

Introduction to Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism

I. What is Kabbalah?

1. **Theopathy**: to reach higher states of consciousness employing meditation and the Divine names
2. **Theurgy** ("Practical Kabbalah"): altering and influencing the course of nature using incantations, amulets, magical seals and various other mystical exercises.
3. **Theosophy**: study of the topography of the Spiritual worlds, souls, God's nature, inner meaning of Torah, numerology

II. But is it really for us?

Shach, Yoreh Deah 246:6

There are those who say that one should wait until the age of 40 before learning Kabbalah, for it says in the Mishnah, 'Forty is the age of wisdom'.

Even Shleima (Vilna Gaon) 11:3

The Redemption will only occur through the study of Torah. And the main part of the redemption is dependent upon the study of Kabbala. (Based on Tikkunei Zohar 4: 4)

תקנו בברכת אהבה רבה שהיא ברכת התורה מתחילה ללמו וללמד ואח"כ והאר עינינו דקאי על פנימיות התורה, ואח"כ והביאנו לשלום.

Origins of mysticism in the classic tradition of Judaism

Chagiga 11b...14b

NOR THE WORK OF CREATION IN THE PRESENCE OF TWO. Whence [do we infer] this? — For the Rabbis taught: For ask thou now of the days past; one may inquire, but two may not inquire.

...R. Johanan said to R. Eleazar: Come, I will instruct you in the 'Work of the Chariot'. He replied: I am not old enough. When he was old enough, R. Johanan died. R. Assi [then] said to him: Come, I will instruct you in the "Work of the Chariot'. He replied: Had I been worthy, I should have been instructed by R. Johanan, your master. R. Joseph was studying the 'Work of the Chariot'; the elders of Pumbeditha were studying the 'Work of Creation'. The latter said to the former: Let the master teach us the 'Work of the Chariot'. He replied: Teach me the 'Work of Creation'. After they had taught him, they said to him: Let the master instruct us in the 'Work of the Chariot'. He replied: We have learnt concerning it: Honey and milk are under thy tongue. The things that are sweeter than honey and milk should be under thy tongue...An objection was raised: How far does [the portion of] the 'Work of the Chariot' extend? Rabbi said: As far as the second "And I saw". R. Isaac said: As far as Hashmal — As far as 'I saw' may be taught; thenceforward, [only] the heads of chapters may be transmitted. Some, however, say: As far as 'I saw', the heads of chapters may be transmitted; thenceforward, if he is a Sage able to speculate by himself, Yes; if not, No. But may one expound [the mysteries of] Hashmal? For behold there was once a child who expounded [the mysteries of] Hashmal, and a fire went forth and consumed him! — [The case of] the child is different, for he had not reached the [fitting] age.

...Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the 'Garden', namely, Ben 'Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, water, water! For it is said: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes. Ben 'Azzai cast a look and died. Of him Scripture says: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Ben Zoma looked and became demented. Of him Scripture says: Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Aher mutilated the shoots. R. Akiba departed unhurt.

III. Classic works of the Kabbalah

Sefer ha-Bahir

[Traditionally attributed to R. Nehuniah ben Hakana, 100 CE. Some scholars say it was adapted from Raza Rabba, and some say it is from 10th century. First published in 1176. Describes the Ten Sefirot and theosophy.]

Chapter 1

1. Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKana said: One verse (*Job 37: 21*) states, "And now they do not see light, it is brilliant (*Bahir*) in the skies...[round about God in terrible majesty]." Another verse, however, (*Psalms 18: 12*), states, "He made darkness His hiding place." It is also written (*Psalms 97: 2*), "Cloud and gloom surround Him." This is an apparent contradiction. A third verse comes and reconciles the two. It is written (*Psalms 139: 12*), "Even darkness is not dark to You. Night shines like day - light and darkness are the same."

2. Rabbi Berachiah said: It is written (*Genesis 1: 2*), "The earth was Chaos (*Tohu*) and Desolation (*Bohu*). What is the meaning of the word "was" in this verse? This indicates that the Chaos existed previously [and already was]. What is Chaos (*Tohu*): Something that confounds (*Taha*) people. What is Desolation (*Bohu*): It is something that has substance. This is the reason that it is called Bohu, that is, Bo Hu - "it is in it."

Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Creation/Creating)

[Traditionally attributed to Avraham Avinu (Saadia, R. Yehuda haLevi), although others (Ramak) attribute its writing to Rabbi Akiva. Modern scholars haven't reached consensus on the question of its origins, but most scholars don't place it later than 200 CE (most place it in 200 BCE). Describes the power of the letters and Sefirot. Used for theurgy and magic.]

Sanhedrin 65b

On the eve of every Shabbat, Judah HaNasi's pupils, Rab Hanina and Rab Hoshaiha, who devoted themselves especially to cosmogony, used to create a delicious calf by means of the Sefer Yetzirah, and ate it on the Sabbath.

Chapter 1

1. In two and thirty most occult and wonderful paths of wisdom did JAH the Lord of Hosts engrave his name: God of the armies of Israel, ever-living God, merciful and gracious, sublime, dwelling on high, who inhabiteth eternity. He created this universe by the three Sepharim, Number, Writing, and Speech.

2. Ten are the numbers, as are the Sephiroth, and twenty-two the letters, these are the Foundation of all things. Of these letters, three are mothers, seven are double, and twelve are simple.

Heichalot/Merkava literature

[Set of texts produced in Talmudic times which explain the Merkava sections of Nach – angels, elevations]

Yechezkel 1:1

⁴I looked, and lo, a stormy wind came sweeping out of the north—a huge cloud and flashing fire, surrounded by a radiance (ניגה); and in the center of it, in the center of the fire, a gleam (חשמל) as of amber. ⁵In the center of it were also the figures of four creatures.

Seder Rabbah de-Bereishit (The Great Order of Creation)

Rabbi Ishmael said: How beloved is Israel before the Holy, Blessed One! Even more than the ministering angels! For [when] the angels want to recite songs first, before making, for instance, mountains of fire or hills of flame, the Holy, Blessed One says to them, 'Be silent, until I have listened to the songs and praises, prayers and pleasant melodies of Israel' as it is written, 'When the morning stars sang together' (*Job 38: 7*)--this [refers to Israel--'and all the sons of God shouted for joy' (*Job 38: 7*)--this refers to the ministering angels.

When all the ministering angels and all the angels of the firmament hear the sound of the songs and praises that Israel sings below, they immediately open [their mouths and] in a loud voice say 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory' (*Isaiah 6: 3*).

When the time arrives for the angels to sing [a song] and melody, the angel Shmu'el, the great, honored and awesome prince stands at the windows of the lower firmament to listen intently to the sound of the songs, praises and melodies that arise from the synagogues and study houses, and lets the children of the firmament and the holy creatures listen. And when he has heard and has let every firmament hear,

immediately countless classes of camps and armies of angels descend into the midst of the rivers of fire and the rivers of flame, and immerse themselves seven times, and examine themselves in the fire three hundred and sixty five times, in accordance [with the fact that] they are appointed to [do] worldly work and descend each day to bring peace to the world. And when the time of song arrives, they ascend to the firmament and purify themselves in the fire...After this they call to each other and talk to each other, and ascend from the rivers of fire with each others permission, and make themselves like light and like the most radiant lightning. Then they ascend by a ladder of fire, until they reach the armies of the seventh heaven, the pure *chashmal*(?), the holy creatures, the wheels of the chariot, the high and exalted throne of glory. Immediately they stand in awe and reverence, in fear and humility, and cover their faces with their wings in order not to look upon the form of God sitting on the chariot. Then they stand in classes of thousands upon thousands, many myriads, and hosts of hosts beyond number before the throne of the glory. And at that moment, the Holy Blessed One sits on the throne of glory filling the whole world, as it says, "The whole world is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6: 3)...Then the 'wheels' of beauty, the *cherubim* of glory, and the holy creatures, sanctify, purify, clothe and wrap themselves...and then all of them stand in purity and holiness and recite songs, praises, melodies, exaltations, adulations, acclamations, and paeans, with [one] voice, one speech, one knowledge, and one melody.

And not only this, but some of these million myriads of ministering angels also fall into the burning rivers of fire, and are burnt up. Why? Because anyone who precedes or follows in song is immediately burnt, while even the holy creatures contain neither 'before' nor 'after' since their standing, 'planting', and shining are all done in unison. They direct the four legs of the throne, each leg corresponding to another, each wheel corresponding to another, each creature corresponding to another, each cherub corresponding to another, and each melody corresponding to another. Then they open their mouths in song, in holiness and purity, with a 'still small voice' [I Kings 19: 12], as it is said, 'and after the earthquake...a still small voice', and they raise the chariot with the sound of songs and praises.

At that moment, holy beings sanctify themselves, pure beings offer praise, angelic beings exult, wheels laud, creatures and angels sing and divide into three classes of millions and myriads, and say, Holy, holy, holy. One class says 'Holy' and falls on its face; [then another class says 'Holy, holy' and falls on its face;] and then another class says 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts'. The holy creatures from under the throne respond and say 'Blessed is the glory of the Lord from its place' (Ezekiel 3:12) because the *Shechinah* is in every place. In the future, the *Shechinah* will return to its place, to the house of the Holy of Holies, and will say, 'Blessed is the glory of the Lord from its place'....

Zohar

[First published by Rabbi Moses de Leon (1240-1305) in the 1270s. Identifies the author as R. Shimon bar Yochai. Some suspect that de Leon is the author of the work. Most comprehensive Kabbalistic text, covering all types of mystical topics.]

Sefer Yuchasin of R. Avraham Zacuto

When I saw the Zohar, I realized that its words are wondrous, drawn from a high place, from the Fount that gives without receiving, blessed be the Name of the glory of His Kingdom forever and ever. I

pursued it, and asked scholars who have large sections of the text about it. These were wondrous words, known by Kabbalah-tradition that had been transmitted orally, but they were never permitted to be written down in a book, where they are clearly available to all who can read.

I inquired as to their source, but the answers that I received did not all agree. Some said one thing, but others had a completely different story.

Some said that the faithful Ramban had sent it from the Holy Land to his son in Catalonia, but that the wind had brought the ship to the land of Aragonia. Others said that it had come to Alicante. Eventually, it came to the hands of the sage, Rabbi Moshe de Leon, who is also called Rabbi Moshe of Guadalupe.

Others claimed that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai never actually wrote the book, but that Rabbi Moshe knew the Name of Writing, and through its power, had written these wondrous things. In order to fetch a high price and obtain much money for the manuscripts, he had "hung his words on great trees."¹⁰⁰ He therefore said that he had transcribed it from a book written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, his son Rabbi Eliezer, and their school.

When I came to Spain, I arrived in the city of Valladolid, where the king had his capitol. It was there that I met Rabbi Moshe, and we became friendly and discussed [the Zohar]. He made a solemn oath and swore to me, "May God strike me down, and may He continue to do so if [the Zohar] is not an ancient book written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. At this very moment, the manuscript is in my house, in Avila, where I live. Come and visit me there, and I will show it to you."

Soon after this, we separated, and Rabbi Moshe left for Arevalo, on the way home to Avila. He became sick in Arevalo, and died there.

When I heard this news, I was deathly upset, but I decided to visit Avila. When I arrived there, I found an elderly sage whose name is Rabbi David of Pancorbo. I found grace in his eyes, and bound him by an oath, saying, "Resolve for me the mystery of the Zohar. Some say one thing and others say the opposite. Rabbi Moshe himself vowed [that the Zohar was authentic], but died before he could verify it to me. I do not know who is reliable and whose word to believe."

He replied, "The truth is this: I have determined without question that this book called the Zohar never existed, and never came to the hand of Rabbi Moshe. But he was a master of the Name of Writing, and through the power of that name, wrote everything in that book. Listen and I will tell you how I determined this.

"Rabbi Moshe was a great spendthrift, tossing away money very generously. Today his house could have been filled with silver and gold, given to him by the rich who understand the great mysteries that he gave them, written through the Name of Writing. But tomorrow it would be completely empty.

"His wife and daughter are presently virtually naked, hungry and thirsty, and totally destitute.

"When I heard that he had died in Arevalo, I went to the wealthiest man in the city, whose name is Joseph de Avila, and I said to him, 'The time has finally arrived when you can obtain the priceless [original] manuscript of the Zohar. Just listen to my advice.'

"I advised Joseph to instruct his wife, 'Send a generous gift to Rabbi Moshe's widow with you maid.' She did this, and on the next day, he told her to go to the house of Rabbi Moshe's widow and say, 'I would like my son to marry your daughter. If you agree, for the rest of your life, you will never lack food or clothing. I want nothing from you other than the manuscript of the Zohar, from which your husband transcribed the copies that he distributed.'

"[Joseph] told his wife, 'Speak to the mother and daughter separately and tell them this. Listen carefully to their answer, and see whether or not the two say the same thing.'

"Rabbi Moshe's widow swore to Joseph's wife, and said, 'May God strike me down [if I lie to you], but my husband never owned such a book. Everything that he wrote was made up, from his own mind.'

“She related that she would often see him writing without any other book in front of him, and she would ask him, ‘Why do you tell people that you are transcribing this from a book? You do not have a book, but are making it all up out of your head. Wouldn’t it be better if you say that you are the author of this book, and that it is the product of your intellect? Would you not have more honor?’

“He would answer, ‘If I would reveal my secret, that I am making this up from my own mind, they would not pay any attention to what I write. They would not give me a penny for my writings, since they would consider them nothing more than the product of my imagination. But now, when they hear that it is taken from the Zohar, written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, with *Ruach HaKodesh*, and that I am only transcribing it, they pay a high price for it. You can see this yourself.’

“After this, Joseph’s wife spoke to Rabbi Moshe’s daughter, saying the same things that she had said to her mother. She proposed that the daughter marry her son, and that the mother would be

provided with food and clothing. She answered exactly the same as her mother, adding nothing and subtracting nothing.

“Do you need any clearer evidence than this?”

After hearing this, I was confused and dismayed. At the time, I was certain that there had never been any original manuscript. All that existed was that he had composed using the Name of Writing and had distributed to people.

I then left Avila and travelled to Talavera. There I found an extraordinary sage, with a generous heart and a good eye, by the name of Rabbi Joseph HaLevi, son of the great Kabbalist, Rabbi Todros.¹⁰¹ I asked him about the Zohar.

He replied, “You must know and believe that the manuscript of the Zohar which Rabbi Moses had was written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. It was this manuscript that he transcribed, giving copies to those whom he deemed worthy. I myself tested Rabbi Moshe to see if he was actually copying from an ancient text, or he was merely inventing it through the power of the Name of Writing.

“This was the test: He had written for me many large volumes of the Zohar. Many days after he had written them, I hid one of the folios and told him that I had lost it, pressing him to write me another copy. He said, ‘If you show me the end of the folio before it and the beginning of the next folio, I will be able to provide you with an exact copy.’

“I did this, and after several days, he brought me a copy of the missing folio. I compared it with the original copy, and there was absolutely no difference between them. Nothing had been added or left out, and there was no change in wording. Both wording and content was exactly the same, just as if it had been copied from my original.

“Can there be a better test than this?”

I then left Talavera and came to Toledo, where I continued to investigate the book, inquiring among the sages and their disciples. There I also found that the subject was controversial, where opposite opinions were being expressed.

I told them about Rabbi Joseph’s test, but they replied that it was by no means conclusive. It was quite possible that [Rabbi Moshe] had used the Name of Writing to make a copy for himself, and then transcribe from his own copy. He would therefore have a primary text, and it would be just as if he were copying it from an ancient manuscript.

But then I discovered something new there. The disciples told me that they had seen an old man, whose name was Jacob, who had been a foremost disciple of Rabbi Moshe, and who had been loved by him like

a son. [I spoke to him, and] he called heaven and earth as his witnesses that the Zohar that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai wrote (The text ends abruptly at this point).

Problems listed by R. Yaakov Emden (Mispachat):

- 1 - Contains names of rabbis who were born after RSBY had already died;
- 2 - Misquotes passages of Scripture and misunderstands the Talmud;
- 3 - Contains ritual observances which were decreed by rabbinical authorities who were born after RSBY had already died;
- 4 - mentions the crusades against the Muslims (who did not exist in the second century);
- 5 - Creates a *drasha* on the word "esnoga", which is a Spanish / Ladino word for "synagogue;"
- 6 - Gives a mystical explanation of the Hebrew vowel-points, which were not introduced until after the Talmudic period.
- 8 – Contains Aramaic errors

IV. The great “Mekubalim” throughout history

Hasidei Ashkenaz: R. Shimon Ha-Gadol (950-1020), R. Eliezer haGadol (990-1060), Rashi (1040-1105)

Peering through the Lattices, p. 137

R. Eliezer *ha-Gadol* (c.990–1060), a prominent ancestor of R. Judah *he-Hasid*, was the source of a number of liturgical and ritual interpretations and customs.¹¹ Among them is the practice at the Passover Seder, presented by R. Eleazar of Worms, of repeatedly dipping a finger in the cup of wine and releasing sixteen drops, as the various plague listings are recited during the Seder. According to R. Eleazar, this practice was transmitted by R. Eliezer *ha-Gadol* and his household to subsequent Qalonymides. Some who had not received this tradition were apparently unsure of its authenticity and purpose. It was understood by the Qalonymides, however, as a means of summoning or conjuring the sixteen-sided avenging sword of the Almighty. This Divine sword could diminish the powers of pestilence and other *maziqin* that were represented by the sixteen times the word *dever* is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah. In addition, the sword could grant meaningful life. This aspect of the sword’s powers is symbolized by the sixteen scheduled weekly ‘*aliyyot* to the Torah (characterized in the Bible as a source of life) and by the eight references to life in the special insertions during the ‘*Amidah* of the High Holidays that

were recited twice during each prayer service (by the congregation and by the *hazzan*) for a total of sixteen times.¹²

R. Qalonymus b. Isaac, a grandson of R. Eliezer *ha-Gadol* (and the father of R. Samuel *he-Hasid*) lived in Mainz during the late eleventh century, and he was a link in the transmission of Qalonymide *sod* traditions. Indeed, R. Qalonymus, who is referred to as both *ha-zaqen* and *he-ḥasid*, was listed as one of those who followed the custom of spilling the drops of wine during the Passover Seder. Moreover, R. Qalonymus also wrote, in an unrelated context, of the sixteen-sided sword of the Almighty. According to R. Qalonymus, God would use this sword to slay the angel of death. R. Qalonymus gives the source of this teaching as *Sefer Hekhalot*.¹³

In the Parma manuscript passage, *petihat ha-lev* connotes the ability to understand Torah teachings clearly and recall those teachings effortlessly.¹⁵ According to this manuscript passage, the state of *petihat ha-lev* was to be accomplished through the writing of a request formula (and adjuration) on a well-boiled egg that was determined to have been the first ever laid by a hen, by the recitation of the adjuration that was directed to the *Sar ha-Torah* as well as the *Sar ha-Panim*, and by eating the egg. These procedures, and the angels to whom they are directed, reflect known concepts and figures within *Hekhalot* literature, although the precise application in the Ashkenazic text at hand constitutes a partial synthesis of different *Hekhalot* rituals.¹⁶

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Rashi was himself familiar with mystical traditions on Divine Names and with a number of esoteric texts and magical and theurgic techniques. In his talmudic commentary to tractate *Sukkah*, Rashi reproduces a scriptural derivation for the Divine Name of seventy-two letters that is found in *Sefer ha-Bahir*.²⁸ He explains, as did an anonymous Ashkenazic contemporary, that the creation of various beings by rabbinic scholars described in talmudic literature was accomplished by means of letter combinations involving Divine Names as contained in *Sefer Yeḥirah* or *Hilkhot Yeḥirah*.²⁹ While *Sefer Yeḥirah* is mentioned in one of the talmudic passages on which Rashi comments, Moshe Idel has shown that the specific methods advocated by Rashi—which adumbrate methods recorded by R. Eleazar of Worms—are not inherent in the talmudic passages themselves, nor can they be derived directly from extant versions of *Sefer Yeḥirah*.³⁰ This indicates that Rashi was familiar with, and possibly even involved in, the formulation of independent *torat ha-sod* and magical concepts, and was not merely reflecting talmudic or rabbinic material. Rashi refers to *Sefer Yeḥirah* on other occasions in his biblical and talmudic commentaries, in the contexts of letter combination and Creation. In one instance, the reference is to a nonextant version of *Sefer Yeḥirah* that circulated in northern France and Germany during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³¹

Rashi interprets the talmudic assertion that R. Ḥanina b. Tradyon was consigned to a harsh death because he pronounced or expressed each letter of the Divine Name (*she-hayah hogeḥ ʿet ha-Shem be-ʿotiyotav*) publicly, as follows: R. Ḥanina explicated the Name (*doresho*) according to its forty-two letters and did with it (magically) that which he wished (*ve-ʿoseh bo mah she-hayah rozeh*).³² Moreover, Rashi writes that the Tannaim who entered *Pardes* ascended to the heavens through a technique involving the recitation of a Divine Name (*ʿalu la-raḥiq ʿal yedei Shem*).³³ Similarly, in his interpretation of a talmudic statement that R. Yishmaʿel received revelations from the angel Suriʿel, Rashi writes that “R. Yishmaʿel ascended to the heavens via a *Shem* [as is found] in the *Baraita* of *Maʿaseh Merkavah*.”³⁴ He defines unidentified *sitrei Torah* referred to in another talmudic passage as those secrets contained in “*Maʿaseh Merkavah*, *Sefer Yeḥirah*, and *Maʿaseh Bereshit*, which is a *Baraita*.”³⁵ In

Isaac the Blind (1160–1235), Ramban (1194–1270)

Ramban, Introduction to Commentary on the Torah

I herewith exhort strongly and give solid, proper advice to anyone showing interest in this book not to engage in rational reasoning or thoughts when it concerns my kabbalistic glosses. For I emphatically inform him that my words cannot be grasped via any logic or rational understanding, except by mouth of a trustworthy wise man. My logical approach is detrimental and causes great damage...do not approach to view God in a destructive manner...Learn from my exegesis novel interpretations in the Torah text and its midrash, and accept moral and ethical teachings from our holy Sages. However, "What is above and beyond do not explore! What is too difficult to understand, do not delve into! What is hidden from you, do not try to know!...Do not have anything to do with the hidden Kabbalah.

רמב"ן בראשית הקדמה

עוד יש בידינו קבלה של אמת כי כל התורה כולה שמותיו של הקב"ה שהתיבות מתחלקות לשמות בענין אחד כאילו תחשוב על דרך משל כי פסוק בראשית יתחלק לתיבות אחרות כגון בראש יתברא אלהים וכל התורה כן מלבד צירופיהן וגימטריותיהן של שמות וכבר כתב רבינו שלמה בפירושו בתלמוד ענין השם הגדול של ע"ב באיזה ענין הוא בשלשה פסוקי ויסע ויבא ויט ומפני זה ספר תורה שטעה בו באות אחת במלא או בחסר פסול. כי זה הענין יחייב אותנו לפסול ס"ת שיחסר בו ו' אחד ממלות אותם שבאו מהם ל"ט מלאים בתורה או שיכתוב הו' באחד משאר החסרי' וכן כיוצא בזה אע"פ שאינו מעלה ולא מוריד כפי העולה במחשבה

רמב"ן בראשית פרק א

וכוונתם זו, שמלת בראשית תרמוז כי בעשר ספירות נברא העולם (עיין ספר יצירה א יד), ורמז לספירה הנקראת חכמה שבה יסוד כל, כענין שנאמר (משלי ג יט) ה' בחכמה יסד ארץ, היא התרומה והיא קדש, אין לה שיעור למיעוט התבוננות הנבראים בה, וכאשר ימנה אדם עשר מדות ויפריש אחת מעשר רמז לעשר ספירות. יתבוננו החכמים בעשירית וידברו בה, והחלה מצוה יחידה בעיסה תרמוז לזה. וישראל שנקראו ראשית היא כנסת ישראל, המשולה בשיר השירים לכלה, שקראה הכתוב בת ואחות ואם, וכבר בא להם זה במדרש (שהש"ר ג כא) בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו (שם ג יא), ובמקומות רבים. וכן וירא ראשית לו דמשה, יסברו כי משה רבינו נסתכל באיספקלריא המאירה (יבמות מט ב) וראה ראשית לו, ולכן זכה לתורה. הכל כוונה אחת להם. ואי אפשר להאריך בפירוש זה הענין במכתב, והרמז רב הנזק, כי יסברו בו סברות אין בהם אמת. אבל הזכרתי זה לבלום פי קטני אמנה מעוטי חכמה, המלעיגים על דברי רבותינו :

R. Abraham Abulafia (1240-1296)

Rashba (Teshuva 548)

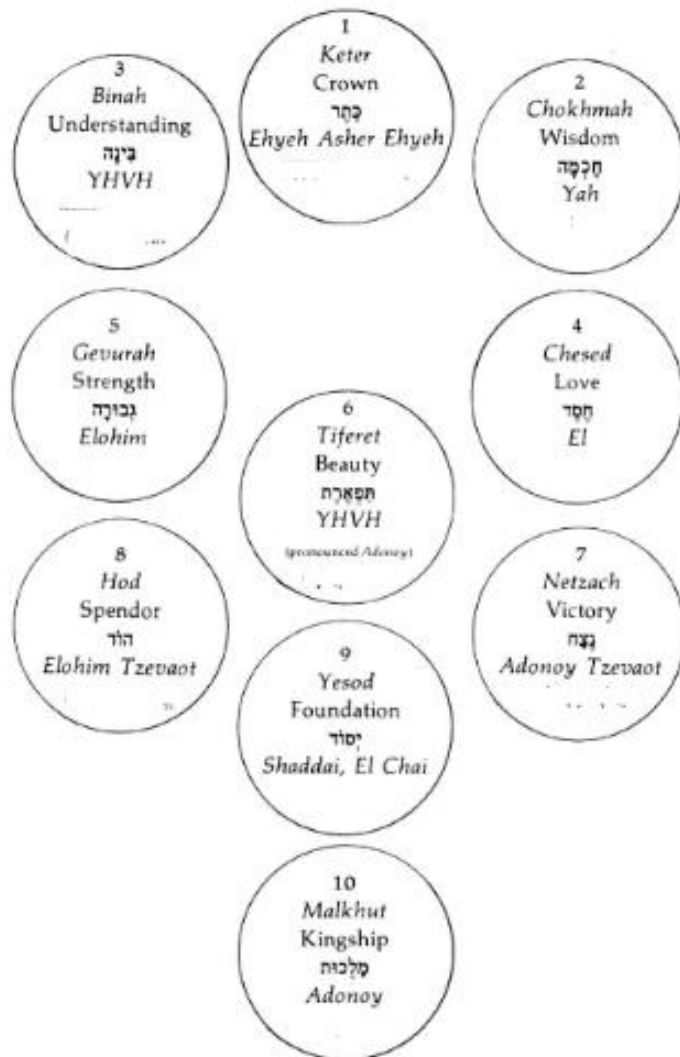
There are many frauds whom I have heard and seen. One is the disgusting creature, "may the name of the wicked rot," whose name is Abraham [Abulafia]. He proclaimed himself as a prophet and messiah in Sicily, and enticed many people with his lies. Through the mercy of God, I was able to slam the door in his face, both with my own letters and with those of many congregations. If not for this, he would have actually been able to begin. He invented many false ideas, totally foolishness which resembles high wisdom, and with this, he could have done much damage. Making use of a certain consistence, he places his mind on an idea for many days, and come up with elaborate numerical exercizes (gematriot) involving both scripture and the words of our sages.

Sefer haTzeruf

God gave us the Torah, teaching us the way of permutations, and the steps of the ladder involving the mystery of letters. Without such information, it is impossible to reach the level of knowing God.

The Tzefat Circle - Ramak (1522-1570), Arizal (1534-1572), R. Yosef Caro (1488-1575), R. Shlomo Alkabetz (1500-1576) and "Lurianic Kabbalah"

The Sefirot and Associated Names of God



R. Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, p. 211, *Shevirat ha-Keilim*

The first stage of creation is called the Universe of Chaos (*Tohu*).

This is a state where the Vessels, which were the primitive Ten Sefirot, could receive God's Light, but could neither give nor interact. Insofar as they did not resemble God, these Vessels were incomplete, and therefore, they could not hold the Light. Since they could not fulfil their purpose, they were overwhelmed by the Light and "shattered." This is the idea of the "Breaking of Vessels."

The original Vessels were in what is now the Universe of Atzilut. When they were shattered, the broken pieces fell to a lower spiritual level, which became the Universe of Beriyah. It is at this level that evil begins to manifest, and its source is in the fragments of the Broken Vessels.

The reason the Vessels were originally created without the ability to hold the Btght was that Evil should come into being. This in turn would give man freedom of choice, which, as we have seen, was necessary for the rectification of the Vessels. Furthermore, since Evil originated in the highest original Vessels, it can be rectified and re-elevated to this level.

This "Breaking of Vessels" is alluded to in the Midrash, which states that "God created universes and destroyed them."²⁴ It is also alluded to in the Torah, in the account of the Kings of Edom, at the end of Genesis 36. The death of each of these Kings is said to infer the shattering of a particular Vessel and its falling to a lower level, such a fall being referred to as "death."

After having been shattered, the Vessels were then rectified and rebuilt into the Partzufim. Each of these Partzufim consists of 613 parts, paralleling the 613 parts of the body, as well as the 613 commandments of the Torah. These Partzufim were then able to interact with each other. More important, they then resembled both man and the Torah. They were therefore able to interact with man through the Torah, and they therefore become givers as well as receivers.

In their rectified state as Partzufim, the Vessels are then adequate to receive God's Light. In the Ari's terminology, this state is called the Universe of Rectification (*Tikkun*). He said that the other Kabbalists had only spoken of the Universe of Chaos, while he was the first to reveal the mysteries of the Partzufim, which are in the Universe of Rectification. These Partzufim constantly interact with each other in an anthropomorphic manner. It is for this reason that the symbolism of sex, birth, and growth play such an important role in the Ari's system.

כְּוִןָא *Just as they [all six sefiros or emanations] unite above in Oneness [without the attachment of evil] so she [the sefirah of kingship] unites below in the secret of Oneness so that it may join those above, the Oneness below paralleling the Oneness above. The Holy One, Blessed is He, Who is One above, does not sit on His royal Throne of Glory until [kingship below] is made over in the secret of Oneness like His, that they may be a Oneness parallel to a Oneness. Thus we have set forth the secret of HASHEM [above] is One and His name [the manifestation of His kingship below] is One.*

This is the secret of the Sabbath: She [Kingship] is called 'Sabbath' when she becomes united in the secret of Oneness so that God's Oneness may rest upon her. [This occurs during] the evening prayer of the Sabbath, for then the holy Throne of Glory [representing His Kingship] becomes unified through the secret of Oneness, and becomes ready for the Supreme Holy King to rest upon it. When the Sabbath arrives, she unified herself in Oneness and divests herself of the Other Side [any trace of evil], all harsh judgments are removed from her, and she remains alone with the Oneness of the holy light. She crowns herself with many crowns for the Holy King. All wrathful dominions and bearers of grievance flee together — and there is no power but she in all the worlds. Chazzan— Her face glows with a heavenly light and she takes the holy people below as her crown, for they crown themselves with new souls [that come with the Sabbath]. Then their prayers begin by blessing her with joy, with radiant faces (and to say):

Lecha Dodi (R. Shlomo Alkabetz), Brich Shmei (Zohar, Vayakhel), Yedid Nefesh (R. Elaar Azikri)

Chassidut - Maharal (1520-1609), Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), R. Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821), Baal ha-Tanya (1745-1813) - Nefesh ha-Chayyim and Tanya

Levels of Prayer

Universe	Portion of the Service
Asiyah	Sacrificial Readings (Korbanoth)
Yetzirah	Biblical Songs of Praise (Pesukei DeZimra)
Beriyah	The Sh'ma and its Blessings (Birkat Sh'ma)
Atzilut	The Amidah

נפש החיים שער א

"זהו ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים גוי'. כי בצלם אלקים עשה וגוי'. שכמו שהוא יתברך שמו הוא האלקים, בעל הכחות הנמצאים בכל העולמות כולם, ומסדרם ומנהיגם כל רגע כרצונו, כן השליט רצונו יתברך את האדם שיהא הוא הפותח והסוגר של כמה אלפי רבואות כחות ועולמות, עפ"י כל פרטי סדרי הנהגותיו בכל עניניו בכל עת ורגע ממש, כפי שרשו העליון של מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו. כאלו הוא ג"כ הבעל כח שלהם כביכול. ואמרו ז"ל באיכה רבתי... בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום מוסיפין כח בגבורה של מעלה... וזאת תורת האדם, כל איש ישראל אל יאמר בלבו חס וחלילה, כי מה אני ומה כוחי לפעול במעשי השפלים שום עניין בעולם, אמנם יבין וידע ויקבע במחשבות לבו שכל פרטי מעשיו ודיבוריו ומחשבותיו לא אתאבידו חס וחלילה... שכל אחד עולה כפי שורשה לפעול כפי פעולתה בגובהי מרומים..."

נפש החיים שער ג, פרק ג

והוא ממש כמשמעו שאין עוד מלבדו יתב' כלל בשום בחי' ונקודה פרטית שבכל העולמו' עליונים ותחתונים והבריו' כולם. רק עצמות אחדותו הפשוט ית"ש לבד... שנאמר כי ס' כו' בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד. מהו אין עוד אפי' בחללו של עולם: וזה ג"כ בכלל מאמרם ז"ל שהוא ית' מקומו של עולם ואין העולם מקומו. היינו שאף כל המקומות שמורגשים לחוש במציאות אין המקומות עצמם. אלא הוא ית"ש הוא המקום של כל המקומות. שמצדו יתב' נחשבים כולם כאלו אינם במציאות כלל גם עתה כקודם הבריאה:

אמנם כבר הקדמנו בתחלת דברינו. שהמשילו דבריהם ז"ל כגחלי אש. שיהא זהיר מאד בגחלתו שלא ליכנס להתבונן ולחקור יותר מדאי. בדברים שאין הרשות נתונה להתבונן הרבה ויכוה ח"ו. וכ"ה זה הענין הנורא. אין הדבר אמור אלא לחכם ומבין מדעתו פנימיות הענין בשיעורא דלבא לבד ברצוא ושוב. להלהיב בזה טוהר לבו לעבודת התפלה. אבל רב ההתבוננות בזה הוא סכנה עצומה. וע"ז נאמר בס"י ואם רץ לבך שוב למקום כמש"ל פ"ב וכמ"ש אי"ה להלן פרק ו'. ובאמת הייתי מונע עצמי מלדב' בענין זה כלל כי הראשוני ז"ל הסתירו הענין מאד כמו שתרא' דברי קדוש ה' הרוקח ז"ל הובא לעיל שלא דיבר בזה רק ברמז. כי נאמנה את אל רוחם וכסו דבר. אבל שבת וראיתי. שכך היה יפה להם לפי דורותיהם. אבל עתה הן ימים רבים ללא מורה. וכל דרך איש ישר בעיניו להלך אחרי נטיית שכלו. וכל יצר מחשבו' לב האד' מלא רק לעוף במחשבתו אל כל אשר יענו שכלו. והעולה על כולם. שזה תורת כל האדם ונעשה משל גם בפי כסילים. לאמר הלא בכל מקום וכל דבר הוא אלהות גמור. ועינם ולבם כל הימים להעמיק ולעיין בזה. עד שגם נערים מנוערים ממשכא להו לבייהו לקבוע כל מעשיהם והנהגתם בזה לפי שכלם זה. וכמה זהירות יתירה צריך האדם להזהר בזה ולשמור את נפשו מאד במשמרת למשמרת. שאם ח"ו יקחנו לבנו לקבוע לנו מחשבה זו להתיר לעצמנו להתנהג גם במעשה לפי המחשבה זו. הלא יוכל להולד מזה ח"ו הריסת כמה יסודות התוה"ק ר"ל. ובנקל יוכל להלכד ח"ו ברשת היצר שיראה לו היתרא עפ"י מחשבה זו דרך משל להרהר בד"ת בשאט נפש אף במקומות המטונפ'. אחר שיוקבע אצלו תחלה שהכל אלהות גמור. ורז"ל הפליגו בזה מאד וכרתוהו ברוח קדשם מהיות לו חלק לעה"יב ר"ל. כמ"ש) ברכות כ"ד ב (שבכלל כי דבר ה' בזה הוא גם המהרהר ד"ת במבואות המטונפים.

נפש החיים שער ד, פרק י

ובשעת העסק והעיון בתורה. ודאי שא"צ אז לענין הדביקות כלל. כנ"ל שבהעסק ועיון לבד הוא דבוק ברצונו ודבורו יתב' והוא יתב' ורצונו ודבורו חד. והוא ענין מאמרם ז"ל בשמות רבה פלי"ג אדם לוקח חפץ שמא יוכל לקנות בעליו. אבל הקב"ה נתן תורה לישראל ואומר להם כביכול לי אתם לוקחים כו'. וז"ש בכמה מקומות בזוהר דקב"ה ואורייתא חד. וגדולה מזו בפי בשלח סי' ע"א ואוליפנא דקב"ה תורה איקרי כו' ואין תורה אלא קב"ה. וגם כי שרשה העליון של התורה הקדושה הוא בעליון שבהעולמות הנקראים עולמות הא"ס. סוד המלבוש הנעלם הנזכר בסתרי פליאות מכמה מתורת רבינו האריז"ל. שהוא ראשית סוד אותיות התורה הקדושה. וכמ"ש ה' קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז. וז"ש ז"ל שקדמה לעולם היינו גם מכל העולמות כולם. שהרי אמרו בב"ר פ"א שקדמה לכסא הכבוד. והאמת שקדמה כביכול גם לעולם האצילות יתב' כנ"ל. אלא שהאצילות נקרי' אין ומסוד הכסא מתחיל סוד השיעור קומה כביכול לכן אמרו שקדמה לכסא הכבוד. ולכן בה נאצלו ונבראו כל העולמות עליונים ותחתונים. כמ"ש) משלי ח (ויהאיה אצלו אמון ואמרו ז"ל א"ת אמון אלא אומן וכו'. ובמשלי רבתי רפ"ט חכמות בנתה ביתה זו התורה שבנתה כל העולמות:

והענין כי התורה הקדושה היא דבורו יתב'. ובמאמר פיו ית' במע"ב נבראו העולמות כולם. שע"י סידור גלגול צרופי האותיות עפ"י סדר הרל"א שערים פנים ואחור שבמאמר בראשית ברא וכו'. נאצלו ונבראו העולמות עליוני עליונים רבי רבון בכל. סדר מצבם ופרטי עניניהם וכל הנכלל בהם. וכך בכל מאמר ומאמר שבו ע"ד הנ"ל נבראו כל פרטי המינים

והעניינים שבאותו הסוג שעליו נאמר אותו המאמר. כמ"ש בזהר תרומה) [ח"ב קס"א א](#) (דכד ברא קוב"ה עלמא אסתכל בה באורייתא וברא עלמא ובאורייתא אתברי עלמא כמה דאוקמוה דכתיב ואהיה אצלו אמון בי ברא קוב"ה עלמא דעד לא אתברי עלמא אקדימת אורייתא כו'.

Letter from the GRA to rabbinic leadership of Belorussian and Podolian communities in fall of 1796 (From The Faith of the Mithnagdim, Nadler, Allan, p. 11)

Into your ears I cry: Woe unto he who says to his father, —what have you begotten?...In the Torah of Moses they have established a new covenant, working out their evil schemes with the masses in the House of the Lord...interpreting the Torah falsely while claiming that their way is precious in the eyes of God...They call themselves Hasidim - that is an abomination! How they have deceived this generation, uttering these words on high: —These are they gods, O Israel: every stick and stone. They interpret the Torah incorrectly regarding the verse —Blessed be the name of the glory of God from his dwelling place (Ez 3: 12) and also regarding the verse: —...and You give life to everything (Neh 9: 6).

Tanya, Likutei AMarim, Sha'ar ha-Yihud vaha-Emuna

With this in mind, the statement in the Zohar that the verse —Hear O Israel (Deut 6: 4) teaches the higher unity of God, while the verse —Blessed be the name (ez 3: 12) teaches the lower-level unity...**namely, that His very essence and being, may He be blessed, which is called by the name Eyn Sof, completely fills the earth in both space and time;** for in the heavens above and on earth below, and in all four directions, everything is filled with the light of the Eyn Sof, may He be blessed...and all...are completely nullified in the light of the Eyn Sof.

Kol Eliyahu on Isaiah 6:3

“The earth is filled with his glory”: The meaning here is akin to “and the earth was enlightened by His glory,” for the manifestation of the Divine here on earth cannot possibly be equal to that in the heavenly sphere; for the [earthly sphere] does not endure eternally, and they [i.e., those who dwell on the earth] are governed by free choice, and the evil impulse often rules them. Rather, it is God’s dominion that rules over every domain, and He is the Lord over all of them. Therefore the name *Ado-nai* [i.e., Sovereign] applies to the earth, whereas *Je-hova* [the unknowable God] applies in the heavens above.¹⁵

Rabbi Zadok mi-Lublin (1823-1890)

R. Shlomo Elyashiv (1841-1926)

Leshem Shevo v-Achloma: Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek Alef, Drush Hei (no. 4), 76.

And permission has been granted to all those who engage this wisdom to understand these ideas, each according to their level. And specifically from the year *taf-reish* (1840)[38] and onwards as it is written in the Zohar (2:117), “and in the six-hundredth year of the sixth millennia, the gates of the higher-wisdom (*chochma li-ailah*) were opened,” and what [the Zohar] meant in writing “opened,” this means to say that permission has been granted to all those who yearn to cleave with the living God (*Elokim Chaim*), to engage *chochmat ha-emes*, to enter and to utilize the Name properly. And anyone who delves into this matter will be enlightened and find that this was not the case before the year *taf-reish*(1840), because then it was still hidden and enclosed, except for a few exceptional individuals, so have I heard in the name of the *gaon* and *chossid* R. Yisrael Salanter z”l, and all of this is rooted in the revelation of supernal light that is revealed above and egresses below, as it draws into this world (*olam ha-zeh*) additional light and the secrets of Torah are revealed in order to rectify (*tikkun*) the world for the eventual rectification.”

R. Yehuda Ashlag/The Kabbalah Center

<https://kabbalah.com/history>

The roots of The Kabbalah Centre were planted in 1922 by Rav Yehuda Ashlag, the first master kabbalist to modernize this closely guarded wisdom, and strive to make it accessible. He passed the mantle of leadership and publishing the sources of enlightenment to his student, Rav Yehuda Tzvi Brandwein, who later handed the torch to Rav Berg. This is our lineage, from which stems the history of The Kabbalah Centre.

שו"ת יחוה דעת חלק ד סימן מז

שאלה: מה היא דעת תורה לגבי הפרסומים בזמן האחרון בכלי התקשורת ובעתונים, על ידי גורמים שונים, הקוראים לקהל הרחב להצטרף בהמוניהם ללימוד תורת הקבלה, ולהפצתה ברבים?

והרב המקובל רבי מאיר פאפירש בספר אור צדיקים (סימן כ"ב אות ל') כתב, שמי שאינו נשוי אסור לו ללמוד קבלה, וגם שיהיה על כל פנים למעלה מגיל עשרים שנה. והובא בכף החיים (סימן קנ"ה סוף ס"ק י"ב). וכ"כ הגר"ח פלאגי בספר תורה וחיים (מערכת ק' אות רנ"ט). ע"ש. וראה בזה בשו"ת שואל ונשאל שם. ובשו"ת ישכיל עבדי חלק א' (בקונטרס דעה והשכל סימן א'). ובשו"ת שמחת כהן חלק ז' (חלק יורה דעה סימן מ"א).

ואף גם זאת הלומד קבלה צריך שידע באופן ברור שהמלמד הוא תלמיד חכם מקובל הבקי בהקדמות אמיתיות של תורת הנסתר, שכן מורה שם קבלה, ובלעדי זאת יצא שכרו בהפסדו, כי הוא עלול בנקל לטעות, ולקצת בנטיעות, וכמו שהזהיר על כך המהר"ח"ו בהקדמתו לספר ההקדמות, והובאה בספר עץ חיים (דף ד' ע"א). וראה בהקדמת הרמב"ן...
וכן כתב בשו"ת הרמ"א (סימן ז') בתשובה למהר"ש"ל; ויותר ממה שאברח מלימוד הפילוסופיה אברח מלעסוק בקבלה להבין מעצמי דבריהם (ולא מפי חכם בקבלה), כי יש לחוש ביותר שלא יטעה בדבריהם. וכמו שכתב הרמב"ן בהקדמתו (הנ"ל)...

ומרן החיד"א בספר שם הגדולים (מערכת גדולים ערך רבי יצחק לוריא, ובמערכת ספרים ערך עמק המלך, עץ החיים, קבלה), הזהיר מאוד שלא ללמוד בספרי קבלה אלא אך ורק בכתבי האר"י, בספר עץ חיים ושמונה שערים שכתב מהר"ח"ו ז"ל, וממנו אין לסור ימין ושמאל, ושאינן ללמוד אלא מפי חכם מקובל מפורסם אשר דבריו נאמנו מאוד...
לפיכך מה שנמסר שהוקם בארץ מכון להפצת תורת הקבלה, ובראשו עומדים אנשים שאינם מוחזקים ליראי ה' וחושבי שמו, הקוראים לעצמם קבליסטים, ויש דתיים שטועים ונמשכים אחריהם בעינים עצומות, שומר נפשו ירחק מהם, מאחר שגם מלמדי הקבלה אינם מוחזקים ליראי שמים, והרי כבר לימדונו חז"ל (חגיגה ט"ז ע"ב) על הפסוק, כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא, אם הרב דומה למלאך ה' צבאות יבקשו תורה מפיהו, ואם לאו אל יבקשו תורה מפיהו. ומכל שכן בתורת הקבלה, שצריך לדקדק בדבר יותר ויותר שיהיה המלמד תלמיד חכם מקובל אמיתי ויראת ה' היא אוצרו. ובפרט לפי מה שנמסר לנו שהתלמידים לומדים שם בצוותא בחורים ובחורות יחדיו מכל הגילים. ואם כן למותר לציין את חילול השם שבדבר, ההופכים ללענה משפט. ויש לקרוא עליהם מקרא שכתוב: הרחק מעליה דרכך ואל תקרב אל פתח ביתה. ומצוה רבה להזהיר לרבים למנוע רגלם מנתיבתם. והמזהיר והנזהר ירבה שלומם כנהר, ועלינו יערה רוח הבורא.