

HOW MUCH KABBALAH IN THE STAR OF REDEMPTION?

by WARREN ZEV HARVEY

Students of Rosenzweig's theology have as a rule downplayed, ignored, or denied outright its relationship to the Jewish mystical tradition. This long-standing reticence with regard to the question of Rosenzweig's Jewish mystical sources may be at least in part due to the rationalist prejudice that to connect Rosenzweig's thought with mysticism would be to besmirch it. This reticence has surely been encouraged by several anti-mystical remarks of Rosenzweig's,¹ but these are far less in number than his anti-philosophic remarks, and no one would think of denying that Rosenzweig was influenced by the philosophic tradition! In any event, Prof.

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1. E.g., after referring to Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel as "a Zionist, mystic and idealist," he added: "each, to me, a worse term of obliquity than the last" – see Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1961), p. 104 [*Briefe* (Berlin, 1935), p. 411]; cf. Rosenzweig's remark about Buber, p. 105 [*Briefe* p. 461]. Cf. *Star of Redemption*, tr. W. Hallo (New York, 1970), pp. 207-208 (German: *Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt, 1921) II, pp. 154-155).

Moshe Idel's paper is one of the first serious attempts to assess the relationship of Rosenzweig to the Kabbalah.²

Let me begin by summarizing somewhat bluntly and impressionistically the biographical picture that emerges from Idel's paper. Unsatisfied by the rationalistic Judaism of the Emancipation, young Rosenzweig almost converted to Christianity in 1913. Like similarly unsatisfied Jews in the 19th and early 20th centuries, he was attracted by Christianity's downright humanization of God (*Gottvermenschlichung*); what ultimately prevented his conversion was his discovery that the Judaism of the Emancipation was not the genuine Judaism of the Bible and the Rabbis.³ In his 1914 essay, "Atheistic Theology," Rosenzweig embraced the approach to the relationship between God and man found in a dictum of the Aggadah attributed to Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai: "God said: 'When you do not testify to Me, I am not.'" ⁴ Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai is designated there by Rosenzweig as "the Master of the Kabbalah,"⁵ which seems to indicate that Rosenzweig considered the Kabbalah to be in the spirit of this aggadic dictum. In the parallel discussion of this dictum in the *Star of Redemption*, Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai is once again designated as "the Master of the Kabbalah."⁶ In other words, it was the Judaism of "the Master of the Kabbalah" which made it both possible and necessary for Rosenzweig to remain a Jew. Rosenzweig's early interest in Jewish mysticism is again suggested by references to the *Zohar* and to the Lurianic Kabbalah in two essays written in 1917

2. When, in 1980, Idel presented his paper and I responded to it, we were unaware of Prof. Nahum N. Glatzer's "Was Franz Rosenzweig a mystic?," *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed., S. Stein and R. Loewe (University, Ala., 1979), pp. 121-132. Glatzer and Idel's papers, written independently of one another, are the first two serious attempts to understand Rosenzweig's relation to the Kabbalah. [Interestingly, neither of Gershom Scholem's essays dealing with the *Star* — "On the 1930 Edition of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), 320-324; "Franz Rosenzweig and his *Star of Redemption*" [Heb.], in *Devarim be-go* (Tel Aviv, 1975), 407-425 — suggest any mystical or Kabbalistic influence *per se*. However, the latter essay, originally composed in 1930 as a eulogy for Rosenzweig, does remark upon the similarity between the contrast drawn by Rosenzweig between the "timeless" quality of German Idealism philosophy and the "time-bound" quality of his own "New Thinking" and a distinction drawn by the 13th century Spanish Kabbalist Abraham ibn Latif between the approach of Neo-Aristotelian philosophy and the Kabbalah — Ed.]

3. *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), pp. 531-532; n.b. reference to "personlicher Einfahrung."

4. "Gott spricht: wenn ihr mich nicht bezeugt, so bin ich nicht" (*Kleinere Schriften*, p. 289). Cf. *Sifre*, Deuteronomy 346: "Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai says... *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God* [Isaiah 43:12]. When you are my witnesses, I am God; and when you are not my witnesses, as it were I am not God!" (cf. *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* 12:6 and other parallels).

5. *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 289.

6. *Star*, p. 171 (German, II, p. 107). Rosenzweig here quotes the midrash thus: "Wenn ihr mich bezeugt, so bin ich Gott, und sonst nicht."

– namely, “It is Time”⁷ and the so-called “Germ-cell of the *Star*.”⁸ Rosenzweig may have seen the *Star* itself as being a response to Emancipation Judaism analogous to the response of the *Zohar* to Maimonideanism.⁹ In any case, the *Star* may be described as an attempt to recapture and to reformulate the Judaism of “the Master of the Kabbalah.”¹⁰

All this may sound exaggerated, even preposterous. But the question which must be asked following Idel’s paper is just what importance the Kabbalistic influences to which he has pointed do have in Rosenzweig’s theological system? Are they mere curiosities, or do they play an integral role? Idel has argued that the Kabbalah influenced Rosenzweig’s approach to all three of his primal relational concepts: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. But what was the weight of this influence? Toward an answer to this question, let us now consider the evidence brought by Idel with regard to Creation, Revelation, and Redemption respectively.

7. In Glatzer, ed., *On Jewish Learning: Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 40 (*Kleinere Schriften*, p. 66).

8. *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 360. In the same year, Rosenzweig wrote to Eugen Rosenstock: “You [Christians] mysticized your dogma after you had set it up, we [Jews] did so before.” (*Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 346; *Judaism Despite Christianity*, ed. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, p. 111; *Briefe*, p. 669).

Again, compare Rosenzweig’s observation at the end of the “Germ-cell” (*Kleinere Schriften*, p. 372) concerning “the special stance of mysticism *between* true theology and true philosophy” with his observation in the *Star* (p. 106; German, II, p. 24; cf. *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 209) that the representative of the new thinking “stands between philosophy and theology.”

9. In remarks written in 1928 (cited above, n. 1), Rosenzweig recognizes explicitly only the Aggadah as faithful to the experiential “anthropomorphism” (he insists on the quotation marks) of the Bible. Both Christianity and the Kabbalah are presented as problematic responses to anti-anthropomorphic deviations from Biblical theology; the former a response to Hellenistic spiritualization, the latter to the Maimonidean *via negativa*. Asking what might be the analogous response to the Emancipation, Rosenzweig suggests – on the basis of “personal experience” – that it might be the great Jewish converts to Christianity in the 19th and early 20th centuries; however, it is just Rosenzweig’s “personal experience” which indicates that a very different response might be the decisive one, viz., the theology of the *Star of Redemption*. How far can the analogy between the *Star* and the *Zohar* be pushed? One might, e.g., compare the Hegelian residues in the *Star* with the Maimonidean residues in the *Zohar*. One might also compare the anti-anthropomorphic aberrations of the *Star* (its Christological elements?) with those of the Kabbalah (its *Gewimmel* of heavenly intermediaries). If in 1928 Rosenzweig was critical of the *Zohar*, he was for the same reasons critical of his own *Star*. It should, withal, be noted that Rosenzweig’s 1928 comments on “anthropomorphism” are thoroughly true to the aggadic dictum of “the Master of the Kabbalah” cited in his 1914 “Atheistic Theology.” To the extent that the historical Kabbalah reflected that dictum, it would not be the object of Rosenzweig’s criticism.

[Prof. Rivka Horwitz has drawn my attention to a remark in Rosenzweig’s diary from 30 June 1922: “Mein Problem hat seine echten Vorgänger *doch* in der Kabbala” (my problem has its forebearer in the Kabbalah) – *Briefe und Tagebücher* (Neihoff, 1979). p. 800 – Ed.]

10. In these last two statements, I may be treading beyond what is implied in Prof. Idel’s paper, but then again I might not be.

I. Creation

Idel's comments regarding Creation are based on a comparison of a text in the "Germ-cell" with several texts in the *Star*. In the "Germ-cell",¹¹ Rosenzweig speaks of the divine Being (*Sein*) which is the "point of origin" (*Keimpunkt*) of the divine reality (*Wirklichkeit*), and which precedes all manner of relationship, whether the relationship of God to the world, or that of God to Himself. Rosenzweig identifies this "divine reality" with Schelling's "dark ground" (*dunkel Grund*), and thereby argues against Schelling that the divine *Being* is *not* the "dark ground." Rosenzweig explains that the divine Being itself or the "point of origin" is "an internalization (*Verinnerung*) of God which *precedes* not only His self-revelation, but also His very Self," and he adds explicitly that this is "so far as I know, as the Lurianic Kabbalah teaches." It seems to me that Rosenzweig's phrase "internalization of God" reflects the Lurianic term *zimzum* (commonly translated "contraction"),¹² although I am not certain just how Rosenzweig's concept is related to the Lurianic doctrine of *zimzum* (or at least to what Rosenzweig *might have understood* to be that doctrine). Whatever may be the precise relationship between Rosenzweig's doctrine of the "point of origin" and the Lurianic Kabbalah, it remains that in this text from the "Germ-cell" Rosenzweig sets forward a doctrine of his own against Schelling's doctrine, which he explicitly identifies with a teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah.

In the parallel text in the *Star*,¹³ God's true nature is again presented as prior to Schelling's — and Eckhart's and Boehme's — "dark ground." If I understand that difficult text correctly, the notion of the divine as the "dark ground" is rejected — on the basis of a Kantian critique — as confusing metaphysics and epistemology. According to Rosenzweig's argument in the *Star*, the Nought which is the "point of departure" (*Ausgangspunkt*) of our knowledge of God is only an *epistemological* Nought, not a metaphysical one; that is, it is the beginning not of God, but of our knowledge of God, and therefore is not a reality which can be described by the term "dark ground," or by any other term: it is "before Yea and Nay." Rosenzweig goes on to argue that God's essence is not the Nought given to our knowledge, but rather the non-Nought, i.e., "the infinity of all that is not Nought." Thus, whereas in the "Germ-cell" Rosenzweig had spoken of an apparently metaphysical "point of origin" which he had identified with the divine Being, in the *Star* he speaks of an expressly epistemological "point of departure,"¹⁴ carefully distinguished from the divine essence, which essence is in turn not a "point" but an "infinity." Whereas in

11. *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 360.

12. When this was read in 1980, Professor Gershom Scholem expressed doubt that "Verinnerung" would be used as a translation of *zimzum*.

13. *Star*, pp. 26-27 (German, I, p. 37).

14. The search for "the point" is a recurring theme in Rosenzweig. Cf. his unfinished last letter, written to Buber: "and now it comes, the point of all points, which the Lord has truly revealed to me in my sleep: the point for which there..." (*Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, p. 174 [Briefe, p. 633]). Might Rosenzweig have been influenced by Kabbalistic speculation concerning points (*nekudot*)?

the "Germ-cell" Rosenzweig had associated his doctrine of the divine Being with a teaching of the Lurianic Kabbalah, in the parallel passage from the *Star* he makes no mention thereof. Whether or not Rosenzweig considered his revised position in the *Star* still to be akin to the Lurianic Kabbalah, it is a clear fact that he had considered the earlier version of his position to be so.

Idel's discussion of the passage from the *Star* shows persuasively its general resemblance to pre-Lurianic Kabbalistic doctrines (Aught : Nought = *yesh* : *ayin* = *Hokhmah* : *Keter*; Infinity = *Ein Sof*),¹⁵ although it does not establish a definite link with any one Kabbalistic text. If his analysis is sound, then it seems that Rosenzweig, in pursuing what he had at first taken to be a Lurianic doctrine, had availed himself of earlier Kabbalistic sources.

The extent of Kabbalistic influences on Rosenzweig's theory of Creation requires much further investigation, but it is clear from Idel's discussion that it was influenced by the Kabbalah at a critical juncture in its development.

II. Revelation

Idel's comments on Revelation refer to Rosenzweig's discussion on "The Wanderings of the Shekhinah" in the *Star*, Part III, Book 3.¹⁶ This discussion is openly mystical, being introduced by the statement that "mysticism bridges the gap," just as the previous discussion, whose topic is Creation, is introduced by the statement that "Jewish mysticism bridges the gap."¹⁷

By his use here of the Lurianic doctrine of the scattered "sparks of divine Light," Rosenzweig in effect interprets his general comments about Revelation and love in the *Star*, Part II, Book 2. However, it seems clear to me that he does not need this particular doctrine in order to establish his theory of Revelation. In other words, even if Kabbalistic concepts were integral to Rosenzweig's notion of Creation, they do not appear to be so for his notion of Revelation, at least not according to the text discussed by Idel. The true importance of the Lurianic doctrine of the "scattered sparks" in Rosenzweig's system is manifestly not for Revelation, but for Redemption.

However, I might here raise a point that was not mentioned by Idel. Professor Ernst Simon has called attention to a similarity between a certain Kabbalistic view of Revelation and Rosenzweig's statement in a letter to Buber in 1925 that "The only immediate content of Revelation... is Revelation itself; with *va-yered* ("He came

15. According to these equations, another statement in the same passage in the *Star* – viz., "[T]he affirmation of the non-Nought circumscribes as inner limit the infinity or all that is not Nought. An infinity is affirmed: God's infinite essence, his infinite actuality, his physis (p. 26-27)..." – might be paraphrased simply: Above *Keter* is *Eyn Sof*.

16. *Star*, pp. 409-410 (German, III, pp. 192-193).

17. *Star*, p. 408 (German, III, p. 191).

down,” Exod. 19:20) it is essentially complete, with *va-yedabber* (“He spoke,” Exod. 20:1) interpretation sets in, and all the more so with *anokhi* (the “I” at the beginning of the Ten Commandments).”¹⁸

III. Redemption

The clearest Kabbalistic influence in the *Star* is undoubtedly in the concept of Redemption, as is evident from Idel’s presentation. This influence is not only clear, but it is also integral to the argument of the book as a whole. Having at the outset of the *Star* shattered the totality of the All into the three fragmentary pieces of God, world, and man, Rosenzweig explains toward the end of the *Star* how, by performing the commandments of the Torah, the Jew redeems God, the world, and man. Is this not the theme – and the climax – of the whole book? “In the innermost constrictions of the Jewish heart there shines the Star of Redemption.”¹⁹

Idel has observed that, already in his “Atheistic Theology,” Rosenzweig was occupied with the Kabbalistic notion of the unification of God.²⁰ The extent of Rosenzweig’s commitment to this Kabbalistic notion in the *Star* is striking. Thus, for example, in the midst of the above-mentioned climactic discussion of the commandments and Redemption, Rosenzweig writes matter-of-factly that before performing the commandments of the Torah, the Jew – not the kabbalist, but the regular unhyphenated Jew! – recites the formula: “for the sake of uniting the holy God and His Shekhinah” (*le-shem yihud kudsha’ berikh hu u-shekhinteh*).²¹ This formula, whose origin is in the Lurianic Kabbalah, was certainly not commonly recited in Rosenzweig’s Frankfurt! Nonetheless, Rosenzweig says that *the Jew* recites it. For Rosenzweig, the kabbalistic notion of the unification of God was indeed fundamental *to Judaism*, and so too it seems that for him this Lurianic formula was fundamental *to Judaism!*

Again, Rosenzweig’s discussion (in the same climactic section) of what he calls “Jewish Life in the Mystery of the Highest”²² evidently reflects the Kabbalistic concept of *mizvot zorekh Gavoha* – “the commandments are a need of the Most High.”²³ “The Jew internalizes himself into his interior only for the sake of the Most High, for God’s sake.” The commandments of the Torah are *for the sake of*

18. See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York, 1969), pp. 30-31, n. 3; also *On Jewish Learning: Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 118 (*Briefe*, p. 535).

19. *Star*, p. 411 (German, III, p. 194).

20. *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 288.

21. *Star*, loc. cit. Rosenzweig also mentions the continuation of the formula, “in awe and love” (*bi-dehīlu u-rehīmu*); cf. *Briefe*, p. 505 (the translation, “fear and trembling,” in *On Jewish Learning: Franz Rosenzweig* p. 116, is wrong).

22. *Star*, p. 408 (German, III, p. 191).

23. See, e.g., the Commentaries of Nahmanides and Bahye ben Asher on Exodus 29:46. Cf. Meir ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Kodesh: hakdamah and helek ha-avodah*; Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit, Sha’ar ha-Gadol*. Cf. my remarks in *Tradition* 15:4 (1976), pp. 16-17.

God! This interpretation of Jewish life in terms of the Kabbalistic mystery of *mizvot zorekh Gavoha* was of course anticipated already in Rosenzweig's remarks in his "Atheistic Theology," when he cited the aggadic dictum of the Master of the Kabbalah: "if you [Israel] do not testify to Me, I am not."

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Idel has demonstrated that there was a meaningful Kabbalistic influence on Rosenzweig. However, he has not succeeded in establishing to what extent Rosenzweig actually read Kabbalistic works. Did Rosenzweig study the *Zohar*? Which books of the Lurianic Kabbalah did he read? Or was his knowledge of the Kabbalah gleaned entirely from monographs written in German? These questions remain unanswered. Yet this is not a criticism of Idel's paper, which must after all be viewed as a ground-breaking effort. The fact is that little work has been done on the question of the Hebrew sources used by Rosenzweig in the *Star*. To be sure, Professor Nahum Glatzer has listed many of these sources in the index he compiled for the second edition of the *Star* (1930), but many are still unidentified. Until there is a careful analysis of Rosenzweig's use of Hebrew — and especially aggadic — sources, it will be difficult to determine with any precision his knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of Kabbalistic books.

Was Rosenzweig a mystic? This question, like the question "Was Rosenzweig a philosopher?", depends of course upon how one defines the term. Idel did not claim that Rosenzweig was a "mystic," and I certainly do not intend to claim this, although there is no doubt whatsoever that Rosenzweig is much closer to the Kabbalistic tradition than to the Maimonidean tradition.

Rosenzweig's attitude toward the Kabbalah reminds me somewhat of that of Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340 — c. 1410).²⁴ Crescas was an accomplished philosopher who wrote an uncompromising critique of the philosophic tradition of his day, and was influenced by the Kabbalah with regard to theological questions on several crucial points. As far as I know, Rosenzweig never read Crescas. The late Professor Harry Austryn Wolfson published his *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* in 1929, the year of Rosenzweig's death. Had Rosenzweig lived to read this monumental work, he would have encountered a thinker whom he might have found even closer to his own heart than Judah Halevi.

But enough speculations!

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24. Eliezer Schweid has remarked on similarities between Crescas' thought and Rosenzweig's. See his introduction to the photo-reprint of the *editio princeps* of Crescas' *Or Adonai* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 69, which was issued in the same year as a separate book, *Ha-Filosofia ha-Datit shel Rabbi Hasdai Cresca*. On Crescas and the Kabbalah, see my essay, "Kabbalistic Elements in Crescas' *Light of the Lord*" [Heb.], *Mehkerei Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisra'el* II (1982-3), pp. 75-109.