



1. Introduction to Kabbalah <https://www.yutorah.org/search/?teacher=81072&collection=5931>

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria: The Ari z"l

2. Kabbalah la'Am, **הארי"י**, <http://www.kab.co.il/heb/content/view/frame/45128>

At the age of 35 he appeared in Safed, shrouded by mystery and splendour. In the span of just two and a half years, until his sudden death, he changed the face of history, birthing a powerful shift in the wisdom of Kabbalah, a shift which opened it to us, the nation.

3. Prof. Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*, pp. 1-7

Isaac Luria is one of the several most extraordinary and influential mystical personalities that the Jewish tradition has ever produced... Luria may be credited with having helped shape the course of Jewish mysticism in decisive and profound ways. Thus, even though Luria (also called the Ari) lived in the Galilean city of Safed for less than three years – from early 1570 until his death at the age of thirty-eight in August 1572 – his name is virtually synonymous with the great renaissance of mystical community that took place there between approximately 1530 and 1590...

During these six decades, Safed spawned an astounding array of impressive religious personalities... Among the kabbalists, however, it was Isaac Luria whose powerful religious imagination and personal charisma served to arouse the most fervent enthusiasm.

Not only did Luria's presence dominate the kabbalistic community in Safed during the relatively brief time that he lived there, but following his death, the impression his personality had made lived on, providing grist for a rich legendary tradition...

Another consequential repercussion of Lurianic Kabbalah is associated with the Sabbatean movement in the middle of the seventeenth century. While there has been much debate about the precise nature of the relationship between Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbateanism, there is no question that the writings of Nathan of Gaza, the central propagandist and religious ideologue of the Sabbatean movement, were thoroughly suffused with Lurianic teaching of a theosophical and mythological type...

A similar observation may be made with respect to the popular pietistic movement known as Hasidim, which swept through eastern Europe beginning in the eighteenth century. As with Sabbateanism, the exact relationship between Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism continues to be the subject of considerable discussion...

Another way in which Lurianic mysticism exerted influence was in the realm of religious devotion and practice. Here Lurianic teaching went far beyond limited scholarly circles and appealed to a much wider audience. A great many of the rituals and customs that Isaac Luria innovated, along with earlier kabbalistic rituals that he adapted and embellished, eventually found their way into Jewish practice in communities in many parts of the Jewish world...

Besides their general diffusion, Lurianic devotional practices also became the central focus for various kabbalistic fellowships...

These several examples provide some idea of the wide-ranging and diverse ways in which the life of Isaac Luria and his teachings influenced the religious culture of Jewry.

4. **ארי"י** אלוקי רבי יצחק אדונינו רבי יצחק אשכנזי רבי יצחק

5. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (16th century Israel), *Pardes Rimonim*, Gate 1

It is well-known regarding the number of *Sefirot*, all who are involved with this hidden knowledge have agreed as one that there are ten. There is no debate in this at all. This is one of the matters in which the covenant has been executed regarding knowledge of the *Sefirot*. And we have the *Book of Creation*, which is ascribed to our patriarch Avraham, and some ascribe it to Rabbi Akiva, and it is not decided. The words of this book are so deep, so lofty, and they are hidden from the eyes of the intellect of those who examine it. And even though there are many different explanations, still, we require explanation of all of its parts. Therefore, we will explain its words as much as we can, to the extent of our weak intellect...

6. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (16th century Israel), Tomer Devorah 1

Man is suited to resemble his Creator, and then he achieves the secret of the higher form, *tzelem* and *demut*. If he were to resemble [his Creator] physically, but not in his actions, he would be making the form into a lie. They would say of him, "This is a pleasant form, but ugly deeds." The essence of the higher *tzelem* and *demut* is in His actions, and of what good is it to be like the higher form, the form of His "limbs", and to not resemble his Creator in his actions?

7. Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (Chida, 18th century Italy/Israel), Shem haGedolim 332

And in his youth he recorded a *Shitah* on Tractate Zevachim in the compilation of his mentor, Rabbi Betzael... And through our great sins, it was burned in the fire in Izmir, with all of his books...

And it is already known that his students asked why he did not compose books of his great Kabbalistic knowledge. He replied that he could not, for wellsprings of knowledge would suddenly open for him, and he lacked the strength to write it. Even speaking was difficult, to find a narrow channel with which to speak to them.

His Mysticism

8. Some key terms

- Tzimtzum
- Sefirot
- Shevirat haKelim
- Tikkun
- Nitzotzot

9. Rabbi Chaim Vital, Eitz haChaim, Anaf 1

Know that before the recipients received and the creations were created, there was higher light, simple, which filled all existence, and no space was empty... All was filled with that simple, infinite light. There was neither beginning nor end, but all was the simple light, all equal with total equality. This is what is called the Infinite Light.

And when it arose in His simple will to create the worlds and to give to the recipients, to bring to light the completeness of His deeds and His Names and His *kinnuyim*, which was the cause for creation of the worlds, as is explained to us... Then He constricted (*tzimtzem*) Himself at a centre point within Him, in the actual centre. And He constricted that light, and it was distanced to the sides all around that centre point. What remained was an open space, and air, and empty space, from that actual centre point...

10. Professor Meir Medan, תפילות החסידים, Machanayim 46 (1960)

<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/mahanaim/tfilat-2.htm>

The Kabbalah of the Ari requires *kavvanot* and *yichudim* with mitzvah deeds, and in each detail of those, and especially in prayers and blessings. The words, and even the letters and vowels, of each statement, are each directed toward a great *tikkun* in the *sefirot* and worlds, according to the secrets of the Torah of that which is hidden. All of them together combine to a complete array of *tikkunim*, and that completeness is essential for it, and any deviation or flaw in the specifics of the *yichudim* and *kavvanot* is like a flaw and corruption in the structure of the worlds. This is the reason for demanding extra care in details of mitzvot and the specifics of text [of prayer and blessings].

But these *yichudim* and *kavvanot* were, essentially, the province of individuals of special levels. Via the Ari and his group they became the province of groups and gatherings of elevated people. Chassidut, on the foundation of the Baal Shem Tov, came to establish the goals of Kabbalah as the province of the masses, and to convert the entire nation into a holy nation, which performs *yichudim* and repairs worlds with its deeds and prayers.

11. Debra Nussbaum Cohen, *Jewish Mysticism Surges On a Tide of Red Strings*, NY Times 12/13/2003

The connection between pop-culture Kabbalah and the real thing "is the relationship between pornography and love," said Adin Steinsaltz, a Hasidic rabbi in Jerusalem who has written several books about Jewish mysticism, including the newly published "Opening the Tanya: Discovering the Moral and Mystical Teachings of a Classical Work of Kabbalah" (Jossey-Bass, 2003).

"Pornography is intrinsically soul-less, and doesn't have any obligations attached," Rabbi Steinsaltz said. "It's just using externals. They are doing exactly the same thing."

Most of the traditionalists' fury is directed at the Kabbalah Centre International, a religious nonprofit organization run by Rabbi Philip Berg of Los Angeles, his wife, Karen, and his sons. They have 10 locations in the United States and 13, in other countries, like Israel and Chile.

The Kabbalah Centre markets Jewish mysticism to everyone, Gentile and Jew, adults and children, as a system of tools for self-understanding, to be acquired through its courses, books, tapes and "gear" like T-shirts and key rings.

But scholars of Jewish mysticism say the center divorces Kabbalah from the obligations, or mitzvot, of traditional Judaism.

"What they teach is heresy," said Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, the author of 30 books on Jewish mysticism.

Rabbi Schochet then went on to quote one of Kabbalah's architects, Rabbi Isaac Luria, who was born in Jerusalem in 1534 and believed that each commandment has a mystical meaning, " 'Just as the body cannot live without the soul, the soul cannot function without the body,' "

"All the Kabbalists without exception emphasize that there has to be a preliminary commitment to Torah and halacha [Jewish law] before one can engage in it," Rabbi Schochet said...

But Kabbalah Centre teachers say their teachings have little to do with Judaism and need not be restricted to anyone.

Kabbalah is "a universal system for self-improvement," said Rabbi Yehuda Berg, a son of Philip Berg and the author of "The 72 Names of Gd: Technology for the Soul" (Kabbalah Publishing, 2003). "A lot of people are disenfranchised from religion, and Kabbalah offers them a very nonjudgmental way to connect."

Review Questions

- 1) Who was the leading Kabbalist in Safed before Rabbi Luria arrived?
- 2) How was Rabbi Luria's Torah published?
- 3) What marked Rabbi Luria's Kabbalah as a departure from that of his predecessors?
- 4) What does Tzimtzum mean?
- 5) Why is there a need for us to redeem sparks of light?
- 6) How do we redeem sparks of light?
- 7) How did Rabbi Luria's edition of the siddur become popular?
- 8) Why was the Kabbalah Centre denounced as abuse of Kabbalah?

A Little More About Asceticism

1. Pirkei Avot 6:4

This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink measured water, sleep on the ground, live a life of pain and work in Torah. If you do this, "You will be fortunate and it will be good for you"...

2. Rabbi Moses Maimonides to Avot 6:4

This is not telling the wealthy to live a life of pain in order to learn Torah. Rather: Even if one only has bread with salt... he should not refrain from involving himself in Torah...

3. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deiot 4:1

One cannot know or understand anything of Gd when he is ill...

4. Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:11

Rabbi Chizkiyah quoted Rabbi Cohen citing Rav: One will be required to give an accounting for everything he saw and did not eat. Rabbi Laizer was careful about this lesson, and saved his pennies and ate from everything annually.

5. Rabbeinu Yosef Yaavetz to Pirkei Avot 6:4

When the insightful spirit is strengthened... then the [body and soul] will be at rest and not attack each other, and he will return to the middle path.