“And let no one suspect me of saying that these words are against the Ari”: Traditional, Zoharic and Lurianic Conceptions in Rabbi Shmuel ben-Zaken from Fez’s Thought

# A. Introduction

A few studies have been devoted to the reception of Zoharic literature in Morocco and the spread of Lurianic Kabbalah among the learned circles there.[[1]](#footnote-1) These studies mostly focused on Kabbalistic circles, personalities, and texts.[[2]](#footnote-2) They did not examine the influence of these corpora on the rabbis of Morocco who were not established Kabbalists and whose works were not Kabbalistic. The exception is Moshe Hallamish’s brief comment that there were some Moroccan sages who, although they did not belong to the Kabbalistic movement, nevertheless cited him in their words, because he was perceived by them as a condition source.[[3]](#footnote-3) To paint a more complete picture of the acceptance of the Zohar literature and Lurianic Kabbalah among the educated class in Morocco, it is appropriate to consider their influence also on non-Kabbalist personalities and texts. Filling this lacuna will contribute to completing the picture of Jewish thought in Morocco in modern times and the intellectual history of the community.

Elsewhere, I expanded a bit on the relationship of North African sages (who were not Kabbalists and their works were not Kabbalistic) to the Zohar literature in the generations after the expulsion from Spain before Lurianic Kabbalah spread there.[[4]](#footnote-4) I pointed out that they referred to the Zohar as ‘Midrash Zohar’ or ‘Midrash Rashbi’ because they considered it to be a Tannaic source. Although they often quoted from Zoharic literature, they possessed an esoteric understanding of the Kabbalistic body of knowledge. They therefore sometimes did not fully explain their statements and made use of language that limited the Kabbalistic knowledge to those who understood or could complete the knowledge from other Kabbalistic works. Nevertheless, I did not find extensive expressions of appreciation for the authority of the Zohar, nor expression of an approach that sanctifies the non-semantic elements of the Zohar and argues that engaging in the study of it, or even merely repeating its words, has a theurgic influence. I also pointed out that these writings often offered a Kabbalistic interpretation alongside a non-Kabbalistic interpretation, but did not differentiate between the different proposals or explain how they coexist.

In the present article, I will take advantage of the explicit and unusual contrast drawn by Shmuel ben-Zaken between the traditional and the Zoharic conceptions of human perfection and his resolution of the apparent contradiction. Moreover, since ben-Zaken was active at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he also encountered clashes between the traditional conception and the Lurianic one. In other words, a study of ben-Zaken’s work will familiarize us with the mechanisms of accommodation of the Zoharic literature among scholars who were not Kabbalists and to expand the scholarly discourse on the penetration of the Lurianic Kabbalah into Moroccan scholars of this type.

Shmuel Ben-Zakan was one of the sages of Fez. Yaakov Moshe Toledano estimated that he lived between the years 1670-1733, and Dan Manor estimates that he was still alive in 1737. According to Toledano, his teachers were Yehuda Uziel (1620-1690) and Yehuda ben ‘Attar (1655-1733), but Manor claims that it is impossible that the former was his teacher and argues that only the latter was. Ben-Zaken authored several books: *Gefen Poria,* a commentary on several Talmudic tractates together with several halakhic responsa, and *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, whose first part is a commentary on the Torah, and second part is comprised of sermons for various events and commentaries on the Prophets and the Writings. The two books remained unpublished manuscripts for many years and were only published at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ben Zion Koenka, the editor of the books (among the senior rabbis of the Sephardic community in Jerusalem and the editor and founder of the Torah journal *HaMe’asef*) wrote short introductions to each alongside introductions by Toledano, and the author’s introductions. Ben-Zaken implies that he also wrote a halakhic composition named *Pri Megadim* which has apparently been lost.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Ben-Zaken was not part of the Kabbalistic circles in Morocco during his time, and his aforementioned writings were not Kabbalistic compositions. However, like many others of his time and place, he quoted many times from the Zoharic literature,[[6]](#footnote-6) the Safed Kabbalists, and others, including Moshe Alsheikh, Avraham Galanti, Shlomo Alkabetz and Yeshaya Horvitz.[[7]](#footnote-7) He also referred to medieval thinkers such as Maimonides, Hasdai Crescas, Joseph Albo, Isaac Abarbanel, Isaac Arama, and others.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In the following section, I will present ben-Zaken’s traditional conception of human perfection. In the section following this, I will present the confrontation between this conception and the Zoharic one on the subject, and in the section thereafter, I will present the conflict between the traditional conception and the Lurianic one.

# B.

Human perfection was extensively discussed in Jewish thought during the Middle Ages.[[9]](#footnote-9) After the expulsion from Spain, Jewish thinkers and commentators continued to do so, especially when in eulogies for men and women from their community.[[10]](#footnote-10) Elsewhere, I have pointed out that one of the prevalent conceptions of human perfection among North African intellectuals of the early modern period was what Yair Lorberbaum has called ‘halakhic religiosity of obedience and servitude.’[[11]](#footnote-11)

According to Lorberbaum, those who held this view believed that obedience to God and servitude to Him are what give a person religious integrity, such that “accepting the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,” that is, submissive submission to God through obedience to His decrees, is the purpose of religious life. The foundation of this idea lies in a theological approach focused on God and His exalted sovereignty and the meaning of standing before Him. This approach emphasizes an anthropomorphic theology according to which God is like a commanding king who imposes his yoke on his creatures and subjugates them. The mild version of this form of religiosity does not negate the reasons for commandments, but advocates that these should not motivate a person to fulfill commandments; a person is required to distinguish between the reason for the commandment and the motive to perform it. Therefore, even the fulfillment of commandments whose rationale, according to Maimonides, is “manifest and the benefits of their performance in this world are known” (*Hilkhot Me‘ilah*, 8:8) requires blind obedience. In other words, the consciousness of submission and servitude should be expressed not only when a person fulfills the *hukim* type of commandments (or refrains from such prohibitions), but also when he fulfills the *mishpatim* type of commandments (or alternatively refrains from prohibitions of this type). Lorberbaum finds this approach already in Rabbinic literature[[12]](#footnote-12) and identifies it in the thinking of Rashi and other medieval Ashkenazi rabbis.[[13]](#footnote-13) At the end of the period, he claims it can be found in Yitzhak Abarbanel.[[14]](#footnote-14) As stated above, I have elsewhere noted that this conception continued to exist in North Africa during the early modern period. For example, Yehuda Uziel, Shlomo Duran, Yehuda Ayash, Makhluf ‘Amar, and others all accepted this idea. Ben-Zaken also endorsed it in his commentary on the verse “The Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron; so they did” (Exodus 12:28).

When they performed the mitzvah (commandment) that the Lord had commanded, they would say, “As the Lord, my God, commanded.” Even if it [the commandment] was rational and they would have done so without the command from their own reason, they still made their action dependent on the will of their Creator, based on what they, [the Sages], may their memory be a blessing said, “A man should not say I have no desire for pig meat, etc.”... They made the thing dependent on the will of the commandment.[[15]](#footnote-15)

This idea that human perfection is acquired by doing God’s will appears in ben-Zaken’s eulogy for a woman, where he sought to reconcile it with two other Kabbalistic approaches according to which human perfection involves other elements. He opened the eulogy with the assertion that the perfection of a person is not contingent on the fulfillment of the entire Torah, but can also be achieved by fulfilling one part of it. This discussion echoes Yosef Albo, whom Ben-Zakan mentions subsequently, that perfection is achieved by fulfilling a mitzvah, meaning to fulfill God’s will without any external intentions.[[16]](#footnote-16) According to Albo, this end is already achieved by the complete fulfillment of a single commandment. The multitude of commandments provides multiple ways to achieve this goal and thus makes its attainment easier.[[17]](#footnote-17) In ben-Zaken’s words:

For the Torah grants perfection in its parts... and even though we have seen that the Lord commanded 613 commandments, [that is] as the words of the Tanna: The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give merit to Israel, therefore, He expanded the Torah and commandments for them... Do not think that what the Lord has multiplied its ways will be a stumbling block for you, saying “Who can fulfill all these?” No, but even with one of them you will merit... as the author of the *Ikkarim* wrote that reason so decrees that surely He did not give us the Torah for revenge, God forbid.[[18]](#footnote-18)

This is how a woman achieves perfection, even though she is exempt from some time-bound commandments, she is obligated in other commandments. As mentioned above, human perfection does not depend upon the fulfillment of all 613 commandments but is achieved even by the partial fulfillment of them. Moreover, a woman is also obligated in all the Torah’s prohibitions, and refraining from transgressing them also manifests a person’s consciousness to do the Creator’s will by refraining from doing what he commanded not to do. This claim also echoes Albo in its emphasis on the centrality of intention in fulfilling a mitzvah. Since intent is primary, fulfilling “Thou shall not” commandments also imparts perfection to a person, because the proper intent, the fear of God, applies to them as well.[[19]](#footnote-19) This time ben-Zaken did not mention Albo:

And since this is so, do not despair about the matter of women and say, that since they are not involved in the study of Torah and the fulfillment of most of its commandments, they will not see God in the Land of Life. Not so, because for every commandment has the power to do a lot, and they are [obligated] in many time-independent commandments... and added for her is a part in the prohibitions alongside them. And do not think to say that a person will not attain perfection by just sitting and not committing a sin, this is not so. For when he refrains on account of God’s commandment, as they [our sages] of blessed memory say, a person should not say “I have no desire for pig meat” etc. In this he is doing the will of God, as it is written in Genesis Rabbah, what difference does it make to God whether one slaughters from the nape or the throat, see in the *Guide*, part III, and in the Novellae of Rashba, chapter “He who is sleeping.” For this is a great principle in our possession about the reasons for the commandments – to fulfill the word of God, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws. I have declared and we will do His will.[[20]](#footnote-20)

# C.1.

The discussion could have ended here: the perfection of man is achieved by fulfilling God’s will, this purpose is also achieved by even partial fulfillment of the commandments of the Torah, both positive commandments and prohibitions. The abundance of commandments is intended to make things easier for a person (not harder) and to create many and varied opportunities for achieving the goal. Therefore, women’s capacity for achieving perfection is not significantly inhibited, even though she is exempt from many positive time-bound commandments.

However, Ben-Zakan’s eulogy does not end at this stage. He then addresses a view that holds otherwise, and his language indicates that this is a Kabbalistic view, and more precisely a Zoharite view, “While the light of God, Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai – to whom the Zohar is traditionally attributed), may his memory be a blessing, has shone upon us and we know faithfully that the commandments are necessary in themselves to achieve perfection.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

In Morocco, there was a long-standing tradition of engagement in Kabbalah since the mid-thirteenth century,[[22]](#footnote-22) and agents of Kabbalist culture involved in editing the Zohar collections in Italy even sought to complete their editions based on Zoharic manuscripts from Fez.[[23]](#footnote-23) According to Idel, after the expulsion, two tracks of Spanish Kabbalah were formed, one European and the other North African. He argues that even Kabbalists who were in Morocco for only a short period, like Judah Hayat and Abraham Saba, had a great influence on the development of Kabbalah in the region, and descendants of the exiles from Spain such as Abraham Adrotiel, Simon Lavi, Joseph Alashkar, and Judah Haliwa wrote significant Kabbalistic works. Furthermore, Idel claims, the most significant change that occurred following the arrival of the many exiles was the acceptance of the Zoharic literature as the main text of the Kabbalah and its transformation into canonical literature.[[24]](#footnote-24) The *Zohar* also played a central role at that time in the Kabbalah circle that operated in Dar‘a around the figure of Moses Maimon Elbaz.[[25]](#footnote-25) As stated above, in the generations after the expulsion from Spain, even the scholars of the Maghreb, who did not belong to the Kabbalistic movement, quoted from the Zohar literature because they perceived it as a Tannaitic source. According to Huss, the reliance on the Zohar and the emphasis on its authority practiced among Sephardic scholars in the sixteenth century played an important role in the struggle of the Sephardic exiles to gain hegemony in their new places of residence. The Zoharic texts’ accessibility for them and their ability to quote from them strengthened their cultural power and helped them achieve a dominant status. According to Huss, the expatriates who settled in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa’s frequent assertions of the authority and precedence of the *Zohar*, as well as their frequent quotations of it were a means of overcoming the other philosophical and Kabbalistic schools they encountered.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, not all the descendants of the Jews expelled from Spain who settled in North Africa can be associated with this trend. Many who were not Kabbalists and did not compose Kabbalistic works, nevertheless made use of Kabbalistic literature and adopted Kabbalistic content and concepts, alongside their use of philosophical literature and philosophical content and terms. As mentioned above, they mostly did not address the very different worldviews of their sources and simply expressed themselves at different times one way or the other, or presented two parallel conceptions (one Kabbalistic and the other not) without attempting to resolve the differences.[[27]](#footnote-27) Ben-Zaken can be numbered among those Moroccan sages who were not Kabbalists and yet resorted to Zoharic literature, and like his peers, he mostly did not distinguish between the different approaches, with one exception, which is the eulogy at the center of this study.

Ben-Zaken did not elaborate on the perspective in question but appears to be referring to Kabbalistic discourse that from its inception, and especially since the Zohar, showed a great deal of interest in the fulfillment of the commandments and ascribed to them, in their details and subtleties, with many meanings, including some radical ones: mitzvot draw abundance into this world, or between the Sephirot, or the fulfillment of commandments influences the divinity, and more. This discourse continued in North Africa in the generations after the expulsion, as can be seen from Shimon Ibn Lavi’s commentary on the Zohar, *Qetem Paz*.[[28]](#footnote-28) Ben-Zaken nevertheless believed that this Zoharic conception of the commandments does not contradict the traditional conception, because one must distinguish between the reasons for the commandments and the motive for their fulfillment. It is the latter that leads to the perfection of man and not the theurgical implications of the performance of the commandments (service as a need of the On High).

Since the divine light of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, may his memory be a blessing, has shone upon us and we confidently know that the commandments are inherently necessary for achieving perfection, nevertheless, this introduction does not fall away at all, but rather both are the case, for we have a great general principle that the reward from God does not depend on the value of the action but on the value of the person acting. Everything depends on the intentions of the heart; therefore, we learn from this that it is not the act itself that is primary, but the intention of the heart in doing God’s will.[[29]](#footnote-29)

At the core of ben-Zaken’s eulogy stands the traditional conception that human perfection is achieved by intending to do the will of the Creator. However, as someone who was active after the Zoharic literature was already accepted as canonical (in North Africa and in general), he felt the need to refer to the widespread Kabbalistic approach. He was aware of the apparent tension between the two approaches, and therefore, in contrast to many of his peers, explicitly addressed it rather than ignoring it or assuming that the approaches complement each other without explaining how.

# 2.3.

This was not the only Kabbalistic approach that ben-Zaken chose to openly and explicitly confront. Later in the eulogy, he presented also the Lurianic approach. According to Huss, following the formation of the Zoharic canon in the second half of the sixteenth century, the way the Kabbalists established their authority and cultural power changed. It was no longer based on their possession and citation of Zoharic texts, but through their mastery of the text’s meaning, namely the interpretation of the Zohar. The interpretation of the Zohar became a central genre in Kabbalah literature, and the hermeneutic field became an arena where the struggle for hegemony in the Kabbalistic creative field took place. The undisputed victor in this struggle was the Kabbalah of the Ari, or Lurianic Kabbalah.[[30]](#footnote-30)

According to Lurianic Kabbalah, “repairing” the world is a human task. By keeping the commandments (and his prayers) one restores the harmony that was disrupted by the primal catastrophe, “the breaking of the vessels,” and by the forces of evil that arose from it. Moreover, through the fulfillment of commandments, a person has the power to unite the “sparks” that were dispersed following the sin of the first man and to raise them to their true place. The Ari developed an approach wherein there is a connection between the 613 commandments and the limbs of the human body and proposed that the soul, which was the original form of a person before his exile into the body, also has 613 parts.[[31]](#footnote-31) By performing the commandments, a person restores his spiritual structure and redraws it through his actions. The conclusion this Lurianic idea leads to is, in the words of Gershom Scholem, that “since every part corresponds to a commandment, the solution of the task demands the complete fulfillment of all the 613 commandments.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

By the end of the sixteenth century, the influence of the Safed Kabbalists had grown and became dominant. Some Kabbalists from Dara’a immigrated to the land of Israel over the century, settled in Safed, and even held an important place in the circles of Kabbalists there.[[33]](#footnote-33) At the same time, emissaries from Israel who visited the Moroccan Jewish community brought with them Kabbalistic literature that originated in the land of Israel; Abraham Azulai (1570-1643), for example, became acquainted with Moses Cordovero’s *Pardes Rimonim* while he was still in Fez.[[34]](#footnote-34) In the literature that developed in North Africa beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, there are notable references to the works of Safed Kabbalists such as Moshe Cordovero, Moshe Alsheich, Shlomo Alkabetz, Elisha Gallico, Eliezer Azkari, Shmuel Ozida, and others.[[35]](#footnote-35) According to Yosef Avivi, the first Lurianic texts were brought to Morocco in the middle of the seventeenth century, by the emissary Elisha Haim Ashkenazi (father of Nathan of Gaza) during his travels there in 1650 or 1662.[[36]](#footnote-36) Little by little, Lurianic Kabbalah supplanted the Kabbalah of Cordovero in Morocco.[[37]](#footnote-37) Circles of Kabbalists focused on Lurianic Kabbalah began to spread in Morocco at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Foremost among them was the circle of Jacob Maragi in Tetouan, whose peers and students encouraged him to write a Lurianic commentary on the *Zohar*. It is a comprehensive commentary but only a small part of it (Vienna, 1887) was published until recently. The entire work, *Emet LeYaakov,* has now been published (Jerusalem, 2021). Some of the Kabbalists from Tetouan, like Abraham ben-Musa (1660?- 1733), immigrated to Sali where they came into contact with other Kabbalists such as Moshe Ibn Tzur. Ben-Musa wrote glosses on the books *Otzarot Hayyim,* *Etz Hayyim, Sefer HaKavanot,* and *Mavo She‘arim*. Ibn Tzur composed *Me‘arat Sedeh HaMakhpelah* (Jerusalem 5688), a poetic synopsis of *Otzarot Hayyim*. Another significant center was in Marrakech, led by Abraham Azulai (b. 1741, who was in contact with Abraham ben-Musa). Among Azulai’s colleagues and students were Shlomo Amar (b. 1735), Yaakov Pinto (b. 1765), and Shalom Bouzaglo (1700-1780). The last is primarily known for his comprehensive Lurianic commentary on the *Zohar* *Mikdash Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1796), which is partially based on the interpretations of his teachers and colleagues in Marrakech.
They engaged in Lurianic Kabbalah also in Fez, where Moshe Ben-Moshe (1695?-1758) attested that he acquired his knowledge on the subject from Mordekhai Buskila. These Lurianic Kabbalists mostly wrote commentaries on the writings of the Ari and Rabbi Hayyim Vital, some of which were published in the book *Makom Binah* (Salonika, 1733), and some that have been preserved in manuscript.[[38]](#footnote-38)

It seems that in light of the spread of Lurianic Kabbalah in Morocco (and in the Jewish diaspora in general) and the acceptance of the Lurianic concept that all 613 commandments are necessary for achieving individual perfection, ben-Zaken felt the need to clarify and emphasize that the idea to which he subscribes and frequently revisited in his eulogy – that a person’s perfection is achieved by fulfilling God’s will, and therefore even by partially fulfilling the 613 commandments – does not contradict the Lurianic view. According to him, the two ideas can coexist; this time his solution is embedded in another Kabbalistic concept – reincarnation.

And let no one suspect me of saying that these words are against the Ari of blessed memory as it is found in his writings that there is no way for a person to achieve perfection except in all the 613 commandments, not one of them is missing. But my words will fit him from a certain perspective, according to what he, of blessed memory, said, about the verse “twice, three times, with mortals [to bring back their souls from the Pit so that they may see the light of life]” (Job 33:29-30). One who did not perform even a single mitzvah in his first, second, or third, reincarnation cannot be rehabilitated, but if he sets his mind to do a good deed in one of these three then He reincarnates him until he accomplishes enough, and then he will return to God who made him. נמצא מי היה לו סיבה בזה יחידית . The result is that these and these are words of the living God and they fit together. We may conclude that the Torah provides perfection even regarding the part of it that is prohibitions and all the more so regarding the positive commandments.... in a manner that is not dependent on action, but on intention, even if it be a transgression for the sake of good.[[39]](#footnote-39)

With the publication of the Zohar, the term *gilgul neshamot*, the reincarnation of souls, became widely used. Ben-Zaken’s approach actually reduces the significance of reincarnation, as not all souls are reincarnated, and not all actions require rebirth in a new body; in fact, there is only one commandment that its avoidance leads to reincarnation as punishment – the commandment of procreation. In contrast, in the later layers of the Zoharic literature, in *Tikkunei Zohar* and *Ra‘aya Mehemna*, the approach to reincarnation found is more radical, and reincarnation occurs for anyone who has not completed the fulfillment of all the commandments. Each person is reincarnated for each commandment he has not fulfilled to repair the spiritual limb damaged by the sin of his body.[[40]](#footnote-40) Some Kabbalists no longer saw reincarnation as a punishment but as an opportunity to correct sins and they therefore believed that the number of reincarnations is not limited, and a person can be reincarnated a thousand times until he corrects and completes himself. Others held a more restrictive view, in which reincarnation was limited to only three times. Ben-Zaken apparently adopted a compromise position according to which a person who has not been able to fulfill all 613 commandments continues to return in a cycle of reincarnation until completing all of them. If he does not bother to fulfill at least one commandment in the first three reincarnations, then he will not have another opportunity. However, if he completes some of the missing commandments in his reincarnation, then infinite reincarnations stand at his disposal until he completes all 613. In other words, according to ben-Zaken, there are two planes for achieving human perfection, which fit both the traditional and the Lurianic approaches: within a given lifetime, it is up to the person to achieve his or her perfection by doing God’s will, while over all of his or her reincarnations in this world, he or she is to fulfill all 613 commandments.

As a scholar active in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Lurianic Kabbalah had thoroughly penetrated North African communities, ben-Zaken felt the need to clear himself from the suspicion that his traditional approach did not fit the Lurianic approach. This time too, he chose to openly address the apparent contradiction between them and resolve it. He did not ignore it or assume that the approaches complement one another without explaining how, as many of his peers did.

In summary, Zoharic and Lurianic Kabbalah penetrated deeply into the Maghreb and influenced scholars and texts that did not have a Kabbalistic orientation in the early modern period. Ben-Zaken’s approach to human perfection reflects the complex relationship of the rabbis in the Maghreb to Zoharic and Lurianic Kabbalah. Ben-Zaken (like his peers) was influenced by them and internalized them, but this did not cause him to abandon traditional approaches, nor did regard the Kabbalistic approaches as the only option. The eulogy discussed here is an almost unique expression of the awareness possessed (and expressed) by a North African rabbi who was not a Kabbalist of the conflict (apparently or not) between these approaches and opens for us a small window into his thought processes and concerns.

1. For comprehensive reviews see: Moshe Idel, “The Kabbalah in Morocco: a Survey,” in *Morocco-Jews and Art in a Muslim Land*, ed. Vivian B. Mann (New York: Merrell, 2000), 105-124. Moshe Hallamish, *The Kabbalah in North Africa* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2001) (Hebrew), 14-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, Meir Benayahu, “Rabbi Abraham ben Moses and his son Rabbi Moses: The Leading Figures of Lurianic Kabbalah in North Africa,” *Mikhael* 5 (1978) (Hebrew), 29-53; Moshe Idel, “R’ Yehuda Haliva and his book *Zofenat Pa‘aneah*,” *Shalem* 4 (1984) (Hebrew), 119-148; Rachel Elior, “Kabbalists of Dar‘a,” *Pe‘amim* 24 (1985) (Hebrew), 36-73; Yosef Alashkar, *Zofenat Pa‘aneah*, Introduction by Moshe Idel (Jerusalem: Misgav, 1991) (Hebrew); Boaz Huss, *‘Al Adnei Paz’: The Kabbalah of Rabbi Shimon Ibn Lavi* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000) (Hebrew); Dan Manor, “Rabbi Moses Bar Maimon (Elbaz) – Kabbalistic Interpretation and its Sources,” *Kabbalah* 7 (2002) (Hebrew) 199-223; Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Magnes,) 2005 (Hebrew) 224-231; Ariel Evan Mayse, “Or haHayyim: Creativity, Tradition, and Mysticism in the Torah Commentary of R. Hayyim ibn Attar,” *Conversation* 13 (2012) 68-89. Further studies will be mentioned later where relevant. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Halamish, *The Kabbalah*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Michal Ohana, Between Three Cities – Jewish Thought in North Africa After the Expulsion from Spain (in print) (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Shmuel ben Zaken, *Pri ‘Etz HaGan* with an introduction by the editor, Jerusalem, 1904 (Hebrew); loc.cit., “A Few Comments About the Late Author” (Hebrew); Dan Manor, “Man in Rabbi Shmuel ben Zaken’s Teachings,” Issachar ben Ami (editor), *Studies in the Culture of North African Jews*, Jerusalem 1991 (Hebrew), 133- 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See for example, *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, part II: “And as it is written in the Zohar parashat VaYigash,” 1a; “As explained in the Zohar, parashat Bo,” 4a; “It is already well-known that which is written in the Zohar,” 10b; “As explained at length in the parashat VaYishlah,” 21a. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for example, *loc. cit.* 5a; 11b; 16a. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, for example, *loc. cit.* 2b; 14b; 21a. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, Happiness in Premodern Judaism – Virtue, Knowledge and Well-being (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003); Yehuda Halper (ed.), Pursuit of Happiness in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Thought: Studies dedicated to Steven Harvey, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example, the eulogies of Israel Nagarah, Moshe Almoshninu, Moshe Albilda and Yaakov Metlon (from the Ottoman Empire) and Shaul Sirero and Yitzhak Tsarfati (from North Africa). For precise references see: Michal Ohana, “‘Through What Do Women Merit?’ – Women’s Ultimate Perfection and Their Reward in the World-to-Come, in the Thought of Rabbi Yizhak Zarfati,” *Daat* 81 (2016) (Hebrew), 252- 277, footnote 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Yair Lorberbaum, “Halakhic Religiosity of Mystery and Transcendence, Halakhic Religiosity of Obedience and Servitude, and Other Forms of Rejecting Reasons of the Commandments,” *Dinei Yisrael* 32 (2018) (Hebrew), 69-114; Yair Lorberbaum, “‘What Would Please Them Most is that the Intellect Would Not Find a Meaning for the Commandments and the Prohibitions,’ – On Transcending the Rationales of the Commandments: A Close Reading of *The Guide of the Perplexed* III 31,” *Daat* 77 (2014) (Hebrew), 17-50; Yair Lorberbaum, “‘To Do the will of His Creator... For in This One Will Attain Happiness’ – Halakhic Religiosity of Obedience and Servitude in Jewish communities in North Africa in the Early Modern Age” (in print). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Sifra* 10:22; b.Kiddushin 31a. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Rashi’s commentary on the Torah: Exodus 15, 26; Leviticus 19, 19. Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud: Megillah 25a. Moshe MiKotzi, *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, positive commandment 3 (at the end). Rabbi Yaakov, son of the Rabbenu Asher, *Arbaah Turim*, *Yoreh De‘ah*, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Torah* vol. 1, Jerusalem 2007, 488. It seems to me that Yosef Albo, at least at the exoteric level of his writing, holds the view that human perfection is achieved through awareness of God’s will, as will become clear shortly. According to Ehrlich, Albo’s esoteric understanding is that the human perfection of a person is defined as the attainment of intellectual knowledge of the world, see Dror Ehrlich, *The Thought of Rabbi Joseph Albo: Esoteric Writing in the Late Middle Ages* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2010) (Hebrew), 152-175. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, Part I, 46b.
 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “The intellectual activity that we said will give spiritual perfection by connecting [intention] to action, is not the intellectual grasp of the intelligibles, but it is that the performer of a physical action will direct it to the service of the Lord in its performance, with the intention of doing the good and the right in the eyes of the Lord, not for his own enjoyment, and not with any other intention at all.” Joseph Albo, *Sefer HaIkkarim*, III:5, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “And it has been explained according to what we said, that a single commandment can suffice to grant human perfection; but the fact that many commandments are found in the Torah, this was not necessary, it was rather for the better so that no man from Israel is missed that he does not merit the World-to-Come through one of them, whichever it may be,” Joseph Albo, *Sefer HaIkkarim*, III:29, 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, Part II, 35b. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Also the avoidance of doing evil deeds because of fear of the Lord will yield perfection in the soul,” Joseph Albo, *Sefer HaIkkarim*, III:27, 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, Part II, 35b. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Loc. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Georges Vajda, “La doctrine astrologique de Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka.” In *Homenaje a’ Milla’s- Valicrosa,* vol. II (Barcelona, 1956) 483-500; Moshe Idel, “The Beginnings of Kabbalah in North Africa: A Lost Document by Rabbi Yehuda ben Nissim Ibn Malka” *Pe’amim* 43 (1990) (Hebrew): 4-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Boaz Huss, Like the Radiance of the Sky: Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of its Symbolic Value (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2008), 118-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Idel, *The Kabbalah*, 112-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Loc. cit*., 117- 118. According to Idel, the *Zohar* was not at the center of interest of the other Kabbalistic circle that operated in Dar‘a whose central figure was David Halevi. For more on the Kabbalist circle in Dar‘a, see Elior, “Kabbalists of Dar‘a”; Garb, *Manifestations of Power*, 224-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Boaz Huss, Yudith Nave. *The Zohar: Reception and Impact* (Liverpool:Liverpool University Press, 2016), 133-138 https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhn0btp. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ohana, Between Three Cities (In Print). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Boaz Huss, Sockets of Fine Gold: The Kabbalah of Rabi Shim'on Ibn Lavi (Jerusalem:Magnes, 2000) (Hebrew), 192 - 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, 35b - 36a. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Huss, *The Zohar Reception*, 155-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This idea has roots in the Talmud (*Makkot* 23b), and it was discussed extensively in the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets and Writings*, *remez* 937). The Zoharic literature also contains an approach that suggests the existence of a link between the human organs and the 613 commandments (*Zohar* Part I, 170 b). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), 279. See also: Moshe Hallamish, “Everyone, One Commandment and One Letter,” *Daat* 71 (2011) (Hebrew), 25-52, especially 30-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Abraham David, “The Ties Between North African Jews and the Land of Israel in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” *Pe‘amim* 24 (1985) (Hebrew), 74-86, especially 79-81. On the influences and similarities between the center in Dara‘a and the Safed center, see: Jonathan Garb, “Magic and Mysticism: Between North Africa and Israel,” *Pe‘amim* 85 (2001) (Hebrew), 121-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Abraham Azulai, *Or HaChama* (Thessaloniki, 5622), introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ohana, *Between Three Cities* (in print). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Yosef Avivi, *Qabbala Luriana* (Jerusalem:Bet Tzvi, 2007) (Hebrew), 746-748. Scholem (*Major Trends*, 287-288) had determined that Lurianic Kabbalah spread at the beginning of the 17th century. However, Gries and Idel postponed it to the second half of the 17th century. See: Ze’ev Gries*, Conduct Literature (Rgimen Vitae): Its History and Place in The Life of Beshtian Hasidism* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1990) (Hebrew), 80-91; Moshe Idel, “‘One From a City and Two From a Family’: A New Look at the Dissemination of the Kabbalah of the Ari and the Sabbateans,” *Pe‘amim* 44 (1990) (Hebrew), 30-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hallamish, *Kabbalah*, 137-138. According to Hallamish, Lurianic influence can already be found in Moshe Elbaz’s commentary on the prayers *Heikhal HaKadosh* (Amsterdam, 1633). Elbaz was active the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries in the area of Dar‘a. See Manor, “Rabbi Moses Bar Maimon (Elbaz),” 218-222, who rejects this possibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. On the spread of Lurianic Kabbalah in Morocco, see: Benayahu, “Rabbi Abraham ben Moses and his son Rabbi Moses,” 10-14,21-26, 44-45, 70-76; Idel, *Kabbalah*, 121, Hallamish, *Kabbalah*, 138- 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Pri ‘Etz HaGan*, vol.2, 36a. And see also ח??, 45a [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See: Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik,1981) (Hebrew), 319- 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)