How Did the Great and Righteous Err So Badly?

Not all of the later authorities fell for the forgery that is the Zohar. We have already seen the words of the R. Emdin, and he was not alone in this. These are the words of a famous rabbi and scholar, R. Eli'ezer Fleckles, a disciple of the Noda' biYehudah (R. Yehezqel Landau 1713–1793 Prague), in his responsa Teshuvah meAhavah, part I, paragraph 26:

This I have written for the opinion of that man who holds that the Book of the Zohar is entirely holy. But I say that we swear by the Torah of the Lord that in the Book of the Zohar several forgeries and corruptions have been found which were added. And one of the discussions of Abaye and Raba in the Babylonian Talmud is holier than the whole Book of the Zohar. Behold, if the sages of the Talmud said of a baraitha, "It is not an authorized version, and perhaps it is corrupted" — and this book certainly did not come from Ribbi Hiyya and Rav Osh'iyah. For none of the generations, from the beginning, mentioned anything of the Book of the Zohar, neither when they were awake, nor in a dream.

For behold, if the matter is true, that this composition is from the tanna Ribbi Shim'on bar Yoḥai, from whom Ribbi Yehudah the Prince also studied, as is explained in the introduction of Maimonides to his book Yad haHazaqah — how did he not mention this book in his composition, the Talmud, the Mishnah, or anywhere? And even Ribbi Yoḥanan, who composed the Jerusalem Talmud, does not mention it anywhere. And Ravina and Rav Ashe, who composed the Babylonian Talmud a hundred years after the composition of the Jerusalem Talmud, and who were the end of the amuraim, did not leave even a hint in the whole Talmud of the Book of the

Zohar. And Rabbah bar Nahmani, who composed the Midrash Rabbah, Shohar Iov and much more, did not mention the composition of Rishbi.

Also, the savuraim, the geonim, the Rif (R. Yishaq Alfasi, 11th century North Africa), and Maimonides, Rashi, the Tosafists, Nahmanides, the Rishba, the Rosh, the Tur, and the Yalquṭh Shim'oni, who gathered and collected all the midrashim and the mekhiletha and the baraitha, all of them — they did not know or see a thing of it until about three hundred years ago. (Are we to believe) they announced and said, “We found it”, and an assembly received it in a gathering, (as if it is as genuine as) the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds.

This is what Maimonides wrote, in his introduction to the Yad haHazaqa, “Everything that is written in the Babylonian Talmud, all of Israel is obliged to follow it. We require every single city, and every single province, to follow all the customs that the sages of the Gemara practiced, and to enact safeguards and to walk in their enactments, since all those matters in the Gemara, all Israel agreed upon them.” Study this further there. And I, God forbid, do not cast a blemish or a defect upon the honor of the godly tanna Shim'on bar Yoḥai, for he was one of the saints of the Most High. Rather I say that the seal of Rishbi and his righteousness is not stamped upon them. And anyone who has half a mind will say so. For several tannaim and amuraim who lived many years after Rishbi are mentioned in the Zohar. And I have dealt with this at length in another place, according to scribes and according to books, as is explained in the book Mitpahath by our illustrious master R. Ya'aqov Emdin, of blessed memory, who decreed and said that the hands of forgers were at work in it, and suspected the scholar R. Moshe de Leon. See there.

And behold, from the day the Book of the Zohar was newly revealed, many have stumbled by it. For several matters, hidden and concealed, which were invented by later generations, to lead astray people who sit in the darkness of the intellect — go out and see how many great corruptions were wrought by those of the evil dog Shabbetai Sevi ... and Ya'aqov Frank ... and they hung their words on the Book of the Zohar, which certainly no iniquity befalls the righteous Rishbi ...

There is no doubt at all that many later rabbis were very much aware of the doubts concerning the origins of the Zohar. Only, being rabbis, they knew what defamations and bans awaited anyone who cast doubt on what had become essentially an article of faith (which might as well be the fourteenth principle of faith): The antiquity of the Zohar. Therefore, they kept quiet about it and protected their own wellbeing. There

were some who did not so much fear for themselves as for the faith of the people of Israel in general. For they reasoned that even though the Zohar is not ancient, if we reveal this to the people, they will not distinguish between the Zohar and the Talmud and the Torah — and in the end they will deny everything. Therefore, it is preferable that they remain believers in the antiquity of the Zohar and avoid leading them to reject the entire Jewish faith.

What they failed to realize is that they are the ones who cause the situation whereby the religious masses make no distinction between the Zohar and the rest of Jewish canon. Through their stubbornness in defending this false belief, they equate the importance of the Zohar to the entire Jewish religion. And this is what gives the religious masses the impression that the Zohar is on the same level as the Talmud and the Torah, if not on a higher level. They ought to have educated the people in the pursuit of truth and explained to them that there's a difference between a book that was completely unknown until after the death of Nahmanides and books that have been with us since ancient times, and throughout the exile.

Maimonides wrote in his commentary on Avoth (5:6):

And let there be no stubbornness in him; rather, if he hears the truth — let him admit it, and even if it were possible for him to reject and to argue and to raise objections, he should not do this. And this is what they mean by, 'And he admits the truth.'

We must admit the truth and rejoice in it. And one who always seeks the truth, and nothing else, has nothing to fear, and nothing to be stubborn about, for he is always comfortable in his opinions. For if he holds a belief, and his fellow comes and refutes all his proofs and shows the opposite of what he thought, even then he rejoices, for he has gained new knowledge. And the opposite of this, in the words of the sages, is an ignoramus.

We certainly have no reason to rejoice in the error of most of our later rabbis, or to consider them ignoramuses for this. We should give them the benefit of the doubt as much as possible and remember that their lack of knowledge in this does not negate any respect they would otherwise be due.

In order to understand better how many good and worthy men erred in such a simple matter, let us ask several questions, and from them the answer will become clear.

(1). The author of the book *Kevod Elohim*, R. Abraham ben Migash (16th century Spain and Constantinople), dedicated a lot of space in his book (chapter 9) to refute the belief in reincarnation (*gilgul*), and devoted a whole chapter to it. But in several places

in that same book he cited statements from the Zohar in order to draw support from them (and what is written in *Beth 'Eged Sefarim* (Bernhard Friedberg, 1870–1961), that this book is against the Kabbalah, is an error). Yet the belief in reincarnation appears many times in the Zohar. How is this possible?

(2). The author of the *'Aqedath Yish'haq* (R. Yish'haq ben Moshe Arama, c. 1420–1494) wrote things that contradict the belief in reincarnation (Gate 6) and wrote that his opinion on this is the opinion of the kabbalists. He cited a statement from the Zohar to support his reasoning on this. Again, how is this possible?

(3). The author of the *'Iqqarim* (R. Yosef Albo, c. 1380–1444) cited the Zohar in Discourse 2, end of chapter 9 — but in Discourse 4, chapter 27, he rejects the belief in reincarnation — and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

(4). In the Book of the Zohar it is written, at least eleven times, that the name of the book is “The Book of the Zohar.” But the Bahya (R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa, c. 1255–1340), who quoted the Zohar many times, never called it by this name, but only “the Midrash of Rishbi.” Why did he not call it by the name it calls itself several times?

(5). The author of the *Agur* (R. Ya'akov ben Yehudah Landau, died 1493) wrote, in Laws of Tefillin, paragraph 16, that he “found in the Book of the Zohar” a certain law, and likewise in chapter 84 he noted three laws that he found in the Zohar “which are not mentioned by any of the authorities whose works are in our hands.” But between these two places he wrote (chapter 43): “Tefillin on the intermediate days of the festival — one puts them on without a blessing. And the Rosh wrote that one does recite the blessing, and the custom is not to bless, and my master my father ... instructed that one is to bless.” He wrote nothing further on this subject. Yet this is against the well-known view of the Zohar *Hadash*, that it is a severe prohibition to put on tefillin on the intermediate days — and how did he not find this or mention it?

(6). The Book of the Zohar was “discovered” in Spain around the year 1282. The Rosh (R. Asher ben Yehiel) arrived in Spain in the year 1306 and remained there until his death in the year 1327. Throughout those twenty-one years that he was in Spain, thousands and tens of thousands of Jews streamed to him to enjoy the radiance of his glory and to ask all kinds of questions, and he was the most famous Torah scholar of his time. If the Jews of Spain (even some of them) had in their possession a composition of such importance, one liable to cause a spiritual (and even halakhic) revolution in the world of Torah — and in their country was possibly the greatest man of the generation, the Rosh — they ought to have rushed to him to show him this pearl. Not only did they (apparently) not show it to him, but he dwelt there twenty-one years, and no one took the trouble to show it to him in all that time. This demands an explanation, and it appears suspicious. How can we explain it?

(7). What were the “pamphlets” that most of the defenders of the belief in the antiquity of the Zohar mentioned (The author of *Yuhasin* also mentioned them), and what could be the origin of this tradition?

The answer to all this is one: The authors and disseminators of the books of the Zohar maintained a certain level of secrecy about the existence of this composition; only among themselves did they study it, add to it, and so forth. The renowned rabbis knew nothing whatsoever about it, except for a few of them who were also Kabbalists. These rabbis only received specific portions of the Zohar — in pamphlets. From those pamphlets it was not easy to discern its forgery. Through those pamphlets the people learned of the existence of the Book of the Zohar, by means of the books of the Kabbalist rabbis who incorporated its passages into their own writings. And every time new pamphlets were revealed to those particular rabbis, they were already conditioned to eagerly accept them as “yet another portion found from the Holy Zohar.”

By the time this group had revealed the greater part of the Zohar, it was already known among the people, attributed to Rishbi, and stamped with the approbations of several famous scholars (who had previously gained access to the pamphlets). It was no longer simple “to disagree” with all the famous scholars who had incorporated passages from the Zohar into their writings. It was no longer acceptable to declare that it was forged. Moreover, every rabbi relied upon those who preceded him (and upon the assumption that they, for the most part, had not erred) and did not trouble themselves to investigate this matter (except for a few), for it was considered a low priority compared to the study of the Talmud or the works of Halakhic authorities.

In order to understand why the authors and disseminators of the Zohar so feared revealing their work to famous rabbis of their generation who were not Kabbalists, I’ll quote R. Me’ir haMe’ili, a rabbinical judge in Narbonne, Provence who lived at the time of the initial revelation of the Zohar, from his book *Milhemeth Hashem* (I copied it myself from a microfilm of the manuscript, at Hebrew University, which was written about six hundred years ago), and this is what he wrote:

...To counter the words of those who speak perversely of the Lord, and of the sages who walk in the ways of the perfect Torah, and of those who fear God. They are those who consider themselves to be wise, and who invent things out of thin air while straying toward heresy. They imagine that there is evidence for their opinions from the Aggadah, which they interpret according to their errors. Heaven forbid, and God forbid, for the intentions of the sages who related them were not as those people think. May God

enable us to do good, and to teach them a valuable lesson... Amen, amen, selah.

Many days have passed where Israel has not had a God in truth, nor Torah nor a teaching priest. The truth was lacking, and a poisonous root and wormwood sprouted from the proliferation of those who bless themselves in their own heart. For prophets have not found (?...). And verily from the kindness of the Lord upon us, He gave us the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, and prophets and righteous men have risen from our midst. Pillars of the world, when they saw that the Torah was being forgotten from Israel due to many woes, and the weight of exile and persecutions, wrote the Oral Torah and the secrets of God as their great wisdom saw fit. Some of them through hints and secrets, and some of them in plain language. Nothing great or small was hidden from them, including the foundations of the Torah in the faith of God. Those who find it acquire the ways of life for a world that's entirely life. They explained our perfect Torah in a revealing light, and they also followed up on it to explain its fundamentals, which a man should grasp and live by. For they are life to those who find them. (Here I omitted superfluous length, the copyist.)

Several days have passed, and fools have suddenly gone out, and revealed concepts that are not according to Jewish law, regarding the belief in the Lord, blessed be He. They are concerning prayer and the reciting of blessings which were instituted by the sages of the Great Assembly. Concepts that have no root or branch, not in the Torah of Moses, and not in the Prophets or Writings. Not from the Talmud, which was arranged by Ravina and Rav Ashe, and is in our possession. In other words, (these concepts have no basis) neither from tradition, nor logic. Not even from the External Aggadoth, not that there are... (?). That they are corrupting and incorrect, and one cannot cite evidence from them, nor pose questions from them. We cannot reconcile from them, nor prove a point from them in the study halls.

And those fools have said we should not direct our study, prayers or benedictions to the ancient and first God, who has no beginning or end. Woe to their souls! What has happened to them, and what have they seen that made them spurn the Holy One of Israel? They have reverted backward in level, and alienated themselves from He who Preceded the World, (?) the God of antiquity, first without a beginning, and last without an end, and aside from Him there is no other god. Just as many verses have attested to, and it is said, "I am first and I am last, and aside from Me, there is no god," and it is said, "You are the one whose years will never end." There are many similar verses. He is God in the heavens above, and on the Earth below,

there is none other, nor does He change. A true One, in a complete oneness without any partnership or combination of sephiroth. Our God, blessed be He, is the cause of all causes, and the occasion of all occasions. He creates great things, and extracted something from nothing by His will alone. He said, and they were. He created them and made them, and as soon as they became established, He decreed that it is good to thank, bless, elevate, pray, and beseech Him and to adore Him. It is right to thank, to bless, to elevate, to pray, to call to Him with thanks and blessings. The master of all, and the creator of all.

Not to his creations, which have a beginning and an end. He watches over, and manages everything, generally and specifically – as the Torah testifies. For all of His ways are just, and nothing is hidden from Him at all. As Scripture says, regarding both the nation and the individual together, and there are many verses. It's not necessary to quote them.

The “wheels,” “spheres,” holy angels, and everything that they might be called are tools for God's handiwork. The God without beginning or end, as they explained the verse, “I shall take him under my wing etc.” He is the one who does it all. As for His other works, the Ancient God without a beginning manages them according to the laws that he instituted from the beginning, so that they don't change their functions – except when He chooses to do so. At that point, He will change nature, and replace the times and moments in order to renew His wonders and their signs for the purpose of validating the words of His prophets, to rescue His worshipers, and to inform them that He alone is the one who creates them and establishes them. That He has the ability to change them or destroy them – and that we should not combine anything with Him.

For it is not appropriate to combine the created with its creator or to associate the raw material with the creator, or that which is emanated with the emanator. Nor is it appropriate to say that there is no complete oneness except with them, that it is all one.

For all that exists outside of Him, He created and formed, from the smallest to the greatest, out of a state of absolute nothingness – this is the correct belief for all of the faithful of Israel. Anyone who combines our Heavenly Father with something else is uprooted from the world.

This is the correct belief for all the faithful of Israel. Anybody who strays from it is a heretic and a blasphemer. How shall we expound upon the words

of fools, that all of their prayers and benedictions are directed toward false gods, whom they say were created and emanated, that they have a beginning and an end? For they say, according to their foolish reasoning, that anybody who is called “first and last” has a beginning and an end. And it is written, “I am first and I am last, and before me there are no gods.”

Thus we found in one of their erroneous books, whose name they called “Bahir,” and so we heard from a few of our scholars who quoted them – that they say we should pray to one created god during the day, and at night to another god, who is above the first one, but he is also created. During the high holidays, after the ten days of penitence there are many days of confusion and backsliding to pray to another created being, and to others who are below him during the rest of the year. They made many distinctions in prayer, according to the mood of their defective minds. They’re a disgrace to all flesh. The worms of their stupidity will never die, and the fire of their folly will never be extinguished. For they have craved many gods. In their lack of wisdom, they have said all of these are attached one to the other, and that they are all one. These fools do not let their ears hear what their mouths are saying.

For in truth, the God who we are supposed to believe in exclusively, to Him is it proper to direct our prayers, to worship, to bless and to thank – for He is one. If they say that He is more than one, then they have already denied the Torah, which says, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” And it said there is none besides Him. If they say that He is one, then why do they divide their prayers to one during the day, and another during the night? Why do they distinguish between the holidays and regular days? Why do they divide between the days of penitence and the other days of the year? How are all these distinctions appropriate? Also, verily, they should know that the Holy One blessed be He is one, and His unity is primordial, without a beginning and without an end, without change. As it is written, “I am the Lord, and I have not changed etc.” If so, He was one before the sephiroth, which have a beginning and an end, were created and emanated. To them do they direct their hearts in their benedictions and prayers. Is this not evidence that their words are incorrect?

But their eyes are plastered so that they are blinded, and their hearts cannot comprehend. In the end, all of their words are like chaff before the wind, and like straw. Words of chaos that have no substance. They are destruction, and contradiction, to the Torah. Words of apostasy and heresy. If their words are accurate, then how would any reasoning person consider that it’s inappropriate to bless and pray to the First God, who has no beginning or

end, the cause of all causes, who they refer to, in their jargon, as “En Sof” (without end). He who does so is, in their eyes, “meqases baNeti’oth” (מקצץ בנטיעות) – a cutter of seedlings) who does not merit to witness the pleasure of salvation, which is known to those who know the Lord, those who fear Him and (?). How could this not have been explained in the perfect Torah, which was given to us by the Lord for everlasting life? For therein it is written, “You have shown us to know that the Lord is God, and there is no other.” How then could we possibly know this thing that the Lord never spoke? How could we possibly know all of this? How could our Holy Teacher (Yehudah haNasi), who edited the Mishnah, and Ravina and Rav Ashe, who sealed and wrote all of the Talmud, which we have today, that they are the basics of the Oral Torah? How could they have considered all of Israel to be mistaken and excluded from the world to come – as “meqasesim baNeti’oth” (מקצצים בנטיעות) cutters of seedlings)?

Woe to the eyes that thus see! Woe to the ears that thus hear! Woe to the generation that experiences this in its days! How could our learned scholars, and God-fearing men, have failed to gird their loins? How could (?) his sages? ... the troubles have increased for us, and the yoke of exile and persecution. Is there, in our time, amongst all the non-Jewish religions that deny the oneness of God more than these people?

They say that he who blesses and prays to the Holy One blessed be He, the cause of all causes and the creator of everything, is excluded from the world, but does merit a place in the world to come, and is not considered a “meqases baNeti’oth” (מקצצים בנטיעות) – cutter of seedlings) – but that they are considered, in their folly, among the ignorant masses, while they themselves are of the elite who know the secrets of God and those who fear Him, that in their wisdom they rise to a higher level than the others in this belief. In so saying, they are fools who abandon certainty, even according to their words, and cling to a mere possibility. Certainly, this is ruinous for them, and their souls are destroyed and desolate, as they descend to the lowest level – the opposite of their hopes and intentions, which are incorrect.

In the end, every knowledgeable man is obligated to distance himself from their foolish words.

Behold, we have written all this before you, our rabbis in every city, to reveal all of these things to you. For we were fearful because of the signatures that were found upon them when we received them. Also that it was told to us that they forged many signatures of the great scholars of this land, who did not actually sign them. Thus many of the masses, from other

lands, could be led astray – as they boast in these lies, saying, “We have found strength and support among the Torah scholars.” Lest they say, “Our hand prevails.”

Heaven forfend, and God forbid, that we would stray after such heresies. Let there not be the like of this in Israel.

I have heard that they’ve already composed a book, which they named “Bahir,” which I have mentioned above, and they did not see light in it. We have already acquired this book, and we found that they attributed it to R. Nehunyah ben haQaneh. God Forbid! That holy man would never have stumbled so, and he was not counted among criminals. The language of that book, and all of its ideas, prove... that it was from a man who is not literate or eloquent. It contains words of heresy and apostasy in many places. We have also heard that they have compiled additional commentaries on the Song of Songs, the Book of Yesirah and Heikhaloth, in which they wrote things according to their heresies. They also wrote a commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes and other books. Seek well and investigate, and if you find them in your midst, destroy them from the Earth, so that they don’t lead people astray. Dig for them, for we have already destroyed the ones that were found among us. Let the Lord, in His mercy, send us a redeemer to gather the dispersed people of Israel and Judah, and remove from among His people their doubts and confusion. Let Him restore the heart of fathers to their sons, and the hearts of sons to their fathers.

We have written all of this with the approbation of our lord, the great rabbi, the candle of Israel, our teacher, R. Meshulam the son of the great rabbi Moshe... and the other scholars of Israel, some of them who have privately known about this matter we have written about. Let the wise shine like the shining of the heavens, and those who bring merit to the public like the stars forever. Amen, amen, selah.

It’s interesting that he concluded with the words “like the shining of the heavens” – because, in Hebrew, it’s “*KaZohar haRaqia*“. It very much looks like he was hinting at the Zohar, which is named after this same verse.

Here is a glossary of Kabbalistic terms, with brief explanations, mentioned in the above excerpt:

Sephiroth (ספירות): The 10 emanations of the Kabbalah. They play a central role in Kabbalistic thought. Note: The Book of Yesirah, mentioned above, does refer to the

“sephiroth,” but that Hebrew word is derived from the word that means “to count,” and it simply means “numerals.” The Book of Yesirah speaks of the nascent sciences of mathematics and Hebrew grammar. In those days, this type of knowledge was considered a “secret,” to be revealed only to the worthy. The Kabbalists borrowed from the Latin word “sphaera” (sphere) and attached it to the Hebrew “sephiroth,” coming up with something like 10 concentric circles – symbolizing various spiritual emanations and realms.

Book of Bahir (ספר הבהיר – “The Book of Brightness” or “The Book of Illumination”): It is one of the earliest extant works of Kabbalah. The work first appears in historical record in late-12th-century Provence, where it circulated among early Kabbalistic circles. Most scholars date its composition or final redaction to the 12th century in Provence.

Hekhaloth (היכלות – palaces/chambers): A body of ancient Jewish mystical texts that describe visionary ascents through the heavenly palaces (*hekhaloth*) and encounters with the divine throne and its angels. Scholarly consensus places the core *Heikhaloth* literature in the late antique period, primarily between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE.

En Sof (אין סוף – literally “no end” or “eternal.”) This is a well-known Kabbalistic term for God in His highest form, without any attributes, and above all of the sephiroth. Old-school Kabbalists considered it impossible, and inappropriate, to direct worship to such a being – instead directing their devotions to the emanations (sephiroth) that emanate from Him.

Megases baNeti’oth (מקצץ בנטיעות – One who “cuts the seedlings.”) In Kabbalistic circles, this refers to one who commits an abomination by destroying something beautiful.

After we’ve seen how fierce was the opposition of contemporary rabbis to the Book of Bahir, is there any wonder if they hid the Zohar from them?

Lest the reader imagine that great Torah scholars cannot be fooled by deception, I’ll include here a small fragment from an article that appeared in the newspaper *Yated Ne’eman*, July 1994, and I quote:

Our illustrious teacher, the Hafes Hayim (R. Yisrael Me’ir Kagan, Belarus 19th century), began donning tefillin written according the opinion of Rabbenu Tam (R. Ya’aqov Me’ir, 12th century France). “What happened today that’s different from yesterday?” asked his friends when they saw this. “In Tractate Qodashim of the Jerusalem Talmud, it is explicitly written according to his opinion,” explained the Hafes Hayim concisely, as was his

habit. "I have seen the light, and it is like the shining Sun at midday – and this is the newly published tractate of Qodashim from the Jerusalem Talmud" wrote the Maharsham from Berezhany (Rabbi Shalom Mordechai HaKohen Schwadron 1835–1911) in his approbation for the new tractate of the Jerusalem Talmud. He continued, "Who among us, of the Children of Israel, will not thirst to see this hidden treasure?" R. Abraham Benyamin Kluger Brodi wrote how this forged manuscript caused an uproar by deceiving the world of Torah for seven years – "Who was this brilliant fraudster and what were his motives?"

On the Methods of Deception

There are people who are not interested in knowing the truth, when that truth doesn't fit in with what they are accustomed to believe. Even when presented with clear proofs, they will dismiss them with far-fetched explanations. These people, according to the definition of the sages, are ignoramuses (Avot 5:1).

These same ignoramuses, when they wish to show the public how mistaken somebody is, for example, the author of this book, will employ several methods:

- A). They will selectively publish the weakest claims from the book, and then give the impression that all of my claims are similarly weak.
- B). They will misquote the language of the claims in such a way that the actual claims will not be recognizable. According to their intentional misinterpretations, and misquoting, of the claims, they'll make it look like all of my claims are weak.
- C). They will easily refute the claims that they invented and attributed to me – in order to give the impression that there is no substance to my words.
- D). In the knowledge that they have no good answers to most of my claims, they will publish the opinions of famous people who say it is forbidden to read this book, because it contains "heresy" – according to their new, and expanded, definition of the term.
- E). Those who do not wish to sink to such accusations will simply tell their students that reading this book is a waste of time, because it may cause them to doubt their faith. Furthermore, they should be spending their time studying more important subjects, such as Talmud and Halakhah.

Apology and Afterword

Most of the books that I reviewed, I read cover to cover. When I omitted portions of their books, it was only due to my preference for brevity, and not in order to hide anything from you. I have nothing to gain from deception; there is an abundance of evidence to support my claims. Therefore, I simply omitted weak evidence from this book.

I did my best to be precise, and even so, there can be no doubt that I have made mistakes. I request of you, dear reader, that you ignore such mistakes if they are mere technicalities, and that you give me the benefit of the doubt.

If at times I did not show adequate deference to those who are greater than myself, it is not out of disrespect, but rather because of my passion in this matter.

I could have cited additional evidence to support my claims, but because I did not wish to spend my entire life on this matter, I told myself that the main thing is to reveal the truth – and not to strive for a thicker book.

Thanks be to God, and I will not be silent, that He gave wisdom to the mind, and in the heart to judge.