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**Leadership and Charisma among Mizrahi Modern Kabbalists
In the Footsteps of Shar'abi- Contemporary Kabbalistic Prayer**

The Jews of the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin have enjoyed many powerful leaders and theologians since the era of Maimonides, and the force of their leadership has taken many forms. Some have lead through argument and the force of their ideas, and some have lead through their charisma and the impenetrability of their religious personalities. The legacy of Maimonides' teaching is evident in the rabbinical academies and in the interaction of Judaism with modernity. Yet other interpretations of Judaism characterize the Judaism of North Africa and the Middle East, and presently, none is more compelling than the mystical prayer ritual of the disciples of R. Shalom Shar'abi.

The role of the leader is also central to the mythos of Kabbalah. The classical movements of Kabbalah were circles gathered around a single charismatic figure. The hero of the Zohar, Shimon Bar Yohai, directed a circle of mystics. The members of the kabbalistic renaissance in the 16th century Galilee hill town of Zfat were similarly gathered around such charismatic figures as Yosef Karo, Moshe Cordovero and Isaac Luria. All of these figures commanded circles of students, circles in which membership was prized and exclusion dreaded. The eros of such leadership and movement also surrounds the original circles of Polish hasidism. Finally, the kabbalists who flourished in the Middle East in early modernity is similarly centered around the personality of a single kabbalist whose personality dominates the schools of Eastern Kabbalah to this day, the 18th century mystic Shalom Shar'abi.

Shar'abi's form of meditative prayer is presently a *living* form of Kabbalah which is enjoying a renaissance, in spite of its exotic and obscure nature. In Jerusalem, Safed, New York and Los Angeles, Jewish mystics regularly pray in elevated states of high concentration and silence. As they complete the Jewish prayer rite, these mystics contemplate complex and abstruse linguistic formulae. These formulae, known as the

kavvanot or “intentions,” are based on a complex set of associations, employing Divine Names, mystical symbols and complex vocalized mantras. The practice of *kavvanot* is a rite, an ascent of the soul and, possibly, an experience of mystical union. For those who pray with the *kavvanot*, the contemplative mind is sacrificed to the cathartic processes of the Divine. The aim of the practice is the fixing of the broken and sundered universe. Prayer with *kavvanot* has been the provenance of the wonder Rabbis who have come to social prominence in the last two decades, the late Hakham Mordechai Shar'abi, R. Yisrael Abuhazeira, the "Baba Sali" and the venerable Hakham Kaddouri of the Bukharian community. Posthumous sainthood has been conferred upon such mendicant figures as R. Yosef Dayyan, an impoverished Jerusalem pietist who made gravesite pilgrimage his special area of concern and who was a natural subject of hagiography.

There are a number of institutions devoted to the practice of *kavvanot*, and they host a shifting number of practitioners. In Jerusalem, the *kavvanot* are led formally in the institutions “Nahar Shalom”, “Beit El”, “Ahavat Shalom”, “Ha-Hayyim ve-ha-Shalom,” and “Nayot be-Ramah” as well as a circle that meets every morning at the Western Wall. Among Jews of Middle Eastern extraction, congregations that meet before dawn are apt to include practitioners of the *kavvanot*. I have observed individuals practicing the *kavvanot* among the pious worshippers at the Aboab Synagogue in Safed and at the Natan Eli congregation in Los Angeles. Manuscripts of influential prayer books with *kavvanot* are being published in photo offset. At the same time, new editions of *kavvanot* are being prepared, in conjunction with the recent empowerment of the Jews from the Middle East communities, from Jerusalem to Los Angeles. The wider public has accepted the primacy of the most esoteric of mystical practices, and ceded the practice to a small elite of venerated mystics.¹

This form of prayer was developed by the eighteenth century mystic Shalom Shar'abi (1720-1780, also known as RaSHaSH).² Shar'abi was a Yemenite kabbalist who arrived in Jerusalem via Syria in the middle eighteenth century. His personal history is

¹ Moshe Halamish. *Kabbalah: In Liturgy, Halakhah and Customs* (Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000) p. 80.

² Died 10 Tevet 1780.

obscured by the sort of hagiographies that attend the biographies of holy men in other traditions: picaresque escapes, the temptations of the flesh and the protagonist's obscuring his spiritual identity as an act of piety. The circumstances of Shar'abi's journey to the land of Israel, his progression from obscurity to the head of the Beit El Yeshivah and his acts of saintliness and intercession sit on the edge of legend.

Shar'abi was raised in Sana, Yemen, although his family originated in Shar'ab, whence his name. He came to the land of Israel from Yemen by way of Aden, Bazrah, Baghdad and Damascus. In Baghdad he studied Zohar with a circle of mystics under the leadership of Sheikh Yizhak Gaon, and his ecstatic manner earned him his first recognition. Controversy seemed to follow him: his flight from Yemen was attended by an incident "like that of the wife of Potiphar."³ In Damascus he seems to have become embroiled in a halakhic dispute (regarding the minimum acceptable weight of the Passover mazah) that hastened his departure for Jerusalem.⁴ In Syria, Shar'abi was employed as the servant of R. Samuel Parhi, the economic advisor of the Pasha of Damascus. R Parhi did not recognize the young man's real nature and abused him. This

³ Zevi Moscowitz, *Hayyei ha-RaSHaSH*. (Jerusalem: Safra 1969) pp. 5-6. The account, drawn from Ya'akov Sapir, *Even Sapir* 110b, is worth repeating:

In the holy city of Sana I knew the family of the Rav RaSha"Sh, wise and steadfast people, and they told me of the circumstances of his coming to (Jerusalem). He was a comely and God fearing youth and his livelihood was to peddle spices and small notions in the city and the villages, as did all the Jewish youths in that district. Once he passed through the gentile city Sana with his peddler's sack on his shoulder and a wealthy Ishmaelite noble woman saw him through the lattice. She called him up to make a purchase. She let him in to her chambers and locked the door behind him and attempted to induce him to sin with her, threatening otherwise to kill him. When he saw that there was no escape he asked to relieve himself. She showed him to the privy and waited outside. He forced himself through a small window in the privy, fell unharmed three stories to the ground and fled. She waited for him in vain, and when she saw that he had fled she flung his pack outside. He fled, and wandered from city to city until he came to Aden, thence to Bazrah, Bavel and from there to Jerusalem...

⁴ Zevi Moscowitz, *Hayyei ha-RaSHaSH*. p. 6

led to an emotional denouement some years later in Jerusalem, as R. Parhi was himself an avid supporter of the Beit-El Yeshivah.⁵

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Shar'abi behaved in a self-effacing manner. He was assigned to be the sexton (*mesharet*) at the Beit El Yeshivah and kept to himself, albeit visiting the sacred graves on the Mount of Olives and listening to lessons in Lurianic Kabbalah from a corner in an adjoining room in the academy. Only through the clandestine circulation of some of his writings did his star begin to rise among the scholars of Beit El. In accordance with the romantic tone of his biography, it was the daughter of R. Gedaliah Hayyun who determined that Shar'abi was circulating the responsa, recognizing the true nature of the quiet, handsome self-effacing young sexton. Hayyun elevated Shar'abi's status and gave him his daughter's hand in marriage!

Beit El

At the time of Shar'abi's arrival, the Beit El yeshivah was still in its fledgling stages, a part of the general flowering of Kabbalah in eighteenth century Jerusalem. The institution was founded by Gedaliah Hayyun (d. 1751), a student of R. Hayyim Alfandari. The mystics were already renowned among the population for their intercessions in times of drought.⁶ The kabbalists for Beit El were united in a commitment to fully explore the kabbalistic system of Isaac Luria, developed nearly two centuries before in the Galilee hill town of Safed. The consensus opinion was that Shar'abi was a catalyst for the spiritual life of Beit El, galvanizing the Yeshivah to its eventual prominence among kabbalists.

The pietistic life of the Beit El mystics was distinguished by the structure of the comradeship. In Beit El, there were three main areas of study: exoteric, philosophical (*maḥshevet Yisrael*) and Kabbalah. The group divided into three "watches" (*mishmarot*) that effectively kept the study room populated twenty-four hours a day. The first watch began at the midnight vigil (*tiqqun hazot*) and concentrated on the study of Lurianic Kabbalah particularly Hayyim Vital's *Ez Hayyim*. The second group commenced after the

⁵ Aharon Heibi, *Giant of the Spirit* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yafet 1987) p. 14;

⁶ Zevi Moscowitz, *Hayyei ha-RaSHaSH*. p. 9

morning prayers and continued until the afternoon. The third watch ran from the afternoon to the evening services and concentrated on the study of Mishnah.⁷ After the evening prayers this group committed itself to the study of the Talmud. Hence, the social structure of the *mishmarot* was such that merchants and people who worked for a living could be preoccupied with exoteric studies during the day while the full-time practitioners of Kabbalah were busy during the night and morning hours.

Shar'abi's leadership galvanized the Beit El community, organizing and chartering all of the Jerusalem kabbalists. The group at Beit El left a number of documents, particularly four charters. These charters were based on the type that had been instituted by the Safed kabbalist Hayyim Vital with the object of coalescing the circles around Luria under his (Vital's) leadership. Three of the Beit El charters were publicized, one of the four, the third version, was kept secret. The first charter reflects concerns about the continuation of the fellowship and the preserving of its social structure and spiritual intensity. As in the case of the charter signed by Vital's companions,⁸ the signers committed themselves to attitudes of love and humility towards their fellows in the circle.⁹ The second charter seems to comprise responses to catastrophe. The signers commit themselves to take responsibility for the education of the comrade's children and take special measures in the event of a comrade's illness or death. The comrades also committed themselves to reciting all of the books of the Psalms, which is also a common response to catastrophe. In the fourth charter the comrades designated themselves as the Ahavat Shalom group, an appellation that survives to this day.¹⁰

Due, in part, to tensions in the Beit El community, a group broke away and formed another institution, the yeshivah *Rehovot ha-Nahar*. *Rehovot ha-Nahar* was

⁷ Hayyim Shaul Dweck and Eliahu Ya'akov Legimi. *Kavvanot Pratiyot* (Jerusalem 1911) 4a-5b.

⁸ Gershom Scholem "A Charter of the Students of the AR" (Hebrew) *Ziyyon* 5, 1940: 133-160.

⁹ The signers of the first draft include Shar'abi, Yom Tov Algazi, Shmuel Al-Ḥadif, Avraham Balul, Aharon Ben Kavod Rabbi Eliah ha-Levi, Menachem ben Rabbi Yosef, Ḥayyim Yosef David Azulai, Yosef Amnon, Shlomo Bela'ah, David Fernandes Dias, Ya'akov Biton, Rafael Eliezer Parḥi, Ḥayyim de la Rosa, Rafael Moshe Gallik, Avraham Yishmael Ḥayyim Sangevinitti, and Ya'akov Algazi. (Naḥman Ha-Cohen, *Minhagei Beit El*. (Jerusalem 1998) pp. 83-85; Aharon Heibi, *Giant of the Spirit* pp. 49-50).

¹⁰ Naḥman ha-Cohen, *Minhagei Beit El* pp. 85-91; Aharon Heibi, *Giant of the Spirit* pp. 51-55

founded in the Yissacharoff synagogue of the Bukharian quarter of Jerusalem's "new city." The founder was R. Nissim Nahum of Tripoli, with the assistance of Hayyim Shaul Dweck of Aleppo. Dweck had left Beit El in the midst of a controversy over the proper kavvanot to be recited for the Sabbatical year.¹¹ This yeshivah was devoted to the kavvanot practice and, like Beit El, operated around the clock. The daily schedule began with nightly immersion in the ritual bath (*mikvah*), the performance of the midnight vigil (*Tiqqun Hazot*) and the full recitation of prayers with Shar'abi's version of the kavvanot.¹² This institution served as a center for the Aleppo scholars and came to include other newcomers to Jerusalem from Yemen and the west, as well as a significant contingent of Ashkenazim. The leaders of "the ascetic Ashkenazim" of Jerusalem, as well as the Hasidic rabbinical court, gave their approbation to Hayyim Shaul Dweck and Eliahu Ya'akov Legimi's book of popular penitential rites *Benyahu ben Yehoyada*.¹³ By the beginning of the twentieth century, then, kavvanot practice was constantly taking place in Beit El, within the walls of Jerusalem's old city, and in the Bukharian quarter of the new city.

The Escape from Pure Theory

If one could pinpoint a single trend in the thought and practice of the kabbalists in the Beit El tradition (and by these I mean scholars in Jerusalem, Tunis, Aleppo and Baghdad in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries), it would be the eschewing of the poetics of "classical" Kabbalah and the move towards a purely Lurianic expression. The Beit El kabbalists did not interpret the Zohar or compose homilies based in the sefirotic system, and their speculations transcended the imagery of the Divine

¹¹ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh*. pp. 80-81, taken from *Divrei Shalom* of Raphael Avraham Shalom Shar'abi (Jerusalem 1908) 17d; Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, introduction to Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom 1998) pp. 40-41.

¹² Zevi Moscowitz, *Hayyei ha-RaSHaSH*. p. 95, Y.A.Z. Margoliot, introduction to Zevi Hirsch of Zidachov, *Zevi le-Zaddik* (Monroe: Samet 1999) p. 38.

¹³ These included Moshe Nahum Wallenstein, Aryeh Leib Beharad and Zevi Pesah Frank.

countenances that so characterized the Lurianic system.¹⁴ Shar'abi and his students substituted doctrines of Divine names to signify the inner processes of the Divine. This view is presaged in the remarks of the Spanish philosopher –mystic, R. Isaac Ibn Latif, advocated contemplation of the Divine name and declared:

The desired end is to strip the Name of all matter and to imagine it in your mind, although it is impossible for the imagination to depict it without some physical image, because the imagination is not separate from the senses, and most of what is attained by the activity of the imagination is performed through the contemplation of the shape of the letters and their forms and number.¹⁵

The preference for names over countenances originated in Shar'abi's sources. It is a matter of record that the kabbalists of the Beit El yeshivah of Jerusalem far preferred to use the later redaction of the Lurianic teaching exemplified in Meir Poppers' widely circulated work *Ez Hayyim*. According to the compositions *Sha'ar ha-Shemot* in Poppers' *Ez Hayyim*, and the chapter of the same title in Ya'akov Zemakh's *Ozrot Hayyim*,¹⁶ the consonants of the various Divine names are the building blocks of the Universe, which their vocalization is the soul.¹⁷ The implication of the *Sha'ar ha-Shemot* is that these names comprise a better depiction of the essence of the system, as opposed to the myths of the sefirot and the countenances. In Beit El, Isaac Luria's myth of the emanation, withdrawal and "breaking of the vessels" was expressed through various Names. In offering this possibility, the Lurianic system finally cut its moorings from the world of

¹⁴ The main exception to this rule is the ongoing reference to the vicissitudes of the Shekhinah in the popular writings of the Beit El kabbalists

¹⁵ Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) pp. 31, 33; Ibn Latif, *Zurat ha-Olam* (Wien 1860) p. 32; See Isaac of Acre *Sefer Meirat Einayim*. Amos Goldreich, ed. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University 1981) p. 89.

¹⁶ In terms of the use of texts, it is interesting that the later work, *Pri Ez Hayyim*, which Shar'abi did not use specifically, kept the use of names at a level more consonantal with the implementation in *Sha'ar ha-Kavvanot*. Shar'abi, in turn, seemed to disapprove of the *Pri Ez Hayyim*.

¹⁷ *Ez Hayyim* (Ashlag 2:327-328, 330; Warsaw 97a-98a).

mythos, just as the world of mythos had shut the door on the symbolic systems offered by the Zohar literature. The practice of Beit El Kabbalah, then, is distinguished by a retreat into pure theory.¹⁸ As a result of this process, the system began to be distanced from its original mythic content.¹⁹ In fact, Shar'abi had concluded that both the names and the mythos were substitutions for processes to ineffable to recount:

May God forgive me, for these things are not as they simply seem, but I have used the language of the Rav, but the reality of the things are not as they seem, but of the essential thing do we not know that no thought can attach itself to it, and were it possible to understand there would be not room to even ask the question.²⁰

Canon Limitation.

The Beit El community centralized its spiritual leadership through the limitation of their acceptable canon of sources. This is not uncommon in religious movements that, as they gain social momentum, often move to limit their accredited body of sacred writings.²¹ The canonization or sacralization of the Zohar led to further limitations on the kabbalistic canon.²² Luria himself deprecated the work of prior kabbalists in a well-known passage referred to as "Nahmanides and his Comrades," saying that up to the *Zohar*, kabbalistic teachings had been imperfect.

¹⁸ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom 2002) p. 254.

¹⁹ See Menachem Kallus, "The Theurgy of Prayer in the Lurianic Kabbalah" PhD. Thesis; Hebrew University 2002. p. 124

²⁰ *Ez Hayyim* Warsaw 59a.

²¹ Professor Boaz Huss has distinguished between cononical vs. sacred writings; see Boaz Huss, "*Sefer ha-Zohar* as a Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Centuries" : 257-307.

²² The Zohar itself limited the sources that it was willing to cite as authoritative. References to *Sefer Yezirah*, for instance, are almost wholly absent from its main sections. The very size and scope of the Zohar tended to run less presumptuous speculative works to ground. This tendency to limit creditable sources is also present in the teachings central figure of post-*Zohar* Kabbalah, Isaac Luria.

In order to reinforce Shar'abi's authority and spiritual hegemony, the communities that speak in his name employ forms of canon limitation that are characteristic of both the Zohar literature and the Lurianic literature that is based upon it. Each mainstream tradition expresses itself as the central arbiter of kabbalistic doctrine in the wake of the previous movement. The Zohar, with its mythic hero R. Shimon bar Yohai, portrays itself as the source of all truth. In turn, it is fair to say that Isaac Luria's interpretation became the standard, authoritative interpretation of the Zohar for a plurality of subsequent circles, with the conclusions of his predecessors being relegated to scholastic interest. Following in this chain of transmission, forces have been at work to cement the authority of Shar'abi's reading of Luria in the active culture of the kabbalists. The tendency to limit the roster of accredited works survived into the teaching of Shalom Shar'abi, who further maligned the early Kabbalah. Shar'abi's relationship to the Lurianic canon is parallel to that canon's compiler, Hayyim Vital. Just as Hayyim Vital was Luria's authoritative redactor, so Shar'abi is the central interpreter of Vital. Shar'abi's portrayal of the Lurianic system is seen as the fulfillment of that system, for he is regarded as the reincarnation of Luria.²³ As for appropriate sources, Shar'abi proposed a very limited group of acceptable sources for the development of his teachings, avowing that he drew all of his ideas from the simple interpretation of Vital's *Eight Gates* and Poppers' *Ez Hayyim*.²⁴

Shar'abi's Hegemony

Shar'abi had the happy experience of having his greatness recognized while he was still active.²⁵ He raised many influential students and even those with whom he was apt to be in disagreement, such as R. Shlomo Molcho, praised him personally.²⁶ For adherents of the Beit El school and other serious acolytes of Lurianic practice, Shar'abi came to complete a triumvirate of revealers of the Kabbalah, along with Shimon Bar

²³ *Nahar Shalom* (ed. included in Vital's *Ez Hayyim* (Warsaw) pp. 32a, 34a). See also Yedidiah Raphael Hai Abulafia, *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Pesukkim/Sefer ha-Likkutim* (Jerusalem 1912) Approbations.

²⁴ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. pp. 202, 206; Abulafia *Kinyan Peiro t* (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom 1988) p. 76.

²⁵ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p.155-156

²⁶ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 157

Yohai and Isaac Luria.²⁷ Shar'abi's relationship to the Lurianic canon is parallel to that canon's compiler, Hayyim Vital. Just as Vital was Luria's authoritative redactor, so Shar'abi is the central interpreter of Vital. Shar'abi's portrayal of the Lurianic system is seen as the fulfillment of that system, for he is regarded as the reincarnation of Luria.²⁸

Shar'abi's ministry was the fulfillment of Luria's promise to his students that he would return after his death to teach them again. Since Shar'abi bore the spark of Luria's soul, he descended to the innermost workings of Luria's mind in order to seek the resolution of his teachings. Paradoxically, then, Shar'abi revealed nothing new, only the source of revelations with regards to Luria's teaching.²⁹ Hence, there is no spirit of auteurism in Shar'abi's teachings, they are not original, but simply a realization of what Luria would have generated, for Shar'abi was gleaned from the same sources as Vital and the original redactors.³⁰ Moreover, according to the Beit El kabbalists, if Shar'abi's understanding were to contradict that of Hayyim Vital, Luria's primary redactor, then Shar'abi's opinion is to be accepted, for he was the spark of Luria, Vital's teacher, and his understanding supercedes Vital's.³¹ When there are differences of opinion in the plain meaning of Vital's and Shar'abi's views regarding a given matter, Shar'abi's opinion holds sway, for it is commonly believed that Shar'abi clarified and resolved issues that had remained hidden from Vital. Hayyim Shaul Dweck, in his *Eifah Sheleimah*, was adamant that if the plain reading of a statement by Hayyim Vital contradicts Shar'abi's interpretation, then Shar'abi's opinion takes precedence.³² Shar'abi's teaching is considered to be authoritative in clarifying difficult issues in Kabbalah, even if his reasoning remains oblique.

²⁷ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. pp. 8-9.

²⁸ Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* 2:223.

²⁹ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. pp. 15, 57.

³⁰ Yosef Hayyim, *Rav Pe'alim* 2 (Jerusalem, 1903) *Sod ha-Yesharim* 13 3c.

³¹ R. Avraham Ferreira in his work *Toldot Aharon U'Moshe* (in the *Kuntrus Efer Yizhak* 9d, Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 1978).

³² Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Eifah Sheleimah*, *Sha'ar ha-Nikkudim* 9:4, 13a in Vital, *Ozrot Hayyim* (Jerusalem 1907); Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, introduction to Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* p. 40; Hayyim Shaul Dweck and Eliahu Ya'akov Legimi, *Benyahu ben Yehoyada* 6a.

Shar'abi's teachings were accepted as persuasive on purely scholastic terms. Yet it was also a matter of record in Beit El that Shar'abi had received a revelation of the prophet Elijah, through "apperception in consciousness (*b'ein ha-sekhel*)."³³ A contemporary kabbalist, Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, even defended the fact that Shar'abi had developed religious practice on the basis of his revelatory experience, insofar as it occurred "face-to-face" with the prophet Elijah.³⁴ This revelation led to Shar'abi's possessing *ruah ha-kodesh*, "holy spirit" as reflected in the Beit El kabbalist Masoud ha-Cohen Alhadad's statement "we have resolved this according to the Holy Spirit of RaSha"Sh."³⁵

A number of the central rabbinic figures of various generations endorsed Shar'abi as the central kabbalistic authority, adjudicating matters of doctrine according to his decisions and considering his prayer system the authoritative one. R. Sasson Bakher Moshe³⁶ declared, "one must never depart from the path of Shar'abi." The contemporary kabbalist Ya'akov Moshe Hillel has declared that, "we only rely on Shar'abi's understanding of the AR"Y"³⁷ and "we on the margins (*azuvei ha-kir*) can only align our thinking with Shar'abi's transcendent wisdom."³⁸

Shar'abi's School

The mystics of the Beit El tradition venerate a particular lineage of sages, drawn from a limited set of communities. Shar'abi's teachings cut a certain swath through the world of the Jews of the Orient and the Levant, from Jerusalem to Aleppo (Halab) and thence to Baghdad, with contributions from the "sages of Tunis." The Aleppo

³³ Yosef Hayyim, *Rav Pe'alim* 3, *Sod ha-Yesharim* 4, 3d; Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 145, Moscowitz, *H*ayyei RaSha"Sh p. 71, citing the work Yissachar ve-Zevulun p. 37, recites an account of a maidservant who saw Elijah communing with Shar'abi, and the latter swearing her to secrecy on the matter.

³⁴ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 146, 148-149.

³⁵ Masoud Alhadad, *Simchat Kohen*. 39a (Jerusalem, 1921); Alhadad is joined in this opinion by R. Yosef Hayyim, the *Ben Ish Hai*, R. Sasson Bakher Moshe, Avraham Fereira.

³⁶ *Petah Einayim* (Jerusalem 1847) 68d, 98a.

³⁷ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 159

³⁸ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 160, see also pp. 150-151.

communities, known to the mystics as “the sages of Aram Zuba,” has great authority and credibility and are considered to have preserved the most authentic version of Shar'abi's *kavvanot*. The influence of the Baghdadi community extended among the expatriate Baghdadi Jews from Southeast Asia to South America.³⁹ Acolytes of Shar'abi's teachings also comprised an inner circle in the Sephardic Chief Rabbinate of Jerusalem. A number of those designated *Rishon le-Ziyyon* in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were theorists of Shar'abi's method, were active in the Beit El circles and even lineal heirs of Shar'abi.

Moshe Halamish has noted that practitioners of Shar'abi's *kavvanot* were rare among the sages of North Africa, whose allegiance is general was emotionally more towards the Zohar and the Safed common religion.⁴⁰ The exception to this is his influence on the mystics of Tunis, particularly in the dissemination of the prayer book, particularly R. Yosef Sadavon whose allegiance to Shar'abi was particularly great.⁴¹ Otherwise the use of Shar'abi's teachings and *kavvanot* only became normative among Moroccan sages in the later generations and they were not involved in the development of the form, according to the hagiographies of the movement.

Shar'abi's immediate heirs assumed the initial leadership of the circle and also had a substantial literary output. Shar'abi's son, R. Hizkiyah Yizhak Shar'abi (referred to as the, by his acronym, *Ha"i be-SheMe"Sh*) was the fourth head of Beit El, as well as an important rabbinical judge. Rafael Avraham Mizrahi Diyedi'a Shar'abi, Shalom Shar'abi's grandson, was among the first major redactors of the teaching. He was the author of the work *Divrei Shalom*, which details the practices of the Beit El community.⁴² He was also involved in developing the eventual version of Shar'abi's prayer book.⁴³ He was known as R. Avraham Shalom Hasid (Ra"Sh), for his piety. He was reputed, as well,

³⁹ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom* p. 223.

⁴⁰ Moshe Halamish, *The Kabbalah in North Africa: A Historical and Cultural Survey* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad 2001) p. 22, 115; See Elior, "The Kabbalists of Dar'a" *Peamim* 24: 1995: 36-73.

⁴¹ Moshe Halamish, *The Kabbalah in North Africa* p. 74.

⁴² Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 167, Eliahu Mishan, *Zedek ve-Shalom*. introduction; Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* pp. 14-16.

⁴³ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 232

to have used practical Kabbalah when Jerusalem was under siege in order to limit the carnage.⁴⁴ Another grandson of Shar'abi, R. Hayyim Avraham Gagin (acronym: *Aga'n*), was the sixth head of Beit El, served as *Rishon le-Zion* from 1842-1848 and was the first to be designated *Hakham Bashi*. Rabbi Hayyim Avraham Gagin married the daughter of R. Avraham Shalom Hasid, who was known as "Doda" (Aunt) Rivka.⁴⁵

Among Shar'abi's other prominent students were Yisrael Ya'akov Algazi and his son, Yom Tov Algazi, who would become the *Rishon le-Ziyyon*.⁴⁶ R. Yom Tov acted as an emissary for the Jerusalem community and made a favorable impression on such monolithic figures of the Hungarian Rabbinate as R. Moshe Sofer, the Hatam Sofer, his father-in-law R. Akiva Eiger and his son R. Avraham Sofer, the author of *Ketav Sofer*.⁴⁷ Besides his rabbinical duties, he was the head of Beit El for the last 25 years of his life, to 1802. Ya'akov Shealtiel Nino authored the work *Emet Le-Ya'akov*, and, in particular, the composition *Sefat Emet* as well as a number of tiqqunim. Nino was raised from his youth in Beit El and also acted as an emissary for the community.⁴⁸

A more humble and unassuming member of the Beit El community, R. Raḥamim Sarim, produced the work *Sha'arei Raḥamim*, which is a series of responsa elicited from such figures as R. Hayyim Shaul Dweck. The questions themselves are often simplistic and the various sages often do not respond altogether to the same point, but the work is otherwise charming, a quality often in short supply in the Beit El tradition.⁴⁹

R. Yedidiah Raphael Hai Abulafia (acronym: the Rav YiR" A) was the seventh head of the Beit El Yeshivah. Like Ya'akov Shealtiel Nino, he was also affiliated with

⁴⁴ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 67.

⁴⁵ His sermons were preserved by his son Shalom Moshe Gagin (d.1883). *Aga'n* also composed *Minḥah Tehorah* on Masekhet *Menahot*, the responsa *Hukei Hayyim*, and *Saviv le-Ohel*, a commentary to Shmuel Ben Meshullan Yarondi's book *Ohel Moed* (Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. p. 224).

⁴⁶ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 76. R. Yom Tov Algazi authored a number of works, *Simḥat Yom Tov*, responsa on the *Turim*, *Kedushat Yom Tov*, responses to Maimonides' halakhic rulings, the small composition *Da'at Le-Hishael*, resolving his father's unresolved matters, and *Yom Tov de-Rabanan*, on Aggadah and the work *Get Mekushar*, published in the end of his father's work *Naot Ya'akov*.

⁴⁷ These figures writings had reached Baghdad, see Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. p. 44.

⁴⁸ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 41; Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. pp. 199, 403 note 29.

⁴⁹ Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, introduction to Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* p. 13.

the Beit El community from childhood. Abulafia is widely considered the final arbiter of the Shar'abi's practices and *kavvanot*.⁵⁰ His prayer book was acclaimed in Beit El as the authoritative version.⁵¹ It was through his efforts that the prayer book expanded to include devotions for the entire year. He also edited the introductions at the beginning of the prayer book, which are commonly called *Rehovot ha-Nahar*. Abulafia was well regarded by R. Eliahu Mani⁵² (1818-1899) who had moved from Baghdad to the land of Israel in 1856, first in Jerusalem but two years later establishing himself in Hebron. He revised his own teachings a number of times, based on his acquisition of Shar'abi's autograph manuscripts that were in his possession.⁵³

Aleppo

The sages of Aleppo (*Aram Zuba* or *Halab*)⁵⁴ have great authority in the Beit El school. They are considered to have preserved the most authentic version of Shar'abi's *kavvanot*. R. Mordechai Abadi was a founding member of that circle.⁵⁵ Eliahu Mishan, one of the major sages of Aram Zuba, referred to Shar'abi in a number of his responsa in his work *Zedek ve-Shalom*.⁵⁶ Mishan was also the author of the commentary *Sefat Emet* on Vital's *Ez Hayyim*.

Mishan and Abadi's principle student was Hayyim Shaul Dweck, the "Rav SaDeH," who is a figure well deserving a full length study, as has been observed by Menachem Kallus.⁵⁷ He represents the apex of the Aleppo school, and in his move to

⁵⁰ Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 236-238.

⁵¹ Alhadad, *Simhat Kohan* 25c.

⁵² Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. pp. 35, 68-69, 70

⁵³ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. pp. 233, 236, 237. See *Kinyan Perot* pp. 32, 88, 166. as well as R. Hayyim de la Rosa, *Torat Hakham* 34b, as an eyewitness for Shar'abi's practices on the Day of Atonement. Abulafia (p. 32) invokes the authority of David Majar as an eyewitness to Shar'abi's practices.,

⁵⁴ Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. pp. 75-99.

⁵⁵ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSh"Sh* p. 94.

⁵⁶ *Zedek ve-Shalom*, 74b. this would lead to the modern tendency to fall back on the Shelah for the Tikkun leil shavuot. See *Ibid*, introduction.

⁵⁷ Menachem Kallus, "The Theurgy of Prayer in the Lurianic Kabbalah" p. 127, note 26.

Jerusalem cemented relations between Jerusalem and his hometown.⁵⁸ In Aleppo, he was also influenced by R. Nissim Harari Raful, author of *'Aleí Nahar*, an early explication of Shar'abi's prayer kavvanot. Early in his career, Dweck contacted R. Sasson Bakher Moshe, the sitting head of Beit El, to discuss scholarly concerns in the study of Shar'abi's practice. At the age of 32 he moved to Jerusalem, and his initial study partner was the renowned pietist R. Nissim 'Ani.

There are many traditions regarding Dweck's bravery in the face of the blindness that afflicted him in his latter years. Yehudah Petayah and Suleiman Mozpi cared for Dweck in his infirmity.⁵⁹ His later works, such as his well-known commentary on Vital's *Ozrot Hayyim*, *Eifah Sheleimah*, were dictated orally to Yehudah Petayah and R. Yosef Hayyim Sofer. R. Rahamim Sarim's *Sha'arei Rahamim* was composed in a similar oral format, while other transcribers include Y. Monsa and E. Ma'aravi.

Dweck's *Eifah Shleimah* by the Rav Sadeh, presents many of Shar'abi's teachings with superior coherency.⁶⁰ R. Nissim Nahum published *Eifah Sheleimah* initially. Because of Dweck's somewhat stormy relations with the sages of Beit El (he had left Beit El in a dispute regarding the Sabbatical year and moved outside the Old City of Jerusalem to the new Yeshivah *Rehovot ha-Nahar*), R. Nissim Nahum sent the manuscript for review to R. Shlomo Eliashiv, the author of *Leshem Shva Ve-Ohalamah*, and the author of *Darkhei Teshuvah*.⁶¹ In his approbation to Dweck and Legimi's *Benyahu Ben Yehoyada'*, R. Shlomo Eliashiv admits that they added and consolidated the kavvanot in Vital's *Sha'ar Ruah ha-Kodesh*. Since this work was intended for penitential purposes, it was certainly acceptable because of the volume of successful repentance that it would expedite.⁶²

Dweck also assisted in the publication of such works as Nissim Harari Raful's *'Aleí Nahar*, Eliahu Mishan's *Sefat Emet* and Avigdor Azriel's *Zimrat ha-Areẓ*. He also

⁵⁸ He left, supposedly, over the lack of modesty on the part of the immodest behavior of the Aleppo women (Y.M. Hillel, introduction to Dweck, *Pe'at ha-Sadeh* pp. 51-53).

⁵⁹ Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, introduction to Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* pp. 20, 22, 31, 33-38.

⁶⁰ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom* p. 179 note 3.

⁶¹ Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, introduction to Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* p. 42.

⁶² Shlomo Eliashiv, Approbation to Hayyim Shaul Dweck and Eliahu Ya'akov Legimi, *Benyahu ben Yehoyada* (Jerusalem 1911).

esteemed the works of the Komarno School, particularly Yizhak Eizik of Komarno's *Heikhal ha-Brakhah*.⁶³ He was also close to other Ashkenazi giants as the Munkaczer Rav, R. Hayyim Eliezer Shapiro, and the Karliner Rebbe.⁶⁴ In this, Dweck represents a link to the scholastic kabbalists of late Hasidism, and the coalescing of various social currents in the Jerusalem into what is now known as the *haredi* or ultra-orthodox community.

Baghdad

The leader of the Baghdadi community,⁶⁵ R. Yosef Hayyim (1835-1909), the "Ben Ish Hai" was an extraordinary religious figure. The scope of his activity is best described by Zvi Zohar:⁶⁶

(He) was an exceptional and unusual spiritual figure. He possessed rare intellectual talents, a phenomenal memory, a fluent and expressive literary and rhetorical style, and an interest in all branches of the Torah creative process. One could describe him as combining the prominent aspects of the Vilna Gaon and the Maggid of Dubno: unusual diligence in study and command of every aspect of the creative Torah literature on one and, and unobstructed involvement in bringing the Torah to the general public through popular sermons and through the composition of special compositions for the general public, on the other hand.

Yosef Hayyim included kabbalistic material in his responsa, *Rav Pe'alim*, as well as his commentary on the Talmud, *Sefer Benyahu* and his popular work, *Ben Ish Hai*.⁶⁷ He made his own versions of Luria's penitential rites in his *Lashon Hakhamim*.⁶⁸

⁶³ Y.M. Hillel, introduction to Dweck, *Pe'at ha-Sadeh* p. 46, note 22

⁶⁴ Y.M. Hillel, introduction to Dweck, *Pe'at ha-Sadeh* pp. 55-56.

⁶⁵ On Baghdad, see Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. p. 20; on relations to Bombay see Ibid pp. 9. 35, 69.

⁶⁶ Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. pp. 40-41, 55-61.

⁶⁷ On R. Yosef Hayyim's halakahic decisions, see Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. pp. 47-49, 82, 325.

As mentioned earlier, a student of the Ben Ish Hai, Suleiman Eliahu, based his didactic work, *Kerem Shlemo*, on Shar'abi.⁶⁹ Eliahu underwent as crisis of faith much on the order of an intellectual of the Eastern *haskalah*, and the Ben Ish Hai intervened to redirect him towards Kabbalah. *Kerem Shelomo* remains a popular work among Beit El kabbalists today. Another important mystic, R. Yehezkel Ezra Raḥamim, immigrated to Jerusalem in order to study Kabbalah.⁷⁰

Shar'abi's influence "crossed over" into the Ashkenazic community of his period and after. One Ashkenazic acolyte, Ya'akov Meir Shpilman in his *Tal Orot* had a conventional intellectual and spiritual awakening through exposure to Shar'abi's teaching, as he details in his didactic work *Tal Orot*:

I did not come but to the edge (of the divine wisdom) until I journeyed to the countries of the west and there I found the works of R. Shmuel Vital, the son of the holy R. Hayyim Vital, and the works of the holy R. Shalom Shar'abi. And I found favor by a student of one of his students, who did not withhold from me the early introductions, and I added his words to the earlier and later authors, and thereby came to understand like a drop in the ocean this sweet delightful beloved holy wisdom.⁷¹

Alliances between the Beit El kabbalists and the Ashkenazi counterparts began over a shared interest in Lurianic practice. At the same time that Shar'abi was making his way to Jerusalem, R. Gershom of Kitov, brother-in-law of the mysterious and charismatic founder of Hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov (acronym: *Besh"t*), was also establishing himself among the kabbalists of the holy city. By most accounts, R. Gershom came to Jerusalem in the mid-eighteenth century and, by some accounts, attached himself to the

⁶⁸ Yosef Hayyim, *Lashon Hakhamim* 1:118-160; Hayyim Shaul Dweck and Eliahu Ya'akov Legimi, *Benyahu ben Yehoyada*. 1a.

⁶⁹ Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 165. Hillel also likes *Shomrei Emunim ha-Kadmon*, from R. Yizchak Irgas, as well as R. Eliahu Mani's *Kisse Eliahu*.

⁷⁰ Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East*. p. 50. His brother, R. Yizhak Nissim, became Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel in 1955.

⁷¹ *Tal Orot* 1c

Beit El community, as well as at the Yeshivah of Hayyim Ibn Attar.⁷² The evidence is that he had established a relationship with R. Gedaliah Hayyun as early as 1748.⁷³ According to *Shivhei ha-Besh"t*, the central record of the Ba'al Shem Tov's legend, Shar'abi called upon Gershom Kitover to lead public prayers for the release from a drought.⁷⁴

The shared language between such geographically disparate figures as the Polish Kitover, the Moroccan Ibn Attar and the Yemenite Shar'abi was their practice of the kavvanot. Eventually these alliances spread over into the realm of social concerns, and the relationships between the European and Eastern schools coalesced into the shared concerns of what would now be called the *haredi* world.

The Jerusalem pietists and zealot R. Yeshayahu Asher Zelig Margoliot served as an intercessor between the Beit El community and the principle sages of Eastern Europe.⁷⁵ R. Sar Shalom Rokeah of Belz and others in the court of the Belzer Hasidim requested manuscripts of Shar'abi's prayer book and *Nahar Shalom* and were, to all reports, enthralled by Shar'abi's insights.⁷⁶ R. Avraham Yeshaye Kareliz, the *Hazon Ish*, meditated in Shar'abi's private quarters and exclaimed "how awesome is this place."⁷⁷ R. Yom Tov Algazi impressed the central members of the Hungarian Rabbinate, the Hatam Sofer and his family, including R. Akiva Eiger.⁷⁸ R. Hayyim Shaul Dweck earned an enthusiastic approbation for his commentary to the Ozrot Hayyim, *Eifah Shleimah* from

⁷² Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 17.

⁷³ The charter indicates a R. Avraham Gershom and many contemporary records of the Jewish community of the Land of Israel refer to Gershom Kitover in that fashion. Zevi Moskowitz in his *Hayyei RaShaSH* expresses doubts about the matter, while A.J. Heschel and his editor S. Dresner accept the reports of *Shivhei ha-Besh"t* at face value, although their presentation contains a number of errors. They erroneously list Shar'abi's death as occurring in 1753 (Ibid p. 83 note 158) ; in fact it was in 1777, providing the possibility of extensive interaction between Kitover and Shar'abi.

⁷⁴ *In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov* Ben Amos and Mintz, eds. (New York: Schocken 1984) #55

⁷⁵ Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, introduction to Hayyim Shaul Dweck, *Peat ha-Sadeh* p. 19

⁷⁶ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* pp. 84-85.

⁷⁷ See introduction *Zevi le-Zaddik* (of R. Zevi Hirsch of Zidachov) by R. Asher Zelig Margoliot (p. 35, note 2; Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* pp. 93-94.

⁷⁸ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 77.

Zevi Hirsch Shapira, the estimable Munkazcer Rav.⁷⁹ Among the later members of the circle was R. Ben Zion Shapira, from the circle of Mahari"l Diskin, as well as R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira, the Munkazcer Rav. Dweck was also an enthusiast for the writings of Yizhak Eizik of Komarno, particularly his Torah commentary.⁸⁰

In recent years, new editions of Shar'abi's *kavvanot* have been published and earlier editions republished. These include new editions of the prayer book, *kavvanot* for special occasions and practices, such as the counting of the *omer* or the bedside *shema*', and specifically penitential prayers. A version of the prayer book was developed by and for the use of the *hasidim* of R. Arele Roth, the Shomrei Emunim community.⁸¹ Another edition was developed which uses an obscure form of color-coding as part of the practice.⁸² The Nahar Shalom community, in collaboration with R. Ya'akov Moshe Hillel, has developed the extensive version *Rehovot ha-Nahar* that is based on the long Aram Zuba editions and the version of R. Yedidiah Raphael Hai Abulafia. Other recent traditions are more syncretistic. In the recent series of devotional works, *Ez Tidhar*, Shar'abi's *kavvanot* are combined with the earlier common religion and even with manifestly Shabbatean ideas, reproducing the commemorative meal for *Tu Be-Shevat* that has its origins in the Shabbatean work *Hemdat ha-Yamim*.⁸³

In the contemporary milieu, the absorption of former heresies, such as Shabbateanism, while eschewing other Lurianic sources besides the teachings of Vital, reflects anxieties regarding contemporary scholarship. Scholars such as Ronit Meroz and Yosef Avivi have developed documentary theories of the development of the Lurianic canon which give particular attention to the works of the ancillary students as a better reflection of the essential Lurianic teaching in its early stages. The Beit El school's strident advocacy of Vital and his deprecation of the "other students" serves as an attack on the archaeological reading of the Lurianic teaching as a response to scholarly analyses

⁷⁹ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 99-100.

⁸⁰ Moskowitz, *Hayyei RaSha"Sh* p. 113.

⁸¹ Asher Anshel Broin, *Siddur Kavvanot ha-RaSha"Sh* (Jerusalem 1990)/

⁸² Yosef Bar El, *Siddur Edut be-Yehosef* (Jerusalem 2002).

⁸³ See Miles Krassen, "Peri Eitz Hadar: A Kabbalist Tu B'shvat Seder" in *Trees, Earth and Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology*. Arthur Waskow (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1996) pp. 135-153.

and a concomitant interest, among adepts as well, in the alternative recensions of other members of Luria's circle. The population that Beit El services represents a social milieu for which the term "professor" is an epithet and "universita" a curse.⁸⁴ An example of the flawed interaction of the two communities, even in the midst of a poignant cross-fertilization between Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities, is the remark of R. Yisrael Abuhazeira, the illustrious Baba Sali. Baba Sali once reflected that universities must be bad places, for he had heard a professor aver that the Ba'al Shem Tov did not possess the holy spirit (*ruah ha-kodesh*).⁸⁵

The Unfolding of Revelation

More deeply than the historical acceptance of Shar'abi by acolytes, it should be noted that adherence of Shar'abi's spiritual authority has taken on some of the muscle of contemporary post-modern messianic. As clarified before, Shar'abi is the third stage in the unfolding of revelation, after Luria and the Zohar. Both the Zohar and Luria's writings are messianic works, whose very revelation presages the beginning of an end-time. The works that are canonical and credible emerge during periods of messianic surge. For example, the *Zohar* avers that it itself is the central mystical document, with a messianic roles for its central figures. Lurianism, in turn, sees itself as the correct interpretation of the Zohar. Sine Luria's teaching derives from a reading of the *Zohar*, one should have no doubt as to the validity of his reading. Hence, Luria's understanding is preferable to the *Zohar*'s plain meaning. Indeed, Luria's emergence was the "appointed time" to reveal the doctrine of cosmic repair, or "tiqqun." For various reasons, the secrets of the world of Divine repair, or *tiqqun*, had been unrevealed until the Luria. The processes of revelation are such that if the Zohar had not been revealed, the worlds would

⁸⁴ Moskowitz, *Hayyei Ra-Sha"Sh*, p. 36, cites the remarks of R. Asher Zelig Margoliot that he was uneasy about publishing Shar'abi's prayer book, for he holy book will be found in the Universities, and the houses of "doctors" and professors" hence he arranged to publish it in small amounts and control its distribution.

⁸⁵

have returned to their state before creation, of being “unformed and void (*tohu va-vohu*).⁸⁶

For contemporary mystics, the degree of enlightenment in the society is according to the growth of the celestial forces of enlightenment. Initially, the Zohar was put away and the wisdom of the sages lessened. In the Safed renaissance, the lights were revealed again, and as these lights are revealed, this wisdom spread below. Each revelation of the secrets of the Torah in successive generations comes about in order to further cleanse the successive worlds of existence. Along with contaminated secular knowledge, there is a growth in esoteric knowledge. Hence, Shalom Shar’abi’s teachings represent another stage in the redemption. If this is the end-time, his teachings are the key to redemption, and if this is not the end time, it the best that the mystics have.

⁸⁶ Shlomo Eliashiv, *Leshem Shevo ve-Ohalama*. (Petersburg, 1912) 21b; Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*. p. 28-30, 37-40, 52, 54, 56.