

## Rabbi Yehudah Hayyat's *System of Divinity*

The Exile of 1492

### Overview:

- This is the story of the life and work of Rabbi Yehudah Hayyat: One Rabbi's epic journey from Spain to Italy after the expulsion of 1492. In this installment, we will look into the tumultuous life events that proved to be the genesis of one of the great Kabbalistic masterpieces of all time, the *Minchat Yehudah*, of Rabbi Hayyat. Tasting from this work, we will encounter one of its deepest mysteries wherein, one of the most mind boggling scientific discoveries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is anticipated—that of Quantum Entanglement.
- We often come upon the distant history of Jewish events such as the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492 as little more than a few footnotes or statistics in a survey of the epochal changes in the Western world. It takes the story of real people and the details of their journey to drive home the significance and scope of these experiences. Starting his voyage in Spain and then Lisbon, Rabbi Yehudah Hayyat provides such a glimpse into this past. The astonishing hardships and afflictions that he would endure—starvation, slavery, imprisonment, and even the loss of his wife, would not break him.
- We encounter Rabbi Yehudah Hayyat in multiple cultural contexts over the course of a multi-year adventure. From Portugal he arrived in the Muslim lands of North Africa only to bring him more persecution. Escaping miraculously time and time again, he finally makes his way to Italy where the challenges do not stop. By the time he arrived in Mantua, where he is welcomed by the Jewish community, he still has the strength to pen one of the classics of the Kabbalah, the *Minchat Yehudah (The Offering of Yehudah)*.
- The *Minchat Yehudah* of Hayyat is in fact a commentary on an earlier Kabbalistic work known as *Marechet HaElokut (The System of Divinity)*. First published in 1557 in Ferrara and then subsequently in 1558 in Mantua, Italy with both works together, the authorship of *Marechet HaElokut* was subject to debate. Nonetheless, the wide spread mainstream acceptance of both this work and Hayyat's commentary on it, offered the student of Kabbalah a systematic treatment of the topics, ideas and concepts of the soul, cosmology and the channels of Divine emanation or *sefirot* as they appear largely in the master work of Kabbalah known as the Zohar.
- One of the most exciting ideas presented in Hayyat's work is an example of the behavior of magnet which some suggest offers a premonition of future science, particularly the bizarre world of Quantum Entanglement where the world of separation breaks down and a single seamless reality emerges. Hayyat maintains that if one were to take a magnet and break it into two and then separate those two parts a great distance, the magnetic effects of iron on one half of the original magnet would be instantaneously registered by the other half regardless of how far away it is. In other words, he was suggesting that there is a non-locality of magnetism in the physical world which reflects a spiritual reality of everything being connected regardless of distance.

### In Summation:

- The story of Rabbi Hayyat is one with the potential to close distances of both space and time. Feeling connected to a man across the gap of five centuries of time, to contemplate his teachings, to listen to his testimony of the horrible events that transpired in those days is to make them part of the enduring memory of our Jewish heritage. Moreover, contemplating the triumph of his survival against all odds and the indelible significance of his contribution to our understanding of Kabbalah, is to bring to life and make meaningful for ourselves and for future generations the magnetic effects of this great Torah luminary.