I.

In 1731, an extensive, two volume work was printed in Smyrna. The anonymous kabbalistic-halakhic work, which dealt with ethical matters, was entitled Hemdat Yamim (hereafter: HY), and was published, and at least partially, edited by Israel Jacob Algazi. It very soon became one of the most influential and controversial books in 18th century Judaism. The structure of the daily ritual life that the author modeled had a profound impact on the Ottoman Jewish world and beyond. The customs and rituals treated in the book became widespread, and HY’s kabbalistic prayers were adopted by many communities and widely reprinted. The book itself was soon reissued in several notable editions. Moreover, the number of pamphlets and *tikkunim* booklets – kabbalistic texts used to recite and practice certain rituals – that were printed on the basis of HY was unprecedented; these also included directions concerning the practices for the Shabbat and the holidays. The importance of this work is summarized by Gershom Scholem: “the most significant account of the life of a pious practitioner of kabbalistic ritual is to be found in the compendious Hemdath Yamim.” Yet the work was also controversial: not long after its publication, it was attacked as consisting of Sabbatean elements in a debate that would last for decades. The fact that the author of the book remained anonymous added to the mystery behind the dispute and to its vociferousness.

The attitudes towards HY within the rabbinic world during the last three centuries has been considerably varied. Among the many stances taken, the position espoused by Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azula (Hida; Jerusalem, 1724 – Livorno, 1806) is of particular interest. The Hida’s approach – a well-known scholar, writer, bibliophile and traveler – is worthy of attention not only thanks to his unparalleled bibliographical and biographical sensibility and curiosity, that led him to make numerous original observations and conclusions. His position is of interest also because it is related to his more general approach to Sabbatean literature, a problem that has troubled many scholars. In this regard, the Hida’s work may shed light on a more fundamental question: the nature of the Sabbatean “heresy” more than one-hundred years after Sabbatai Tsevi’s conversion and death. In other words, the basic question dealt with in this article is not the Hida’s attitude toward HY, but rather the magnitude of the Sabbatean heresy in the second half of the 18th century according to the Hida.

To sharpen this point, in the years immediately following Sabbatai Tsevi’s conversion, the Jewish world was in turmoil, with no clear-cut, universally accepted response to Sabbateanism. Different individuals and groups held different positions, some of them rather ambiguous, but the undisputable fact is that Sabbatianism shook the foundations of the Jewish society in the immediate period after Sabbatai Tsevi’s death. But what was the threatening facet of the Sabbatean movement - if indeed it was still considered a threat - in the eyes of the rabbinic stratum, more than one hundred years after the dramatic events of the 1660’s? By this time, the exegetic dust had already settled on Tsevi’s works, and the (crypto-)Sabbateans were well contained within institutionalized Jewish Life. More than a century after its origination, both Sabbateanism’s Messianic beliefs, and the antinomian fears their thought evoked – if these were ever the main issue in the Sabbatean dispute – were already well known, and do not suit the concrete socio-cultural context. Although the Hida never delt directly with the work, nor with the question of the Sabbatean accusations, his response to HY can serve as a key to fathom this affair. The Hida’s perspective on the Sabbatean “heresy” allows us to define Sabbateanism more accurately, and to better place it within its historical context.

I argue that the prism through which the Hida’s attitude toward HY should be approached is his project of shaping, classifying, and organizing the set of practices originating in the school of Rabbi Isaac Luria, the Ari. The acceptance of Luria’s teachings – and the emergence of the genre known as *Arizal* – was rapid, and took place both directly and indirectly, in complex and convoluted ways. But more than the philosophical or theosophical aspects, it was the practical aspects of Lurianic thought that were accepted and developed so rapidly. These include various types of tikkunim, as well as other ritual practices concerning the order of the prayers, public and private worship, as well as approaches to, and rulings on, matters of halakha – particularly those related to daily life and to the cycle of the year. Interestingly, the processing, marketing, distribution, and popularization of Lurianic practices – or pseudo-Lurianic practices, whose association with Luria was merely a figment of the imagination – occurred primarily in the Ashkenazi regions and in Italy. This was the case regarding the copying and distribution of numerous manuscripts, among them: *Naggid U’metzave*, written by the kabbalist Jacob Tsemah, a work dedicated to collecting Lurianic practices; the *Shulchan Arukh Ha’Ari,* a halakhic-kabbalistic manual that appeared in several editions, and other works in this genre; the work of legal-halakhic commentators, such as Abraham Gombiner’s *Magen Avraham,* and subsequent authorities who discussed, and in doing so internalized, the Lurianic practices in the context of halakhic literature; and the intense publication of numerous works of Lurianic ritual practices, prayers and tikkunim. These types of works were not as widely disseminated in the Ottoman Empire, certainly not as printed texts. Luria’s disciples were active in this cultural realm and, as a result, the influence of his teachings was more direct and, to an extent, more locally accepted, particularly in communities residing in the land of Israel or in geographical proximity to it, such as Damascus.

However, the gap between the dissemination of Luria’s teachings in the East and in the West was narrowed considerably in the first half of the eighteenth century, wherein Sabbateanism played a key role. Although Sabbatean thinkers’ attitudes to Lurianic Kabbalah were complex, Sabbateanism led to a massive increase in popular pietistic practices, particularly rituals and practices with Lurianic influence. Sabbateanism also increased the occupation with various types of tikkunim, including *tikkunei teshuva* – penitential rituals – whose Lurianic foundations were evident. But the true revolution in this regard was created by HY, whose importance and influence cannot be overestimated. Two aspects of this multilayered work are especially pertinent in this context: First, HY deals extensively with matters of halakha and kabbalah, and devotes a major section to Kabbalistic and Lurianic practices and tikkunim. Second, as noted above, the influence of HY, especially within the Ottoman Empire and in Italy, was tremendous. Aside from the direct impact of the work, the indirect influence of HY on the contemporary Zeitgeist and paradigms of thought was even greater. Consequently, HY generated a major shift in the Jewish world of Southern Europe regarding meditation, and played a key role in disseminating and popularizing Lurianic practice and conduct.

Shortly after the book's appearance, questions began to surface regarding its possible Sabbatean origin. The first to level these accusations was, not surprisingly, Jacob Emden, whose attack opened a protracted scholarly debate that persists, to an extent, to this day. In appraising this type of halakhic-kabbalistic compilation, the “Sabbatean” / ”non-Sabbatean” binary is not always relevant or productive; what can be said without a doubt is that Sabbatean elements are not lacking in the work, although it is uncertain whether in all cases the author was aware of this, or what his purpose was in citing the Sabbatean elements. Today, thanks to the work of Shmuel Teffilinski and Yechiel Goldhaber, it is possible to identify the author of the book, and to characterize the nature of the work and the manner in which it was composed. It seems that the better part of the text was not an original work, but rather a compilation of texts from a variety of periods and cultural spaces. The author worked to conceal his sources, and blurring these different layers by creating a single, flattened text. As noted, the author-compiler was none other than the editor and publisher, Israel Yakov Algazi. However, nearly all the academic discourse regarding HY, and specifically regarding the text’s Sabbateanism, has been dedicated to the question of the role of Sabbateanism in the work. By focusing on issues of halakha and ritual practices, which form the core of the text, several points can be clarified.

As noted, the Hida’s work begins with a profound discomfort concerning the unregulated distribution of Lurianic writings and practices, and with the popular application of kabbalistic texts, which he considered to be an esoteric and “closed” form of knowledge. From this point of departure he launched the wide-ranging project of shaping the Lurianic practice, although he never explicitly defined or declared the project as such. The components of this endeavor included an extensive discussion, unprecedented in terms of its scope, of various Lurianic traditions relating to matters of halakha and conduct; a total incorporation of Lurianic practices into the halakhic system and discourse; and the production of conduct booklets, which, although not strictly speaking Lurianic, nonetheless broadly and fundamentally reflected the principles of Lurianic practice. The primary result of this project was the emergence of a unified standard and organizing system for the otherwise disorderly array of Lurianic traditions of practice and conduct.

As one might expect, the question of Lurianic practice within the writings of Hida cannot be properly addressed without returning time and time again to HY. As will be shown, the Hida himself was led to confront this text repeatedly.

II.

Before demonstrating this tension, I shall briefly refer to the relatively scarce research about the Hida’s attitude towards HY. Two of the greatest scholars of the Hebrew print and Sabbateanism in the 18th century, Avraham Yaari and Meir Benayhu, have argued that Hida’s basic approach to the book was definitely favorable. The first to attempt to present an unequivocal picture regarding Hida’s approach to HY was undertaken by Avraham Yaari. In his work dedicated to the riddle of HY’s author, he added the following footnote:

True, the Hida does not mention the Hemdat-Yamim within his ethical works, nor does he mention it in his *Shem Hagedolim* [his biographical-bibliographical encyclopedia; ES]. Nevertheless, he certainly was very familiar with the book. In his Responsa […] he defends the opinion of Hemdat-Yamim from those who challenged it on halakhic matters. […] Likewise, in his prayers, we find complete sections that have been taken from Hemdat-Yamim.

Yaari based the claim that the Hida regarded HY favorably upon two facts: first, that the Hida apparently defended the opinion of HY concerning halakhic matters in two legal issues, to which Yaari refers. And second, that some of the Hida’s prayers contain passages taken from HY, albeit in modified form. As Isaiah Tishbi writes regarding Yaari’s argument, “Meir Benayahu responded with an ‘amen’”. That is, in his monumental book about the Hida, Benayahu cites Yaari’s claim, seemingly without having personally examined the actual quotes of the Hida to which he referred.

Benayahu, though, did add one important point to the discussion – the mention of HY in the Hida’s diary, in which he documented his own practices and readings. (Only small selections of the Hida’s diaries have been printed, while the rest remain in manuscript form). It appears that the Hida read and studied HY, as well as works directly derived from it: in the entries for the years 5530 (1729/30), 5528 (1767/8) and 5534-38 (1773-78), he records that he examined some portions of the work dealing with the holidays and with the ten days of repentance. From 5539 (1738) onwards, HY is no longer mentioned in the Hida’s diary, with the exception of an entry from 5543 (1782), in which he recorded learning a commentary about Yom Kippur’s Temple Service. According to Benayahu, the fact that the Hida does not record having read HY from the year 5539 “does not indicate that he abandoned reading this work due to the flaw of it being Sabbatean. The Hida did not read from the same works every year, so certainly works that he read regularly would not be mentioned in every list of his practices.” Benayahu concludes that “the work was considered holy in his eyes, he read it, and recited the prayers found in it.” The approach suggested by Yaari and supported by Benayahu has been generally accepted without any dissent.

I will refer to the arguments regarding the Hida’s prayers and his diary entries later in the article, but Yaari’s main argument – the Hida’s supposed “defense” of HY’s halakhic rulings – is very far from convincing. A full elaboration on the specific examples is not possible here, but even a short analysis is sufficient to recognize the weakness of this argument.

Yaari’s first example is taken from a responsum regarding the halakhic prohibition to erase letters on the Sabbath. In attempting to ascertain whether the injunction applies to a particular case, the Hida indeed mentions HY in his discussion, and eventually rules in favor of the position held, among others, by that book. However, the Hida’s text mentions HY by name only because it appears within a quote from another legal work, which the Hida discusses. The dispute itself is unrelated to any unique position taken by HY. It is not HY that the Hida is interested in, but rather the work that cited it, *Kol Eliyahu*, (Livorno, 1792). In addition, even when the Hida mentions the name HY, he does so by utilizing an unfamiliar acronym, סח"י (ספר חמדת ימים, Sefer Hemdat Yamim).

A few bibliographic considerations concerning the Hida’s preferences regarding the typeset of his works, as well as his publisher’s manner of printing the name of HY in other publications, make it abundantly clear that this acronym was not a simple abbreviation used for the sake of saving space or for convenience, but rather a deliberate choice made in order to conceal the name of the book. It shall be noted that also in the second instance where the Hida explicitly mentions the name “Hemdat-Yamim” the work is referred to in this same cryptic manner, concealing its full name. These are the only two references to HY by the Hida of which I am aware.

The second example cited by Yaari is even less convincing. In a different responsum, the Hida is attempting to issue a ruling concerning a halakhic dispute heavily debated among many kabbalistic-oriented halakhic authorities. Although the Hida does rule in favor of the opinion proffered by HY, many other kabbalistic authorities also ruled in accordance with this opinion. Thus, in this case there is a wide agreement of which HY’s opinion part. Moreover, HY is neither mentioned in the discussion nor brought into consideration, even though the Hida explicitly lists which kabbalistic sages supported which opinion. It seems certain that HY’s ruling in this issue is not what guided the Hida’s conclusion; in fact, it seems not to have had any impact at all. Taking this responsum as an example for a case where the Hida “defends the opinion of HY from those who challenged it on halakhic matters” is more than a little misleading.

The rest of this responsum indicates again that the Hida’s ruling stemmed from considerations totally unrelated to HY. The Hida proceeds to briefly discuss the propriety of the custom to perform the biblical commandment of blowing the *Shofar* on New Year Festival at dawn, even prior to the morning praying, which was the more usual hour for the performance of the commandment. This unique custom was common in several Jewish areas of the Ottoman Empire, and the Hida testifies that “many held this practice.” It is quite reasonable to speculate that this custom stemmed from the practices of Nathan of Gaza, (although it was widespread also among Kabbalistic circles in the seventeenth century that were not directly connected to Nathan). HY likewise mentions this custom and supports it – a fact that presumably led to the significant popularity of the custom. In this instance, though, the Hida ruled that the custom should be abolished, following the opinion of contemporary Kabbalists. And here too, HY is not mentioned in the Hida’s discussion, and the considerations of the issue are broader, pertaining to the opinions of other Kabbalistic authorities. Just as the Hida’s conclusion in this latter regard cannot indicate his reservations about HY, his conclusion regarding the former issue cannot in any way indicate his approval of the work, as Yaari and Benayahu have suggested. Rather, in both cases the Hida simply based his ruling upon the particular context, the halachic considerations, and the opinions of other Kabbalists.

If the second responsum cited by Yaari indicates anything about the Hida’s approach to HY, it would likely be that his omission of the opinion of HY from the two issues debated – despite the fact that the other sources quoted by the Hida do mention HY – indicates his strong reservations concerning the work. As said, on the very rare occasions when the Hida did mention the “Book Which Should Not be Named”, he did so using a strange, uncommon acronym.

III.

There are, indeed, several additional instances where the Hida discusses practices mentioned in HY. But without exception, the name of HY cannot be found in any of these discussions, although the Hida is clearly referring to it. In all these cases, as will be shown, his attitude towards the work is unfavorable, to say the least.

1. The first issue has to do with the correct manner of performing the Lurianic *kavanot,* (detailed meditations). Beyond the Hida’s general reservations about the popularization of this literature and practice, his expressions when confronting and rejecting two phenomena related to the *kavanot* are especially fierce. At stake are the verbalization and vocalization of the complex names of God found in the Lurianic *kavanot*, and the recitation of these kavanot “in a manner of a prayer” (כוונת דרך תפילה) – as opposed to just meditating on these names in one’s mind. That is, instead of thinking about the theurgic processes that supposedly occur in the heavens and in the world while one is praying or performing a religious act, one *requests* that these theurgic processes take place. Several times the Hida also points to specific examples of this “corrupt” custom: the authoring and recitation of detailed kabbalistic prayers on the nights when the *Omer* is counted, as well as similar prayers recited for each of the Passover Seder’s *siamnin,* (stages of the ritual procedure). In these prayers, based upon the Lurianic kavanot, both flaws – verbalizing the kavanot, and utilizing them as a prayer (request) – were present.

This apparently technical issue is actually profoundly related to broader and more fundamental questions regarding the Hida’s approach to esoteric and exoteric knowledge and to the practice and study of the kabbalah, questions that go beyond the purvey of this discussion. For the current discussion it is enough to note that Hida deeply rejected these phenomena for a number of reasons, among them the notion that this was not the traditional, authentic Lurianic manner of the kavanot’s performance.

The phenomena described by the Hida can be found in a number of representations and contexts dealing with the literature of Lurianic kavanot. However, it is very clear that the “prime suspect” is indeed HY: Many of the scores of prayers that appear throughout that work are constructed in that form, as “kavanot in a manner of a prayer” – requests that the theurgic processes take place. Moreover, the author frequently instructs the reader to verbalize the kavanot using his mouth, and details precisely why one should do so. The author of HY included in his work specific prayers, consisting of complex Lurianic kavanot and kabbalistic names of God, that he personally authored for each of the simanim of Passover’s Seder, and for each of the nights on which the Omer is counted. Although these prayers were mainly based on the teachings of Luria, they were authored and formulated solely by the author HY, who also gave precise instructions on how to perform them. Not surprisingly, the two elements that troubled the Hida especially are present in these prayers: reciting the kavanot “in the form of a prayer,” and the verbalization, and not just meditation, of the kavanot. These prayers were then reprinted numerous times, shortly after HY was first published in 1731, both within the Ottoman Empire and in Italy. Even without mentioning its name, the Hida’s harsh tone and expressions, that appear in this regard again and again in his writings, are definitely aimed against one major work – HY.

2. A second case in which the Hida refers to HY is when he deals with the series of pietistic fasts known in as *Shovavim* (an acronym of the weekly Torah portions read in the weeks in which these fast were observed). This series of fasts during the short winter days is of relatively early origin, but only appear in writings from the fifteenth century onwards. Various explanations were suggested as to the emergence of the custom, but here too, as in many other question, the Lurianic teachings played a prominent role by giving novel meaning and significance to an existing practice, as well as by modifying the practical manner in which such practices should be performed. Among other instructions, Luria particularly emphasizes one instruction, which, although mentioned in works that preceded him slightly, he was the one to institutionalize: the undertaking of forty consecutive fasts during these specific weeks. The question of how and when these fasts could be exactly observed was discussed in depth for many years in Lurianic circles. The Hida, too, gave much attention to the exact calculation of these fasts – to their proper dates and hours – matters that were not directly addressed by Luria or his immediate disciples. Following a discussion of several widespread customs that do not accurately match the Lurianic tradition, the Hida notes:

That [practice] in which they were somewhat clever in counting the first “day” [of the fast] while it was still daytime for one hour, and then fasting for one hour on the third night, saying that for the weak this is considered three days [of fasting], it is completely ineffective, as it was stated explicitly by Rabbi Haim Vital, who received as a tradition from the Ari ZTL that even if one fasted like on Yom Kippur [i.e., beginning the fast a short period of time before nightfall] it is considered only one fast. And who ascended to heaven or had Elijah the prophet, may his memory be a blessing, revealed to him that determined after our teacher the Ari ZTL that [one may] compromise/interpret [in this manner] about matters that stand in the highest elevations of the world, and that bring a tikkun with names [of God] and the upper worlds?

And the cessation [of eating] for three days [that is, three consecutive days and nights, in contrast to regular daytime-only fasts; ES] is considered like forty days. Nothing more is found in the true writings of the Ari ZTL.

The call for pietism and atonement may have a certain popular appeal, but a consecutive three-day fast was exceptionally difficult demand. For that reason, some authorities held that if a few people began the fast before it technically began at nightfall, and a few minutes were added after it had technically concluded, it could be considered a three-day fast. Thus, fasting on Mondays and Thursdays could be considered as a full six days of fasting. The Hida, however, was not tolerant of such interpretations. He strongly states that the complex Lurianic calculations of these fasts are not a matter that people can decide about independently. And since Luria explicitly rejected this calculation, there is no room for any further discussion: “… who ascended to heaven or had Elijah the prophet revealed to him… that [one may] compromise/interpret [in this manner] about matters that stand in the highest elevations of the world, and that bring a tikkun with names [of God] and the upper worlds?” The Lurianic penitential rituals are defined as “matters that stand in the highest elevations of the world.” As a result, the usual logical reasoning used in rabbinical and Talmudic study are no longer valid.

Now, who are those “who were overwise / who tried to be over-sophisticated,” *nitchakmu ktzat,*  to use the Hida’s admonishing term, who made this suggestion? None but the author of HY, who ascribed this practice to his anonymous teacher. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first, and until the Hida’s days, perhaps the only, place where this suggestion can be found. Again, without referring to HY directly or even mentioning the work’s name, the Hida accused HY of favoring its own original, “human” logic over the Lurianic “divine” traditions.

The Hida was aware of the difficulty of these fasts, and he too offer solutions for the weak. But he strongly rejected the original idea of “manipulating” the calculation of the fast, as explicitly deviating from Luria’s teachings and violating the “purity” of the Lurianic ideal by mixing the authentic and the inauthentic.

3. In one of the most noteworthy responsa regarding Lurianic practice, the Hida discusses Rabbeinu Tam’s obligation to don *teffilin* (phylacteries). In an aside, he then adds a short guideline concerning some issues regarding teffilinin general. One of these is especially interesting: the donning of teffilin during the afternoon service (*Minha*) on Friday.

The custom of donning teffilin at Minha is a long-established custom, and was universally accepted among Lurianic Kabbalists. By contrast, donning teffilin at Minha on Friday afternoon was not practiced for the most part among Luria’s disciples. However, in 1721 a controversy on the subject arose in Modena, when several members of the Ashkenazi synagogue began to do so. This provoked a fiery dispute involving the most prominent Kabbalists of Italy, seemingly a much greater debate than one would have expected for a rather specific and undramatic question. Most of the Italian Kabbalists, led by Binyamin Hacohen Vitali (Rabach), the disciple of Moshe Zacut, and Yosef Irgas, attempted to abolish this new practice. Opposing them was Ephraim HaCohen of Ostroh who supported “these individuals.”

The matter engendered excessive anger and dispute, to the extent that Vitali called those who practiced the custom “little foxes who demolish the vineyards,” and fiercely opposed it. It has been suggested that the reason for the excessive acridity may have been the custom’s Sabbatean roots. And, although this custom stands in contrast to the majority of the Lurianic traditions, stemming from Luria himself and his disciples, the author of HY nonetheless supported it, lending credence to the hypothesis of a Sabbatean root. This inclination to see the matter thus is reinforced by the specific wording with which the Hida chose to address the issue, usiong a tone that stands in marked contrast to the previous short and pointed rulings:

(6) At Minha one should don teffilin like *Rabbeinu Tam*, as our teacher Rabbi Haim Vital did.

(7) At Minha on Friday one should not don teffilin, as the Kabbalist Rabbi Meir Papirash writes that such was his tradition, and the famous Rabbi Yosef Irgaz wrote this as well in his work *Shomer Emunim*. And do not pay attention to the summaries and compiled pamphlets, and think that you have the power of the arbitrator [to decide the proper practice], or can stand among the group [of those who can decide these matters]. Know that you must bend your ears and listen to the voice of the teachers, as one needs great awareness of the character and nature of these works, and no more need be said.

The local, technical instruction, regarding the precise Lurianic tradition concerning Friday afternoon quickly turns into a more fundamental warning to rely strictly only on the authentic sources and rigorously transmitted traditions, and this fundamental guideline leads to an admonition about the problematic and suspicious nature of the popular genre as a whole. The Sabbatean context that until now was relegated mainly to the background, at once becomes much more palpable. Although not explicitly stated, it is very likely that the Hida linked the custom of laying teffilin on Friday afternoon with the instruction of HY to do so. If this is the case, this passage is the best reflection of the Hida’s extremely critical and fierce response to HY, and its enterprising attitude towards the Lurianic practices and meditations: He considered it to be a distortion and misuse of the “true” Lurianic traditions.

4. The Hida also addressed HY’s comments on “classic” halakhic subjects. An early testimony claimed that Luria himself refrained from eating meat on a day that he had eaten cheese. HY cites this testimony, but the author claims it is inaccurate, and that Luria would not eat meat on a day on which he had drunk milk, but that he would eat meat after having eaten cheese on that day. According to HY, there are even lofty kabbalistic benefits from doing so. As many have noted, this entire passage in HY is a slightly modified version of the teachings of Natan of Gaza, that were found in one of Abraham Rovigo’s notebooks. The Hida’s comments in this regard are pointed, less “dramatic” in their formulation than in the previous case. In short order he rejects the argument of HY, after attesting to the major impact it had had on common practice, leading many to change their previous practice. He argues simply that the author of HY had not possessed the “true writings of the Ari.” He also adds:

And as for the tikkunim and secrets, we are poor hands and only listen to that which was written by R. Haim Vital of blessed memory who received the tradition from the Ari ZTL. And even concerning the students of the Ari ZTL, those who were fortunate enough to learn from his holy mouth, we have heard a warning from R. Haim Vital not to pay attention to their words, and R. Moshe Zacut was also very severe about this, as is known.

Here too, as in other places, the Hida does not mention the name of HY, but rather states that “there is one who wrote,” and replies to that anonymous opinion. There is no doubt, however, to what he was referring. The Hida’s directive is not to pay attention to practices and customs not clearly founded in the true Lurianic writings of Luria and practices that were not punctiliously transmitted is about HY.

IV.

Among the Hida’s many discussions of Lurianic practice and ritual, the fiercest and sharpest expressions of are directed towards HY. The examples above are representative of the Hida’s general attitude towards the book. In each of examples cited, the Hida’s critique goes beyond a narrow response regarding a certain ruling or conclusion which he opposed, and is formulated as a fundamental criticism regarding the work as a whole, its motives, and its basic nature.

It is undeniable that the Hida studied HY. He clearly possessed the work in his library and read it from time to time, and some portions of the prayer formulations that he authored are, to an extent, based on versions found in HY. It should nonetheless be noted that this phenomenon is much less significant than Yaari and Benayahu have stated, and that the Hida was very careful and selective in utilizing prayer formulations found in HY. This studious use may actually be indicative of his cautious approach and his reservations about the work.

The key to understanding Hida’s attitude towards HY was supplied by the Hida himself, in the second instance where he mentions HY’s name explicitly. As in the first instance – the first of Ya’ari’s two references – the Hida cites a text that explicitly quoted the name of the book, using the unfamiliar acronym SHY, סח"י. The Hida notes then notes that “It is known that the afore-mentioned book (=HY) emerged as a compilation (of) genuine sayings of the commentators and the halakhic authorities, and this saying [cited in HY] was taken from the Rabbi [author of] the *Manot HaLevi* (R. Shlomo Alkabets).” In other words, the Hida was cognizant of a point that modern scholarship has only recently proven, namely, that HY is almost entirely compiled from earlier sources.

This understanding shaped the Hida’s attitude towards the work: he considered certain parts of it to be authentic and unproblematic, while fundamentally rejecting other portions of the book. Thus, those simple formulations of prayers, or the Lurianic recitation rituals and tikkunim, that did not contain any noticeable difference from rigorous Lurianic transmission, were not problematic in the slightest. From this perspective, most of the sections on *mussar* [ethical teachings] and halakha are not problematic. The commentary on the Yom Kippur Temple Service, for example – which Hida records having read on Yom Kippur eve, 5743 – is essentially a compilation of earlier writings taken from the works of 16th century scholars Moshe Cordovero and Moshe Nigrin.

By contrast, the aspects of HY that provoked the Hida’s ire were those related to Lurianic practice, and more accurately to the distortion and misuse of this body of knowledge and practices. HY is perhaps the best representation of what the Hida considered “despicable summaries and compiled works.” It exemplifies what the Hida inflexible approach to Lurianic practice and the transmission of the Lurianic teachings in general.

Stated differently, the Hida certainly did not share the approach of Jacob Emden, according to which the HY should be banned. He himself read it, and distinguished between the various layers of the book. However, his overall attitude towards the book – as opposed to his attitude toward any specific matters of halakha or ethics to which the book referred – was profoundly negative, due to the HY’s mixing of authentic and inauthentic Lurianic practices, and its compilation and publication of prayers in which the Lurianic kavanot were utilized in a manner not in accordance with the esoteric Lurianic tradition. It is not without reason that even on the few occasions when the Hida did refer to HY directly he refrained from mentioning its name explicitly, and only alluded to it using an unfamiliar acronym.

In this sense, his criticism of the book was not directly related to issues of Sabbateanism. Even if the Hida did not consider HY to be a Sabbatean work in the narrow sense, he consider it to be a *popular* work in the negative sense of the term, mixing legitimate and illegitimate material, and citing unreliable and inauthentic traditions.

But it seems there is more to be said regarding the Sabbatean perspective and HY. On the one hand, the immediate Sabbatean context of the practices against which Hida wrote so fiercely is evident. The most obvious case is the dispute regarding the laying of tefillin on Friday afternoon; the Sabbatean context of this practice is quite convincing, and the Hida’s formulations, that link the practice to suspicious texts in general (“one needs great awareness of the character and nature of these works”), strengthen the case for a Sabbatean context. But the Sabbatean background is clear in the other practices and customs as well, as some of them either stemmed directly from Sabbatean groups or were widely practices by their followers. HY’s argument regarding eating meat after cheese, for instance, was taken directly from the teaching of Nathan of Gaza. There is no reason to assume that the Hida was aware of the immediate Sabbatean context of this argument or its source, but that is irrelevant to the greater picture. The argument it is not about one or particular custom or another and its Sabbatean roots, but about the comprehensive life-framework of the Sabbatean circles and its connection to the phenomena which the Hida discusses. The fact that a certain custom had a Sabbatean context may be of interest, but what is particularly important are the frequent connections between Sabbatean practices and inappropriate variations of Lurianic practices. These are no mere coincidence.

In other words: it seems possible that the Hida did not view HY as a Sabbatean work in the simple sense of the term, but that, in his eyes ,it was nonetheless a severely flawed work. It suffered from what the Hida refers to as the characteristic problem of “summaries and compiled pamphlets” – the mixing of reliable and unreliable traditions, deviating from the careful transmission of the Lurianic teachings. In his opinion, this flaw was *inherent* to the Sabbatean movement, at least following Sabbatai Tsevi’s death.

The Sabbatean movement and, more specifically, the followers of Nathan after the conversion, soon became deeply engaged with kabbalistic-Lurianic pious practices. In 18th century southern Europe this was the most common expression of Sabbateanism; the Italian crypto-Sabbatean circles were ascetic, elitist groups who attempted to observe a pious Lurianic daily routine. This is the context of the tensions between the Sabbatean movement and the broader issues agonizing the Hida: the popularization of kabbalistic knowledge and practice, the unregulated distribution of Lurianic, semi-Lurianic and pseudo-Lurianic texts, and the ways in which these matters relate to unreliable and even spurious beliefs. The crypto-Sabbatean circles in Italy were operating in the domain of aesthetic Lurianic piety, and this is the context within which the extent of their deviation from the strict Lurianic traditions should be assessed.

In other words, Sabbateanism quickly underwent a transformation from a movement whose defining characteristic was its antinomian, revolutionary force, to one whose most apparent characteristic seemed to be traditional, kabbalistic-Lurianic values. While these aspects were present from the movement’s birth, its relation to the Lurianic heritage underwent a change. From a movement that voiced more than minor reservations about the Lurianic school, it quickly became almost a sub-school within Lurianic kabbalah; in many cases a pietistic and elitist sub-school. This is the context to which the Hida responds, basically saying: if you want to take part in the Lurianic cultural and practical sphere – be my guests, but you must play according the proper, accurate and rigorous rules.

By approaching this question from a somewhat different angle we will be able to briefly address a closely related question, namely the Hida’s attitude toward the Sabbatean sages. As Isaiah Tishbi has shown, the Hida did not refrain from praising rabbis and sages even after he learned that they had adopted certain versions of the Sabbatean belief. On the other hand, the Hida also repeatedly expressed strong aversion to the Sabbatean creed itself. When he learned of sages who had adopted this belief he cried out in grief and expressed great sorrow, and when he referred to the zealousness of Jacob Emden in his struggle against Sabbataism, he named the followers of Sabbatai “the cursed sect that violates [prohibitions rendering one guilty] of excision and death at the hands of the court.”

Even without directly resolving the Hida’s attitude to Sabbateanism in general, utilizing more complex parameters to distinguish between different contexts and situations relating to the Sabbatean movement will be extremely productive. As there was no one “Sabbateanism,” only various expressions of beliefs and practices in various cultural, social and geographical contexts, the most pertinent distinction should be made between the Sabbatean belief itself and the way it was expressed and its setting in life. Though the major theological issues are certainly interesting, these did not especially trouble the Hida when he encountered figures with connections to circles close to the faith of Sabbatai. Much more crucial, in his eyes, were questions of religious practice and the modes of transmission of Lurianic traditions. Take, for example, Binyamin Hakohen Vitali. Vitali maintained the rulings of his teacher (Zacut) without any deviation whatsoever, not accepting any guidelines or practices that deviated from the strictly authentic Lurianic tradition; thus, he firmly opposed donning tefillin on Friday afternoon. For the Hida, the question of his exact beliefs is therefore a relatively minor issue. By contrast, the same “believing rabbi, who was seduced in our many sins by nonsense,” was far more disturbing when he asked whether perhaps he should not fast on the 9th of Av, or he attempted to abolish part of the *Tikun Hatzot,* because there was no longer any theosophical need for it. In general, given the strict pietistic orientation of the "Nathanian" circles in Italy, it seems that when no real deviations from Lurianic practices were discovered, the Hida saw no need to question the status and social and religious standing of figures connected to these circles.

The Hida, consequently, acted neither as a “Sabbatean hunter,” like Jacob Emden, nor as a contemporary Sabbatian scholar, searching for Sabbatean theological residues within different textual layers. However, he was very sensitive to any deviations from custom, to baseless instructions, and to the mixing of different registers and types of religious materials. It is true that the Hida’s repeated warnings to rely only on the authentic Lurianic writings are related to the main principles of the Lurianic theosophy, whose inaccurate editing and modifications included, according to him, errors and inaccuracies. But in this context as well the Hida was consistent in not accepting the improper mixing of material or “compiled summaries.” In focusing on the various expressions of the Sabbatean movement more than a hundred years after the death of Sabbatai Tsevi, the Hida does not identify the main point of struggle as a question of faith, nor is it a matter of assessing the true nature of a text or a sage. For him, the main issue concerned the practical expression of these ideas within personal and public religious life.

From the Hida’s personal diaries we learn that in the 1760’s and 1770’s he consulted HY several times, reading potions of it, or booklets derived directly from it. After 1779, in his last twenty-six years of life, it seems that he ceased to do so, and this is telling. (The one exception is Yom Kippur 1782, but this is not quite relevant, since he undertook this reading in connection with a scholarly commentary of the temple service, taken from writings of 16th century scholars, and not in connection with matters of Lurianic kabbalah, ritual, practice and prayer).

Why did the Hida seemingly abandon the study of HY, or the prayer books based on it, in 1780? Was there a single event, or perhaps a series of concrete events, that caused him to do so? The answer, perhaps, has to do with the printing of certain Kabbalistic works, such as several volumes of *Siddurei* *HaAri* in the last third of the 18th century, as well as several other works directly influenced by HY. This was a ruinous phenomenon in the eyes of the Hida, and it may be that after he had become more aware of this work’s harmful impact, he felt bound to react not only publicly, but also on a personal level. But although this is possible, a much more tempting speculation is to see the Hida’s actions in light of his personal biography. In 1778, after six years of travelling, the Hida finally settled in Livorno, where he resided until his death in 1806. The Hida’s choice not to read HY may have been a reaction to his new local context of Italian Jewry, in some of who’s circles the use of book was widespread.

Italian Jewry may even have been the context from which the Hida drew the customs against which he had protested, such as reciting the prayers for the Seder night or for counting of the Omer (prayers which Hida attests were quite popular), or the unacceptable novel calculation of the Shovavim fasts. The controversy of whether to don tefillin on Friday afternoon had appeared more than half a century earlier, not far from Livorno in the community of Modena. But the extent of the Hida’s urgency, and his unusually severe tone when discussing the matter, indicate that the controversy and the dispute it engendered had not subsided by the time he arrived in Italy. Although we lack direct evidence linking the Hida’s personal reading habits to his settling in Livorno in 1778, it is tempting to see his sudden cessation of the reading of HY exactly at this time as a response to the widespread, distorted Lurinaic practices he encountered among some of the Italian Jewry.