

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

2. Maggid Meisharim, Bereishit, Mahadura Kama

You should know that I am the Mishnah, which speaks through your mouth. And when you will know all six orders of Mishnah appropriately, you will climb higher levels, and the channels of the wisdom of truth will be opened for you, for I am the Mishnah, and in me is the wisdom of truth. I am the mother upon whom (Proverbs 31) says, “Whose mother rebuked him.” Therefore, be careful from this day onward, and do not lose your thoughts from thoughts of mishnah, as you have done until now. And even though the matters of law which you are involved in are good, learning mishnah will take you to higher levels. “Grab on to this, and do not leave your hand from that either,” for both are good as one...

3. Rabbi Dr. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (2nd ed. 1977)

Background

4. Map showing Safed, from Wikimedia Commons



5. Rabbi Dr. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* pg. 122

By the time Karo arrived in Safed, this insignificant Galilean village had developed to a flourishing Jewish centre and was on the verge of becoming the Mecca of Jewish piety. Scholars and saints from Salonica, Adrianople, and other centres of the Sephardi diaspora were joined by pious men from Ashkenazi countries – Germany, Poland, Moravia, &c.

Rabbi Yosef Karo as Legal Authority

6. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Introduction to Beit Yosef

When a long period passed, we were poured from vessel to vessel and we travelled in exile, and many pains bound together in sequence, rivals to each other, befell us, to the point that in our sins, the verse “The wisdom of its sages was lost (Isaiah 29:14)” was fulfilled in us, and the hand of Torah and its students was lost, for Torah was not made like two Torahs, but like infinite Torahs, because of the many books explaining her statutes and laws... And I decided to compose a book collecting all of the practical laws, with explanation of their roots and sources from the Talmud, with all of the disputes of the legal authorities. None would be left out.

7. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Introduction to Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law)

I saw in my heart that it would be good to collect the lilies, the sapphires of his words, in a short form, in pure and all-inclusive language, attractive and pleasant, so that the unblemished Torah of Gd would be fluent in the mouths of every Jew, and when they would ask a scholar a law he would not be uncertain... Every law about which he would be asked for practical guidance would be clear, fluent in his mouth. This book, “built for *talpiyo*” – the *tel* (hill) to which all turn – would be divided into thirty parts, to learn part each day...

8. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Introduction to Kesef Mishneh

I saw that Moshe, the great luminary, son of Maimon z"l explained this Torah, "Torah was commanded to us by Moshe, an inheritance", and he composed his great 14-part composition on all of the Torah's laws, its general principles, its specifics, its fine points. And who is like him, to teach in brief language and purity, like the language of the mishnah. And generations who came after him, their hands were too limited to understand from his words and to descend to the depth of his pure statements, which were refined sevenfold. The source of each law was also lost upon them... And as Rabbeinu Asher wrote in a responsum (31:9), "All who give practical rulings from the words of our master, Moshe son of Maimon, without being expert in Mishnah and Gemara to know the source of his words, will make mistakes, permitting the prohibited and prohibiting the permitted... For all who read it think they understand it, and it is not so..."

9. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Sanhedrin 4:11

It appears to me that if all of the Sages in Israel would agree to appoint judges and ordain them, they would be ordained.

10. Zohar, Parshat Vayakhel pg. 207b

The sanctity of Friday night is the sanctity of Shabbat of Bereishit, which was sanctified from 32 paths [of *binah*] and three levels of the sacred apples. And for that sanctity we must state the deeds of Bereishit.

11. Zohar, Parshat Emor 105a

When a person produces a holy declaration from his mouth, a declaration of Torah, a voice is produced from it, and it ascends above and arouses the holy ones of the Highest King, and it is crowned, and it causes great joy in realms above and below.

12. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 10:3

What is the appropriate love for Gd? To love Gd greatly, excessively, powerfully, to the point that his soul is tied to love of Gd, and he is perpetually lost in it, like an ill person who is ill from love, whose mind is never free of that woman, and he is perpetually lost in it, whether sitting or rising or eating or drinking. Beyond this should be the love of Gd... as Gd instructed us (Deuteronomy 6:5), "with all your heart, and with all your soul."...

Rabbi Yosef Karo as a Mystic

13. Rabbi Dr. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* pp. 13-15

The student of mysticism needs no special proof that *maggidism* and similar phenomena (mentor angels, guiding spirits, voices, &c.) exist and that in certain periods and in certain groups their manifestations can be fairly frequent and typical, not to say epidemic...

The many testimonies and reports about *maggidim* and similar phenomena should not be underestimated. In spite of modern attempts – in diverse quarters – to boost the purely 'spiritual' side of mysticism... it becomes increasingly clear that the history of mysticism does not necessarily justify the fashionable tendencies among writers on mysticism...

As far as Karo's *Maggid* goes we have solid contemporary evidence. The slightly deprecatory remark in Vital's *Sha'ar haGilgulim* that the *Maggid* had misled Karo in the matter of the former incarnations of his son's soul at any rate confirms that Karo's *Maggid* was taken for granted at the time in Safed...

14. *Maggid Meisharim*, Shevach haRav

Gd is with you, etc. Only, adhere to Me, and to awe of Me, and do not separate your thoughts from My Mishnah, even for a moment. I have made you a leader of My people, etc. Have I not instructed you not to separate your thoughts, even for a moment, from My awe and My Mishnah, and do not eat and drink in the manner of pleasure at all, for what benefit is there in your pleasure in this world? Your thoughts should only be that if the soul could survive in the body without any benefit, you would want this very much. Thus you will always adhere to Hashem, and you will merit to have miracles performed via you...

15. Rabbi Dr. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* pg. 123

The hope of living again the full life of *Torah*, with all that this implied in terms of the new kabbalistic mysticism, gave a very precise meaning to the prophetic promise (Isaiah 1:26), "I will restore thy judges as at first... afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city". The prophecy clearly meant the restoration of organization, and ordination itself was now seen in an eschatological perspective...

16. Maggid Meisharim, Acharei Mot

Be strong and courageous in your Torah, as you do with Torah, Mishnah, Gemara, Rashi, Tosafot, rulings and mysticism, for you join them with each other...

17. Maggid Meisharim, Mussar

אכלתי מעט מזעיר וכן עשיתי בשתייתן ושניתי משניות בתחלת הלילה וישנתי עד אור היום והקצתי והשמש זרח על הארץ ונצטערתי מאד באמרי "איך לא קמתי בעוד לילה כדי שיבא אלי הדבור כמנהג!" ועכ"ז התחלתי לגרוס משניות וקרייתי ה' פרקים ובעודי קורא במשניות קול דודי דופק בתוך פי, מנגן מאליו, והתחיל ואמר: ד' עמך בכל אשר תלך וכל אשר עשית ואשר תעשה ה' מצליח בידך רק כי תדבק בי וביראתי ובתורתתי ובמשניותי תמיד ולא כאשר עשית בזאת הלילה, שאף ע"פ שקדשת עצמך במאכלך ובמשתיתך מ"מ ישנת שנת עצל... אבל בזכות השיתא סדרי משנה שאתה יודע על פה ובזכות אותם הענויים והסגופים שעשית בימים שקדמו וגם עתה אתה מחזיק בהם הסכימו בישיבה של מעלה שאחזור לדבר עמך כבראשונה...

18. Maggid Meisharim, Vayikra, Mahadura Kama

ויען כי מסרת נפשך על חזרת עטרת הסמיכה ליושנה. תזכה להיות מוסמך מכל חכמי א"י ומחכמי חוץ לארץ, ועל ידך אחזיר הסמיכה ליושנה ואזכך לגמור חיבורך וכו' ובתר כן תיתוקד על קדושת שמי ותסתלק כעמר נקי וכו' ותזכה לתחיית המתים...

19. Maggid Meisharim, Toldot

והשתא אתינא לגלאה לך רזא דקדישא הלא לך למינדע מאי דאמר שלמה בחירי דאין לענות אמן אחר "ויקרב משיח" לאו קושטא איהו אלא צריך לענות אמן ה' זימנין...

Review Questions

- 1) Why was the 16th century ripe for the growth of Kabbalah?
- 2) Why did mystical Jews come to Safed in the 16th century, as opposed to other parts of the Ottoman Empire?
- 3) What three major Jewish legal texts did Rabbi Yosef Karo author?
- 4) What were two major purposes of the attempt to re-start ordination?
- 5) What are three ways that the study of Jewish law can be mystical?
- 6) What did the Maggid want of Rabbi Yosef Karo?
- 7) Did Rabbi Karo incorporate mysticism into his legal writing?