

REVIEW ARTICLE

Spinoza and Kabbalah: Convergences, Divergences, and Their Theoretical Implications²

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Received: 01 July 2024 Accepted: 15 July 2024 Published: 30 July 2024

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Abstract

This article aims to shed light on the possible influence of the Kabbalah on Spinoza. To do this, I will analyze the role that the Kabbalist theoretical model may have had on the development of Spinozist philosophy, in order to understand both their convergences and their divergences. I will then clarify Spinoza's relationship to this theory, especially the Lurianic Kabbalah, and emphasize the importance of the notion of *Tsimtsum* (contraction of the Divine light).

Keywords: Spinoza, Kabbalah, R. Shlomo Gabirol, R. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, R. Israel Sarug, R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, R. Abraham Ha-Cohen Herrera, Leibniz, Tsimtsum, Shekynah, Immanentism, Pantheism, Hylomorphism, Feminine Alterity.

1. Introduction

Since the publication of Johann Georg Wachter's 1699 work, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb oder, die von dem heutigen Judenthumb und dessen Geheimen Kabbala vergötterte Welt*, the relationship between Spinozism and Kabbalah has been the subject of much debate. Beyond the identification of these two doctrines with pantheism and the controversies that followed, I will seek to determine the nature of the Kabbalist concepts that contributed to the emergence of Spinozism. I will first examine the historical context in which the comparison between these two doctrines must be situated. I will then compare the theoretical foundations of Spinozism with Kabbalist

conceptuality in general. Finally, I will verify the results of the historical and conceptual analysis of the notion of *Tsimtsum* (concentration of the Divine light or its withdrawing,³) concerning both its consequences on the notions of alterity and Divine Presence, showing that Spinoza (1632-1677) could not accept them.

2. Spinoza, the Kabbalah, and the Debates over their Identification with Pantheism

Kabbalah has been considered by some commentators as the "key to Spinozism." Erwin Reinisch suggests that Spinoza's knowledge of Kabbalah would explain the mention, in his *Letter 76* to Albert Burgh, "I know that I understand the real philosophy" (*veram me*

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²I would like to thank Avishai Bar-Asher, Carlos Gilly, Alessandro Guetta, Nicola Polloni, and Elliot R. Wolfson for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. Regarding the works of Spinoza, I refer to the Latin and Dutch Edition: Baruch de Spinoza Opera, edited by Carl Gebhardt, Heidelberg, Universitätsbuchhandlung Carl Winter, 1925. The English translations of Spinoza's texts are my translations. Regarding the transliteration of Hebrew, I have generally followed the system of Ch. L. Echols and Th. Legrand Transliteration of Hebrew Consonants, Vowels, and Accents, etc. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/5388085/Transliteration_of_Hebrew_Consonants_Vowels_and_Accents_etc

³The translation of the term *Tsimtsum* by withdrawal was proposed by Gershom G. Scholem. It was criticized by Paul Franks, showing that it opposes Midrashic sources mentioning a Divine contraction. G. G. Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York, Schocken books, Third Edition, 1967, p.260; P. Franks, *The Midrashic Background of the Doctrine of Divine Contraction: Against Gershom Scholem on Tsimtsum*. In A. Bielik-Robson & D. H. Weiss (Eds.), *Tsimtsum and Modernity: Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology*. Berlin, De Gruyter. 2020, p.41

Citation: Jacques J. Rozenberg. Spinoza and Kabbalah: Convergences, Divergences, and Their Theoretical Implications. *Journal of Religion and Theology*. 2024;6(1): 59 -80.

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intelligere scio),⁴ as constituting a clear allusion to a tradition of thought from which he had inherited.⁵ Moreover, in his *Letter 73* to Henry Oldenburg, he affirms with Paul that everything is in God and moves in God, adding, “I would even venture to say that this was the thought of all the ancient Hebrews” (*auderem etiam dicere, cum antiquis omnibus Hebraeis*),⁶ and that some commentators have identified with the Kabbalists.⁷ R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo (1591-1655), in *Maḥref laHokmah*, noted that the theory of Plato, Aristotle’s teacher, corresponds almost to that of the Sages of Israel (*kim ‘at hen de’ot shel ḥokmey Israel*).⁸ Spinoza owned this work, and therefore it may be assumed that his remark to Oldenburg, on the “thought of all the ancient Hebrews,” was influenced by his reading of R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo. Such an interpretation would make even more understandable what Spinoza wrote to Hugo Boxel: “The authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates etc. doesn’t carry much weight for me” (*Non multum apud me Autoritas Platonis, Aristotelis, ac Socratis valet*).⁹ However, beyond the direct reference to the ancient Hebrews, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* underlines that “the eternal word and covenant of God and the true religion are inscribed by God in the hearts of men, that is, in the human spirit” (*Dei aeternum verbum & pactum, veramque religionem hominum cordibus,*

hoc est, humanae menti divinitus inscriptam esse).¹⁰ I don’t intend to deal here with Spinoza’s connection to Neo-Platonism and the *Prisca Scientia* or *Prisca Theologia*, but I will limit myself to emphasizing that these themes were pivotal to the writings of R. Judah Abarbanel (Leo the Hebrew, 1460-1553). Spinoza owned the Spanish translation of his *Dialogues of Love*, which is a synthesis between Florentine Neo-Platonism, Maimonidean philosophy, and Kabbalistic topics.¹¹ The theme of the *Prisca Theologia* was also important for R. Abraham Cohen Herrera (1570-1635) who seems to have strongly influenced Spinoza,¹² and for R. Simone (Simḥah) Luzzato’s theory (1460-1553),¹³ an author that Spinoza had read, and who affirmed the affinity between the *sefyrot* and the Platonic ideas.¹⁴ It’s also worth mentioning that if we can detect real traces of Neo-Platonism in the *Short Treatise*, they will fade in the *Ethics*.¹⁵

In the debate between Moses Germanus (or Johann Peter Spaeth, 1625-1701) and Johann Georg Wachter (1673-1757), the former insisted on the disparity between Judaism and pantheism,¹⁶ while identifying Kabbalah with Spinozism on the basis of a rather superficial interpretation of the *Ethics*.¹⁷ Wachter was referring to the work of Knorr von Rosenroth (1631-1689), which summarized the Lurianic thesis of *Tsimtsum*.¹⁸ It should be remembered that Knorr

⁴Spinoza, Letter 76, to Albert Burgh, G. IV, 320

⁵E. Reinisch, La clef du spinozisme. Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger. 169, 1 1979, pp. 12-13

⁶Spinoza, Letter 73, to Henry Oldenburg, G. IV, 307

⁷M. Beltrán, The Influence of Abraham Cohen de Herrera’s Kabbalah on Spinoza’s Metaphysics. Leiden, Brill, 2016, p.366

⁸R. Joseph Slomo Delmedigo, Maḥref LaHokmah. In Ta’alumot Hokmah, Basili, 1629, p.28b

⁹Spinoza, Letter 56 to Boxel, G. IV, 261

¹⁰Spinoza, TTP, XII, 1. G. III, 158

¹¹C. Gebhardt, Leone Ebreo: Dialoghi d’amore. Hebräische Gedichte. Heidelberg : Winter / Amsterdam: Hertzberger / London, Oxford University Press, 1929. S. Ansaldi, Un nouvel Art d’aimer. Descartes, Léon l’Hébreu et Spinoza. In C. Jaquet, P. Sévérac, A. Suhamy (Eds.), Spinoza, philosophe de l’amour. Saint-Etienne, Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, 2005, pp.23-40; B. Ogren, Leone Ebreo on “prisca sapientia”: Jewish Wisdom and the Textual Transmission of Knowledge. In S. U. Baldassarri-, F. Lelli (Eds.), Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano. Firenze, Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2016, pp.181-194

¹²N. Yosha, Abraham Cohen de Herrera. An Outstanding Exponent of Prisca Theologia in Early Seventeenth Century Amsterdam. In J. Michman (Ed.), Dutch Jewish History. Assen, Gorcum, 1993, pp.117-126

¹³Cf. G. Veltri, The Political-Philosophical Dimension of the Caeremonialia Hebraeorum: Baruk Spinoza and Simone Luzzatto. Jewish Matter. 13, 2008, pp.81-90

¹⁴R. S. Luzzatto, M’amar ‘al Yehudye Veniçy’a. Trad.hébraïque. Jerusalem.M. Bialik, 1951, p.104

¹⁵W. van Bunge, Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship. Leiden, Brill, 2012, p.215

¹⁶J. G. Wachter published the thesis of Germanus, as well as the First and Second Replies of Germanus in Der Spinozismus im Jüdentumb. pp.31-73 and pp.73-77. The first part of the book (pp.1-106) is devoted to this thesis.

¹⁷G. Friedmann, Leibniz et Spinoza. Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p.206. On Wachter’s role in the controversies over Spinozism, cf. G. G. Scholem, Die Wachtersche Kontroverse über den Spinozismus und ihre Folgen. In Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung. K. Gründer, W. Schmidt-Biggemann (Eds.). Heidelberg, Schneider, 1984, pp.15-26

¹⁸J. G. Wachter, Der Spinozismus im Jüdentumb oder, die von dem heutigen Jüdentumb und dessen Geheimen Kabbala vergötterte Welt. Amsterdam, J. Walters, 1699, pp.83-86. C. Knorr von Rosenroth, Kabbala denudata, seu doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica. Sulzbaci, 1677-1684, p.655. The author translates Tsimtsum by the noun contractio, deriving it from the verb contrahere. C. Knorr von Rosenroth’s work strongly influenced John Locke, Locke, Henry More, and Leibniz. Cf. G. Di Biase, John Locke and the Kabbala denudata. Pre-existence, transmigration and personal identity. Nuovo Giornale di Filosofia della Religione. Nuova Serie. 2, 2022, pp.322-342.

von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata* was published in the same year as the *Spinoza Opera Posthuma* (1677), which is also the year of Spinoza's death, and that both works were manifestly intended for the same readers.¹⁹ Wachter then argued that Spinoza's *De Deo* conformed to Kabbalist doctrine as expounded by R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, the author of the *Puerta del Cielo*.²⁰ It is the difficulties encountered by Spinoza's *Ethics*, to really determine the nature of the relationship between the infinite and the finite, that led Wachter to posit such a conformity. He showed that Spinozism did not contradict the theory of *Tsimtsum*, which itself remains capable of deriving the finite from the infinite. However, in 1706, in his work *Elucidarius cabalisticus*, Wachter went back on his first Spinoza qualification as a pantheist, and then he considered both Spinozism and Kabbalah to be theistic.²¹ However, according to Leibniz's statement, he sought to prove that God and the world are not confused: "but in this he hardly satisfies" (*Sed in eo parum satisfacit*).²² The *Elucidarius cabalisticus* was written in reaction to Johann Franz Budde's (1667-1729) work, *Defensio Cabbalae Ebraeorum contra auctores quosdam modernos* (1700). This work

sought to rehabilitate the Jewish Kabbalah, as *prisca theologia*, by including it in the history of philosophy, but separating it from Spinozism.²³

It should also be noted that Spinoza may have known certain Kabbalist texts through Hebrew Christian mystics such as Adam Boreel (1602-1665), Benjamin Furlly (1636-1714), John Dury (1596-1680), and Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669). The latter was the link between Spinoza, Henry Oldenburg (1618-1677) and Robert Boyle (1627-1691) in England. He was involved in the Amsterdam Sabbatarian movement, and he had a keen interest in alchemy as well.²⁴ In this context, it should be emphasized that Spinoza was strongly concerned with research on alchemy,²⁵ the links of which Gershom Scholem has shown with Christian Kabbalah and Rosicrucianism.²⁶ Similarly, one may wonder whether, like Leibniz (1646-1716) Spinoza was affiliated with the Rosicrucian Movement,²⁷ which itself has a Kabbalist origin?²⁸ We have no proof of this, but Spinoza had taken up the image of the rose, which is the symbol of this movement, on his seal where his motto "Caute" appeared, which, according to Yovel is the "slogan of the son of the Marranos."²⁹

¹⁹R. H. Popkin, Spinoza, neoplatonic kabbalist? In L. Goodman (Ed.), *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*. Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992, p.391

²⁰J. G. Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Jüdenthumb oder, die von dem heutigen Jüdenthumb und dessen Geheimen Kabbala vergötterte Welt*, pp.93-96

²¹J. G. Wachter, *Elucidarius cabalisticus, sive reconditae Hebraeorum philosophiae brevis et succincta recensio*. Halle, 1706. On the impact this work had on Leibniz, concerning both his conception developed in *De numeris characteristicis ad linguam universalem constituendam*, Ak. VI, 4, 264, that his refutation of Spinozism, cf. Ph. Beeley, Leibniz on Wachter's *Elucidarius cabalisticus*: A Critical Edition of the so-called 'Réfutation de Spinoza'. *The Leibniz Review*.12, 2002, pp. I-VIII; A. Coudert, Leibniz and the Kabbalah, p.75. On how Wachter's thesis clarified the status of Kabbalah and Spinozism in Leibniz and More, cf. M. Lærke, Three texts on the Kabbalah: More, Wachter, Leibniz, and the philosophy of the Hebrews, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*.25, 5, 2017, pp.1011-1030.

²²Leibniz, *Animadversiones ad Joh. George Wachteri librum de recondita Hebraeorum philosophia*, Published by F. L.-A. de Careil, *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza par Leibniz. Précédée d'un mémoire*. Paris. 1854, pp.4-5

²³J-F. Budde, *Defensio cabbalae Ebraeorum contra auctores quosdam modernos*. In *Observationes selectae ad rem litterariam spectantes*.1, C. Thomasius et al. (Eds.), Obs. 16. Halle, Renger, 1700. Cf. *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*. H. F. Klemme, M. Kuehn (Eds.), Oxford, New York, 2006, pp.108-111. On the importance of what Mogens Lærke called the Lurianic Revolution, and on the influence it had on the philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries, cf. M. Lærke, *Kabbalisten i den europæiske tanke*. Fra Isak den Blinde til Johann Georg Wachter. Aarhus, Forlaget Modtryk, 2004, pp.42-50.

²⁴G. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi-The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676*. English translation, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1973, p.333

²⁵M. J. Villaverde, Spinoza's Paradoxes: An Atheist Who Defended the Scriptures? A Freethinking Alchemist? pp.25-26. Spinoza's interest in alchemy has been underscored by, among others, Wim Klever, *The Helvetius affair or Spinoza and the Philosopher's Stone: A document on the background of Letter 40*. *Studia Spinozana*. 3, 1987, pp.439-458, and Steven Nadler, *Spinoza, A Life*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.263. According to Villaverde (Ibid, pp.25-26), the editors of the *Opera Posthuma* have tried to erase Spinoza's interest in alchemy by, among other things, removing Jarig Jellesz's letters on this subject, omitting to include Schuller's letter dated November 14, 1675, on alchemy, and modifying, in the Letter 72, the word "antimony", designating an essential element of alchemy, in "anonymous."

²⁶G. G. Scholem., *Alchemy and Kabbalah*. Washington, English translation, D.C. Spring Publications, 2006, pp.12-22

²⁷F. Wittemans, *A New and Authentic History of the Rosicrucians*, p. 57; M. K. Scuchard, Leibniz, Benzelius, and Swedenborg. In *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*. *International Archives of the History of Ideas*. 158, 1998, p.90. Y. Belaval reports that Leibniz was, for two years, the secretary of the Rosicrucian movement, of which he ended up speaking in a joking tone. Y. Belaval, *Leibniz, initiation à sa philosophie*. Paris, Vrin, 1993, p.47. In correspondence, Carlos Gilly pointed out that there are no serious sources indicating that Spinoza was affiliated with the Rosicrucian Movement.

²⁸Cf. F. A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, p.228

²⁹Y. Yovel *Heretics*, p.32

It should also be noted that R. Yitzhak Aboab (1605-1693), who had been one of Spinoza's teachers, and who had participated in his banishment, was in the years 1665-1666 a supporter of Sabbatai Tzvi.³⁰ He was also an eminent Kabbalist, who had translated into Hebrew the works of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera: *Beyt 'Elohyim* and *Sha'ar ha-Shamaym*, which Spinoza had certainly read.³¹ It should be noted that the question of the language in which Spinoza could have read the works of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera is still unsettled. Concerning *The Gates of Heaven* in particular, according to Giuseppa Saccaro, Spinoza may have read the Hebrew text, but it's possible that he read also the Spanish original manuscript preserved in the Jewish community of Amsterdam, even before his excommunication.³² She points out, however, that the potential impact of Neo-Platonic philosophy of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera on Spinoza implies that he read the Spanish version, since the Hebrew translation has largely expurgated the strictly philosophical references.³³ However, the Spanish manuscripts of *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la Divinidad* were then only available in the *Ez Hayyim* library at Amsterdam,³⁴ while the Hebrew translation was printed and therefore much more accessible. In addition, the Hebrew translation of *Puerta del Cielo*, *Sha'ar ha-Shamaym*, deals explicitly with Platonism,³⁵ and it has fourteen references to Plotinus and one to Ficino. The Hebrew translation of *Casa de la Divinidad*, *Beyt 'Elohyim*, has forty-one references to Plato and Platonism, seven to Plotinus, and one to

Ficino. Therefore, it seems more likely that Spinoza read the Hebrew translation of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera's two works, rather than their manuscript versions in Spanish. For all these reasons, I refer to the Hebrew translation of these two works. It's worth mentioning that R. Abraham Cohen Herrera was a member of the reading and censorship committee of the publishing house established in 1627 by R. Menashe ben Israel, one of Spinoza's supposed teachers. This publisher, who directed one of the great centers for the printing and dissemination of Jewish mysticism, and particularly of the Lurianic Kabbalah, had approved the publication of the work *Sefer 'Elym* by R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo. Spinoza possessed the work of this author, who was a kabbalist²⁶ and astronomer, and the reading of his book allowed Spinoza to be introduced to the theory of Galileo of whom R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo had been a student.³⁷

Following in the footsteps of Moses Germanus,³⁸ Johann Georg Wachter,³⁹ and Jacques Basnage,⁴⁰ Salomon Maimon identified Spinozism with the Kabbalah.⁴¹ However, this thesis cannot be taken literally, since Spinoza disdained the Kabbalah in the name of his strict rationalism, calling the Kabbalists "braggarts (*nugatores*)," and he stressed that he could not have been sufficiently surprised at their "madness (*insaniam*)."⁴² However, this remark should be put into perspective. Indeed, according to Sigmund Gelbhaus,⁴³ who was followed by Gershom G. Scholem,⁴⁴ Yitzhak Y. Melamed, this remark would apply only

³⁰W. Montag, *Bodies, masses, power. Spinoza and his contemporaries*. London and New York, Verso, 1999, p.88

³¹K. Krabbenhoft, *Syncretism and Millenium in Herrera's Kabbalah*. In M. D. Goldish and R. H. Popkin (Eds), *Jewish Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*. Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2001, pp.65-76

³²G. Saccaro Battisti, *Abraham Cohen Herrera et le jeune Spinoza, entre Kabbale et scolastique- à propos de la création ex nihilo*. *Archives de Philosophie*, 51, 1988, p.59 note 9

³³G. Saccaro Del Buffa, *Alle origini del panteismo. Genesi dell'Ethica di Spinoza e delle sue forme di argomentazione*. Milano, F. Angeli, 2004, p.52

³⁴*Puerta del Cielo* (Ref. EH 48 A 16) and *Libro de la Casa de la Divinidad* (Ref. EH 48 A 20). Another copy of each manuscript is also in the Royal Library of Holland, but this one is based in The Hague and was founded in 1798. Concerning the book *Puerta del Cielo*. I use here Hebrew translation by R. Yitzhak Aboab under the title *Sha'ar ha-Shamaym*, Amsterdam, 1655, Reedition in Warsaw in 1864. Concerning the book *Casa de la Divinidad*, I use here the Hebrew translation by R. Yitzhak Aboab, under the title: *Beyt 'Elohyim*. Amsterdam, E. Benvenisti, 1655.

³⁵R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Sha'ar Shamaym*, II, 6

³⁶D. B. Ruderman, *Jewish thought and scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, p.136

³⁷J. Adler, *Joseph Solomon Delmedigo: Student of Galileo, Teacher of Spinoza*. *Intellectual History Review*. 23, 1, 2013, p.145

³⁸J. G. Wachter published Germanus' thesis, as well as Germanus' First and Second Replicas in *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb*. pp.31-73 and pp.73-77. The entire first part of the book (pp.1-106) is devoted to him.

³⁹J. G. Wachter, *Spinozism in the Jew's Thumb or, the World Deified by Today's Jew and His Secret Kabbalah*. Amsterdam, J. Walters, 1699. On the relations of Leibniz to de Wachter concerning Kabbalah, cf. M. Lærke, *Three texts on the Kabbalah: More, Wachter, Leibniz, and the philosophy of the Hebrews*. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. 25, 5, 2017, pp.1011-1030.

⁴⁰J. Basnage, *History of the Jews from Jesus Christ to the Present*. The Hague, H. Scheurleer, 1707, Vol. IV, chap. 7

⁴¹S. Maimon, *G'ivat Ha-Moreh*. Reed. Jerusalem, 'Aqademyah ha-l'eumyt ha-israelyt lemad'aym, 1965, p.161

⁴²Spinoza, *TTP*, IX, 13

⁴³S. Gelbhaus, *Die Metaphysik der Ethik Spinozas im Quellenlichte der Kabbalah*. Wien-Brünn, Max Hickel, 1917, pp.12-13

⁴⁴G. G. Scholem, *Abraham Cohen Herrera, ba'al "Sha'ar Ha-Shamaym"*. *Hayyaw, yeçyrato wehashpa'atah*, p.52

to a superstitious form of Kabbalah, and especially to practical Kabbalah, while its properly rational content would remain at the heart of Spinozism.⁴⁵

Although, in the words of Adolphe Franck, it seems that Spinoza has had a “sketchy and very uncertain idea” of the Kabbalah.⁴⁶ As I noted earlier, Spinoza had read several Kabbalist works, including the Kabbalist commentary on the *Pentateuch* by R. Menahem Recanati (1223-1290). It has been pointed out that this author had developed a textual exegesis that aimed to grasp scriptural truth independently of any philosophical interpretation, as Spinoza himself would have it.⁴⁷ As I mentioned previously, Spinoza’s library included the Spanish version of Leo the Hebrew’s (Judah Abravanel) book *Los Dialogos de amor*, and R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo’s *Ta’alumot Hokmah*, which included numerous references to the *Zohar* as well as an exposition of the Lurianic Kabbalah.⁴⁸

I recalled earlier the probable influence that the works of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera may have had

on Spinoza.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that R. Abraham Cohen Herrera had studied under R. Israel Sarug (or Saruq, second half of the sixteenth century - first third of the seventeenth century),⁵⁰ himself a pupil of R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi (Arizal, 1534-1572). R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo devoted an entire chapter to describing the theory of R. Israel Sarug in the book *Ta’alumot Hokmah*,⁵¹ through which Spinoza could have known the theory of *Tzimzum*. He was certainly attentive to R. Abraham Cohen Herrera’s inclusion in the world of action (*‘asyah*) of the set of laws of nature, whom he then identified with God.⁵²

3. Spinozist and the Kabbalistic Conceptuality

Spinozism seems to have a close relationship with Kabbalist theories, as shown after Wachter and Leibniz,⁵³ among others, the studies of Adolph Jellinek,⁵⁴ Sigmund Gelbhaus,⁵⁵ Stanislaus von Dunin Borkowski,⁵⁶ Harry Waton,⁵⁷ Alexandre Matheron,⁵⁸ Gershom G. Scholem,⁵⁹ Nissim Yosh’a,⁶⁰ Moshe Idel,⁶¹ Johan Aanen,⁶² and Miquel Beltrán.⁶³

⁴⁵Y. Y. Melamed, From the Gate of Heaven to the ‘Field of Holy Apples’: Spinoza and the Kabbalah. https://www.academia.edu/37708754/Spinoza_and_the_Kabbalah_From_the_Gates_of_Heaven_to_the_Field_of_Holy_Apples_forthcoming_in_Cristina_Ciucu_ed_Modern_Philosophy_and_the_Kabbalah Johann Michael Lange drew attention to a text by Johann Christoph Sturm, a German scholar who, during the year 1660, had paid several visits to Spinoza in Rijnsburg. Lange was one of the students to whom Sturm reported the remarks that Spinoza is said to have confided to him (J. C. Sturm, *De Cartesianis & Cartesianismo Brevis Dissertatio*. Altdorff, 1677, p.14). These remarks refer to a strange experience of “resurrection of the dead (resuscitandi mortuos),” following the instructions of a book of practical Kabbalah (Kabbalam practicam) that belonged to his father, and by which Spinoza thought he could resurrect him. The failure of such an attempt would have been the “ridiculous cause (causa illa ridicula)” that led Spinoza to doubt the faith of his people and, as a result, would have led him to “leave the Synagogue (e Synagoga transfuga).” J. M. Langii, *De genealogiis nunquam finiendis et fabulis judaicis*. Altdorff, 1696, § 76, p.91. A German translation of Lange’s text can be found in C. Gilly’s *Oppositissimorum ingeniorum conspiratio et consensus: Die Bezichtigung des Atheismus gegen Böhme und Spinoza*. In *Libertas philosophandi. Spinoza als gids voor een vrije wereld*. C. van Heertum (Ed.). Amsterdam, De Pelikaan, 2008, p.834. J. Aanen translated this text into English, *The Kabbalistic Sources of Spinoza*, *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*. 24, 2016, p.287. This anecdote would explain the reasons for Spinoza’s opposition to those who devote themselves to practical Kabbalah.

⁴⁶A. Franck, *La Kabbale ou la Philosophie Religieuse des Hébreux*. Paris, Hachette, 1843, p.28

⁴⁷M. Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy 1280-1510. A Survey*. New Haven Conn. Yale University Press, 2011, p.131

⁴⁸R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, *Ta’alumot Hokmah*, Basileae, 1629, pp.37-51a

⁴⁹M. Beltrán, *The Influence of Abraham Cohen de Herrera’s Kabbalah on Spinoza’s Metaphysics*. pp.41-44

⁵⁰G. G. Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p.257

⁵¹R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, *Ta’alumot Hokmah*. Shever Yosef: Qabalat Moreynu Ha-Rav R. Israel Sarug, pp.77b - 84b. The author also refers to R. Israel Sarug in his *Sefer Novlot Hokmah*. Basileae, 1631, p. 169 and p.198.

⁵²K. K. Krabbenhoft, *Introduction to the English translation of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, Gates of Heaven*. p.XXVIII ; G. Saccaro Battisti, *Abraham Cohen Herrera et le jeune Spinoza, entre Kabbale et scolastique- à propos de la création ex nihilo*. *Archives de Philosophie*, 51, 1988, pp.55-74; M. Beltrán, *The Influence of Abraham Cohen de Herrera’s Kabbalah on Spinoza’s Metaphysics*. pp.323-324.

⁵³Leibniz, *Animadversiones ad Joh. George Wachteri librum de recondita Hebraeorum philosophia*, Published by F. L.-A. de Careil, *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza par Leibniz*. Précédée d’un mémoire, pp.3-6.

⁵⁴A. Jellinek, *Beiträge zu Geschichte der Kabbalah, Erstes Heft*. Leipzig. 1852, pp.62-66.

⁵⁵S. Gelbhaus, *Die Metaphysik der Ethik Spinozas im Quellenlichte der Kabbalah*. pp.12-13

⁵⁶S. von Dunin-Borkowski, *Der junge De Spinoza. Leben und Werdegang im Lichte der Weltphilosophie*. Münster, Aschendorff. 1910, pp.342-354

⁵⁷H. Waton, *The Kabbalah and Spinoza’s Philosophy as a Basis for an Idea of Universal History*. Spinoza Institute of America. 1931. Reedition Whitefish, Kessinger Publishing, 2006

⁵⁸A. Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris, Minuit, 1968, pp.616-622

⁵⁹G. G. Scholem, *Abraham Cohen Herrera, ba’al “Sha’ar Ha-Shamaym”*. Hayyaw, yecyrato wehashpa’atah. Hebrew translation, Jerusalem, Bialik, 1978, p.52

⁶⁰N. Yosh’a, *Mytos we-Met’afarah: Ha-parshanut ha-filosofyt shel R. Abraham Ha-Kohen Herrera leQabalat ha-’Ary*. Jerusalem, Yad Bençvy, 1994, pp.361-372

⁶¹Cf. W. Z. Harvey, *Idel on Spinoza*. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*. 6, 18, 2007, pp.88-94

⁶²J. Aanen, *The Kabbalistic Sources of Spinoza*. *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*. 24, 2, 2016, pp.279-299.

⁶³M. Beltrán, *The Influence of Abraham Cohen de Herrera’s Kabbalah on Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, pp.41-83

It seems possible to posit a conceptual convergence between the conditions of the intelligibility of nature and the theory of *sefyrot*, i.e. emanated Divine forms and constitutive of all reality, which express the ontic structure of the world.⁶⁴ R. Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291) was the first to point out the numerical correspondence, existing in Hebrew, between nature (*ha-tev'a*) and God (*'Elohyim*),⁶⁵ which was taken up by R. Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570).⁶⁶ If this correspondence seems to be at the origin of the Spinozist formula *Deus sive natura*⁶⁷, it should be noted that nature is the last of the *sefyrot*: *Malkut* (kingship), expressing one of the Divine Names which designates the attribute of rigor (*dyn*).⁶⁸ R. Yosef Gikatilla (1248-1305), in presenting a systematization of the Divine Names, showed that nature represents the last part of a more general sefirotic ontology. This approach penetrated Renaissance thought through Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), who widely disseminated kabbalistic thought in Renaissance humanist circles.

R. Elie Benamozegh (1822-1900) reminds us that the Spinozist extension is precisely identified with the tenth *sefyrah* "Kingship" (*Malkut*). He then spotted Spinoza's pantheistic error in putting the attributes thought and extension on the same level, whereas they belong respectively to the third *sefyrah*, "Intelligence" (*Bynah*), and to the tenth *sefyrah*, "Kingship" (*Malkut*),⁶⁹ a fault that Alessandro Guetta describes as a "union from below."⁷⁰ This confusion, which proceeds from the monistic theory, is at the

origin of illegitimate crossings constantly operated by Spinoza between two different points of view: respectively intensional and extensional. In our case, the first point of view concerns the *sefyrah Bynah* which, being naturing, remains unique and cannot be substituted *salva veritate*, while the second point of view applies to the *sefyrah Malkut*. This is itself of a natured order and refers to phenomena that remain susceptible to classification according to extensional procedures.⁷¹

Like Leibniz,⁷² Spinoza found in the Kabbalah the elements of a theoretical and structural model that seems to have guided the writing of the *Ethics*. Adolph Jellinek has shown that the architectonics of *Ethics* is totally isomorphic to the sefirotic structure. In 1852 he published a commentary on Azriel of Gerona's (1175-1235) *By'ur 'Eser Sefyrot*, according to the form of Spinoza's *Ethics* (*nach der Form der Ethik von Spinoza*). Without wishing to enter into the details of his analysis, I will only recall that he gave two definitions, and then he presented six propositions, each of which contains proofs and scholia in a Spinozist style.⁷³

Moreover, Alexandre Matheron, referring to a famous diagram published by Gershom Scholem, described, in 1968, in terms of transformational structures of *sefyrot*, several Propositions of Books III, IV and V of the *Ethics*, and the different types of powers of the Spinozist state.⁷⁴ Finally, Alessandro Guetta has

⁶⁴M. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002, pp.298-299

⁶⁵R. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Ner 'Elohyim*, Jerusalem, Ed. A. Gross, 2002, p.46

⁶⁶R. Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rymonym*, XVII, 4

⁶⁷M. Idel, *Deus sive Natura, The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, pp.88-89

⁶⁸R. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Oçar 'Eden Ha-ganuz*, Jerusalem, Ed. A. Gross, III, 9. It should be noted that Leibniz translated into Hebrew the Spinozist expression "an empire within an empire" (*imperium in imperio*), Preface *Ethics*, IV, by Malcuth in Malcuth. A. Foucher de Careil, *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza par Leibniz. Remarques critiques de Leibniz*. Paris, 1854, p.64. To explain Adam's primordial sin, Leibniz, in the *Théodicée* (§ 372), also mentions the tenth *sefyrah*, which he calls "maleuth." Adam had removed the last of the sefirot "by making an empire in the empire of God" (*en se faisant un empire dans l'empire de Dieu*). Finally, note that R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, in his work *Ta'alumot Hokmah*, which Spinoza possessed, uses the expression *Malkut shel Malkut*, p.71a.

⁶⁹R. E. Benamozegh, *Spinoza et la Kabbale*. L'Univers Israélite. 1864, pp. 11 and 35, note 1. On the influence that Spinoza may have had on the development of the thought of R. E. Benamozegh, cf. G. Abensour, "God's Plurality within Unity: Spinoza's influence on Benamozegh's Thought" in *Miscellanea*. Quest Editorial Staff, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC, n. 12, December 2017. DOI : 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/820

⁷⁰A. Guetta, *Philosophie et Cabbale. Essai sur la pensée d'Elie Benamozegh*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998, p.56

⁷¹J. J. Rozenberg, *Spinoza, le spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation*. Amazon, 2023, pp.35-41

⁷²According to Allison Coudert, Leibniz's monad has a Kabbalistic origin, as do his theories of causality and language. *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995, p.80, pp.136-154.

⁷³A. Jellinek, *Beiträge zu Geschichte der Kabbalah, Erstes Heft*. Leipzig. 1852, pp.62-66. This text has been translated into English by Christian. D. Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah: its doctrines, development, and literature*. London, Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1865, pp.95-97. Azriel of Gerona's *By'ur 'Eser Sefyrot*, has been Edited by R. Moshe Shtaz, *Makon Pithey Megadym*, Jerusalem, 1997. See also, I. Misses, *Spinoza und die Kabbala*. *Zeitschrift für exakte Philosophie*. VIII, 1869, p. 359-367.

⁷⁴A. Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris, Minuit, 1968, pp.616-622. Cf. G. G. Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*. p.214.

related the notion of *sefyrāh* or *mydot* (dimensions) with the Spinozist notion of attribute, and the notion of *parçuf* (face) with that of mode.⁷⁵

Harry A. Wolfson has pointed out that Spinoza uses an emanatist style peculiar to medieval Jewish philosophy. He takes as an example the Demonstration of *Ethics* I, 28: that which is finite could not have been produced by attributes of substance, “for all that follows from the absolute nature of a certain attribute of God is infinite and eternal (*quicquid enim ex absoluta natura alicujus Dei attributi sequitur, id infinitum et aeternum est*).”⁷⁶ Generally speaking, expressions such as *sequi*, *agit*, or *produci* are, in the *Ethics*, Latin translations of Hebrew terms such as *yaç’a* or *ythayyev*, often used in an emanatist context.⁷⁷ Let us also add that the use of the term *effluxisse*,⁷⁸ translates the kabbalistic term *shef’a* (effusion or influx). Spinoza tried to account for the emergence of finite modes, by interposing infinite modes between God and finite things, in the manner of the Neoplatonists. In this way, he sought to account for the generation of multiplicity from unity.⁷⁹ However, Spinozism differs from emanatism which, following Aristotle, denied the infinity of the causal series.⁸⁰

⁷⁵A. Guetta, *Kabbalah and Rationalism in the Works of Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto*. In G. Veltri (Ed.), *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era: Essays in Intellectual History*. Boston, Academic Studies Press, 2014, pp.218-219.

⁷⁶Spinoza, *Ethics* I, 28, demonstration

⁷⁷H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1934, I, pp. 372-373, cites Maimonides and R. ‘Abraham Da’ud. He points out, however, that for the emanatists, God is pure thought, whereas for Spinoza, thought is only an infinite attribute of God.

⁷⁸Spinoza, *Ethics* I, 17, scholia

⁷⁹Plotinus, *Ennead*, V, 3, On the Stoic and Neoplatonic sources of Ethics, cf. P. O. Kristeller, *Stoic and Neoplatonic sources of Spinoza’s Ethics*. *History of European Ideas*. 5, 1, 1984, pp.1-15.

⁸⁰Aristotle, *Metaphysics* II, 1, 993a 30

⁸¹Plotinus, *Ennead*, V, 5

⁸²R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Puerta del Cielo*. Hebrew translation by R. Yitzhak Aboab under the title *Sha ‘ar ha-Shamaym*, Amsterdam, 1655

⁸³R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, *Ta‘alumot Hokmah*. Basileae, 1629

⁸⁴Leibniz to Jablonski, March 1701 (?), G. E. Guhrauer (Ed.), *Leibniz’s Deutsche Schriften*, Berlin, Veit und Comp, 1838-1840, II, p.176; Ph. Beeley, *Leibniz on Wachter’s Elucidarius cabalisticus: A Critical Edition of the so-called ‘Refutation of Spinoza’*. *The Leibniz Review*.12, 2002, p.VII. On the influence that Wachter may have had on Leibniz, and the importance of the Kabbalah in the philosophical writings of Leibniz and More, cf. A. P. Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995, pp.112-135; M. Lærke, *Three texts on the Kabbalah: More, Wachter, Leibniz, and the philosophy of the Hebrews*. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. 25, 5, 2017, pp.1-20. Lærke relates to Wachter the German idealist interpretation of Spinozism, via Moses Mendelssohn’s *Philosophische Gespräche* of 1755, an interpretation that culminated in Hegel’s readings of 1825-1826. M. Lærke, *Spinozism, Kabbalism, and Idealism from Johann Georg Wachter to Moses Mendelssohn*. *Journal of Modern Philosophy*. 3, 1, 2021, pp.1-20. As I have shown elsewhere, Hegel’s subjective and idealistic interpretation of Spinozist attributes was preceded a century earlier by Isaac Orabio de Castro. He posited that attributes only express the “weakness of our intellect (*nostrum intellectu imbecillitatem*),” although they aim to apprehend God. I. Orabio de Castro, *Certamen Philosophicum Propugnatae Veritatis Divinae ac Naturalis Adversus J. Bredenburchi Principia* Amsterdam, Assaan. I quote from the 1703 Edition, pp. 11-12 ; J. J. Rozenberg, *Spinoza, le spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation*, pp.208-213.

⁸⁵J. G. Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthum*, p.185

⁸⁶C. Oetinger, *Die Lehrtafel der Prinzessin Antonia*. Reed. Berlin, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1977, T. I, pp.133, 197, 223

⁸⁷Leibniz, *De totae cogitabilium varietatis uno obtutu complexione* (1685 ?). Ak, I, p.596; F. H. Jacobi to Moses Mendelssohn, 4.11.1783. (Eds.), *Correspondence. Complete Edition, Series I, Vol. 3: Briefwechsel 1782–1784*. Stuttgart, Bad Cannstatt 1987, p. 233.

⁸⁸L. Rensoli, *La polémica sobre la Kabbalah y Spinoza: Moses Germanus y Leibniz*. Granada, Editorial Comares, 2011, p.23

⁸⁹Y. Schwartz, *‘Imanençyah, trançandançyah we’at’eyzm. Ha-wvykuah savyv ha-Qabalah ber’eshyt ha-‘et ha-hadasha*. *Daat*, 57-59, 2006, p.181. It should be remembered that the controversies surrounding Kabbalah took on a particular dimension in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, specifically because of the rise of Lurianism. On these controversies, among the Jewish scholars of this period, cf. R. Elior, *Ha-ma’avaq ‘al m’amadah shel ha-Qabalah beme’ah ha-16*. *Mehqarey Yerushalayim bemahshevet Israel*. 1981, pp.177-190.

Moreover, emanatism affirms the transcendence of the Divine as the origin of this series.⁸¹

Let us try to examine the relations of Spinozism to the theory of *Tsimtsum*, which Spinoza certainly knew through his readings of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera’s,⁸² and R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo’s works.⁸³

4. Spinoza and the Notion of Tsimtsum

Wachter who, according to Leibniz, was first influenced by Germanus, but which he will then seek to refute,⁸⁴ stressed the importance of the notion of *Tsimtsum* for understanding pantheism. Wachter translated this term as *Zusammenziehung*,⁸⁵ which was later generalized by Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782),⁸⁶ while Leibniz and later Lessing used the term *Contraction*.⁸⁷ These debates summed up, in a way, the great questions that agitated the philosophers of the 17th century, notably concerning the derivation of the finite from the infinite, and the status of pantheism.⁸⁸ In the eighteenth century, these questions had some profound repercussions on the so-called Pantheism Controversy (*Pantheismusstreit*), in connection with the question of atheism and Spinozism.⁸⁹

However, in order to show that the Spinozist conception of nature remained in conformity with Judaism, Meir Hallevis Letteris argued, in 1845, that Spinoza integrated the Kabbalist notion of contraction (*Tsimtsum*).⁹⁰ In doing so, he was repeating a remark of Solomon Maimon,⁹¹ himself referring to Moses Mendelssohn who, concerning Spinozist substance, evoked the separation of the finite (*endlich*) and nature, regarding what was initially infinite (*unendlich*).⁹² However, Harry A. Wolfson rejected the compatibility between Spinozism and the notion of *Tsimtsum*, because the Lurianic theory involves the notions of finality, Divine will, and creation *ex nihilo*; notions that Spinoza could not accept.⁹³ Yitzhak Y. Melamed points out, however, that Spinoza, in line with R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, rejects the literal interpretation of *Tsimtsum*. This interpretation would then be compatible with the monism of substance since, according to R. 'Imanu'el Hay Ryqy, it necessarily implies pantheism.⁹⁴ Solomon Maimon, in his exposition of the theory of *Tsimtsum*, is thought to have aligned himself with Spinoza's position.⁹⁵

According to the teaching of R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi, one of the purposes of *Tsimtsum* was to express the ontological abyss between the created world and the *Eyn Sof* (Infinite). It should be noted that one of his pupils, R. Israel Sarug, doubled the

notion of *Eyn Sof*, presented, on the one hand, in a transcendent form, designating the encompassing *Eyn Sof* (*maqyf*), and on the other hand in a form which is immanent in the world, and described as the encompassed *Eyn Sof* (*muqaf*).⁹⁶ This interpretation of Lurianism was summarized by R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, in his work *Ta'alumot Hokmah*, which Spinoza possessed. He reproduced the passage that was to be published under the title *Lymudey 'Açylut*. R. Israel Sarug demonstrates the correlation between these two varieties of infiniteness by utilizing an example from the *Sefer Yeçyrah*, which depicts the unity between the flame (*shalhevet*) and the ember (*gahélet*).⁹⁷ R. Israel Sarug interpreted this metaphor according to the aphorism of *Proverbs* 6: 23: "For the commandment is a candle, and the Torah is a light (*ky ner myçwah we-Torah 'or*)."⁹⁸ Such a metaphor was used by R. Hasdai Crescas to clarify the nature of the Divine substantial attributes, which can only be compared to the flame, uniquely being accessible to man. This, however, proceeds from the embers, a symbol of God's transcendent essence.⁹⁹ R. Israel Sarug points out that the candle is limited (*yesh lah shy'ur*; literally: *it has a dimension*), while the light itself remains unlimited (*'eyn lah shy'ur*). He also states, according to the Munkacs edition, that "the light is that of the *Eyn Sof* ... and the encompassing and the encompassed (*we-ha-maqyfwe-ha-muqaf*)."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁰M. Hallevis Letteris, Baruch Spinoza. In I. S. Reggio (Ed.). Bykourey ha-'Itym ha-hadashym. Vienne, Schmid und Dusch, 1845, p.32 a.

⁹¹S. Maimon, G'ivat ha-Moreh. Reed. Jerusalem, Aqademiah ha-L'eoumyt ha-Isr'alyt Lemad'aym, 1965, p.161

⁹²M. Mendelssohn, Morning Hours or Lectures on the Existence of God. I. Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1790, pp.228-229

⁹³H. A. Wolfson, Spinoza I, pp.394-395

⁹⁴Y. Y. Melamed, From the Gate of Heaven to the 'Field of Holy Apples': Spinoza and the Kabbalah. <https://www.academia.edu/37708754/>. Gershon Scholem believed that the literal interpretation of *Tsimtsum* was still damaging to Divine immutability. G. Scholem, Abraham Cohen Herrera, ba'al "Sha'ar Ha-Shamaym". Hayyaw, yeçyrato wehashpa'atah. Hebrew Translation, p.35. However, according to the texts we report in this chapter, *Tsimtsum* concerned only the light ('or), and not the substance ('eçem) of the 'Eyn Sof, and therefore such a contraction could not have affected the Divine immutability.

⁹⁵S. Maimon, P. Reitter, Y. Y. Melamed and A. P. Socher (Eds), Autobiography. The Complete Translation. English translation. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019, note 15, p.57. Gide'on Freudenthal reminds us, however, that in his "kabbalist" and pre-philosophical period, Maimon adhered to the literal theory of *Tsimtsum*. G. Freudenthal, Shlomo ben Yehoshu'a (Maimon) ha-mequbal. Ma'aseh Livnat ha-Sapyr. Mav'o uma-hadurah. Tarbiz. 86, 2-3, 2019, pp.8-10.

⁹⁶Based on this distinction between these two types of infinity, Ronit Meroz has compared, despite their profound differences, the theory of R. Israel Sarug to that of Spinozist pantheism, suggesting that several propositions of the Ethics seem to conform to the teaching of this Kabbalist. (R. Meroz, Perush 'anonymy le'Idr'a Rab'a ha-nimnah 'im 'eskolat Saruq 'o: mah beyn Saruq we-haveraw u-beyn 'Iygr'as, Spinoza we-'aherym. Mehqarey Yerushalaym beMahshevet Israel. 12, 1996, p.321, note 70). However, the ontological abyss between the created world and the *Eyn Sof*, which I have just mentioned, contradicts the monism of Spinozistic substance. Moreover, the notion of *Tsimtsum*, which is at the origin of this abyss, could not be accepted by Spinoza, as I show in this article.

⁹⁷Sefer Yeçyrah I, 6

⁹⁸Sefer Lymudey 'açylut. Munkacs, 1857, p.22a; R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, Shever Yosef. In Ta'alumot Hokmah. p.60 a.

⁹⁹R. Hasdai Crescas, 'Or Ha-Shem, I, 3, 3. Reed. Jerusalem, R. Shlomo Fisher, 1990, p.113, W. Z. Harvey, Yesodot Qabalyym beSefer 'Or Ha-Shem leRahaq. Mekqarey Yerushalaym beMahshevet Israel. II, 1, 1983, pp.88-90.

¹⁰⁰Sefer Lymudey 'Açylut. Munkacs, 1857, p.22a. This expression is also reported by R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, equating the encompassing and the encompassed. R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo Shever Yosef. In Ta'alumot Hokmah, p.60a. Spinoza owned this work, and one may wonder whether he was sensitive to this version, putting on the same level encompassing and encompassed, and then arguing in favor of a monistic perspective.

which means that the *Eyn Sof* also belongs to the encompassed order. But, according to the Lemberg Edition of this text, it reads: “And the light is the light of the *Eyn Sof*, and (constitutes) the encompassing of the encompassed (*we-ha-’or hu’ ‘Or Eyn Sof we-ha-maqyf ha-muqaf*),” thus dissociating the *Eyn Sof* from the encompassed.¹⁰¹ The encompassing here really designates the *Eyn Sof*, while the encompassed, being limited, is not infinite by itself. The Lemberg edition, showing the preeminence of the encompassing over the encompassed, agrees with the example, given by R. Israel Sarug, of the hand shading on a sheet of white paper. The shadow thus perceived has no other reality than the limitation of light caused by the movement of the hand. This limitation only pertains to us (*klapey didan*), because of the perceived shadow, but it cannot affect the light itself.¹⁰² One of R. Israel Sarug’s students, R. Naftaly Hyrc Bakrak, referring to this example, noted that everything proceeds from the *Eyn Sof*. Resolving, in a way, the contradiction between the two versions of the text quoted above, he suggests that for man, the *Eyn Sof* can be described as both encompassing and encompassed (*maqyf u-muqaf*), since the encompassed is indeed a part (*heleq*) of the encompassing.¹⁰³ However, as I recalled earlier, the encompassing term denotes no topographical determination, but only the excess of light that could not be integrated into the receptacle, because of the limitation of its receptive capacity¹⁰⁴. Fundamentally limited, the encompassed is the instrument of the progressive revelation of the all-encompassing light, but it should not be confused with it.

5. The Tzimzum between Immanence and Transcendence

The reminders I have just made allow us to understand that Spinoza could not accept the notion of *tzimzum*,

because it contradicts the theory of an immanence not coupled with transcendence. Although this notion remains capable of resolving the difficulties of Spinozism concerning, in particular, the generation of finite modes by the infinite Divine substance. Since the *Tsimtsum* constitutes the root of finitude, it seems attractive, as Kenneth Seeskin suggests, to compare the notion of *sefirot* with the Spinozist notion of infinite modes, with the aim to resolve the problem of the derivation of the finite from the infinite.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, R. Abraham Cohen Herrera conceives the *sefirot* as the intermediary (*’emça’ut*) between the *Eyn Sof* and the lower worlds,¹⁰⁶ and similarly, Spinoza assigns to infinite modes a mediating role between the infinite naturing realm and the finite natured realm.¹⁰⁷ However, two points should be made about this comparison. First, as I have shown in detail elsewhere, the infinite modes, both mediate and immediate, are incapable of effecting such a derivation insofar as the passage from the infinite to the finite is blocked by Spinoza’s assertion: “And that which is finite and has a definite existence has not been produced by the absolute nature of a certain attribute of God, for all that flows from the absolute nature of a certain attribute of God is infinite and eternal” (*At id quod finitum est et determinatam habet existentiam, ab absoluta natura alicujus Dei attributi produci non potuit; quicquid enim ex absoluta natura alicujus Dei attributi sequitur, id infi-nitum et æternum est*).¹⁰⁸ That is why there is always an insurmountable gap between the infinite and the finite.¹⁰⁹ Secondly, while the infinite and eternal Spinozistic modes proceed from the infinity of attributes,¹¹⁰ the kabbalist *sefirot* are themselves limited by reason of their number, and by the fact that they were produced after the *Tsimtsum*.¹¹¹

It should be noted, however, that Spinozist pantheism seems to accord with the situation that prevailed before

¹⁰¹Sefer Lymudey ’Açylut. Lemberg, 1850, p.15b

¹⁰²Sefer Lymudey ’Açylut. Lemberg, 1850, p.23b

¹⁰³R. Naftaly Hyrc Bakrak, ‘Emeq ha-Melek, I, 2, T. I. Reed. Jerusalem, Yaryd ha-Sfarym, 2003, pp.119-120

¹⁰⁴R. Naftaly Hyrc Bakrak, ‘Emeq ha-Melek, VI, 21, T.I, p.197; cf. S. Shatil, The Doctrine of Secrets of Emeq Ha-Melech. Jewish Studies Quarterly, 17, 4, 2010, pp.358-395.

¹⁰⁵K. Seeskin, *Tsimtsum and the Root of Finitude*. In A. Bielik-Robson & D. H. Weiss (Eds.), *Tsimtsum and Modernity: Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, p.115

¹⁰⁶R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Beyt ’Elohym*. I, 4, p.2b

¹⁰⁷Spinoza, *Ethics* I, 21-23; M. Gueroult, *Spinoza I*. Paris, Aubier, 1968, p.309

¹⁰⁸Spinoza, *Ethics* I, 28, demonstration.

¹⁰⁹Cf. J. J. Rozenberg, *Spinoza, le spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation*. pp.219-237. I have also shown that while Spinoza poses that modes are modifications of the substance (Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, 28, demonstration), he does not explain how the substance can be modified by its finite modes, nor does he account for the mechanism proper to such modifications, p.221.

¹¹⁰A. V. Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.42

¹¹¹R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, *klā”h pithey hokmah*, 26. Reed. R. H. Friedlander (Ed.), *Bney Braq*, 1992, pp.69-70

the *Tsimtsum*. In this primordial, pre-creational state, the omnipresence of the Divine light was total. After the *Tsimtsum* came a vacant (*halal*) space, which thus made possible the creation of finite beings.¹¹² In this sense, the *Zohar* specifies that *the Eyn Sof*,¹¹³ often referred to by the third person singular (*'ihu*), both fills (*memal'e*) and surrounds (*sovev*) all the worlds.¹¹⁴ These two situations, before and after the *Tsimtsum*, can be interpreted, respectively, as Tamar Ross has done, in terms of immanence and transcendence. Before the *Tsimtsum*, the Eyn Sof was omnipresent, but after the *Tsimtsum* there was then a radical separation between the infinity of the 'Eyn Sof and the finite creatures. The *Tsimtsum* has thus made their creation possible, and the Eyn Sof, as a result of this primordial contraction, continues to maintain with the creatures a relation of absolute transcendence.¹¹⁵

Alexander Altmann emphasizes that while the notion of *Tsimtsum* denotes the utter transcendence of *Eyn Sof*, the light emanated from it remains immanent to all things and it expresses the presence of the infinite in the finite. Therefore, without transcendence, there can be no immanence.¹¹⁶

It should also be noted that *the Tsimtsum* of the *Eyn Sof* remains the condition of possibility, on the one

hand, of free will, which would be impossible if man were entirely determined by the Divine light, and on the other hand, of the creation of vessels giving access to this light.¹¹⁷ According to Lurianic Kabbalah, the *Tsimtsum* was designed to make it possible to fulfill the Torah's commandments.¹¹⁸ But Spinoza entirely rejected the notions of transcendence,¹¹⁹ of free will, as a mere illusion,¹²⁰ as well as of commandments which, after the destruction of the state of the Hebrews, had become, for Spinoza, fundamentally obsolete.¹²¹

Finally, let us emphasize the question of the relationship between the notion of *Tsimtsum* and that of attribute. According to Lurianic Kabbalah, the world was created following the *Tsimtsum*, so that creatures could assign attributes to God. Indeed, without creatures, God would not have been able to grant them, for example, mercy and compassion, for then He could not have been called "Merciful" (*Rahum*) and "Compassionate" (*Hanun*).¹²² The attributes are just appellations (*kynuym*), which can only exist after the *Tsimtsum* and Creation occurred. Spinoza, in *TTP* XIII, 5, refers to the verse of *Exodus* 6: 3, clearly stipulating the distinction between the Tetragrammaton, which designates the absolute

¹¹²R. Itshaq 'Iyyzyq Haver Wyldman, Pithey Sh'earym. Warsaw, 1888, II, IX

¹¹³Zohar I, 16b

¹¹⁴Zohar, III, 225a

¹¹⁵T. Ross, *Shney perushym leTorat ha-Tsimtsum*: R. Hayyim mi-Wolozyn we-R. Shny'ur Zalman mi-L'ady. Mehqarey Yerushalayim beMahshevet Israel, 1982, pp.155-156; E. R. Wolfson, *Nequddat ha-Reshimu-The Trace of Transcendence and the Transcendence of the Trace: The Paradox of Šimšum in the RaShaB's Hemshekh Ayin Beit*. Kabbalah. 29, 2013, pp.75-120

¹¹⁶A. Altmann, *Lurianic Kabbalah in a Platonic Key: Abraham Cohen Herrera's Puerta del Cielo*. In I. Twersky and B. Septimus (Eds), *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge-London, Harvard University Press, 1987, p.36

¹¹⁷A. Hayyim Wyt'al, 'Eç Hayyim. Sha'ar ha-klalym, II. It may be pointed out, from the point of view of the history of ideas, that, unlike Spinoza, Kant sought to "annul knowledge in order to make room for faith." (*Critique of Pure Reason*. Preface, Second Edition, Werner Pluhar (Translator). Cambridge, MA. Hackett Publishing, 1996, p.31), thus operating a kind of *Tsimtsum* of natural knowledge. In this sense, in the wake of Kantian practical reason, the discovery of freedom in Fichte and Schelling took place in accordance with the notion of *Tsimtsum*. Cf. P. Franks, *Fichte's Kabbalistic Realism: Summons as zimzum*. In G. Gottlieb (Ed.), *Fichte's Foundations of natural right: a critical guide*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2016, pp.92-116; C. Schulte, *Zimzum in the Works of Schelling*. Iyyun, 41, 1992, pp.21-40. Agata Bielik-Robson has linked the notions of negative and finitude, notably in Schelling and Hegel, to the concept of *Tsimtsum*. A. Bielik-Robson, *God of Luria, Hegel, Schelling: The Divine Contraction and the Modern Metaphysics of Finitude*. In D. Lewin, S. D. Podmore, & D. Williams, *Mystical Theology and Continental Philosophy: Interchange in the Wake of God*. London & New York, Routledge, 2017, pp.30-52. Elliot R. Wolfson has shown the importance of this notion in Derrida's deconstructivist theory. E. R. Wolfson, *Giving beyond the gift: apophysis and overcoming theomania*. New York, Fordham University Press, 2014, ebook, p.368 and p.425. This author also highlighted the role of *Tsimtsum* in Heideggerian meta-ontology. E. R. Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiësis*. Indiana University Press, 2019, pp.137-196.

¹¹⁸R. Hayyim Wyt'al, *Sha'arey Ma'amarey Rashby, Parashat 'Egev*; D. Novak, *Self-Contraction of the Godhead in Kabbalistic Theology*. In L. Goodman (Ed.), *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, p.309.

¹¹⁹Spinoza, *Ethics* I, 18

¹²⁰Spinoza, *Ethics* III, 2, scholium

¹²¹Spinoza, *TTP*, V, 5

¹²²R. 'Elyahu Tsyon Sofer, *Binyan Tsyon*, Jerusalem, 2001, pp.7-8. The author refers to note 4 of the commentary on the work 'Oçrot Hayyim, by R. Moshe Zacuto (1610? or 1625? - 1697), who seems to have known Spinoza in Amsterdam, since, maybe not at the same time, they were both pupils of R. Sha'ul ha-Levy Morteira. Cf. H. Besso, *Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries*. *Hispanic Bulletin*, 40, 2, 1938. pp.159-160; G. Scholem and J. Michman. "Zacuto, Moses ben Mordecai." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 2nd ed. vol. 21. Detroit, Macmillan, 2007, pp. 435-437. On the importance of this author in the Kabbalist circle of Amsterdam, cf. E. Baumgarten and U. Safrat, *Rabbi Moshe Zacuto and the Kabbalistic Circle of Amsterdam*. *Studia Rosenthaliana*. 46, 1-2, 2020, pp.29-49.

essence of God (*Dei absolutam essentiam*), and the derived Divine Names (*Appellativa*).¹²³ However, contrary to Spinoza's conception of the attribute, as constituting the essence of substance (*essentiam constituens*),¹²⁴ and that of the equivalence between substance and its attributes (*substantiae ... sive attributi*),¹²⁵ from a Kabbalist point of view the attributes appear only after the *Tsimtsum*. They are not the essence of God, nor do they identify themselves with Him. In this sense, according to Maimonides, attributes only describe God's actions in the world, never concerning His essence.¹²⁶

6. The Question of Literal and Non-Literal Interpretations of Tsimtsum

Recall that R. Hayyim Wyt'al (1542-1620) defined the notion of *Tsimtsum* in a way that may have appeared ambiguous, since its definition can give rise to several interpretations: "The *Eyn Sof* contracted itself (*çimçem 'et 'açmo*) at its midpoint (*benequdah ha-'emça'yt 'asher bo*), truly in the middle of its light

(*be'emç'a 'oro mamash*). And it contracted this light (*we-çymçem ha-'or ha-hu'*), which moved away in the direction of the sides, around the midpoint (*we-nitraheq 'el çdady sevyvot ha-nequdah ha-'emç'ayt*). As a result, a vacant place (*maqom panuy*), a gas (*'awyr*, literally air), and an empty space (*we-halal reqny*) were formed."¹²⁷ R. Hayyim Wyt'al thus jointly asserts that the *Eyn Sof* contracted itself, and that it contracted its light.¹²⁸ However, R. Abraham Cohen Herrera explains that in reality the *Eyn Sof* contracted "from itself to itself (*mi'açmo le'açmo*)," and it did not "contract itself (*çimçem 'et 'açmo*)." ¹²⁹ He made it clear that this contraction was not "in itself (*l'o be'açmo*)," since it was only a "contraction of the light (*çymçum ha-'or*)," ¹³⁰ or of his Glory and Strength (*kevodo u-gevurato*),¹³¹ and not of the *Eyn Sof* itself.¹³² It should be remembered that R. Abraham Cohen Herrera was himself a disciple of R. Israel Sarug, who defended the thesis that *Tsimtsum* was not a true contraction, but the condition of a "preparation (*hakannah*)" to "receive, so to speak

¹²³Spinoza, TTP XIII, 5. On the status of the Tetragrammaton in Spinoza, cf. Y. Y. Melamed, "Et revera". Spinoza, Maimonide et la signification du Tétragramme. trad.franç. In F. Manzini (Ed.) Spinoza et les scolastiques, Paris, PUPS, 2011, pp.155-170.

¹²⁴Spinoza, Ethics I, Definition IV

¹²⁵Spinoza, Ethics I, 5

¹²⁶Maimonides, Guide, I, 61, p.102. Y. Y. Melamed, following C. Fraenkel, sees no essential difference between Maimonides's conception of the Tetragrammaton and its revival by Spinoza. However, he notes that the notion of the Necessity of Existence, which Maimonides borrowed from Avicenna, implies existence that does not depend on a cause. I think that this remark is sufficient to profoundly distinguish between the Maimonidean and Spinozist conceptions, since the *De Deo* opens with the definition of *causa sui*, whereas Maimonides rejects any idea of causality to characterize the nature of God. In support of his thesis, Melamed recalls that Maimonides' conception of the Tetragrammaton was summarized in the work *Giv'at Sh'aul* by R. Sh'aul Levi Morteira, the rabbi of the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam, who had participated in Spinoza's Herem, a work with which the latter was certainly familiar. It should be noted, however, that R. Sh'aul Levi Morteira points out, in the page quoted by Melamed, that all the Divine Names derived from the Tetragrammaton only after the creation of the world. Spinoza, who rejected the idea of creation, could not accept such a conception, especially since the derived Names constitute the attributes of God's actions in the world, and therefore they do not describe His essence, whereas for Spinoza the attribute is that which "the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence." Ethics I, Def. IV. C. Fraenkel, God's Existence and Attributes. In S. Nadler and T. Rudavsky (Eds.). The Cambridge History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, p.591; Y. Y. Melamed, The Metaphysics of Spinoza's Theological Political Treatise. In Y. Y. Melamed and M. A. Rosenthal (Eds.), Spinoza's Theological Political Treatise: A Critical Guide. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.139, notes 51 and 54; R. Sha'ul Levi Morteira, *Giv'at Sha'ul*, Amsterdam, 1645, pp.60-61.

¹²⁷A. Hayyim Wyt'al, 'Eç Hayyim, I, 2, Drush 'igulyum we-yosher, Reedition Jerusalem, 1963, p.11b; R. Yehuda Leyyb ha-Levi Ashlag states that the "midpoint" refers to the primary existence of the receptacle (*kely*), whose being is always a function of its disposition to receive light ('*or*). The *Tsimtsum* concerns only the receptacles, which are subject to the transformations that are specific to the lower realms, but not the Infinite light, which always remains immutable. R. Yehuda Leyyb ha-Levi Ashlag, *Talmud 'Eser Sefyrot*. I, Jerusalem, 1956, pp.44-45. As Yosef Avyv pointed out, the first four editions of the Drush 'Adam Qadmon mention only an empty place, as an effect of *Tsimtsum*. The student of the Arizal, R. Yosef Ibn Tubul then introduced the notion of trace (*reshymo*) of primordial light, as a direct consequence of *Tsimtsum*. Y. 'Avyv'y, *Qyçur Seder ha-'Açylut*. Jerusalem, M. Bençvy, 2000, pp.108-114. Later editions of the *Sefer 'Eç Hayyim* incorporated this notion of trace. *Sefer 'Eç Hayyim*, Sha'ar 'Aqudym, 4, p.26b. Avinoam Fraenkel points out that in the text of R. Hayyim Wyt'al, the contraction does not concern the essence of the *Eyn Sof*. A. Fraenkel, *Nefesh haTzimtum: Rabbi Chaim Volozhnh's Nefesh haChaim*. Jerusalem, New York, Urim, Ebook, 2020, I, p.596.

¹²⁸A. M'eyr Ha-Cohen P'apyrash (1624-1662) underlines that the topographical names used to describe *Tsimtsum*, as middle, sides, around or empty, are metaphorical. They have no reality concerning the infinite spiritual world, and they only help to understand this process (*lesaber ha-'ozen*). They do not designate any change in the essence of the Creator Himself (*l'o nithadesh davar ba-Bor'e*). R. M'eyr Ha-Cohen P'apyrash, *Sefer Zohar ha-Raqy'a*. By'your 'al ha-Zohar miha-'Aryz"al. Reed. Jerusalem, Sha'arey Zyv, (no date of publication), pp.23a-b.

¹²⁹R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, Sha'ar Ha-Shamaym, III, 7, p.17a

¹³⁰R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, Sha'ar Ha-Shamaym, V, 11, p.43b

¹³¹R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, Sha'ar Ha-Shamaym, III, 1, 12a

¹³²R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, Sha'ar Ha-Shamaym, IV, 3, p.26

(*leqabel kavyakol*) a concretization (*hitgalmut*), (or according to another version), a determined revelation (*hitgalut*).¹³³ *Tsimtsum* is not, therefore, as Gershom Scholem thought, a contraction of God Himself (*Selbstverschiinkung Gottes*).¹³⁴ It should be noted that Shaul Magid attempted to apply Scholem's interpretation to a text by R. Shabtai Sheftel ha-Levi Horowitz (1565-1619) on the notion of *Tsimtsum*, which he described as follows: "Before creation, God contracted himself (*çymçem 'açmo*), in his own essence (*betok 'açmuto*), so to speak (*kavyakol*), from Himself, in Himself and within Himself (*mi'açmo 'el 'açmo u-betok 'açmo*)." ¹³⁵ However, the text of R. Shabtai Sheftel ha-Levi Horowitz does not mention God at all, but only the light of the *Eyn Sof*. It should be noted that this text contains the expression "so to speak (*kavyakol*)" three times, to emphasize the metaphorical character of Divine light's contraction. This text can therefore in no way support Scholem's thesis that the *Tsimtsum* concerns God Himself. R. Shabtai Sheftel ha-Levi Horowitz thus recalls that, according to the *Midrash*, the Divine Presence (*Shekynah*) contracted in the Holy of Holies, between the two rods (*badyim*) intended to carry the Holy Ark.¹³⁶ Even though, as Ysh'ayah Tishby suggests, the *Tsimtsum* appears as a fracture, this author also makes it clear that it only "resembles a fracture in the *Eyn Sof* (*m'eyn shvyrah*

be-'Eyn Sof)." ¹³⁷ It should be noted that the notion of *Tsimtsum* presents the paradoxical idea, described by Elliot R. Wolfson, as being a "self-limitation on the part of that which has no limit. The Infinite, which fills all space, with-draws from itself to create a space within itself from which it is vacated."¹³⁸

The *Eyn Sof* is a light (*'or*), and therefore it does not constitute the Divine substance itself.¹³⁹ R. Moshe Cordovero precises that Light (*'or*) is synonymous with influx (*shef'a*), and it represents a lower degree of the Divine Presence (*Shekynah tit'aah*).¹⁴⁰ And R. Shny'yur Zalman of L'ady (between 1745 and 1749-1812), specifies that the *Tsimtsum* did not occur in the *Eyn Sof*, but only in its light (*'oro*).¹⁴¹ According to R. Yonatan 'Eybeshyç (1690-1764), the *Tsimtsum*, which constituted a total disposal of light (*syluq 'or gamur*), took place only in the ten sefirot (*be'esser sefirot*).¹⁴² For R. 'Elyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (the G'aon of Vilna, 1720-1797) the *Tsimtsum* occurred only in God's will (*reçono*), and thus "He contracted His will in the creation of the worlds (*çymçem reçono bebry'at ha-'olamot*)." ¹⁴³

It should be remembered that the Kabbalists disagreed on the question of whether the process of the *Tsimtsum* should be understood literally (*kepshto*) or non-literal

¹³³Sefer Lymudey 'Açylut. Munkacs, 1857, p.22 a. This work is traditionally attributed to R. Hayym Wyt'al, but G. G. Scholem has disputed this thesis, giving the authorship of this work to R. Israel Sarug (or Saruq), Major trends in Jewish Mysticism, p.257. On R. Israel Sarug's theory of *Tsimtsum*, cf. R. Meroz, The Kabbalah of Saruq "Contrasting opinions among the Founders of Saruq's School". In P. Fenton & R. Goetschel (Eds.), Experience, Scripture, and Theology in Judaism and the Religions of the Book. Paris, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000, pp.194-198. Y. 'Avyv' states that this book was written by R. 'Azaryah of F'ano, himself a pupil of R. Israel Sarug. 'Avyv'y, Qabalat ha-'Ary. I, Jerusalem, Makon Bençby, 2008, pp.308-309. On the correspondence between the terminology used by R. Israel Sarug and that of R. Hayym Wyt'al, cf. Y. 'Avyv'y, Qabalat ha-'Ary. I, pp.242-243.

¹³⁴G. Scholem, Schopfung aus Nichts und Selbstverschiinkung Gottes. Eranos Jahrbuch, XXV, 1956, pp. 87-119. It should be noted that the various presentations of *Tsimtsum* in the writings of R. Hayym Wyt'al, all show that *Tsimtsum* is primarily concerned with the light of the 'Eyn Sof. Thus, the second version of R. Hayym Wyt'al ('Eç Hayym, Sha'ar 'iygoulym we-yosher I, 2, Tany'n'a, p.12b.) states that the Emanator (Ha-Ma'açyl) contracted Himself (*çymçem 'açmo*), but in the midst of His light (*be'emç'a ha-'or shelo*). A similar expression is found in 'Adam Yashar, (Reed. Cracow, 1885, p.3a), where R. Hayym Wyt'al points out that "the *Eyn Sof* contracted itself by means of its light (*çymçem ha-'Eyn Sof' 'et 'açmo be'emç'a'ut ha-'or shelo*). In 'Oçrot Hayym (Reed. Jerusalem, 1907, p. 1a), the subject of contraction is not mentioned; the sentence remaining in the third person singular. On the other hand, the Sha'ar ha-Hagdmat, (Reed. Jerusalem, 1909, I, p.6a and p.9b), reports that it was the *Eyn Sof* that contracted itself (*çymçem ha-'Eyn Sof' and 'açmo*). The Mav'o She'arym (Reed. Jerusalem, 1961, p.1a) notes that, in order to create the world, "the *Eyn Sof* had to contract its existence and its light (*huçrak she'Eyn Sof çymçem meçy'uto we'oro*)." ¹³⁵R. Shaptal Horovyç, Shef'a Tal. Reed. Jerusalem, Yaryd ha-Sfarym, 2005, III, 5, p.180; S. Magid, Origin and Overcoming the Beginning: Zimzum as a Trope of Reading in Post-Lurianic Kabbala. In A. Cohen and S. Magid (Eds.). Beginning/again: toward hermeneutics of Jewish texts. New York, Seven Bridges Press, 2002, p.165. It should be noted that the expression "from itself to itself (*mi'açmo le'açmo*)" is already found in R. Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570), 'Eylymah Rabaty, p. 53a. This occurrence contradicts Scholem's remark that this expression is by R. Shaptal Horovyç (1565-1619), and then taken over by R. Israel Sarug. G. G. Scholem, Major trends in Jewish Mysticism, p.410 note 45.

¹³⁶Ber'eshyt Rabah, V, 7, on the text of Exodus 25: 14.

¹³⁷Y. Tishby, Torat ha-r'a we-ha-qlypah beQabalat ha-'Ary. Reed. Jerusalem, Magnes, 1984, p.57

¹³⁸E. R. Wolfson, Divine Suffering and the Hermeneutics of Reading- Philosophical Reflections on Lurianic Mythology. In R. Gibbs and E. R. Wolfson (Eds.), Suffering Religion. New York and London, Routledge, 2002, p.117

¹³⁹R. S. Boiman, Maftethey Hokmat 'Emet. Torat Seder ha-Hishtalshelut. I, Warsaw, 1937, p.22

¹⁴⁰R. Moshe Cordovero, Shy'ur Qomah. Reed. Warsaw, 1883, p.47a; B. Zaq, Torat ha-Tsimtsum shel R. Moshe Cordovero. Tarbiz, 58, 1989, p.210.

¹⁴¹R. Shny'yur Zalman MiL'ady, Torah 'Or. Miqçç, p.39a

¹⁴²R. Yonatan 'Eybeshyç, Shem 'Olam. Pressburg, 1891, p.87

¹⁴³R. 'Elyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, Sifr'a deçiny'out'a. Lyqoutey ha-Gr'à Zal. Vilna, 1882, p.38a.

(*shel'o kepshuto*).¹⁴⁴ This debate was initiated by R. Yosef Ergas (1685-1730) who, in his work *Shomer 'Emunym (ha-qadmon)*, refers to the disciples of R. Israel Sarug (without, however, as far as I know, mentioning him): R. Menahem 'Azaryah of F'ano, R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, R. Naftaly Hyrç Bakrak and R. Abraham Cohen Herrera. For these Kabbalists, the *Tsimtsum* should not be understood in the literal sense, because it could be reductive due to the risks of quantification, of spatial figuration, and therefore of materialization of the Infinite. Therefore, the process of the *Tsimtsum* can only be an allegory and an image (*mashal we-dimyon*).¹⁴⁵

However, R. 'Imanu'el Hay Ryqy (1688-1743) challenged this interpretation of the writings of R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, and of the Lurianic Kabbalah in general, by highlighting the metaphysical and theological issues of the debates concerning the *Tsimtsum*. He points out that the literal interpretation (*kepshuto*) does not in any way imply a materialization of the Divine substance (*'ačmuto*). If “the Holy One, Blessed be He, is the place (*Maqom*) of the world, but the world is not its place (*we'eyn ha-'olam meqomo*),” as the *Midrash* states,¹⁴⁶ then the notion of *Tsimtsum* must be understood literally, for it is only through the *Tsimtsum* of His light that God gives a place to the world. But if the notion of *Tsimtsum* were to be understood allegorically, without a true contraction of His light, then God would necessarily have to be in the world, as supported by pantheism, because, contrary to the precision given by the *Midrash*, the world would thus constitute His Place. It should be noted that such a justification of pantheism is in fact contradicted by the verse of *Exodus* 33:21 “Here is a

place with Me (*hineh maqom 'ity*).”¹⁴⁷ God is not to be confused with place, although the place is always co-present with God. It is because the *Eyn Sof* has contracted its light, thus giving a place to the world, that the world is not the place of God, and therefore His substance (*'ačmuto*) can in no way concern the created world.¹⁴⁸

R. 'Imanu'el Hay Ryqy also specifies that the *Tsimtsum* took place in a centrifugal manner, and as a result the *Eyn Sof*, which remained in the center, then became the location of the world, thus forbidding that its substance could then extend to the lower worlds. The *Tsimtsum* allowed creation itself, by leaving a place for the multiplicity of worlds, without the *Eyn Sof* being confused with these worlds.¹⁴⁹ For all these reasons, R. 'Imanu'el Hay Ryqy denounces the thesis of the non-literal interpretation of *Tsimtsum* as purely speculative (*mi-svar'a*), because it does not proceed by reception (*qabalah*) from the truthful teaching of R. Itshaq Luria Ashkenazi himself.¹⁵⁰ R. Ya'aqov 'Emdyn (1698-1776),¹⁵¹ and R. 'Elyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, among others, also supported this view.¹⁵²

These debates were never about any contraction of the Divine substance itself, but only about the light of the *Eyn Sof*. The *Tsimtsum* makes creation possible, on the one hand by leaving the Divine substance unchanged, and on the other hand by transforming only God's infinite light which, being contracted, provides the conditions for the possibility of finite worlds.¹⁵³

7. Tsimtsum and Hylemorphism

In 1859 Solomon Munk identified Avicebron with the Jewish philosopher R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol (1021 or

¹⁴⁴Cf. G. Scholem, *Kabbalah*. New York, Meridian, 1973, pp.131-135; M. Hallamish, *Mav'o leQabalah*. Jerusalem, 'Elynor we-ha-Qybuç ha-Me'uhad, 1992, pp.160-161. This author showed the importance of the debates on *Tsimtsum* in the formation of Hasidic thought, in particular HABAD: *Mishnato ha-'iyunyt shel R. Shny'ur Zalman MiL'ady (weyehasah leTorat Ha-Qabalah u-leR'eshyt ha-Hasydut)*. Ph.D, Dissertation, Jerusalem, Hebrew University, 1976, pp.95-98.

¹⁴⁵R. Yosef Ergas, *Shomer 'Emunym (ha-Qadmon)*. Reed. Vilna, 1876, p.4a, pp.20a-24a. Cf. R. Goetschel, *La Notion de Šimšūm dans le “Šōmēr Emūnīm” de Joseph Ergaz*. Leuven, Peeters, 1980. Cf. R. Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Puerta del Cielo*. Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 2015, p.68, note 80 de Miquel Beltrán.

¹⁴⁶*Ber'eshyt Rabah*, LXVIII, 9

¹⁴⁷*Exodus*, 33: 21. The Maharal of Prague states that the place, mentioned in this verse, was indeed separated from God, Gur 'Aryeh, ad loc.

¹⁴⁸R. Menahem 'Azaryah of F'ano notes that the Place (*Maqom*) is only a dressing (*malbush*) of the light after the *Tsimtsum*. Kanfey Yona. Reed. Jerusalem, M. Bney Yssakar, 1998, p.3.

¹⁴⁹Cf. R. Naftaly Hyrç Bakrak, 'Emeq ha-Melek. I, 1, p.115

¹⁵⁰R. 'Imanu'el Hay Ryqy, *Yosher levav*. Kracow, 1890, pp.7b-9a

¹⁵¹R. Ya'aqov 'Emdyn, *Mitpahat Sefarym*. Lelow, 1870, p.110

¹⁵²For a summary of the respective positions of R. Shny'ur Zalman MiL'ady and of R. 'Elyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, cf. A. Fraenkel, *Nefesh haTsimtsum: Understanding Nefesh HaChaim through the Key Concept of Tsimtsum and Related Writings*. Jerusalem, New York, Urim, Ebook, 2020, II, pp.123-125.

¹⁵³S. Magid, *Origin and Overcoming the Beginning: Zimzum as a Trope of Reading in Post-Lurianic Kabbala*. In *Beginning/again: toward hermeneutics of Jewish texts*. p.195

1022-1050 or 1070).¹⁵⁴ Gershom Scholem,¹⁵⁵ Jacques Schlanger,¹⁵⁶ and Yehuda Liebes,¹⁵⁷ among others, then showed the influence that the reading of the *Sefer Yeçyrah* would have exerted on the author of the *Fons Vitae*. Concerning the question of hylemorphism, the Kabbalists have shown that the notions of form (*çurah*) and matter (*homer*), by making it possible to distinguish those of light, (*'or*) and receptacle (*kely*), are consequences of the *Tsimtsum*.¹⁵⁸

Indeed, it is the withdrawal or contraction of the Divine light that founds the thesis of hylemorphism, as it is set forth in the *Fons Vitae*. For R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, hylemorphism results from the Divine creative will. Although he is generally described as a Neoplatonist, R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol is nevertheless opposed to Plotinus who, in agreement with Plato, posited the eternity of the world as itself proceeding from the Divine will.¹⁵⁹ However, for R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, the doctrine of the will (*scientiae de voluntate*) remains incompatible with the thesis of the eternity of the world since it implies the notion of creation (*scientiam de creatione*).¹⁶⁰ This allows a modelling (literally an *exit*) of the form from the first origin (*exitus formae ab origine prima*), which, through the will, then influences the matter (*influxio eius super materiam*).¹⁶¹

R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol agrees, however, with the Platonic conception of matter as a receptacle.¹⁶² The

actualization of matter, by means of form, is posited in terms of reception (in Latin, *receptio* and in Hebrew, *qabalah*), and it always remains a function of the preparation (in Latin, *preparatio* and in Hebrew, *hakanah*) of matter for this reception.¹⁶³ The latter was identified by Plotinus both with the mirror, which reflects light,¹⁶⁴ and with the mother, which contains all things.¹⁶⁵ R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol takes up the theme of the mirror, specifying that form, by proceeding from the will, is imprinted in matter, on the model of the image of the one who looks at himself (*inspector*) in a mirror (in *speculo*).¹⁶⁶ Although he does not use the maternal metaphor, he makes it clear that what drives matter to receive form is the appetite to receive good and delight (*appetitus materiae ad recipiendum bonitatem et delectationem*). He defines the good by the attainment of unity (*unitas*), and the appetite of matter to receive form, as the aspiration to unity, for the purpose to love it and to associate with it (*amatum et unitionis*).¹⁶⁷

The theoretical innovation of R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, in relation to the Greek conception of the notion of hylemorphism, is to have related matter to Divinity, positing them both as being first occult (*occulto*), and then as manifest (*manifestum*).¹⁶⁸ The Creator of all things is One, whereas at the level of creatures, matter, like form, is both diverse (*diversificari*) and multiple (*multae*).¹⁶⁹ While aiming to reconcile the cosmic duality of matter and form with Divine unity,¹⁷⁰ R.

¹⁵⁴S. Munk, *Mélanges de Philosophie Juive et Arabe*. Paris, A. Franck, 1859, pp.291-292

¹⁵⁵G. Scholem, 'Iqvotyaw shel Gabyrol beQabalah. In A. A. Qebeq, 'E. Steiman (Eds). Ma'asaf Sofrey 'Ereç Israel. Tel Aviv, 'Agudat ha-sofrym ha-'Ivrym be'Ereç Israel, 1940, pp.160-178.

¹⁵⁶J. Schlanger, On the Role of the "Whole" in Creation according to Ibn Gabyrol. *Journal of Jewish Studies*. 124, 1965, pp. 125-135, *The Philosophy of Solomon Ibn Gabyrol: Study of a Neoplatonism*. Leiden, Brill, 1968, p.105.

¹⁵⁷Y. Liebes, *Sefer Yeçyrah 'eçel R. Shlomo 'Even Gabyrol u-Perush ha-Shyr 'ahavatyk*. Mehqarey Yerushalaym beMahshavat Israel. 3-4, 1987, pp.73-123

¹⁵⁸Cf. R. Shlomo 'Ely'ash'ew, *Leshem shebo we-'ahlamah. Sefer ha-de'a'h*. Notably, pp.14 and 80. Vincent Cantarino describes a metaphysics of light in R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol. V. Cantarino, *Ibn Gabirol's Metaphysic of Light*. *Studia Islamica*. 26, 1967, pp. 49-71.

¹⁵⁹Plotinus, *Ennead*, II, 1; Plato, *Timaeus* 41a.

¹⁶⁰R. Shlomo ibn Gabyrol (Avencebrolis), *Fons Vitae*. Latin translation, Johannes Hispalensis & Dominicus Gundissalinus. Clemens Baeumker (Ed.). *Monasterii, Aschendorff*, 1892, V, 40, p.329. I also refer to the literal Hebrew translation, from the Latin, of Y. Bloomstein. *Sefer Meqor Hayym*. Tel Aviv, Mahberot laSyfrut, 1950, p.418.

¹⁶¹R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, *Fons Vitae*, V, 41, p.330, Hebrew, p.421

¹⁶²Plato, *Timaeus*, 50d2-e4

¹⁶³R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, *Fons Vitae*, III, 55, p.202, Hebrew, p.260

¹⁶⁴Plotinus, *Ennead*, III, 14. On the identification of matter with the mirror, within the framework of Neo-Platonism, cf. F. Fauquier, *La matière comme miroir: pertinence et limites d'une image selon Plotin et Proclus*. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*. 37, 1, 2003, pp.65-87.

¹⁶⁵Plotinus, *Ennead* III, 19

¹⁶⁶R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, *Fons Vitae*, V, 41, p.202, Hebrew, p.330

¹⁶⁷R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, *Fons Vitae*, V, 32-33, pp.316-318, Hebrew, p.403-404

¹⁶⁸R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, *Fons Vitae*, I, 11, p.14, Hebrew, p.24. In his poem, *Keter Malkut*, R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol states that the desire of the creature is to make manifest, that is, to unveil the secrets of the deity (*ygaleh çfonotyka*). *Keter Malkut*, Reed. Shkolow, 1785, 4b.

¹⁶⁹R. Shlomo Ibn Gabyrol, *Fons Vitae*, IV, 7, p.227, Hebrew, p.292

¹⁷⁰J. Wijnhoven, *The Mysticism of Solomon Ibn Gabyrol*. *The Journal of Religion*. 45, 2, 1965, p.139

Shlomo Ibn Gabryol insists on the radical otherness of the Creator in relation to His creatures, because of their diversity and multiplicity.¹⁷¹

According to Tamar Rudavsky, there is a theoretical convergence between R. Shlomo Ibn Gabryol's conception of intelligible matter, of Divine nature, and Spinoza's notion of God as *res extensa*. The former is merely an implicit identity, whereas the latter claims it as being explicit.¹⁷² However, while the Spinozist distinction between the thought attribute and the extended attribute, both belonging to the *natura naturans*, which he identifies with God,¹⁷³ takes up the Aristotelian and scholastic hylemorphic relationship,¹⁷⁴ for R. Shlomo Ibn Gabryol, hylemorphism concerns only creatures, and therefore exclusively what Spinoza calls the *natura naturata*.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, according to R. Shlomo Ibn Gabryol, form necessarily imprints matter, without maintaining any parallel relationship with it.¹⁷⁶

8. Tsimtsum, Alterity, and the Divine Presence

In R. Shlomo Ibn Gabryol, we can identify a position of alterity, which would then be incompatible with the monism of Spinozist substance. This opposition to monism would also announce Levinas' ethics, particularly regarding the feminine whose nature is defined precisely by alterity.¹⁷⁷ R. Shlomo Ibn Gabryol's theory of matter actually implies a transformation of feminine passivity, on the Aristotelian model, into the desire for completeness. Such a desire then brings

about the feminine presence as transcending the masculine desire, which itself aims to use its own force (in Spinozist language, its *conatus* to develop the desire to receive the presence of the Other).¹⁷⁸ It should be noted that, for the Kabbalists, it is the *Tsimtsum* that is at the origin of the feminine (*shoresh ha-neqvah*),¹⁷⁹ which Moshe Idel characterized as “the sublime root of the female.”¹⁸⁰ Consequently the incompatibility, which I have pointed out above, between the notion of *Tsimtsum* and Spinozist monism, could explain, at least partially, Spinoza's insistence, in the *Political Treatise*, XI, 4, on positing sexual inequality, as well as the rejection of women from the political world; what W. N. A. Klever has called the “black page (*zwarte bladzijde*)” of Spinozism.¹⁸¹ Spinoza tries to justify the inferior condition of women by the fact that it derives from their natural weakness, thus preventing them from having “by nature a right equal to that of men” (*foeminas ex natura non aequale viris habere jus*).¹⁸² From a Kabbalist point of view, the feminine expression of Divinity is concerned with the Divine Presence (*Shekynah*), which relates to the tenth *sefyrat*, *Malkut* (Kingship).¹⁸³

The immanentism of substance excludes the idea of the Divine Presence. This is why, according to Spinoza, God's intellectual love forbids us to “imagine Him as present (*ut praesentem imaginamur*).” Therefore, we only need to “understand that God is eternal (*aeternum esse intelligimus*).”¹⁸⁴ This rejection of the Divine Presence seems paradoxical. In fact, in accordance with the immanence posited by the *Ethics*, Spinoza conceives as the third dogma of the

¹⁷¹Cf. J. M. Dillon, Solomon Ibn Gabirol's Doctrine of Intelligible Matter. *Irish Philosophical Journal*. 6, 1, 1989, pp.59-81

¹⁷²T. M. Rudavsky, Matter, Mind, and hylomorphism in Ibn Gabryol and Spinoza. In H. Lagerlund (Eds), *Forming The Mind. Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind*. Dordrecht, Springer, 2007, p. 109

¹⁷³Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, 29, scholium

¹⁷⁴H. A. Wolfson, *Spinoza*, II, pp. 47-48; R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza: The Arguments of the Philosophers*. New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p.192

¹⁷⁵N. Polloni, Toledan ontologies: Gundissalinus, Ibn Daud, and the problem of Gabryolian hylomorphism. In A. Fidora and N. Polloni (Eds). *Appropriation, interpretation and criticism: philosophical and theological exchanges between the Arabic, Hebrew and Latin intellectual traditions*. Barcelona - Roma, Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2017, p.21.

¹⁷⁶R. Shlomo Ibn Gabryol, *Fons Vitae*, II, 13, p.46, Hebrew, p.70

¹⁷⁷E. Levinas, *Éthique et infini*. Paris, Fayard, 1984, p. 57; S. Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p.150.

¹⁷⁸S. Pessin, Loss, Presence, and Gabryol's Desire: Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Possibility of a Feminist Ground. In H. Tirosh-Samuelson (Ed.), *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004, pp.38-43

¹⁷⁹R. ‘Ymanue’l Hay Ryqy, *Yosher levav*. p.5a

¹⁸⁰M. Idel, *The Privileged Divine Feminine in Kabbalah (Perspectives on Jewish Texts and Contexts)*. Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter, 2019, p.112

¹⁸¹W. N. A. Klever, Een zwarte bladzijde? Spinoza over de vrouw. *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*. 84, 1, 1992, pp.38-51

¹⁸²Spinoza, *TP*, XI, 4; H. Sharp, Eve's Perfection: Spinoza on Sexual (In)Equality. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 50, 4, 2012, p.566.

¹⁸³Cf. R. Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonym*, VI, 5; C. Ciucu, Existence is Feminine: The Kabbalistic Metamorphoses of a Pythagorean Idea. *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, XLVI/2021-2022, p.47.

¹⁸⁴Spinoza, *Ethics* V, 32, corollary; M. Rovere, *Exister, Méthodes de Spinoza*. Paris, CNRS Editions, 2010, p.342.

universal faith, that God “is present everywhere” (*eum ubique esse praesentem*).¹⁸⁵ However, in the *Short Treatise*, while still retaining the notions of Providence (*Voorzienigheid*), general and particular, Spinoza opposes Maimonides, who posited that Divine Providence concerns species as well as individuals.¹⁸⁶ It entirely empties these terms of all religious content: general Providence then concerns only the laws of nature, and particular Providence only the effort of each individual to maintain his own being.¹⁸⁷ According to Spinoza, closeness to God is a purely cognitive human initiative, for man can only unite himself with God if he has a “very clear idea” (*een zoo klare denkbeeld*).¹⁸⁸ The *Ethics* will specify that “God, strictly speaking, loves no one and hates no one (*Deus proprie loquendo neminem amat neque odio habet*),”¹⁸⁹ and it is only indirectly that “God, in so far as He loves Himself, loves men (*quod Deus quatenus seipsum amat, homines amat*).”¹⁹⁰

It should also be noted that the notion of *Shekynah* could be interpreted as denoting God’s dwelling in the world,¹⁹¹ and therefore it could be associated with pantheism. On this point, it should be remembered that Adriaan Koerbach published a work of Spinozist inspiration in 1668, under the title *Een Bloemhof*. Arrested in Leiden, then transferred to Amsterdam, he was interrogated by the municipal authorities on 20 July 1668. The questions included whether he knew Spinoza, whether Spinoza had participated in the writing of his book, and his knowledge of the Hebrew language. He was then asked if he knew the meaning of the word “Shabinot” or “Shekynah”

(Presence), and he replied that he should consult *Buxtorf’s Lexicon*.¹⁹² The purpose of this interrogation was to unmask the pantheistic ideas developed by Koerbach’s work. It should be noted that the pantheistic interpretation of the term *Shekynah* derives precisely from the various translations given by Buxtorf’s *Lexicon*, which Spinoza possessed: “*praesentia, gloria et majestate divina aut Divinitate*.”¹⁹³ It is this assimilation of the *praesentia* to the *Divinitate* itself that may have provoked the suspicions of pantheism expressed against Koerbach, and thus accused him of Spinozism. Finally, it should be noted that Lewis Samuel Feuer refers, after Buxtorf, to the pantheistic use of the term *Shekynah* to the *Talmud*, while Warren Montag refers it to the *Zohar*.¹⁹⁴ However, the *Shekynah* is only the Divine Presence and not God Himself, as I pointed out earlier, it is the feminine expression of Divinity. It does not concern the eternal essence of God, but, as Ephraim E. Urbach has pointed out, it denotes His closeness (*nokhut*) to man, without cancelling out the sense of His distance, that is, of His transcendence.¹⁹⁵

9. Conclusion

In this article, I have endeavored to show the importance of Kabbalistic sources in the constitution of Spinozism, examining first the thesis that Kabbalah can be considered the “key to spinozism.” I then put this thesis in the historical framework that followed the publication of Wachter’s *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb oder, die von dem heutigen Judenthumb und dessen Geheimen Kabbala vergötterte Welt*. By distinguishing between practical and speculative

¹⁸⁵Spinoza, TTP, XV, 10. G. III, 177

¹⁸⁶Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. III, 18, English translation, S. Pines. Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press. 1963, II, p.476

¹⁸⁷Spinoza, KV, I, V, 2, G. I, 40, cf. J. J. Rozenberg, *Spinoza, le spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation*. p. 17

¹⁸⁸Spinoza, KV, II, 13, G. I, 34

¹⁸⁹Spinoza, *Ethics*, V, 17, corollary

¹⁹⁰Spinoza, *Ethics*, V, 36, corollary

¹⁹¹D. Lobel, A dwelling place for the Shekhinah. *Jewish Quarterly Review*. 90, 1999, pp. 103-125. The term *Shekynah*, literally meaning “residence,” is translated, by R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, in the verse of Deuteronomy xii, 5, as Gegenwart (Presence). *Der Pentateuch übersetzt und erläutert*. J. Kauffmann, Frankfurt a. M. S, V, 1878, p.176.

¹⁹²W. van Bunge, Introduction to M. R. Wielema (Ed.), *Adriaan Koerbach, A Light Shining in Dark Places, to Illuminate the Main Questions of Theology and Religion*. Leiden, Brill, 2011, p.32. J. Freudenthal translated the summary of this interrogation into German: *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza’s in Quellenschriften, Urkunden und nichtamtlichen Nachrichten*. Leipzig, Veit & comp, 1899, pp.119-121. L. S. Feuer translated it into English: *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism*. London, Routledge, 1987, pp.282-283 note 40.

¹⁹³J. Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum and Rabbinicum*. (Work by J. Buxtorf I, unfinished, but completed and published by his son). Basileae, L. König, 1639, p.2394.

¹⁹⁴W. Montag, That Hebrew Word”: Spinoza and the Concept of the Shekhinah. In H. M. Ravven, L. E. Goodman (Eds), *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy*. p.135. On the status of the notion of *Shekynah* in the *Zohar*, cf. S. ’Asulyan, *Qumatah shel ha-Shekynah: beyn ha-’Id r’a Rabah le-’Idr’a Zut’a*. In H. Kreisel, B. Huss, U. Ehrlich (Eds.), *Samkut ruhanyt. Ma’av’aqym ‘al koah tarbuty*. Beer Sheva, Ben Gurion University, 2010, pp.103-182. On the internal debates in the Jewish Tradition, having concerned the definition of the *Shekynah*, cf. T. Weiss, *Qyçuç benety’iot. ‘Avodat ha-Shekynah be’olamah shel sifrut ha-Qabalah ha-muqdemet*. Jerusalem, Magnes, 2015, pp.32-39.

¹⁹⁵E. E. Urbach, *Hazal: Pirqey ‘Emunot we-de’ot*. Jerusalem. Magnes, 1969, pp.29-59

Kabbalah, I have shown to what extent and in what ways Spinoza was truly influenced by the Lurianic Kabbalah, notably through his readings of R. Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo and R. Abraham Cohen Herrera. I subsequently put in parallel a number of notions specific to the Lurianic Kabbalah and those that seem central to grasp the logic of Ethics. I then examined the role that the notion of *Tsimtsum* (contraction of divine light) played in the interpretations of Spinozism, as well as the status of the notion of *Shehynah* (Divine Presence) and its connections to pantheism. Concerning the notion of *Tsimtsum*, I recalled the nature of the controversy between the Kabbalists on whether it should be understood in a literal or figurative way. I then showed that Spinoza, unable to integrate this notion into his philosophical system, because it involves that of creation and free will, was in fact leaning towards a figurative interpretation. Concerning the notion of *Shehynah*, I showed the reasons for the Spinozist refusal to think of God as being present.

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