The last few decades have witnessed the veritable explosion of “new perspectives” and horizons in the academic study of Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism. From the pioneering work of the late Professor Gershom Scholem, and the establishment of the study of Jewish Mysticism as a legitimate scholarly pursuit, we witness a scene nowadays populated by men and women, Jews and non-Jews, who have challenged, (re)constructed, and expanded upon Scholem’s work.[2]

These men and women themselves have been variously praised and criticized themselves for sometimes blurring the lines between academician and practitioner of Kabbalah and mysticism.[3]

Professor Boaz Huss of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has done
extensive work in this area.[4]
One of the most impressive examples of this fusion of identities is Professor Yehuda Liebes (Jerusalem, 1947-) of Hebrew University, who completed his doctoral studies under Scholem, and rose to prominence himself by challenging scholarly orthodoxies established by his mentor.

On a personal note, the initial encounter between so-called ‘traditional’ notions of Kabbalah and academic scholarship was a jarring one, calling into question aspects of faith and fealty to long-held beliefs.[5]
In a moment of presumption, I would imagine that this same process is part and parcel of many peoples’ paths to a more mature and nuanced conception of Torah and tradition, having undergone the same experience. The discovery of scholar/practitioners like Prof. Liebes, and the fusion of mysticism and scholarship in their constructive (rather than deconstructive) work has served to help transcend and erase the tired dichotomies and conflicts that previously wracked the traditional readers’ mind.[6]

It is in this sense, and in honor of the 33rd of the ‘Omer – the Rosh ha-Shana of The Zohar and Jewish Mysticism that I present here an expanded and annotated translation of Rabbi Menachem Hai Shalom Froman’s poem and pean to his teacher, Professor Yehuda Liebes.[7]
Study of the unprecedented relationship between the two, and other traditional/academic academic/traditional Torah relationships remains a scholarly/traditional desideratum.[8]

Rabbi Menachem Froman
was born in 1945, in Kfar Hasidim, Israel, and served as the town rabbi of Teko’a in the West Bank of Israel. During his military service, served as an IDF paratrooper and was one of the first to reach the Western Wall. He was a student of R. Zvi Yehuda Kook at Yeshivat Merkaz ha-Rav and also studied Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A founder of Gush Emunim, R. Froman was the founder of Erets Shalom and advocate of interfaith-based peace negotiation and reconciliation with Muslim Arabs. As a result of his long-developed personal friendships, R. Froman served as a negotiator with leaders from both the PLO and Hamas. He has been called a “ma'verิก Rabbi,” likened to an “Old Testament seer,”[9] and summed him up as “a very esoteric kind of guy.”[10] Others have pointed to R. Froman’s expansive and sophisticated religious imagination; at the same time conveying impressions of ‘madness’ that some of R. Froman’s outward appearances, mannerisms, and public activities may have engendered amongst some observers.[11] He passed away in 2013.

R. Froman was not known for his written output, although recently a volume collecting some of his programmatic and public writing has appeared, Sahaki ‘Aretz (Jerusalem: Yediot and Ruben Mass Publishers: 2014).[12] I hope to treat the book and its fascinating material in a future post at the Seforim blog. [13]

**The Princess and I**

Menachem Froman
Translated and Annotated by Josh Rosenfeld
II Samuel 6:12-23
And she saw him, dancing and leaping[14]
amongst lambs and goats
it troubled her
and she despised
him in her heart that
had opened to love
she had com/passion
and she sought from her
father to be his wife
And she saw him, dancing
and leaping
with her in the ways of
men amidst the longing of doves
it troubled her
and she despised
him in her heart at the
moment of intimacy
she had com/passion
upon him like the
embrace of parting moment
And she saw him, dancing
and leaping
amongst foreign matrons
it troubled her
and she despised
him in her heart that he
had left her in pain
and she resorted to the
honor of her father and the garb of royals
He saw her, and he leapt
and he danced
in the presence of the
glory of his God
he was troubled
and he despised
in his heart conceiving
the troubles in hers
he had com/passion
yet still returned
to his flocks and his
herds
to the dancing and
leaping he loved

It is through this poem, written many years ago, that I wish to join with those who are honoring my teacher and Rebbe Muvhak [ =longtime teacher] Professor Yehuda Liebes, shlita [ =may he merit long life]
(or, as my own students in the Yeshiva are used to hearing during my lectures, Rebbe u'Mori ‘Yudele’ who disguises himself as Professor Liebes...).

This poem (at least according to its authorial intent), describes the ambivalent relationship between two poles; between Mikhal, the daughter of Saul, who is connected to the world of kingship and royalty, organized and honorable – and David, the wild shepherd, a Judean ‘Hilltop Youth’ [ =no’ar gev’aat]. Why did I find (and it pleases me to add: with the advice of my wife) that the description of the complex relationship between Mikhal, who comes from a yekkishe family, and David, who comes from a Polish hasidishe family, is connected to [Prof.] Yehuda [Liebes]? (By the way, Yehuda’s family on his father’s side comes from a city which is of doubtful Polish or German sovereignty). Because it may be proper, to attempt to reveal the secret of Yehuda – how it is possible to bifurcate his creativity into the following two ingredients: the responsible, circumspect (medu-yekke) scientific foundation, and the basic value of lightness and freedom.

Seriousness and mirth (as he analyzes with intensity in his essay “Zohar and Eros”[19]), formality and excess (as he explains in his book, “The Doctrine of
Creation according to *Sefer Yetsirah*[20]), contraction and expansion, saying and the unsaid, straightness (=shura) and song (=shira). Words that stumble in the dark, seek in the murky mist, for there lies the divine secret. Maimonides favors the words: wisdom and will;
and in the Zohar, Yehuda’s book, coupling and pairs are of course, quite central: left as opposed to right, might (=gevura) as opposed to lovingkindness (=hesed), and also masculinity as opposed to the feminine amongst others. I too, will also try: the foundation of intellectualism and the foundation of sensualism found by Yehuda.

Do these two fundamental aspects of Yehuda’s creativity mesh together to form a unity? This poem, which I have dedicated to Yehuda, follows in the simple meaning of the biblical story of the love between Mikhal and David, and it does not have a ‘happy ending’; they separate from each other – and their love does not bear fruit. Here is also the fitting place to point out that our Yehuda also merited much criticism from within the academic community, and not all find in his oeuvre a unified whole or scientific coherence of value. But perhaps this is to be instead found by his students! I am used to suggesting in my lectures my own interpretation of ‘esotericism’/secret: that which is impossible to [fully] understand, that which is ultimately not logically or rationally acceptable.

I will conclude with a story ‘in praise of Liebes’ (Yehuda explained to me that he assumes the meaning of his family name is: one who is related to a woman named Liba or, in the changing of a name, one who is related to an
Ahuva/loved one). As is well known, in
the past few years, Yehuda has the custom of ascending (=
‘aliya le-regel)[21]
on La”g b’Omer to the
celebration ( =hilula) of
RaShb”I[22]
in Meron. Is there anyone who can comprehend – including
Yehuda himself – how a
university professor, whose entire study of Zohar is permeated
with the notion
that the Zohar is a book from the thirteenth-century (and
himself composed an
entire monograph: “How the Zohar Was Written?”[23]), can be
emotionally invested along with the masses of the Jewish
people from all walks
of life, in the celebration of RaShb”I, the author of the Holy
Zohar?

Four years ago, Yehuda
asked me to join him on this pilgrimage to Meron, and I
responded to him with
the following point: when I stay put, I deliver a long lecture
on the Zohar to
many students on La”g b’Omer,
and perhaps this is more than going to the grave of
RaShb”I.[24]
Yehuda bested me, and roared like a lion: “All year long –
Zohar, but on La”g b’Omer – RaShb”I!”

God’s secret is with/in those who fear him, and
his
covenant makes it known.[25]

[1] I wish to thank yedidi R’ Menachem Butler for his patient
guidance and assistance in the preparation of this short
essay. His expertise and erudition is something worthy of true
admiration. Thanks, as well, is also due to the other editors
at the Seforim Blog for their consideration of this piece, and
for providing such a remarkable, long-running platform for the
dissemination, discussion, and study of Jewish culture and
thought
[2] It is no understatement to say that there is a vast

For a unique example of a non-apologetic traditional engagement with Scholem’s work, see R. Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (ShaGaR), *Nehalekh be-Regesh* (Efrat: Mahon Kitve ha-Rav Shagar, 2010), 75-97, especially 77-78 (Hebrew), which I hope to explore in a future essay at the Seforim blog.

[3] While representing a range of academic approaches, these scholars can be said to have typified a distinct phenomenological approach to the academic study of Kabbalah and what is called “Jewish Mysticism.” See Boaz Huss, “The

[4] See Boaz Huss, “Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Cultural Category and
its Challenge

For an example of the sometimes fraught encounter and oppositional traditional stance regarding the academic study of Kabbalah, see Jonatan Meir, “The Boundaries of the Kabbalah: R. Yaakov Moshe Hillel and the Kabbalah in Jerusalem,” in Boaz Huss, ed., Kabbalah and Contemporary Spiritual Revival (Be’er Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2011), 176-177. Inter alia, Meir discusses the adoption of publishing houses like R. Hillel’s Hevrat Ahavat Shalom of “safe” academic practices such as examining Ms. for textual accuracy when printing traditional Kabbalistic works. See also R. Yaakov Hillel, “Understanding Kabbalah,” in Ascending Jacob’s Ladder (Brooklyn: Ahavat Shalom Publications, 2007), 213-240; and the broader


[7] The poem and essay were first published in Menachem Froman, “The King’s Daughter and I,” in Maren R. Niehoff, Ronit Meroz, and Jonathan Garb, eds., ve-Zot le-Yehuda – And This Is For Yehuda: Yehuda Liebes Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2012), 34-35 (Hebrew). The translation and annotation of this essay at the Seforim blog has been prepared by Josh Rosenfeld.

[8] For a sketch of the (non)interactions of traditional and academic scholarship in

[9] See
Speaking to a member of the Israeli media at R. Froman’s funeral, the author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi described “Rav Menachem” as “somebody who, as a Jew, loved his people, loved his land, loved humanity – without making distinctions, he was a man of the messianic age, he saw something of the redemption and tried to bring it into an unredeemed reality,” available online here (here).
R. Froman’s mystical political theology permeated his own personal existence. Even on what was to become his deathbed, he related in interviews how he conceived of his illness in terms of his political vision: “How do you feel?” “You are coming to me after a very difficult night, there were great miracles. It is forbidden to fight with these pains, we must flow with them, otherwise the pain just grows and overcomes us. This is what there is, this is the reality that we must live with. Such is the political reality, and so too with the disease.” (Interview with Yehoshua
Breiner, Walla! News Org.; 3/4/13, emphasis mine)

[11] See, for example, the short, incisive treatment of Noah Feldman, “Is a Jew Meshuga for Wanting to Live in Palestine?” Bloomberg News (7 March 2013), available online (here), who concisely presents the obvious paradox of “The Settler Rabbi” who nevertheless advocates for a Palestinian State, and outlines the central challenges to R. Froman’s “peace theology” from practical security concerns for Jews living in such a state to the challenges of unrealistic idealism in R. Froman’s thought.

[12] A presentation of some of the first translations of some of Sahaki ‘Aretz’ fascinating material, can be seen online (here).

personality is the forthcoming essay by Professor Shaul Magid, “(Re)Thinking American Jewish Zionist Identity: A Case for PostZionism in the Diaspora.” To the best of my knowledge, Professor Magid’s currently unpublished essay is the first scholarly treatment of R. Froman’s writings in Sahaki ‘Aretz, although see the brief review by Ariel Seri-Levi, “The Vision of the Prophet Menachem, Rebbe Menachem Froman,” Ha’aretz Literary Supplement (9 February 2015; Hebrew). I would like to thank Menachem Butler for introducing me to Professor Magid.

[14] King David is at times referred to as the badhana d’malka, or “Jester of the King” (see Zohar, II:107a); Liebes treats the subject at length in Yehuda Liebes, “The Book of Zohar and Eros,” Alpayim 9 (1994): 67-119 (Hebrew).


[16] For an outlining of the parallel, sometimes oppositional, and rarely unified relationships between the two royal lineages of Joseph and Judah, see the remarkable presentation of R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica (1801-1854), Mei ha-Shiloah, vol. 1, pp. 47-48, 54-56. On these passages, see Shaul Magid, Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism in Izbica/Radzin Hasidism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 120, 147, 154, et al. The marriage of David to Mikhal, daughter of Saul, represented an attempted mystical fusion of the two houses and their perhaps complementary spiritual roots, as R. Froman alludes to later in his essay.

[17] Song of Songs 2:14, 5:2. See, most recently, Michael Fishbane, The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs (Philadelphia: Jewish
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<td>[18]</td>
<td>1 Kings 7:36, see also b. Yoma 54b with commentary of Rashi.</td>
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<td>[21]</td>
<td>See the start of this essay, where we defined Lag ba-Omer in the sense of the Kabbalistic/Mystical Rosh ha-Shana. For an overview of Lag ba-Omer and its unique connection to the study of the Zohar, see Naftali Toker, “Lag ba-Omer: A Small Holiday of Great Meaning and Deep Secrets,” Shana beShana (2003): 57-78 (Hebrew), available online (here).</td>
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<td>[24]</td>
<td>Towards the end of his life, R. Froman delivered extended meditations/learning of Zohar and works of</td>
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the Hasidic masters in a caravan at the edge of the Teko’a settlement in Gush Etzion. These ‘arvei shirah ve-Torah were usually joined by famous Israeli musicians, such as the Banai family and Barry Sakharov. One particular evening was graced with Professor Liebes’ presence, whereupon Liebes and Froman proceeded to jointly teach from the Zohar. It is available online (here).

edition of R. Avraham Yitzhak Sperling's Ta’amei ha-Minhagim u’Mekorei ha-Dinim and for sources and translations relating to the connection of RaShb”I and the pilgrimage (yoma d’pagra) to his grave in Meron, see (here).