

J A C O B ' S L A D D E R:
KABBALISTIC ALLEGORY IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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JACOB'S LADDER:
KABBALISTIC ALLEGORY
IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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O, please, reveal to me that wondrous ladder that descends from the heights of Heaven to our miserable Earth, that ladder that only the Wise can climb — but they, those who would learn the Divine Truth, they will ascend higher than the stars and higher than the planets. O, please, God, let me be one of those chosen.

Ivan Lopukhin. *The Spiritual Knight*

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INTRODUCTION

Kabbalah Then and Now: a Historical Perspective

Jewish mystical thought, widely known as Kabbalah, remains one of the most grossly misunderstood parts of Judaism. In traditional Judaism, Kabbalah refers to a set of esoteric teachings meant to define the inner meaning of both the Hebrew Bible and traditional Rabbinic literature, as well as to explain the significance of Jewish religious observances. Kabbalistic philosophy has long been the subject of speculative studies, which stemmed either from simple ignorance or from a general confusion between the original Jewish philosophical teaching and its later magical adaptations. Consequently, during the last few centuries, outside the margins of the Jewish religious establishments, Kabbalah has been associated merely with occultism and perceived as a type of Jewish magic.

In recent years, though, people's response to Kabbalah has been changing. Jewish mysticism, for generations practiced only in yeshivas by a few Orthodox Jews, suddenly has turned into a trendy New Age practice, thus becoming an integral part of popular culture. Madonna has published kabbalistic stories for children. Demi Moore publicly witnesses her interest in Jewish mysticism. A fancy retreat center in upstate New York invites everyone to "experience the mystical texts of Kabbalah in your own body while encountering a Tai-Chi-based movement conditioning to embody the Divine spirit and reconstruct the Divine essence that underlies all being, in your soul."¹ *Vogue* advertises the new "kabbalistic perfume" called *Tree of Life*; and the author of this manuscript has been recently asked to write a short essay on the importance of kabbalistic practices in fitness for a Russian glamour magazine. However, such interest,

although it looks puzzling at first, is certainly not new. During the last thousand years, Gentiles have turned to Kabbalah on multiple occasions and for multiple causes. For centuries — beginning in the early 1200s and arguably continuing until the present day — Kabbalah has functioned as a crossroads of European culture and Jewish mysticism.

The relations between kabbalistic teaching and European philosophy in the West have been already comprehensively acknowledged in academic criticism. From Francis Yates' classical tome *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* to the recently published *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: the Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)* by Allison Coudert, the influence of Kabbalah on non-Jewish intellectuals has been extensively studied and analyzed. By contrast, the influence of Kabbalah on Russian philosophy and literature is among the issues that still await a serious scholarly study. There are several reasons for this state of affairs. Russian-born scholars hesitate to include this subject in the scope of their research due to the fact that in the course of the twentieth century it mostly appeared to attract those pseudo-scholars who wished to combat the "almighty Judeo-Masonic conspiracy." Indeed, too often, upon spotting a new publication on the role of Kabbalah in Russian culture in a Moscow or St. Petersburg bookstore, a scholar encounters yet another fresh declaration that "the eighteenth-century Russian masons turned to the black magic of ancient Zionists because of their Masonic interest in the mystical and the supernatural," and that "these writers have influenced the rise of the Russian *intelligentsia* which, in its turn, led Russia to the Revolution and the Zionist rule of Yeltsin and Chubais."² In terms of Western research, most scholars of Jewish mysticism consider Kabbalah a strictly Judaic phenomenon. Accordingly, they are typically not interested in discussing its influence on either Russian thought or Russian literature. Slavic scholars, by contrast, are not broadly familiar with Jewish mysticism and, therefore, do not feel comfortable touching upon such an obscure subject, especially since the Russian published sources available to the Western reader remain quite limited and are often politically biased. As a result, serious research into this topic is still lacking.

Yet the question of the role of Kabbalah in Russian literary tradition is quite important. Kabbalistic symbolism has been broadly used and encoded in Russian belles lettres of certain periods. Understanding it is crucial in helping the reader not only to decipher many important metaphors and images in literary works that now seem peculiar and enigmatic, but also in helping change the scholarly perspective of the role of mystical and magical Jewish imagery in Russian literature. Such an understanding also proves that the majority of so-called “kabbalistic” concepts used in such anti-Semitic essays as Pavel Florensky’s *Israel in Past, Present, and Future* or Vasilii Rozanov’s *Ekhad or Thirteen Wounds of Yushchinsky* did not originate in Jewish philosophy but in Russian literary imagery based on the largely mythological stereotypes. These stereotypes created a particular interpretation of Kabbalah that has predominated in Russian anti-Semitic works up to the present time, as amply demonstrated by numerous pamphlets distributed by the National-Patriotic political camp. This book analyzes the process of the formation and gradual development of these stereotypes and their appeal to targeted audiences.

Until recently, most research discussed the use of kabbalistic motifs in Russian literature without distinguishing them from other occult elements that intrigued Russian intellectuals. However, lately there has been a rise of interest in the study of Kabbalah in Russian thought. Russian scholars Konstantin Burmistrov and Maria Endel have recently produced a number of articles on the place of Kabbalah in the doctrine of Russian Freemasonry. Burmistrov has also discussed the influence of Kabbalah on early twentieth-century Russian philosophy. American scholar Judith Kornblatt has analyzed the influence of Kabbalah on the writings of Vladimir Soloviev. Nikolai Bogomolov has briefly touched on the issue of occult kabbalistic symbolism in the poetry of Russian Silver Age, and Israeli scholar Mikhail Vaiskopf has discussed the question of kabbalistic allegory in Russian Romanticism.³ Still, in comparison with other topics, this theme remains under-investigated; and, moreover, none of these studies either argue for the presence of the specific genre of a “kabbalistic text” in Russian literature or name those literary devices that construct such a text. Even in recent

literary studies, such as Mikhail Vaiskopf's book, Kabbalah has not been analyzed as a particular type of mystical poetics. Instead, authors have concentrated primarily on historical and religious or philosophical questions, rather than offering a detailed close literary analysis of the imagery and narrative forms that characterize the development of the kabbalistic narrative in Russian literary works. The existing scholarship on the influence of Kabbalah on Russian literature is still limited to the discussion of the role of kabbalistic symbolism in disjointed literary works that belong to various historical eras or literary schools.

While scholars have successfully presented the historical and cultural background that shaped the interest of Russian thinkers in Kabbalah during particular periods, they have aspired neither to provide a complete analysis of the evolution of the perception of Kabbalah in Russian consciousness, nor to show the reflection of this evolution in Russian literature. By contrast, this volume follows the evolution of kabbalistic symbolism in Russian intellectual culture as reflected in Russian literature from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. The most important sources for this manuscript are found in the archival collections of Widener Library at Harvard University, the New York Public Library, private possessions, and major Moscow and St. Petersburg archives (the Russian State Library, the Russian National Library, and the Russian State Archives of Literature and Art).

Historical research has been combined with a detailed analysis of literary criticism on Russian and Western Romanticism and Modernism, Russian eighteenth-century literature, and Russian Freemasonry. This volume explores Jewish and Christian mystical philosophy and esotericism, cultural history and the history of ideas, Western historical periods and literary movements, and Russian media. However, the main focus of this book is the close study of literary works presented in their broad cultural and historical context. This investigation covers the reflection of kabbalistic allegory in Russian poetry and prose over the course of two centuries, with special attention to Russian pre-Romantic literary works of the last decades of the eighteenth century, Romanticism, and the Silver Age. This coverage includes the most

famous authors of these periods as well as the virtually unknown or forgotten.

Recently, a new trend in Kabbalah scholarship has developed, which is oriented towards studying kabbalistic texts as a poetic narrative rather than just theosophical or mystical-experiential literature.⁴ While this book intends to look at texts originally written as literary, not theosophical, pieces, the majority of these texts followed specific literary codes and tropes that originated from authentic theosophical kabbalistic texts. The methodological goal of this study is to identify and interpret those specific linguistic and metaphoric devices that formed particular “kabbalistic” allegorical “codes” in Russian literature, which over the time began to be used as typical stereotypes for any writer who adhered to the use of kabbalistic allegory in either poetry or fiction. Thus, rather than simply studying the influence of kabbalistic thought on various Russian writers, this work argues for the existence of a tradition of kabbalistic narrative in Russian literature and shows the development of this tradition from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

This argument encompasses not only issues involving the written text, but also those cultural factors that played a significant role in the interpretive process of kabbalistic symbolism in Russian literary works. Further, this study advances an analysis of the mystical poetics created by Kabbalah through a structuralist and culturally-semiotic reading that on the one hand, can ignite interest in the mystical and poetic endeavors of those Russian authors who have been influenced by Kabbalah, and on the other hand, will show the major elements characteristic of this “kabbalistic” narrative. Thus, from a wide body of literary works, only the texts that most clearly reflect the typical literary interpretation of Kabbalah during certain particular periods have been chosen. A detailed study of cultural semiotics (i.e., various cultural codes) that corresponded to the particular interpretation and use of specific models of “kabbalistic allegory” further advances the literary analysis. The theoretical conclusions presented in this study are based on closely studied literary material as well as secondary sources such as memoirs, newspaper articles, and non-literary works that, when presented

together, help to deconstruct established clichés and argue for the development of a specific genre in Russian literature that can be understood only through the prism of a broad cultural appreciation and interpretation of Kabbalah as theosophy and poetics.

The close reading of a range of texts serves as the basis for an analysis of the practical application of three central kabbalistic allegories to Russian letters: the allegory of divine emanations (*sefirot*), the allegory of Wisdom (*Hokhmah*), and that of primordial Adam (*Adam Kadmon*). The book consists of five chapters. The first chapter offers the classification of diverse eighteenth-century Russian kabbalistic texts and sources, the vast majority of which remain unpublished. It then discusses the role of three central kabbalistic allegories in the Freemasonic literature of the second half of the eighteenth century. The chapter establishes the origins of these images, discusses their interpretation in Russian Masonic non-literary texts, and shows their transformation in major eighteenth-century literary works. This part of the book helps to fully illuminate the important place that kabbalistic allegory occupied in Russian pre-Romantic literature and enables a better understanding of the first stage of the dissemination of kabbalistic images in Russian literary circles, which would later provide a base for the further development of kabbalistic symbolism. Unlike the works of Burmistrov and Endel, which primarily concentrate on the study of kabbalistic imagery in eighteenth-century non-literary texts, this chapter aims to focus on the role of kabbalistic imagery in Russian literary pre-Romantic consciousness.

The second chapter discusses the mutation of kabbalistic imagery in the works of Russian romantic writers. It argues that in the early nineteenth century the Russian understanding of kabbalistic teaching underwent a significant transformation. In eighteenth-century Masonic archives, the quantity of magically oriented materials is considerably less than the number of materials on ethical and mystical themes. Russian philosophical poetry of that period, written mostly under the influence of Masonic ideology, thus shows less interest in magical Kabbalah than in the ethical mystical allegories of Adam Kadmon, Wisdom, and *sefirot*. Occult and alchemical texts, although widespread among eighteenth-century

Freemasons, had no significant influence on Russian eighteenth-century literature and achieved popularity among literary circles only between 1810 and 1820. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, Russian intellectuals began to perceive Kabbalah as a magical science rather than a mystical philosophy. They brought forward the concept of kabbalistic “scientific mysticism,” which is often referred to as *kabbalistika* rather than *Kabbalah* in Russian literature of this period. The chapter analyzes the development of this approach, which gradually reduced the meaning of Kabbalah to simple numerological magic in the works of the younger generation of Russian romantic writers.

In the 1840s, Romantic “scientific” mysticism began to fall out of favor and was progressively replaced by materialistic positivism. By the mid-nineteenth century, the interest in kabbalistic scientific magic gradually lost its place in Russian literature. The third and fourth chapters analyze the role of this new interpretation of Kabbalah in the poetic works of Russian authors of the Silver Age. The close literary analysis of these works serves as an example of the practical embodiment of modernist theory: that magical kabbalistic symbolism can be used as a tool in an attempt to reconstruct the world prior to Adam’s fall — the era when language was powerful enough to create rather than describe reality. The two prior Russian interpretations of kabbalistic allegories of Wisdom, Adam Kadmon, and *sefirot* — the magical and the mystical, fuse together in the literature of Silver Age in an attempt to construct a new artistic philosophy. These chapters also briefly touch upon the role that the romantic and modernist interpretation of kabbalistic symbolism played in the formation of the “kabbalistic” aspect of the Judeo-Masonic myth that represented Kabbalah as a secret Judeo-Masonic magical teaching. A detailed analysis of the Judeo-Masonic mythology is beyond the scope of this study. However, this work aspires to significantly change the scholarly perspective of the roots of “kabbalistic” stereotypes in twentieth-century anti-Semitic propaganda by proving that the interpretation of the kabbalistic imagery in anti-Semitic political works that formed around 1905–1917 mirrors and elaborates on those particular cultural semiotics of Kabbalah that originated in Russian romantic literary circles and

became widespread in the literary milieus of the early twentieth century.

The development of kabbalistic allegory in the Russian literary tradition cannot be fully comprehended without first analyzing its evolution within European philosophy. Kabbalah arrived from the West; therefore, it is necessary to trace the phases in the gradual formation of the body of texts that eventually reached Russia in the middle of the eighteenth century. As already noted, during the last thousand years Gentiles have turned to Kabbalah on numerous occasions and for numerous reasons. Whereas some were interested in its theoretical mysticism, others considered Kabbalah an occult doctrine and used it as a practical manual for magical purposes. There were scholars who tried to find in kabbalistic teaching the traces of lost primordial knowledge, and those who believed that its postulates would reform established religious traditions. However, as K. Burmistrov pointed out, no single Christian kabbalist tradition existed; therefore, when discussing such phenomena as Christian Kabbalah, we should rather refer to a certain type of comprehension of Jewish mystical teaching in non-Jewish consciousness.⁵ For many Christian apprentices of Kabbalah, their interest in kabbalistic doctrine went hand in hand with that of other non-dogmatic religious teachings. As a result, the scholar has to be extremely accurate while discussing and tracing kabbalistic images in Christian thought, since many of them have parallels in Gnosticism or Neo-Platonism.

The body of kabbalistic literature is very large and the aim of this work is not by any means to shed new light on the development of Kabbalah in the West. Yet a brief summary of its development will introduce the reader to the background necessary for a later focus on Russian literary works. During the last century, secular scholarship has applied various approaches to the study of Kabbalah, from classical works by Gershom Scholem to more recent studies by Yehuda Liebes and Moshe Idel. While the classical tradition, started by Scholem, has illuminated kabbalistic texts mostly from historical, theosophical, or mystical-experiential perspectives, the newer research, represented, for example, by Michael Fishbane or Nathan

Wolsky, has contributed to the study of kabbalistic narrative as a literary text, concentrating on its mystical poetics.⁶

In order to examine kabbalistic narrative, it is important to name and identify those particular poetic images that originated in Jewish kabbalistic tradition as philosophical allegories but simultaneously can be also clearly regarded as literary metaphors. Those images form a special type of mystical poetics that is essential for our understanding of the place that Kabbalah occupied in the Russian literary imagination. It is also important to summarize and briefly analyze the particular narrative structure that was characteristic of the most essential kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*, since this structure was widely used and interpreted in Russian literary works that were influenced by kabbalistic mysticism. Two major aspects in theosophical Jewish Kabbalah also require explanation, as they later evolved into two separate Christian traditions, the mystical and the occult, which in some historical periods either merged with or detached from each other. The understanding of the constituents of each of these two traditions prior to the beginning of the modern period will assist in tracing the later development of kabbalistic hermeneutics in eighteenth-century Europe, and consequently in the modern Russian literary tradition.

A detailed analysis of Jewish mystical literature remains outside the boundaries of this research; therefore we will concentrate here on only few texts that belong to this tradition. The first is the early Jewish mystical text, *Sefer Yetzirah* (*The Book of Creation*), which is devoted to speculation concerning God's creation of the world and its present structure.⁷ *Sefer Yetzirah* describes the universe as being created through numerological and linguistic principles and introduces the concept of ten primal numbers, known as *Sefirot*, which, in combination with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, represent the plan of Creation, of all higher and lower things, or "the body of the universe." According to *Sefer Yetzirah*, the first emanation from the spirit of God was the *ruach* (spirit or air) that produced fire, which, in its turn, generated water.⁸ As the numbers from two to ten are derived from the number one, so the ten *Sefirot* are derived from one, the spirit of God. God, however, is both the beginning and end of the *Sefirot*, "their end being in their beginning

and their beginning in their end, even as the flame is connected with the ashes.”⁹ Hence the *Sefirot* must not be conceived as emanations in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather as modifications of the divine spirit.

According to *Sefer Yetzirah*, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet produced the material world, for they are the formative powers of all existence and development. By means of these elements the actual creation of the world took place, and the ten *Sefirot*, which before this had only an ideal existence, became realities. Both the universe and mankind are viewed in *Sefer Yetzirah* in as products of the combination these mystical letters.¹⁰ The linguistic theories of the author of *Sefer Yetzirah* are the fundamental component of his philosophy. *Sefer Yetzirah* introduces the idea that later would become essential for Kabbalah: the idea that God created heaven and earth by means of divine alphabet.

The *creative methods* (i.e., various magical and mystical formulas based on various letters and numbers) discussed in the *Sefer Yetzirah* served as the basis for a new type of “linguistic mysticism.” This new type of mysticism was founded on the belief that a mystic could establish personal contact with the divine realm through the specific principles of numerical and linguistic speculation. The first such method, called *gematria*, meant discovering the numerical meaning of the word and establishing a connection with words of the same numerical meaning. The second method, in which letters of a word were used as abbreviations for whole sentences, was named *notarikon*. The third one, *tmura*, dealt with combinations and replacements of words in a sentence according to the principles above. These principles formed that particular role that *Sefer Yetzirah* played in the later literary mystical tradition—it was the first text that defined Creation as a linguistic and semiotic process, which has been recently described by Elliot Wolfson as “a nexus of language, imagination, and world-making that is indicative of poetic orientation to being in the world.”¹¹ As Wolfson observes, for the kabbalist, as for the poet, “language, the multivalent vocalizations of the unspeakable name, informs us about the duplicitous nature of truth . . . ; all that exists is a symbolic articulation of the . . . name, the word that is not a sign but a showing

that manifests in the façade of reality in its inexhaustible linguistic potentiality.”¹²

The majority of scholars define the developments in Kabbalah between the twelfth and the sixteenth century as “early Kabbalah.”¹³ During this time kabbalistic mysticism separated into two major trends: the ecstatic and the theosophical (also known as theurgical).¹⁴ The theosophical trend concentrated mainly on the study of mystical commentary on the ancient texts that enabled knowledge of and intimate contact with God. The ecstatic Kabbalah focused on the practical applications of kabbalistic symbolism to mystical meditations that could help the mystic achieve contact with the divine realm, and on descriptions of that mystical experience. The techniques that were used in those meditations included letter-numbers combinations, the visualization of *sefirot* as vessels filled with liquid of various colors, and concentration on the words of the commandments.¹⁵

The goals of both the ecstatic and the theurgical mystics were the same: to reach mystical experience by understanding the true meaning of the Torah and to reveal the divine secrets of being. But for an ecstatic Kabbalist the combinations of divine names revealed the path to these secrets, while the adepts of theurgical Kabbalah concentrated on the mystical importance of Jewish religious duties and the whole Torah as the “face of God.” Theurgists and theosophers regarded Jewish religious duties as mystical codes that contained ciphered divine secrets. To understand those secrets, one should not only know and practice these duties, especially the prayers, but also observe and practice them with mystical “intention,” or *kavana*. Therefore, moral purity and the virtuous life were an essential part of the theurgist’s mystical practices.

The development of kabbalistic thought in the thirteenth century was marked by the appearance of the most influential book in the history of Kabbalah in Europe, the book of the *Zohar* (*The Divine Light*). The *Zohar* is the first text that not only contains particular imagery that is reflected in later texts, but also is notable for its particular plot structure. The book consists of the “classical” zoharic story, a mystical allegorical “travelogue” that soon would become a cliché literary frame widely used in Christian kabbalistic texts

first in the West and then in Russia. The original story describes the wanderings of famous Rabbi Shimon Ben Yohai in Palestine. During his wanderings, Ben Yohai meets various people and involves himself in philosophical discussions. The composition is filled with numerous interpretations of the Bible, especially Genesis and The Song of Songs, and stresses the importance of a mystical approach to religion. It has multiple fairy-tale features as well, including miraculous donkey drivers, wizards, and wandering desert hermits. The motif of travel is deeply linked to the development of the plot; and the anonymity of most characters signifies their role as “everymen,” engaged in a mystical quest in search of spiritual wisdom. It is also important to stress that this is a “mystical” rather than a usual travelogue, since the motif of an earthly journey in the *Zohar* is directly linked with the “heavenly” travels that the human soul experiences during spiritual meditation. This meditation, based usually on prayer and often experienced through visualizing the divine realm through *sefirot*, permits the adept to visit other worlds, receive various visions, and pronounce prophecies. The *Zohar* regards this meditation as a spiritual transformation, similar to death; and the spiritual path of the meditating adept often parallel those of the dead.¹⁶

According to the text of the *Zohar*, God manifests himself in divine light (in Hebrew *Zohar*), the flow of which is an emanation of the creative energy that actually forged the Creation. The *Zohar* describes this emanation as ten impulses of the divine light, which can be regarded as ten stages of Creation or ten steps by which the divine light comes to earth. The *Zohar* presents *sefirot* as vessels through which the divine energy, *ein-sof*, emanates from the divine realm into the human world. Through this process of emanation, each *sefirah* successfully reveals to humans a particular aspect of divine nature. The *Zohar* characterizes the first *sefirah* as the divine glory (*Keter*, i.e., the origin of Creation), and *Hokhmah* as the second *sefirah* and the first step in the Creation. The other *sefirot* are *Binah* (understanding), *Din* (judgment) *Hesed* (mercy), *Tiferet* (beauty), *Hod* (majesty), *Nezah* (victory), *Yesod* (foundation), and *Malkhut* (kingdom). Together they compose a symbolic figure, known as the “tree of life,” that rests on three pillars. The central pillar forms

the spine through which the divine dew flows down from the higher realm through the middle world and into the lower spheres, represented as a womb. This metaphor later becomes one of the key allegories of kabbalistic symbolism not only in Jewish but also in Christian Kabbalah and later in kabbalistic alchemy.¹⁷ The highest *sefirah*, *Keter*, plays the role of the divine seed, placed in the divine womb, the *sefirah* of *Hokhmah*, which flows out of *Hokhmah* into the third *sefirah* of *Bihah*, the heavenly mother, and then down into the sea of nothingness. The third *sefirah* thus becomes the river that flows out of its source and is subsequently divided on its way into different streams, until all its tributaries flow into the great sea of the last *sefirah* *Malkhut*, known also as *Shekhinah*.¹⁸

The image of *Hokhmah*, or Divine Wisdom, is among the most important in the system of *Zohar*. It is also essential for the understanding of Russian kabbalistic literary texts. In Hebrew in the famous line “in the beginning God created Heaven and Earth,” the words *in the beginning* (*bereshit*) suggest a possible double reading, since the word *reshit* comes from the word *rosh*, which means “head.”¹⁹ This duality resulted in the belief among some thinkers that the Creation is actually a result of the divine idea of the Deity, his actual “thought” or “wisdom” (in Hebrew, *Hokhmah*). Rabbi Azriel of Gerona writes in his *Explanation of the Ten Sefirot*: “The second *sefirah* is called Wisdom (*Hokhmah*). It is the brain of the Deity, the inner thought, the hidden things, which belong to our Lord, our God. It is the beginning of conceptualization and stands for the angelic power.”²⁰ It is important to note, though, that in Russian mystical works the image of Wisdom (*Sophia*) is closer to the Jewish *Shekhinah* than to *Hokhmah*, even in those moments when the actual term *Hokhmah* is used. *Shekhinah*, the lowest and the only earthly *sefirah*, is detached from the others by Adam’s sin and lost in the material world. Governed by her remembrance of the time when she was united with other *sefirot*, she is constantly searching for the ways to return to her divine “sisters.” It is also worth mentioning here that in Kabbalah Creation is seen not as a linear but as a cyclical process, since in this process the divine energy makes a circle and returns to the Godhead. Therefore the Creation is endless and is regarded as an infinite

process of *ein-sof* (no-end), just as the essence of God is an infinite *ein-sof*.

Regarded as the conception of Creation, *Hokhmah* is always associated with love and sexual energy. The pictures found in kabbalistic texts portray *sefirot* as the result of mystical intercourse in which a ray of the divine light is rendered as a seed placed by *Hokhmah* in the womb of the divine mother, symbolized by the *sefirah* of *Keter*. Therefore, kabbalistic literature sees *Hokhmah* as the *sefirah* that symbolizes divine love. This love is a bond between God and his creatures, and is physical rather than platonic. As Scholem notes, "The organic symbolism equates the primordial point with the seed sown in the womb of 'the supernal mother,' who is Binah. The womb is brought to fruition through the fertilization of the semen and gives birth to the children who are the emanations."²¹ Kabbalah interprets male-female sexual relations as an allegorical representation of the creative "sexual" relation between the *sefirot* and, as a result, reinforces a traditional Jewish focus on marital relations. By contrast with many other esoteric systems, sex in Kabbalah is seen as giving life, not death. For example, one way of uniting with *Shekhinah* is for a male Jew to have intercourse with his wife on the Sabbath.

One of the *Zohar's* most important idea is that man can affect the cosmic processes by his deeds and thoughts. This idea had great influence on ecstatic Kabbalah, in which prayer was regarded as a meditation that helped man to unite with the divine. An ecstatic kabbalist influenced by the *Zohar* looked at prayer as a tool that would help him to send upwards the impulses which "help to promote greater harmony in the *Sefirotic* realm, and to succeed in bringing down the resulting flow of divine grace and blessing."²²

The theosophical branch of kabbalistic mysticism that stressed the moral qualities of a mystic over all others became predominant in later, Lurianic Kabbalah, named after the spiritual leader of the school, Rabbi Isaac Luria.²³ In his teaching Luria concentrated not on the idea of the role of divine names in creating the world, but on the place that God and Man both occupied in the process of creation. In his theological system, Luria followed early Kabbalah in its interpretation of *ein-sof*. He asserted that creation took place

when God “contracted” his infinite light in order to allow for a “conceptual space” [inside himself] to give birth to the *sefirot* and eventually to the world. Luria called this process *tsimzum* in Hebrew, a word that might be translated as either “condensation” or “withdrawal.”²⁴

Luria’s doctrine primarily concentrated on the allegory of primordial Adam, in Hebrew *Adam Kadmon*, which became the cornerstone of the Lurianic kabbalistic tradition.²⁵ As with the symbolism of *Hokhmah*, the allegory of Adam Kadmon derives from the duality that exists in the first chapters of the Bible, and, in particular, from two different versions of the story of the creation of man. In Genesis 1:11, man is created as the first of the creatures; in Genesis 2:4, he is created last.²⁶ This duality resulted in the kabbalistic interpretation of the creation of man, according to which the first man was created not as the last but as the first of all creatures. This first man was called Adam Kadmon, and differed greatly from human beings as we now know them, resembling not so much a material man as a “crystal vessel” full of divine light. In the early Kabbalah the figure of Adam Kadmon served as one of the allegorical representations of the *Tree of Sefirot*, where each *sefirah* represented one part of Adam’s body.

The concept of Adam Kadmon can be seen as a natural development of the idea that man has been made in the image of God, and therefore his structure is divine. Luria’s theosophy, however, gave a totally new reading to this image. According to Luria’s teaching, prior to the moment of the biblical fall the first material man, Adam HaRishon (the first man) and his spiritual ego, Adam Kadmon (the primordial man), had been united as one. God and man had existed in close harmony, and man knew all the secrets of the divine world. The fall of Adam changed this order. The evil forces from the underground world, *qlippoth*, ascended into the world of *sefirot*, and, under pressure, the “crystal vessel” broke into a million pieces, each containing a spark of the divine light. Adam Kadmon was destroyed, and material man, Adam Rishon, lost his eternal life and great knowledge. The exile from Paradise is regarded in Kabbalah as an allegorical exile from *Hokhmah*, i.e., from the Godhead, and thus from unity with God as well.

According to Luria, given that the soul of Adam was the original human soul that contained all the souls of mankind, at the moment of birth each human receives a small piece of the crystal vessel of Adam Kadmon with one spark of the divine light inside. As the major task of a mystic is to reunite himself with God, therefore, the primary aim of man is to rekindle this spark in order to bring oneself back to the source of the divine light and to spiritual reunification with *Hokhmah*. This process of spiritual restoration, called *tikkun* (restoration or mending) in Hebrew, can be achieved by observing moral and religious laws.²⁷

The above concepts, adopted by Christian mystics and eventually transplanted onto Russian soil, constituted the basis for the interpretation of kabbalistic allegory in the Russian literary imagination. The onset of Christian kabbalistic tradition is rooted in Renaissance theology.²⁸ Most Renaissance Christian scholars regarded the study of ancient Jewish wisdom as one step towards the union between the Jews and the Christians, universal religion, and an inauguration of the golden age; consequently, they viewed their study of Kabbalah and Hebrew as primary instruments for deciphering the mysteries of divine creation, signaling the approaching redemption. In Christian kabbalistic tradition the central idea of Kabbalah was the idea of the power of the “divine names,” united with the belief that all the secrets of divine and earthly beings could be decoded and revealed by manipulation of the names of God as various letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Natural magic (*magia naturalis*) was regarded as a less potent level of Kabbalah, which in its entirety was perceived as the quintessence of magic. The practical application of the “divine names” for magical purposes was further developed in such influential works as Johannes Reuchlin’s *De Arte Kabbalistica* (*On the Art of Kabbalah*) and Agrippa of Nettesheim’s *De Occulta Philosophia* (*On the Occult Philosophy*) that brought forward the idea that numerous anagrams of the divine name could be used to call upon demons and angels.²⁹ Agrippa attributed to each demon its own *sefirah* and connected these *sefirot* with astrological signs, which he believed could also be used to summon demons.³⁰

The occultists no longer regarded Kabbalah to be an integral part of Judaism. Moreover, they stressed that Jews had misinterpreted