

## Article

# Education toward Rooted Cosmopolitanism Viewed from a Religious Prism: The Case of Rabbi Ashlag's Social Altruistic Doctrine

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**Abstract:** Cosmopolitanism, which has recently become a matter of great scholarly interest, is an ethical and political theory that envisions all human beings as citizens in a single community. This paper presents a “rooted” approach to cosmopolitanism, claiming that local attachments can be essential to our ability to nurture a cosmopolitan orientation. More specifically, this paper explores the potential that lies in the connection between the ideas of 20th century Kabbalist, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (1884–1954), which stem from the mystical interpretation of reality and Jewish scriptures, and cosmopolitanism, viewed from an educational prism. To exemplify how a cosmopolitan-oriented religious education might look, the author presents a hermeneutic account of the social doctrine of Ashlag, whose writings, mediated by both orthodox and secular successors, have influenced millions. Relying on Ashlag's approach to otherness—one of the main themes in cosmopolitanism—the author shows how religious affiliations can serve as a strong impetus for the cultivation of cosmopolitan values.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism; Kabbalah; egoism; spirituality; spiritual education



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## 1. Introduction: Cosmopolitanism and Rooted Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a socio-ethical theory, which originated with the Cynics in the 5th century BCE, although similar ideas can be traced in other ancient cultures (Delanty 2009). The main thread running through most cosmopolitan approaches throughout history is that all human beings belong or should belong to one global community, transcending their innate differences into a single moral, religious, cultural, environmental, political imagined or even physical community (Kleingeld and Brown 2014).

In recent years, primarily due to the ramifications of globalization and the modern discourse about human, cultural and group rights, cosmopolitanism has once again become a matter of great scholarly interest across the humanities and social sciences (Beck and Sznaider 2006; Benhabib 2004; Brown and Held 2010; Delanty 2009; Fine 2009; Rovisco and Nowicka 2011, among others). Cosmopolitanism is being discussed in the educational arena as well (Hansen 2011; Nussbaum 1996; Papastephanou 2011; Roth and Burbules 2011; Todd 2009; Waks 2009, 2010). As David Harvey (2000, p. 529) articulated it: “Cosmopolitanism is back”.

However, the abundance of writings on cosmopolitanism has also generated a new form of critique. In addition to the parochial critique of cosmopolitanism's lack of viability due to people's innate connections to their close kin and localities (Barber 1996), contemporary scholars have noticed that throughout ancient and modern history, cosmopolitanism was associated with ideas such as elitism, eurocentrism, shared rational morality, global governance, homogenization of cultures, and even imperialism and colonialism (Kymlicka and Walker 2012).

As an alternative, critical scholars who believe in the cosmopolitan ideal have suggested envisioning cosmopolitanism as a rooted perspective that can be traced in, and

derived from, various cultures, religions, nationalities and other localities (e.g., Appiah 1997, 2005; Bhabha 1996; Dallmayr 2003; Erskine 2008; Vinokur 2018; Werbner 2008; Hansen 2011; Kymlicka and Walker 2012).

Anthony Appiah, who coined the notion of “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 1997), redefined cosmopolitanism as “universality plus difference” (Appiah 2005), suggesting that our local attachments are essential to our ability to nurture a cosmopolitan perspective (Appiah 1997, 2005). Kymlicka and Walker (2012) introduced “rooted cosmopolitanism” to political theory, claiming that cosmopolitan commitments can be traced in various national civic traditions.

Finally, in the educational realm, David Hansen (2011), has developed the notion of “cosmopolitanism on the ground”, and “actually existing cosmopolitanism”, suggesting cosmopolitanism to be an orientation toward the world that allows for balance between “reflective openness to the new with a reflective loyalty to the known”. (p. 1). According to Hansen, “cosmopolitanism on the ground” encompasses linguistic, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, and somatic dimensions of the cosmopolitan encounter with similarity and difference. It is a bottom-up rather than top-down moral perspective, beginning with peoples’ concrete experience and paying heed to their individual and community self-understandings, as well as their internal debates about how to regard both the local and larger world (Hansen 2011).

Cosmopolitanism, the way Hansen (2011) understands it, does not advocate detachment from one’s roots, but rather a stronger embrace of them (even if that necessitates letting go of some of them), precisely as a result of the interaction with the world and the other. The form of cosmopolitan education that Hansen advocates moves on the dialectic axis of: between the local and the global, between the old and the new, between loyalty and openness, between the person and the other, and between the student and the curriculum. Hansen does not seek to resolve these differences. On the contrary, cosmopolitan life—with the beauty of its uncertainty—flourishes within this tension and not in a single uniform category of thought and act (Ibid., pp. 87–88).

Following in Hansen’s footsteps, Eli Vinokur (2018) used Robert Nozick’s notion of dialectic explanation to suggest that education toward openness to different human beings and traditions (cosmopolitanism), can be sustained through the local prism of civic, cultural, spiritual, or religious tradition. Alas, Vinokur’s (2018) “education toward rooted cosmopolitanism”, was presented only in broad strokes, lacking sufficient examples.

This paper seeks to follow this trend in the literature, by providing a clear example of rooted cosmopolitanism in a specific religious context. At first glance, this obviously seems paradoxical: how can a cosmopolitan perspective stem from a particular religion without undermining the very idea of cosmopolitanism? Relying on Nozick’s (1981) definition of a philosophical explanation—as the ability to suggest new and dialectic solutions to reconcile contradictions between ideas, instead of trying to prove one of the ideas wrong—my attempt herein will be to suggest a philosophical explanation regarding the way a specific religious perspective could be simultaneously rooted and cosmopolitan. By presenting an elaborated account of the social doctrine of Jewish thinker and Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Leib Halevi Ashlag (1884–1954), whose ideas have recently influenced millions, I will suggest that a religious perspective can provide a very strong justification for education toward cosmopolitan values, such as the need to “overcome the otherness of the other” (Beck 2002, p. 18).

To this end, the paper will be divided into five parts. First, I will provide a short introduction to the dialectic method of Robert Nozick which will provide a preliminary framework for this paper. Then, I will narrow my scope to scholarly literature in religious education that offers similar ideas. Eventually, I will focus on Jewish mysticism, referring to Lurianic Kabbalah at large, and Ashlag’s method in particular. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the central idea of Ashlag’s work: the primordial shattering of the general soul and its contemporary reconstruction via the establishment of an egalitarian spiritual cosmopolitan society as a pathway to human redemption. In the process, I will present

Ashlag's unique relation to otherness as an example of cosmopolitan thought rooted in Jewish mysticism, as well as his educational program, which I will label, following Appiah (2008), "education toward rooted cosmopolitanism". Finally, I will draw some conclusions regarding the possible implications of my work in religious and cosmopolitan education.

## 2. Cosmopolitan and Religious Education

The philosophical question that is presented in this paper is can we educate toward cosmopolitanism in the particular framework of a given religious tradition? Put differently, could a specific religious perspective be simultaneously rooted and cosmopolitan? How could an education that is perpetuated in the framework of a specific religious tradition and thus promotes loyalty to a bounded community of faith (and sometimes territory, history and nationality) coexist alongside an unbounded education that promotes loyalty to a global community that crosses borders of belief, ethnicity, culture, gender, history and nationality?

The core philosophical argument that I will propose in this paper is that the tension between cosmopolitan and religious education can be bridged by a deeper account of both, namely "education toward rooted cosmopolitanism" (Vinokur 2018; see also: Kymlicka and Walker 2012) or "religious cosmopolitanism", which will be capable of aligning one's internal beliefs. This sort of logic is driven by the notion of "a philosophical explanation", developed by Nozick (1981).

According to Nozick, when facing a dialectic question such as "how a certain phenomenon could exist given contradictory conditions?", we should not search for a theory that proves or discards one of the sides in the "debate". Instead, we should seek a philosophical explanation that shows how that phenomenon might actually be plausible given contradictory conditions. Nozick claimed that by locating different ideas in different theoretical contexts and clarifying the connections between them, we can shed new light on a researched phenomenon and expand the scope of opportunities for its understanding. During such a process, the emphasis is given not only to a plausible explanation but also to interesting explanations that suggest new meanings and understandings.

In the spirit of Nozick's approach, a plausible way to bridge the tension between education toward cosmopolitanism and the human need to preserve one's religious identity could be to look at the cosmopolitan discourse through a local religious prism.

The buds of such a dialectic approach can be identified in a growing corpus of writing that has developed in recent years in the fields of religious, post-secular and spiritual education. Although there are relatively few scholarly references in this literature to cosmopolitanism, moreover rooted in cosmopolitanism, the idea of looking at contemporary reality from a dialectical "both/and" lens, rather than from an "either/or" monological one, appears in the writings of several prominent scholars of religious education and post-secularism.

In fact, post-secularity itself, as explained by Lewin (2017), is a dialectical concept which encapsulates neither secularity nor religiosity in any simple and binary sense, but rather, the entanglement of one with the other. It relies on the rejection of the essentialist and hegemonic definitions of "religion" and "secularity", which originated in the western, Christian-protestant tradition, and then expanded into various non-Christian religious and cultural contexts, creating false differentiations between the secular, the public, the national, the faithful, the practical and the private. In other words, contemporary scholars who write about post-secularism claim it to be far more in tune with East Asian non-dualist approaches (Cady and Hurd 2010; among others).

To say the least, in recent years, more and more scholars reveal new ways in which religions can offer different symbolic systems and rich narratives for dialectical meaning-making, critiquing, understanding, and renewing education on a global scale. One such example is Wexler's (2000) "mystical society", which examines the connections between canonical social theory and the varied mystical tradition in order to determine that mysticism has become the foundation of the new society, which is in many ways cosmopolitan.

Following Wexler, [Hotam \(2016\)](#) challenged the dichotomy between religion and secular “awareness”, by shedding light on the continuity between education and its religious roots in the European scene, showing that more than once the so-called “religiously neutral” secular approach to education is actually very much “charged” with deep Christian meanings.

Two especially important contributions which tie between cosmopolitan values and the field of religious education can be seen in McLaughlin’s idea of “openness with roots” ([Alexander and McLaughlin 2003](#), p. 147) and [Alexander’s \(2014\)](#) “pedagogy of difference”. These contributions, which—at least in Alexander’s case—build upon Nozick’s notion of “philosophical explanation”, are especially relevant to our discussion. According to [Alexander \(2014\)](#), openness to different human traditions can be promoted by exposing a child to alternative perspectives together with a profound initiation to a major spiritual or religious tradition.

Thus, although McLaughlin and Alexander did not relate directly to cosmopolitanism in their writings, their vision of religious and spiritual education is cosmopolitan in nature. In their joint paper, McLaughlin ([Alexander and McLaughlin 2003](#), pp. 361–62) wrote:

On the side of ‘openness’, liberal democratic societies should be committed, within familiar limits, to a robust pluralism that accommodates a diversity of religious and spiritual belief, commitment, and activity and ensures the development for individuals of the tools of self-definition . . . On the side of ‘rootedness’, however, liberal democratic societies also have an interest in the flourishing, again within familiar limits, of forms of religious and spiritual belief, commitment, and activity that constitute not only important contexts for the formation of persons and of democratic character, but also resources for the shaping of lives.

Alexander and McLaughlin, both separately and conjointly, believe that it is possible to envision the cultivation of liberal pluralism that will allow for a *modus vivendi* in a single civic society through education of dynamic and particular traditions. Such an approach can bring together different perspectives, interpret existing practices anew and acknowledge that people are equal in nature and deserve to be respected for who they are. In other words, according to Alexander and McLaughlin, initiation into a specific religion or spiritual tradition not only does not contradict cosmopolitan values but can rather imbue them with a deep local meaning and justification.

While Alexander and McLaughlin have exemplified this approach from Jewish and Christian perspectives (consecutively), more examples can be found in the work of [Waghid \(2014\)](#), who wrote about the philosophical probability of the connection between cosmopolitanism and Islamic education, as well as about the pedagogic contours of an opening of religion to life in pluralistic democracies from an Islamic perspective ([Waghid 2011](#)). Similar work was done by [Aslan et al. \(2016\)](#) in their mutually edited book.

Following the above-mentioned dialectical direction of philosophical explanation, in what follows I will seek to examine the way cosmopolitan values can be introduced in a specific religious setting. This will be done through a hermeneutical reading of the social doctrine of Ashlag, who attempted to reveal Kabbalah to the world via a social interpretation, which provided profound mystical justification for the need to care for the other, regardless of race, religion and national affiliation. Relying on Alexander and McLaughlin’s terminology, the paper will bring together two very disparate intellectual genres—contemporary cosmopolitan thought and modern Jewish mysticism—to make a strong argument for rooted cosmopolitanism by means of a clear example of openness, with roots grounded in a pedagogy of difference.

However, in order to prepare the foundation for my further writing, I will provide a short introduction to Jewish mysticism at large and to Ashlag’s Kabbalistic doctrine in particular.

### 3. Jewish Mysticism in a Nutshell

Jewish mysticism is a corpus of ancient writings that date back to 100 BCE–100 CE. According to Gershom Scholem, the founder of the academic study of Jewish mysticism, it contains the origins of Jewish tradition as a whole (Scholem 1987, p. 3). Of the many forms of Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah, which emerged in 12th-century Europe (Meroz 2013), is the most well-known.

Kabbalists, meaning people who study and practice the wisdom of Kabbalah, seek to narrow the gap between this world and the divine. For a Kabbalist, the entire mundane reality, including all phenomena that occur within it, is no more than a symbolic system reflecting the manifestation of the Creator in the world. A Kabbalist aspires to penetrate the roots of this symbolic system, to discover what happens “behind the scenes of this imaginary world”, and uncover the divine presence that is concealed within everything. Unlike the transcendent model to which Judaism is accustomed, Kabbalists seek to personally cling to their Maker, to know Him, to witness His marvelous world and to act within it (Jacobson 1984). In the quest to attain the reality hidden from the eyes of most ordinary people, a Kabbalist is exposed to intensive experiences of ascension, some of which are described in Ashlag’s writings (Ashlag 2014).

The research in the field tends to divide the wisdom of Kabbalah into an early branch and a modern branch (Jacobson 1984). The early branch dates back to the 12th century in Provence and is considered to have existed until the Alhambra Decree in 1492. The magnum opus of this branch is the renowned Kabbalistic symbolic commentary to the Torah, *The Book of Zohar* (*Splendor*), most of which revolves around the adventures and teachings of Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai (also known by his acronym RASHBI), a 2nd-century tannaitic sage in ancient Judea, and his group of disciples.

The modern branch of Kabbalah is considered to have originated in 16th century Safed. It is mostly known due to the writings of Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (also known his acronym “the ARI”), a sage who lived in Safed and contributed significantly to the development of Kabbalah into a scientific method (Dan 1992), as well as to the creation of Hasidism in the mid-18th century.

Due to Luria’s influence on Ashlag, whose method stands in the core of this paper, it is important to devote a few words to the Lurianic tradition, its background and its successors, in order to emphasize how Ashlag offers a genuinely original contribution to this tradition. This has significant value also to my argument about cosmopolitanism, since some of Luria’s writings relate extensively to the origins and fate of the general human soul, a spiritual entity which includes the individual souls of all human beings.

### 4. Luria and Lurianic Kabbalah

Luria was active soon after the issuing of the Alhambra Decree, at a time when the Jewish community sought to justify the hardest disaster it had experienced since the ruin of the Second Temple. According to Scholem ([1961] 1995, pp. 244–86), this disaster triggered Luria to develop a doctrine that presents the exile not as a punishment but rather as a collective messianic mission, placed upon the Jewish nation—assisting God to restore harmony in the shattered spiritual and corporeal reality.

In a nutshell, according to Luria, the origin of our social reality is rooted in the “shattering of the vessels” and the primordial sin of Adam. In a complicated process of creation, the vessels which were created to sustain the Creator’s light were shattered. The soul of Adam was created to restore harmony in the divine reality. Alas, Adam failed and sinned. His soul was shattered into 600,000 pieces—which is also the number of the Israelites that were redeemed from Egypt—and collapsed into the impure reality of “the kingdom of the shells”. This myth of the shattering of the soul of Adam determines the role of the people of Israel hereof: to help the Creator redeem the shattered sparks from the impure system of the shells where they are bound, thus restoring the balance in the whole system of creation and assisting the Creator in its correction.



According to Luria, the exile in the lower reality is only a reflection of the exile in the upper reality. Thus, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the chaos that were caused by the cosmic shattering are expressed historically in the story of the exile and suffering of the people of Israel. The broken soul of Adam is referred to as “the broken people of Israel”, who were persecuted, expelled and scattered among the nations of the world, which are allegorically resembled to the impure forces. Only when the people of Israel will correct below what has shattered above, the exile will end and the world will be redeemed. By the deeds, intentions and corrections performed by the people of Israel in exile, they redeem sparks of light from their captivity in the depth of the shells and raise them to their origin in the upper reality. When the work of scrutiny and correction will be completed, the world will merit its redemption and the Creator’s purpose in creating the reality will be completed (Vital 1988).

Luria’s doctrine brought about an unprecedented shift in Jewish history, since it provided with a sublime justification to the suffering of the Jewish people. Luria’s doctrine also served as an alternative to the spiritual challenge Christianity presented before Judaism in early modernity. Unlike the rationalistic current in Judaism, which focused on the technical fulfillment of commandments, attempting to find a rational justification to their observance (Alexander 2014), Luria provided the Jewish community with a much deeper meaning to the “dry” practice of Orthodox rituals. According to Luria, by the observance of the Jewish ritual commandments with the right intentions, the observant becomes a pathway to the correction of the world and God’s active partner in His quest to restore the creation’s harmony.

The Kabbalistic method of Luria was unique and echoed in the Jewish world long after his passing. Many Kabbalists relied on it to develop additional innovative Kabbalistic methods. According to Scholem ([1961] 1995), Lurianic Kabbalah swept the Jewish world during the 16th and the 17th centuries, both under Christian and Muslim rule in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Although Scholem’s aforementioned statement was later disputed (Idel 1988), there is much less dispute regarding the fact that Lurianic Kabbalah was the fundament upon which the movement of Hasidism was established during the 18th century in Eastern Europe.

Luria’s internalization of Judaism through his “method of intentions” (Scholem [1961] 1995) created an opening that was used by the leaders of Hasidism to present the engagement in Jewish canonical texts and rituals as an intellectual (in the case of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s Chabad) or an emotional (in the case of other Hasidism), psychological subjective experience. According to Scholem, Lurianic Kabbalah also influenced the Zionist movement, in the framework of which Jews went against God and intervened in history again to take their future into their own hands (Ibid.). Lurianic Kabbalah has also greatly influenced Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, whose method stands at the core of this paper.

## 5. “The Master of the Ladder”

Ashlag was born in 1884 in Warsaw and was educated in the spirit of the Jewish Hasidic dynasty of Gur. After completing his rabbinic training, he served as a Rabbi and a teacher in the Jewish Orthodox community in Warsaw. At the same time, he studied Kabbalah with Rabbi Meir Shalom Rabinovich from Kaloshin and with Rabinovich’s son, Rabbi Yehushua Asher from Porisov (Garb 2009, p. 28). Convinced that the Jewish community was in danger in Poland, Ashlag decided to organize mass immigration of the Polish Jews to Israel in 1920. His dream was to establish in Israel an altruistic community whose members would combine physical work (sweat equity) with intense spiritual engagement. His followers even claim that he pre-ordered 200 sheds from Sweden to accommodate the first families that were supposed to arrive. Alas, his dream never materialized. The rabbinical institution in Warsaw condemned Ashlag for his “Zionist” efforts, and in 1921 he immigrated to Palestine on his own, later bringing his family with him (Soraski 1984).

In Palestine, Ashlag devoted his life to extensive writing. His books are among the most prominent commentaries on both medieval and modern branches of Kabbalah:

the “*Sulam*” (Ladder) commentary on *The Book of Zohar* (*The Book of Splendor*), including *The Zohar*’s complete translation into Hebrew, after which he was called “the Master of the Ladder”; *The Study of Ten Sefirot*, and *Panim Meirot uMasbirot* (*Shining and Welcoming Face*)—meticulous and elaborate commentaries on Luria’s *Tree of Life*; as well as numerous introductions to Kabbalah for people who sought to make their first steps in the wisdom. Less known, but no less important, are his social essays and manuscripts, written between 1933 and 1954. In these essays, he reacted to the social climate of his time and developed the theoretical milestones for the establishment of an altruistic egalitarian society, where “the standard of living of the Arabs will be equal to the standard of living of the Jews” (Ashlag 2005).

Ashlag’s writing was greatly influenced by Lurianic Kabbalah. A profound example to this is his commentary to *The Book of Zohar* (*Splendor*), which is based entirely on the Lurianic tradition (Ashlag 1951). In fact, Ashlag felt such unity with Luria in that he attested to his soul being a reincarnation of Luria’s (Ashlag 2014, p. 215). Moreover, in one place in his commentary to Luria’s *Tree of Life*, he criticizes Haim Vital—to whom Luria dictated all of his books and who is considered to be his closest disciple—for distorting the words of Luria (Ashlag 1998, p. 538).

In that same commentary, Ashlag formed a dictionary at the end of every part, but the translation he proposed to Luria’s concepts was more of an interpretation and development of the Lurianic method. A prominent example is the concept of “the desire to receive”, which is an essential element in Ashlag’s Kabbalistic, social and psychological doctrine, although it is absent from Luria’s writings (Ashlag 1975, p. 107).

Ashlag’s interpretive enterprise represents a unique attempt to reconstruct the Kabbalistic tradition—both the text and the mundane actions that are implied by it—out of an aspiration to place at its core the formation of the subjective experience of the individual—Jew and non-Jew alike—with respect to his or her relation to the other.

Unlike Scholem, who sought to present the “Lurianic Myth” as revealing the hidden evil within Godliness and the creation as God’s way of cleansing Himself from this evil, Ashlag led an anti-mythical line of commentary, asking to refer all evil in our reality to the egoistic desire within humans. As I will present in what follows, per Ashlag, people’s self-centered approach to reality—and not the evil within Godliness—is the source of separation between God and humankind, and thus the source of all evil. When people will correct the innate evil within them, meaning their egotistic attitude toward others, using Ashlag’s social doctrine, they will discover that God is benevolent and that He had not ever contained any evil.

By developing this line of commentary, Ashlag followed in the footsteps of thinkers such as Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas, who sought to redeem Jewish traditional texts from their particular Jewish context and open them to address the broad world, using a dialogic universalistic commentary. This approach was the exact opposite of the hermeneutic path of scholars such as Cohen, who sought to find in Jewish canonical texts the rational fundaments which could pave their way into the general discourse of the enlightenment (Alexander 2014).

However, unlike Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas, who relied for this purpose on Hasidic texts on the one hand and on Jewish canonical texts on the other hand, Ashlag’s contribution focused on the Kabbalistic literature, which until his time, was locked before the unexperienced reader. Ashlag’s attempt was unique especially in light of its difference from Scholem’s approach, who saw Kabbalah as a way to turn the gaze of the Jews into themselves in order to find a justification for their existence inside their tradition (Alexander 2014). Conversely, even the purpose of the Commandments—the locus of Kabbalah the way Scholem understood it—underwent a social transformation in the hands of Ashlag. The Commandments, the way Ashlag understood them, are external signs that symbolize the social-spiritual corrections that people should perform. In his social writings, Ashlag (2005) referred to religious rituals as a nation’s “culture”, depriving them from their transcendent status. Ashlag also redefined orthodoxy—from fear of God or modernity into fear of

people's inability to love each other, out of an aspiration to resemble their Maker's attribute of love. Thus he wrote (Ashlag 2005, p. 375): "Revolution in religious perception means that instead of the monks being thus far the destructors of the world, when they assume altruism, the monks will be the builders of the world, since the measure of Haredut (E.V: anxiety, referring to Jewish religious orthodoxy) can be measured only by the measure of help to society, in order to bring contentment to the maker".

Much like Levinas's attitude toward the *Talmud*—the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology, Ashlag's attitude toward Kabbalistic texts was not historical, philological or strictly religious, but rather as a carrier of eternal wisdom, that teaches the readers how they should interact with each other. As Levinas, Ashlag believed that the study itself, and not only its plain content, can turn the engagement with the sacred text into a transformative experience for the learner (Alexander 2014).

In the same spirit, Ashlag placed the other between God and the person who seeks contact with the divine, as if telling him or her: "Wish to discover Godliness? Know that It is hidden between people. Develop an attitude of love toward the other, and then, inside that attitude, you will discover the totally Other". The practical pedagogical practice that Ashlag suggested for this purpose included the study of canonic Kabbalistic texts out of a desire that the forces that are hidden within them will change the learner, as well as the establishment of a communistic altruistic society with the purpose to transcend the instrumental desires among its members into a cosmopolitan society that is guided by "the religion of love" (Ashlag 2005).

Therefore, in Ashlag's commentary and writings he moved between sticking to the Lurianic tradition and continuing it in his unique direction, by developing the principle of correction in Luria's writings into a broad psychological and social doctrine. Focused on his goal to spread the ideas of Kabbalah as widely as possible, to Jews and non-Jews alike, Ashlag sought to present Kabbalah to the world through his social Lurianic interpretation. The freedom that Ashlag took upon himself to interpret the writings of Luria stemmed from his belief that he is adhered to the words of his teacher, and only organizes them in a comfortable manner for the reader, who according to Ashlag, needs them more than anything else in our generation (Ashlag 1975, p. 205). Moreover, Haim Vital's teachings, who was the most prominent student of Luria, are probably the source of Ashlag's belief that simply be the virtue of the spread of the knowledge of Kabbalah, the advent of the Messiah would be hastened (Elior 2004; Vinokur 2021). This could also explain the two hermeneutical directions Ashlag took in his writings:

1. The translation and adaptation of the Book of Zohar and Luria's writings for people who are interested in the Kabbalistic tradition.
2. The extension of Kabbalah into the social realm and to the general masses of non-Kabbalah students through his social writings.<sup>1</sup>

Now, after we have clarified the knot of connections between Ashlag's writings and Lurianic Kabbalah, we can move on to present to core of Ashlag's religious cosmopolitan doctrine.

## 6. The Common Soul

Following Luria, Ashlag's doctrine builds on the premise that all human beings, regardless of race, religion and national affiliation, originate from the processes that occurred to the primordial perfect structure of a single soul, which was created in the beginning of creation (Ashlag 2009).

The central difference between Luria's and Ashlag's method is that, in the latter, the terms "Israel" and "nations of the world" are internalized and referred to as two types of desires within one individual, Jew and non-Jew alike. Unlike Scholem who related to the process of correction as an endeavor focused only on the people of Israel, and unlike some of the latter successors of Lurianic Kabbalah, mainly from the Hasidic branch, which saw Lurianic Kabbalah as centered around psychological processes within the Jewish soul, Ashlag's commentary includes a more cosmopolitan point of view, centering on the point



of Israel within every individual in the world, out of which he or she aspires to return to their root. In the words of [Ashlag \(2014\)](#) “Israel is he who strains himself to return to his root” (p. 116).

According to [Ashlag \(2009\)](#), the Maker, which is defined in his writings as a pure desire to bestow, created the common soul, which is defined as a desire to receive, through a complicated dialectical process: “to delight His creatures” (p. 112). However, if so, why was this soul shattered?

This can be answered using the following example. Just like children do not really understand their parents until they become parents themselves, to fully experience the Creator, the single soul had to be detached from Him. Only then, in a state of concealment of the Creator, if the soul will decide to resemble His quality of bestowal out of complete autonomy, awareness and freedom of choice, it could climb back up the rungs of the spiritual ladder—the degrees of greater and greater ability to bestow upon others—and merit the purpose of creation ([Ashlag 2009](#)).

To enable this future spiritual development, during the process of creation the structure of the collective soul was “shattered” into 600,000 individual souls or “sparks”, to use Kabbalistic terminology, which fell into our world and formed human society, as we know it. Here, also the number of 600,000 receives an important universalistic meaning. Originally, the number refers to the 600,000 Israelites that were redeemed from Egypt during the exodus. In Ashlag’s doctrine, the number refers to the 600,000 sparks of “Israel”, that represents the divine attribute of bestowal, which allegorically fell into “Egypt”, “the kingship of impure forces”, which represents our egoistic reality.

In other words, this “shattering” and descent to our world is explained in socio-psychological terms as the corruption of the altruistic relations that were present between the “organs” of the common soul as a result of the growth of egoism in this metaphysical system. The growth of egoism in the relations between the organs of the common soul results in the soul finding itself in greater and greater “disparity of form” with its Maker—whilst He altruistically desires to give, the general soul egoistically wants to receive—and thus feels Him less. According to Ashlag, our world represents the furthest degree of remoteness from the Creator, where each human being “carries” a small spark from the general soul—a small tendency to bestow, or a small fraction of those 600,000 sparks that continue to shatter into more and more sparks as they have departed from their Maker—which is covered by egoism ([Ashlag 2009](#)).

Hence, the mission of every human being in the world is to unveil this spark from the egoism that covers it, to autonomously choose to resemble the Creator. According to [Ashlag \(2009\)](#), as long as the Creator is concealed, the only way people could resemble His quality of bestowal and thus know Him, is by developing a similar attitude toward fellow people. How? By realizing the teachings of Kabbalists, which describe the corrected state of the general soul, and thus help people understand how to implement the main principle of the Torah—which is referred to by Ashlag not only as the Pentateuch alone, or as the rabbinic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, both legal and literary, but also as a whole of the Kabbalah itself—“love thy friend as thyself”.

In a letter to his disciples, [Ashlag \(2014, p. 102\)](#) wrote about this process: “You should know that there are many sparks of holiness in each person... When you assemble all the sparks of holiness into one place, as brothers, with love and friendship, you will certainly have a very high level of holiness for a while, from the Light of Life”.

Ashlag’s elder son, Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, has suggested that the way to resemble the Creator’s attribute of bestowal via the creation of altruistic relations between people can be exemplified by looking into the way a radio receiver works ([Ashlag 2008, p. 1939](#)). All around us, writes Baruch Ashlag, different radio stations are transmitting through many different frequencies. However, we hear a specific radio station, only if we have a radio receiver that is set on that specific frequency. In the same way, explains Baruch Ashlag, the Creator is always “transmitting”, always bestowing upon us His bounty. The only problem is that we cannot feel it, since we are “tuned” to a different frequency—He is bestowing,

while we are receiving egoistically. By changing people's natural self-centered attitude to an attitude of bestowal, human beings can begin "transmitting" on the same frequency as the Creator, and thus will know and feel Him. The elder Ashlag called such resemblance "equivalence of form" (Ashlag 2009, p. 55).

Ashlag developed this process of resemblance to the Creator into a profound yet to some extent deterministic social theory. For Ashlag, human development throughout history is the development of egoistic desires within people—from basic desires for food and sex, to more developed desires for fame, honor, domination and eventually knowledge (Ashlag 2009, pp. 127–28, 434–35).

The only problem with this is that as humanity becomes more egoistic, it also draws farther from the Creator and from the purpose of creation. As a result, it suffers (Ashlag 2009, pp. 84–86). Moreover, on a deeper level, the growth of desires within people also brings with it a feeling of dissatisfaction (Ashlag 2009, p. 316). More and more people today, claims Ashlag, begin to feel that they are unable to satisfy their egoistic desires for sex, money, fame, honor, social recognition and knowledge. This leads to a deep inner crisis, which, according to Ashlag, is also an opportunity. In his eyes, the fact that more people are beginning to ask questions about the meaning of life indicates the birth of the most advanced form of desire within people—the desire to receive spirituality (Ashlag 2009, p. 125). Furthermore, although it is an egoistic desire, it pushes people to seek for a deeper and more profound source of fulfillment. The question "what is the meaning of life?" cannot be muted by additional corporeal comfort, consumption, or the achievement of any other materialistic goal. This question is aroused by that small spark of the general soul that comes to life within a person, and it will not settle until it will be realized. From this moment, people's only way toward tranquility is to strive for a much higher purpose—the attainment of the Creator's attribute of bestowal (Ashlag 2009, p. 446).

In other words, the purpose of human and individual development (and suffering) is to make people question their lives and eventually strive to change their egoistic ways. The wisdom of Kabbalah, the way Ashlag understood it, is a method that allows them to undertake this "correction" through a meticulous educational and social process.

By creating loving relations, the members of human society can "rescue" the sparks of the general soul from the "kingship of egoism", and thus reconstruct the general soul, restore balance in the system of creation and achieve adhesion with the Creator (Ashlag 2009, p. 563). This process manifests on the corporeal level in the establishment of an altruistic society where every member autonomously chooses to imitate the divine attribute of bestowal by contributing to society as much as he can and receiving from it as much as he needs (Ashlag 2005).

After this introduction to the main ideas of Ashlag's Kabbalistic doctrine, we can focus on the way he used it to provide a unique justification to one of the main principles of cosmopolitanism—the need to express openness, compassion, care and even responsibility for the other (Vinokur 2016).

## 7. The Sublime Root of the Otherness of the Other

As mentioned above, following a long tradition of Kabbalists, Ashlag believed that the origins of human society are rooted in the shattering of the general soul. The correction of the shattering takes place in the framework of this world and spreads across generations. According to Ashlag, the world's population consists of a specific spiritual mass of souls, symbolically titled "600,000 souls", which clothes in new bodies from generation to generation (Ashlag 2009, pp. 270, 387). In each generation, the sparks of the general soul undergo another milestone in their journey back to their root. This is, however, only half of the story.

Each individual soul, claims Ashlag, is unique. It can be traced back through the chain of all generations up to its root in the general soul (p. 386): "... even when thousands of people share the same environment ... you will still not find two people who share the same attribute. This is because each of them has his or her own unique source".

In other words, according to Ashlag, every culture, every person and even every human tendency has a sublime root. Thus, eradicating a unique tendency or culture is as disastrous as harming the Creator Himself, the root of that uniqueness. Moreover, every tendency represents a unique potential that can be realized only by that human being in whom it is rooted. Moreover, Ashlag calls nations that prevent people from living their lives according to their traditions and by their tendencies as “no less than murderers: (Ashlag 2009, p. 387): “...what a terrible wrong inflict those nations that force their reign on minorities, depriving them of freedom without allowing them to live their lives by the tendencies they have inherited from their ancestors. They are regarded as no less than murderers”. To emphasize this point even more, Ashlag devoted a whole essay to a critique of Marx’s attempt to eradicate the “historical cultural treasure” of each nation (Ashlag 2005, pp. 381–82). In conclusion, only the connections between people, and not people themselves, should be corrected.

Ashlag’s call for care for the otherness of the other, resonates with Beck’s (2002) call to “overcome the otherness of the other” (p. 18). Beck’s central critique of the national perspective is that it revolves around a monological imagination, excluding the possibility of the otherness of the other (Beck 2002). Conversely, the cosmopolitan perspective represents an alternative, dialogical imagination. Cosmopolitanism, claims Beck, involves the possibility to imagine alternative ways of life and comprehensions of life, which include the otherness of the other. Ashlag’s approach strengthens Beck’s claim, by imbuing it with a strong metaphysical justification. Learning about the unique role of every individual and culture in the common soul can contribute greatly to the development of that cosmopolitan imagination Beck envisions in his writing.

Another example of Ashlag’s (2009) high regard for the need to protect uniqueness and otherness can be found in his condemnation of colonialism. In his social writings, he called those who wish to force their culture and religion on minorities “no less than murderers” (p. 387): “...what a terrible wrong inflict those nations that force their reign on minorities, depriving them of freedom without allowing them to live their lives by the tendencies they have inherited from their ancestors. They are regarded as no less than murderers”. Furthermore, he continued (Ibid.):

“And even those who do not believe in religion or in purposeful guidance can understand the necessity to preserve the freedom of the individual by watching nature’s systems. For we can see how all the nations that ever fell, throughout the generations, came to it only due to their oppression of minorities and individuals, which had therefore rebelled against them and ruined them”.

In other words, the system of nature (or the Creator) itself, avenges the oppression of minorities! Continuing this line of thought, Ashlag (2005) wrote that an egoistic claim could not justify the conquering of land by force. In his social writings, he almost cries out to his readers: “What prerogative and ownership over raw materials in the soil has one nation over others? Who legislated this proprietary law? All the more so when they have acquired it by means of swords and bayonets!” (p. 334).

Ashlag’s approach to natural resources resembles Beitz’s (1999) approach to cosmopolitan justice, the latter claiming that the current distribution of natural resources is completely arbitrary from a moral standpoint. The fact that this or another natural resource was discovered in a certain country does not provide the country with an automatic, let alone exclusive, ownership over that given resource, since the planet belongs to us all. Thus, according to Beitz, there is a moral justification to discuss new principles of justice that will allow for a renewed and more just distribution of natural resources (Beitz 1999, pp. 137–41).

In a different essay, elaborating on the idea of just distribution and care for the other, Ashlag (2009) devoted a thorough discussion to the critique of “world reformers”, referring to people who think that they hold the sole and complete knowledge regarding the way the world should look, and thus try to impose their understanding or regime upon people of different beliefs and cultures in the name of “the good of humanity” (p. 84). Due to the actions of such people, who do not understand the divine uniqueness of every culture and

individual, humanity has suffered and is destined to suffer from calamities, trouble and destruction, claims Ashlag.

With that being said, it is important to note that although Ashlag attributed great importance to the unique tendencies of different people and cultures, and opposed anyone who wished to hurt otherness, his words should not imply that he supported the extreme relativistic discourse that is accustomed in some of the critical traditions. Unlike the relativistic branch in critical theory, Ashlag believed that there are objective standards by which a discussion about human uniqueness and otherness should be conducted. In his writings, he suggested a normative axis that could be used to evaluate the extent to which people are using their unique tendencies for the benefit of society. This axis was the extent to which an adult or young disciple seeks to use their uniqueness to promote humanity toward the realization of the goal of creation—acquiring the altruistic attribute of the Creator (Ashlag 2009, pp. 55–56). To this end, in some of his writings, Ashlag presented a critique of the egoistic ways by which individuals and societies sought to express their uniqueness and suggested alternative, altruistic directions (Ashlag 1940).

## 8. Bridge over Troubled Water

A famous critique of cosmopolitanism is Todd's account of its attempt to "cultivate humanity". Per Todd, what some scholars of cosmopolitanism tend to forget is that our inhumanity is also a part of our humanity (Todd 2009). Thus, claims Todd, by presenting to children a "shared" naïve and oversimplistic picture of reality, we prevent them "from confronting the far more difficult and much closer task at hand of facing the troublesome aspects of human interaction that emerge in specific times and places" (Todd 2009, p. 9). Moreover, relating to Levinas' discussion about the nature of violence, Todd wrote that it is insufficient to "sooth the wounds of the world by couching a nice language of 'care', 'love', or 'empathy'." Indeed, there is a need to perform a somewhat painful move of letting go of one's own firm grasp on a fixed system of beliefs—and one's own desires and interests—to allow for the creation of a cosmopolitan moment, and even further, of a cosmopolitan orientation of care for another.

In this respect, another major contribution by Ashlag to the field of cosmopolitanism is his take on the tension that naturally arises when people encounter otherness. Instead of ignoring or trying to minimize the natural difficulty in accepting the other and opening oneself to the other, Ashlag devoted a whole corpus of writing to the evil that is innate in the relationships between people and the hard work and huge sacrifice that is demanded to overcome it (Ashlag 2009, pp. 55–56). According to Ashlag, the tension that usually accompanies an encounter with the other should not be ignored, since our awareness of these emotions can allow us to work with them and eventually leverage them for greater spiritual advancement.

People's natural attitude toward otherness is a result of the shattering of the general soul. The shattering manifests in the fact that people love what is pleasant to their egoism and reject what is less convenient and close to them (Ashlag 2009, pp. 376, 389, 464). Thus, the more interactions will take place among different people, the greater egoistic gap will be revealed between them (Ashlag 1940). However, if they will be able to bridge this gap with love, they will merit a greater spiritual degree, since they will overcome greater egoistic resistance.

The encounter with otherness also allows people to know themselves better since it uncovers their own egoistic nature to themselves (Ashlag 2009, p. 55). In other words, similarly to Todd (2011), Ashlag claims that an encounter with otherness that is properly reflected upon can provide people with a clear mirror of themselves and of the degree of their egoistic attitude to reality. Since Ashlag is addressing people who seek spiritual growth, the way he understands it—i.e., the transformation from egoism to altruism—the clearer the mirror such people will face, the more it will allow them to hasten their process of "correction". This way, the encounter with others, combined with a divine goal in mind,

can become the most fertile ground for spiritual progress, a platform for self-transformation, or to use Delanty's (2009) terminology, "a cosmopolitan moment".

Ashlag, however, was not naïve. Knowing the egoistic beginnings inherent in human nature, he did not expect people to succeed in their altruistic efforts. However, he did expect them to try. Ashlag believed that as a result of their efforts to better their interactions, people would eventually recognize the corruption inherent in their egoistic approach to life. As a result of the recognition of the difference between their nature and the Creator's attribute of bestowal, they would develop a true desire to change their ways. Ashlag (2014) called this inner cry to change one's nature from egoism to altruism, a "prayer". This prayer, he believed, is a prayer the Creator responds to (p. 301).

Our discussion allows us to depict the educational program presented by Ashlag, namely the stages people undergo during their educational advancement from egoism to altruism. As people develop through this educational process, they undergo a moral metamorphosis in the sense that they begin to despise their narrow love of self, whereas the love of others, becomes the goal to which they aspire, since it brings them to a divine stature. The process of self-transformation from egoism to altruism, and not momentary pleasure, is what gradually becomes of value to the "educated being". Ashlag (2009, pp. 55–56), describes this process in the following words:

The crude, undeveloped person does not regard egoism as a bad attribute and uses it openly, without shame or restraints. He steals and murders in broad daylight wherever he finds it possible. The somewhat more developed, sense some measure of their egoism to be bad, and are at least ashamed to use it in public, to steal and kill openly. But in secrecy they still commit their crimes.

The even more developed feel egoism to be a loathsome thing indeed, until they cannot tolerate it within and reject it completely, as much as they detect of it, until they cannot, and do not want to enjoy the labor of others. Then begin to emerge in them the sparks of love for others, called "altruism", which is the general attribute of goodness.

And that, too, evolves gradually. First develops love and desire to bestow upon one's family and kin, as in the verse, "thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh". When further developing, one's attribute of bestowal expands to all the people around him, being one's townspeople or one's nation. And so one adds, until he finally develops love for the whole of humanity.

Ashlag's proposed educational program "from egoism to altruism", fits neatly to Hansen's (2011) definition of cosmopolitanism as an orientation toward the world.

## 9. The Religion of Love

In 1995, almost 40 years after Ashlag's passing, his personal handwritten notes were published and revealed a depiction of quasi "communistic altruistic" spiritual society, which he believed should be created. This cosmopolitan society, which never materialized, was supposed to be established by people whose level of morality would be sufficient to practice altruistic interrelations among each other. Ashlag (2005) envisioned such a society as a focal point, expanding until it would accommodate all the nations in the world (pp. 312–13).

One of the most interesting aspects of this society is its religious nature. Throughout his writings, Ashlag titled the religion that will be accustomed in this future society as "the collective religion of all the nations" (pp. 312–13, 338–40). It was a religion according to which "the life of thy friend precedes one's own life" and all of its followers willingly fulfill the rule of "love thy friend as thyself" (p. 338). Ashlag also called this religion "the religion that necessitates love and bestowal upon all humankind equally", and "the religion of bestowal".

Unlike Ashlag's published essays, where he presented a very moderate critique of religion, in general, and of Judaism, in particular, his handwritings unveil a different



approach. One example is Ashlag's call for "nihilism of . . . the religious conducts", which were accepted in his time (Ashlag 2005, p. 350). In a different section, Ashlag wrote straightforwardly that contemporary representatives of religion have corrupted it via their commentaries, and that by so doing, they have contributed to the deterioration of the world (p. 374). To prevent further destruction, he believed there is a need perform a "revolution in religious perception", meaning that "instead of the monks being thus far the destructors of the world, when they assume altruism, the monks will be the builders of the world, since the measure of *Haredut* (E.V: anxiety, referring to Jewish religious orthodoxy) can be measured only by the measure of help to society, in order to bring contentment to the Maker" (p. 375).

In other words, Ashlag redefines religious orthodoxy from anxiety from the Lord and keeping secularity out of the religious society, into an anxiety about being unable to love the other as part of an attempt to cling to the Creator. Ashlag stresses his point even more when claiming that contemporary religion is used by those in power as a manipulative apparatus, through which they control the masses according to their narrow interests. Ashlag believed that ordinary people should take religion back in their hands and turn it from a polarizing and narrow-minded apparatus into a positive one, which promotes unity and reconciliation (pp. 374–75). To this end, Ashlag's approach resembles Hull's (1992) neo-Marxist approach to religious education in the Christian tradition and his critique of religionism, namely "that kind of religion which involve the identity of the believer in such a way as to support tribalism and nationalistic solidarity through fostering negative attitudes towards other religions" (Hull 2000, p. 75).

Another example of Ashlag's unique attitude toward religion is the condition he placed upon nations or peoples who wished to join that spiritual altruistic society. If a nation wanted to join the society and agreed to follow the rules of bestowal and love toward the other, it "may follow its own religion and tradition", and other groups of people "must not interfere" with that group's inner religious life (Ashlag 2005, p. 338).

In other words, the citizens of the future spiritual society will need to change their inner, egoistic attitude, to a divine, altruistic one, and thus undergo an essential inner correction. Their "external wrapping", however, can stay the way it is, and no one has the right to demand it to change, as long as it does not endanger the uniqueness of others (pp. 381–82).

## 10. Conclusions

Ironically enough, more than once, in today's globalized world, when educators try to suggest a program or a curriculum that has a cosmopolitan bearing, they stumble upon stiff opposition. Educational systems globally are often used as a vehicle for socialization and acculturation. In a reality where next to lofty words about global responsibility, nationalism, ethnocentrism and racism are on the rise, educators sometimes find it hard to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Why?

It is because common knowledge regarding cosmopolitanism's call for unity beyond language, racial, historical, and religious borders makes policy makers feel that cosmopolitan education may pose a potential threat to the resilience of their local communities. "Who will care for our community?" they often ask, "if its members care for the world?"

Additionally, cosmopolitanism is perceived to be an "elitist", "top down" perspective, which views the world "from nowhere" and does not consider that people often find meaning in life and form their vision of the good based on their "thick" historical, cultural, religious and national connections and origins. From this perspective, cosmopolitan theory and practice is insensitive to local realities, loyalties, and attachments.

My attempt in this paper was to suggest a dialectic golden route, similarly to what was broadly suggested with respect to the civic realm by Nussbaum (2011) and with respect to the cultural realm by Appiah (2008). Namely, not cosmopolitanism or local religious attachments, but rather both. Following previous research about "rooted cosmopolitanism", I suggested viewing cosmopolitanism as a grounded educational response that can be found

in different religions and cultivated from within them. My underlying assumption was that many religious thinkers have developed a unique moral grounding for life in a constant tension between “self” and “other”. Furthermore, since nurturing a humane response to the encounter with otherness is one of the basic tenets of cosmopolitanism, I sought to exemplify my suggestion of rooted cosmopolitan education viewed from a religious prism by presenting a hermeneutic account of a “rooted religious approach”—the social doctrine of Jewish thinker and Kabbalist, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag.

Through his genuinely original Lurianic commentary on Jewish canonical texts, Ashlag developed a unique worldview about the origins of human society and the nature of the connections between people, which invites teachers and students to challenge their individual and community self-understandings as well as the ways they should regard both the local and larger world.

Unlike cosmopolitan perspectives that seek to promote a rationalistic Western vision of the good, which often collides with religious and mystical traditions, Ashlag sought to present a deep theological justification for concern, responsibility, and love toward the other, regardless of religious affiliation. “We are all members of the same soul”, claimed Ashlag. “Furthermore, we have to begin behaving as such”. Moreover, each and every human being has a unique root in this divine structure. The sublime root of every human inclination should also teach us that we must preserve the uniqueness of all people and religions. Per Ashlag, the Creator Himself demands it from us.

The transformative process of changing one’s attitude toward the other, from egoism to altruism, is thus articulated not only on ethical and moral grounds, but also on metaphysical grounds. By consciously and willingly overcoming the remoteness that is naturally present between people, not only does a person contribute to the creation of a more pluralistic and open society, but he also attains the essence of life, contributing to the restoration of the single human soul.

By education toward relating to people as parts of one single soul—regardless of national, religious, cultural, racial and historical differences—Ashlag overcomes the barrier of indoctrination that religious education, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, tends to stumble upon. Instead of trying to force the other to accept my vision of the good, as religious fundamentalists so often try to do, Ashlag suggested that religious education worthy of its name should address the problems of religious intolerance through a call for a transformation of the self, and not the other. Ashlag claims that this is especially important today, since contemporary representatives of Jewish religious education, mainly in Israel, have moved too far from its original values, i.e., openness, self-transformation, care and responsibility for the other. In fact, he claims they have gone so far from brotherly love, that they are the ones to blame for most of the Jewish suffering (Ashlag 2009, pp. 142–46).

Therefore, Ashlag’s approach and its broad ramifications to the role of religious education today comprises a profound contribution to the scholarly discussion about both cosmopolitan and religious education, since it creates an opening to consider the potential that lies in cosmopolitan-oriented religious education. Instead of ignoring people’s local affiliations or even defining them as opposing cosmopolitanism, Ashlag suggests leveraging people’s local affiliations to serve as an impetus for the cultivation of cosmopolitan values.

By doing so, rooted religious cosmopolitan education can imbue the cosmopolitan worldview with local meanings, and thus help educators creatively tackle the tension that might arise while introducing a cosmopolitan-oriented education, which is perceived as an initiation to a global community of rootless citizens, into a specific educational setting. Such an approach can also become a gateway to consolidation between religions, by promoting cosmopolitan values from within religions.

My hope is that this examination of a particular religious perspective from a cosmopolitan lens will serve as a starting point to a much broader discussion about the role of religious education, the responsibility of religious leaders and the connection between cosmopolitanism and religion in our time.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> These two directions can be seen in the course of development of his teachings years after his passing. Some successors, such as Philip Berg's 'Kabbalah Center' and Michael Laitman's 'Bnei Baruch' and 'Kabbalah for the People', popularized Kabbalah and gave it a cosmopolitan interpretation, whereas other, more orthodox successors, used his writings to give a deeper, more social or psychological commentary, to Jewish traditions and commandments. For a typology of Ashlag's successors see: Garb (2009), among others.

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