



Book cover image from the comprehensive library of Barry Kapandji (pseudonym) on Shabbtai Zevi, and the Dönme.



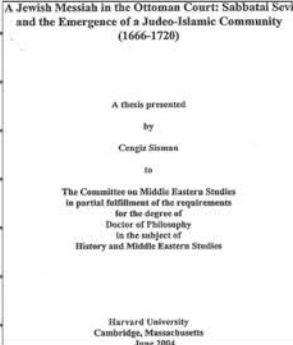
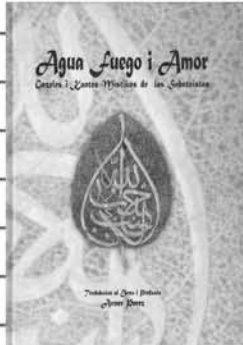
'Portrait of Sabbatai from Thomas Coenen's book', in Gershom Scholem's Shabbatai Sevi: the mystical messiah, part A, published by Am Oved 1957

Sabbatai Zevi, (Hebrew: צַבִּי בֶּן-יִשָּׁן, *Shabbetai Zevi*, other spellings include **Sabetay Sevi** in Turkish), (August 1, 1626, in Izmir—possibly September 17, 1676, in Dulcigno (present day Ulcinj), Montenegro) was a kabbalist who claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, and later converted to Islam. He was the founder of the Jewish Sabbatean movement and inspired the founding of a number of other similar sects, such as the Dönme in Turkey.

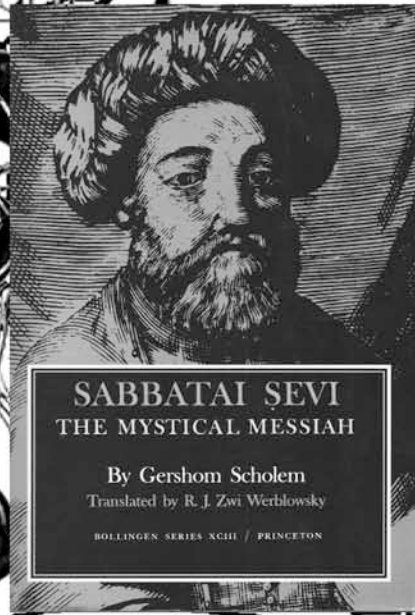
Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680) (Hebrew: נחמן נתן) was a theologian, born in Jerusalem, who became famous as a prophet for the alleged messiah, Sabbatai Zevi. As brilliant as he was as a kabbalistic theologian and as a student, Nathan of Gaza was also endowed with other remarkable characteristics that ultimately helped to promote the messianic claims surrounding Shabbetai Zevi. He was known, for example, for his prophetic visions as well as for his ideological and radical views, all of which helped to shape the eventual mystical movement around Shabbethai Zevi — Wikipedia



'portrait of Nathan of Gaza from Thomas Coenen's book', in Gershom Scholem's Shabbatai Sevi: the mystical messiah, part B, published by Am Oved 1957



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From Gershom Scholem's book, P.225 Nathan vision of Shabbtai as the messiah

A son will be born and he will be called Shabbtai Sevi, he will subdue the great dragon, and take away the full strength of the piercing serpent and the strength of the crooked serpent and he will be the true messiah. He will go forth to war without weapons, stand upon thy feet and hear the power of this man. Although he be poor and lean. He is my beloved, my one and only beloved, like the apple of my eye and my very heart... and he shall sit on my throne... I am still wondering at this vision and a man stood before me. His appearance like that of a polished brass from the appearance of his loins downwards and he had the brightness of fire round him. And from the appearance of his loins even upwards like bdellium and like the body of heaven in his clearance... and a deep sleep fell upon me, a horror of great darkness... and there came a ferret and a chameleon and brought great light... his light... and behold there was a man, his size was one square cubit and his beard a cubit long and his *membrum virile* a cubit and a span... he held a hammer in his hand and tore up a great mountain.

P.723

Later letters from Shabbtai reveal the use of the word Satan from Gaza instead of Nathan from Gaza, in response to Nathan paradoxical thinking on Shabbtai; whereas Shabbtai's mental sickness* had first been defined in metaphysical terms, his apostasy** and present condition were now metaphorically described as illness. Shabbtai's letter using Satan from Gaza illustrate his dependency on his 'physician' and a sense of betrayal Shabbtai felt.

*Shabbtai suffered from Mania Depressia

** Shabbtai converted from Judaism to Islam, after receiving such a request and threats of death from the Sultan.

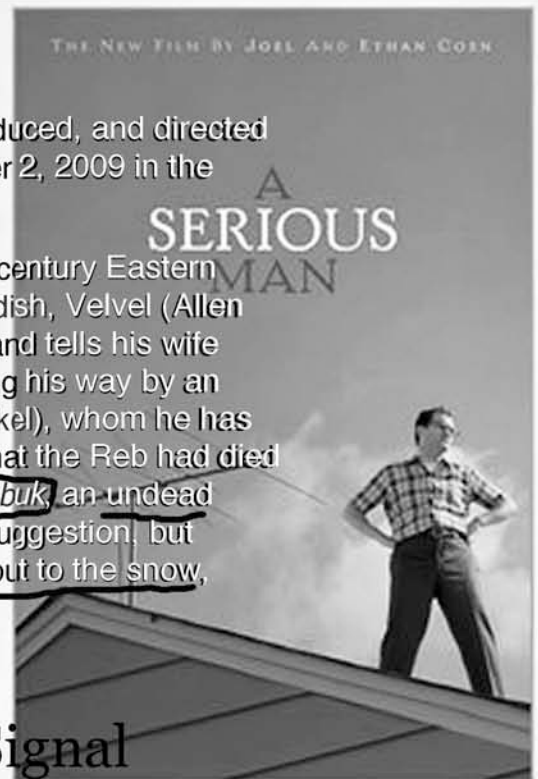


Shabbtai, I would like to think, is part of an historical Jewish tradition of eccentricity and transgression embedded in a systematic questioning of the established order, in this case of organised religion. The Movie *Serious Man* (Coen Brothers, 2009) uses this impending sense of specifically Jewish eccentricity, horror and folklore to tell a Hollywood story.

Plot

A Serious Man is a black comedy film written, produced, and directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. It was released on October 2, 2009 in the United States.

The film opens with a prologue scene set in a 19th-century Eastern European *shtetl*. In the scene, filmed entirely in Yiddish, Velvel (Allen Lewis Rickman) comes home during a snowstorm and tells his wife (Yelena Shmulenson) that he had been helped along his way by an acquaintance of hers, Reb Groshkover (Fyvush Finkel), whom he has invited in for soup. However, the wife informs him that the Reb had died three years prior, and that this visitor must be a dybbuk, an undead being of Jewish folklore. The guest laughs off this suggestion, but eventually she stabs the visitor, and he goes back out to the snow, leaving the mystery unresolved. (Wikipedia)



Calls to God: Always a Busy Signal

The New York Times

By A. O. SCOTT
Published: October 2, 2009

Did you hear the one about the guy who lived in the land of Uz, who was perfect and upright and feared God? His name was Job. In the new movie version, "A Serious Man," some details have been changed. He's called Larry Gopnik and he lives in Minnesota, where he teaches physics at a university. When we first meet Larry, in the spring of 1967, his tenure case is pending, his son's bar mitzvah is approaching, and, as in the original, a lot of bad stuff is about to happen, for no apparent reason. At work, Larry specializes in topics like Schrödinger's Paradox and the Heisenberg Principle — complex and esoteric ideas that can be summarized by the layman, more or less, as "God knows." Because we can't. Though if he does, he isn't saying much. (extract from review)



<http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/10/02/movies/02serious.html>

The same night of watching Serious Man I come home to this email, first of its kind. Considering the content of the film, full of warning of the Jewish kind, I was spooked.

Name:

Email: @hotmail.com

Enquiry: What is the meaning behind you mocking frum jewish men?

Frum (Yiddish: פֿרומ; [frum | frim]), from the German *fromm*, meaning "devout" or "pious", is a Yiddish word meaning committed to be observant of the 613 Mitzvot, or Jewish commandments, specifically of Orthodox Judaism. This appellation is used especially in reference to *haredim* (i.e. the "Ultra-Orthodox"), and to a lesser extent among the Modern Orthodox.

Did you know mocking in judaism is the lowest thing a human being can do?

It seems as if perhaps you have an issue with your identity, or are unhappy with the traditions orthodoxy has upkept?

Are you possessed? Do you have a Dybbuk? In Jewish folklore, a **dybbuk** is a malicious possessing spirit, believed to be the dislocated soul of a dead person

Have you thought of visiting

stanford hill or golders green london and performed such cross dressing

activities with beds and so on? i dont know whether the reaction you recieve

there will be that of "off the wall slightly deranged art lovers" giving you kudos in such a safe environment of an art gallery or an anything goes soho street

I have an amazing website for you its called

<http://www.simpletoremember.com/authors/a/rabbi-akiva-tatz/> this guy is a doctor, Rabbi and overall genius, he may give you some answers your looking

for and is also available to meet within the jewish learning centre golders green.

Anyway im sure this small message wont prevent you from discovering more about

yourself and art work and as HaShem the names of God has given us free will, the world is there

for your taking, who knows, maybe in your next life he may place you back into

this world as a chabad lubavich Rabbi!!!! PLEASE G-D, this could be your tikkun! Tikkun olam, the Jewish concept of "mending the world"

Anyway all the best

Am I cursed now? Have I been issued with the Jewish version of the Fatwā? Will I go to hell and come back as an orthodox Jewish man? Will that mend me? Or the world? What does she mean by this email? Did she see me in the film?? Is this a Jewish induced Paranoia?

An imaginary image of Shabbtai leading his people from exile to Zion, from a 1666 bulletin in Gershom Scholem's Shabbatai Sevi: the mystical messiah, part B, published by Am Oved 1957



Shabbtai's highly performative and provocative behaviour was intent, consciously and unconsciously, on the deconstruction of the given religious value system from within. Rabbinical Judaism has been shaken to its core by the immense influence of Shabbtai's performances of extreme blasphemous acts, based in parts on the mystical logistics of the Kabbalah. An economic crisis had actually developed in the Near East and Europe, as Jewish communities were packing their belonging in a zealous, if highly ungrounded, quest to follow Shabbtai to Zion. Shabbtai and his followers constituted a perplexing moment of embarrassment and a shameful threat in Jewish history.

My fascination with Shabbtai Zvi is also centred around the two main relationships in his life, Nathan of Gaza and Sarah. Both relationships were spectacularly fraught in the context of their time. Shabbtai, who was manic depressive, handsome but 'strange', a little weak, and not to be relied upon, was foregrounded by the respected theologian Nathan of Gaza. Nathan acted as Zvi's faithful and dedicated Public Relations manager, to use contemporary jargon, and most of Shabbtai's popularity is in fact indebted to him. Nathan's written visions of Shabbtai, as the new messiah, are loaded with romantic and homoerotic scripts, and recent academic studies suggest a co-dependency and sexual relationship between the two. It is well documented that Shabbtai did not touch his first two wives, his opponents used this as evidence of his madness or illness. At some point Shabbtai himself seems to have spread the rumour that he had no sexual relationship with his third wife Sarah either, although they had two children. From historical documents Sarah appears to be a similarly independent character; a wildly beautiful lone traveller, and one who is also engaged in 'Strange Acts', mainly spiritual ones such as palm reading. Sarah has been systematically condemned by Shabbtai's opponents as a witch and a prostitute who funded her travels through sex. She was also said to have stigmata or her father's permanent blue finger marks on her neck.

However, my main intrigue with Shabbtai is the ripe relationship between his 'Strange Acts' and performance art. Shabbtai suffered from severe bouts of manic depression throughout his life. In times of depression he would lock himself in his room for weeks without seeing anyone and without as much as reading. In his manic periods he conducted a series of what came to be called by his peers - Strange Acts. Those acts are very much in the tradition of Happenings, Fluxus performances and conceptual performative works. Some of the Strange Acts have included: walking in the streets pushing a pram with a fish dressed in baby clothes inside it, fasting for 24 hours, but before doing so, planning for a meal to be consumed at the end of the fast, and buying the ingredients one at a time until sweaty and completely exhausted, declaring that he could levitate and stop the sun.

- STRANGE ACTS -



An imaginary image of Shabbtai riding a horse wearing green from a 1666 bulletin in Gershom Scholem Shabbatai Sevi: the mystical messiah, part B, published by Am Oved 1957

Most of the acts were blasphemous to the extreme, like pronouncing repeatedly the four Hebrew letters that make the name of God, y-oh-v-a, and which will not be spoken under any circumstances. Announcing that all major Jewish festivals will be celebrated in the same week, allowing women to touch the holy scrolls in synagogues, marrying himself to the old testament and according to his opponents having sex with a man using phylacteries after his conversion from Judaism to Islam. Jews at the time were not allowed to wear green, the Islamic colour of respect, or ride horses. However, the sultan was so enchanted with Shabbtai that he allowed him to do both.

I wrote a participatory play *Shabbtai, Nathan, Sarah – First Reading* to be performed daily at the Whitstable Biennale 2008

PLAY:
Shabbtai, Nathan, Sarah- First Reading



Interactive play reading by the Hut Theatre *The Saint/s of Whitstable* included the daily reading of the play *Shabbtai, Sarah, Nathan – first reading*. Every day different visitors/participants constituted a new group that read the play, usually alongside one other friend or collaborator. Each group created a different dynamic and gave the play another tone. Visitors watched the play in the performance space, hence creating two types of audience; viewers and participants, both intimate and arbitrary. The play is humorous yet deals densely with historical documents around Shabbtai's sense of performative transgression and his love relationships with Nathan of Gaza and Sarah. The play employs certain 'silly' and amateurish tactics, bringing into question the potential agency embedded in 'silly acts'. Questions around faith, charisma, celebrity culture, mental illness, religion and bisexuality, and the relationships between visual art, performance art and theatre are all rooted in the script.

© Hut Theatre 2008

PLAY:
Shabbtai, Nathan, Sarah- first reading

Characters:

Director

Assistant director

Actor I – Playing Shabbtai (False Messiah)

Actor II – Playing Nathan (Shabbtai's lover and messianic promoter)

Actor III – Playing Sarah (Shabbtai's possible lover and wife)

General cast members – (random participants take it upon themselves to read the parts)

Act I

(all cast members are sitting around reading)

Director: *(looking at everyone in the room with a sense of occasion)*
Hi everybody and good to meet you all, It's a pleasure to finally put names to faces.

Assistant director: *(looking around and smiling)* Hello everyone, its my pleasure to meet you all in the flesh

Director: The play we are about to develop together in the next few months will be a contemporary take on the controversial messianic figure of Shabbtai Zvi

Actor II Playing Nathan *:(interjecting)* And his companions; Nathan and Sarah.

Director: *(nodding his head and smiling to Actor II)* I am delighted to be working with such rich historical material.

Assistant director: *(looking around)* Needless to say that I feel equally excited.

Actor II Playing Nathan: *(looking at director)* me too

(Actor I and III looking at each other shaking their heads)

Actor III playing Sarah: *(whispering to actor I)* Creep

Extract from the play *Shabbtai, Sarah, Nathan – first reading?*



Riding on the back of an eight months pregnant Nadia, as if on a horse

Lets imagine one of their conversations, after Shabbtai's conversion (*touch both Actor I, and II noses lightly*)

Shabbtai: Nathan, I thought you loved me

Nathan: I do love you, but my love of God must come first, or else I might as well not be me

Shabbtai: But you know I had no choice, it was apostasy or death, would you rather have me a dead Jew than a living Muslim?

Nathan: You had a choice! we all have a choice. You could have run! gone into hiding... I don't know, anything but this! Do you know how many Jews in Spain were forced to become Catholic during the Dark Ages ???

Shabbtai: And what?

Nathan: They refused! What do you think? and got burnt alive by the Spanish inquisition!! Burnt!! Burnt Burnt!!

Director: (*lifting his hand, doing the stop sign*) Can I stop you here and ask you Nathan to move your head to the left, then right and left (*demonstrating*) as you say out loud, Burnt! Burnt! Burnt!... actually- lets us all do it together: Burnt! Burnt! Burnt!

All cast and actor move their head to the left, right and left again as they say out loud, Burnt! Burnt! Burnt!

Director: Take it from the top again Nathan

Nathan: (*starts again*) **Nathan:** You had a choice! we all have a choice. You could have run! gone into hiding... I don't know, anything but this! Do you know how many Jews in Spain were forced to become Catholic during the Dark Ages ???

Shabbtai: And what?

Nathan: They refused! What do you think? and got burnt alive by the Spanish inquisition!! Burnt!! Burnt Burnt!!

And how many Jews now are forced by the Sultan to swear to Muhammad, and what? Do you see them putting a turban on their heads and bowing to the Sultan like a spineless clown? No they don't.

Shabbtai: I believe it is a test. I am being tested, God wants to test me and see if I can continue to serve him through this darkness... as a Muslim

Nathan: And which god might that be? Our God or Allah? undoubtedly you will tell this to your followers who will become Muslims too, Sarah has already converted, I believe. But I am out of here. I can no longer support you or your actions.

Shabbtai: OK.. Ok...ok.. calm down. You are scaring me, I have never seeing you like this before. Have you turned into Satan? Is it Nathan the Satan all of a sudden? Lets just pack up and leave, move away, leave all this behind us.

Nathan: This is your answer to everything; "lets pack up and leave"... how many times have we done this? How many times have we packed up and left? I want nothing to do with you. I've put up with your mood swings, with Sarah, with your strange little rituals... but this time you really crossed the line. You make me sick. You have to be sick to convert, those who called you mad were right all along, you have to be sick to betray all those people who put their trust in you.

Director: OK ok.. enough... this was a terrible piece of acting... I mean do you have no feel for the character at all? (*touching Actor I*)

Extract from the play Shabbtai, Sarah, Nathan - first reading





Here He Comes

In May 2008 Ashery re-enacted one of Shabbtai Zvi's 'Strange Acts'. In Saloniki, Greece, Shabbtai walked with a fish dressed in baby clothes inside a decorated pram, prophesying that Israel will be saved under the sign of Pisces, meaning that the Jews will return to Zion. Outside the Church of Scientology in London, Ashery walked with a pram, a fish and a sign saying, "Palestine will be Saved Under the Sign of Pisces", evoking the Palestinian *Right to Return*. The performance took place just minutes after a demonstration against Scientology by the group Anonymous over control issues in Google. Ashery proceeded to kiss the fish, with tongue, at great length after which she walked the pram over the millennium bridge.

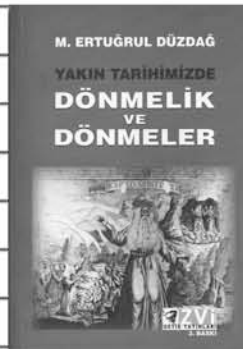
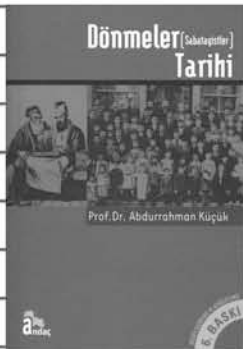
Some of Shabbta'si followers are the Frankist movement and to a larger effect the Sabbatean movement, who like Shabbtai converted to Islam. The Sabbatean's descendants are known in Turkey today, as the Dönmeh, and are treated with suspicion, as they are seen as Muslim Jews, and not real Muslims. In 1923, there was a population exchange between Greece and Turkey. Muslims moved to Turkey. During WWII, 86% of Greek Jews who stayed in Greece were murdered or deported to camps. For this reason there are claims that Shabbtai is indeed the messiah, since those who followed him and converted to Islam were saved from the Nazis.



Jacob Frank (פרנק יעקב) **Ya'akov Frank, Jakob Frank**; 1726–1791) was an 18th century Jewish religious leader who claimed to be the reincarnation of the self-proclaimed messiah Sabbatai Zevi and also of King David. Frank and his followers were excommunicated due to his extremely unconventional doctrines that included acceptance of the New Testament, Enlightenment and some controversial concepts such as "purification through transgression."^[1]

Frank arguably created a new religion, now referred to as **Frankism**, which combined some aspects of Christianity and Judaism. The development of Frankism was one of the consequences of the messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi, the religious mysticism that resulted as a reaction to nascent Hassidism and the socioeconomic upheavals among the Jews of Poland and Ukraine

Wikipedia



Book cover image from the comprehensive library of Barry Kapandji (pseudonym) on Shabbtai Zevi, and the Dönmeh.

Dönme refers to a group of Jews in Turkey who converted to Islam during the era of Sabbatai Zevi. Until the 20th century, many secretly maintained practices associated with the Sabbatean movement

The dönme played an enormous role on the Young Turk movement, a band of modernist revolutionaries who brought down the Ottoman Empire. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the dönme strongly supported the Republican, pro-Western reforms of Atatürk that tried to restrict the power of the religious establishment and to modernize the society.

Since the publication of the book Şebeke ("Network") by Yalçın Küçük in 2002, a new wave of conspiracy theories popular among neo-nationalists emerged. According to these speculations, the dönme are related through a network that links them to "International Jewry", with whom they control the Turkish government

Wikipedia

"dönme"

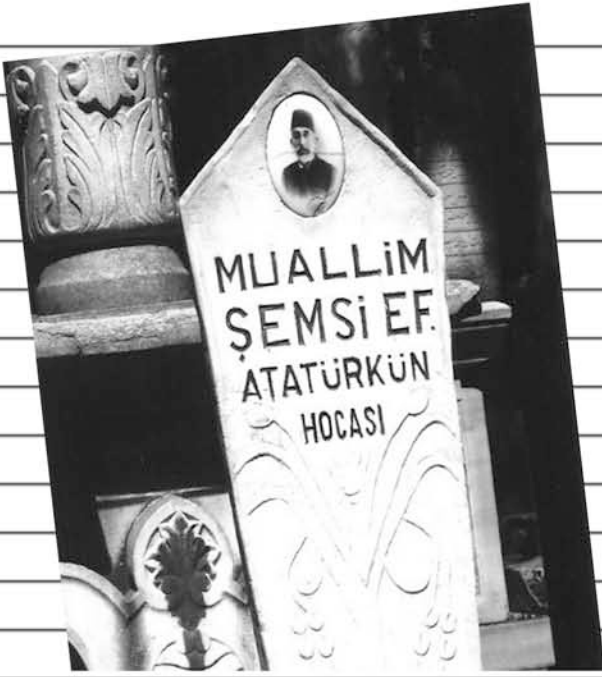
The word "dönme" is from Turkish *dön-* which means "to turn", i.e., "to convert," to betray. The word now is also used to refer to transsexuals and homosexuals.

wikipedia



Ataturk on the internet suspected of being a hidden Jew - Dönme and homosexual

Book covers and tape images from the comprehensive library of Barry kapandji (pseudonym) on Shabbtai and the Dönme



If I had doubts, these grave-stones in Bulbulderesi Cemetery, İstanbul, were my living evidence to the existence of the Dönme. Jews and Muslim do not have portraits of the dead on the stones. However in this Muslim cemetery, there are sections of graves with portraits of the dead, those are the Dönme's graves. It is also possible to connect some of the family names like Thessaloniki to this history.

Bulbulderesi Cemetery, İstanbul



After the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in 1877-78, people from Thessaloniki of Jewish origin who had become Muslim started to immigrate to İstanbul. This wave of immigration continued after the Greek War in 1897, finally slowing down after the Balkan War in 1912. The wealthy families, called Selânik converts, settled in the most elite districts of İstanbul. The tombstone of Şemsi Efendi, one of the teachers of Atatürk, is also here.

http://www.uskudar.bel.tr/portal/En_/t1.jsp?PageName=guideAyr&ID=228



I go to Izmir, to look for Shabbati's house. We are sent to six different derelict houses, Some belonged to Jewish families. We finally find the house. The house is now the centre of current activities around Shabbtai. It is now an official archeological site, but it is not clear what the future holds. Those who are interested in Shabbtai, along side his contemporary followers, are fighting for the house to become Shabbati's official museum. However with the current political sensitivity around the issue of the Dönme in Turkey, and the need to prove that this is indeed his house, the future of the house remains open.



The play *Shabbtai, Nathan, Sarah: First Reading*, ends with the group of amateur actors putting their names down for a trip to Izmir to find the house.



Oreet Ashery

May 20 at 9:52am

good to know you are around



Sabetay Sevi

May 28 at 1:51am

thank you :)



Oreet Ashery

May 28 at 10:47am

so what are you up to at the moment? what activities are you engaged in?



Sabetay Sevi

May 29 at 1:14pm

celebrating the shavuot.
were you in istanbul lately?
can you send me pictures from that activity?
will you come to istanbul again? Will you be able to take on more of my activities?



Oreet Ashery

June 1 at 11:48am

Since I visited the house in Izmir, I received various facebook messages and emails, asking me to join the battle to keep the house and to perform more actions reenacting Shabbtai's Strange Acts