



# Sabbatai Zevi - Is Sin the Path to Redemption?



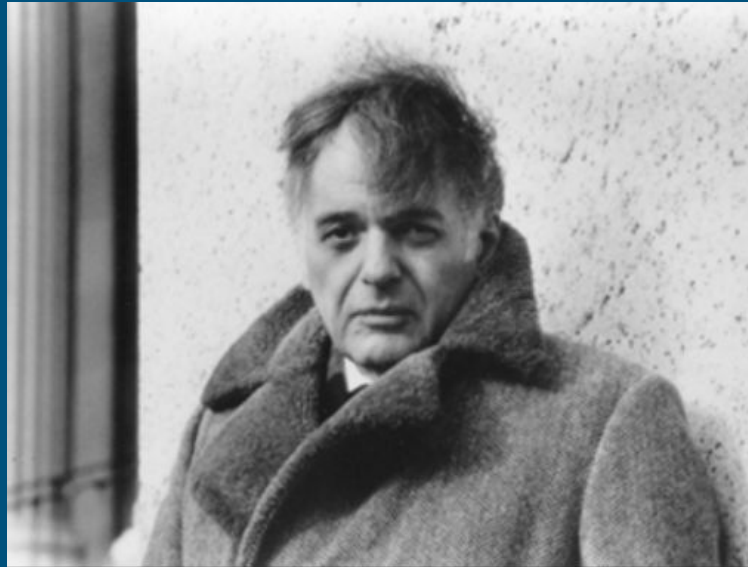
Matan - Great Debates in Jewish Thought, History, and Halakha



# Professor Yosef Yerushalmi

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“Jews are the messianic people par excellence”



# Who was Sabbtai Zevi? Why is he so famous?

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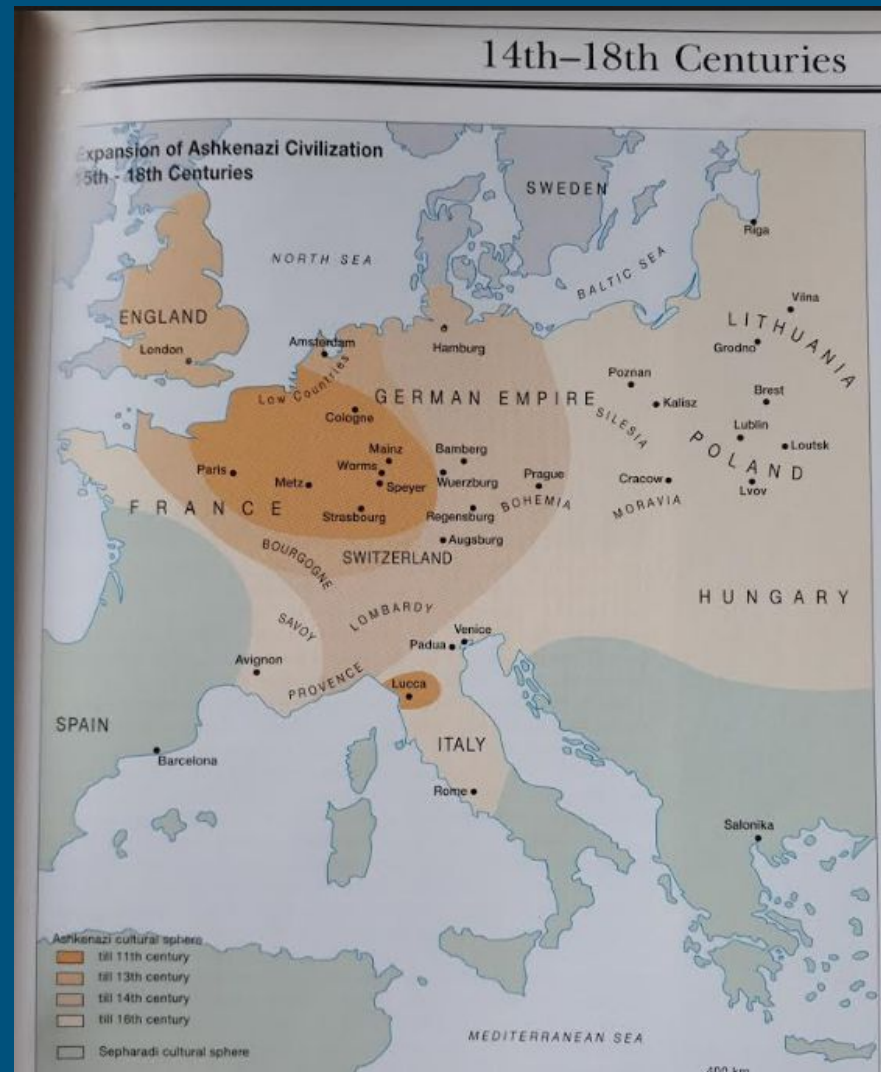


# Key Jewish Events/Dates

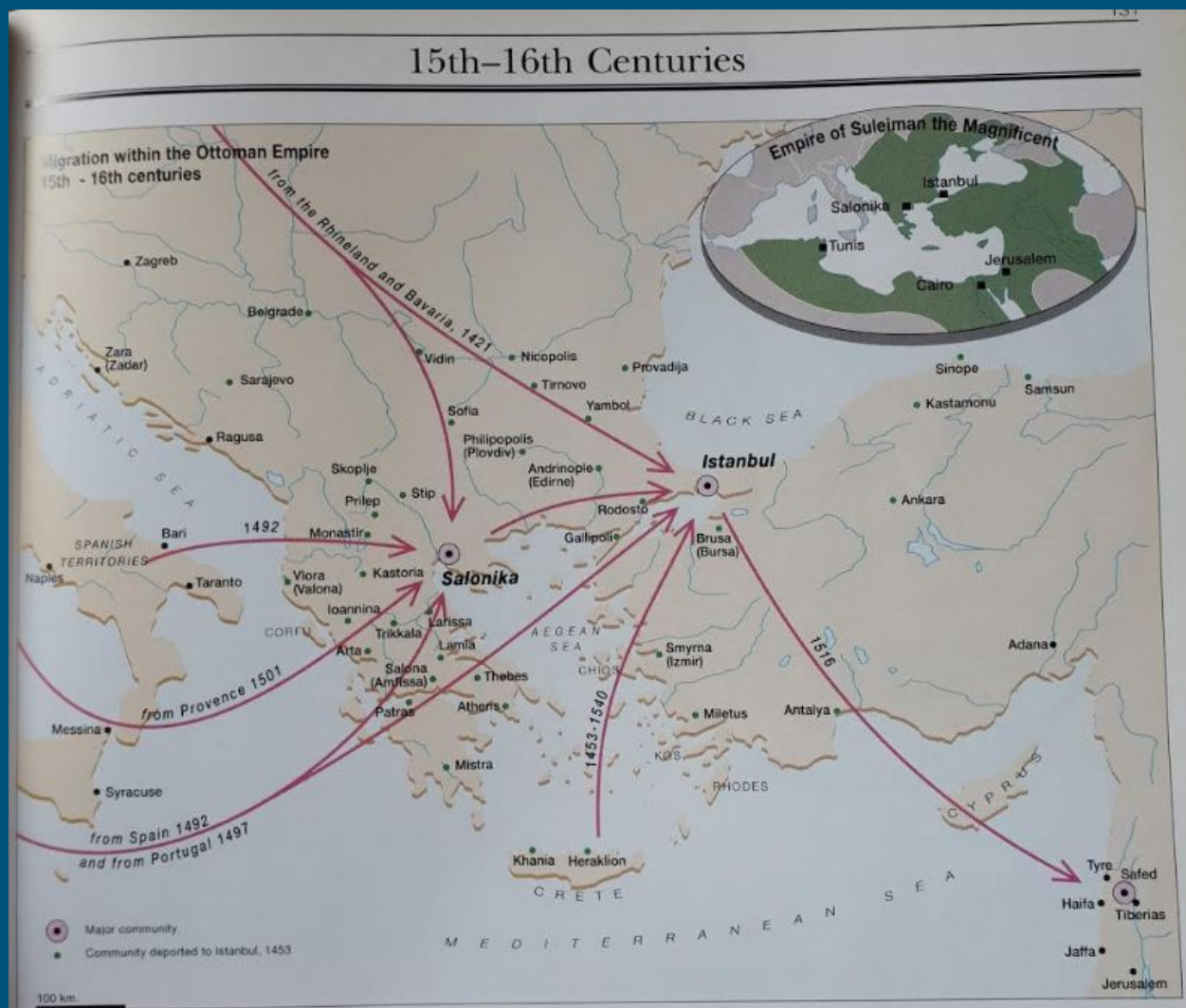
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- 1626-1676 - Sabbatai Zevi
- 1492 - Jews expelled from Spain
- 1534-1572 - Arizal in Safed
- 1550's - Shulkhan Aruch composed
- 1655 - Jews officially let back into England
- 1648 - Jewish population of Poland reached 450,000
- 1648–1655 -Ukrainian Cossack Bohdan Chmielnicki leads a massacre of Polish gentry and Jewry (100,00 dead)
- 1700-1760 - Baal Shem Tov
- 1720-1797 - Vilna Gaon

# Expanding Ashkenaz

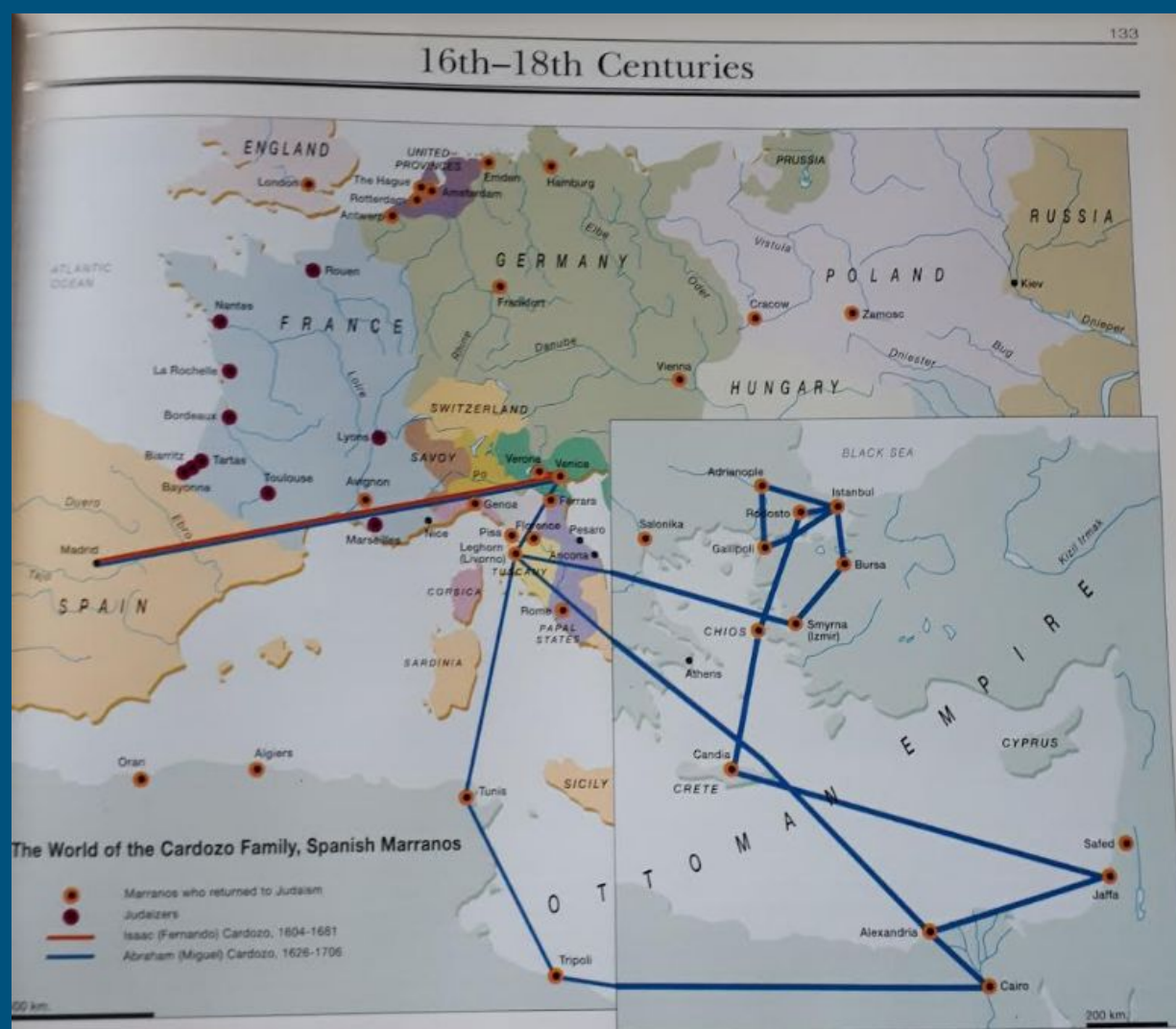


## 15th–16th Centuries





# Marranos



# Description of SZ



some envoys from Poland who left an account of their encounter with Sabbatai. Leyb b. Ozer is even more circumstantial: "I talked to people who had eaten and drunk with him and who had been with him in the fortress where he was imprisoned but who were not of his party. They told me that there is no comparison to his majesty; his face was like that of an angel of the Lord and all the time his cheeks were red. They also testified that whenever he was singing songs of praise to God, as he would do several times every day, it was impossible to look into his face, for it was like looking into a fire. Many worthy people who had visited him have testified to this, and although they opposed him, yet they confirmed that this was the truth; for this reason also many believed in him."<sup>66</sup>



# SZ's Study of Kabbalah

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Like many other students of kabbalah, Sabbatai could not but feel disturbed by a problem that of necessity arose from his reading of the Zohar and similar writings. A recurrent theme in these texts is the distinction between the first emanator, the hidden God, called *En-Sof*, shrouded in the mystery of his hidden recesses, and the emanation, that is, the sphere of the ten *sefiroth* and the divine attributes. ~~Who is the God of Israel whom we address in prayer and whose commandments we obey?~~ Reference has already been made to an important testimony concerning the youthful Sabbatai's perplexities in this matter, and we have seen how he shrank from attributing to *En-Sof* all the divine names and attributes by which the God of Israel is called in prayer. Did not the kabbalistic texts explicitly state that *En-Sof* had no attributes whatsoever, that it was even beyond will and thought, and that it was absolutely inaccessible and hidden? However, in the course of his reading Sabbatai discovered that the Zohar specified the term "The Holy One Blessed Be He," and the name of the Godhead, the Tetragrammaton, as symbols of one particular *sefirah*: *Tifereth*. Accord-

# Letter from Rav Shlomo Laniado (Aleppo, 1669)

When he [Sabbatai Şevi] passed through Aleppo, he told us his personal experiences: how in the year 1648 the Spirit of God descended upon him one night while he was walking at about two hours distance from the city in solitary meditation, until he heard the voice of God speaking to him, "Thou art the savior of Israel, the messiah, the son of David, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and thou art destined to redeem Israel, to gather it from the four corners of the earth to Jerusalem. . . ." From that moment on he was clothed with the Holy Spirit and with a great illumination; he pronounced the [ineffable] name of God and performed all sorts of strange actions as seemed fit to him by reason of the mystical *tiqqun* intended by them. Those who saw him did not understand his actions, and in their eyes he was like a fool. Repeatedly he was flogged by our teachers in Palestine for his many deeds<sup>77</sup> which appeared repugnant to reason, until he retired, away from men, to the wilderness. Every time he appeared again he had grown mightier, seeing what no mouth can utter, though at other times he suffered great anguish. Sometimes he beheld the splendor of the Shekhinah, and sometimes God tried him with severe temptations, all of which he withstood, until in 1665,<sup>78</sup> when he was in Egypt, God tried him with a very great temptation but he—praise be to God—withstood it. But afterward he adjured God with a mighty oath and with many prayers and supplications not to tempt him again and since the day that he made this adjuration, the Holy Spirit has forsaken him and so has his illumination, and he became like an ordinary man. He also repented all of his "strange acts," since he could no longer understand their [mystical] significance which he had understood when he originally performed them.<sup>79</sup>

# Letter by Nathan of Gaza

an earlier transmigration. When I had attained the age of twenty, I began to study the book Zohar and some of the Lurianic writings. [According to the Talmud] he who wants to purify himself receives the aid of Heaven; and thus He sent me some of His holy angels and blessed spirits who revealed to me many of the mysteries of the Torah. In that same year, my force having been stimulated by the visions of the angels and the blessed souls, I was undergoing a prolonged fast<sup>15</sup> in the week before the feast of Purim. Having locked myself in a separate room in holiness and purity, and reciting the penitential prayers of the morning service with many tears, the spirit came over me, my hair stood on end and my knees shook and I beheld the *merkabah*,<sup>16</sup> and I saw visions of God all day long and all night, and I was vouchsafed true prophecy like any other prophet, as the voice spoke to me and began with the words: "Thus speaks the Lord." And with the utmost clarity my heart perceived toward whom my prophecy was directed [that



# Nathan's Letter Continued

is, toward Sabbatai Şevi], even as Maimonides has stated that the prophets perceived in their hearts the correct interpretation of their prophecy so that they could not doubt its meaning.<sup>17</sup> Until this day I never yet had so great a vision, but it remained hidden in my heart until the redeemer revealed himself in Gaza and proclaimed himself the messiah; only then did the angel permit me to proclaim what I had seen. I recognized that he was [the] true [messiah] by the signs which Isaac Luria had taught, for he [Luria] has revealed profound mysteries in the Torah and not one thing faileth of all that he has taught. And also the angel that revealed himself to me in a waking vision was a truthful one, and he revealed to me awesome mysteries.<sup>18</sup>



Sabbatai Sevi as messiah, sitting on the kingly throne, under a celestial crown held by angels and bearing the inscription "Crown of Sevi." Below: the Ten Tribes studying the Torah with the messiah. From an etching after the title page of one of the editions of Nathan's *Tiqqun Qeri'ah* (Amsterdam, 1666)

# AMIRAH

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His followers began to refer to him with the title AMIRAH, a Hebrew acronym for the phrase "Our Lord and King, his Majesty be exalted" (Adoneinu Malkeinu Yarum Hodo).



# SZ's Greatest Hits

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- Born on Tisha Be'av 1626
- Marriage to Sarah
- Mystical Marriage with the Torah
- Eats Chelev
- Made Shabbat into Monday, Celebrated all three festivals in one week
- Appointed his followers as king - King David, King Jehoshapat, King Zedekiah
- Dressed up a fish like a baby and put it in a crib





## תהלים פרק קמו

(ז) עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט

לְעֹשִׂיִּים נִתֵּן לָחֶם

לְרַעֲבִים יִקְזֶק מִתֵּיר

אֲסוּרִים:



But there were more dramatic incidents than the proceedings before the *cadi*. Sabbatai was still in a state of illumination, and his inspired behavior inevitably created a major scandal. Abraham Cuenque, a devout Sabbatian believer, reports (no doubt on the authority of local Palestinian traditions) that “Sabbatai Ševi, accompanied by many followers, proceeded via Ramleh to Jerusalem; and in Jerusalem he did many things that were passing strange and incomprehensible to all who beheld them.”<sup>122</sup> Cuenque carefully omits details, but the Dutch correspondent from Smyrna informed his readers that the rabbis of Jerusalem wanted to kill Sabbatai because he had blasphemed God and His Law.<sup>123</sup> What was the outrage referred to? The clue seems to be provided by Moses [b. Isaac] b. Ḥabib, who reports a detail, which, in the light of our other knowledge, is eminently credible. According to Moses b. Ḥabib, it was a well-known fact among the scholars in Jerusalem and Hebron<sup>124</sup> that even “before his apostasy” Sabbatai had caused ten Israelites to eat *heleb*, “fat of the kidney,” and had actually “recited a benediction over this ritually forbidden fat: ‘Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who permittest that which is forbidden.’ I also heard from a very pious scholar that he

# What Did SZ Believe in? The only letter we have from him....[after he converted]

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Know ye my brethren, my children, and my friends that I recognized with great clarity that the True [God] whom I alone know for many generations and for whom I have done so much, has willed that I should enter with all my heart into the Islamic religion [*din islam*], the religion of Ishmael, to permit what it permits, and to forbid what it forbids, and to nullify the Torah of Moses until the time of the End. For this is important for the glory of His Godhead and for His revelation that I should induct herein everyone whose soul would agree with me [to

do so] after I would reveal to them the [Mystery of] His Godhead, which is [capable of being] demonstrated with utmost stringency; that is, the supreme rank of His true being and the wondrous glory of the Cause of All Causes. And this is what the psalm says [Ps. 119:126]: [When] it is time to work for God, they nullify Thy Torah,<sup>56</sup> as the Ishmaelites used to say: The Torah of Moses is nullified, as is also esoterically implied in the Talmudic saying [where God is reported to have said to Moses]: May thy strength increase because you broke the tablets of the Covenant.<sup>57</sup> [And this is so] because the Torah of Moses without [the knowledge of] the True One is worth nothing as it is said [II Chron. 15:3]: For a long time Israel is [to be] without the True God and without Torah. Since they do not have the True God, his [Moses'] Torah is no Torah. But *Din Islam haqq haqq* [the religion of Islam is the very Truth].<sup>58</sup> . . . And when Maimonides of blessed memory was formulating the dogma "The Law God gave he never will amend/Nor ever by another Law replace,"<sup>59</sup> he was completely mistaken because he did not know the God of Truth, who is the God of Sabbatai Şevi. And do not believe, my brethren, that I did this [becoming a Muslim] on the strength of an illumination so that you become terrified and say: today or tomorrow the illumination will depart from him and he will regret what he had said and will be very sorry for it. This is not so, but I did this on my own, through the great power and strength of the Truth and Faith which no wind in the world and no sages and prophets can cause me to leave my place. . . . Thus speaks the master of Truth and Faith, the Turco and the Meşurman.



# גדולה עבירה לשמה

## 1. תלמוד בבלי מסכת נזיר דף כג עמוד ב

אמר עולא: תמר זינתה, זמרי זינה, תמר זינתה - יצאו ממנה מלכים ונביאים, זמרי זינה - נפלו עליו כמה רבבות מישראל.

2. אמר ר"נ בר יצחק: גדולה עבירה לשמה ממצוה שלא לשמה.

3. והאמר רב יהודה אמר רב: לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצות אפי' שלא לשמן, שמתוך שלא לשמן בא לשמן!

4. אלא אימא: כמצוה שלא לשמה,

5. דכתיב: תבורך מנשים יעל אשת חבר הקני מנשים באהל תבורך, מאן נשים שבאהל? שרה, רבקה, רחל ולאה. א"ר יוחנן: שבע בעילות בעל אותו רשע באותה שעה, שנאמר: בין רגליה כרע נפל שכב וגו'.

## המהרי"ק

והנה דבר פשוט הוא כי אסתר לא עשתה שום איסור, ולא היה בדבר אפילו נדנוד עבירה, אלא — מצווה רבה עשתה, שהצילה כל ישראל

## ר' יוסף אלבו בספר העיקרים

וכלל הדברים הוא, כי כל פעולה שיעשה העושה אותה לשם שמים זוכה בה לחיי העולם הבא, ואף אם הפועל ההוא יחשב בו שהוא רע. אמרו ז"ל בכל דרכיך דעהו - ואפילו לדבר עבירה ואמרו עוד גדולה עבירה לשמה ממצווה ושלם לועמה





# Will the Torah Change in Messianic Times?

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ר' פנחס ור' לוי ור' יוחנן בשם ר' מנחם דגליא, לעתיד לבא כל הקרבנות בטלין וקרבת תודה אינו בטל, כל התפילות בטלות, ההודאה אינה בטלה....

## מדרש משלי (בובר) פרשה ט

שכל המועדים עתידים בטלים, וימי הפורים אינם בטלים לעולם, שנאמר וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים (אסתר ט כח).

אמר ר' אלעזר אף יום הכפור





## אור החיים ויקרא פרק יא פסוק ג

על דרך אומרם ז"ל (רבינו בחיי בשם תנחומא) למה נקרא שמו חזיר שעתיד לחזור לח

## ישעיהו פרק נא

(ד) הִקְשִׁיבוּ אֵלַי עַמִּי וְלֹאֹמְרֵי אֵלַי הֶאֱזִינוּ כִּי תוֹרָה יֵאָתֵר יֵצֵא וּמִשְׁפָּטִי לְאוֹר עַמִּים אֲרָגִיל

## מדרש תהלים (בובר) מזמור קמו

ה' מתיר אסורים. מהו מתיר אסורים, יש אומרים כל הבהמה שנטמאת בעולם הזה מטהר אותה הקדוש ברוך הוא לעתיד לבוא.... ולמה אסר אותה, לראות מי שמקבל דבריו, ומי אינו מקבל, ולעתיד לבוא הוא מתיר את כל מה שאסר.

ומהו מתיר אסורים, אין אסור גדול מן הנדה, שהאשה רואה דם ואסרה הקדוש ברוך הוא לבעלה, ולעתיד לבוא הוא מתירה, וגם את הנביאים ואת רוח הטומאה אעביר מן הארץ (זכריה יג ב)....  
ומהו מתיר אסורים, אסורי מות ואסורי שאול.

## תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף סג עמוד א

דרש בר קפרא: איזוהי פרשה קטנה שכל גופי תורה תלוין בה - בכל דרכיך דעהו והוא יישר ארחתך.



אמר רבא: אפילו לדבר עבירה.



## תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף צט עמוד א

אמר ריש לקיש: פעמים שביטולה של תורה זהו יס

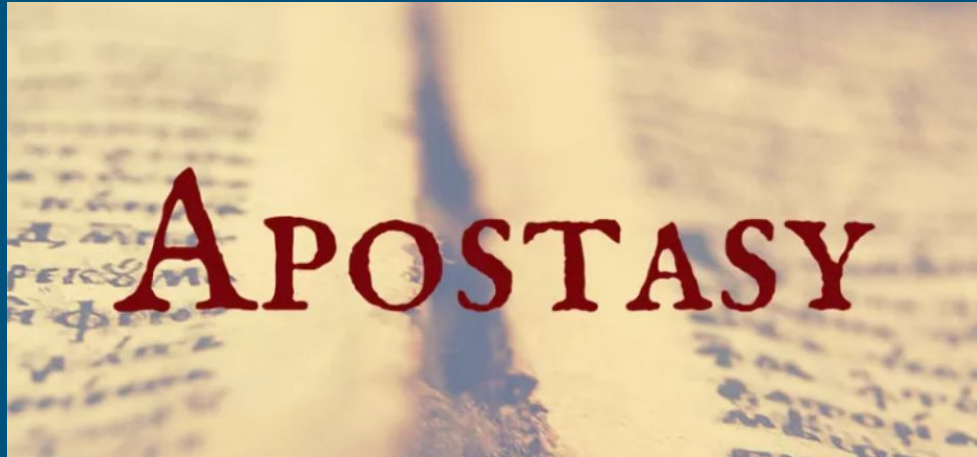
דכתיב: אשר שברת -

אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: יישר כחך ששבו

# How to explain SZ's Apostasy

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- 1) Radical Wing - Donmeh, Jacob Frank
- 2) Moderate Wing - Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Cardozo,
- 3) Fierce Opponents - R Jacob Sasportas, R Yaakov Emden, Rav Moshe Hagiz



# A Sympathizer's view of What happened..

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arrived in the evening it was too late to go to him [the sultan]. In the morning he appeared before the sultan, who said to him: "Peace be with thee," and he [Sabbatai] replied in Turkish: "Upon thee, peace." Thereupon a royal attendant came to him bringing a robe which the sultan had worn, and another attendant with one of the sultan's turbans, and they clothed him with these and called him Mehemed, in the name of the sultan. The sultan also gave orders that a large sum be paid to him every day. Thus the rumor got about that he had apostatized, and there was a great deliverance to the Jews. Our Lord made request before the sultan for the Jews to reverse the letters of wrath and anger which he wrote to destroy all the Jews in Constantinople . . . and no Jew suffered any harm because of this.<sup>269</sup>

# Why Did they still believe?

the original intentions of the people.

We should remind ourselves, in this connection, of a significant fact described in a previous chapter: in the minds of the believers imminent redemption and realized redemption came to be confused. Salvation was not merely at hand; it had already begun to be established and to make its inroads upon the old order. The arguments of the doubters to the effect that nothing had really happened so far fell on deaf ears because they took no account of the new emotional reality. The new feeling did not content itself with hopes for political redemption, although the political aspects of traditional messianism and the expectation of Israel's liberation from the yoke of the gentiles and from the degradation of exile were evidently taken for granted. However, the powerful messianic ferment produced psychological by-products which soon acquired an autonomous life of their own. Many believers were convinced, in their enthusiasm, that the new *aion* had already begun. In fact, they had crossed the threshold into a new world. The kabbalistic doctrine, propounded by the Sabbatian circle,



# Paradox bred Paradox

The essence of the Sabbatian's conviction, in other words, can be summarized in a sentence: it is inconceivable that all of God's people should inwardly err, and so, if their vital experience is contradicted by the facts, it is the facts that stand in need of explanation. In the words of a Sabbatian "moderate" <sup>3</sup> writing thirty years after Sabbatai Zevi's apostasy: "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not ensnare even the animals of the righteous, much less the righteous themselves, to say nothing of so terribly deceiving an entire people. . . . And how is it possible that all of

# Cardozo and the Marranos Angle



Marranos: Secret **Seder** in Spain during the times of inquisition, an 1892 painting by **Moshe Maimon**

The Messiah is constrained to commit "strange acts" (*ma'asim zarim*; a concept hereafter to occupy a central place in Sabbatian theology), of which his apostasy is the most startling; all of these, however, are necessary for the fulfillment of his mission. In the formulation of Cardozo: "It is ordained that the King Messiah don the garments of a Marrano and so go unrecognized by his fellow Jews. In a word, it is ordained that he become a Marrano like me." <sup>5</sup>

Before proceeding to take a closer look at this bold and heretical doctrine, one might well dwell for a moment on Cardozo's own words, which provide in my opinion an invaluable clue to the motivation behind it, as they do in fact to nearly every other feature of the Sabbatian movement as well. Underlying the novelty of Sabbatian thought more than anything else was the deeply paradoxical religious sensibility of the Marranos and their descendants, who constituted a large portion of Sephardic Jewry. Had it not been for the unique psychology of these reconverts to Judaism, the new theology would never have found the fertile ground to flourish in that it did. Regardless of what the actual backgrounds of its first disseminators may have been, the Sabbatian doctrine of the Messiah was perfectly tailored to the needs of the Marranic mentality. Indeed, we know for a fact that

# THE SUFFERING SERVANT

## ישעיהו פרק נג

(ד) אֵכֶן חָלִינוּ. הוּא נָשָׂא וּמִכְאֲבֵינוּ סָבַלם וְאֲנַחְנוּ חֲשַׁבְנָהוּ נְגִיעַ מִכָּה אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲנָה:

(ה) וְהוּא מַחֲלֵל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּכָא מַעֲוֹנֵיתֵנוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבַחֲבֵרְתוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ:

Here the 53rd chapter of Isaiah played a key role, for as it was now reinterpreted the verse "But he was wounded because of our transgressions" was taken to be an allusion not only to the Messiah ben Joseph, the legendary forerunner of the Redeemer who according to tradition was to suffer death at the hands of the Gentiles, but to the Messiah ben David as well, who "would be forceably prevented from observing the Torah." By a play on words, the Hebrew *ve-hu meholal*, "but he was wounded," was interpreted as meaning "from sacred he [the Messiah] will be made profane [*hol*]." Thus,

# Why did so many people Follow SZ?

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# Heinrich Graetz

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#1 - Shabbtai Zevi was about Mass Hysteria. SZ was a madman



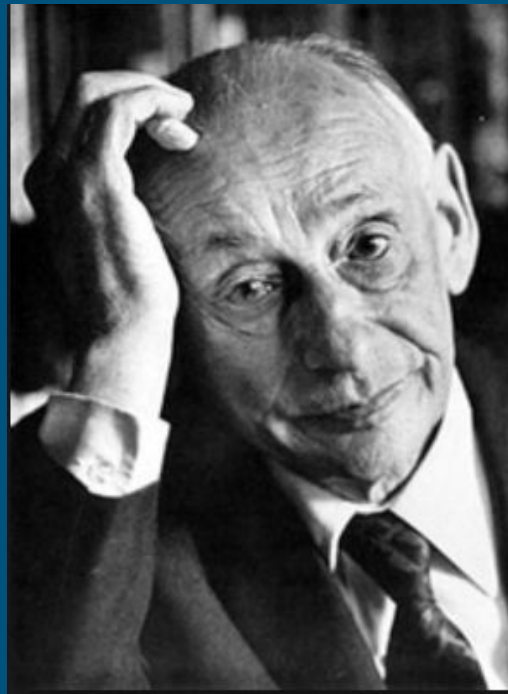
# How Could So Many Jews Believe in SZ?

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#2 - Gershom Scholem -

*Martin Buber once remarked,  
"all of us have students, schools,  
but only Gershom Scholem  
has created a whole academic discipline!"*

**The Key is Lurianic Kabbalah**





indeed. Whatever we may think of Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, the fact is: their followers, while they were certainly not "innocents"—if there was one thing lacking in the paradoxical religion of the Sabbatians it was innocence!—were sincere in their faith, and it is the nature of this faith, which penetrated to the hidden depths and abysses of the human spirit, that we wish to understand.

In the generation preceding Sabbatai Zevi's advent the rapid spread of the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria and his school had resulted in a grafting of the theories of the Kabbalists, the *de facto* theologians of the Jewish people in the seventeenth century, onto the traditional Jewish view of the role and personality of the Messiah. Mystical Lurianic speculations about the nature of the redemption and "the restored world" (*olam ha-tikkun*) which was to follow upon its heels added new contents and dimensions to the popular Messianic folk-myth of a conquering national hero, raising it to the level of a supreme cosmic drama: the redemptive process was now no longer conceived of as simply a working-out of Israel's temporal emancipation from the yoke of the Gentiles, but rather as a fundamental transformation of the entire Creation, affecting material and spiritual worlds alike and leading to a rectification of the primordial catastrophe of the "breaking of the vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*), in the course of which the divine worlds would be returned to their original unity and perfection.

# Lurianic Kabbalah - שבירת הכלים

The Arizal explains that when it arose in the Divine Will to create the finite world, the first step was to "withdraw" or conceal the infinite Or Ein Sof in the process known as "the first constriction" or "tzimtzum harishon". The first "world" (plane of existence) that came into being after the tzimtzum is called Adam Kadmon...

The existence of the finite world as we know it, and as God intended it, is still not possible in Adam Kadmon due to its extremely lofty state. In order for a finite world to exist, the light in Adam Kadmon had to go through several more stages of quantitative contraction and descent. In one of these stages of descent, one of the several types of light emitted from Adam Kadmon is manifested as ten individual qualities or attributes that act as separate, independent points of light, or quanta of energy....Each of these points is an extremely powerful concentration of light (the level of keter of each of the ensuing sefirot) as it descends from Adam Kadmon. These sefirot compose the world of Tohu (chaos or disorder).

# continued...

Due to the intensity and exclusivity of the lights and the inability of their vessels to contain them, the vessels of the lower sefirot of Tohu shattered and the lights they contained remained above. The fragments of these vessels then fell to lower levels, becoming absorbed into the various worlds below the world of Tohu. The three uppermost vessels had the ability to contain the lights designated for them and did not die...



# Lurianic Kabbalah - תיקון

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Tikkun, therefore, entails two separate but related processes. First, it means the gathering of the divine lights that had fallen into the realm of the qelipot as a result of the “breaking of the vessels.” Second, it means the gathering of all the holy souls likewise imprisoned in the qelipot.

Tikkun is to be achieved by human beings through their contemplative action. Every religious act requires contemplative concentration on the various dimensions of divinity and the various combinations of the divine name in order to “raise up the fallen sparks.” The focus of concentration is the inner dynamics of reorganization and restructuring that takes place in the course of acts of devotional piety.

# Dialectical Forces in Jewish History

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Spanish Expulsion....Lurianic Kabbalah....Shabtai  
Zevi.....Frankism....Modernity/Haskalah/Reform Judaism





### #3 - Moshe Idel



These observations are intended to stimulate a reevaluation of Scholem's thesis concerning the dependence of Sabbatianism upon Lurianic Kabbalah. Although a reevaluation cannot be offered here, it must be mentioned because the postulated "triumph" of this messianic ideology has been assumed to be the result of an alleged spread of Lurianic Kabbalah among the Jewish masses. The attempt to disentangle Lurianism from Sabbatianism is one that ought to be conducted primarily on the sociological level. Rumors of the coming of the Messiah in the person of a specific individual were believed not because they fit into Lurianic messianism but for rather different reasons: indeed, the motivations of the ex-Marranos for eagerly accepting Ševi as Messiah must have been different from those of Polish Jewry after the massacre of 1648. Kabbalah, even Lurianic Kabbalah, had little to do with the mass psychologies prevalent in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Notwithstanding this, I want to stress that Sabbatianism indeed benefited from Lurianic Kabbalah, primarily through the adoption of its theosophy and mythology. Although Ševi himself was not particularly interested in this type of Kabbalah, his prophet, Nathan of Gaza, can be considered as a Lurianic Kabbalist who employed Lurianic terminology creatively, giving it a special twist that "illuminated" the personal myth of Ševi. Moreover, the theological

# Why is Messianism Dangerous?

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# Jewish messianism as Catastrophic

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Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature—this cannot be sufficiently emphasized—  
a theory of catastrophe. This theory stresses the revolutionary,  
cataclysmic element in the transition from every historical present  
to the Messianic future. This transition itself becomes a problem in that, beginning with the words of the prophets Amos and Isaiah, the really non-transitional character of it is pointed up and emphasized. Isaiah's Day of the Lord (chapters 2 and 4) is a day of catastrophe and is described in visions which stress this catastrophic

# Sages after Bar Kochba

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There were many who felt repulsed by apocalypticism. Their attitude is most sharply expressed by the strictly anti-apocalyptic definition of the Babylonian teacher Samuel of the first half of the third century, which is often referred to in the Talmud: "The only difference between this aeon and the Days of the Messiah is the subjection [of Israel] to the nations."<sup>18</sup> This obviously polemical utterance provides the cue for a tendency with which we



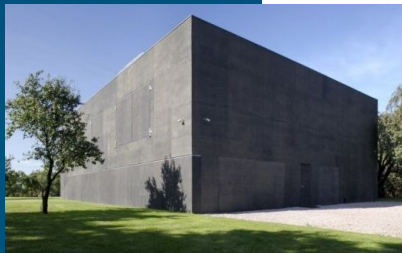
# Tension: Halakha vs Messianism

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The relationship between the Jewish *Halakhab* and Messianism is indeed filled with such tension. On the one hand, Messianic utopianism presents itself as the completion and perfection of *Halakhab*. It is to perfect what cannot yet find expression in the *Halakhab* as the law of an unredeemed world. Thus, for example, only in Messianic times will all those parts of the law which are not realizable under the conditions of the exile become capable of fulfillment. And thus there seems to be no antagonism created at



From the point of view of the *Halak-*  
*hab*, to be sure, Judaism appears as a well-ordered house, and it  
is a profound truth that a well-ordered house is a dangerous  
thing. Something of Messianic apocalypticism penetrates into this  
house; perhaps I can best describe it as a kind of anarchic breeze.  
A window is open through which the winds blow in, and it is not  
quite certain just what they bring in with them. As vital as this  
anarchic airing may have been for the house of the law, it is cer-  
tainly easy to understand the reticence and misgivings with which  
other significant representatives of *Halakhab* regarded everything  
that makes up Messianic utopianism.



As long as Messianism appeared only as an abstract hope, as an element totally deferred to the future which had no living significance for the life of the Jew in the present, the opposition between the essentially conservative rabbinic and the never completely defined Messianic authority, which was to be estab-

But whenever there was an actual eruption of such hope, that is to say, in every historical hour in which the Messianic idea entered the mind as a power with direct influence, the tension which exists between these two forms of religious authority immediately became noticeable.



# Opposition to Political Zionism = Sabbateanism



Even when they did not say so explicitly, the Orthodox opponents of Zionism saw it as a direct threat to traditional ways of thought—to nothing less, that is, than the theological interpretation of Jewish history—and not only to traditional practices. No wonder, then, that the issue of the relationship between Zionism and messianism soon became a central question: no longer confined to the realm of intuitive aversion and protest, it now became a subject for direct debate and eloquent ideological formulation.

To some, even the earliest initiatives of the Hibbat Zion movement—a precursor to political Zionism—evoked old echoes of false messianism. “They are a new sect like that of Shabbatai Zevi, may the names of evil-doers rot”—fulminated the rabbi of Brisk, Joseph Baer Soloveichik (1889).<sup>7</sup> Ten years later, following in his father’s footsteps, his great son, Rabbi Hayyim Soloveichik, was equally unsparing in his castigation of the new Zionist movement: “Regarding the ‘Zionist sect,’ which has now banded and united together by force . . . Have they not a bad reputation in their own places, and is not their purpose to uproot the fundamentals of [our] religion—and to this end also to take control of all the Jewish communities . . . The people of Israel should take care not to join a venture that threatens their souls, to destroy religion, and is a stumbling block to the

## רב קוק - שמונה קבצים

לפעמים יש צורך בהעברה על דברי תורה, ואין בדור מי שיוכל להראות את הדרך, בא הענין על ידי התפרצות. ומכל מקום יותר טוב הוא לעולם שיבוא ענין כזה על ידי שגגה, ובזה מונח היסוד של מוטב שיהיו שוגגין ואל יהיו מזידין. רק כשהנבואה שרויה בישראל אפשר לתקן ענין כזה על ידי הוראת שעה, ואז נעשה בדרך היתר ומצוה בגלוי. ועל ידי סתימת אור הנבואה, נעשה תיקון זה על ידי פרצה, שמדאבת את הלב מצד חיצוניותה, ומשמחת אותו מצד פנימיותה.

"Sometimes when there is a necessity to transgress the words of the Torah, and there is no-one in the generation who can lead the way, the matter comes to an explosion. In any case, it is better for the world that this matter will evolve unintentionally, based upon the ruling, "better they be unintentional sinners rather than intentional". Only when prophecy rests among the Jewish people is it possible to decree about a matter like this in an emergency decree, and then it will be in a permissible way and a clear mitzvah. But if (today) there is no prophecy, this correction is done by a long-term breach which depresses the heart because of it's externity but gladdens because of its interior (goal).



# What are the Lessons for Jews today?

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Does Religious Zionism share any similarities

With Sabbatianism?

How is it similar and different?

"ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו"???





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## Jacob Katz

The dangers inherent in the intimate connection between Zionism and messianism are thus palpable. To meet them, some have argued that Zionism can and should be vindicated without resort to such irrational backing. Arguments of this kind have been marshaled to counter the growing claims made by movements like Gush Emunim, but the arguments themselves are not new. As early as 1929 the great scholar of Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem, protested on behalf of “thousands of Zionists” against the blurring of boundaries between the political aims of Zionism and the religious expectations of Jewish messianism. Since then, Scholem repeatedly confirmed his profound opposition to such enterprises—an opposition that comes with special point from one who has dedicated his life to the study of the irrational dimensions of Judaism and has even been motivated in his scholarship by his personal attachment to the project of national revival. Aware of the misguided potentialities of irrational messianism as demonstrated by the seventeenth-century false messiah Sabbatai Şevi, and by the movement bearing his name, Scholem warned of similar dangers to modern-day Zionism.

The parallelism between Sabbateanism and Zionism was and is a recurring theme in the historical evaluation of Zionism, especially among its opponents. For the late Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the most consistent antagonist of Zionism in the last generation, Zionism and Sabbateanism were veritable synonyms. Since the ingathering into the Holy Land and

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the regaining of Jewish political independence had taken place without divine intervention or confirmation, as prescribed by traditional messianic sources, Zionism for Rabbi Teitelbaum represented an even greater usurping force than had the movement of Sabbatai Şevi.