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ON THE SOCIAL AND EXISTENTIAL  
MEANING OF JEWISH MYSTICISM TODAY:  
PITFALLS AND POTENTIAL

**Abstract:** The authors review the profound and diverse ways in which mysticism is embedded in and influences belief, lifestyle, identity and politics in Jewish life in Israel and North America. They outline some existential and cultural dimensions of the conditions in which this phenomena flourish, specifically relating to the condition of post-modernity. The seeming dominance of mysticism over more rational forms of religious belief and behavior is explored. The opposite ideational and historic trends within Jewish mysticism as they relate to national lifestyle, being alternatively closed and parochial or open and universal are reviewed. The authors suggest that, in light of the current situation within and outside of the Jewish people, the latter approach needs to be strengthened.

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**Key words:** Jewish  
mysticism, universal and  
particular, post-modern  
condition, existential,  
political, kabala, Israel,  
Jewish people, Zionism

**Jewish Mysticism as a Cultural, Social and Political Force**

Interest in and the influence of mysticism in the Jewish world is on the rise. In the Jewish context, the function mysticism serves and the meaning it has, depends on one's cultural and religious affiliation. In this article we will describe some major trends in attitudes toward Jewish mysticism as a living phenomenon. Discussing issues concerning mysticism mainly in North America and Israel, where the majority of Jews live today, we will point to some of the dangers and the potential of engagement with this longstanding tradition.

Judaism is carried forward as living culture by Jews in North America and Israel for extremely diverse reasons and with hugely varied styles and manifestations. Among Orthodox Jews we find many sub-divisions, but we feel safe in stating that, if Maimonidean rationality represents one edge of Jewish life and Kabbalistic Mysticism the other, then Kabbala is on the rise. This is most obvious in a perhaps unexpected quarter: the way that Jewish mystical ideas and Kabbalistic interpretations have a strong impact on Israeli politics. Idel<sup>1</sup>, taking a pragmatic view, observes that in the not so distant past, nobody would have thought that Kabbalistic religious leaders will have such a strong influence on Israeli elections results. These leaders usually belong to the Mizrahi camp, or, as Mizrahi intellectuals would like to refer to them: "Arab Jews"<sup>2</sup>. The re-awakening of Jewish Kabbalistic traditions and magical practices among these Jews can be seen also in the context of a marginalized group that is fighting to reclaim its own identity,

after being rejected by the hegemony of Ashkenazi (European) Jews<sup>3</sup>. Back in the 1950's when the Arab Jews arrived in Israel with their particular traditions, rituals and magic, they were ridiculed by the Ashkenazi Jews, who were very inclined towards modernism and rationality. So the new arrivals' rituals and practices became "hidden". Today, they are again, openly, an important part of culture for many Arab Jews. This includes an entire array of amulets, ornaments, holy water and other objects and books that, according to their users, bring good luck to the owner. The Chabad movement has had a strong inclination toward mysticism since its Founder, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), published 'Tanya', his reinterpretation of the Baal Shem Tov's mystical teachings. It seems that the inclination toward the supernatural had a strong impact on many of this movement's followers; it has helped the process of denial that embraced many after the death of the last Rabbi of this Chasidic lineage. The Chabad movement shifted from being perceived as an innocent and benevolent group of Jews into a political entity with strong connections to the Israeli right. Another movement that was quite dormant and has reawakened in the last decades is the Breslav movement. It attracts Jews from different backgrounds, especially those who go through a process of "hazara bethsuva" ("returning" to (orthodox) religious belief and practice'). This movement, with followers distributing free materials in Israeli public spaces such as street intersections, is very visible. It is, however, seen by many as a movement of ex-drug addicts, hippies, and those who return from their far-east tour (very popular amongst young Israelis) with a sense of spiritual void and a need to find meaning in their lives. The strong following of previously secular Jews that the Chabad and Breslav movement attracts can be seen as a continuation of the process of the constitution of meaning that many young Israelis go through after their army service. They are attracted to religion after practicing yoga, reiki and meditation in different ashrams. Many times they are initiated into Jewish mysticism during their trip. They may participate in the activities of a Chabad house in one of more than 20 locations in the Far East. In many cases the Chabad Shaliach himself (an emissary from Israel; always a male) is an ex-secular Israeli who went through the same journey (meditation, ashrams, drugs) and is now a perfect agent of reinterpreting and reframing mystical experiences and religious quests in a Jewish flavor.<sup>4</sup>

The modern orthodox stream seems also to have left its Maimonidean approach (if we put aside some intellectual elites in universities and similar institutions) and follows the mystical interpretations of Rabbi Kook to the Zohar very strongly. Despite the fact that there are some who show that Kook had a much softer, eclectic and universal mystical direction<sup>5</sup>, Kook's mysticism, his eschatological theology, and his mystical reinterpretation of Zionism have helped create a political phenomenon called the religious right. This mystical camp, suffering from the blow of the disengagement

from Gaza, is increasingly alienated from the secular segments of Israeli Society, politically, sociologically and culturally and, in the process, radicalized in their messianic views.

Secular Israelis, more often Ashkenazi than Sephardic Jews, are open to a world combining mystical and new age approaches to Judaism. This openness is related to globalization and to the fact that for many of these Israelis there is a movement from an iconographic and particular identity<sup>6</sup> to an identity which is much more diffuse and open to external ideas. Since globalization supports non-territorial identities<sup>7</sup>, it is not uncommon to hear about Israelis who open a spiritual commune in India, Costa Rica or other places, in conjunction with people of other nationalities. They also happily participate in diverse workshops, both in Israel and abroad, often led by foreign spiritual leaders or by Israelis who 'see the light' elsewhere and then rejoin Israeli society in order to influence it from within. Goenka's Vipassana movement, for example, started with a few sporadic courses in the 1990's. They now have a full year of scheduled 10-day courses, given for free at the permanently leased Hatzeva site in the Arava desert.

Furthermore, there are more and more hybrid movements, with Ohad Ezrachi as an example. He started as an orthodox Jew, but Indian influence has motivated him to open his "Yeshiva-Ashram" in the Dead Sea with the support of an American Jewish foundation. We hear also many instances where individuals who come from an orthodox religious background, engage in the study and/or practice of meditation and eastern philosophy. See, for example, the case of the Talmudic scholar and poet Admiel Kosman, who is fascinated and influenced by Krishnamurti<sup>8</sup>, and national, religious, ex-politician and Knesset member, Lagental, who practices meditation and other spiritual techniques and who happily engaged in a dialogue with Nissim Amon, ex-Israeli, secular-now-Zen-monk in the book they wrote together: "When Moses Met Buddha"<sup>9</sup>.

Jewish mystical views influence liberal Jewish traditions in North America as well. The Reform Movement, the largest organized Jewish religious movement, in all its expressions from its Jewish Camping program to its new prayer book, has witnessed a shift from a very "rational" movement into one that emphasizes spirituality and spiritually oriented rituals. Student rabbis return from their study year in Jerusalem filled with new ideas and practices, campers are encouraged to be in touch with their own spiritual world and the movement's first-rate magazine 'Reform Judaism' often covers stories related to spiritual growth, healing and journeys. This correlates with Cohen and Eisen's assertion that we are witnessing the:

[...] emergence of Jews who combine great concern for issues of spirituality and meaning with severely

diminished interest in the organizational life of the Jewish community<sup>10</sup>.

In addition, *Tikkun Olam* ('repairing the world', a key concept of - and command implicit in - the mystical Kabbalistic tradition of Rabbi Luria) is the movement's single most well-known flagship value. In fact, the movement has 'exported' the term such that a huge array of national Jewish organizations in North America (such as federations and Jewish Community Centers, to name some) include the term in their core self-descriptions and mission statements. The term has become a *sine qua non* of Jewish life. This particular religious-cultural-intellectual parentage and conceptual emphasis within Reform Judaism has not always existed. Early in its development, Reform Judaism drew very heavily on prophetic Judaism as its inspiration and as its language of engagement with issues related to social justice and universal global responsibilities. It was only with the passing of time that the dominant form of discourse came to draw on the Kabbalistic term 'Tikkun Olam'. While one might doubt that the rank and file Reform Jews know or understand the mystical origins and deep meaning of the term (though increasingly they seem to), the spiritual and intellectual leadership of the movement has shaped and embraced this development with knowledge and awareness. It is curious that the movement once associated with Jewish religious rationalism should eschew the Prophetic discourse in favor of Jewish mysticism as its dominant framing narrative and language. Remarkably, this transition has barely been researched. (The authors of this paper look forward to reading the doctoral dissertation they anticipate will someday be written on how and why this transpired.) Our intuition is that the engagement with the Kabbalistic version of Jewish mysticism speaks deeply to the interplay of cognitive, emotional and existential sensitivities that have a great importance in the contemporary world.

A parallel phenomenon to the Reform Movement can be found in the American Jewish renewal movement, where chanting, meditation and yoga seem to be almost a pre-requisite, together with daring re-interpretation of the Jewish texts<sup>11</sup>. Again, dialogue with Buddhists and other eastern traditions is encouraged. See for example, the lively discussion between Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and other Jewish leaders with the Dalai Lama in an intensive seminar<sup>12</sup>. The engagement of the youth at camp in spiritual practice may encourage the development of spiritual meaning, but it does not necessarily lead to heightened activity in the "regular" synagogue setting. Many Jews evince this pattern, revealing a high degree of commitment to their own Jewish life and inner Jewish journey, but relatively infrequent participation in conventional Jewish communal activities and little explicit engagement with issues concerned with the continued existence of the Jewish people.

The strong influence of capitalism on the transformation of culture into a commodity and the push toward non-national or particular identities in a globalized world, can also explain the reframing of previously particular practices, such as Jewish Kabbalah, into a spiritual commodity to be practiced by whoever wants to be involved: Jews and non-Jews alike. The involvement in Kabbalah of a megastar like Madonna, along with a great number of other stars, is the most advertised case of this phenomenon.

It reflects a shift of passion from the public domain to the private sphere, from what post-modern theorists call the "grand narrative" (in this case, the exalted story of Jewish people and destiny) to the "local narratives" and "personal stories" of family and self.

### The Conditions in Which Mysticism is Flourishing

We observe the above phenomena of Jewish Mysticism within our (Jewish) people and seek to inquire into the source of mysticism's appeal and where the phenomena might lead to. We see the attraction to mysticism as partly related to what Frankl called a "search for meaning"<sup>13</sup>. In a deep search for meaning, the individual seeks their own 'unio-mystica', their attempt to forge their own answer to "the meaning of it all". Frankl's interpretation of this search was decidedly teleological; each person naturally seeks their meaning in a purpose or project that arises from the circumstances of their own life. Illuminating the phenomena from a different angle, we can draw on Eliade<sup>14</sup> who described people in pre-modern, by definition religious, societies as engaged in a quest to experience that which was real. He argues that pre-modern cultures often contain methods which helped people experience (or re-experience, in the collective sense) again and again in a cyclic manner, the founding moments of the world across time and place. This process was at once deeply mythical and absolutely real. It answered the deep existential need to have their fleeting, ephemeral life/existence anchored in reality itself, helping them feel, as he calls it, 'saturated with reality'. Eliade describes the malaise of modern people in an increasingly secularized world for whom culture no longer plays that role. This existential quest for reality can be seen as a reason for the appeal of the utopian and restorative dimensions of what Gershom Sholem calls, 'The Messianic impulse'<sup>15</sup>, the need for a myth Yerushalmi<sup>16</sup> describes in his historical philosophizing and Buber's<sup>17</sup> dialogic striving to be an "I" in an "I-Thou" relationship and his desire to "overcome the dualisms of truth and reality, idea and fact, morals and politics".

These descriptions of the meeting point between the human condition on the one hand and Jewish life and thought on the other are given especially bold relief by the emergence of what Harvey has termed 'The Post-Modern Condition'<sup>18</sup>. He describes Postmodernity first and

foremost as a cognitive-cultural-economic-political condition, not as an age or a period of time. It is a condition of flux, transition, irony and conditionality. Indeed, Lyotard defines postmodern as “incredulity toward meta-narratives”<sup>19</sup>. He says that all we are left with is negotiations whereby “the temporary contract is in practice supplanting permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural and family, and international domains, as well as in political affairs”.<sup>20</sup> Lyotard tells us that while the impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self, much current interest in history and heritage is a “[...] shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives and our history. We have no understanding of history in depth, but are instead offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse.” Technology allows us to live in many times & places simultaneously: “Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to Reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong”. It leads to a masking of any real local authentic difference. If the need for meaning, reality and purpose were always important, then the deep drive to experience them will be even more acute in an age that where everything is, in a sense, un-real.

Harvey<sup>21</sup> points to how this post-modern condition creates a deep crisis at the individual and societal level a reason for which a passage is worth quoting at length:

A number of consequences flow from the domination of this motif (*fragmentation*) in postmodernist thought. We can no longer conceive of the individual as alienated in the classic Marxist sense, because to be alienated presupposes a coherent rather than fragmented sense of self from which to be alienated. It is only in terms of such a centered sense of personal identity that individuals can pursue projects over time, or think cogently about the production of a future significantly better than time present and time past. Modernism was very much about the pursuit of better futures, even if perpetual frustration of that aim was conducive to paranoia. But Postmodernism typically strips away that possibility by concentrating on those schizophrenic circumstances induced by fragmentation and all those instabilities (including those of language) that prevent us even picturing coherently, let alone devising strategies to produce, some radically different future... there is good reason to believe that “alienation of the subject is displaced by fragmentation of the subject” in

Postmodern aesthetics<sup>22</sup>. If, as Marx insisted, it takes an alienated individual to pursue the Enlightenment project with tenacity and coherence sufficient to bring us to some better future, then the loss of that alienated subject would seem to preclude the conscious construction of alternative social futures.”<sup>23</sup>

The rhetoric of postmodernism is dangerous for it avoids confronting the realities of political economy and the circumstances of global power. Even Lyotard, the most resolute of postmodernists, is faced in the end with either making some universal gesture (like his appeal to a pristine concept of Justice) or lapsing, like Derrida, into total political silence. Metatheory cannot be dispensed with. The postmodernists simply push it underground where it continues to function as a “now unconscious effectivity”. I find myself agreeing, therefore, with Eagleton’s repudiation of Lyotard, for whom “there can be no difference between truth, authority and rhetorical seductiveness; he who has the smoothest tongue or the raciest story has the power.”<sup>24</sup>

Putting these together, we can say that people today living in advanced industrial societies are faced with four interlocking challenges (we add the discipline which might illuminate the challenge and on which responses might draw):

- Alienation and the need for a community of intimacy (psychology)
- Passivity and the need for a community of involvement (sociology)
- Dependency and the need for a community of authority (epistemology)
- Purposelessness and the need for a community of intention (teleology)

### **Mystical Alternatives and Their Corresponding Alternative (Mystical) Futures**

Today, thanks to the works of authors such as Maslow<sup>25</sup>, Eliade and Idel<sup>26</sup> there is a heightened acceptance of an inquiry into the phenomenological aspects of Mysticism, including the possibility to go out there as “see what they do”<sup>27</sup>. As educators with backgrounds in sociology and philosophy, we ourselves engaged in experiential search and testing<sup>28</sup>, and our preference to one kind of mysticism over the other stems from our world view. We



prefer a mysticism that educates to interdependence and to "seeing the big picture" rather to an ethnocentric, and in our eyes, distorted view of the religious experience.

Some have tried to show that the biblical tradition can be a resource to draw from when responding to this malaise. Putnam<sup>29</sup> stresses the importance that he confers on moral order and its connection to the recovery of the theological horizon of Judaism. It is to the Biblical tradition that he attributes the formulation of the concept of "equality among human beings". Based on what he describes as the unique Judaic contribution to Western culture, the ideal of universal equality among people is one of Putnam's favorite "moral images of the world". This equality is, to his mind, intended to assume two fundamental functions in the sphere of the contemporary debate: it is on the one hand a bulwark against the nihilism typical of French post-structuralism, and, on the other hand, an emblem of the emancipatory ideal sustained by that part of German philosophy that includes Habermas and the heirs of the Frankfurt school. Yet the trends we have described here indicate perhaps that more than this kind of Jewish rationalism, it is actually Jewish mysticism which in its various manifestations offers answers to these profound needs, or at least a language with which to begin to address them.

Lurianic Kabala, founded by Rabbi Isaac Luria, described creation as a process by which God contracted the divine self in order to create space in which the world could be created. God then emanated ten *sefirot* – aspects of the divine presence – into the world. God contained these *sefirot* within vessels, but some of the vessels proved too weak to hold the more powerful of the *sefirot*. The vessels shattered and the divine light mixed with the *kelipot*, or broken shards of the vessels. The story end with the moral that it is each person's responsibility and opportunity to collect the shards and remake the vessels for the divine light to inhabit again the world in its fullness. Luria gave birth to and was carried forward over time by a rich folk literature of symbolically-laden stories about people sent on a journey to fulfill a mission and who need to overcome many obstacles. These stories were particularly instrumental in spreading Lurianic ideas in emotionally available ways to even less learned Jews. The narrative embedded in this approach focuses on the individuals' journey, on the command of the hour that arises from their specific life-conditions, validates the physical world everywhere as an external expression of deeper, religious reality and maintains an overall framework of meaning that is mythically true rather than purely historically based. This approach is sympathetic to post-modern sensibilities in that it demands an existential morality rather than a set of complete or known answers, is dynamic an unfolding. In this sense, the Lurianic Kabbalistic narrative makes some 'moves' that are both revolutionary in terms of their religious meaning and particularly compelling for contemporary people:



- Places the individual in the center of holy action which has a universal even cosmic meaning, therefore empowering and ennobling him/her
- Is based on a situational ethic that encouraged people to act in the here-and-now without needing to place faith in a complete, coherent vision of the perfected world<sup>30</sup>
- Resolved two crises of contemporary faith with one solution. Through a narrative that grants religious significance to the individual's ethical action, it addressed both philosophical and epistemological uncertainty about the need and path for doing good and metaphysical uncertainty about God's reality

We think this a case in point of the argument put forward by Wexler<sup>31</sup> who, drawing widely on Mircea Eliade, Moshe Idel, and Ioan Petru Culianu, suggests that not only can sociology explain mysticism, but that mysticism is necessary to explain some aspects of social reality. He says that there are reactive forces trying to reintegrate mystical modalities into life and society, ones that move beyond and against the secularization and disintegration of society. To understand this, we need to develop a mystical sociology; one that is at the same time academic and empirical but also one that is attuned to and draws on mystical sensitivities in rational way.

Shilhav<sup>32</sup> develops a model of tension between opposing orientations to national life; the extreme expression of either orientation cannot be sustained by a society in the contemporary world. The orientations are 'iconographic', which stresses the importance of locality, deifies specific sites and is accompanied by a closed attitude to knowing about, interacting with or attributing significance to the outside world. The other attitude is 'circulatory', meaning that there is an outward sweep, creation and use of access, inquisitiveness, entrepreneurship of the population and openness to change. Drawing on and adding to this primarily geographic concept, we can describe two kinds of Jewish mysticism. One kind tends to be more iconographic, particularistic, and relates in particular to Jewish culture, nation and the Biblical Land of Israel. There is abundant positive eros, but this eros is limited to members of the group, with the others looked upon as outsiders, negative, lesser in soul, etc<sup>33</sup>. The other kind of mysticism is more universal, diffuse and oftentimes a hybrid combination of different ideas from different cultures. This latter version is softer, does not limit the eros to one's group, is culturally cosmopolitan, universal and has a more global consciousness<sup>34</sup>.

The first model is astonishingly uninterested in mundane history; it seeks to reclaim the past and to wait for redemption. This form of Jewish mysticism is deeply rooted in later interpretations of the biblical tradition. Yerushalmi<sup>35</sup> shows how Biblical religion does not eschew history; it saturates itself in it and is inconceivable without it. Not all parts of history

are worthy of being remembered: only those parts where God reveals God's self and humans respond. The Talmudic sages, he claims, had no interest in history; they played with time and events. They had much interest in the meaning of history, but little in history as it was unfolding. They knew of history what they needed to know. Ironically, their total absorption of Biblical interpretation of history meant there was no point in writing history. No new concept of history had to be forged to help understand history. Once the future was known - that the Messiah would come - whether he would come at God's behest alone or after human repentance was irrelevant to the fact that the Jewish obligation was to become a holy people by observing the Law. Mundane history had no interest beyond that. No events yielded clues that enriched their current understanding of history. Here is the 'iconographic' people par excellence: self-contained in time, place, knowledge (we would add, culture) and human community. This trend finds deep expression in the Kabala; Scholem<sup>36</sup> references the legend of the great magician and Kabbalist who captured Samael, the devil, and thus could have bought about the redemption had he himself not fallen under the devil's sway in the process. He calls it 'a grand allegory of all "Pressing for the End."', the process whereby humans assume the mantle for taking action to try to hasten the coming of the end of days, the ultimate stage in God's path for world history.

The core thrust of the second model also has its proponents in Jewish life, from the wander-lust Israelis seeking spiritual insight through contact with Eastern religions to the universal social justice orientation of the Reform movement. The similarities between Kabbalistic ideas and psychological insights have also been documented. In writing on the philosophical and psychological significance of the Lurianic Kabala, Drob<sup>37</sup> explores how the ten dimensions of the Kabbalists' universe - Creative negation, wisdom, understanding, love, power, beauty, endurance, splendor, foundation, sovereignty - form a guide not only to the godhead's inner nature, but to the psychological development of the human personality. Two older, diverse movements in Jewish life express this thrust in noteworthy ways. Lurianic Kabala itself was developed by Rabbi Isaac Luria in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Tzfat (or Safed). He lived in a community of immigrants to *Eretz Yisrael* - the ancient Land of Israel - who sought to create a community based on reconnecting with nature, ethical relations between themselves and a desire to reconnect with God. Centuries later we see the same themes replicated in a different form. The early Zionist pioneers who followed A.D. Gordon, a philosopher-pioneer, elder statesman who wrote extensively, also saw themselves as impacting not only their own lives, but actually reconnecting with and completing the cosmos through these same dimensions of human striving - reconnecting with nature, ethical relations between themselves and a desire to reconnect to the Spirit. In both cases the deep Jewish landed-ness - these groups were very cognizant of being in the *Eretz Yisrael* - was not a

relationship of colonization or claiming political rights over territory. Similarly Buber<sup>38</sup> says that nature and history are separated only in the human mind and he decries the way that in the Zionist movement, “common sense is used against every kind of ‘mysticism’”. His mystical direction is not parochial; just the opposite:

If Israel (*i.e. the Jewish people*) renounces the mystery, it renounces the heart of reality itself. National forms without the eternal purpose from which they have arisen signify the end of Israel’s specific fruitfulness. The free development of the latent power of the nation without a supreme value to give it purpose and direction does not mean regeneration but the mere sport of a common self-deception behind which spiritual death lurks in ambush. If Israel desires less than it is intended to fulfill then it will fail to achieve even the lesser goal.

Gordon’s mystical socialist vision with its global social, economic and political dimensions and Buber’s historic-cosmic drive for the people to contribute to the world community are on a continuum with the voice of the Lurianic vision. Theirs was a mystical vision of connecting to the created world, with their Creator and with each other and all humanity in a holy triad. It reflected an unusual and powerful mixture of particular and the universal.

While both voices and visions co-exist in Jewish life today, we live in an era of a growing understanding that the planet and its inhabitants’ survival requires humans to become more appreciative of and committed to sustainability. In looking at both models of Jewish mysticism, we propose that the softer version of Jewish mysticism needs to be preferred as a strategy that would allow the search for a common (spiritual) good<sup>39</sup>. We believe that even if individuals who engage in inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue begin with very particularistic views, it is possible that listening and learning with “others” may soften their particularism and move them to a position that allows them to embrace the otherness of those different to themselves. We advocate for strengthening the utopian, universal strand of Jewish mysticism as reflected in the kabalistic tradition.

Today the Jewish world is split between the two kinds of mystical tradition: one narrow, parochial, mechanistic and closed on itself and the other universal, inclusive, holistic and open. These two authentically Jewish attitudes have always been in tension. Scholem<sup>40</sup> suggests that a similar tension is an essential component of Jewish mystical self-understanding. Within Rabbinic Judaism, there are three forces at work: conservative (the preservation of that which exists), restorative (the return and recreation of a past condition which comes to be felt as an ideal) and utopian (a vision of the future that has never yet existed). The

conservative factor has never been part of Jewish messianism, but the other two have always been essential for it. One of these two is always present even though the relationship between the two forces is complicated. The restorative force has a utopian factor and the utopian a restorative one. No matter whether knowingly or unknowingly, the desire to restore a lost past inevitable includes in it totally new aspects which it projects onto the past before gathering them up and projecting them into the future. Alternately, utopianism is bolstered by reference to the past, albeit (again) one transformed.

And yet the fact that this tension is prevalent does not absolve us of the responsibility to make judgments about the direction in which the balance needs to be pushed. The term '*Tikun Olam*' has been used in myriad ways over time by different Jewish communities<sup>41</sup>. One of its earliest uses is in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in the *Mishna*, where it refers to a small change in a legal rule to allow for the better functioning of the community. That seems like the epitome of the narrow mystical tradition. A later use we have explored was the Lurianic Kabala and various strands of the Zionist movement. While both directions seem to answer deep needs within the Jewish community, we think that in light of the post-modern milieu in which we find ourselves and the by now obvious environmental crisis we face – with its complex dimensions and far-reaching, multi-faceted implications, what we might call the utopian mysticism is more likely to serve us, to offer us guidance and to enable us to live more human live. After all, in the Lurianic drama, the difference between the world God creates initially and the one that we are commanded to create by collecting the sparks is that the first world created by God alone was not sustainable. The radical message here is that while God can create a perfect world, it is not one that is sustainable through time. We are left with the tantalizing implication that human beings, if they repair God's handiwork wisely, can do better and create a once-perfect, then-broken, now-sustainable world. Given that we ourselves are part of that creation, we need in fact to also – perhaps pre-eminently – repair ourselves. The Jewish tradition, like many others, is a source of rich insight, ideas and wisdom for those who seek to undertake this enterprise.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Machshavot Israel. "An Interview with Moshe Idel." In *Machshavot Israel - Judaism Here and Now*, (Tel Aviv: Yediot Sfarim, 2000), 47-66. In Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> Yehuda Shenhav, "The cloak, the cage and the fog of sanctity: the Zionist mission and the role of religion among Arab Jews", *Nations and Nationalism* 9, 4 (October 2003): 511-531.

<sup>3</sup> Shenhav, 511-531.

<sup>4</sup> Daria Maoz, "The Eastern Wall: On Chabad Houses in East Asia,," *Chayim Acherim*, (March, 2006), 114. (Hebrew). Retrieved from: <http://www.masa.co.il/article.php?cid=2019>. 1-5.

<sup>5</sup> Reuven Gerber, *The Enlightenment Revolution: The Spiritual Way of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hachohen Kook* (Jerusalem: Sifria Tzionit, 2005), 13-18. (Hebrew).

<sup>6</sup> Yosseph Shilhav, "The Educational Dilemma in a Globalized World," *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 1, 2 (February 2006): 15-22.

<sup>7</sup> Shilhav, 2006, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Adiel Kosman, Introduction to *Insight*, by Jiddu Krishnamurti (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), 9-12. (Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> Nahum Langental and Nissim Amon, *When Moses met Buddha* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Sfarim, 2005). (Hebrew)

<sup>10</sup> Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen, "The Sovereign Self: Jewish Identity in Post Modern America", *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*, 453 (May, 2001). Retrieved from: <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp453.htm>. 1-18.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation* (New York: Perennial, 1995), 285-306.

<sup>12</sup> Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in The Lotus* (New York: Harper, 1994), 72-90.

<sup>13</sup> Victor E Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, Simon and Schuster, 1963), 157.

<sup>14</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Florida: Harcourt, 1959), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Gerschom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* (USA: University of Washington Press, 1982), 77-104.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Buber, "The Holy Way," in *On Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1923), 114.

<sup>18</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (USA: Blackwell, 1989), 300-307.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 6-20.

<sup>20</sup> Lyotard, 66.

<sup>21</sup> Harvey, 4-53.

<sup>22</sup> Fredrick Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism* (USA: Duke University Press, 1991), 60.

<sup>23</sup> Harvey, 4-53

<sup>24</sup> Harvey, 117.



<sup>25</sup> Abraham H Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (New York, The Viking Press, 1970).

<sup>26</sup> See Ron Margolin, "Moshe Idel's Phenomenology and its Sources", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (Winter 2007): 41-51, <http://www.jsri.ro>

<sup>27</sup> Philip Wexler, "Mystical Jewish Sociology" *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (Winter, 2007): 206-217, <http://www.jsri.ro>

<sup>28</sup> Yehuda Bar Shalom and Yonatan Glaser, "Jewish Pastoral Counseling: a window of opportunity for Israeli Academia", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16 (Spring 2007): 21, <http://www.jsri.ro>

<sup>29</sup> The introduction to Hilary Putnam, "Between the New Left and Judaism", in *The American Philosopher*, ed. Giovanna Borradori, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 56.

<sup>30</sup> Thereby avoiding the kind of "isms" that for many people, after the horrors of modernism gone wrong (as exemplified by everything from communism to fascism to unbridled capitalism), elicit an instinctive reaction of recoil.

<sup>31</sup> Wexler, 206-217.

<sup>32</sup> Shilhav, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Eli Sagan, *Freud, Women, and Morality: The Psychology of Good and Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 197-207.

<sup>34</sup> Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1987), 53-76.

<sup>35</sup> Yerushalmi, 1-26.

<sup>36</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Sanford Drob, "The Sefirot: Kabbalistic Archetypes of Mind and Creation," *Cross Currents* 47, 1 (Spring, 1997). Retrieved from: <http://www.crosscurrents.org/Drob.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Martin Buber, *On Zion: The History of an Idea* (New York: Schocken, 1973). Retrieved from: <http://www.wzo.org.il/doingzionism/resources/view.asp?id=1235>

<sup>39</sup> See for example's Jensen's similar call from a Christian perspective many people today have developed: David H Jensen, *In the Company of Others: A Dialogical Christology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 1-17.

<sup>40</sup> Scholem, 1-36.

<sup>41</sup> An interesting treatment by Rabbi Jill Jacobs is in Zeek, 2007, at <http://www.zeek.net/706tohu/index.php?page=1>.