

The Holiness of Sin

Gershom Scholem

Since its original appearance in Hebrew in the mid-30's under the title "Mitzvah ha-Ba'ah ba-Averah," GERSHOM SCHOLEM's study of those Jews of the 18th and 19th centuries who clung to their belief in the Messiahship of Sabbatai Zevi even after his conversion to Islam, has been widely regarded as one of the classics of modern Jewish scholarship and one of the great works of the historical imagination in our time. What follows is the first translation of that essay into English, done by Hillel Halkin; the text has not been cut or altered in any way except for the elimination of certain footnote references. The essay will also be included (with the footnotes retained) under the title "Redemption Through Sin" in The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality which Schocken Books will be issuing shortly.

Among Gershom Scholem's other books which have been translated into English are Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism and On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism. Readers of the present essay will be particularly interested to learn that Professor Scholem's two-volume work on Sabbatai Zevi, published about ten years ago in Hebrew, is being readied by the Princeton University Press for publication in an English translation within the coming months.

NO CHAPTER in the history of the Jewish people during the last several hundred years has been as shrouded in mystery as that of the Sabbatian movement. On one point, at least, there is no longer any disagreement: the dramatic events and widespread religious revival that preceded the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi in 1666 form an important and integral part of Jewish history and deserve to be studied objectively, to the exclusion of moralistic condemnations of the historical figures involved. It has come increasingly to be realized that a true understanding of the rise of Sabbatianism will never be possible as long as scholars continue to appraise it by inappropriate standards, whether these be the conventional beliefs of their own age or the values of traditional Judaism itself. Today indeed one rarely encounters the baseless assumptions of "charlatanry" and "impotence" which occupy so prominent a place in earlier historical literature on the subject. On the contrary: in these times of Jewish national rebirth it is only natural that the deep though ultimately tragic yearning for national redemption to which the initial stages of Sabbatianism gave expression should meet with greater comprehension than in the past.

In turning to consider the Sabbatian movement after Sabbatai Zevi's conversion to Islam, however, we are faced with an entirely different situation. Here we find ourselves still standing before a blank wall, not only of misunderstanding, but often of an actual refusal to understand. Even

in recent times there has been a definite tendency among scholars to minimize at all costs the significance of this "heretical" Sabbatianism, with the result that no adequate investigation yet exists of its spiritual foundations, its overall impact on 18th-century Jewry, or its ultimate fate. It is impossible, in fact, to read any of the studies that have been done in these areas without being astounded by the amount of invective directed against the leaders and adherents of the various Sabbatian sects. Typical of this approach is David Kahana's *A History of the Kabbalists, Sabbatians, and Hasidim* (in Hebrew), but the angry moralizing that characterizes this volume has not been confined to any one historical school; rather, it has been shared by writers of widely differing points of view, secular as well as religious. The problem itself, meanwhile, remains as recondite as ever.

Two enormous difficulties, therefore, confront the student of the Sabbatian "heresies": on the one hand, there are the obstacles posed by the sources themselves, and on the other, those created by the attitude generally taken toward them. To a great extent, moreover, these two sets of difficulties have always been related.

Why should this be so?

The Sabbatian movement in its various shadings and configurations persisted with remarkable obstinacy among certain sectors of the Jewish

people for approximately one hundred and fifty years after Sabbatai Zevi's conversion. In a number of countries it grew to be powerful, but for various reasons, internal as well as external, its affairs were deliberately hidden from the public eye. In particular, its spokesmen refrained from committing their beliefs to print, and the few books that they actually published concealed twice what they revealed. They did, however, produce a rich literature, which circulated only among groups of "believers" (*ma'aminim*)—the term by which Sabbatian sectarians generally chose to refer to themselves, down to the last of the Dönme in Salonika and the last Frankists in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As long as Sabbatianism remained a vital force within the Jewish ghetto, threatening to undermine the very existence of rabbinic Judaism, its opponents labored ceaselessly to root it out and systematically destroyed whatever of its writings came into their possession, "including [even] the sacred names of God [*azkarot*] which they contain," as the bans upon them read. As a result many of their writings were lost without a trace, and had it been left solely up to the rabbinical authorities nothing would have come down to us at all except for certain tendentiously chosen fragments quoted in anti-Sabbatian polemics. In addition, although an extensive religious literature was still to be found in the hands of Frankists in Moravia and Bohemia at the beginning of the 19th century, the children and grandchildren of these "believers" in Prague and other Jewish centers themselves attempted to obliterate every shred of evidence bearing on their ancestors' beliefs and practices. The well-known philosopher and historian of atheism Fritz Mauthner has preserved the following interesting story in his memoirs: in the declining days of the movement in Bohemia, Frankist "emissaries" came to his grandfather (and undoubtedly to other members of the sect as well) and requested that he surrender to them a picture of "the Lady" and "all kinds of writings" which he had in his possession. The emissaries took them and left. The incident took place sometime during the 1820's or 1830's. In spite of all this, at least two large manuscripts from these circles have survived.

One must therefore bear in mind in dealing with the history of Sabbatianism that powerful interests and emotions have often been at stake. Each for reasons of his own, all those who have written on the subject in the past shared one belief: the less importance attributed to the Sabbatian movement, the better.

AUTHORS AND HISTORIANS of the Orthodox camp, for their part, have been anxious to belittle and even distort the overall role of Sabbatianism in order to safeguard the reputations, as they have conceived of them, of certain honored religious figures of the past. Such

apologetics have had their inevitable effect upon the writing of history, as has the fundamental outlook of their proponents, tending as it does to idealize religious life in the ghetto at the expense of completely ignoring the deep inner conflicts and divisions to which not even the rabbis were necessarily immune. To acknowledge the Sabbatianism of eminent rabbis in Jerusalem, Adrianople, Constantinople, or Izmir, Prague, Hamburg, or Berlin, has been in the eyes of such authors openly to impeach the integrity of an entire body of men who were never supposed to be other than learned and virtuous defenders of Jewish tradition. Given such an attitude, it is hardly to be wondered at that one should instinctively avoid the kinds of inquiry that might lead to the discovery of heretical opinion, to say nothing of actual licentiousness, in the most unlikely places. One might cite endless examples of this kind of mentality in historical literature dealing with rabbinical and congregational life in the 18th century, and in at least one case, A. L. Frumkin's *A Historical Account of the Scholars of Jerusalem* (in Hebrew), the author goes so far as to "acquit" some of the most dedicated Sabbatians of the "scandal" of heterodoxy!

Secularist historians, on the other hand, have been at pains to deemphasize the role of Sabbatianism for a different reason. Not only did most of the families once associated with the Sabbatian movement in Western and Central Europe continue to remain afterward within the Jewish fold, but many of their descendants, particularly in Austria, rose to positions of importance during the 19th century as prominent intellectuals, great financiers, and men of high political connections. Such persons, needless to say, could scarcely have been expected to approve of attempts to "expose" their "tainted" lineage, and in view of their stature in the Jewish community it is not surprising that their wishes should have carried weight. Furthermore, in an age when Jewish scholarship itself was considered to be in part an extension of the struggle for political emancipation, the climate for research in so sensitive an area was by no means generally favorable. In consequence, those Jewish scholars who had access to the wealth of Sabbatian documents and eyewitness reports that were still to be found early in the century failed to take advantage of the opportunity, while by the time a later generation arrived on the scene the sources had been destroyed and were no longer available even to anyone who might have desired to make use of them.

The survivors of the Frankists in Poland and of Dönme or "apostates" in Salonika formed yet a third group having a direct interest in disguising the historical facts. These two Sabbatian sects, both of which formally renounced the Jewish religion (the Dönme converting to Islam in 1683, the Frankists to Catholicism in 1759), continued to adhere to their secret identities long

after their defection from their mother faith; the Dönme, in fact, did not disappear until the present generation, while in the case of the Frankists, whose history in the course of the 19th century is obscure, it is impossible to determine at exactly what point in time they were finally swallowed up by the rest of Polish society. There is reason to suspect that until the eve of World War I many original manuscripts and documents were preserved by both these groups, particularly by a number of Frankist families in Warsaw; but how much of this material may yet be uncovered, and how much has been purposely destroyed by its owners in order to conceal forever the secret of their descent, is in no way ascertainable.

Nevertheless, the total picture is not as dark as it may seem to have been painted: despite the many efforts at suppression, which supplemented, as it were, the inevitable "selective" process of time itself, a considerable amount of valuable material has been saved. Many of the accusations made against the "believers" by their opponents can now be weighed (and more often than not confirmed!) on the basis of a number of the "believers'" own books which were not allowed to perish. Little by little our knowledge has grown, and although many of the historical details we would like to know will undoubtedly never come to light at all, there is reason to hope that this important chapter in Jewish history will yet be fully written. In any event, it is clear that a correct understanding of the Sabbatian movement after the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi will provide a new clue toward understanding the history of the Jews in the 18th century as a whole, and in particular, the beginnings of the Haskalah (Enlightenment) movement in a number of countries.

I do not propose in this essay to trace the outward history of Sabbatianism in its several manifestations over the century and a half in which it retained its vitality, nor (although I can hardly conceal my opinion that the entire movement was far more widespread than is generally conceded even today) do I mean to debate the question of whether this or that particular individual was or was not a Sabbatian himself. Suffice it to say that the sources in our possession, meager as they are, make it perfectly clear that the number of Sabbatian rabbis was far greater than has been commonly estimated, greater even than was believed by that anti-Sabbatian zealot Rabbi Jacob Emden, who has almost always been accused of exaggeration. In the present essay, however, I shall put such questions aside and limit myself to the area that has been the most sadly neglected in the entire field, namely, the origins and development of Sabbatian thought per se.

If one accepts what Heinrich Graetz and David Kahana have to say on the subject of Sabbatian theology, it is impossible to understand what its essential attraction ever was; indeed, if it is true, as both these writers claim, that the entire move-

ment was a colossal hoax perpetrated by degenerates and frauds, one might well ask why a serious historian should bother to waste his time on it in the first place. And if this is the case with Sabbatianism in general, how much more so when one ventures to consider what is undoubtedly the most tragic episode in the entire drama, that of the Frankists, the psychological barriers to the understanding of which are incomparably greater. How, for instance, can one get around the historical fact that in the course of their public disputation with Jewish rabbis in Lvov in 1759 the members of this sect did not even shrink from resorting to the notorious blood libel, an accusation far more painful to Jewish sensitivities than any of their actual beliefs? A great deal has been written about this incident, particularly by the eminent historian Meir Balaban, in whose book, *On the History of the Frankist Movement* (in Hebrew), it is dealt with exhaustively. Balaban, who makes the Lvov libel a starting point for his overall inquiry, reaches the significant conclusion that there was no organic connection between it and the Frankist "articles of faith" presented at the disputation. The members of the sect, in fact, were reluctant to make the accusation at all, and did so only at the instigation of the Catholic clergy, which was interested in using them for purposes of its own, having nothing to do with their Sabbatian background. That they finally agreed to collaborate in the scheme can be explained by their desire to wreak vengeance on their rabbinical persecutors.

THUS, THOUGH the behavior of the Frankists at Lvov must certainly be judged harshly from both a universal-ethical and a Jewish-national point of view, it is important to keep in mind that the blood libels against the Jews (the indications are that there was more than one) do not in themselves tell us anything about the inner spiritual world of the sect, in all of whose literature (written one and two generations after the Lvov disputation) not a single allusion to such a belief is to be found. The truly astonishing thing is that although several important texts of Frankist teachings actually do exist, not a single serious attempt has so far been made to analyze their contents. The reason for this is simple. Graetz and A. Kraushar, two reputable scholars, one of whom wrote a full-length study of Jacob Frank and his Polish followers, were both of the opinion that there was no such thing as a Frankist "creed," and that *The Sayings of the Lord*, which has come down to us in a Polish version alone, was incoherent nonsense. According to Kraushar, Frank's sayings are "grotesque, comical, and incomprehensible," while Graetz, whose attitude toward all forms of mysticism is well known, could hardly have been expected to show much insight into the religious motivations of the sect. Balaban, on the other

hand, is mainly concerned with the outward history of the Frankists up to the time of their mass conversion, and his reconstruction of their theology is based solely on the positions publicly taken by them in their disputations with the rabbis. It is his reliance on these "articles of faith," in fact, which were actually far from accurate reflections of the Frankists' true beliefs, that leads him to conclude that after 1759 the history of the sect was "determined more by the personalities of Jacob Frank and his disciples than by any intrinsic religious relationship to Judaism."

I myself cannot agree with Balaban on this point, and in the following pages I shall attempt to show, at least summarily, that Sabbatianism must be regarded not only as a single continuous development which retained its identity in the eyes of its adherents regardless of whether they themselves remained Jews or not, but also, paradoxical though it may seem, as a specifically Jewish phenomenon to the end. I shall endeavor to show that the nihilism of the Sabbatian and Frankist movements, with its doctrine—so profoundly shocking to the Jewish conception of things—that the violation of the Torah could become its true fulfillment (*bittulah shel torah zehu kiyyumah*), was a dialectical outgrowth of the belief in the Messiahship of Sabbatai Zevi, and that this nihilism, in turn, helped pave the way for the Haskalah and the Reform movement of the 19th century, once its original religious impulse was exhausted. Beyond this, I hope to make the reader see how within the spiritual world of the Sabbatian sects, within the very *sanctum sanctorum* of Kabbalistic mysticism, as it were, the crisis of faith which overtook the Jewish people as a whole upon its emergence from its medieval isolation was first anticipated, and how groups of Jews within the walls of the ghetto, while still outwardly adhering to the practices of their forefathers, had begun to embark on a radically new inner life of their own. Prior to the French Revolution the historical conditions were lacking which might have caused this upheaval to break forth in the form of an open struggle for social change, with the result that it turned further inward upon itself to act upon the hidden recesses of the Jewish psyche; but it would be mistaken to conclude from this that Sabbatianism did not permanently affect the outward course of Jewish history. The desire for total liberation which played so tragic a role in the development of Sabbatian nihilism was by no means a purely self-destructive force; on the contrary, beneath the surface of lawlessness, antinomianism, and catastrophic negation, powerful constructive impulses were at work, and these, I maintain, it is the duty of the historian to uncover.

Undeniably, the difficulties in the face of this are great, and it is not to be wondered at that Jewish historians until now have not had the inner freedom to attempt the task. In our own

times we owe much to the experience of Zionism for enabling us to detect in Sabbatianism's throes those gropings toward a healthier national existence which must have seemed like an undiluted nightmare to the peaceable Jewish bourgeois of the 19th century. Even today, however, the writing of Jewish history suffers unduly from the influence of 19th-century Jewish historiography. To be sure, as Jewish historians we have clearly advanced beyond the vantage point of our predecessors, having learned to insist, and rightly so, that Jewish history is a process that can only be understood when viewed from *within*; but in spite of all this, our progress in applying this truth to concrete historical situations, as opposed to general historiographical theories, has been slow. Up to the present [1935—Ed.] only two men, Siegmund Hurwitz in his *From Whither to Where* (in Hebrew) and Zalman Rubashov (Shazar) in his essay "Upon the Ruins of Frankism" (in Hebrew), have shown any true appreciation of the complexities of Sabbatian psychology, and their work has by and large failed to attract the attention it deserves.

AND NOW, one last introductory comment. In dismissing the need for objective research on the Sabbatian and Frankist movements, it has often been asserted that since the phenomena are essentially pathological, they belong more properly to the study of medicine than to the study of history. Indeed, an article on "Frank and His Sect in the Light of Psychiatry" (Bychowski, *Ha-Tekufah*, Vol. XIV) has actually been published, but it only succeeds in demonstrating how incapable such an approach is of dealing satisfactorily with the problem. From the standpoint of sexual pathology it can hardly be doubted that Frank himself was a diseased individual, just as there can be no question that at the center and among the ranks of the Sabbatian movement (as in all radical movements that spring from certain particular tensions, some of which are not so far removed from those of "ordinary" life) it would be possible to find cases of marked mental aberrance. But what is the significance of all this? We are not, after all, so much concerned with this or that prominent Sabbatian personality as with the question of why such people were able to attract the following that they did. The diagnosis of a neurologist would be of little value in determining why thousands of human beings were able to find a spiritual home in the labyrinth of Sabbatian theology. We must refuse to be deluded by such convenient tags as "hysteria" or "mass psychosis," which only confuse the issue at the same time that they provide an excuse for avoiding it and comfortably reassure one of one's own comparative "normality." It is undoubtedly true that Jacob Frank was every bit the depraved and unscrupulous person he is supposed to have been, and yet the moment we seriously ponder his

“teachings,” or attempt to understand why masses of men should have regarded him as their leader and prophet, this same individual becomes highly problematic. Even more than the psychology of the leader, however, it is the psychology of the led that demands to be understood, and in the case of Sabbatianism, a movement built entirely upon paradoxes, this question is crucial indeed. Whatever we may think of Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, the fact is: their followers, while they were certainly not “innocents”—if there was one thing lacking in the paradoxical religion of the Sabbatians, it was innocence!—were sincere in their faith, and it is the nature of this faith, which penetrated to the hidden depths and abysses of the human spirit, that we wish to understand.

II

AS A MYSTICAL heterodoxy Sabbatianism assumed different and changing forms: it splintered into many sects, so that even from the polemical writings against it we learn that the “heretics” quarreled among themselves over practically everything. The word “practically,” however, must be stressed, for on one essential, the underlying ground of their “holy faith,” as they called it, the “believers” all agreed. Let us proceed then to examine this common ground of faith as it manifested itself both psychologically and dogmatically.

By all accounts, the messianic revival of 1665-66 spread to every sector of the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora. Among the believers and penitents a new emotion, which was not restricted to the traditional expectation of a political deliverance of Israel alone, began to make itself felt. This is not to say that hope for a divine liberation from the bondage and degradation of exile was not an important element in the general contagion, but rather that various psychological reactions which accompanied it soon took on an independent existence of their own. Prior to Sabbatai Zevi's apostasy, great masses of people were able to believe in perfect simplicity that a new era of history was being ushered in and that they themselves had already begun to inhabit a new and redeemed world. Such a belief could not but have a profound effect on those who held it: their innermost feelings, which assured them of the presence of a messianic reality, seemed entirely in harmony with the outward course of events, those climactic developments in a historico-political realm that Sabbatai Zevi was soon to overthrow by means of his miraculous journey to the Turkish sultan, whom he would depose from his throne and strip of all his powers.

In the generation preceding Sabbatai Zevi's advent the rapid spread of the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria and his school had resulted in a grafting of the theories of the Kabbalists, the *de facto* theologians of the Jewish people in the 17th cen-

tury, onto the traditional Jewish view of the role and personality of the Messiah. Mystical Lurianic speculations about the nature of the redemption and “the restored world” (*olam ha-tikkun*) which was to follow upon its heels added new contents and dimensions to the popular messianic folk-myth of a conquering national hero, raising it to the level of a supreme cosmic drama: the redemptive process was now no longer conceived of as simply a working-out of Israel's temporal emancipation from the yoke of the Gentiles, but rather as a fundamental transformation of the entire Creation, affecting material and spiritual worlds alike and leading to a rectification of the primordial catastrophe of the “breaking of the vessels” (*shevirat ha-kelim*), in the course of which the divine worlds would be returned to their original unity and perfection. By stressing the spiritual side of the redemption far more than its outward aspect, the Kabbalists of the Lurianic school, though by no means overlooking the latter, gradually converted it into a symbol of purely spiritual processes and ends. As long as the messianic expectancies they encouraged were not put to the test in the actual crucible of history, the dangers inherent in this shift of emphasis went unnoticed, for the Kabbalists themselves never once imagined that a conflict might arise between the symbol and the reality it was intended to represent. To be sure, Lurianic Kabbalah had openly educated its followers to prepare themselves more for an inner than for an outer renewal; but inasmuch as it was commonly assumed that the one could not take place without the other, the procedure seemed in no way questionable. On the contrary: the spread of Lurianic teachings, so it was thought, was in itself bound to hasten the coming of the historical Redeemer.

The appearance of Sabbatai Zevi and the growth of popular faith in his mission caused this inner sense of freedom, of “a world made pure again,” to become an immediate reality for thousands. This did not of course mean that Sabbatai Zevi himself was no longer expected to fulfill the various messianic tasks assigned him by Jewish tradition, but in the meantime an irreversible change had taken place in the souls of the faithful. Who could deny that the *Shekhinah*, the earthly presence of God, had risen from the dust?

“Heretical” Sabbatianism was born at the moment of Sabbatai Zevi's totally unexpected conversion, when for the first time a contradiction appeared between the two levels of the drama of redemption, that of the subjective experience of the individual on the one hand, and that of the objective historical facts on the other. The conflict was no less intense than unforeseen. One had to choose: either one heard the voice of God in the decree of history, or else one heard it in the newly revealed reality within. “Heretical” Sabbatianism was the result of the refusal of large sections of the Jewish people to submit to the

sentence of history by admitting that their own personal experience had been false and untrustworthy.

Thus, the various attempts to construct a Sabbatian theology were all motivated by a similar purpose, namely, to rationalize the abyss that had suddenly opened between the objective order of things and that inward certainty which it could no longer serve to symbolize, and to render the tension between the two more endurable for those who continued to live with it. The sense of contradiction from which Sabbatianism sprung became a lasting characteristic of the movement: following upon the initial paradox of an apostate Messiah, paradox engendered paradox. Above all, the "believers," those who remained loyal to their inward experience, were compelled to find an answer to the simple question: what could be the value of a historical reality that had proved to be so bitterly disappointing, and how might it be related to the hopes it had betrayed?

The essence of the Sabbatian's conviction, in other words, can be summarized in a sentence: it is inconceivable that all of God's people should inwardly err, and so, if their vital experience is contradicted in the facts, it is the facts which stand in need of explanation. In the words of a Sabbatian "moderate" writing thirty years after Sabbatai Zevi's apostasy: "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not ensnare even the animals of the righteous, much less the righteous themselves, to say nothing of so terribly deceiving an entire people. . . . And how is it possible that all of Israel be deceived unless this be part of some great divine plan?" This line of argument, which was adopted by many persons from the very beginning of the Sabbatian movement, is known to have impressed even the movement's opponents, who were equally disinclined to find fault with the entire Jewish people and sought instead some other explanation for what had happened.

During the century and a half of its existence Sabbatianism was embraced by those Jewish circles which desired to prolong the novel sensation of living in a "restored world" by developing attitudes and institutions that seemed commensurate with a new divine order. Inasmuch as this deliberately maintained state of consciousness was directly opposed to the outlook of ghetto Jewry as a whole, of which the "believers" themselves formed a part, the latter of necessity tended to become innovators and rebels, particularly the radicals among them. Herein lay the psychological basis of that spirit of revolt which so infuriated the champions of Orthodoxy, who, though they may at first have had no inkling of the lengths to which it would be ultimately carried, rightly suspected it from the outset of striving to subvert the authority of rabbinic Judaism. Herein, too, lay the basis of all future efforts to construct a Sabbatian theology, to the consideration of which we must now turn our attention.

IN THE HISTORY of religion we frequently encounter types of individuals known as "pneumatics" (*pneumatikoi*) or "spiritualists" (*spirituales*). Such persons, who played a major role in the development of Sabbatianism, were known in Jewish tradition as "spiritual" or "extra-spirited" men or, in the language of the *Zohar*, as "masters of a holy soul." These terms did not refer to just anyone who may have had occasion in the course of his life to be "moved by the spirit"; rather, they applied only to those few who abode in the "palace of the king" (*hekhal ha-melekh*), that is, who lived in continual communion with a spiritual realm through whose gates they had passed, whether by actually dwelling within it to the point of abandoning their previous existence, or by appropriating from it a "spark" or "holy soul," as only the elect were privileged to do. One so favored was in certain respects no longer considered to be subject to the laws of everyday reality, having realized within himself the hidden world of divine light. Naturally, spiritualistic types of this sort have always regarded themselves as forming a group apart, and hence the special sense of their own "superiority" by which they are characterized: from their lofty perspective the world of material affairs tends to look lowly indeed. Here, then, we have all the prerequisites for the sectarian disposition, for the sect serves the *illuminati* as both a rallying point for their own kind and a refuge from the incomprehension of the carnal and unenlightened masses. The sectarians regard themselves as the vanguard of a new world, but they do not therefore need to renounce the parent religion which inspired them, for they can always reinterpret it in the light of the supreme reality to which they owe their newly discovered allegiance.

For a number of reasons, which cannot be gone into here, such spiritualists were rarely allowed to develop within the Jewish community after the period of the Second Temple. In part this was a consequence of Christianity, to which many of them ultimately passed; but even when they continued to exist within Judaism itself, it was always as isolated and unorganized individuals. It is a well-known fact, for instance, that spiritualism particularly abounds in the domain of religious mysticism; and yet, as the history of Kabbalism amply demonstrates, despite the opposition between conventional religion and the ecstasy, at times even abandon, of the pneumatic, medieval Judaism was capable of absorbing the latter into its orbit. Such was not the case, however, with either Christianity or Islam: here the conflict broke out openly and fiercely on numerous occasions, and the spiritualist sects which it produced went on to play important roles in the development of new social and religious institutions, often giving birth, albeit in religious guise, to the most revolutionary ideas. To take but one example, historical research during the last several

decades has clearly shown the direct connection between Christian sectarianism in Europe and the growth of the Enlightenment and the ideal of toleration in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The existence of similar forces in Jewish history, on the other hand, has been all but neglected by the historians, an oversight facilitated by the fact that Jewish spiritualism has either long been outwardly dormant or else, as in the case of Kabbalism, has always preferred to work invisibly and unsystematically beneath the surface. Indeed, as long as Jewish historiography was dominated by a spirit of assimilation, no one so much as suspected that positivism and religious reform were the progeny not only of the rational mind, but of an entirely different sort of psychology as well, that of the Kabbalah and the Sabbatian crisis—in other words, of that very “lawless heresy” which was so soundly excoriated in their name!

IN THE Sabbatian movement, which was the first clear manifestation (one might better say *explosion*) of spiritualistic sectarianism in Judaism since the days of the Second Temple, the type of the radical spiritualist found its perfect expression. To be sure, *illuminati* of the same class were later prevalent in Hasidism too, particularly during the golden age of the movement; but Hasidism, rather than allow itself to be taken over by such types, forced them after a period of initial equivocation to curb their unruly spirituality, and did so with such success that it was able to overcome the most difficult and hazardous challenge of all, that of safely incorporating them into its own collective body. Unlike Sabbatianism, whose followers were determined to carry their doctrine to its ultimate conclusion, it was the genius of Hasidism that it knew where to set itself limits. But the Sabbatians pressed on to the end, into the abyss of the mythical “gates of impurity” (*sha'are tum'ah*), where the pure spiritual awareness of a world made new became a pitfall fraught with peril for the moral life.

Here, then, were all the materials necessary to cause a true conflagration in the heart of Jewry. A new type of Jew had appeared for whom the world of exile and Diaspora Judaism was partly or wholly abolished and who uncompromisingly believed that a “restored world,” whose laws and practices he was commanded to obey, was in the process of coming into being. The great historical disappointment experienced by the Sabbatian had instilled in him the paradoxical conviction that he and his like were privy to a secret whose time had not yet come to be generally revealed, and it was this certainty which, in Hebrew literature of the period, imparted a special meaning to his use of the terms “believer” and “holy faith,” the peculiar shadings of which immediately inform us that we are dealing with a Sabbatian document even when there is not the slightest allusion there-

in to Sabbatai Zevi himself: by virtue of his “holy faith” in the mysterious realignment of the divine worlds and in the special relationship to them of the Creator during the transitional period of cosmic restitution (*tikkun*), the “believer,” he who trusted in the mission of Sabbatai Zevi, was exalted above all other men. Hidden in the “believer’s” soul was a precious jewel, the pearl of messianic freedom, which shone forth from its chamber of chambers to pierce the opaqueness of evil and materiality; he who possessed it was a free man by power of his own personal experience, and to this inner sense of freedom, whether gotten during the mass revival that preceded Sabbatai Zevi’s apostasy, or afterward, in the ranks of “holy faith,” he would continue to cling no matter how much he would know it to be contradicted by the outward facts.

All Sabbatian doctrine had as its aim the resolution of this contradiction. The conflict was bitterly clear. Those who were disillusioned by Sabbatai Zevi’s apostasy were able to claim that nothing had really changed: the world was the same as ever, the exile was no different than before; therefore the Torah was the same Torah and the familiar Kabbalistic teachings about the nature of the Godhead and the divine worlds remained in force. A great opportunity had perhaps existed, but it had been missed: henceforth the one recourse was a return to Israel’s traditional faith in its God. The “believers,” on the other hand, could say, in paraphrase of Job, “our eyes have beheld and not another’s”: the redemption had begun indeed, only its ways were mysterious and its outward aspect was still incomplete. Externals might seem the same, but inwardly all was in the process of renewal. Both the Torah and the exile had been fundamentally altered, as had the nature of the Godhead, but for the time being all these transformations bore “inward faces” alone.

The Sabbatian movement soon developed all the psychological characteristics of a spiritual sect, and before long many of its followers proceeded to organize themselves along such lines. The persecutions against them on the part of various rabbinical and congregational authorities, their own special feeling of apartness and the need to preserve their secret, and the novel practices which their beliefs eventually compelled them to pursue, were all factors in bringing this about. I do not propose to dwell at length on the history of any of these groups, but I do wish to emphasize briefly at this point that large numbers of Jews, especially among the Sephardim, continued to remain faithful to Sabbatai Zevi after his conversion. Even such opponents of Sabbatianism as Jacob Sasportas, who claimed that the followers of the movement were now an “insubstantial minority,” was forced to admit on other occasions that the minority in question was considerable indeed, particularly in Morocco, Palestine, Egypt, and most of Turkey

and the Balkans. Most of the Sabbatian groups in these areas maintained constant contact with each other and kept up a running battle over the correct interpretation of their "holy faith." From these regions came the first theoreticians of the movement, men such as Nathan of Gaza, Samuel Primo, Abraham Miguel Cardozo, and Nehemiah Hayon as well as the believers in "voluntary Marranism," who went on to form the sect of the Dönme in Salonika. In Italy the number of Sabbatians was smaller, though it included some of the country's most important Kabbalists; within a generation after its appearance there, Sabbatianism had dwindled into the concern of a few rabbis and scholars (chief among them Rabbi Benjamin Cohen of Reggio and Rabbi Abraham Rovigo of Modena), in whose hands it remained for a century without ever penetrating into wider circles.

In Northern Europe Sabbatianism was also restricted at first to small groups of adherents, devotees of such "prophets" as Heshel Zoref of Vilna and Mordecai of Eisenstadt in Hungary, but after 1700, following the commencement of a "Palestinian period" during which organized Sabbatian emigrations to the Holy Land took place from several countries, the movement spread rapidly through Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Lithuania it failed to take root, but in Podolia and Moravia it became so entrenched that it was soon able to claim the allegiance of many ordinary Jewish burghers and small businessmen (according to Jacob Emden, the numerical value of the Hebrew letters in the verse in Psalms 14, "There is none that doeth good, not even one," was equivalent to the numerical value of the letters in the Hebrew word for Moravia!). In Prague and Mannheim Sabbatian-oriented centers of learning came into being. The influence of the "graduates" of these institutions was great; one of them, in fact, was the author of the heretical treatise *Va-Avo ha-Yom El ha-Ayin* ("And I Came This Day unto the Fountain") which provoked so much furor at the time of the controversy surrounding Jonathan Eibeschutz (1751) and led to a polemical "battle of the books" which has enabled us to trace the identities of many Sabbatians of whom otherwise we would have known nothing at all. In the middle of the 18th century many of the Sabbatians in Podolia converted to Christianity after the example of their leader Jacob Frank, but still others remained within the Jewish fold. Finally, a Sabbatian stronghold sprang up again in Prague, where Frankism was propagated in a Jewish form. After 1815, however, the movement fell apart and its members were absorbed into secular Jewish society, like the Frankist ancestors of Louis Brandeis.

It is now time to turn our attention to the actual content of the spiritualism of these Sabbatian groups, for although the details of their philosophical teachings cannot be understood by anyone not already familiar with the intricacies of

Kabbalistic speculation in both the *Zohar* and the writings of the Lurianic school, other vital questions which concerned them, as well as their doctrine of the Godhead in its more general form, can be rendered intelligible even to those who are not fully versed in the esoteric side of Jewish mystical thought.

III

THE QUESTION which first confronted the "believers" after the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi, and one to which they never ceased returning, was of the following order: since by all external tokens the redemption had already been at hand, and since the Messiah, the authenticity of whose mission was beyond doubt, had actually revealed himself to his people, why had he forsaken them and his religion, and why had the historical and political deliverance from bondage which was to have naturally accompanied the cosmic process of *tikkun* been delayed? To this a paradoxically compelling answer was quickly offered: the apostasy of the Messiah was itself a religious mystery of the most crucial importance! No less an authority than Maimonides himself, it was argued, had stated that the actual details of the redemptive process were not to be known in advance; and although the truth of the matter was that everything that had happened was fully alluded to in the Holy Scriptures, these allusions themselves could not be correctly understood until the events they foretold had come to pass. All might be found to have been predicted in the relevant prophecies and legends which Nathan of Gaza, and even more so Abraham Cardozo, now proceeded to expound in the form of a new doctrine to which Sabbatai Zevi himself apparently subscribed.

As long as the last divine sparks (*nitzotzot*) of holiness and good which fell at the time of Adam's primordial sin into the impure realm of the *kelipot* (the hylic forces of evil whose hold in the world is particularly strong among the Gentiles) have not been gathered back again to their source—so the explanation ran—the process of redemption is incomplete. It is therefore left to the Redeemer, the holiest of men, to accomplish what not even the most righteous souls in the past have been able to do: to descend through the gates of impurity into the realm of the *kelipot* and to rescue the divine sparks still imprisoned there. As soon as this task is performed the Kingdom of Evil will collapse of itself, for its existence is made possible only by the divine sparks in its midst. The Messiah is constrained to commit "strange acts" (*ma'asim zarim*; a concept hereafter to occupy a central place in Sabbatian theology), of which his apostasy is the most startling; all of these, however, are necessary for the fulfillment of his mission. In the formulation of Cardozo: "It is ordained that the King Messiah don

the garments of a Marrano and so go unrecognized by his fellow Jews. In a word, it is ordained that he become a Marrano like me."

Before proceeding to take a closer look at this bold and heretical doctrine, one might well dwell for a moment on Cardozo's own words, which provide in my opinion an invaluable clue to the motivation behind it, as they do in fact to nearly every other feature of the Sabbatian movement as well. Underlying the novelty of Sabbatian thought more than anything else was the deeply paradoxical religious sensibility of the Marranos and their descendants, who constituted a large portion of Sephardic Jewry. Had it not been for the unique psychology of these re-converts to Judaism, the new theology would never have found the fertile ground to flourish in that it did. Regardless of what the actual backgrounds of its first disseminators may have been, the Sabbatian doctrine of the Messiah was perfectly tailored to the needs of the Marranic mentality. Indeed, we know for a fact that Abraham Cardozo, one of the movement's most successful proselytizers, was of definite Marrano origin—he was born in Spain in 1627—a particular which goes far to explain the remarkable zeal and sincerity with which he defended the new doctrine. Historians in our own day have pointed out at length the degree of contradiction, of duplicity and duality, which was involved in the religious consciousness of the Marranos. For these undercover Jews "to don the garments of a Marrano" was by no means an unjustifiable act; in its defense they were fond of citing the story of Queen Esther, as well as various other biblical fragments and verses. Formal apostasy had never been considered by them to represent an irreconcilable break with their mother faith. And now along came a religious metaphysic which exalted just such a form of life to the highest possible level by attributing it to the person of the Redeemer himself! Certainly all kinds of implications, which we shall deal with later on, were contained in this original idea. Let us examine it more closely.

To begin with, the new doctrine could no longer be harmonized with the traditional messianic folk-myth held to by the Jewish masses unless room could be found in the latter for such a "contradiction in terms" as the apostasy of the Redeemer. At first it was no doubt believed that the Messiah's descent into the realm of the *kelipot* was but an incidental aspect of his mission, "as happened to King David. [when he sojourned] with Achish King of Gath," but it soon came to be realized that such an extraordinary event must occupy the center of any messianic schema, which if necessary would have to be rebuilt around it: if the Messiah's task indeed contained a tragic element, as was now being proposed, support for this belief would have to be found in the sources and attitudes of Jewish tradition. What now took place in Sabbatianism was similar to what hap-

pened in Christianity at the time of the apostles, the chief difference being the shifting of the tragic moment in the Messiah's destiny from his crucifixion to his apostasy, a change which rendered the paradox in question even more severe. And to this novel conception another was soon added, one which indeed had a basis in aggadic literature, but whose hidden implications had gone unnoticed as long as no pressing reality had existed to force its application outside of the domain of pure theory and imagination; this was the notion that the King Messiah was to give "a new Torah" and that the commandments of the Law (*mitzvot*) were to be abrogated in messianic times. Speculations of this nature could be found in various Midrashim and Aggadot, but possessed no particular authority and were easily challenged by means of other exegetical passages to the opposite effect, with the consequence that, in Jewish tradition, the entire question had hitherto been allowed to remain in abeyance. Even those visionaries who dreamt through the ages of a new Word of God in a redeemed world did not, in fact, particularly connect this idea with the activities of the Messiah himself, and it was not until it was seized upon by the new "Marranic" doctrine that its latent explosive power was revealed.

THE DOCTRINE of the necessary apostasy of the Messiah did not originate in the realm of literature, but was rather rooted in new religious feelings that had come to exist. It was only after the initial manifestation of these that the effort to justify them on the basis of authoritative sources began, and with truly remarkable results, for practically overnight a new religious language was born. From bits and pieces of Scripture, from scattered paradoxes and sayings in the writings of the Kabbalah, from all the remotest corners of Jewish religious literature, an unprecedented theology of Judaism was brought into being. The cynicism of most Jewish historians toward these "inanities" does not reveal any great understanding of what actually took place. Suddenly we find ourselves confronted by an original Jewish terminology, far removed from that of Christianity, yet equally determined to express the contradictions inherent in the life of the Redeemer and in redemption itself. Striking as it did a hidden wellspring of deep religious emotion, one can hardly deny that this gospel must have possessed a powerful attraction, nor that it often managed to inject new meanings into familiar phrases and figures of speech with a fascinating profundity. Such a dialectical eruption of new forces in the midst of old concepts is rare indeed. Because Graetz and other historians insisted on regarding its articulation as being nothing more than a pretext for a monstrous debauchment of moral and spiritual values, they completely overlooked its true significance. To be sure, the doctrine of an apostate Messiah did serve as a pretext

too, but it was also a great deal more; and had it not appealed (and by virtue of its very paradoxicality!) to vital components in the spiritual make-up of the Jew, and above all to his sense of spiritual mission, it would never have succeeded in attracting a following in the first place. This missionary ideology reached a peak in the writings of the Lurianic Kabbalah, which strove to inculcate in every Jew a sense of duty to "elevate the sparks" and so help bring about the ultimate *tikkun* of the Creation.

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

all Gentiles are referred to as profane [*hol*] and *kelipah*, and whereas Israel alone is called sacred, all the other nations are profane. And even though a Jew commit a transgression, as long as he remains a Jew among Jews he is called sacred and an Israelite, for as the rabbis have said, "Even though he has sinned, he is still an Israelite." It follows that there is no way for the King Messiah to be made profane except he be removed from the Community of Israel into another domain.

Many similar homilies were written on the rest of the chapter, especially on the verse, "And he made his grave with the wicked." Yet another favorite verse was Deuteronomy 33:7 ("And this for Judah, and he said: Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people"), which was assumed to allude to the Davidic Messiah of the House of Judah, whose destiny it was to be taken from his people (hence Moses's prayer that God bring him back to them). Endless biblical verses were cited to prove that the Messiah was fated to be condemned as an outcast and criminal by his own people. Clothed in Messianic radiance, all the typical arguments of the Marranos were applied to Sabbatai Zevi:

And similar to this [the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi] is what happened to Esther, who was the cause of great salvation to Israel; for although most of the people, being ignorant, most certainly despised her for having given herself to an idol-worshiper and a Gentile in clear violation of the bidding of the Torah, the sages of old, who knew the secret [of her action], did not regard her as a sinner, for it is said of her in the Talmud: "Esther was the ground of the entire world."

In the same vein, the familiar aggadic saying that "the last Redeemer will be as the first" was taken to mean that just as Moses lived for many years at the court of Pharaoh, so the Messiah must live with "the Turk," for as the exile draws to a close the Messiah himself must be exiled to atone for Israel's sins.

NEXT CAME the turn of the *Zohar*, and here too, with the help of major or minor distortions, a world of new symbols was made to emerge, such as the figure of "the king who is good within but clothed in evil garments." In vain it was argued against this interpretation that the passage does not refer in this context to a king at all, much less to the Messiah; the image, so expressive in its obscurity, penetrated deep into the Sabbatian consciousness where it remained for generations to come. Two other writers whose works were mined in this fashion were Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel of Prague and Rabbi Joseph Taitatsak of Salonika, one of the emigrés from Spain in 1492: the former was found to have cryptically predicted that the Messiah would be bound to the world of Islam, while the latter was supposed to have stated, "when the rabbis said that the Son of David would not come until the kingdom was entirely given over to unbelief [*Sanhedrin* 97a], they were thinking of the Kingdom of Heaven, for the *Shekhinah* is destined to don the garments of Ishmael." In a word, the attempt to justify the belief that the fall and apostasy of the Messiah were necessary actions was carried out assiduously and successfully and led to the composition of many homilies, treatises, and books, some of which have not yet been recovered from their resting places. Endless vindications and defenses of the new doctrine were brought from practically every corner of Jewish literature. At first the tendency was to assert that although the Messiah's conversion had been forced upon him, it was qualitatively to be considered as a deliberate act; gradually, however, this motif disappeared, and the emphasis came to be placed squarely on the paradox that the Messiah should convert of his own free will. The descent into the *kelipot* was, indeed had to be, a voluntary one.

It was at this point that a radically new content was bestowed upon the old rabbinic concept of *mitzvah ha-ba'ah ba-averah*, literally, "a commandment which is fulfilled by means of a transgression." Once it could be claimed that the Messiah's apostasy was in no way a transgression, but was rather a fulfillment of the commandment of God, "for it is known throughout Israel that the prophets can do and command things which are not in accord with the Torah and its laws," the entire question of the continued validity of the Law had reached a critical stage. We know that even before his apostasy Sabbatai Zevi violated several of the commandments by eating the fat of animals and administering it to others, directing

that the paschal sacrifice be performed outside of the Land of Israel, and cancelling the fast days. His followers soon began to seek explanations for these acts, and here began a division which was to lead eventually to an open split in the movement.

IV

THE NEW DOCTRINE of the necessary apostasy of the Messiah was accepted by all the "believers." In fact, it proved to be symbolically richer than was at first assumed, for it expertly expressed the contradiction between the outward reality of history and the inward reality of the "believers'" lives. It was now no longer to be wondered at that the outward deliverance had been delayed, for this could be explained by the mystic principle of "good within but clothed in evil garments." In turn, however, other questions arose which the doctrine of necessary apostasy was in itself insufficient to answer.

First of all, it was asked, what was the nature of the Messiah's act? Was it intended to be an exemplar for others? Were all Jews enjoined to follow suit? Or was it essentially inimitable and to be looked upon as a theoretical model only?

Second, what was the nature of the transitional period during which the Messiah was in the clutches of the *kelipot*? Could it properly be called the redemption or not? Since it was agreed by all that the *Shekhinah* had "risen from the dust," where was the *Shekhinah* now? Did it still make sense to speak of her "exile" and to mourn for her? What exactly was the relationship of inwardness to outwardness in the present age?

Third, what was the status of the Torah during this period? Had a new aspect of it been revealed? How was the principle of *mitzvah ha-ba'ah ba-averah* to be understood? Could it not be argued that the change which had taken place in the relationship of the divine worlds necessitated a corresponding change in the performance of the commandments, the purpose of which had been to restore the harmony of the old, unredeemed cosmos that had been shattered by the primordial sin? Was not the Lurianic Kabbalah in its traditional form now outdated?

These were the principal dilemmas which were to shape the development of Sabbatianism in the course of the following hundred years, and in several countries to transform it from a messianic movement into a nihilistic movement operating within a religious framework. And just as these questions were themselves mutually related, so the nihilism which resulted from them was to be characterized by its internal unity and consistency.

Here, then, it is necessary to distinguish between two opposing Sabbatian factions which emerged from the clashes of opinion surrounding these disputed points, as well as from differing interpretations of the theosophical "mystery of

the Godhead" (*sod ha-elohut*) revealed by Sabbatai Zevi to his disciples: a moderate and rather piously inclined wing of the movement on the one hand, and a radical, antinomian, and nihilistic wing on the other. (Both of these factions, in turn, contained many subdivisions, but here we are concerned only with the more general features of each.) In the case of some Sabbatians, who have left us no completely candid record of their feelings, it is difficult to determine to which of these two camps they belonged.* As might naturally be expected, in face of the persecutions against them the "believers" were not often in a position to expound their beliefs undisguisedly, and certainly not to permit them to appear in print. This was particularly true of the nihilists, who had good and compelling reasons for concealing their doctrines.

Moderate Sabbatianism, which we shall consider first, was a view shared by many rabbis and was represented by men like Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Cardozo, and Abraham Rovigo. Of these three, Cardozo and Rovigo are the more valuable sources, especially the former, a large number of whose many treatises have survived thanks to the refusal of his disciples in London, Turkey, and Morocco to burn them in compliance with the injunctions of the rabbinical courts.

According to the "moderates," the apostasy of the Messiah was not intended to serve as an example for others. To be sure, Sabbatai Zevi had done what was necessary, but to attempt to follow in his footsteps was to belie the significance of his act, which was performed in behalf of everybody. In the words of Isaiah 53: "The Lord hath made to light on him the iniquity of us all." Strictly speaking, "all were [originally] under the obligation to convert," but God in His mercy permitted the apostasy of the Messiah to atone for the sins of His people. Besides being strange and scandalous in its nature, Sabbatai Zevi's conversion was in a class by itself and was not an object of imitation. The Jew was expected to remain a Jew. True, a new world-era had undoubtedly been ushered in, the spiritual worlds had undergone *tikkun*, and their structure was now permanently altered; nonetheless, as long as the redemption did not manifest itself outwardly in the realm of objective events in history, as long as the external bondage continued and the phenomenal world remained unchanged, no aspect or commandment of the Torah was to be openly tampered with except for the small number of inno-

* One might particularly cite in this connection the puzzling case of the great Talmudic scholar Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschtütz, a psychological enigma that still needs badly to be unraveled, although here is not the place to do so. I cannot conceal the fact, however, that after thoroughly examining both Eibeschtütz's own Kabbalistic writings and all the polemical works that they engendered I have been forced to conclude that he was indeed a Sabbatian, as both Jacob Emden and, in a later age, Heinrich Graetz insisted.

ventions, such as the cancellation of the fast of *Tish'ah be-Av* (the day of the destruction of the Temple), which had been proclaimed by the Messiah and his prophets as symbolic tokens of the redemption's commencement. Even on this point, however, there was disagreement, for several Sabbatians, including Abraham Rovigo himself, decided to reinstate the fast after a period of hesitation lasting a number of years during which they had disregarded it—not because they had “gone back” on their beliefs, but because of the questionable nature of the practice itself, as witnessed by the fact that Rovigo's disciple, Mordecai Ashkenazi, had been bidden by a *maggid* or “spiritual intelligence” to desist from it. On the whole, it was the view of the “moderates” that during the transitional period under way the *kelipot* still retained a good deal of their power, which could only be eliminated by continued performance of the *mitzvot*: the “façade” of rabbinic Judaism must be allowed to remain temporarily standing, although great changes had already taken place within the edifice. One unmistakable testimony to this inner transformation was the abandonment by many of the “moderates” of the mystical meditations (*kavvanot*) of Isaac Luria. The first to discontinue their use was Nathan of Gaza, whose reasons for doing so were as follows:

The *kavvanot* of the Lurianic Kabbalists were inward actions of thought designed to relate the performance of given commandments or prayers to specific stages in the dynamic chain of the divine worlds and thereby to reintegrate the latter by helping to restore them to the places they had occupied before their catastrophic fall. Thus, each *kavvanah* was a spiritual act demonstrating that the outward undertaking which occasioned it harmonized invisibly with the overall structure of the cosmos. Now, however, with the advent of the Messiah, this structure had changed. The sense of inner freedom possessed by the “believers” was not a subjective illusion, but was caused by a real reorganization of the worlds illuminating the soul, as a result of which the Lurianic *kavvanot* had become obsolete. This in turn led to a revaluation of the entire Lurianic Kabbalah, and on occasion both Nathan of Gaza and Abraham Cardozo went so far as to direct veiled criticisms at Isaac Luria himself. Nathan, for example, writes: “In the present age it is no longer in order to read the *tikkunim* composed by Rabbi Isaac Luria of blessed memory and his disciples, nor to meditate according to their *kavvanot*, for the times have changed. The *kavvanot* of Rabbi Isaac Luria were meant for his own age, which was [like] an ordinary day of the week, whereas now it is the eve of the Sabbath, and it is not proper to treat the Sabbath as though it were a weekday.” Elsewhere he writes: “My meaning is that the *kavvanot* discovered by our teacher Rabbi Isaac Luria, may his saintly and righteous memory be blessed, are no longer appropriate to

our own time, because the raising up [of the divine worlds] has entered a new phase, so that it would be like employing *kavvanot* intended for a weekday on the Sabbath. Therefore, let everyone beware of using them, and likewise let none of the *kavvanot* or homilies or writings of Rabbi Isaac Luria be read henceforward, for they are abstruse and no living man has understood them except Rabbi Hayyim Vital, who was a disciple of the master [Isaac Luria] for several years, at the end of which he surpassed him in knowledge.”

In a similar vein: “It is no longer in order to perform the midnight vigil, that is, to weep and mourn for the exile of the *Shekhinah*, for she has already begun to rise from the earth, so that whoever mourns for her is a blunderer and attracts the company of that guilty [demon] Lilith, since it is she now who weeps and wails.” Many other passages like these could be cited. As a matter of course Cardozo hastened to compose a new series of updated *kavvanot*, but these were never to prove popular with his fellow Sabbatians, who either gave up the practice of mystical meditations entirely, or else, like many of the Hasidim who came after them, took to composing their own as they individually saw fit.

IT WAS generally held by all the Sabbatians that now, on the “eve of the Sabbath,” the mystery of the Godhead that had eluded the rabbis, philosophers, and Kabbalists throughout the ages was finally to be revealed. This was not to say that the secret had not been hinted at by the last of the Gnostics living in the Tannaitic period, who cryptically concealed it in the pages of the *Zohar* and in several *Aggadot*, particularly those known as the *aggadot shel dofi* or “offensive *Aggadot*,” which had served as milestones for the contemplation of the mystics and as obscure hints at the mysteries during the dark night of exile. But the true meaning of these had been overlooked; nor could it be fully comprehended until the End of Days. On the other hand, although the “mystery of the Godhead” was yet to be revealed in its entirety, a part of it had now been made known. Here again a rejection of Lurianism and the substitution of a new Sabbatian Kabbalah in its place were involved. The first written exposition of the new system, which was to be subject to a great many different inferences and interpretations, was the small tract *Raza de-Mehemanuta* (“The Secret of the Faith”) which was orally dictated by Sabbatai Zevi to a disciple after his apostasy. Its effect was to prefix yet another stage to the theogonic speculations of the Kabbalists, for it treated (and quite remarkably) of the mysterious inner life of the Godhead before its *tzimtzum* or primordial contraction, whereas Lurianic Kabbalah had dealt only with the counter-expansion of the deity once the *tzimtzum* had taken place.

We have already seen in connection with their doctrine of the apostate Messiah that the Sabbatians were not in the least bit chary of paradoxes, and indeed, their theological reflections on the true nature of "the Faith" and its history in Israel reveal a dialectical daring that cannot but be respected. Here we are given our deepest glimpse yet into the souls of these revolutionaries who regarded themselves as loyal Jews while at the same time completely overturning the traditional religious categories of Judaism. I am not of course speaking of a feeling of "loyalty" to the Jewish religion as it was defined by rabbinical authority. For many, if not for most Sabbatians, the Judaism of the rabbis, which they identified with the Judaism of the exile, had come to assume an entirely dubious character. Even when they continued to live within its jurisdiction it was not out of any sense of positive commitment; no doubt it had been suited to its time, but in the light of the soul-shaking truth of the redemption that time had passed. Taking into account all that has been said here, it is hardly surprising that this attitude should have existed. What is surprising, however, indeed astoundingly so, is the nature of the spiritual world that the Sabbatians should have stumbled upon in the course of their search through the Bible for "the mystery of the Godhead" which exilic Judaism had allowed to perish, for here we are confronted with nothing less than the totally unexpected revival of the religious beliefs of the ancient Gnostics, albeit in a transvalued form.

THE Gnostics, who were the contemporaries of the Jewish Tannaim of the 2nd century, believed that it was necessary to distinguish between a good but hidden God who alone was worthy of being worshiped by the elect, and a Demiurge or creator of the physical universe, whom they identified with the "just" God of the Old Testament. In effect they did not so much reject the Jewish Scriptures, whose account of events they conceded to be at least partly true, as they denied the superiority of the Jewish God, for whom they reserved the most pejorative terms. Salvation was brought to mankind by messengers sent by the hidden God to rescue the soul from the cruel law or "justice" of the Demiurge, whose dominion over the evil material world, as testified to by the Bible, was but an indication of his lowly status. The hidden God Himself was unknown, but He had entrusted Jesus and the gnostic faithful with the task of overthrowing the "God of the Jews." As for the claim of both Jews and orthodox Christians that the God of Israel who created the world and the transcendent God of goodness were one and the same, this was a great falsehood which stood in the way of true gnosis. This kind of "metaphysical anti-Semitism," as is well known, did not vanish from history with the disappearance of the gnostic sects,

but continued to reassert itself within the Catholic Church and its heretical offshoots throughout the Middle Ages.

"The mystery of the Godhead" which Sabbatianism now "discovered," and which it believed to be identical with "the mystery of the God of Israel" and "the faith of Father Abraham," was founded entirely on a new formulation of this ancient gnostic paradox. In the version made current by Cardozo it was expounded as follows:

All nations and philosophers have been led by irrefutable laws of the intellect to acknowledge the existence of a First Cause responsible for setting all else in motion. Given the fact, therefore, that anyone capable of logical reasoning can demonstrate to his own satisfaction that such a Cause exists, what need is there for it to be specially revealed to mankind? What possible religious difference can such a revelation make when we are no less the wiser without it? The answer is, none at all. The First Cause, which was worshiped by Pharaoh and Nimrod and the wise men of India alike, is not the concern of religion at all, for it has nothing to do with the affairs of this world or its creation and exerts no influence on it for good or for bad. The purpose of a divine revelation must be to make something known which cannot be grasped by the intellect on its own, something which has specifically religious value and content. And indeed, this is precisely the case with the Jewish Torah, which does not dwell at all on that Hidden Principle whose existence can be adequately proven by the intellect, but speaks only of the God of Israel, *Elohei Yisrael*, who is the creator of the world and the first emanation to proceed from the First Cause. This God, in turn, has two aspects, or "countenances" (*partzufim*), one male and one female, the latter being known as the *Shekhinah*; He alone it is who creates and reveals Himself and redeems, and to Him alone are prayer and worship to be rendered. It is this paradox of a God of religion who is distinct from the First Cause that is the essence of true Judaism, that "faith of our fathers" which is concealed in the books of the Bible and in the dark sayings of Aggadot and the Kabbalah. In the course of the confusion and demoralization brought on by the exile this mystery (of which even Christianity was nothing but a distorted expression) was forgotten and the Jewish People was mistakenly led to identify the impersonal First Cause with the personal God of the Bible, a spiritual disaster for which Saadia Gaon, Maimonides, and the other philosophers will yet be held accountable. It was thus that the words of the prophet Hosea, "For the Children of Israel shall sit solitary many days without a king" (3:4), came to be fulfilled. At the exile's end, however, Israel's God will reveal Himself once more, and this secret is a source of precious comfort to the "believers."

Here we have a typically gnostic scheme, only

inverted: the good God is no longer the *deus absconditus*, who has now become the deity of the philosophers for whom there is no room in religion proper, but rather the God of Israel who created the world and presented it with His Torah. What daring labyrinths of the spirit are revealed in this new creed! What yearnings for a regeneration of faith and what disdainful negation of the exile! Like true spiritual revolutionaries, with an unfeigned enthusiasm which even today cannot fail to impress the reader of Cardozo's books, the "believers" unflinchingly proclaimed their belief that all during the exile the Jewish people had worshiped a powerless divinity and had clung to a way of life that was fundamentally in need of reform. When one considers how wildly extravagant all this may appear even now, it is easy enough to appreciate the wrath and indignation with which such a theology was greeted by the Orthodox camp in its own day. Determined to avoid a full-scale revolution within the heart of Jewry, the rabbinical traditionalists and their supporters did all they could to drive the "believers" beyond the pale. And yet in spite of all this, one can hardly deny that a great deal that is authentically Jewish was embodied in these paradoxical individuals too, in their desire to start afresh and in their realization of the fact that negating the exile meant negating its religious and institutional forms as well and returning to the original fountainheads of the Jewish faith. This last practice—a tendency to rely in matters of belief upon the Bible and the Aggadah—grew to be particularly strong among the nihilists in the movement. Here, too, faith in paradox reigned supreme: the stranger the Aggadah, the more offensive to reason and common sense, the more likely it was to be seized upon as a symbol of that "mystery of faith" which naturally tended to conceal itself in the most frightful and fanciful tales.

I HAVE alluded to the fierce discussions that broke out among the Sabbatians over the issue of how "the mystery of the Godhead" was to be interpreted. Several of the elucidations of the doctrine that are known to us differ substantially from the version given by Cardozo, who devoted his very best speculative powers to the question. All of these treatises employ the terminology of the *Zohar* and the Lurianic Kabbalah, but proceed to attribute to them meanings that are entirely their own. Among the speculations on the subject that have come down to us in detail are those of Nehemiah Hayon, Samuel Primo, and Jonathan Eibeschutz. Despite their division of the Godhead into three hypostases (*partzufim*)—the First Cause or "Holy Ancient One" (*atika kadisha*), the God of Israel or "Holy King" (*malka kadisha*), and the *Shekhinah*—all of these writers sought to uphold the essential dynamic unity of the divinity. The cen-

tral problems as they saw them—problems, be it said, which did not exist for non-Sabbatian Kabbalah at all—were first of all to determine the nature of the relationship, the "three knots of faith" as they called it, between the First Cause, the God of Israel, and the *Shekhinah*, and secondly to establish the exact content of the new revelation concerning the essence of the God of Israel. Characteristic of the approach of these Sabbatian "moderates" was their stubborn refusal to leave any room in their gnostic theories for a doctrine of divine incarnation. Indeed, the literature of "moderate" Sabbatianism is in general filled with violent denunciations of Christianity and of the Christian dogma of the Trinity.

According to several of the "moderates," "the mystery of the Godhead" had not yet been fully revealed: during the original messianic revival period of 1665-66, they argued, there had been an initial revelation which it was permitted to make known freely, but now, during the period of transition, eclipse, and uncertainty, the situation was no longer the same. The *Shekhinah* had indeed "begun to rise," but "she has still not returned to her place entirely, for had she returned we would no longer be in exile." These words were written by Abraham Rovigo more than thirty years after Sabbatai Zevi's apostasy, of the mystic meaning of which he had absolutely no doubt, and they illustrate in a nutshell the psychology of "moderate" Sabbatianism while at the same time solving the riddle of how so many rabbis who were confirmed "believers" nevertheless managed to remain in their rabbinical posts. The redemption had truly begun, but it was a gradual process: "[It proceeds] step by step. In the End the Holy One, blessed be He, will raise her from the dust." This was not to say that the *Shekhinah* had not already begun to rise of her own accord, but "as long as He does not lift her up Himself it is said that she is still in exile." It goes without saying that those who subscribed to this view were obliged to keep up all the traditional practices of exilic, i.e., historic, Judaism. Even the midnight vigil for the *Shekhinah* was ultimately reintroduced.

In a word, at the same time that it was completely transforming the historic inner world of Judaism in its own unique manner, "moderate" Sabbatianism continued to adhere to traditional Jewish observance not for the sake of mere camouflage, but as a matter of principle. The inward crisis which every "moderate" underwent was permitted little or no outward expression, and inasmuch as such an objectification of his feelings was barred by either the exigencies of the situation or the compunctions of his own religious consciousness, he was forced to retreat even further into himself. But although the new sense of inner freedom bore purely inner consequences, we can nevertheless rely on the judgment of those anti-Sabbatian polemicists who saw

perfectly clearly that the inward devastation of old values was no less dangerous or far-reaching than its outward manifestation. Whoever reads such a volume as Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschütz's *The Book of the Eternal Name*, a treatise on "the mystery of the Godhead" composed in the traditional style of Talmudic dialectics, will readily see what abysses had opened up in the very heart of Judaism. From these were to come the deluge: pure founts of salvation and spiritual rebirth to the one camp, gross waters of corruption and shameless sacrilege to the other.

V

WE HAVE SEEN how the principal feature of "moderate" Sabbatian doctrine was the belief that the apostasy of the Messiah was *sui generis*. The Messiah must go his lonely way into the kingdom of impurity and "the other side" (*sitra ahra*) and dwell there in the realm of a "strange god" whom he would yet refuse to worship. The enormous tension between the subjective and the objective which had developed in the ranks of his followers had so far found a legitimate expression in this one act alone. Whereas Sabbatai Zevi had actually done strange and objectionable things in the name of the holy, the celebration of this paradox among the "believers" was restricted to the domain of faith. "Moderate" Sabbatianism drew a circle around the concept of "strange holiness" and forbade itself to enter: it was indeed the Messiah's fate to scandalize Israel by his deeds, but it was decidedly his fate alone.

Once drawn, however, the line was clearly difficult to maintain. The more ardent "believer" found himself becoming increasingly restive. Was he to abandon the Messiah entirely just when the latter was engaged in the most bitter phase of his struggle with the power of evil? If the spark of the redemption had been experienced by all, why should not all do as the Redeemer? How could one refuse to go to his aid? And soon the cry was heard: Let us surrender ourselves as he did! Let us descend together to the abyss before it shuts again! Let us cram the maw of impurity with the power of holiness until it bursts from within.

Feelings such as these formed the psychological background for the great nihilistic conflagration that was to break out in the "radical" wing of the Sabbatian movement. The fire was fed by powerful religious emotions, but in the crucial moment these were to join forces with passions of an entirely different sort, namely, with the instincts of anarchy and lawlessness that lie deeply buried in every human soul. Traditionally Judaism had always sought to suppress such impulses, but now that they were allowed to emerge in the revolutionary exhilaration brought on by the experience of redemption and its freedom, they burst forth more violently than ever. An aura of holiness

seemed to surround them. They too would be granted their *tikkun*, if only in the "hindparts of holiness."

Ultimately, too, the disappointing course of external events had a telling effect. Though he possessed the heroic soul of the warrior Bar Kokhba, Sabbatai Zevi had not gone forth to do battle on the Day of the Lord. A yawning chasm had appeared between inner and outer realities, and once it was decided that the former was the truer of the two, it was only to be expected that the value of the latter would increasingly come to be rejected. It was precisely at this point that messianism was transformed into nihilism. Having been denied the political and historical outlets it had originally anticipated, the new sense of freedom now sought to express itself in the sphere of human morality. The psychology of the "radical" Sabbatians was utterly paradoxical and "Maranic." Essentially its guiding principle was: Whoever is as he appears to be cannot be a true "believer." In practice this meant the following:

The "true faith" cannot be a faith which men publicly profess. On the contrary, the "true faith" must always be concealed. In fact, it is one's duty to deny it outwardly, for it is like a seed that has been planted in the bed of the soul and it cannot grow unless it is first covered over. For this reason every Jew is obliged to become a Marrano.

Again: a "true act" cannot be an act committed publicly, before the eyes of the world. Like the "true faith," the "true act" is concealed, for only through concealment can it negate the falsehood of what is explicit. Through a revolution of values, what was formerly sacred has become profane and what was formerly profane has become sacred. It is no longer enough to invent new mystical meditations (*kavvanot*) to suit the changed times. New forms of action are needed. Prior to the advent of the Redeemer the inward and the outward were in harmony, and this is why it was possible to effect great *tikkunim* by means of outwardly performing the commandments. Now that the Redeemer has arrived, however, the two spheres are in opposition: the inward commandment, which alone can effect a *tikkun*, has become synonymous with the outward transgression. *Bitulah shel torah zehu kiyumah*: the violation of the Torah is now its true fulfillment.

More than anything else, it was this insistence of the "radicals" on the potential holiness of sin—a belief which they attempted to justify by citing out of context the Talmudic dictum (*Nazir 23b*), "A transgression committed for its own sake is greater than a commandment not committed for its own sake"—which alienated and offended the average Jew and caused even the "believers" themselves to undergo the severest of conflicts.

In the history of religion, whenever we come across the doctrine of the holiness of sin it is always in conjunction with one or another spiritualistic sect. The type of the pneumatic, which I

have previously discussed, is particularly susceptible to such a teaching and it is hardly necessary to point out the connections that exist between the theories of nihilism and those of the more extravagant forms of spiritualism. To the pneumatic, the spiritual universe which he inhabits is of an entirely different order from the world of ordinary flesh and blood, whose opinion of the new laws he has chosen to live by is therefore irrelevant; insofar as he is above sin (an idea, common to many sectarian groups, which occasionally occurs in the literature of Hasidism as well) he may do as the spirit dictates without needing to take into account the moral standards of the society around him. Indeed he is, if anything, duty-bound to violate and subvert this "ordinary" morality in the name of the higher principles that have been revealed to him.

ALTHOUGH INDIVIDUALS with inclinations in this direction existed in Judaism also, particularly among the Kabbalists, up to the time of the Sabbatians their activities were confined entirely to the level of pure theory. The most outstanding example of such speculative or virtual "spiritualism" to be found in Kabbalistic literature is the *Sefer ha-Temunah* ("The Book of the Image"), a mystical treatise written in early 13th-century Spain, in which it is stated that the Torah consists of a body of spiritual letters which, though they remain essentially unchanged, present different appearances to the reader in different cosmic aeons (*shemiotot*). In effect, therefore, each aeon, or *shemita*, possesses a Torah of its own. In the current *shemita*, which is ruled by the divine quality of *din*, stern judgment or rigor, the Torah is read in terms of prohibitions and commandments and even its most mystic allusions must be interpreted in this light. In the coming aeon, however, which will be that of *rahamim*, divine mercy, the Torah will be read differently, so that in all probability "what is prohibited now will be permitted then." Everything depends on the particular aeon and the divine quality (or attribute) presiding over it. Sensing the dangers inherent in such a doctrine, certain Kabbalists, such as Moses Cordovero, attempted to dismiss it as entirely unworthy of consideration. But it was precisely those works that propounded it, such as the *Sefer ha-Temunah* and the *Sefer ha-Kanah*, which influenced the Sabbatians tremendously.

To the theory of the cosmic aeons the Sabbatians assimilated a second, originally unrelated concept. The *Zohar* itself does not recognize or, more exactly, does not utilize the idea of the *shemiotot* at all (a fact that was instrumental in making it suspect in the eyes of later Kabbalists), but in two later additions to the Zoharic corpus, the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* and the *Ra'ya Mehemna*, a great deal is said on the subject of four emanated worlds, the World of *atzilut* or "Em-

anation," the World of *beriah* or "Creation," the World of *yetzirah* or "Formation," and the World of *asayah* or "Making," which together comprise the different levels of spiritual reality. In connection with these we also occasionally hear of a "Torah of *atzilut*" and a "Torah of *beriah*," the meanings of which are not entirely clear. By the time of the Kabbalists of the School of Safed, however, we find these latter terms employed in a definite sense to indicate that there are two aspects of the one essential Torah, i.e., the Torah as it is understood in the supernal World of *atzilut* and the Torah as it is understood in the lower World of *beriah*. What the Sabbatians now did was to seize this idea and expound it in the light of the theory of cosmic aeons. The Torah of *beriah*, they argued, borrowing a metaphor from the *Zohar* (I, 23) is the Torah of the unredeemed world of exile, whose purpose it was to serve as a garment for the *Shekhinah* in her exile, so that whoever observed its commandments and prohibitions was like one who helped clothe the *Shekhinah* in her state of distress. The Torah of *atzilut*, on the other hand, is the "true" Torah which, like "the mystery of the Godhead" it makes manifest, has been in a state of concealment for the entire period of the exile. Now that the redemption has commenced it is about to be revealed, and although in essence it is identical with the Torah of *beriah*, its way of being read will be different; thus, all the commandments and prohibitions of the Torah of *beriah* will now be reinterpreted by the light of the World of *atzilut*, in which (to take but one example), as is stated in several Kabbalistic sources, there is no such thing as forbidden sexual practices. It was in this manner that assertions made in a completely different spirit and in terms of a wholly different understanding of the concepts "World of *atzilut*" and "Torah of *atzilut*" were pressed into service by the "radical" Sabbatians as slogans for their new morality.*

* Among anti-Sabbatian Kabbalists there were a number of attempts to explain this monstrous perversion, as it seemed, of sacred writings. In his *Divrei Sofrim* ([1913], p. 32d), for example, R. Zadok Hacohen of Lublin cites an unidentified "book written by a saintly man" as his authority for asserting that the Sabbatians "came to the end that they came to because they engaged in the study of the Kabbalah with their hearts full of lust and therefore materialized much [of its spiritual meaning]; and in consequence of the fact that they saw references to copulation, kissing, embracing, and so forth [in what they read], they yielded to lascivious passions, may God preserve us from the same, and committed great evil." In much the same vein, Rabbi Zevi of Zydaczow, one of the great Kabbalists of the Hasidic movement and possibly none other than Rabbi Zadok Hacohen's "saintly man" himself, writes in his *Sur me-Ra va-Aseh Tov*: "I once heard my teacher [the Seer of Lublin] comment on certain students by mentioning the case of that well-known sect. . . . It [i.e., Sabbatian antinomianism] happened because they desired to achieve the revelation of Elijah and to prophesy by the Holy Spirit . . . without troubling to discipline their nature or their material selves. . . ."

The concept of the two Torahs was an extremely important one for Sabbatian nihilism, not least because it corresponded so perfectly to the "Mar-ranic" mentality. In accordance with its purely mystical nature the Torah of *atzilut* was to be observed strictly in secret; the Torah of *beriah*, on the other hand, was to be actively and deliberately violated. As to how this was to be done, however, the "radicals" could not agree and differing schools of thought evolved among them. It is important to keep in mind that we are dealing here with an eruption of the most diverse sorts of emotion. The Gordian knot binding the soul of the exilic Jew had been cut and a vertigo that ultimately was to be his undoing seized the newly liberated individual: genuine desires for a reconsecration of life mingled indiscriminately with all kinds of destructive and libidinal forces tossed up from the depths by an irrepressible groundswell that undulated wildly between the earthly and the divine.

The psychological factors at work were particularly various in regard to the doctrine of the holiness of sin, which though restricted at first by some of the "believers" to the performance of certain specified acts alone, tended by virtue of its own inner logic to embrace more and more of the Mosaic Law, especially the biblical prohibitions. Among the leaders of the Dönneh the antinomian blessing composed by Sabbatai Zevi, "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe, who permittest the forbidden [*mattir isurim*],"* became a byword. In fact, two somewhat contradictory rationalizations of antinomian behavior existed side by side. On the one hand there were those who said: in the world of redemption there can be no such thing as sin, therefore all is holy and everything is permitted. To this it was retorted: not at all! what is needed rather is totally to deny the *beriah*, "Creation" (a word that had by now come to denote every aspect of the old life and its institutions), to trample its values underfoot, for only by casting off the last vestiges of these can we truly become free. To state the matter in Kabbalistic terms, the one side proposed to withhold the sparks of holiness from the *kelipot* until they perished from lack of nourishment, whereas the other insisted that the *kelipot* be positively filled with holiness until they disintegrated from the pressure. But in either case, and despite the many psychological nuances which entered into the "transgression committed for its own sake" and the sacred sin, all the "radicals" were united in their belief in the sanctifying power of sin itself "that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses," as they interpreted the phrase in Leviticus 16:6.

IT WOULD BE pointless to deny that the sexual element in this outburst was very strong: a primitive abandon such as the Jewish people would scarcely have thought itself capable of after so many centuries of discipline in the Law joined hands with perversely pathological drives to seek a common ideological rehabilitation. In the light of what happened there is little to wonder at when we read in the texts of rabbinical excommunications dating from the 18th century that the children of the "believers" were automatically to be considered bastards, just as it is perfectly understandable that these children and grandchildren themselves should have done everything in their power to obscure the history of their descent. One may readily grant, of course, as Zalman Rubashov justly observes in his study of the Frankists, that "every sectarian movement is suspected by the church against which it rebels of the most infamous misconduct and immorality," a conclusion which has led to the hypothesis that such accusations invariably tell us more about the depraved fantasies of the accusers than they do about the actual behavior of the accused. It is Rubashov's opinion, indeed, that although the conduct of the Frankists was "in itself adequate cause for indignation and amazement," there is also "every reason to assume that as a matter of course it was greatly exaggerated." As valid as the general rule may be, however, the plain facts of the matter are that in the case of the "radical" Sabbatians there was hardly any need for exaggeration. As Nahum Sokolow has pointed out in a note to Kraushar's history of Frankism, no matter how thoroughly fantastic and partisan the allegations of the anti-Sabbatians may seem to us, we have not the slightest justification for doubting their accuracy, inasmuch as in every case we can rely for evidence on the "confessions" of the "believers" themselves, as well as on a number of their apologias which have come down to us in both theoretical and homiletical form.

All this has recently been confirmed by an unexpected discovery. For many years—well into the present age, in fact—the Sabbatians in Salonika, the Dönneh, regularly held a celebration on the twenty-second day of the Hebrew month of Adar known as "the Festival of the Lamb," the exact nature of which was kept a carefully guarded secret until some of the younger members of the sect were finally prevailed upon to reveal it to outsiders. According to their account the festival included an orgiastic rite called "the extinguishing of the lights." From what we know of this rite it probably came to Salonika from Izmir, for both its name and its contents were evidently borrowed from the pagan cult of "the Great Mother" which flourished in antiquity and continued to be practiced after its general demise by a small sect of "Light Extinguishers" in Asia Minor under the cover of Islam. There can be no

*A pun on the blessing in the morning prayer, "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe, who freest those who are in bondage [*mattir asurim*]." [Translator's note]

question that the Dönme took over this ancient bacchanalia based on immemorial myths and adapted it to conform to their mystical belief in the sacramental value of exchanging wives, a custom that was undoubtedly observed by other "radicals" in the movement as well.

The history of Sabbatian nihilism as a mass movement rather than as the concern of a few isolated Jewish scholars who "donned the fez" like Sabbatai Zevi, began in 1683, when several hundred Jewish families in Salonika converted to Islam "so as to conquer the *kelipah* from within." From this point on organized Sabbatian nihilism appeared in four main forms:

1) That of the "believers" who chose "voluntary Marranism" in the form of Islam. The research that has been done on the subject of the Dönme, particularly the studies of Abraham Danon and Solomon Rosanes, definitely establishes that the sect was purely Jewish in its internal character, not, of course, in the accepted rabbinical sense, but rather in the sense of a mystical heresy. The apostasy of the Dönme aroused violent opposition among the "moderates," for reasons which I have already made clear.

2) That of the "believers" who remained traditional Jews in outward life while inwardly adhering to the "Torah of *atzilut*." Several groups of such individuals existed in the Balkans and Palestine (beginning with the arrival there of Hayyim Malakh), and afterward, in the 18th century, in Northern and Eastern Europe, where they were concentrated particularly in Podolia and in such nearby towns as Buczacz, Busk, Gliniany, Horodenka, Zhólkiew, Zloczow, Tysmenieca, Nadwórna, Podhaice, Rohatyn, and Satanow, but also in other countries, especially Rumania, Hungary, and Moravia.

3) That of the Frankists who "Marranized themselves" by converting to Catholicism.

4) That of the Frankists in Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, and Rumania, who chose to remain Jewish.

Despite the differences among these groups, all of them were part of a single larger entity. Inasmuch as it was believed by all the "radicals" that externals were no indication of true faith, apostasy was not a factor to come between them. A Jew in the ghetto of Prague, for example, who went on publicly observing the commandments of the "Torah of *beriah*" while at the same time violating them in private, knew perfectly well that the "believer" in Warsaw or, say, Offenbach who had recently been baptized "for mystical reasons" was still his brother, just as fifty years earlier Sabbatians in Northern Europe had continued to remain in close touch with the Dönme in Salonika even after their conversion to Islam. Essentially, the "radicals" all inhabited the same intellectual world. Their attitudes toward the Torah, the Messiah, and "the mystery of the Godhead" were

identical, for all that they assumed new and unusual forms among the Frankists.

VI

THE SYSTEMATIC violation of the Torah of *beriah* was considered by the "radical" Sabbatians to be the principal attestation of the new epoch ushered in by Sabbatai Zevi. But exactly how was one to distinguish between what belonged to the lower World of *beriah* and its Torah, and what belonged to the higher World of *atzilut* and its Torah? Here opinion was divided. Baruchya Russo, better known as Berahya or Berochia, the leader of the radical wing of the Dönme in the beginning of the 18th century, preached to his followers that even the thirty-six transgressions deemed worthy by the Torah of the ultimate punishment of *karet*, i.e., being "cut off" from Israel and from God (a category that included all the forbidden sexual practices), were aspects of the Torah of *beriah* only. By the same token it was decreed permissible to eat of the sinew of the thigh-vein, for with the advent of the Messiah "Jacob's thigh has been restored."* In the opinion of some, who based their argument on a passage from the *Zohar*, refraining from the sinew of the thigh-vein and fasting on *Tish'ah be-Av* were mutually connected observances: "As long as it is forbidden to eat on *Tish'ah be-Av* it is forbidden to eat the sinew of the thigh-vein, and when it is permitted to eat on *Tish'ah be-Av* it is permitted to eat the sinew of the thigh-vein." Others went still further: "It is widely known that belonging to these sects are those who believe that [with the advent of the Messiah] the Torah has been nullified [*betelah*] and that in the future it will be [read] without [reference to] the commandments, for they say that the violation of the Torah has become its fulfillment, which they illustrate by the example of a grain of wheat that rots in the earth." In other words, just as a grain of wheat must rot in the earth before it can sprout, so the deeds of the "believers" must be truly "rotten" before they can germinate the redemption. This metaphor, which appears to have been extremely popular, conveys the whole of sectarian Sabbatian psychology in a nutshell: in the period of transition, while the redemption is still in a state of concealment, the Torah in its explicit form must be denied, for only thus can it too become "concealed" and ultimately renewed.

There were, however, even more extreme cases than these. Jacob Emden relates how he was told

* The prohibition against eating the sinew of the thigh-vein is to be found in Genesis 32, which tells of Jacob's wrestling with the angel: "Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew of the thigh-vein which is upon the hollow of the thigh unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, even in the sinew of the thigh-vein" (32:33). [Translator's Note]

by a rabbinical associate of great learning, the Rabbi of the Amsterdam Ashkenazim, that

when he was in Zhólkiew he became involved with one of these heretics, a man named Fishl Zloczow, who was expertly versed in the entire Talmud, which he knew practically by heart, for he was in the habit of shutting himself up in his room in order to pore over it, never ceasing from his studies (for he was a wealthy man) nor engaging in idle conversation. He would linger over his prayers twice as long as the Hasidim of olden times and was considered by all to be a most pious and ascetic individual. Once he came to him [i.e., to Emden's informant] in order to confess his sins and revealed that he belonged to the sect of Sabbatai Zevi, that he had eaten leavened bread on the Passover, and so forth, carrying on contritely all the while as though he had truly repented of his deeds. Soon afterward, however, he was caught in the act of committing grave transgressions of the Law and was excommunicated by the rabbis of Lithuania and Volhynia. When asked why he had not continued his hidden sins in private instead of [committing acts that led to his exposure] in public . . . he replied that on the contrary, the more shame he was forced to suffer for his faith, the better it was.

Here we are confronted with the type of the "believer" in its most paradoxical form, and, significantly, the individual in question was no ordinary Jew, but was rather conceded to be an excellent rabbinic scholar by an eminent authority who was in a position to know. One could hardly wish for a more perfect example of the nihilistic rejection of the Torah of *beriah*, which in this case was studied for the sole purpose that it might be better violated in spirit! The Jewish world was indeed showing signs of inner decay if types such as these were able to make themselves so easily at home in its midst. And yet underneath all these vagaries there was obviously a deep-seated desire for something positive which for lack of suitable conditions under which to function had come to nought.

Illustrative parables and homilies were also brought to bear on the doctrine of the sacred sin itself, and the reader cannot fail to notice that they are more than just paradoxical and highly offensive sayings. They breathe an entirely new spirit. "The patriarchs came into the world to restore [*le-takken*] the senses and this they did to four of them. Then came Sabbatai Zevi and restored the fifth, the sense of touch, which according to Aristotle and Maimonides is a source of shame to us, but which now has been raised by him to a place of honor and glory." As late as the beginning of the 19th century we find a fervent "believer" in Prague commenting in connection with the verse in Psalm 68, "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive," that the captive in question is the spiritual Torah of *atzilut*, which is called a "prisoner" because it was captured by Moses and forced to dwell in

the prison cell of the material Torah of *beriah*:

Such is the case with the inner Torah, for the outer is in opposition to the inner . . . and must be annihilated before the inner can be freed. And just as a woman from Ishmael [i.e., from a Moslem country] feels as though she has been freed from her confinement when she comes to Edom [i.e., a Christian country] . . . so continuing [to live] in Israel under the Torah of *beriah* is called "captivity," nor can she be given in marriage under the Torah of *beriah* but only in Edom, whereas in Israel one must remain a virgin—and [he who is able to, let him] understand.

The cryptic Frankist allusions at the end of this passage to Christianity and to "remaining a virgin" are rather obscure, but it is evident from the whole how strongly the rejection of the lower, or material, Torah of *beriah* continued to be upheld by Sabbatian Jews right down to the movement's last years. Elsewhere the author of the above, a thoughtful and deeply religious individual, explains that the commonly expressed belief that "no mischief can befall the righteous man [Prov. 12:21] nor can he be a cause of sin" must be understood in the light of the Torah of *atzilut* to mean that no matter how sinful the acts of the righteous may appear to others they are in fact always fully justified in themselves. He then adduces a number of astute mystical reasons for the necessity of certain transgressions, such as eating on the fast days, which he defends by arguing that fasting is a kind of spiritual "bribe" given to the *kelipot* and as such is not in keeping with the pure spiritual nature of the Torah of *atzilut*.

AS TO THE ultimate step of apostasy, the arguments presented by the "radicals" in its behalf closely resemble those brought forward by the "moderates" to vindicate the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi himself. We happen to have in our possession an illuminating document bearing on the disputes that arose over this question among the "believers" in the form of a homily by the well-known Sabbatian Nehemiah Hayon on the verse (Deut. 29:17), "Lest there be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go serve the gods of those nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." The paradoxical solution arrived at by Hayon toward the close of his long discourse, which I quote here in abbreviated form, is an invaluable reflection of the perplexity and deep inner conflict experienced by those Sabbatians who were unable to choose between the "radical" and "moderate" positions:

It is supposed among those versed in esoteric lore that the redemption can be brought about in either one of two ways: either Israel will have the power to withdraw all the sparks of holiness from [the realm of] the *kelipah* so that the

kelipah will wither into nothing, or else the *kelipah* will become so filled with holiness that because of this repletion it must be spewn forth. . . . And this [fact], that the coming of the redemption can be prompted in one of two ways, was what the rabbis of blessed memory had in mind when they said that the Son of David would come either in a generation that was entirely guiltless (meaning when Israel by virtue of its good deeds had withdrawn all the sparks of holiness from the *kelipah*), or else in a generation that was entirely guilty (meaning when the *kelipah* had become so filled with holiness that it split its maw and perished). . . . And it is in consequence of this thesis that many, though their intentions are good, have mistakenly said, "Let us go worship other gods that we may fill the *kelipah* to bursting that it die." . . . Nay, do not reason with yourself, "Since it is impossible for all to become guiltless so as to withdraw the holiness from the *kelipah*, it is better that I become a sinner and so hasten the doom of the *kelipah* in that way that it might die and salvation might come," but rather, "Wait for the Lord and keep His way" [Ps. 37:34]: it is better that you endure the length of the exile and look to salvation than that you sin by worshiping other gods in order to bring on the redemption. This brings us to the meaning of the verse, "Lest there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood [29:17], and it come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse" [etc.; 29:18]. In other words, when he hears the words of the curse that is threatened . . . he turns away his heart from God and blesses himself in his heart [29:18], saying: "What Moses has written is true" . . . but [he thinks that] if he does not turn away his heart from God and if his intentions are good, that is, if he means to quench the *kelipah* by giving it holiness to drink, then certainly no evil will befall him, but on the contrary, God will turn the curse into a blessing. And this is the meaning of the words "and he blesses himself in his heart," for he says to himself, "I am sure that no harm will befall me . . . because I did not turn my heart [from God] . . . and because my intentions are good . . . [namely] to water the *kelipah*, the thirsty one, with the holiness that I extend to her that she may partake of it and die. It is of such a one that Moses said, "The Lord will not be willing to pardon him" [29:19]. . . . Even though his intentions were good and he only desired to hasten the redemption, he cannot be forgiven. . . . Nor does [the principle of] "A transgression committed for its own sake" [is greater than a commandment not committed for its own sake] apply here, since there [in its original context] it refers to an ordinary sin, as in the case of Jael [in killing Sisera; Judg. 4], whereas here, where it is a question of worshiping other gods, the Lord will not be willing to pardon him. . . . They [who act on this mistaken assumption] are powerless to destroy the *kelipah*; on the contrary, he [who attempts to fill the *kelipah* with holiness] will remain stuck in its midst, and this is why it is said that the Lord will not be willing to pardon him. . . . There is also another possible explanation [of the verse], namely,

that when Moses said that the Lord would not be willing to pardon him he was not pronouncing a curse . . . but was thinking the following: . . . since he [the deliberate sinner] believes in his heart that God will not account his actions as sins, but will rather reward them . . . it is inconceivable that he should ever repent for he does not believe he has done wrong. . . . How then can the Holy One, blessed be He, forgive him? On the contrary, each time [he sins] he only angers Him the more . . . by thinking that he has done good instead of evil . . . and by saying that the greater a sinner he is the more he hastens the coming of the redemption. Such a one undoubtedly incurs the full power of the curse, since he deliberately violates all its injunctions. . . . "And the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel" [29:20]. . . . But perhaps one can interpret the meaning of the text as follows: since such a person intends his deeds to redound to the benefit of all Israel . . . if after sinning and passing through the *kelipah* he reconsiders and repents completely, he undoubtedly succeeds in raising up many sparks from the *kelipah*, just as in the case of the human body when one is administered an emetic he does not simply vomit up the drug itself, but rather having opened his mouth proceeds to spew forth both the drug and everything that was near it. And so it is with the *kelipah*: sometimes it gains power over a man whose soul is great and does him harm, but as soon as he repents he spews forth all that was within him. And this is what Solomon meant when he said [Eccl. 8:9] there is a time when one man rules another to do him harm. [But since] There is a time [for such things] and miracles do not happen every hour, therefore Moses warns that one should not place himself in this peril. . . . "And the Lord shall separate him unto evil"; in other words, if he [the deliberate sinner] has been a cause of evil he is singled out [for judgment] from the tribes of Israel, for [it is a halakhic principle that] one cannot commit a transgression for another by proxy even if one has been authorized to do so, much less if one has not been, so that having gone [and committed evil] of his own accord, there is no doubt that the evil which results [from his actions] will not be imputed to Israel as a whole. But if he does good—that is, if he repents wholeheartedly and raises up sparks from Israel by virtue of his repentance—then all the tribes of Israel have a part in this good; it is only in the evil that they do not have a part.

Likely as not, this entire passage has an autobiographical basis. In any event, it is clear that the attitude of its author toward the "voluntary Marranos" whose conversion he decries yet understands so well is far from being hostile or vindictive.

ONE OF THE strongest factors in the development of a nihilistic mentality among the "radicals" was their desire to negate an objective historical order in which the exile

continued in full force and the beginnings of the redemption went unnoticed by all but the "believers" themselves. Understandably, during the period now in question this antipathy toward outward reality remained confined to the area of religion alone, the world of ghetto Jewry still being sufficiently stable to preclude its active politicalization. Prior to the French Revolution, indeed, there was no connection between the ideas of Sabbatianism and the growing undercurrent of discontent with the *ancien régime* in Europe. It was only when changing times had widened the "believers'" horizons and revealed to them the existence of more tangible ways of affecting the course of history than the violation of the Torah of *beriah* that they too began to dream of revolutionizing the structure of society itself. In a sense this was to mean the restoration to Jewish Messianism of its traditional political content, which, as I have shown, the Sabbatian movement transformed beyond recognition. As long as external conditions were not conducive to this, even the "radicals" remained politically unaware, nor were they able to conceive of any other method of revitalizing Jewish life than the subversion of its most sacred values; but it is not surprising that once the opportune moment arose the essentially this-worldly emphasis of Jewish Messianism which Sabbatianism had striven to suppress should have come to be stressed again. I shall have more to say on this important subject; first, however, I would like to comment on a related matter, one which will serve as yet another example of the uniquely paradoxical dialectic of Sabbatian thought: its attitude toward Palestine.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER the collapse of the initial messianic expectations aroused by Sabbatai Zevi, scattered groups of Sabbatians began to express their opposition to the idea of emigration to the Holy Land. As has now been established, Nathan of Gaza himself was of the opinion that "for the time being it is best not to go to the Land of Israel." But this point of view did not go unchallenged. A number of "believers," especially after 1700, attempted to demonstrate by mystical reasons that in the light of Sabbatian doctrine emigration was indeed desirable after all. Individuals from both the circle of Abraham Rovigo and the whole band of "Hasidim" centered around Rabbi Judah Hasid actually settled in Palestine as a result of specifically Sabbatian aspirations. One belief that was current at the time was that on the occasion of Sabbatai Zevi's second advent, which would take place forty years after his "concealment," a true mystical knowledge of his nature would be revealed to those of his followers, and only to those, who were living in the Holy Land. Sabbatian nihilists like Hayyim Malakh, who were contemporaries of such groups, also were in favor of going to the Land of Israel, from which they too undoubtedly expected special

revelation to come; in addition, they may have felt that there was an advantage to violating the Torah of *beriah* on the most consecrated ground of all, on the analogy of "conquering the queen in her own home." As late as the middle of the 18th century Sabbatian nihilists in Podolia still had contacts and acquaintances in Palestine, while a number of the emissaries sent by the Palestinian Jewish community to raise funds in the Diaspora were Sabbatian scholars who acted on the side both as secret propagators of the faith and as contacts between "believers" in different localities. Many of these, such as the author of the *The Book of the Adornment of Days*, a beautiful and detailed description (in Hebrew) of the life of a Kabbalist devotee all through the year, were undoubtedly "moderates," but regarding many others we will probably never know exactly where they stood.

Toward the middle of the 18th century, however, a reaction took place, so that we find a distinct anti-Palestinian bias setting in throughout the movement. Whether or not the anti-Palestinian sermon cited by Jacob Emden in his *Edut be-Ya'akov* (44b) is really the handiwork of Jonathan Eibeschütz is uncertain, but in any case there can be no question of its being a total fabrication, inasmuch as similar ideas to those expressed in it can be found in other Sabbatian documents which Emden could not possibly have seen. Among the Frankists an astonishing and clear-cut ideology of Jewish territorialism (as distinct from Palestine-centered tendencies) developed at about this time, apparently as a result of Frank's own personal ambitions. In a word, on the very eve of its absorption of new political ideas Sabbatian nihilism completely reversed its previously positive evaluation of the role of the Land of Israel, so that when shortly afterward it began to speak the language of a revived political Messianism and to prophesy the rebirth of the Jewish nation as one outcome of an impending world revolution, there was no longer any real interest on its part in the idea of the Land of Israel as a national center. As stated by the Frankist writer in Prague whom we have already had occasion to quote, Israel's exile is not a consequence of its sins at all, but is rather part of a plan designed to bring about the destruction of the *keli-pot* all over the world, so that "even if several thousands or tens-of-thousands of Jews are enabled to return to the Land of Israel, nothing has been completed." According to the same author this new doctrine of the exile is "a secret mystical principle which was hidden from all the sages until it was [recently] revealed in Poland." And thus we see how in the final stages of Sabbatianism the intrinsic nature of the exile came to be reconsidered in an entirely new light.

The figure of Sabbatai Zevi himself was also recast by the passage of time, becoming entirely mythical: gradually the element of historical truth was diminished until nothing was left but a

legendary hero who had inaugurated a new epoch of world history. Even in Sabbatai Zevi's lifetime one of his first disciples, Abraham Yakhini, could write of him (in his book *Vavei ha-Amudim*): "Just as one of the seventy faces of the Torah is concerned entirely with the resurrection of the dead, as is to be seen in [the commentaries of] the *Zohar* on several chapters [of the Pentateuch], [the allusions to the resurrection in] the other chapters being inaccessible to us because of the limitations of our intellects, so one of the seventy faces of the Torah is concerned entirely with the Messiah, our lord and master, may his majesty increase, and shortly, when he reveals himself to us [completely], we shall be privileged to understand the entire Torah in this way." It is little wonder that the concrete historical figure of Sabbatai Zevi came to be transformed by his followers in much the same manner as Jesus's was by his, if not more so, since his conversion into a mythological figure was even more complete. Like the early Christians, in fact, the "radicals" eventually came to believe that the Messiah had not been a mere superior human being, but an incarnation of God Himself in human form. This new interpretation of "the mystery of the Godhead" was accepted by all the "radical" groups down to the last of the Frankists and was considered by them to be the most profound mystic truth in their entire body of doctrine. Whence it came cannot yet be determined: perhaps from the collective memory of thousands of Marranos, perhaps from Christian books or anti-Christian polemics, or perhaps from the "believers'" own inner conflict, the paradoxical cause of which—an apostate Messiah—may have led them to adopt the same paradoxical solution that a like contradiction—a crucified Messiah—produced in yet another group of Jews caught in the toils of religious turmoil. And perhaps, too, all of these factors combined to work together.

THE DOCTRINE of an incarnate God, which immediately became a bone of contention between the "radicals" and the "moderates" in the Sabbatian camp, was limited at first to the figure of Sabbatai Zevi himself. According to one view, when the redemption began, "the Holy One, blessed be He, removed Himself upward and Sabbatai Zevi ascended to be God in His place." Since in the Sabbatian faith "the Holy One, blessed be He," was synonymous, as we have seen, with "the God of Israel," this meant that Sabbatai Zevi had now assumed the latter's title and become "the Holy King." Before long, however, the "believers" in Salonika replaced this teaching with another: "the Holy King" had Himself been incarnated in the person of the Messiah in order to restore the world and nullify the Torah of *beriah*. It was in this form that the doctrine was accepted by the Sabbatian nihilists in Podolia. A prayer of theirs that has come into our

possession reads: "May it be Thy will that we prosper in Thy Torah and cling to Thy commandments, and mayst Thou purify my thoughts to worship Thee in truth . . . and may all our deeds in the Torah of *atzilut* [meaning: transgressions!] be only for the sake of Thy great name, O Señor Santo,* that we may recognize Thy greatness, for Thou art the true God and King of the universe, our living Messiah who wast in this earthly world and didst nullify the Torah of *beriah* and didst reascend to Thy place to conduct all the worlds."

But this doctrine of a single incarnation did not long remain unaltered in turn. Apparently among the Sephardic converts to Islam the belief developed that the leaders of the "believers" in every age were reincarnations of Sabbatai Zevi. Whether this actually meant that these leaders—particularly Baruchya, who was one of the foremost promulgators of the new belief—were thought to be, or considered themselves, divine incarnations no less than the Messiah himself is not entirely clear, but there are good reasons for believing that the gospel preached by Jacob Frank at the beginning of his career was nothing but this Sephardic teaching with a number of modifications to suit his own personality, and Frank himself, though he never said so in so many words, was correctly understood by his disciples to imply that he personally was the living God once again incarnated on earth. Not without a certain "consistency" the Frankists held that each of the three hypostases of the Godhead had its individual incarnation in a separate Messiah: Sabbatai Zevi, whom Frank was in the habit of referring to simply as "the First One," had been the embodiment of "the Ancient Holy One," Frank himself was the personification of "the Holy King," and the third hypostasis, the *Shekhinah*, variously known in the writings of the Kabbalah as "the Kingdom" (*malkhut*), "the Lady" (*matronita*), "the Maiden," and "the Doe," was to appear in the form of a woman. It is hard not to associate this novelty—a female Messiah, referred to by Frank as "the Virgin," who was yet to be revealed and whose task it would be to complete the work of the redemption—with the influence of certain mystical Christian sects prevalent at about this time in Eastern Europe that believed in a triad of saviors corresponding to the threefold nature of God and in a feminine incarnation of the *Sophia*, the Divine Wisdom or Holy Spirit. With one of these groups, in fact, the "Philipovicités" in Rumania and the Ukraine, the Frankists were in such close contact that one of its former leaders publicly defended them before the Catholic authorities of Poland.

Interpreted in this manner the redemption was a process filled with incarnations of the divinity.

* The Spanish term used to denote Baruchya of Salonika in the sect of his followers who saw in him the reborn Sabbatai Zevi and God incarnate.

Even the "radicals" in Prague who clung to their Jewish identity and strove to defend their beliefs by means of Jewish concepts and sources were won over to this view, and although their hostility to Christianity as an institution knew no bounds, references to "the mystery of the incarnation" can be found throughout their literature. The anti-Sabbatian polemicists who accused the "believers" of corporealizing the idea of God were perfectly right in their assertions, but this fact, which seemed to them a damning admission of weakness, was in reality their opponents' greatest source of pride! "Because the Godhead has a body the sting of death is gone," wrote one "believer." On the surface it would seem that the exaggerated spirituality of the World of *atzilut* and the yearning to see God in the flesh that was evidenced by the doctrine of a messianic incarnation were two mutually opposed tendencies, and yet, after all that has been said here, it should not be difficult to see that underlying both was the struggle of a new sensibility toward life to express itself by means of a religious vocabulary inherited from the old. In such cases the paradox is always the only solution.

In summary, the five distinguishing beliefs of "radical" Sabbatianism are:

- 1) The belief in the necessary apostasy of the Messiah and in the sacramental nature of the descent into the realm of the *kelipot*.
- 2) The belief that the "believer" must not appear to be as he really is.
- 3) The belief that the Torah of *atzilut* must be observed through the violation of the Torah of *beriah*.
- 4) The belief that the First Cause and the God of Israel are not the same, the former being the God of rational philosophy, the latter the God of religion.
- 5) The belief in three hypostases of the Godhead, all of which have been or will be incarnated in human form.

These theses amply demonstrate, in my opinion, that in the onward course of the Sabbatian movement the world of traditional Judaism was shattered beyond repair. In the minds of those who took part in this revolutionary destruction of old values a special susceptibility to new ideas inevitably came to exist. Well might the "believers" have asked how long their newly released energies and emotions were to go on being aimlessly squandered. Were their lives required to be dominated by paradoxes forever?

But just as the character of the Sabbatian movement was dictated by the circumstances of the movement's birth, so, in turn, it was to dictate the circumstances of the movement's disintegration and death. For as the "believers" had meant to fire the sparks of holiness with the *kelipot*, so they were to wander in the blackest of blind alleys; and as they had wished to "play" with "the other side," the dark side of life, so they were to

dance in the devil's own arms. And last and most ironically of all: as they had hastened to come to the aid of the Redeemer—"to do as he did for strange are his deeds, to worship as he worships for his worship is alien" (Isa. 28:21)—so they were to be induced in the end to play into the hands of a man like Jacob Frank.

VII

JACOB FRANK (1726-91) will always be remembered as one of the most frightening phenomena in the whole of Jewish history: a religious leader who, whether for purely self-interested motives or otherwise, was in all his actions a truly corrupt and degenerate individual. Indeed, it might plausibly be argued that in order to exhaust completely its seemingly endless potential for the contradictory and the unexpected, the Sabbatian movement was in need of just such a strongman, a man who could snuff out its last inner lights and pervert whatever will to truth and goodness was still to be found in the mazelike ruins of the "believers'" souls. Even if one is willing to concede that the doctrine of the sacred sin, the *mitzvah ha-ba'ah ba-averah*, was not lacking in certain insights, there can be no question but that these were thoroughly debased upon coming in contact with the person of Frank. But just as the "believers" had deliberately chosen to follow that dangerous path along which nothing is impossible, so it was perhaps precisely this that attracted them to Frank, for here was a man who was not afraid to push on to the very end, to take the final step into the abyss, to drain the cup of desolation and destruction to the lees until the last bit of holiness had been made into a mockery. His admirers, who themselves fell far short of him in respect of this ability, were won over by his intrepidity, which neither the fear of God nor the terrors of the bottomless pit were able to daunt, and saw in him the type of the true saint, a new Sabbatai Zevi and an incarnate God.

If the full truth be told, however, even after one has taken into account Frank's unscrupulous opportunism, his calculated deceits, and his personal ambitions, none of which really concern us here, he remains a figure of tremendous if satanic power. True, neither the promises and pledges with which he lured his disciples, nor his visionary schemes for the future that was to follow the general cataclysm of the times seem particularly impressive today, although of his territorialist program it may at least be said that besides revealing his own lust for power it expressed in a bizarre yet unmistakable manner the desire of his followers for a reconstruction of Jewish national and even economic existence; and yet for all the negativism of his teachings, they nonetheless contained a genuine creed of life.

Frank was a nihilist, and his nihilism possessed a rare authenticity. Certainly, its primitive feroc-

ity is frightening to behold. Certainly, too, Frank himself was not only an unlettered man, but boasted continually of his own lack of culture. But in spite of all this—and here is the significant point—we are confronted in his person with the extraordinary spectacle of a powerful and tyrannical soul living in the middle of the 18th century and yet immersed entirely in a mythological world of its own making. Out of the ideas of radical Sabbatianism, a movement in which he was apparently raised and educated, Frank was able to weave a complete myth of religious nihilism. This, surely, is worthy of attention.

Frank was not an original speculative thinker, but he did have a decided talent for the pithy, the strikingly illustrative, and the concretely symbolic expression. Despite their nihilistic content, his sayings in *The Sayings of the Lord* (*Slawa Pańskie*) are not very different in form from those of many famous Hasidic Zaddikim, and for all his despotic nature he possessed a hidden poetic impulse which appears all the more surprising in the light of his customary savagery. Even Kraushar, who like his predecessors was intent on emphasizing everything that seemed incoherent or grotesque in Frank's recorded sayings, was forced to admit that on occasion they show vigor and imagination. For my own part, I fail to see how any sensitive individual who reads the many excerpts published by Kraushar from *The Sayings of the Lord* with a degree of understanding—something which it is far from impossible to do—can contemplate them without emotion. But how many have even troubled to make the effort?*

Frank was particularly gifted at the creation of new images and symbols, and in spite of its popular coloration his language is full of mystical overtones. Of the terminology of the Kabbalah he rarely made use, at times even criticizing the Sabbatian sectarians in Podolia for their continuing absorption in Kabbalistic ideas, which he called "madness." Anyone familiar with "radical" Sabbatian thought, however, can readily detect its continued presence beneath the new verbal façade. Thus, in place of the familiar Sabbatian "three knots of the faith" we now have "the Good God," "the Big Brother who stands before the Lord," and "the Virgin," terms which are highly suggestive for all their earthy quality. The *keli-pah*, the Torahs of *beriah* and *atzilut*, the sparks of holiness, indeed all the conceptual usages that are basic to Sabbatian theological discourse, have disappeared entirely, to be replaced by a completely exoteric vocabulary. Even the figure of

Sabbatai Zevi has greatly declined in importance. The world of Sabbatianism itself, on the other hand, remains intact, or rather, has reached that ultimate stage of its development where it verges on self-annihilation.

In the following pages I will attempt to present an overall view of Frank's religious teachings, to the extent, that is, that they can be fully reconstructed from his many sayings, and in a form that they apparently did not completely attain until after his conversion to Catholicism. Although they will occasionally seem to contradict one another, they are for the most part mutually consistent. The somberness of their world or, more accurately, world-ruin, did not in fact encourage a great deal of variety, although this did not prevent the "believers," including even the traditionalists among them in Prague, from finding a dark fascination in its tidings, which Frank himself brutally summed up in a single brusque remark: "It is one thing to worship God—and quite another to follow the path that I have taken."

ACCORDING TO FRANK, the "cosmos" (*tevel*), or "earthly world" (*tevel ha-gashmi*) as it was called by the sectarians in Salonika, is not the creation of the Good or Living God, for if it were it would be external and man would be immortal, whereas as we see from the presence of death in the world this is not at all the case. To be sure, there are "worlds" which belong to "the Good God" too, but these are hidden from all but the "believers." In them are divine powers, one of whom is "the King of Kings," who is also known as "the Big Brother" and "He who stands before the Lord." The evil power that created the cosmos and introduced death into the world, on the other hand, is connected with the feminine, and is most probably composed of three "gods" or "Rulers of the World," one of whom is the Angel of Death. In any case, it is these "Rulers," all of whom have been incarnated on earth in human form, who block the path leading to "the Good God," who is unknown to men, for mystic knowledge of Him has as yet been revealed to no one, nor has the holy soul (*nishmata*) that emanates from Him been in any creature, not even in Sabbatai Zevi. In the current aeon there are three "Rulers of the World," "Life," "Wealth," and "Death," the last of which must be replaced by "Wisdom"—a task, however, that is not easily accomplished, for although "Wisdom" is in some mysterious manner connected to "the Good God," the latter is still not able to reveal Himself to mankind, "for the world is in the thrall of laws that are no good."

Hence it is necessary to cast off the domination of these laws, which are laws of death and harmful to mankind. To bring this about, the Good God has sent messengers such as the patriarchs "who dug wells," Moses, Jesus, and others,

* Frank's sayings were never published in Hebrew because the Hebrew translation of the second volume of Kraushar's history, in which they appear, was prevented from going to press at the last minute by the news of Kraushar's conversion to Catholicism, which shocked the Jewish public. I am deeply indebted to my friend Miss Hadassah Goldgart for furnishing me with an exact version of the original Polish text.

into the world. Moses pointed out the true way, but it was found to be too difficult, whereupon he resorted to "another religion" and presented men with "the Law of Moses," whose commandments are injurious and useless. "The Law of the Lord," on the other hand—the spiritual Torah of the Sabbatians—"is perfect" (Ps. 19:8), only no man has yet been able to attain it. Finally, the Good God sent Sabbatai Zevi into the world, but he too was powerless to achieve anything, because he was unable to find the true way. "But my desire is to lead you toward Life." Nevertheless, the way to Life is not easy, for it is the way of nihilism and it means to free oneself of all laws, conventions, and religions, to adopt every conceivable attitude and to reject it, and to follow one's leader step for step into the abyss. Baptism is a necessity, as Frank said prior to his conversion, "because Christianity has paved the way for us." Thirty years afterward this same "Christian" observed: "This much I tell you: Christ, as you know, said that he had come to redeem the world from the hands of the devil, but I have come to redeem it from all the laws and customs that have ever existed. It is my task to annihilate all this so that the Good God can reveal Himself."

THE ANNIHILATION of every religion and positive system of belief—this was the "true way" the "believers" were expected to follow. Concerning the redemptive powers of havoc and destruction Frank's imagination knew no limits. "Wherever Adam trod a city was built but wherever I set foot all will be destroyed, for I came into this world only to destroy and to annihilate. But what I build, will last forever." Mankind is engaged in a war without quarter with the "no-good" laws that are in power—"and I say to you, all who would be warriors must be without religion, which means that they must reach freedom under their own power and seize hold of the Tree of Life." No region of the human soul can remain untouched by this struggle. In order to ascend one must first descend. "No man can climb a mountain until he has first descended to its foot. Therefore we must descend and be cast down to the bottom rung, for only then can we climb to the infinite. This is the mystic principle of Jacob's Ladder, which I have seen and which is shaped like a V." Again, "I did not come into this world to lift you up but rather to cast you down to the bottom of the abyss. Further than this it is impossible to descend, nor can one ascend again by virtue of one's own strength, for only the Lord can raise one up from the depths by the power of His hand." The descent into the abyss requires not only the rejection of all religions and conventions, but also the commission of "strange acts," and this in turn demands the voluntary abasement of one's own sense of self, so that libertinism and the achievement of that state of

utter shamelessness which leads to a *tikkun* of the soul are one and the same thing.

"We are all now obliged to enter the abyss" in which all laws and religions are annihilated. But the way is perilous, for there are powers and "gods"—these being none other than the three "Rulers of the World"—that do not let one pass. It is necessary to elude them and continue onward, and this none of the ancients was able to do, neither Solomon, nor Jesus, nor even Sabbatai Zevi. To accomplish this, that is, to overcome the opposing powers, which are the gods of other religions, it is imperative that one be "perfectly silent," even deceitful. This is the mystic principle of "the burden of silence" (*masa' dumah*; Isa. 21:11), i.e., of maintaining the great reserve that is becoming to the "believer" (a new version of the original Sabbatian injunction against appearing as one really is!). Indeed, this is the principle of the "true way" itself: "Just as a man who wishes to conquer a fortress does not do it by means of making a speech, but must go there himself with all his forces, so we too must go our way in silence." "It is better to see than to speak, for the heart must not reveal what it knows to the mouth." "Here there is no need for scholars because here belongs the burden of silence." "When I was baptized in Lvov I said to you: so far, so good! But from here on: a burden of silence! Muzzle your mouths!" "Our forefathers were always talking, only what good did it do them and what did they accomplish? But we are under the burden of silence: here we must be quiet and bear what is needful, and that is why it is a burden." "When a man goes from one place to another he should hold his tongue. It is the same as with a man drawing a bow: the longer he holds his breath, the further the arrow will fly."

From the abyss, if only the "burden of silence" is borne, "holy knowledge" will emerge. The task, then, is "to acquire knowledge," "and the passageway to knowledge is to combine with the nations" but not, of course, to intermingle with them. He who reaches the destination will lead a life of anarchic liberty as a free man. "The place that we are going to tolerates no laws, for all that comes from the side of Death, whereas we are bound for Life." The name of this place is "Edom" or "Esau," and the way to it, which must be followed by the light of "knowledge" (*gnosis*) and under the "burden of silence" through the depths of the abyss, is called "the way to Esau." This was the road taken by Jacob the patriarch, "the first Jacob," all of whose deeds prefigured those of "the last Jacob"—Jacob Frank. "Esau" too was foreshadowed by the Esau of the Bible, though only in a veiled way: "Esau the son of Jacob was but the curtain that hangs before the entrance to the king's inner chambers." Herein lies the mystical principle of the wells dug by the patriarchs, as well as the mystic content of the story (Gen. 29) of how Jacob came to a well that

had already been dug, rolled the stone from its mouth, and encountered Rachel and her father Laban. Another who found the passage to "Esau" was the sorcerer Balaam. "Esau" belongs to the realm of the Good God where the power of death is made nought, and it is also the dwelling place of "the Virgin," she who is called Rachel in the biblical stories about Jacob and is elsewhere known as "the beautiful maiden who has no eyes." She it is who is the real Messiah (who cannot, contrary to traditional opinion, be a man) and to her "all the king's weapons are surrendered," for she is also the much sought-after "Divine Wisdom" or *Sophia* who is destined to take "Death's" place as one of the three "Rulers of the World." For the present, however, she is hidden in a castle and kept from the sight of all living creatures; all the "strange acts," in comparison with which the "strange fire" offered before the Lord by Aaron's two sons (Lev. 10) was but a trifle, are committed for the sole purpose of reaching her. Again, she is the "holy serpent" who guards the garden, and he who asked what the serpent was doing in Paradise was simply betraying his ignorance. As of yet, the place of "Esau," the home of "the Virgin" and of true salvation, has not been attained by anyone, but its hidden light will first be revealed to the "believers," who will have the distinction of being its soldiers and fighting on its behalf.

These are some of the main features of Frank's teaching. It is a veritable myth of religious nihilism, the work of a man who did not live at all in the world of rational argument and discussion, but inhabited a realm entirely made up of mythological entities. Indeed, to anyone familiar with the history of religion it might seem far more likely that he was dealing here with an antinomian myth from the second century composed by such nihilistic Gnostics as Carpocrates and his followers than that all this was actually taught and believed by Polish Jews living on the eve of the French Revolution, among whom neither the "master" nor his "disciples" had the slightest inkling that they were engaged in resuscitating an ancient tradition! Not only the general train of thought, but even some of the symbols and terms are the same! And yet, none of this seems as surprising as it may appear to be at first glance when we reflect that no less than the Frankists, the Gnostics of antiquity developed their thought within a biblical framework, for all that they completely inverted the biblical values. They too believed that Esau and Balaam were worshipers of "the Good God," they too converted the serpent in the Garden of Eden into a symbol of *gnosis*, salvation, and the true "Divine Wisdom" that guided men to freedom from the evil rule of the Demiurge by teaching them to disobey his laws and institutions, and they too held that the Law of the good and "alien" God, which enjoined the commission of "strange acts," was directly op-

posed to the Law of Moses, which was largely the promulgation of the irascible Creator.

FRANK'S ULTIMATE VISION of the future was based upon the still unrevealed laws of the Torah of *atzilut* which he promised his disciples would take effect once they had "come to Esau," that is, when the passage through the "abyss" with its unmitigated destruction and negation was finally accomplished. In seeking to elucidate this gospel of libertinism I can do no better than to quote a passage from the excellent book on Gnosticism by the philosopher Hans Jonas in which he discusses the development of a libertine ethic among the nihilistically minded pneumatics of the second century:*

The spiritualist morality of these pneumatics possessed a revolutionary character that did not stop short of actively implementing its beliefs. In this doctrine of immoralism we are confronted both with a total and overt rejection of all traditional norms of behavior, and with an exaggerated feeling of freedom that regards the license to do as it pleases as a proof of its own authenticity and as a favor bestowed upon it from above. . . . The entire doctrine rests on the concept of an "extra spirit" as a privilege conferred upon a new type of human being who from here on is no longer to be subject to the standards and obligations that have hitherto always been the rule. Unlike the ordinary, purely "psychic" individual, the pneumatic is a free man, free from the demands of the Law . . . and, inasmuch as it implies a positive realization of this freedom, his uninhibited behavior is far from being a purely negative reaction. Such moral nihilism fully reveals the crisis of a world in transition: by arbitrarily asserting its own complete freedom and pluming itself on its abandonment to the sacredness of sin, the self seeks to fill the vacuum created by the "interregnum" between two different and opposing periods of law. Especially characteristic of this over-all mood of anarchy are its hostility toward all established conventions, its need to define itself in terms that are clearly exclusive of the great majority of the human race, and its desire to flout that authority of the "divine" powers, that is, of the world-rulers who are the custodians of the old standards of morality. Over and above the rejection of the past for its own sake, therefore, we are faced here with an additional motive, namely, the desire to heap insult on its guardians and to revolt openly against them. Here we have revolution without the slightest speculative dissemblance and this is why the gospel of libertinism stands at the center of the gnostic revolution in religious thought. No doubt, too, there was in addition to all this an element of pure "daredeviltry" which the Gnostic could proudly point to as an indication of his reliance on his own "spiritual" nature. Indeed, in all periods of revolution human beings have been fond of the intoxicating power of big words.

* Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (1934), I, 234.

All of this is fully applicable to both "radical" Sabbatianism in general and to the Frankist movement in particular; the mentality that Jonas describes could not possibly, indeed, assume a more radical form than Frank's nihilistic myth. It goes without saying, of course, that in a given age myth and reality do not always coincide, and in the case of Frankists the former was undoubtedly the extremer of the two, even if Fran himself was not far from living up to it in actual practice, as emerged from the manuscript of *The Chronicles of the Life of the Lord* which one of the Frankist families permitted Kraushar to use and which afterward vanished. But in any event the significant point is the fact that the myth should have been born at all and that a considerable number of ghetto Jews should have come to regard it as a way to "political and spiritual liberation," to quote the words used by the educated Frankist Gabriel Porges in Prague to describe the movement's aims to his son after Frank himself was no longer alive. Clearly, for the Jew who saw in Frankism the solution to his personal problems and queries, the world of Judaism had been utterly dashed to pieces, although he himself may not have traveled the "true way" at all, may even, in fact, have continued to remain outwardly the most orthodox of observers.

VIII

WE WILL apparently never know with any certainty why most of the Sabbatians in Podolia followed Frank's lead and became Catholics while their counterparts in Western Europe, who for the most part also regarded Frank as their spiritual leader, chose to remain Jews. Our knowledge in this area, which is of such crucial importance to an understanding of Jewish history in the countries in question, is practically nil and we must content ourselves with mere speculation. Possibly the decisive factor was the differing social structures of the two groups. The majority of the Sabbatians in Podolia were members of the lower class and few (which is not to say none at all) of those who converted were educated individuals. The Sabbatians in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on the other hand, were largely from a more wealthy background and many of them were men of considerable rabbinical learning. As is frequently the case with religious sects, Sabbatianism was transmitted by entire families and not just by isolated individuals. Even today records exist to prove that a number of families, some of them quite prominent, which were known for their Sabbatian allegiances about 1740, were still clinging to "the holy faith" over sixty years later. For such groups traditional Judaism had become a permanent outer cloak for their true beliefs, although there were undoubtedly different viewpoints among them as to the exact nature of the relationship.

Not all were followers of Frank, albeit the Frankists in Prague were spiritually the strongest among them and were extremely active in disseminating their views. Most probably those Sabbatians who had once been disciples of Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschütz were also to be found in this category. In any case, the fact remains that among these groups the number of conversions was very small. Many of their adherents may have desired to reach "the holy gnosis of Edom," but few were willing to pass through the gates of Christianity in order to do so.

On the whole, however, in the years following Frank's death the various Sabbatian groups still in existence continued to develop along more or less parallel lines. Four principal documents bearing on this final phase of Sabbatianism have come down to us: *The Book of the Prophecy of Isaiah* written by an apostate "believer" in Offenbach; a long sermon on the *Alenu* prayer published by Wessely from a lengthy Frankist manuscript; several Frankist epistles as presented in substance by Peter Beer; and a commentary on the book *En Ya'akov* that came into the possession of Dr. H. Brody, when he was Chief Rabbi of Prague. All of these sources share the same world, differing only in that the first speaks in praise of baptism and heaps "prophetic" imprecations on the Jewish people, its rabbis and officials, whereas the others, written by Jews, preserve silence on these topics. Also found in the volume containing the commentary on the *En Ya'akov* was a Frankist commentary on the *Hallel* prayer, the joyous faith and emotion of which are genuinely moving. The man who wrote these few pages was a pure and immaculate spirit and his jubilant profession of "the redemption and deliverance of his soul" is obviously deeply felt. Like most of the Sabbatians in the West, he may never have met Frank face to face, but on the other hand, the author of *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, who did, also believed him to be the incarnation of the Living God, "the true Jacob who never dies," and clung to this feeling of salvation throughout his life.

In all of these documents the Frankist myth has lost much of its radical wildness. Most of its component parts are still recognizable in the form of "profound mysteries" that are to be revealed only to the prudent, but these too have undergone considerable modification. In many places, for instance, Frank's insistence that the "believers" were literally to become soldiers is so completely allegorized that it loses both its logic and its paradoxicality. The most striking change, however, is that while the doctrine of "strange acts" remains, and continues to be associated with the appearance of "the Virgin" or "the Lady," there is no longer the slightest reference to any ethic of libertinism. Here radicalism has retraced its steps and returned from the moral sphere to the historical. Even if we suppose that the authors of these documents were careful not to reveal them-

selves entirely in their writings—an assumption that many of their cryptic allusions would indeed seem to bear out—it is nonetheless apparent that libertine behavior is no longer considered by them to be a binding religious obligation. Instead there is an increased effort to understand the “strange acts” of the religious heroes of the past, particularly of the characters in the Bible, a book which the “believers” no less than the orthodox regarded as the ultimate authority; here too, however, the emphasis falls on vindicating such cases in theory rather than on imitating them in practice. In Offenbach, it is true, certain scandalous acts continued to be performed on no less than the Day of Atonement itself, but this had degenerated into a mere semblance, whereas “in good faith” among themselves the “believers” were no longer in the habit of carrying on such practices. As for the mystic principle of the “conjugation” of masculine and feminine elements in the divine worlds that had played so large a role in the unorthodox Kabbalistic theories of the nihilists and the “radicals,” this too, to judge by the sources in our possession, was now “toned down.” All in all, while the idea of violating the Torah of *beriah* reminded a cardinal principle of “the holy faith,” its application was transferred to other areas, particularly to dreams of a general revolution that would sweep away the past in a single stroke so that the world might be rebuilt.

TOWARD THE END of Frank's life the hopes he had entertained of abolishing all laws and conventions took on a very real historical significance. As a result of the French Revolution the Sabbatian and Frankist subversion of the old morality and religion was suddenly placed in a new and relevant context, and perhaps not only in the abstract, for we know that Frank's nephews, whether as “believers” or out of some other motive, were active in high revolutionary circles in Paris and Strasbourg. Seemingly, the Revolution had come to corroborate the fact that the nihilist outlook had been correct all along: now the pillars of the world were indeed being shaken, and all the old ways seemed about to be overturned. For the “believers” all this had a double significance. On the one hand, with the characteristic self-centeredness of a spiritualist sect, they saw in it a sign of special divine intervention in their favor, since in the general upheaval the inner renewal and their clandestine activities based on it would be more likely to go unnoticed. This opinion was expressed by Frank himself and was commonly repeated by his followers in Prague. At the same time that the Revolution served as a screen for the world of inwardness, however, it was also recognized as having a practical value in itself, namely, the undermining of all spiritual and secular authorities, the power of the priesthood most of all. The “believers” in the ghettos of Austria,

whose admiration for certain doctrines of the Christian Church (such as Incarnation) went hand in hand with a deep hatred of its priests and institutions, were particularly alive to this last possibility. Here the fashionable anti-clericalism of the times found a ready reception. In great and enthusiastic detail the Frankist author of *The Prophecy of Isaiah* describes the coming apocalypse which is destined to take place solely that the Jewish people might be reborn, repudiate its rabbis and other false leaders, and embrace the faith of “the true Jacob” as befits “the People of the God of Jacob.” To the commentator on the *Hallel* prayer writing in Prague, the verse in Psalm 118, “The right hand of the Lord is exalted,” meant that “if the right hand of the Lord begins to emerge, the deceitful left hand of Esau and his priests and the deceitful sword will retire”—an allusion, of course, to the combined rule of the secular and ecclesiastical powers. Throughout this literature apocalyptic ideas mingle freely with the political theories of the Revolution, which were also intended, after all, to lead to a “political and spiritual liberation,” to cite that illuminating and undeservedly neglected phrase with which the Frankists in Prague, as we have seen, defined the aims of their movement.

All this culminated in the remarkable case of “The Red Epistle,” of 1799, a circular letter written in red ink and addressed by the Frankists in Offenbach, the last Mecca of the sect, to a large number of Jewish congregations, exhorting them to embrace “the holy religion of Edom.” The theoretical part of this document—approximately the last third of it—is highly interesting. Here, in a single page, the epistlers summarize their beliefs without a single overt reference to Christianity, the word “Edom,” as we have seen, possessing a more specialized meaning in their vocabulary. Besides bearing all the markings of the Frankist myth, the epistle contains the familiar ingredients of the Sabbatian homily as well, particularly in its audacious exegeses of biblical stories, Midrashim and Aggadot, passages from the *Zohar*, and Kabbalistic texts. In sum, an entire mystical theory of revolution. The passage that I am going to quote exemplifies perfectly the thinking, style, and cryptic manner of expression of this type of Frankist literature:

Know that “it is time for the Lord to work, [for] they have made void Thy law” [Ps. 119:226], and in this connection the rabbis of blessed memory have said [*Sanhedrin* 97a] [that the Messiah will not come] “until the kingdom is entirely given over to heresy” [this being the mystical meaning of the words in Leviticus 13: 13] “it is all turned white and then he is clean,” and as is explained in the book *Zror ha-Mor*, his servants are clean too. For the time has come that Jacob [was referring to when he] promised, “I will come unto my Lord unto Seir” [Gen. 33:14], for we know that until now he has not

yet gone thither; and he [who will fulfill the verse] is our Holy Lord Jacob, "the most perfect of all" [*Zohar*, II, 23a] and the most excellent of the patriarchs, for he grasps both sides [*Zohar*, I, 147a], binding one extreme to the other until the last extreme of all. But although last, he who will rise upon earth and say, "Arise O Virgin of Israel," is not least [i.e., he is more important and favored than the first Jacob]. Nay, he is certainly not dead, and it is he who leads us on the true way in the holy religion of Edom, so that whoever is of the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must follow in their path, for they have shown the way that their sons are to take at the End of Days, Abraham by descending to Egypt [Gen. 12], Isaac [by journey] to Abimelech [Gen. 26], and Jacob, the most excellent of the patriarchs, by leaving Beersheba and going to Haran [Gen. 28] [that is], by leaving the faith [of his fathers] and the Land of Israel for another realm of impurity, as is explained in the *Zohar*; for the *Zohar* explains that the redemption must be sought in the most evil place of all. Then he came to the mouth of the well [Gen. 29] and found Rachel and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and came to Laban and worked for him [in the realm of evil] and brought out his own portion. And afterward he went to Esau [Gen. 32], but he was still not done [with his task], for although he rolled the stone [from the well] they rolled it back again [Gen. 29:3], and therefore he could not go to Seir [the place where there are no laws] and all this was but to prepare the way for the last Jacob [Frank], the most perfect of all, at the End of Days. For as the *Zohar* explains, the first Jacob is perfect but the last Jacob is perfect in everything, and he will complete [Jacob's mission in] everything. And it is said [in allusion to this] in the *Zohar*: "Until a man comes in the form of Adam and a woman in the form of Eve and they circumvent him [i.e., the serpent] and outwit him," and so forth. Therefore, we must follow in his path, for "the ways of the Lord are right, and the just do walk in them" [Hos. 14:10], and though there is a burden of silence [about this] and the heart must not reveal [what it knows] to the mouth, it is nonetheless written [Isa. 42:16], "And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not, in paths that they know not I will lead them, I will make darkness light before them and rugged places plain." And here it was that Jacob "honored his Master," and so forth [namely, by standing in the realm of evil]—and look in the *Zohar* [I, 161b, where these words are to be found]. And herein will be [found the mystical meaning of the verse] "Lord, when Thou didst go forth out of Seir, when Thou didst march out of the field of Edom" [Judg. 5:14] and "Who is this that cometh from Edom?" [Isa. 63:1], for as is [stated] in the *Tanna debe Eliyahu*, there will come a day when the angels will seek the Lord and the sea will say "He is not in me" and the abyss will say "He is not in me." Where then will they find him? In Edom, for it is said, "Who is this that cometh from Edom?" And they who follow

him into this holy religion and cling to the House of Jacob [Frank] and take shelter in its shadow—for it is said [Lam. 4:20], "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations" and [Mic. 4:2] "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and the House of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths"—to them it will be granted to cling to the Lord, for they [the ways of the Lord] are a way of life to those who find them. And it is written [Deut. 4:29], "From thence ye will seek the Lord thy God and thou shalt find Him." Why does the text emphasize "from thence"? Because light will be made known from darkness [*Zohar*, III, 47b], as it is written [Mic. 7:8], "Though I sit in darkness, the Lord is a light unto me."

The government officials who intercepted copies of this epistle rightly suspected its authors of being hidden revolutionaries, but for the wrong reason. The many obscure references to an individual called "Jacob" led them to surmise that they were in reality dealing with—the Jacobins, who in this manner were supposed to spread their radical propaganda among the Jews of the ghetto. An investigation was ordered on the spot. The authorities who conducted it in Frankfurt and Offenbach, however, did not delve beneath the surface of the affair and were quickly satisfied that it involved nothing more than an intrigue to swindle and extort money from ignorant Jews. In our own day, a historian who has published their official report, rather naively concludes by remarking, "and so the ridiculous theories of a Frankist plot which had proved so alarming to these imperial bureaucrats were at last laid to rest," thereby failing to realize himself that on a deeper level the authorities' suspicions were fully if unwittingly justified! Had they bothered to read and understand not just the debtors' notes of Frank's children in Offenbach which were in possession of the town's bankers and moneylenders, but also *The Prophecy of Isaiah* that had been composed within the four walls of the "court" itself, they would have been amazed to discover how ardently these Frankist "Jacobins" yearned for the overthrow of the existing regime.

THE HOPES and beliefs of these last Sabbatians caused them to be particularly susceptible to the "millennial" winds of the times. Even while still "believers"—in fact, precisely because they were "believers"—they had been drawing closer to the spirit of the Haskalah all along, so that when the flame of their faith finally flickered out they soon reappeared as leaders of Reform Judaism, secular intellectuals, or simply complete and indifferent skeptics. We have already noted how deeply rooted the Sabbatian apathy toward Orthodox observance and Jewish tradition in general was. Even the "moderates" tended to believe that the commandments were for the most part meant to be observed only in

the Land of Israel and that "in the exile there is no punishment [for not observing them], even though there is still as always a reward [if they are kept]"—a doctrine that was ultimately to have a catastrophic effect on all traditional ties and to help prepare the way for the philosophy of assimilationism. A man such as Jonas Wehle, for example, the spiritual leader and educator of the Sabbatians in Prague after 1790, was equally appreciative of both Moses Mendelssohn and Sabbatai Zevi, and the fragments of his writings that have survived amply bear out the assertion of one of his opponents that "he took the teachings of the philosopher Kant and dressed them up in the costume of the *Zohar* and the Lurianic Kabbalah." It is evident from the commentary on the *En Ya'akov* and from the letters that were in Peter Beer's possession that men like Wehle intended to use the Haskalah for their own Sabbatian ends, but in the meanwhile the Haskalah went its way and proceeded to make use of them.

Indeed, even for those "believers" who remained faithful to their own religious world and did not share the enthusiasm of the Prague

Frankists for the "School of Mendelssohn," the way to the Haskalah was easily traveled. It was surely no accident that a city like Prossnitz, which served as a center for the Haskalah in Moravia upon the movement's spread there one generation earlier, was also a bastion of Sabbatianism in that country. The leaders of the "School of Mendelssohn," who were neither Sabbatians themselves, of course, nor under the influence of mysticism at all, to say nothing of mystical heresy, found ready recruits for their cause in Sabbatian circles, where the world of rabbinic Judaism had already been completely destroyed from within, quite independently of the efforts of secularist criticism. Those who had survived the ruin were now open to any alternative or wind of change; and so, their "mad visions" behind them, they turned their energies and hidden desires for a more positive life to assimilation and the Haskalah, two forces that accomplished without paradoxes, indeed without religion at all, what they, the members of "the accursed sect," had earnestly striven for in a stormy contention with truth, carried on in the half-light of a faith pregnant with paradoxes.



WHAT'S GOOD FOR GM

EDWARD AYRES
Introduction by Senator Gaylord Nelson
\$4.95

"This volume is not confined to General Motors, but covers the entire U.S. automobile industry. Ayres has written a sweeping, angry, and . . . eloquent attack upon the industry itself, our 'car culture,' and the economic, political, environmental, and psychological effects of automobiles."

Library Journal



DON'T GET SICK IN AMERICA

DANIEL SCHORR
Introduction by Senator Edward Kennedy
\$5.95

"His book is essentially a statement and analysis of facts regarding the need for at least 50,000 more practicing doctors, the concentration of doctors in relatively wealthy urban areas to the neglect of rural communities, the virtues and inadequacies of health insurance groups, and the AMA's fight against 'socialized medicine.' An eye-opening, valuable study."

Publishers Weekly

**A Piercing
Look
at Today's
AMERICA**



AURORA PUBLISHERS, INC./Suite 619, 170 Fourth Ave. N., Nashville, Tenn. 37219
Please send me

_____ copies of *What's Good for GM* at \$4.95
_____ copies of *Don't Get Sick in America* at \$5.95

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
Enclosed is check or money order for \$_____ (Include 25¢ per copy for handling)

AURORA PUBLISHERS, INC./NASHVILLE/SUITE 619, 170 FOURTH AVENUE N., NASHVILLE, TENN. 37219