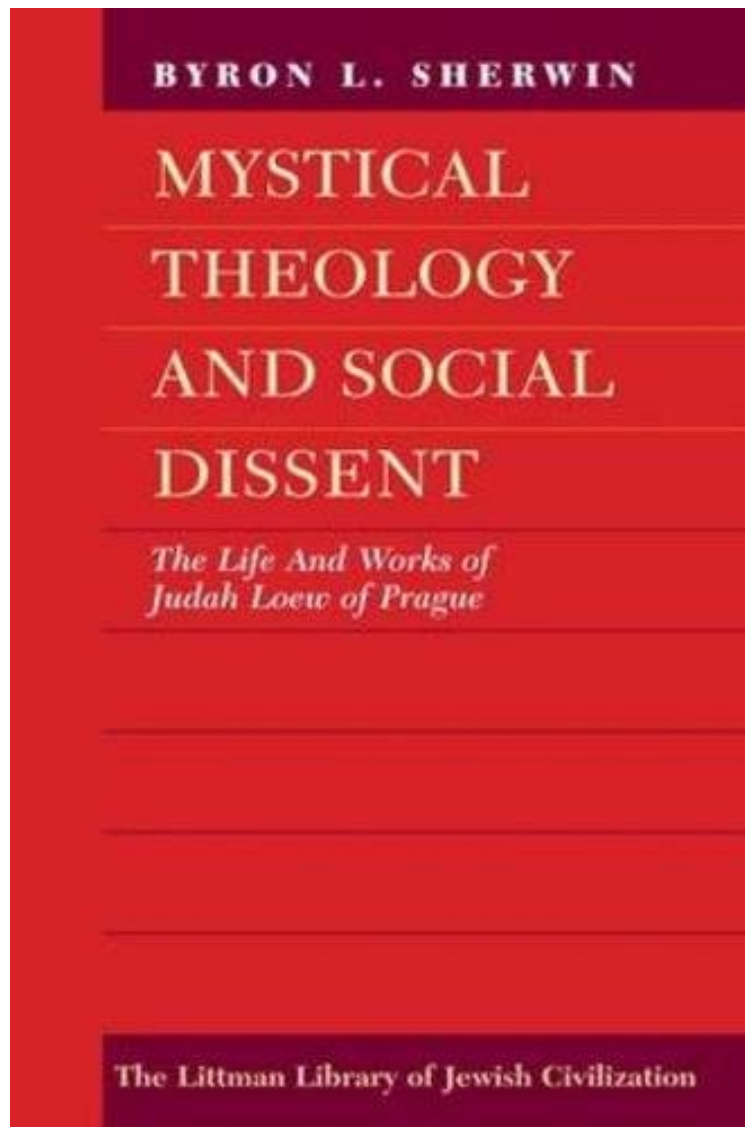


(Ebook pdf) Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

## **Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)**

*Byron L. Sherwin*

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**Byron L. Sherwin : Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised **Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)**:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An important work about the Maharal  
 By Gregor Brand  
 The last decades of the 20th century saw an increasing number of books and articles about Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (also called the "Maharal"). More and more people consider the Maharal (died in 1609), who was chief rabbi of Prague, Moravia and Poland, to be one of the greatest intellectual figures of Judaism of all time. Among all these works about the Jewish philosopher, talmudist and kabbalist of Prague, whose roots were in German Jewry (Alsace/Worms), the book of Professor Sherwin deserves special interest. Sherwin describes in a scholarly, but well readable way the essential facts of the life of the Maharal as well as the main themes of his thought. Judah Loew wrote extensively about the nature of God, the nature of Torah, the special destiny of the Jewish people, about Jewish and Gentile relations and a lot of other topics, which in our time are no less important than 400 years ago. Sherwin, a leading expert in Jewish philosophy and Jewish intellectual heritage, shows that R. Judah Loew was in many ways - not only in philosophical and theological matters - an exceptional personality, who influenced Jewish thought from his time until the present. Special chapters of Byron Sherwin's book deal with still unsolved biographical questions such as: "When was Judah Loew born?" or "In what order did Judah Loew write his works?". Although I can't follow all of Sherwin's conclusions, I think his book is one of the most important works about the illustrious rabbi and philosopher from Prague.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Well written work  
 By Neal J. Pollock  
 The author has masterfully portrayed the life, works, major themes of Judah Loew of 16th c. Prague. He convincingly argues for Loew's mystical view provides an integrated, consistent theoretical practical worldview. His work is readable yet scholarly; his organization is effective. He presents, per Loew his opponents, significant expositions of important legal, mystical, scientific, metaphysical issues (e.g. mystical cleaving to God). He avoids inserting his own values: p. 20: "Too often the image conjured up by the modern scholar represents a projection of his own mind rather than an accurate depiction of the subject of his scholarly seance...taking their silhouettes in his own likeness!" However, he conflates mysticism, metaphysics, religion. Mysticism is a personal experience of cleaving or union with the divine as opposed to religion which is group-oriented (in Judaism), tradition-bound (e.g. ritual, dogma). Metaphysics is concerned with cosmology/comogony issues--i.e. divine physics. He thus confuses Loew's mysticism with his metaphysics. He also discounts the Golem legend its effects. Loew's perspective is tradition-based though open to natural science if not applied to religion. He favored cultural isolation which later proved deadly for both Jews Tibetans. His views of gentiles seem derogatory--but Sherwin asserts they were based on the recent Iberian expulsion of Jews: p. 91: "How can one reconcile theological assumptions with historical reality? How can one harmonize the theory of the Jews as an elected people with the reality of the Jews as a despised, persecuted, humiliated people?" It seems ironic that Jews have been stereotyped as material (money oriented) when Loew characterized gentiles as material Jews as spiritual. Indeed, he views Moses as a God-man! Further, he favored Moslems over Christians--things have changed since then. Many of his views seem to be apologetics--theory devised to fit the result desired. He opposed Karo's Shulkan Arukh since it was too easy to use thus encouraged lack of individual thinking p. 164: "he believed poor leadership low-quality education to be the major cause of contemporary undesirable realities." Certainly his criticism of the politics bribery in appointments, lack of training, gifts to rabbis seemed well founded as was his psychological progression in education (matching curricula to student abilities). His position on gentile converts is complicated, his position on gentile wine, is deeply rooted in his metaphysical worldview. Many of his views, however, influenced later leaders writers including Hasidic masters. My least favorite portion is his resistance to any new paradigm--he was tradition-based though the tradition was heavily kabbalistic. My favorite portion is his mysticism non-halakhic metaphysics: p. 66: "The sefirot relate to their source as rays of the sun relate to the sun. Their emanation does not imply a diminishing of the source, nor does it reveal the essence of their source." Such a universal view parallels the wisdom literature of other traditions such as Tibetan Dzogchen's view of "the Ground of Being."

Judah Loew, better known as the Maharal of Prague, was a pivotal personality in late medieval European Judaism. Best known from the popular legend that credited him with the creation of a golem-an artificial human with superhuman powers-his true importance lay in his comprehensive exposition of a unique expression of Jewish mystical theology, his call for a reformation of Jewish communal life, and his influence on subsequent Jewish life and thought. Byron Sherwin's lucid exposition of the life, legend, works, and ideas developed in Loew's massive writings 'reveals the concealed' by unravelling the often obscure nature of his mystical theology, his polemical jousts against past and contemporary Jewish scholars, and his innovative programme for social and educational reform.

'Very fine ... a model of clarity and scholarship.' Howard Schwartz, Jerusalem Post 'A solid contribution to our knowledge of the intellectual world of central and east European Jewry in the early modern era, an area and an era that deserves greater scholarly attention.' Ira Robinson, Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter 'The heart of the book, on Maharal's thought, is valuable for its careful and admirably clear explication of Maharal's complex views on Divine attributes, Torah, Jewish uniqueness, man and his perfection, and messianism ... to be welcomed for its lucid presentation of major themes in the thought of a protean sixteenth-century Jewish thinker who influenced certain key Hasidic, Zionistic and semi-Mitnagdic thinkers.' Hillel Goldberg, Journal of the American Academy of Religion

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About the Author Byron L. Sherwin is Distinguished Service Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism and Director of Doctoral Programs at Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, Chicago. His recent books include Golems among Us, Workers of Wonders, and Kabbalah: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism.