

ISAAC BEN SOLOMON LURIA, HA'ARI

Luria (1534 - 1572), also known as "the Ari", is most famous for the very significant influence he exerted on kabbalistic thought in 16th century Safed and on all later mystic thought. Luria wrote one book early in his career, a commentary on a short but important part of the Zohar. This book, however, does not reflect the mystical thought system that he taught later on in his life, a system that became a central part of kabbalistic thought. Therefore, it is to his disciples that we must turn in order to learn about his ideas. It is important to note that Luria was one of many kabbalists living in Safed at this time; this was a very vibrant and dynamic mystical community.

Luria's thought system is very complex, but can be summarized as follows: In the process of the creation of the world, a cataclysmic event occurred, an event of cosmic importance, which left the newly created world in a 'broken', incomplete state. All of human history can be interpreted as humanity's attempts to repair the damage wrought by this original crisis, to bring about 'tikun olam', a repaired world. Luria explained that every human being's actions influence this process of tikun; even the smallest acts assume cosmic significance. Luria's approach was extremely messianic as it focused on bringing about a restored and completed cosmos. This reflected the general intellectual climate of the period. Luria's thought is especially relevant for Netzer, as the idea of 'tikun', especially central to our ideology, really developed and took hold in his world view.

TALES OF THE HASIDIM

This title does not refer to a single book, but rather to a category of literature produced by Hasidim in the 18th and 19th centuries. Hasidut was a religious movement which held sway in much of Eastern European Jewry from the late 18th century until the Holocaust. The Hasidim's unique world view is represented in its literature, some of which is philosophical, some of which appears in the traditional Jewish form of biblical commentary, and some in the form of stories. We refer here to the stories, as they seem to be the genre most adaptable for use in a youth movement context. Hasidic stories vary. Some describe the lives of the great Hasidic leaders, the Tzadikim, recounting the righteous (and sometimes miraculous) lives they led.

Some focus on particular values in pious Jewish life. Some, like those of master storyteller Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, are seemingly simple folk tales which in fact bear many concealed levels of meanings.

Several anthologies of Hasidic tales exist. Perhaps the most famous are Martin Buber's collections. A large controversy reigns over Buber's interpretation of the tales. Some claim that Buber's interpretations reveal more about his own thoughts than those of the original authors of the tales. If we are using the stories as historical documents, we should be aware of this question mark, as it does challenge whether the stories represent the Hasidic movement as it actually was. However, if the tales are used as tools to convey spiritual values, which is the way they will most probably be used in a youth movement context, it is not crucial whether these represent historically accurate portrayals of Hasidut. The stories portray religious truths, if not historical ones.

