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Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

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ב"ה



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Kabbalah

Introduction

Kaballah has intrigued Jews and non-Jews alike for centuries. Its powerful but abstract insights into life have lured many and the mysteries surrounding tales of Kabbalistic magic have created a perception of Kabbalah as a kind of occult Jewish practice. What is the truth about Kabbalah? What is it and what is it not? Where did it originate from? And what is it all about?

In this booklet, we will explore the traditional Jewish view of Kabbalah and acquaint ourselves with some of its most fundamental concepts.

The Mystical Dimension

The Talmud makes reference to the mystical dimension of the Torah, a part of Torah called “Pardes” which means an orchard.

The Talmud speaks of four sages who entered the mystical realm, only one was not adversely affected by the experience:

Talmud, Chagigah 14b

ת"ר ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס ואלו הן, בן עזאי ובן זומא אחר ורבי עקיבא...בן עזאי הצית ומת...בן זומא הציץ ונפגע...אחר קיצץ בנטיעות, רבי עקיבא יצא בשלום

Four Sages entered the “pardes” (“Orchard” a reference to the most esoteric and lofty secrets of the Torah). They are: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, “Acher” (“the Other” – a reference to Elisha ben Avuya,

a Sage who went astray), and Rabbi Akiva. Ben Azzai gazed and died. Ben Zoma gazed and went mad. "Acher" gazed and cut saplings (i.e., was led to heresy). Only Rabbi Akiva emerged complete.

The "pardes" is a Persian word that means "orchard" (a likely origin of the word paradise) that is used in the Talmud to refer to the mystical realm. The Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eidels 1555–1681) explains what this encrypted Talmud tale means:

Maharsha, Chiddushei Aggados ad loc.

בן עזאי הציץ ומת מתוך שדבקה נפשו באהבה רבה דבקות אמתי
דברים עליונים שהם יסודה... נתפרדה מן הגוף... ולא שבה עוד
למקומה, וזו מעלה גדולה.

בן זומא הציץ ונפגע שלא היה שלם במעלות וביישוב הדעת כבן עזאי
ומתוך שהציץ... באור בהיר יותר ממה שהיתה דעתו סובלת, נתבלבלו
אצלו הדברים ונטרפה דעתו כאדם נפגע שאינו משיג הדברים על
בוריין...

אלישע בן אבויה-אחר... חשב שהם ב' רשויות ולכך נקרא מקצץ
בנטיעות שקצץ הדברים המיוחדים והפרידן זה מזה.

רבי עקיבא שלם בכל מיני השלימות, וכשהגיע לגבול ששכל האנושי
אי אפשר להגיע אליו עמד ולא הרם לעלות אל ה'.

"Ben Azzai gazed and died." His soul was drawn with such great love and genuine attachment to the spiritual entities that it left his body ... never to return. This is an exalted level.

"Ben Zoma gazed and went mad." He was not as

solidly enough prepared nor as calm of mind as Ben Azzai, so that when he gazed at a clearer light than his mind could fathom the matters became confused in his mind and his mind was confounded like that of an injured person who does not understand things clearly ...

Alisha ben Abuya, "Acher," thought that there were two powers [of good and evil], and that is why it says he "split saplings," i.e. he divided things that are really unified.

Rabbi Akiva achieved perfection in many different areas, and when he reached the furthest point that human intellect can reach he restrained himself, thereby preserving his life.

Three Types of Kabbalah

Kabbalah comes in three distinct forms:

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Meditation and Kabbalah, Introduction

The science of Kabbalah is divided into three basic areas: the theoretical, the meditative, and the practical.

The theoretical deals with the form of the mysteries, teaching the structure of the angelic domains as well as of the Sefiros, or Divine Emanations. With great success, it deals with problems posed by the many

schools of philosophy, and it provides a conceptual framework into which all theological ideas can be fitted. More important for the discussion at hand, it also provides a framework through which the mechanism of both the meditative and practical Kabbalah can be understood.

Some three thousand Kabbalah texts exist in print, and, for the most part, the vast majority deal with the theoretical Kabbalah. Falling within this category are the best known Kabbalah works, such as the Zohar and the Bahir, which are almost totally theoretical in their scope. The same is true of the writings of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the Ari, considered by many to have been the greatest of all Kabbalists. With the passage of time, this school probed deeper and deeper into the philosophical ramifications of the primary Kabbalistic concepts, producing an extremely profound, self-consistent and satisfying philosophical system.

The practical Kabbalah, on the other hand, was a kind of white magic, dealing with the use of techniques that could evoke supernatural powers. It involved the use of divine names and incantations, amulets and talismans, as well as chiromancy, physiognomy and astrology. Many theoretical Kabbalists, led by the Ari, frowned on the use of such techniques, labeling them as dangerous and

spiritually demeaning. As a result, only a very small number of texts have survived at all, mostly in manuscript form, and only a handful of the most innocuous of these have been published.

It is significant to note that a number of techniques alluded to in these fragments also appear to have been preserved among the non-Jewish school of magic in Europe. The relationship between the practical Kabbalah and these magical schools would constitute an interesting area of study.

The meditative Kabbalah stands between these two extremes. Some of the earliest meditative methods border on the practical Kabbalah, and their use is discouraged by the latter masters, especially those of the Ari's school. Within this category are the few surviving texts from the Talmudic period. The same is true of the teachings of the Thirteenth Century master, Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, whose meditative works have never been printed and survive only in manuscript.

Limitations on the Study of Kabbalah

The study of Kabbalah most often refers to the study of theoretical Kabbalah, which, in its most classical sense, refers to the study of two realms:

- 1) “Maaseh Merkavah”—the metaphysical dynamics of Elokus as found in the book of Yechezkel that describes the

appearance of Hashem's heavenly chariot, and

2) “Maaseh Bereishis”—Jewish cosmogony, a spiritual understanding of the process of creation described in Bereishis.

The Mishnah places certain limitations on the study of these topics in order to protect its students from effects of its improper study:

Mishnah, Chagigah 11b

אין דורשין במעשה בראשית בשנים ולא במרכבה ביחיד אלא אם כן
היה חכם ומבין מדעתו.

Do not expound on “Ma’aseh Bereishis” to two students, or on Ma’aseh Merkavah even to one student, unless he is a wise person who is able to intuit the concepts on his own.

What are “Ma’aseh Bereishis” and “Ma’aseh Merkavah?” The Meiri (Rabbi Menchem Meiri 1249–1310) sheds some light on what these concepts refer to:

Meiri, Chagigah 11b

וענין מעשה בראשית הוא ידיעת חכמת הטבע ונכלל בה ידיעת שני עולמות ר"ל עולם היסודות ועולם הגלגלים, ומעשה מרכבה האמור במשנה זו הוא ידיעת מה שאחר הטבע והוא עולם מלאכים ר"ל ידיעת אמתת מציאותם וידיעת מציאותו ית' ואחדותו, לא שתהיה הכוונה בהשגת הדברים על אמיתתם שאף הם לא ישיגו על בוריה מה שלמעלה מהם בעליונות מעלה, אבל ישיגו מאמתתו יתברך דעה גדולה והשגה עצומה כל אחת כפי מעלתה.

Ma'aseh Bereishis includes the wisdom of the physical world, like astronomy and cosmology, while Ma'aseh Merkavah involves metaphysical phenomena, like the world of angels and understanding Hashem's existence and His unique Oneness. The true understanding of the concepts of Ma'aseh Merkavah are above human comprehension; even angels cannot understand spiritual levels of worlds above them, but each one attains an exalted level of knowledge and understanding of Hashem's existence in accordance with his own level.

The concept of the secret teachings of the Torah being reserved for a select few is alluded to in Tehillim:

Tehillim 25:14

סוד ה' ליראיו ובריתו להודיעם.

“Hashem's secret is revealed to those who revere Him; and to them He makes known His covenant.”

The Radak (Rabbi Dovid Kimchi 1160–1239) explains this posuk to mean:

Radak, Ad Loc.

לא יגלה כי אם ליראיו כי המתעסקים בחכמה אם לא יהיו יראי ה' ושלמים במצותיו לא יגלה להם סוד האל.

Hashem will only reveal [the secrets of the Torah] to those people who fear Him. For if a person is

immersed in the pursuit of wisdom but does not have awe of Hashem and does not fully observe His mitzvos, Hashem will not reveal His secrets to him.

Kabbalah Before 40

In addition to observance being a precondition to the study of Kaballah, there are other prerequisites as well. A more popularly cited limitation, but not one that is commonly followed, is the prohibition against studying Kaballah before one is 40 years of age:

Shach, Yoreh Deah 146:6

ויש שכתבו שלא ללמוד קבלה עד שיהא בן ארבעים שנה כמ"ש בן ארבעים לבניה בשגם שצריך קדושה וטהרה וזריזות ונקיות לזה

Some have written that one should not study Kabbalah until they are 40 years old following the Mishnah's teaching "40 is the age of wisdom" since one must first attain a degree of holiness, purity, agility, and cleanliness for it.

In practice, the more common opinion is that one shouldn't study Kabbalah before one is 20 years old and ones mind has matured to be able to comprehend sublime abstract concepts. Some point to the fact that the greatest Kabbalists of all time (such as the Arizal and Rabbi Nachman of Breslov) could not have waited until 40 to study Kabbalah, as they passed away before they even reached 40.

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194–1270) warns the reader of his commentary on Chumash to avoid trying to make sense of the kabbalistic references he cites in his work:

ואני הנני מביא בברית נאמנת והיא הנותנת עצה הוגנת לכל מסתכל בספר הזה לבל יסבור סברה ואל יחשוב מחשבות בדבר מכל הרמזים אשר אני כותב בסתרי התורה כי אני מודיעו נאמנה שלא ישיגו דברי ולא יודעו כלל בשום שכל ובינה זולתי מפי מקובל חכם לאוזן מקבל מבין, והסברא בהן איזלת, מחשבה מועלת רבת הנזקין מונעת התועלת... הוא יראה את רצוייו מתורתו נפלאות, אבל יחזו בפירושינו חרושים בפשטים ובמדרשים יקחו מוסר מפי רבותינו הקדושים, בגדול ממך אל תדרוש בחזק ממך בל תחקור, במופלא ממך בל תדע, במכוסה ממך בל תשאל, במה שהורשית התבונן שאין לך עסק בנסתרות.

I hereby enter the reader into a covenant whereby he undertakes not to philosophize and hypothesize about anything I write that has to do with the secrets of the Torah. Let it be known that nothing of this sort can be fathomed without a received oral tradition from a wise mentor. Advancing logical explanations in these matters is pure foolishness and is harmful and counterproductive ... For someone who cannot avail himself of such a tradition, he should restrict himself to those parts of my commentary that deal with revealed aspects of the Torah, taking from them the constructive ethical lessons of our holy Sages. Do not seek out that which is greater than you; do not investigate that which is more powerful than you, do not attempt to know that which is far from you; do not ask about that which is hidden from you. Meditate upon what you have been taught for you have no business with

the hidden matters.

As we will learn, times have changed, and as the generations progress, so, the barriers to the study of Kabbalah have fallen. Today, Kabbalah is accessible in some form or other to anyone who wishes to seek out its teachings.

Origins of Kabbalah

Kabbalah is considered a part of the Oral Torah like any other that was given to Moses at Sinai. In fact, the word “kabbalah” itself means “received”:

Tikunei Zohar 147a

קבלה למושה מסיני

Moses received it (the Kabbalah) from Sinai

The teachings of Kabbalah include a collection of teachings from the Oral Torah transmitted through (and recorded in the form of sayings in the name of) the Sages of the Mishnah that were not included in the final redaction of the Mishnah by Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi in 200 CE. Many of these teachings appear in the Zohar:

Shem Gedolim, Zohar

נראה שהיו משניות וברייתות ותוספתות בסתרי תורה ג"כ, ואפשר שהיו בכלל הת"ר סדרי משנה שהיו מקדם קדמתה

It appears that there were also Mishnayos, Braisos, and Toseftos (collections of teachings from Mishnaic sages) in the hidden parts of Torah. It is possible that they were part of the original 600 orders of

the Mishnah that once existed (i.e., part of the 600 orders of Mishnah that were transmitted to Moses on Sinai and were preserved until the generation of Hillel, many of which were subsequently lost before the reduction of the Mishnah).

Torah study is a multi-layered discipline that primarily consists of four realms, alluded to by the acronym “Pardes”:

- 1) Pshat: The literal
- 2) Drush: The homiletic
- 3) Remez: The symbolic
- 4) Sod: The esoteric

Kabbalah is another name for the esoteric dimension of Torah, which is as authentic a part of Torah as any other.

Many Kabbalistic ideas appear in the form of Aggadah, homiletic interpretation, in the Talmud:

Shulchan Aruch Admur Hazaken, Hilchos Talmud Torah Ch. 2

אמרו חכמים רצונך שתכיר מי שאמר והיה העולם למוד דברי אגדה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את הקדוש ברוך הוא ומתדבק בדרכיו כי רוב סודות התורה שהיא חכמת הקבלה וידיעת ה' גנוזים באגדות.

Our Sages declared: If you want to get to know the One Who said and the world came into existence, study the matters of Aggadah (homiletic interpretation) for through them you will come to recognize Hashem and connect to His ways, because the majority of Torah's secrets, which is

the wisdom of Kabbalah and the knowledge of Hashem, are hidden in the Kabbalah.

Sefer Yetzirah

The earliest work of Kabbalah is Sefer Yetzirah, The Book of Creation.

Kuzari, 4:25

ספר יצירה והוא לאברהם אבינו

Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Creation) is attributed to Avraham Avinu.

The famous Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, in his book *Pardes Rimonim*, cites a minority opinion that Rabbi Akiva redacted our Avraham Avinu's version into the current version we have today. Some also have a tradition that the original version was written by Adam Harishon, but only in the sense that Adam was aware of its teachings and transmitted them to his son, and his son to his son, until Avraham Avinu wrote them down.

Sefer Yetzirah is a concise but highly encrypted book that is extant in multiple versions. The shortest version contains a mere 1,300 words. It describes the process of creation through "32 wondrous ways of wisdom" including 10 numbers and 22 letters.

The Talmud describes the usage of Sefer Yetzirah for the purpose of Practical Kabbalah

רבא ברא גברא (ע"י ספר יצירה שלמדו צרוף אותיות של שם-רש"י)
שדריה לקמיה דר' זירא הוה קא משתעי בהדיה ולא הוה קא מהדר
ליה אמר ליה מן חבריא את הדר לעפריך

Rava created a person (Rashi: through the study of Sefer Yetzirah, Rava learned how to arrange the letters of G-d's Name with which He created the world [and by using such arrangements created a person]) and sent it before Rav Zeira. Rav Zeira spoke to it, but it would not reply. [Rav Zeira] said to it: You are a creation of one of my colleagues; return to your dust!

This story is an instance of practical Kabbalah (as opposed to the theoretical and meditative forms of Kabbalah mentioned earlier) being used to create a living being. It is also the first reference to the creation of a Golem, an anthropomorphic being created entirely from inanimate matter.

Jewish folklore tell tales of the creations of Golems by Kabbalists to protect Jews from anti-semitic uprisings. The most popular of which is the Golem of Prague created by the Maharal (Rabbi Yehudah Leow 1520–1609) (although it is likely that those tales originated from a Golem created by Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem of Chelm (1550–1583)).

The concept of creating a Golem using kabbalistic means is sourced in the Talmud and in several major authoritative works of Kabbalah.

The Talmud continues to tell an additional story of Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaya who calf created using Sefer

Yetzirah in order to have meat to eat in honor of Shabbat:

Talmud, ibid

רב חנינא ורב אושעיא הוו יתבי כל מעלי שבתא ועסקי בספר יצירה ומיברו להו עיגלא תילתא ואכלי ליה

Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaya would sit together every Erev Shabbos and delve into Sefer Yetzirah. A calf which was at one-third of its maturity (Rashi: when it would have finished growing, and is at its prime to be eaten) would be created for them and they would eat it.

Rashi explains why these creations are not considered magic that is forbidden by the Torah:

Rashi Ibid, 67b

ואין כאן משום מכשפות דמעשה הקב"ה הן ע"י שם קדושה שלו הוא:

This was not a work of witchcraft, but a work of Hashem, created through Hashem's Holy Name.

We find reference elsewhere to the fact that Avraham Avinu used this technique when he was visited by three angels and was short one calf to serve them three tongues:

Chessed L'Avraham 5:51

הוצרך אברהם לברא פר שלישי על ידי ספר יצירה כדי שלא יצטער בסעודת אורחים...וז"ש ובן הבקר אשר עשה ממש

Avraham needed to create a third calf using Sefer Yetzirah in order that he should not be pained in

preparing a meal for his guests...this what the verse alludes to when it says (Bereishis 18:8) “and the calf that he had made”—literally!

The Zohar

The Zohar is a multi-volume work that serves as the most foundational and central text of the Kabbalah. The word Zohar means radiance and it primarily contains a mystical explanation of the pesukim of the Torah.

The Kabbalists have generally accepted Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as the author of the Zohar's teachings. For example, the famous kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Codovero (1522–1570) writes about the Zohar:

Sha'arei Zohar p. 9 citing Ramak—Ohr Yakar, Tikunei Zohar I 24

”כד אתגליא האי חיבורא“ היינו כדפירשתי במקום אחר שהיה עתיד ספר זה להעלם ולהסתתר מעיני היודעים, וכך היה, אין מי שיודע האידך נגנז, ולא נתפרסם כל מציאות זמן הקדמונים, שלא נתפרסם אלא זה מאתים שנה בקירוב...עם היות שנתחבר בזמנו נתעלם ונסתתר עד זמן שנתגלה, ואפילו אחר שנתגלה היה ביד חכמים בגניזה ולא היו מפרסמין אותו.

The Zohar itself makes reference to the fact that at one point it would be revealed. This is a reference to the fact that this book was destined to be hidden from the world's eyes for many years. In fact, the earlier generations knew nothing about it, until it was revealed some two hundred years ago. Even after it was found, it was not widely publicized; rather, the Sages kept it quietly amongst themselves.

Similarly, the Alter Rebbe writes:

Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh 26

ספר הזהר...היה גנוז בימיהם וגם כל חכמת הקבלה היתה נסתרה בימיהם ונעלמה מכל תלמידי חכמים כ"א ליחידי סגולה ואף גם זאת בהצנע לכת ולא ברבים כדאיתא בגמרא וכמ"ש האריז"ל דדוקא בדורות אלו האחרונים מותר ומצוה לגלות זאת החכמה ולא בדורות הראשונים וגם רשב"י אמר בזוה"ק שלא ניתן רשות לגלות רק לו ולחביריו לבדם

[The Zohar] was [still] concealed in their days; indeed, the whole wisdom of the Kabbalah was hidden in their days and concealed from all the Torah scholars, except for a select few, and even then, [it was studied] in a concealed manner and not publicly, as stated in the Gemara. Thus R' Yitzchak Luria, of blessed memory, wrote that it is only in these latter generations that "it is permitted and obligatory to reveal this wisdom" — i.e., the Kabbalah, which illuminates the esoteric dimension of the Torah — but not in the earlier generations. R' Shimon bar Yochai, too, stated in the Holy Zohar that permission to reveal [the secrets of the Kabbalah] was only granted to himself and his associates.

The Arizal

Following the revelation of the Zohar, the next major step in the development of the teachings of Kabbalah came with the teachings of the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria

Ashkenazi 1534–1572). The Arizal is considered the father of contemporary Kabbalah.

While the Arizal's personal writings are few, his teachings are preserved in the writings of his disciples, most notably that of Rabbi Chaim Vital (1543–1620) who authored the voluminous kabbalistic work, *Etz Chaim*. The Aramaic Kabbalistic songs we sing at Shabbos meals were written by the Arizal.

Shabtai Tzvi

In the time period following the Arizal, the scholarly Jewish world was enlivened by the study of Lurianic Kabbalah. That was until the Shabtai Tzvi debacle. Shabtai Tzvi (1626–1676) was a Sefardic rabbi and Kabbalist who led much of the Jewish world to believe that he was Moshiach. The Jewish historian Rabbi Berel Wein estimates that at one point, up to 30% of the Jewish world followed Shabtai Tzvi. He was known to practice practical Kabbalah, performing magic using the Names of Hashem. His name spread far and wide thanks to the efforts of his disciple, Nasan of Gaza. Then, in 1666, he was imprisoned by Sultan Mehmed IV and given a choice to convert to Islam or be beheaded. To the dismay of world Jewry, he chose to convert to Islam, dashing the hopes of a Moshiach's coming that so many thought had finally arrived.

The effects of this event dampened the focus on Kabbalah and even cast its teachers in a suspicious light. This was until the emergence of Chassidus.

Chassidus and Kabbalah

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Meditation and Kabbalah

The Chassidic movement was founded in the mid 1700's by Rabbi Israel, known as the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760). By the time the movement was fifty years old, it commanded the allegiance of a majority of Eastern European Jewry, and Chassidic rabbis dominated many important communities. Many Kabbalah texts were printed under the aegis of this movement, often for the first time ... Where Kabbalah had previously been the province of only the greatest scholars, it had now become part of the popular folklore, and even the simplest individuals had become familiar with its terminology.

Contrary to what many think, the teachings of Chassidus are not a commentary on Kabbalah. According to the Rebbe Rashab (Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneerson 1860–1920) Kabbalah serves as a commentary to Chassidus:

Toras Shalom p. 172

די וועלט מיינט אז חסידות איז א ביאור אויף קבלה, דאס איז א טעות,
קבלה איז א ביאור אויף חסידות.

The world thinks Chassidus is a commentary on Kabbalah, this is a mistake, Kabbalah is a commentary on Chassidus.

The Rebbe explains:

החסידות ענינה ידיעת האלקות כו'...ע"י כמה משלים דוגמאות הסברות וכו', והקבלה מבארת "המקום" בגופא דמלכא, בספירות וכו'

The purpose of Chassidus is to know the Divine... through analogies, examples, and explanations etc., whereas Kabbalah provides "the location" within Elokus, using the language of sefirot etc.

In other words, if both Chassidus and Kabbalah answer the "why" of Torah and Jewish practice (in their function as the soul of Torah), Chassidus is the essential answer and explanation, whereas Kabbalah provides the spiritual terms and definitions that Chassidus uses to provide that explanation.

Chassidus explains the "essence" and "personality"—the "who" and "what"—of Elokus, whereas Kabbalah speaks about the "where" of Elokus, i.e., the spiritual "environment" and "landmarks" within the spiritual cosmos.

The Soul of Torah

The Zohar refers to the teachings of Kabbalah as "the soul of Torah." What does this mean?

חכמת הקבלה נקראת נשמת התורה המתפשטת בתוך הלכות תורה שבעל פה שהם גופי תורה. וכמו שכל כחות נשמה נראים באברי הגוף כן נראים פנימיות טעמי המצות שבזוהר בתוך התורה הנגלית.

The wisdom of Kabbalah is referred to (by the Zohar) as the soul of Torah that spreads out into

the laws of the Oral Torah which is considered the body of Torah. Just as the soul's powers can be witnessed in the organs of the body, similarly, the inner reasons for the Mitzvos that are found in the Zohar can be seen in the revealed aspects of Torah.

Just as a person is comprised of body and soul, the Torah too has an inner soul and an outer body. By studying Kabbalah, the inner workings of Torah, one gains insight into the outer shell of Torah, namely the many laws discussed in the Talmud.

Some Basic Concepts in Kabbalah

The Kabbalah introduces a host of terminology useful in explaining the relationship between Hashem and created beings, as well as providing insight into the process of creation and our spiritual purpose in this world. To this end, let us explore a few basic Kabbalistic concepts:

Infinite Light (Ohr Ein Sof) and Tzitztzum

Mystical Concepts in Chassidism p. 47

One of the basic theological problems is concerned with the seeming enigma of reconciling G-d with the universe: How can there be a transition from the Infinite to the finite, from pure Intelligence to matter, from absolute Unity or Oneness to multifariousness? Moreover, how do we reconcile the Divine creation or bringing about of the universe and its multifarious parts with the eternal and inviolable absolute perfection of G-d, of whom

Scripture affirms “I the Eternal, I have not changed (Malachi 3:6)?

To this end, Lurianic Kabbalah introduces the concept of tzimtzum, the contraction of Infinite Light for the purpose of creating a void within which limited concepts of dimension could take shape:

Rabbi Chaim Vital, Eitz Chaim 1:2

דע כי טרם שנאצלו הנאצלים ונבראו הנבראים היה אור עליון פשוט ממלא כל המציאות ולא היה שום מקום פנוי בבחי' אויר ריקני וחלל אלא הכל היה ממולא מן אור א"ס פשוט שהוא ולא היה לא בחי' ראש ולא בחי' סוף אלא הכל היה אור א' פשוט שוה בהשוואה א' והוא הנק' אור א"ס.

וכאשר עלה ברצונו הפשוט לברוא העולמות ולהאציל הנאצלים... והנה אז צמצם את עצמו א"ס בנקודה האמצעית אשר בו באמצע אורו ממש וצמצם האור ההוא ונתרחק אל צדדי סביבות הנקודה האמצעית ואז נשאר מקום פנוי ואויר וחלל ריקני מנקודה אמצעית ממש

Before Creation, the Exalted light was simple. It filled all existence, so that there was no empty space. Everything was filled with Infinite Light. The concepts of “beginning” and “end” did not exist. Everything consisted of one simple light, Infinite Light.

When it was Hashem's Will to create all the worlds ... He constricted Himself at the central point of His Light. And exactly at the middle He withdrew His Light and pulled it back to the sides around the

central point. Thus an empty space encircling that central point came into being ...

According to the understanding of many kabbalists including the Alter Rebbe in Tanya, the tzimtzum is not literal, for Hashem is Infinite which means that no place can be void of His Presence. The contraction of the tzimtzum is actually only a perceived contraction from the perspective of the created being. From Hashem's perspective, there remains to be limitation to His Infinite Presence.

Worlds (Olamos)

Mystical Concepts in Chassidism p. 49

Tzimtzum on its various levels brings about a series of numerous intermediary stages between the infinite Light of the En Sof and the finite universe, making possible the creation of the finite and pluralistic world. These intermediary stages are generally divided into ...classes or grades, referred to as the... Worlds or Realms. The varying radiations of the Divine Light in these Worlds, becoming ever more intensely screened and obscured from one level to the next, are referred to as the Sefiros.

The specific worlds are:

Mystical Concepts in Chassidism p. 109

Atzilus, the World of Emanation. The term is derived from the root אצל, as in Bamidbar 11:17 and Koheles 2:10.

Beriah-the World of Creation;

Yetzirah-the World of Formation; and

Asiyah- the World of Action or Making. These latter three names are derived from the creative terms in Yeshayahu 43:7.

Atzilus is primarily an emanation of Elokus, and not a created world. The worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah represent three stages through which creation takes shape. These three stages are analogous to the mathematical concepts of point, line, and plane. The point represents creation in the world of Beriah, where the essential concept of creation exists in the form of the emergence of something from nothing, although it does not yet have a shape or form. Creation is further developed in Yetzirah, where the particles of creation exist in a linear formation without the complex integration necessary for them to take up a shape, form, or dimension. In the world of Asiyah, the concept of dimension is introduced and the physical world as we know it can take shape.

These three worlds also parallel the three types of expression man is capable of, namely thought (Beriah) speech (Yetzirah) and Action (Asiyah).

Sefiros

Sefer Yetzirah, as the first work of Kabbalah, is the first to refer to the concept of ten Sefiros, albeit in an abstract reference:

עשר ספירות בלימה כמספר "עשר אצבעות"

10 Sefiros (radiances) without substance as the number of "ten fingers."

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, inner.org

A sefirah (pl. sefirot) is a channel of Divine energy or life-force. This most fundamental concept of Kabbalah is that in the process of creation an intermediate stage was emanated from Hashem's infinite light to create what we experience as finite reality. These channels are called the Ten Sefiros, Ten Divine Emanations, Ten Divine Radiances, Ten Divine Eluminices, or Ten Divine Powers which are the basic terms and concepts of the inner wisdom of the Torah which is called Kabbalah.

Keser - Crown

Keser, or Crown...corresponds to the superconscious realm of experience. Thus, the image of a "crown," which suggests an aura surrounding one's consciousness.

Chochmah - Wisdom

Chochmah...is the first power of conscious intellect within Creation...Chochmah is associated in the soul with the power of intuitive insight, flashing

lightning-like across consciousness... The “wisdom” of chochmah also implies the ability to look deeply at some aspect of reality and abstract its conceptual essence till one succeeds in uncovering its underlying axiomatic truth. These seeds of truth can then be conveyed to the companion power of binah for the sake of intellectual analysis and development.

Binah - Understanding

Binah, or understanding, is...the second conscious power of intellect in Creation... Binah is associated in the soul with the power of conceptual analysis and reasoning, both inductive and deductive... The “understanding” of binah also implies the ability to examine the degree of truth or falsehood inherent in a particular idea... Another feature identified with the property of binah is the ability to explain and elucidate concepts both to oneself and others. For this reason it is symbolized in Kabbalah as “the wide river.”

Da’as - Knowledge

Da’as is the third and last conscious power of intellect in Creation.... Da’as is associated in the soul with the powers of memory and concentration, powers which rely upon one’s “recognition” (hakarah) of, and “sensitivity” (hergesh) to, the potential meaningfulness of those ideas generated in

consciousness through the powers of Chochmah and Binah. Da'as...serves to connect the intellect as a whole with the realm of emotion, thereby enhancing one's determination and resolve to act in accordance with the essential truths that one has integrated into consciousness.

Chesed - Loving-Kindness

Chesed is...the first of the emotive attributes within Creation... Chesed is associated in the soul with the desire to embrace all of Creation and bestow upon it goodness.

Gevurah - Might

Gevurah is associated in the soul with the power to restrain one's innate urge to bestow goodness upon others, when the recipient of that good is judged to be unworthy and liable to misuse it. As the force which measures and assesses the worthiness of Creation, gevurah is also referred to in Kabbalah as midas hadin ("the attribute of judgment"). It is the restraining might of gevurah which allows one to overcome his enemies, be they from without or from within (his evil inclination).

Chesed and gevurah act together to create an inner balance in the soul's approach to the outside world. While the "right arm" of chesed operates to draw others near, the "left arm" of gevurah reserves the

option of repelling those deemed undeserving.

Tiferes - Beauty

Tiferes is associated in the soul with the power to reconcile the conflicting inclinations of chesed and gevurah so as to allow for focused compassion, thus accounting for its designation in Kabbalah as midas harachamim (“the attribute of mercy”).

Netzach - Victory

Netzach is associated in the soul with the power to overcome those obstacles which stand in the way of realizing one’s chesed aspiration to bestow goodness upon Creation... The word netzach denotes both “victory” and “eternity.”

Hod - Splendour

Hod is associated in the soul with the power to continually advance, with the determination and perseverance born of deep inner commitment, toward the realization of one’s life goals. The acknowledgment of a supreme purpose in life, and the total submission of self which it inspires, serve to endow the source of one’s inspiration with an aura of splendor and majesty. Hence the word hod connotes both “acknowledgment” (hoda’ah) and “splendor,” in the sense of an aura-like “reverberation” (hed) of light.

Yesod - Foundation

Yesod is associated in the soul with the power to contact, connect and communicate with outer reality (represented by the sefirah of malchus). The foundation (yesod) of a building is its “grounding,” its union with the earth (malchus).

Malchus - Kingdom

Malchus is associated in the soul with the power of self-expression. Kabbalah identifies three basic “garments” (levushim) of the soul which enable it to achieve expression: “thought” (machshavah), by which the soul is revealed inwardly; and “speech” (dibur) and “deed” (ma’aseh), by which it is revealed outwardly.

Malchus as a whole is often referred to as “the world of speech” insofar as the spoken word represents the essential medium of self-expression, allowing one to not only reveal himself to outer reality but to guide and influence that reality as well. Hence, speech allows one to exercise authority and “kingship,” the literal meaning of malchut.

Sheviras Hakeilim of Tohu

Torah Ohr, 27c

עד“מ תיבת ברוך כשאותיות” מצורפות בתיבה זו מתלבש בהן השכלה שהוא ענין הברכה אבל כשיתפרדו הדי’ אותיות אלו זמ”ז להיות הבי”ת

בפ"ע וכן הרי"ש וכו' אזי לא ימצא בהן התלבשות השכלה זאת כלל. ועד"ז הוא שבה"כ דתהו שנתפרדו הכלים לחלקים רבים מפורדים זמ"ז עד שנסתלק מהם האור שהי' מתלבש בתוכן קודם פירוד זה. ומצד זה ירדו במדרגה בבחי' בי"ע ונתהוו מזה עולמות הנפרדים ברואים רבים מינים ממינים שונים.

Take, for example, the word "Baruch" (blessed); when its letters combine to form this word, intelligent meaning becomes manifest in them, namely, the concept of a blessing. However, when you separate these four letters and allow the "Beis" to stand on its own, and the "Reish" to stand on its own, and so on, then the meaning is no longer contained by these letters. Similarly, with regard to the shattering of the vessels of the world of Tohu, in which the vessels shattered into many pieces to the point at which the light that they originally contained left them. And for this reason, they descended in level through the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah to create worlds that appear separate to Elokus and contain many different kinds of creations.

In the process of creation, that deeper meaning and unification got lost in the emphasis of the details. Imagine a child who hardly recognized the aleph beis opened a book of philosophy. He would get excited when he recognized an "al" in the word "and" and a "b" in the word "because" but the entire meaning that the philosopher intended to convey would be lost.

Similarly regarding the creation of this world, we only see the details of creation, but their deeper meaning is lost to us. We are blinded by the specifics of reality from seeing its collective purpose.

We only see the Kelipos (shells), the fragments of letters that when combined together can create meaning.

Kelipos are seen as the source of evil, for they lead us astray from Hashem's unity. Practically, this means we get distracted by the technical details of life and lose focus from its purpose.

Our purpose in this world is to reverse the process of creation by creating meaning and unification by putting together the pieces in a meaningful way (without losing touch of reality).

Torah guides us to know how we can piece together the pieces in a way that will express their inherent (G-dly) unity.

For instance, when we eat for the purpose of gaining strength to perform a mitzvah, daven to Hashem, or study Torah; when we work to earn money to contribute to tzedakah; when we go about our daily lives with the intent of living for a higher purpose, then we reintroduce a higher sense of spirituality, meaning, purpose, and unity to creation. This ultimately leads to the purpose of creation, the coming of Moshiach, when (Yeshayahu 11:9) "The world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as water covers the seabed" (i.e., creation will become like a single unit of G-dly knowledge).

Studying Kabbalah Nowadays

On several occasions, the Rebbe emphasized that nowadays we are not only allowed to study the "hidden" dimension of Torah (i.e., Chassidus), but we are encouraged to do so:

לא נתגלתה... בדורות הראשונים שהיתה נסתרה בימיהם ונעלמה מכל תלמידי חכמים כ"א ליחידי סגולה, כי אם בדורות האחרונים בעקבות משיחא דוקא. והשני טעמים בזה: א) כיון שבעקבות משיחא הולך ומתגבר החושך ביותר, יש צורך לבטל ולהאיר חושך גדול זה ע"י אור גדול ביותר. ב) כיון שמתקרבים לימות המשיח שאז יהי שלמות הגילוי דפנימיות התורה, צ"ל הכנה מעין זה ע"י הפצת המעיינות החוצה.

The inner dimension of Torah was not revealed in earlier generations—it was hidden from the Sages and only revealed to a select few—until recent generations, during the era preceding the arrival of Moshiach. There are two reasons for this: 1) Since in the time before the coming of Moshiach the darkness becomes exceedingly overbearing, it is necessary to light up this great darkness with an exceedingly great light. 2) Since, as we near the coming of Moshiach when there will be the complete revelation of the inner dimension of Torah, the preparation for this takes place in a similar fashion—by spreading the wellsprings [i.e., the inner dimension of Torah] to the outside.

Nowadays, that the teachings of the inner dimension of Torah has been made accessible through Chassidus, it is our imperitage to study Chassidus, live by it's teachings, and teach it to the world. As is well known that when the Baal Shem Tov visited Moshiach's heavenly chambers and asked "When will you come?" he was told "When your wellsprings are spread to the outside world."

Take-aways

- » Kabbalah is the hidden, mystical dimension of the Torah.
- » It's teachings are delicate and abstract and therefore should be treated with care. Certain precautions were set in place to ensure it is not abused.
- » There are three methods within Kabbalah, namely theoretical kabbalah, practical kabbalah, and meditative kabbalah.
- » Sefer Yetzirah is the oldest work of kabbalah and contains the secrets of creation. Sages and Kabbalists have used these secrets (Names of G-d) to create anthropomorphic beings.
- » The Zohar is the most foundational work of Kabbalah. It's authorship is disputed, but most traditional scholars believe it originated from the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.
- » The Arizal is the father of modern kabbalah, although Jewry became suspicious of the study of kabbalah following the Shabtai Tzvi debacle.
- » Chassidus reintroduced the study of Kabbalah. Chassidus is about connecting to Hashem, and Kabbalah provides the terminology to refer to Elokus.
- » Some basic terms in Kabbalah are Ein Sof - Hashem's Infinitude, Tzimtzum - the contraction of Infinity to create a platform for creation, Olamos - spiritual worlds that form a process of creation, sefiros - intellectual and emotional characteristics through which the Divine light is expressed.

- » In the process of creation, the Divine light became hidden, its deeper meaning obscured by the details. Our purpose in this world is to reintroduce that meaning through Torah and Mitzvos. The teachings of Kabbalah help us see how the Mitzvos achieve that.