

Kabbalah

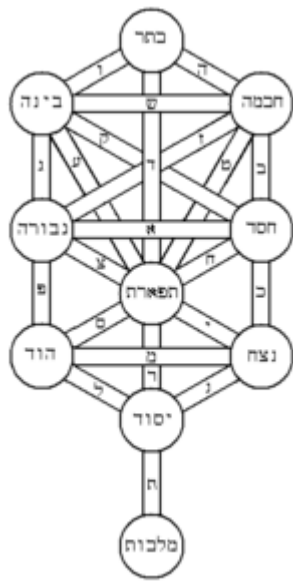
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v t e

Kabbalah (Hebrew: קַבְּלָה, literally "receiving/tradition"; also Romanised **Cabala**, **Qabbālā**, etc.; different transliterations now tend to denote alternative traditions^[1]) is an esoteric method, discipline, and school of thought. A traditional Kabbalist in Judaism is called a *Mekubal* (Hebrew: מְקוּבָּל).

Kabbalah's definition varies according to the tradition and aims of those following it,^[2] from its religious origin as an integral part of Judaism, to its later Christian, New Age, or Occultist syncretic adaptations. Kabbalah is a set of esoteric teachings meant to explain the relationship between an unchanging, eternal, and mysterious Ein Sof (no end) and the mortal and finite universe (God's creation). While it is heavily used by some denominations, it is not a religious denomination in itself. It forms the foundations of mystical religious interpretation. Kabbalah

seeks to define the nature of the universe and the human being, the nature and purpose of existence, and various other [ontological](#) questions. It also presents methods to aid understanding of these concepts and thereby attain spiritual realisation.

Kabbalah originally developed entirely within the realm of [Jewish thought](#), and kabbalists often use classical Jewish sources to explain and demonstrate its esoteric teachings. These teachings are held by followers in [Judaism](#) to define the inner meaning of both the [Hebrew Bible](#) and traditional [Rabbinic literature](#) and their formerly concealed [transmitted](#) dimension, as well as to explain the significance of Jewish [religious observances](#).^[3]

Traditional practitioners believe its earliest origins pre-date world religions, forming the primordial blueprint for Creation's [philosophies](#), [religions](#), [sciences](#), [arts](#), and [political systems](#).^[4] Historically, Kabbalah emerged, after earlier forms of [Jewish mysticism](#), in 12th- to 13th-century [Southern France](#) and [Spain](#), becoming reinterpreted in the Jewish mystical renaissance of 16th-century [Ottoman Palestine](#). It was popularised in the form of [Hasidic Judaism](#) from the 18th century onwards. 20th-century interest in Kabbalah has inspired cross-denominational [Jewish renewal](#) and contributed to wider non-Jewish [contemporary spirituality](#), as well as engaging its [flourishing emergence](#) and historical re-emphasis through newly established [academic investigation](#).

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Overview[[edit](#)]

According to the [Zohar](#), a foundational text for kabbalistic thought, [Torah study](#) can proceed along four levels of interpretation ([exegesis](#)).^{[5][6]} These four levels are called [pardes](#) from their initial letters (PRDS [Hebrew](#): פרדס, orchard).

- [Peshat](#) ([Hebrew](#): פשט lit. "simple"): the direct interpretations of meaning.
- *Remez* ([Hebrew](#): רמז lit. "hint[s]"): the [allegoric](#) meanings (through [allusion](#)).
- *Derash* ([Hebrew](#): דרש from Heb. *darash*: "inquire" or "seek"): [midrashic](#) (Rabbinic) meanings, often with imaginative comparisons with similar words or verses.
- *Sod* ([Hebrew](#): סוד lit. "secret" or "mystery"): the inner, esoteric ([metaphysical](#)) meanings, expressed in kabbalah.

Kabbalah is considered by its followers as a necessary part of the study of [Torah](#) – the study of Torah (the [Tanakh](#) and [Rabbinic literature](#)) being an inherent duty of observant Jews.^[7] Kabbalah teaches doctrines that are accepted by some Jews as the true meaning of Judaism while other Jews have rejected these doctrines as [heretical](#) and antithetical to Judaism. After the Medieval Kabbalah, and especially after its 16th-century development and synthesis, Kabbalah replaced [Jewish philosophy](#) (*hakira*) as the mainstream traditional [Jewish theology](#),^[citation needed] both in

scholarly circles and in the popular imagination. With the arrival of [modernity](#), through the influence of [haskalah](#), this has changed among non-Orthodox [Jewish denominations](#), although its 20th-century academic study and cross-denominational spiritual applications (especially through [Neo-Hasidism](#)) has reawakened a following beyond [Orthodoxy](#).

The origins of the term "kabbalah" are unknown and disputed to belong either to Jewish [philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol](#) (1021–1058) or else to the 13th-century Spanish kabbalist [Bahya ben Asher](#). While other terms have been used in many religious documents from the 2nd century up to the present day, the term "kabbalah" has become the main descriptive of Jewish esoteric knowledge and practices.^{[[citation needed](#)]} Jewish mystical literature, which served as the basis for the development of kabbalistic thought, developed through a theological tradition inherent in Judaism from Antiquity, as part of wider [Rabbinic literature](#). Its theoretical development can be characterised in alternative schools and successive stages. After the [Hebrew Bible](#) experience of prophecy, the first documented schools of specifically mystical theory and method in Judaism are found in the 1st and 2nd centuries, described in the [heichalot](#) (supernal "palaces") texts and the earliest existent book on Jewish esotericism, [Sefer Yetzirah](#). Their method, known as [Merkabah](#) (contemplation of the Divine "Chariot") mysticism lasted until the 10th century, where it was subsumed by the Medieval doctrinal emergence of the Kabbalah in southwestern Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. Its teachings, embodied in the [Zohar](#), became the foundation of later Jewish mysticism, becoming re-interpreted in the early-modern developments of 16th-century [Safed](#) in the Galilee, through the new system of [Isaac Luria](#). [Lurianic Kabbalah](#) became popularised as a social mysticism for the whole Jewish community through 18th-century [Hasidism](#) in eastern Europe, and its new notions of mystical leadership.

Modern [academic-historical](#) study of Jewish mysticism reserves the term "kabbalah" to designate the particular, distinctive doctrines that textually emerged fully expressed in the Middle Ages, as distinct from the earlier Merkabah mystical concepts and methods.^{[[81](#)]} According to this descriptive categorisation, both versions of Kabbalistic theory, the medieval-Zoharic and the early-modern Lurianic together comprise the [theosophical](#) tradition in Kabbalah, while the [meditative-ecstatic Kabbalah](#) incorporates a parallel inter-related Medieval tradition. A third tradition, related but more shunned, involves the [magical](#) aims of [Practical Kabbalah](#). Moshe Idel, for example, writes that these 3 basic models can be discerned operating and competing throughout the whole history of Jewish mysticism, beyond the particular Kabbalistic background of the Middle Ages.^{[[91](#)]} They can be readily distinguished by their basic intent with respect to God:

- The [Theosophical](#) tradition of *Theoretical Kabbalah* (the main focus of the [Zohar](#) and [Luria](#)) seeks to understand and describe the divine realm. As an alternative to rationalist [Jewish philosophy](#), particularly Maimonides' Aristotelianism, this speculation became the central component of Kabbalah
- The [Ecstatic](#) tradition of *Meditative Kabbalah* (exemplified by [Abulafia](#) and [Isaac of Acre](#)) strives to achieve a mystical union with God. Abraham Abulafia's "Prophetic Kabbalah" was the supreme example of this, though marginal in Kabbalistic development, and his alternative to the program of theosophical Kabbalah
- The [Magico-theurgical](#) tradition of *Practical Kabbalah* (in often unpublished manuscripts) endeavours to alter both the Divine realms and the World. While some

interpretations of prayer see its role as manipulating heavenly forces, Practical Kabbalah properly involved white-magical acts, and was censored by kabbalists for only those completely pure of intent. Consequently it formed a separate minor tradition shunned from Kabbalah

According to traditional belief, early kabbalistic knowledge was transmitted orally by the [Patriarchs](#), [prophets](#), and sages ([hakhamim](#) in [Hebrew](#)), eventually to be "interwoven" into Jewish religious writings and culture. According to this view, early kabbalah was, in around the 10th century BC, an open knowledge practiced by over a million people in ancient Israel.^[10] Foreign conquests drove the Jewish spiritual leadership of the time (the [Sanhedrin](#)) to hide the knowledge and make it secret, fearing that it might be misused if it fell into the wrong hands.^[11] The Sanhedrin leaders were also concerned that the practice of kabbalah by Jews of the [Jewish diaspora](#), unsupervised and unguided by the masters, might lead them into wrong practice and forbidden ways. As a result, the kabbalah became secretive, forbidden and esoteric to Judaism (*Torat Ha'Sod* תורת הסוד) for two and a half millennia.^[citation needed]

It is hard to clarify with any degree of certainty the exact concepts within kabbalah. There are several different schools of thought with very different outlooks; however, all are accepted as correct.^[12] Modern [halakhic](#) authorities have tried to narrow the scope and diversity within kabbalah, by restricting study to certain texts, notably Zohar and the teachings of [Isaac Luria](#) as passed down through [Hayyim ben Joseph Vital](#).^[13] However even this qualification does little to limit the scope of understanding and expression, as included in those works are commentaries on Abulafian writings, *Sefer Yetzirah*, Albotonian writings, and the *Berit Menuhah*,^[14] which is known to the kabbalistic elect and which, as described more recently by [Gershom Scholem](#), combined [ecstatic](#) with [theosophical mysticism](#). It is therefore important to bear in mind when discussing things such as the *sefirot* and their interactions that one is dealing with highly abstract concepts that at best can only be understood intuitively.^[15]

Difference between Jewish and non-Jewish Cabala^[edit]



 Latin translation of [Gikatilla's](#) *Shaarei Ora*

From the [Renaissance](#) onwards Jewish Kabbalah texts entered non-Jewish culture, where they were studied and translated by [Christian Hebraists](#) and [Hermetic](#) occultists.^[16] [Syncretic](#) traditions of [Christian Cabala](#) and [Hermetic Qabalah](#) developed independently of Jewish Kabbalah, reading the Jewish texts as universal ancient wisdom. Both adapted the Jewish concepts freely from their Judaic understanding, to merge with other theologies, religious

traditions and magical associations. With the decline of Christian Cabala in the [Age of Reason](#), Hermetic Qabalah continued as a central underground tradition in [Western esotericism](#). Through these non-Jewish associations with [magic](#), [alchemy](#) and [divination](#), Kabbalah acquired some popular [occult connotations](#) forbidden within Judaism, where Jewish theurgic [Practical Kabbalah](#) was a minor, permitted tradition restricted for a few elite. Today, many publications on Kabbalah belong to the non-Jewish [New Age](#) and occult traditions of Cabala, rather than giving an accurate picture of Judaic Kabbalah.^[17] Instead, academic and traditional publications now translate and study Judaic Kabbalah for wide readership.

History of Jewish mysticism[[edit](#)]

See also: [Jewish mysticism](#)

Forms of Jewish mysticism	
	
800–500 BCE	Prophetic Judaism Apocalyptic
300–100 BCE	Judaism Rabbinic mysticism
c. 0–130s CE	Merkabah-Hekhalot Proto-Kabbalah
100 BCE – 1000 CE	Chassidei Ashkenaz Medieval Kabbalah
200–600 CE	• Meditative-Prophetic
C. 1150–1250 CE	• Practical Kabbalah • Safed Kabbalah
c. 1175–1570 CE	Lurianic Kabbalah Sabbatean movements
1500s CE	Hasidic Judaism • Hasidic schools
1570 CE–today	Neo-Hasidism/Kabbalah
1665–c.	Mystical Zionism

1800 CE [Academic study](#)

1730s

CE–today

c. 1900s–

today

c. 1910s–

today

c. 1920s–

today

Origins of Judaic mysticism[\[edit\]](#)

According to the traditional understanding, Kabbalah dates from Eden.^[18] It came down from a remote past as a revelation to elect [Tzadikim](#) (righteous people), and, for the most part, was preserved only by a privileged few. Talmudic Judaism records its view of the proper protocol for teaching this wisdom, as well as many of its concepts, in the [Talmud](#), Tractate *Hagigah*, Ch.2.

Contemporary scholarship suggests that various schools of Jewish [esotericism](#) arose at different periods of Jewish history, each reflecting not only prior forms of [mysticism](#), but also the intellectual and cultural milieu of that historical period. Answers to questions of transmission, lineage, influence, and innovation vary greatly and cannot be easily summarised.

Origins of terms[\[edit\]](#)

Originally, Kabbalistic knowledge was believed to be an integral part of the [Oral Torah](#) (see also [Aggadah](#)), given by [God](#) to [Moses](#) on [Mount Sinai](#) around 13th century BCE, though there is a view that Kabbalah began with Adam.

When the Israelites arrived at their destination and settled in [Canaan](#), for a few centuries the esoteric knowledge was referred to by its aspect practice—meditation [Hitbonenut](#) ([Hebrew](#): ^[19]התבוננות), Rebbe [Nachman of Breslov](#)'s [Hitbodedut](#) ([Hebrew](#): התבודדות), translated as "being alone" or "isolating oneself", or by a different term describing the actual, desired goal of the practice—[prophecy](#) ("NeVu'a" [Hebrew](#): נבואה).

During the 5th century BCE, when the works of the [Tanakh](#) were edited and canonised and the secret knowledge encrypted within the various writings and scrolls ("Megilot"), the knowledge was referred to as [Ma'aseh Merkavah](#) ([Hebrew](#): מעשה מרכבה)^[20] and [Ma'aseh B'reshit](#) ([Hebrew](#): מעשה בראשית)^[21] respectively "the act of the Chariot" and "the act of Creation". Merkavah mysticism alluded to the encrypted knowledge within the book of the prophet [Ezekiel](#) describing his vision of the "Divine Chariot". B'reshit mysticism referred to the first chapter of [Genesis](#) ([Hebrew](#): בראשית) in the [Torah](#) that is believed to contain secrets of the creation of the universe and forces of nature. These terms are also mentioned in the second chapter of the Talmudic tractate *Haggigah*.

Mystic elements of the Torah^[edit]



[Ezekiel](#) and [Isaiah](#) had prophetic visions of the angelic [Chariot](#) and Divine [Throne](#).

According to adherents of Kabbalah, its origin begins with secrets that God revealed to Adam. When read by later generations of Kabbalists, the [Torah's](#) description of the creation in the [Book of Genesis](#) reveals mysteries about the godhead itself, the true nature of [Adam and Eve](#), the [Garden of Eden](#), the [Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil](#) and the [Tree of Life](#), as well as the interaction of these supernal entities with the [Serpent](#) which leads to disaster when they eat the [forbidden fruit](#), as recorded in Genesis 3.^[22]

The Bible provides ample additional material for mythic and mystical speculation. The prophet [Ezekiel's](#) visions in particular attracted much mystical speculation, as did Isaiah's Temple vision—*Isaiah*, Ch.6. [Jacob's](#) vision of the [ladder to heaven](#) provided another example of esoteric experience. [Moses'](#) encounters with the [Burning bush](#) and God on [Mount Sinai](#) are evidence of mystical events in the [Torah](#) that form the origin of Jewish mystical beliefs.

The [72 letter name of God](#) which is used in Jewish mysticism for meditation purposes is derived from the Hebrew verbal utterance Moses spoke in the presence of an angel, while the [Sea of Reeds](#) parted, allowing the Hebrews to escape their approaching attackers. The miracle of the Exodus, which led to Moses receiving the [Ten Commandments](#) and the Jewish Orthodox view of the acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai, preceded the creation of the first Jewish nation approximately three hundred years before [King Saul](#).

Mystical doctrines in the Talmudic era^[edit]



Grave of [Rabbi Akiva](#) in [Tiberias](#). He features in [Hekhalot](#) mystical literature, and as one of the four who entered the [Pardes](#)





The grave of [Shimon bar Yochai](#) in [Meron](#) before 1899. A Talmudic [Tanna](#), he is the mystical teacher in the central Kabbalistic work, the [Zohar](#)

In early [rabbinic Judaism](#) (the early centuries of the 1st millennium CE), the terms *Ma'aseh Bereshit* ("Works of Creation") and *Ma'aseh Merkabah* ("Works of the Divine Throne/Chariot") clearly indicate the [Midrashic](#) nature of these speculations; they are really based upon [Genesis](#) 1 and [Book of Ezekiel](#) 1:4–28, while the names *Sitrei Torah* (Hidden aspects of the Torah) (Talmud *Hag.* 13a) and *Razei Torah* (Torah secrets) (*Ab.* vi. 1) indicate their character as secret lore. An additional term also expanded Jewish esoteric knowledge, namely *Chochmah Nistara* (Hidden wisdom).

Talmudic doctrine forbade the public teaching of esoteric doctrines and warned of their dangers. In the [Mishnah](#) (Hagigah 2:1), [rabbi](#)s were warned to teach the mystical creation doctrines only to one student at a time.^[23] To highlight the danger, in one [Jewish aggadic](#) ("legendary") anecdote, four prominent rabbis of the [Mishnaic](#) period (1st century CE) are said to have visited the [Orchard](#) (that is, [Paradise](#), *pardes*, [Hebrew](#): פרדס lit., *orchard*):

"Four men entered *pardes*—[Ben Azzai](#), [Ben Zoma](#), *Acher* ([Elisha ben Abuyah](#)),^[24] and [Akiba](#). Ben Azzai looked and died; Ben Zoma looked and went mad; Acher destroyed the plants; Akiba entered in peace and departed in peace."^[25]

In notable readings of this legend, only Rabbi Akiba was fit to handle the study of mystical doctrines. The [Tosafot](#), medieval commentaries on the Talmud, say that the four sages "did not go up literally, but it appeared to them as if they went up".^[26] On the other hand, Rabbi [Louis Ginzberg](#), writes in the [Jewish Encyclopedia](#) (1901–1906) that the journey to paradise "is to be taken literally and not allegorically".^[27] For further analysis, see [The Four Who Entered Paradise](#).

Maimonides interprets *pardes* as physics and not mysticism.^[28]^{[[need quotation to verify](#)]}

Pre-Kabbalistic schools^{[[edit](#)]}

Main articles: [Hekhalot literature](#), [Merkabah mysticism](#), and [Chassidei Ashkenaz](#)

The mystical methods and doctrines of [Hekhalot](#) (Heavenly "Chambers") and [Merkabah](#) (Divine "Chariot") texts, named by modern scholars from these repeated motifs, lasted from the 1st century BCE through to the 10th century, before giving way to the documented manuscript emergence of Kabbalah. Initiates were said to "descend the chariot", possibly a reference to internal introspection on the Heavenly journey through the spiritual realms. The ultimate aim was to arrive before the [transcendent](#) awe, rather than nearness, of the Divine. From the 8th to 11th centuries, the Hekhalot texts, and the proto-Kabbalistic early [Sefer Yetzirah](#) ("Book of Creation") made their way into European Jewish circles.

Another, separate influential mystical movement, shortly before the arrival there of Kabbalistic theory, was the "[Chassidei Ashkenaz](#)" (זנכשא ידיסא) or Medieval German Pietists from 1150-

1250. This ethical-ascetic movement arose mostly among a single scholarly family, the [Kalonymus family](#) of the French and German Rhineland.

Medieval emergence of the Kabbalah^[edit]



The 13th-century eminence of [Nachmanides](#), a classic Rabbinic figure, gave Kabbalah mainstream acceptance through his [Torah commentary](#)

Modern scholars have identified several mystical brotherhoods that functioned in Europe starting in the 12th century. Some, such as the "Iyyun Circle" and the "Unique Cherub Circle", were truly esoteric, remaining largely anonymous.

There were certain [Rishonim](#) ("Elder Sages") of exoteric Judaism who are known to have been experts in Kabbalah. One of the best known is [Nahmanides](#) (the *Ramban*) (1194–1270) whose commentary on the [Torah](#) is considered to be based on Kabbalistic knowledge. [Bahya ben Asher](#) (the *Rabbeinu Behaye*) (d. 1340) also combined Torah commentary and Kabbalah. Another was [Isaac the Blind](#) (1160–1235), the teacher of Nahmanides, who is widely argued to have written the first work of classic Kabbalah, the [Bahir](#) (Book of "Brightness").

Sefer Bahir and another work, the "[Treatise on the Left Emanation](#)", probably composed in Spain by [Isaac ben Isaac ha-Kohen](#), laid the groundwork for the composition of [Sefer Zohar](#) ("Book of Splendor/Radiance"), written by [Moses de Leon](#) and his mystical circle at the end of the 13th century but credited to the Talmudic sage [Shimon bar Yochai](#) (cf. [Zohar](#)). The Zohar proved to be the first truly "popular" work of Kabbalah, and the most influential. From the 13th century onward, Kabbalah began to be widely disseminated, and it branched out into an extensive literature. Historians in the 19th century, for example, [Heinrich Graetz](#), argued that the emergence into public view of Jewish esotericism at this time coincides with, and represents a response to, the rising influence of the rationalist philosophy of [Maimonides](#) and his followers.^{[[citation needed](#)]} [Gershom Scholem](#) sought to undermine this view as part of his resistance to seeing Kabbalah as merely a response to medieval Jewish rationalism.^{[[citation needed](#)]} Arguing for a [gnostic](#) influence has to be seen as part of this strategy.^{[[citation needed](#)]} More recently, [Moshe Idel](#) and [Elliot Wolfson](#) have independently argued that the impact of Maimonides can be seen in the change from orality to writing in the 13th century.^{[[citation needed](#)]} That is, Kabbalists committed to writing many of their oral traditions in part as a response to the attempt of Maimonides to explain the older esoteric subjects philosophically.

Many [Orthodox Jews](#) reject the idea that Kabbalah underwent significant historical development or change such as has been proposed above. After the composition known as the Zohar was presented to the public in the 13th century, the term "Kabbalah" began to refer more specifically to teachings derived from, or related to, the *Zohar*. At an even later time, the term began to generally be applied to Zoharic teachings as elaborated upon by [Isaac Luria Arizal](#). Historians generally date the start of Kabbalah as a major influence in Jewish thought and practice with the publication of the Zohar and climaxing with the spread of the [Arizal](#)'s teachings. The majority of [Haredi](#) Jews accept the Zohar as the representative of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and *Ma'aseh B'reshit* that are referred to in Talmudic texts.^[29]

Early modern era: Lurianic Kabbalah[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Lurianic Kabbalah](#)



The leading scholars in 16th-century [Safed](#) invigorated mainstream Judaism through new legal, liturgical, exegetical and Lurianic-mythological developments

Following the upheavals and dislocations in the Jewish world as a result of [anti-Judaism](#) during the [Middle Ages](#), the [Spanish Inquisition](#), and the national trauma of the [expulsion from Spain](#) in 1492, closing the Spanish Jewish flowering, Jews began to search for signs of when the long-awaited [Jewish Messiah](#) would come to comfort them in their painful exiles. In the 1500s the community of [Safed](#) in the Galilee became the centre of Jewish mystical, exegetical, legal and liturgical developments. The Safed mystics responded to the Spanish expulsion by turning Kabbalistic doctrine and practice towards a messianic focus. [Moses Cordovero](#) and his school popularised the teachings of the Zohar which had until then been only a restricted work. Cordovero's comprehensive works achieved the systemisation of preceding Kabbalah. The author of the [Shulkhan Arukh](#) (the normative Jewish "Code of Law"), Rabbi [Yosef Karo](#) (1488–1575), was also a scholar of Kabbalah who kept a personal mystical diary. [Moshe Alshich](#) wrote a mystical commentary on the Torah, and [Shlomo Alkabetz](#) wrote Kabbalistic commentaries and poems.

The messianism of the Safed mystics culminated in Kabbalah receiving its biggest transformation in the Jewish world with the explication of its new interpretation from Rabbi [Isaac Luria](#) (1534–1572), by his disciples [Hayim Vital](#) and [Israel Sarug](#). Both transcribed Luria's teachings (in variant forms) gaining them widespread popularity, Sarug taking [Lurianic Kabbalah](#) to Europe, Vital authoring the latterly canonical version. Luria's teachings came to

rival the influence of the Zohar and Luria stands, alongside [Moses de Leon](#), as the most influential mystic in Jewish history.

Ban on studying Kabbalah[\[edit\]](#)

"I have seen it written that the prohibition from Above to refrain from open study in the wisdom of truth was only for a limited period, until the end of 1490, but from then on the prohibition has been lifted and permission was granted to study the Zohar. Since 1540 it has been a great Mitzva (commandment) for the masses to study in public, old and young... and that is because the Messiah will come because of that and not because of any other reason. Therefore, we must not be negligent."

Rabbi Abraham Ben Mordechai Azulai, Introduction to the book, Ohr HaChama [Light of the Sun] ^[30]

The ban on studying Kabbalah was lifted by the efforts of the 16th-century kabbalist Rabbi [Avraham Azulai](#) (1570–1643).

"I have found it written that all that has been decreed Above forbidding open involvement in the Wisdom of Truth [Kabbalah] was [only meant for] the limited time period until the year 5,250 (1490 C.E.). From then on after is called the "Last Generation", and what was forbidden is [now] allowed. And permission is granted to occupy ourselves in the [study of] Zohar. And from the year 5,300 (1540 C.E.) it is most desirable that the masses both those great and small [in Torah], should occupy themselves [in the study of Kabbalah], as it says in the Raya M'hemna [a section of the Zohar]. And because in this merit King Mashiach will come in the future—and not in any other merit—it is not proper to be discouraged [from the study of Kabbalah]." ^[31]

The question, however, is whether the ban ever existed in the first place. Concerning the above quote by Avraham Azulai, it has found many versions in English, another is this

"From the year 1540 and onward, the basic levels of Kabbalah must be taught publicly to everyone, young and old. Only through Kabbalah will we forever eliminate war, destruction, and man's inhumanity to his fellow man." ^[32]

The lines concerning the year 1490 are also missing from the Hebrew edition of *Hesed L'Avraham*, the source work that both of these quote from. Furthermore, by Azulai's view the ban was lifted thirty years before his birth, a time that would have corresponded with Haim Vital's publication of the teaching of Isaac Luria. Moshe Isserles understood there to be only a minor restriction, in his words, "One's belly must be full of meat and wine, discerning between the prohibited and the permitted." ^[33] He is supported by the Bier Hetiv, the Pithei Teshuva as well as the [Vilna Gaon](#). The Vilna Gaon says, "There was never any ban or enactment restricting the study of the wisdom of Kabbalah. Any who says there is has never studied Kabbalah, has never seen PaRDeS, and speaks as an ignoramus." ^[34]

Sefardi and Mizrahi[\[edit\]](#)



[Synagogue Beit El](#) Jerusalem. Oriental Judaism has its own chain of Kabbalah

The Kabbalah of the [Sefardi](#) (Portuguese or Spanish) and [Mizrahi](#) (Middle East, North Africa, and the Caucasus) Torah scholars has a long history. Kabbalah in various forms was widely studied, commented upon, and expanded by North African, Turkish, Yemenite, and Asian scholars from the 16th century onward. It flourished among Sefardic Jews in Tzfat ([Safed](#)), Israel even before the arrival of Isaac Luria. [Yosef Karo](#), author of the *Shulchan Arukh* was part of the Tzfat school of Kabbalah. [Shlomo Alkabetz](#), author of the hymn *Lekhah Dodi*, taught there.

His disciple [Moses ben Jacob Cordovero](#) authored *Pardes Rimonim*, an organised, exhaustive compilation of kabbalistic teachings on a variety of subjects up to that point. Cordovero headed the academy of Tzfat until his death, when [Isaac Luria](#) rose to prominence. Rabbi Moshe's disciple [Eliyahu De Vidas](#) authored the classic work, *Reishit Chochma*, combining kabbalistic and *mussar* (moral) teachings. [Chaim Vital](#) also studied under Cordovero, but with the arrival of Luria became his main disciple. Vital claimed to be the only one authorised to transmit the Ari's teachings, though other disciples also published books presenting Luria's teachings.

The Oriental Kabbalist tradition continues until today among Sephardi and Mizrahi [Hakham](#) sages and study circles. Among leading figures were the Yemenite [Shalom Sharabi](#) (1720–1777) of the [Beit El Synagogue](#), the Jerusalemite [Hida](#) (1724–1806), the Baghdad leader [Ben Ish Chai](#) (1832–1909), and the [Abuhatzzeira](#) dynasty.

Maharal[\[edit\]](#)



The 16th-century [Maharal](#) of Prague articulated a mystical exegesis in philosophical language

One of the most innovative theologians in early-modern Judaism was [Judah Loew ben Bezalel](#) (1525–1609) known as the "Maharal of Prague". Many of his written works survive and are studied for their unusual combination of the [mystical](#) and [philosophical](#) approaches in Judaism. While conversant in Kabbalistic learning, he expresses Jewish mystical thought in his own individual approach without reference to Kabbalistic terms.^[35] The Maharal is most well known in popular culture for the legend of the [golem](#) of Prague, associated with him in folklore. However, his thought influenced [Hasidism](#), for example being studied in the introspective [Przysucha](#) school. During the 20th century, [Isaac Hutner](#) (1906–1980) continued to spread the Maharal's works indirectly through his own teachings and publications within the [non-Hasidic yeshiva](#) world.

Sabbatian mysticism[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Sabbateans](#)

The spiritual and mystical yearnings of many Jews remained frustrated after the death of Isaac Luria and his disciples and colleagues. No hope was in sight for many following the devastation and mass killings of the [pogroms](#) that followed in the wake the [Chmielnicki Uprising](#) (1648–1654), the largest single massacre of Jews until the Holocaust, and it was at this time that a controversial scholar by the name of [Sabbatai Zevi](#) (1626–1676) captured the hearts and minds of the Jewish masses of that time with the promise of a newly minted messianic [Millennialism](#) in the form of his own personage.

His charisma, mystical teachings that included repeated pronunciations of the holy [Tetragrammaton](#) in public, tied to an unstable personality, and with the help of his greatest enthusiast, [Nathan of Gaza](#), convinced the Jewish masses that the [Jewish Messiah](#) had finally come. It seemed that the esoteric teachings of Kabbalah had found their "champion" and had triumphed, but this era of Jewish history unravelled when Zevi became an [apostate](#) to Judaism by converting to [Islam](#) after he was arrested by the [Ottoman Sultan](#) and threatened with execution for attempting a plan to conquer the world and rebuild the [Temple in Jerusalem](#). Unwilling to give up their messianic expectations, a minority of Zvi's Jewish followers converted to Islam along with him.

Many of his followers, known as [Sabbatians](#), continued to worship him in secret, explaining his conversion not as an effort to save his life but to recover the sparks of the holy in each religion, and most leading rabbis were always on guard to root them out. The [Donmeh](#) movement in modern Turkey is a surviving remnant of the Sabbatian schism.

Due to the chaos caused in the Jewish world, the Rabbinic prohibition against studying Kabbalah established itself firmly within the Jewish religion. One of the conditions allowing a man to study and engage himself in the Kabbalah was to be of age forty. This age requirement came about during this period and is not [Talmudic](#) in origin but Rabbinic. Many Jews are familiar with this ruling, but are not aware of its origins.^{[\[citation needed\]](#)} Moreover, the prohibition is not halakhic in nature. According to Moses Cordovero, halakhically, one must be of age twenty to engage in the Kabbalah. Many famous kabbalists, including the [ARI](#), [Rabbi Nachman of Breslov](#), [Yehuda Ashlag](#), were younger than twenty when they began.

Frankism^[edit]

The Sabbatian movement was followed by that of the [Frankists](#) who were disciples of [Jacob Frank](#) (1726–1791) who eventually became an apostate to Judaism by apparently converting to [Catholicism](#). This era of disappointment did not stem the Jewish masses' yearnings for "mystical" leadership.

Modern era traditional Kabbalah^[edit]



Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, leading Italian kabbalist, also wrote secular works, seen by the [Haskalah](#) as the start of modern [Hebrew literature](#)



The [Vilna Gaon](#), 18th century leader of Rabbinic [opposition](#) to Hasidism, was a Kabbalist who opposed Hasidic doctrinal and practical innovations

Rabbi [Moshe Chaim Luzzatto](#) (1707–1746), based in Italy, was a precocious Talmudic scholar who arrived at the conclusion that there was a need for the public teaching and study of Kabbalah. He established a [yeshiva](#) for Kabbalah study and actively recruited students and, in addition, wrote copious manuscripts in an appealing clear [Hebrew](#) style, all of which gained the attention of both admirers and rabbinical critics who feared another "Shabbetai Zevi (false messiah) in the making". He was forced to close his school by his rabbinical opponents, hand over and destroy many of his most precious unpublished kabbalistic writings, and go into exile in the Netherlands. He eventually moved to the [Land of Israel](#). Some of his most important works, such as [Derekh Hashem](#), survive and are used as a gateway to the world of Jewish mysticism.

Rabbi [Elijah of Vilna](#) ([Vilna Gaon](#)) (1720–1797), based in [Lithuania](#), had his teachings encoded and publicised by his disciples such as by Rabbi [Chaim Volozhin](#) who published the mystical-ethical work [Nefesh HaChaim](#)^[4]. However, he was staunchly opposed to the new Hasidic movement and warned against their public displays of religious fervour inspired by the mystical teachings of their rabbis. Although the Vilna Gaon was not in favor of the Hasidic movement, he did not prohibit the study and engagement in the Kabbalah. This is evident from his writings in

the *Even Shlema*. "He that is able to understand secrets of the Torah and does not try to understand them will be judged harshly, may God have mercy". (The Vilna Gaon, *Even Shlema*, 8:24). "The Redemption will only come about through learning Torah, and the essence of the Redemption depends upon learning Kabbalah" (The Vilna Gaon, *Even Shlema*, 11:3).

Among the [Oriental](#) tradition of Kabbalah, [Shalom Sharabi](#) (1720–1777) from Yemen was a major esoteric clarifier of the works of the Ari. The [Beit El Synagogue](#), "yeshivah of the kabbalists", which he came to head, was one of the few communities to bring Lurianic [meditation](#) into communal prayer.

In the 20th century, [Yehuda Ashlag](#) (1885—1954) in Mandate Palestine, was a leading esoteric kabbalist in the traditional mode, who translated the Zohar into Hebrew with a new approach in Lurianic Kabbalah.

Hasidic Judaism^[edit]

Main articles: [Hasidic Judaism](#) and [Hasidic thought](#)



Synagogue of the [Baal Shem Tov](#), founder of [Hasidism](#), in [Medzhybizh](#) Ukraine. It gave a new phase to Jewish mysticism, seeking its popularisation through [internal correspondence](#)

Rabbi [Israel ben Eliezer Baal Shem Tov](#) (1698–1760), founder of Hasidism in the area of the [Ukraine](#), spread teachings based on Lurianic Kabbalah, but adapted to a different aim of immediate psychological perception of [Divine Omnipresence](#) amidst the mundane. The emotional, ecstatic fervour of early Hasidism developed from previous [Nistarim](#) circles of mystical activity, but instead sought communal revival of the common folk by reframing Judaism around the central principle of [devekut](#) (mystical cleaving to God) for all. This new approach turned formerly esoteric elite kabbalistic theory into a popular social mysticism movement for the first time, with its own doctrines, classic texts, teachings and customs. From the Baal Shem Tov sprang the wide ongoing [schools](#) of Hasidic Judaism, each with different approaches and thought. Hasidism instituted a new concept of [Tzadik](#) leadership in Jewish mysticism, where the elite scholars of mystical texts now took on a social role as embodiments and intercessors of Divinity for the masses. With the 19th century consolidation of the movement, [leadership](#) became dynastic. Among later Hasidic schools:

Rebbe [Nachman of Breslov](#) (1772–1810), the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, revitalised and further expanded the latter's teachings, amassing a following of thousands in [Ukraine](#), [Belarus](#), [Lithuania](#) and Poland. In a unique amalgam of Hasidic and [Mitnagid](#) approaches, Rebbe Nachman emphasised study of both Kabbalah and serious Torah scholarship to his disciples. His teachings also differed from the way other Hasidic groups were developing, as he rejected the

idea of hereditary [Hasidic dynasties](#) and taught that each Hasid must "search for the [tzaddik](#) ('saintly/righteous person') for himself and within himself.

The [Habad-Lubavitch](#) intellectual school of Hasidism broke away from General-Hasidism's emotional faith orientation, by making the mind central as the route to the internal heart. Its texts combine Jewish [rational](#) investigation with explanation of Kabbalah through articulating unity in a common Divine essence. In recent times, the messianic element latent in Hasidism has come to the fore in Habad.

20th century influence[\[edit\]](#)

Jewish mysticism has influenced the thought of some major Jewish theologians in the 20th century, outside of Kabbalistic or Hasidic traditions. The first Chief Rabbi of Mandate Palestine, [Abraham Isaac Kook](#) was a mystical thinker who drew heavily on Kabbalistic notions through his own poetic terminology. His writings are concerned with fusing the false divisions between sacred and secular, rational and mystical, legal and imaginative. Students of [Joseph B. Soloveitchik](#), figurehead of American [Modern Orthodox Judaism](#) have read the influence of Kabbalistic symbols in his [philosophical](#) works.^[36] [Neo-Hasidism](#), rather than Kabbalah, shaped [Martin Buber](#)'s philosophy of dialogue and [Abraham Joshua Heschel](#)'s [Conservative Judaism](#). [Lurianic](#) symbols of Tzimtzum and Shevirah have informed [Holocaust theologians](#).^[37]

Concepts[\[edit\]](#)

Concealed and Revealed God[\[edit\]](#)



Metaphorical scheme of emanated [spiritual worlds](#) within the [Ein Sof](#)

The nature of the [Divine](#) prompted kabbalists to envision two aspects to God: (a) God in [essence](#), absolutely [transcendent](#), unknowable, limitless [Divine simplicity](#), and (b) God in manifestation, the revealed persona of God through which He creates and sustains and relates to mankind. Kabbalists speak of the first as [Ein/Ayn Sof](#) (אין סוף "the infinite/endless", literally "that which has no limits"). Of the impersonal Ein Sof nothing can be grasped. The second aspect of Divine [emanations](#), however, are accessible to human perception, dynamically interacting throughout spiritual and physical existence, reveal the Divine [immanently](#), and are bound up in the life of man. Kabbalists believe that these two aspects are not contradictory but complement one another, emanations revealing the concealed mystery from within the Godhead.

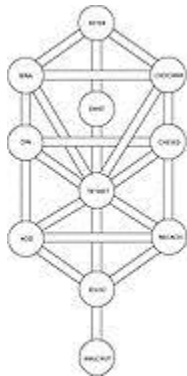
The [Zohar](#) reads the first words of [Genesis](#) *BeReishit Bara Elohim* – *In the beginning God created* as "With the level of "Reishit-Beginning" the Ein Sof created [Elohim](#)-God's [manifestation](#) in Creation:

"At the very beginning the King made engravings in the supernal purity. A spark of blackness emerged in the sealed within the sealed, from the mystery of the Ayn Sof, a mist within matter, implanted in a ring, no white, no black, no red, no yellow, no colour at all. When He measured with the standard of measure, He made colours to provide light. Within the spark, in the innermost part, emerged a source, from which the colours are painted below; it is sealed among the sealed things of the mystery of Ayn Sof. It penetrated, yet did not penetrate its air. It was not known at all until, from the pressure of its penetration, a single point shone, sealed, supernal. Beyond this point nothing is known, so it is called *reishit* (beginning): the first word of all..."^[38]

The structure of emanations has been characterised in various ways: [Sefirot](#) (Divine attributes) and [Partzufim](#) (Divine "faces"), [Ohr](#) (spiritual light and flow), [Names of God](#) and the supernal Torah, [Olamot](#) (Spiritual Worlds), a Divine Tree and [Archetypal Man](#), Angelic [Chariot](#) and [Palaces](#), male and female, en clothed layers of reality, inwardly holy vitality and external [Kelipot](#) shells, [613 channels](#) ("limbs" of the King) and the Divine souls in man. Kabbalists see all aspects as unified through their absolute dependence on their source in the Ein Sof.

Sefirot and the Divine Feminine^[edit]

Main articles: [Sephiraot](#) and [Shekhinah](#)



Scheme of descending [Sefirot](#) in 3 columns, as a tree with roots above and branches below

The [Sephiraot](#) (also spelled "sephiroth") (singular *sefirah*) are the ten emanations and attributes of [God](#) with which he continually sustains the universe in existence. The [Zohar](#) and other formative texts elaborate on their emergence from concealment and potential in the infinite [unity](#) of the [Ein Sof](#). [Cordovero](#) systemises them as one [light](#) poured into ten created [vessels](#). Comparison of his counting with [Luria's](#), describes dual rational and unconscious aspects of Kabbalah. Two metaphors are used to describe the *sephirot*, their [theocentric](#) manifestation as the Trees of [Life](#) and [Knowledge](#), and their [anthropocentric](#) correspondence in man, exemplified as [Adam Kadmon](#). This dual-directional perspective embodies the cyclical, inclusive nature of the divine flow, where alternative divine and human perspectives have validity. The central metaphor of man allows human understanding of the sephirot, as they correspond to the psychological

faculties of the soul, and incorporate masculine and feminine aspects after Genesis 1:27 ("God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them"). Corresponding to the last *sefirah* in Creation is the [indwelling shekhinah](#) (Feminine Divine Presence). Downward flow of divine [Light](#) in Creation forms the supernal [Four Worlds](#); [Atziluth](#), [Beri'ah](#), [Yetzirah](#) and [Assiah](#) manifesting the dominance of successive sephirot towards action in this world. The acts of man unite or divide the Heavenly masculine and feminine aspects of the sephirot, their [anthropomorphic](#) harmony completing Creation. As the spiritual foundation of Creation, the sephirot correspond to the [names of God in Judaism](#) and the particular nature of any entity.

Ten Sefirot as process of Creation [\[edit\]](#)

See also: [Ayin and Yesh](#)

According to Lurianic cosmology, the *sefirot* correspond to various levels of creation (ten *sefirot* in each of the [Four Worlds](#), and four worlds within each of the larger four worlds, each containing ten *sefirot*, which themselves contain ten *sefirot*, to an infinite number of possibilities),^[39] and are emanated from the Creator for the purpose of creating the universe. The *sefirot* are considered revelations of the Creator's will (*ratzon*),^[40] and they should not be understood as ten different "gods" but as ten different ways the one God reveals his will through the Emanations. It is not God who changes but the ability to perceive God that changes.

Altogether, eleven *sefirot* are named. However *Keter* and *Daat* are unconscious and conscious dimensions of one principle, conserving 10 forces. The names of the *sefirot* in descending order are:

- [Keter](#) (supernal crown, representing above-conscious will)
- [Chochmah](#) (the highest potential of thought)
- [Binah](#) (the understanding of the potential)
- [Daat](#) (intellect of knowledge)
- [Chesed](#) (sometimes referred to as *Gedolah*-greatness) (loving-kindness)
- [Gevurah](#) (sometimes referred to as *Din*-justice or *Pachad*-fear) (severity/strength)
- [Rachamim also known as Tiphereth](#) (mercy)
- [Netzach](#) (victory/eternity)
- [Hod](#) (glory/splendour)
- [Yesod](#) (foundation)
- [Malkuth](#) (kingdom)

Ten Sefirot as process of ethics [\[edit\]](#)

See also: [Mussar literature](#)



In the 16-17th centuries Kabbalah was popularised through a new genre of [ethical literature](#), related to [Kabbalistic meditation](#)

Divine creation by means of the Ten Sefirot is an ethical process. They represent the different aspects of Morality. Loving-Kindness is a possible moral justification found in Chessed, and Gevurah is the Moral Justification of Justice and both are mediated by Mercy which is Rachamim. However, these pillars of morality become immoral once they become extremes. When Loving-Kindness become extreme it can lead to sexual depravity and lack of Justice to the wicked. When Justice becomes extreme, it can lead to torture and the Murder of innocents and unfair punishment.

"Righteous" humans ([tzadikim](#)) ascend these ethical qualities of the ten *sefirot* by doing righteous actions. If there were no righteous humans, the blessings of God would become completely hidden, and creation would cease to exist. While real human actions are the "Foundation" ([Yesod](#)) of this universe ([Malchut](#)), these actions must accompany the conscious intention of compassion. Compassionate actions are often impossible without faith (*Emunah*), meaning to trust that God always supports compassionate actions even when God seems hidden. Ultimately, it is necessary to show compassion toward oneself too in order to share compassion toward others. This "selfish" enjoyment of God's blessings but only in order to empower oneself to assist others is an important aspect of "Restriction", and is considered a kind of [golden mean](#) in kabbalah, corresponding to the *sefirah* of Adornment ([Tiferet](#)) being part of the "Middle Column".

[Moses ben Jacob Cordovero](#), wrote [Tomer Devorah](#) (*Palm Tree of Deborah*), he presents an ethical teaching of Judaism in the kabbalistic context of the ten *sefirot*. *Tomer Devorah* has become also a foundational [Musal text](#).^[41]

Descending spiritual Worlds[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Four Worlds](#)

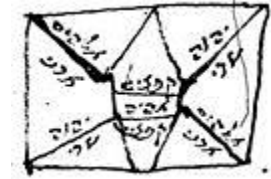
Medieval Kabbalists believed that all things are linked to God through these emanations, making all levels in creation part of one great, gradually descending [chain of being](#). Through this any lower creation reflects its particular characteristics in Supernal Divinity.

[Hasidic thought](#) extends the [Divine immanence](#) of Kabbalah by holding that God is all that really exists, all else being completely undifferentiated from God's perspective. This view can be defined as [monistic panentheism](#). According to this philosophy, God's existence is higher than anything that this world can express, yet he includes all things of this world within his Divine

reality in perfect unity, so that the Creation effected no change in him at all. This paradox is dealt with at length in [Chabad](#) texts.^[42]

Origin of evil^[edit]

Main article: [Kelipot](#)



Amulet from the 1400s. Theosophical kabbalists, especially Luria, censored contemporary [Practical Kabbalah](#), but allowed amulets by Sages^[43]

Among problems considered in the Hebrew Kabbalah is the theological issue of the nature and origin of evil. In the views of some Kabbalists this conceives 'evil' as a 'quality of God', asserting that negativity enters into the essence of the Absolute. In this view it is conceived that the Absolute needs evil to 'be what it is', i.e., to exist.^[44] Foundational texts of Medieval Kabbalism conceived evil as a demonic parallel to the holy, called the *Sitra Achra* (the "Other Side"), and the [Kelipot](#)/*Qliphoth* (the "Shells/Husks") that cover and conceal the holy, are nurtured from it, and yet also protect it by limiting its revelation. [Scholem](#) termed this element of the Spanish Kabbalah a "Jewish [gnostic](#)" motif, in the sense of dual powers in the divine realm of manifestation. In a radical notion, the root of evil is found within the 10 holy Sephirot, through an imbalance of [Gevurah](#), the power of "Strength/Judgement/Severity".

Gevurah is necessary for Creation to exist as it counterposes [Chesed](#) ("loving-kindness"), restricting the unlimited divine bounty within suitable vessels, so forming the Worlds. However, if man sins (actualising impure judgement within his soul), the supernal Judgement is reciprocally empowered over the Kindness, introducing disharmony among the Sephirot in the divine realm and exile from God throughout Creation. The demonic realm, though illusory in its holy origin, becomes the real apparent realm of impurity in lower Creation.

Role of Man^[edit]



[Joseph Karo](#)'s role as both legalist and mystic underscores Kabbalah's spiritualisation of normative Jewish observance

Kabbalistic doctrine gives man the central role in Creation, as his soul and body correspond to the supernal divine manifestations. In the [Christian Kabbalah](#) this scheme was [universalised](#) to describe *harmino mundi*, the harmony of Creation within man.^[45] In [Judaism](#), it gave a profound spiritualisation of [Jewish practice](#). While the kabbalistic scheme gave a radically innovative, though conceptually continuous, development of mainstream [Midrashic](#) and [Talmudic Rabbinic](#) notions, kabbalistic thought underscored and invigorated conservative Jewish observance. The esoteric teachings of kabbalah gave the traditional [mitzvot](#) observances the central role in

spiritual creation, whether the practitioner was learned in this knowledge or not. Accompanying normative Jewish observance and worship with elite mystical [kavanot](#) intentions gave them [theurgic](#) power, but sincere observance by common folk, especially in the [Hasidic](#) popularisation of kabbalah, could replace esoteric abilities. Many kabbalists were also leading legal figures in Judaism, such as [Nachmanides](#) and [Joseph Karo](#).

Medieval kabbalah elaborates particular reasons for each Biblical [mitzvah](#), and their role in harmonising the supernal divine flow, [uniting](#) masculine and feminine forces on High. With this, the feminine [Divine presence](#) in this world is drawn from exile to the [Holy One](#) Above. The [613 mitzvot](#) are embodied in the organs and soul of man. [Lurianic kabbalah](#) incorporates this in the more inclusive scheme of [Jewish messianic rectification](#) of exiled divinity. Jewish mysticism, in contrast to [Divine-transcendent rationalist](#) human-centred reasons for Jewish observance, gave [Divine-immanent providential](#) cosmic significance to the daily events in the worldly life of man in general, and the spiritual role of Jewish observance in particular.

Levels of the soul^{[[edit](#)]}



Building on Kabbalah's conception of the soul, [Abraham Abulafia](#)'s meditations included the "inner illumination of" the human form^{[[46](#)]}

The Kabbalah posits that the human soul has three elements, the *nefesh*, *ru'ach*, and *neshamah*. The *nefesh* is found in all humans, and enters the physical body at birth. It is the source of one's physical and psychological nature. The next two parts of the soul are not implanted at birth, but can be developed over time; their development depends on the actions and beliefs of the individual. They are said to only fully exist in people awakened spiritually. A common way of explaining the three parts of the soul is as follows:

- *Nefesh* (נפש): the lower part, or "animal part", of the soul. It is linked to [instincts](#) and bodily [cravings](#). This part of the soul is provided at birth.
- *Ruach* (רוח): the middle soul, the "spirit". It contains the [moral virtues](#) and the ability to distinguish between [good](#) and [evil](#).
- *Neshamah* (נשמה): the higher soul, or "super-soul". This separates man from all other life-forms. It is related to the [intellect](#) and allows man to enjoy and benefit from [the afterlife](#). It allows one to have some awareness of the existence and presence of God.

The [Raaya Meheimna](#), a section of related teachings spread throughout the [Zohar](#), discusses fourth and fifth parts of the human soul, the *chayyah* and *yehidah* (first mentioned in the Midrash Rabbah). [Gershom Scholem](#) writes that these "were considered to represent the sublimest levels of intuitive cognition, and to be within the grasp of only a few chosen individuals". The Chayyah and the Yehidah do not enter into the body like the other three—thus they received less attention in other sections of the *Zohar*.

- *Chayyah* (חַיָּה): The part of the soul that allows one to have an awareness of the divine life force itself.
- *Yehidah* (יְהִידָה): The highest plane of the soul, in which one can achieve as full a union with God as is possible.

Both rabbinic and kabbalistic works posit that there are a few additional, non-permanent states of the soul that people can develop on certain occasions. These extra souls, or extra states of the soul, play no part in any afterlife scheme, but are mentioned for completeness:

- *Ruach HaKodesh* (רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ) ("spirit of holiness"): a state of the soul that makes prophecy possible. Since the age of classical prophecy passed, no one (outside of Israel) receives the soul of prophecy any longer. See the teachings of [Abraham Abulafia](#) for differing views of this matter.
- *Neshamah Yeseira*: The "supplemental soul" that a Jew can experience on [Shabbat](#). It makes possible an enhanced spiritual enjoyment of the day. This exists only when one is observing Shabbat; it can be lost and gained depending on one's observance.
- *Neshamah Kedosha*: Provided to Jews at the age of maturity (13 for boys, 12 for girls) and is related to the study and fulfillment of the [Torah](#) commandments. It exists only when one studies and follows the [Torah](#); it can be lost and gained depending on one's study and observance.

Reincarnation[[edit](#)]

Main article: [Gilgul](#)

[Reincarnation](#), the transmigration of the soul after death, was introduced into Judaism as a central esoteric tenet of Kabbalah from the Medieval period onwards, called [Gilgul neshamot](#) ("Cycles of the soul"). The concept does not appear overtly in the [Hebrew Bible](#) or classic [Rabbinic literature](#), and was rejected by various Medieval [Jewish philosophers](#). However, the Kabbalists explained a number of scriptural passages in reference to Gilgulim. The concept became central to the later Kabbalah of [Isaac Luria](#), who systemised it as the personal parallel to the cosmic process of [rectification](#). Through Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidic Judaism, reincarnation entered popular [Jewish culture](#) as a literary motif.

Tzimtzum, Shevirah and Tikun[[edit](#)]

Main article: [Lurianic Kabbalah](#)



16th century graves of [Safed](#), Galilee. The messianic focus of its mystical renaissance culminated in [Lurianic](#) thought

After publication of the [Zohar](#) in the late 13th century, attempts were made to interpret and systemise the doctrines within its imagery. This culminated in the successive, comprehensive expositions of [Cordovero](#) and [Luria](#) in 16th century [Safed](#). While Cordovero systemised Medieval kabbalah in a [rationally](#) influenced linear scheme, this was subsequently superseded by the mythological, dynamic scheme of Isaac Luria, recorded by [Chaim Vital](#) and his other disciples. Lurianic theosophy became the foundation of modern kabbalah, incorporating Medieval theosophy within its wider explanation. The supra-rational [Lurianic doctrines](#) of [Tzimtzum](#), [Shevirah](#) and [Tikun](#) reorganised Kabbalistic doctrine around crisis-catharsis Divine exile and redemption, explaining [Jewish messianism](#) in Kabbalah.

[Tzimtzum](#) (Constriction/Concentration) is the primordial cosmic act whereby God "contracted" His infinite light, leaving a "void" into which the light of existence was poured. This allowed the emergence of independent existence that would not become nullified by the pristine [Infinite Light](#), reconciling the unity of the [Ein Sof](#) with the plurality of creation. This changed the first creative act into one of withdrawal/exile, the antithesis of the ultimate Divine Will. In contrast, a new emanation after the Tzimtzum shone into the vacuum to begin creation, but led to an initial instability called [Tohu](#) (Chaos), leading to a new crisis of [Shevirah](#) (Shattering) of the sephirot vessels. The shards of the broken vessels fell down into the lower realms, animated by remnants of their divine light, causing primordial exile within the Divine Persona before the creation of man. Exile and enclothement of higher divinity within lower realms throughout existence requires man to complete the [Tikkun olam](#) (Rectification) process. Rectification Above corresponds to the reorganization of the independent sefirot into relating [Partzufim](#) (Divine Personas), previously referred to obliquely in the Zohar. From the catastrophe stems the possibility of self-aware Creation, and also the [Kelipot](#) (Impure Shells) of previous Medieval kabbalah. The metaphorical [anthropomorphism](#) of the partzufim accenuates the sexual unifications of the redemption process, while [Gilgul](#) reincarnation emerges from the scheme. Uniquely, Lurianism gave formerly private mysticism the urgency of Messianic social involvement.

According to interpretations of Luria, the catastrophe stemmed from the "unwillingness" of the residue imprint after the Tzimtzum to relate to the new vitality that began creation. The process was arranged to shed and harmonise the Divine Infinity with the latent potential of evil.^[47] The creation of [Adam](#) would have redeemed existence, but his sin caused new shevirah of Divine vitality, requiring the [Giving of the Torah](#) to begin Messianic rectification. Historical and individual history becomes the narrative of reclaiming exiled Divine sparks.

Linguistic mysticism of Hebrew[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Pardes \(Jewish exegesis\)](#)

See also: [Gematria](#), [Notaricon](#), and [Temurah \(Kabbalah\)](#)



Kabbalistic painting of the supernal [illumination](#) of [Hebrew](#) letters in Creation

Kabbalistic thought extended [Biblical](#) and [Midrashic](#) notions that God enacted Creation through the Hebrew language and through the Torah into a full linguistic mysticism. In this, every [Hebrew letter](#), word, number, even accent on words of the [Hebrew Bible](#) contain esoteric meanings, describing the spiritual dimensions within exoteric ideas, and it teaches the [hermeneutic](#) methods of interpretation for ascertaining these meanings. [Names of God in Judaism](#) have further prominence, though fluidity of meaning turns the whole Torah into a Divine name. As the Hebrew name of things is the channel of their life force, parallel to the sephirot, so concepts such as "holiness" and "[mitzvot](#)" embody [ontological Divine immanence](#), as God can be known in manifestation as well as [transcendence](#). The infinite potential of meaning in the Torah, as in the [Ein Sof](#), is reflected in the symbol of the two trees of the [Garden of Eden](#); the Torah of the [Tree of Knowledge](#) is the external, [Halachic](#) Torah, through which mystics can perceive the unlimited Torah of the [Tree of Life](#). In Lurianic expression, each of the 600,000 souls of Israel find their own interpretation in Torah.

"The reapers of the Field are the Comrades, masters of this wisdom, because *Malkhut* is called the Apple Field, and She grows sprouts of secrets and new meanings of Torah. Those who constantly create new interpretations of Torah are the ones who reap Her."^[48]

As early as the 1st century BCE Jews believed that the [Torah](#) (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and wider canonical texts contained [encoded](#) messages and hidden meanings. [Gematria](#) is one method for discovering its hidden meanings. Each letter in Hebrew also represents a number; Hebrew, unlike many other languages, never developed a separate numerical alphabet. By converting letters to numbers, Kabbalists were able to find a hidden meaning in each word. This method of interpretation was used extensively by various schools.

Primary texts[\[edit\]](#)



Title page of first printed edition of the [Zohar](#), main sourcebook of Kabbalah, from [Mantua](#), Italy in 1558

Main article: [Kabbalah: Primary texts](#)

See also: [Rabbinic literature](#)

Like the rest of the Rabbinic literature, the texts of kabbalah were once part of an ongoing [oral tradition](#), though, over the centuries, much of the oral tradition has been written down.

Jewish forms of [esotericism](#) existed over 2,000 years ago. [Ben Sira](#) (born c. 170 BCE) warns against it, saying: "You shall have no business with secret things".^[49] Nonetheless, mystical studies were undertaken and resulted in mystical literature, the first being the [Apocalyptic literature](#) of the second and first pre-Christian centuries and which contained elements that carried over to later kabbalah.

Throughout the centuries since, many texts have been produced, among them the ancient descriptions of [Sefer Yetzirah](#), the [Heichalot](#) mystical ascent literature, the [Bahir](#), [Sefer Raziel HaMalakh](#) and the [Zohar](#), the main text of Kabbalistic exegesis. Classic mystical [Bible commentaries](#) are included in fuller versions of the [Mikraot Gedolot](#) (Main Commentators). Cordoveran systemisation is presented in [Pardes Rimonim](#), philosophical articulation in the works of the [Maharal](#), and Lurianic rectification in [Etz Chayim](#). Subsequent interpretation of Lurianic Kabbalah was made in the writings of [Shalom Sharabi](#), in [Nefesh HaChaim](#) and the 20th-century [Sulam](#). Hasidism interpreted kabbalistic structures to their correspondence in inward perception.^[50] The [Hasidic](#) development of kabbalah incorporates a successive stage of Jewish mysticism from historical kabbalistic metaphysics.^[51]

Scholarship[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [List of Jewish mysticism scholars](#)

The first modern-academic historians of Judaism, the "[Wissenschaft des Judentums](#)" school of the 19th century, framed Judaism in solely [rational](#) terms in the [emancipatory Haskalah](#) spirit of their age. They opposed kabbalah and restricted its significance from Jewish [historiography](#). In the mid-20th century, it was left to [Gershom Scholem](#) to overturn their stance, establishing the flourishing present-day academic investigation of Jewish mysticism, and making Heichalot, Kabbalistic and Hasidic texts the objects of scholarly critical-historical study. In Scholem's

opinion, the mythical and mystical components of Judaism were at least as important as the rational ones, and he thought that they, rather than the exoteric [Halakha](#), were the living current in historical Jewish development.

The [Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#) has been a centre of this research, including Scholem and [Isaiah Tishby](#), and more recently [Joseph Dan](#), [Yehuda Liebes](#), [Rachel Elijor](#), and [Moshe Idel](#).^[52] Scholars across the eras of Jewish mysticism in America and Britain have included [Arthur Green](#), [Lawrence Fine](#), [Elliot Wolfson](#), [Daniel Matt](#)^[53] and [Ada Rapoport-Albert](#).

Scholars in the present generation have revised early theories including Scholem's, on such questions as Heichalot mysticism and a Jewish "[gnosticism](#)", the origins of Kabbalah, and the sources of Hasidism.^[citation needed] Moshe Idel has opened up research on the [Ecstatic Kabbalah](#) alongside the theosophical, and has called for new multi-disciplinary approaches, beyond the [philological](#) and [historical](#) that have dominated until now, to include [phenomenology](#), [psychology](#), [anthropology](#) and [comparative studies](#).^[54]

Claims for authority^{[[edit](#)]}

Historians have noted that most claims for the authority of kabbalah involve an argument of the antiquity of authority (see, e.g., Joseph Dan's discussion in his *Circle of the Unique Cherub*). As a result, virtually all early foundational works [pseudepigraphically](#) claim, or are ascribed, ancient authorship. For example, *[Sefer Raziel HaMalach](#)*, an [astro-magical](#) text partly based on a magical manual of late antiquity, *[Sefer ha-Razim](#)*, was, according to the kabbalists, transmitted by the angel [Raziel](#) to Adam after he was evicted from [Eden](#).

Another famous work, the early *[Sefer Yetzirah](#)*, supposedly dates back to the patriarch [Abraham](#). This tendency toward pseudepigraphy has its roots in [apocalyptic literature](#), which claims that esoteric knowledge such as [magic](#), [divination](#) and [astrology](#) was transmitted to humans in the mythic past by the two angels, Aza and [Azaz'el](#) (in other places, Azaz'el and Uzaz'el) who fell from heaven (see Genesis 6:4).

Criticism^{[[edit](#)]}

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Dualistic cosmology[\[edit\]](#)

Although Kabbalah propounds the Unity of God, one of the most serious and sustained criticisms is that it may lead away from [monotheism](#), and instead promote [dualism](#), the belief that there is a supernatural counterpart to God. The dualistic system holds that there is a good power versus an evil power. There are two primary models of Gnostic-dualistic cosmology: the first, which goes back to [Zoroastrianism](#), believes creation is ontologically divided between good and evil forces;

the second, found largely in Greco-Roman [metaphysics](#) like [Neo-Platonism](#), argues that the universe knew a primordial harmony, but that a cosmic disruption yielded a second, evil, dimension to reality. This second model influenced the cosmology of the Kabbalah.

According to Kabbalistic cosmology, the Ten Sefirot correspond to ten levels of creation. These levels of creation must not be understood as ten different "gods" but as ten different ways of revealing God, one per level. It is not God who changes but the ability to perceive God that changes.

While God may seem to exhibit dual natures (masculine-feminine, compassionate-judgmental, creator-creation), all adherents of Kabbalah have consistently stressed the ultimate unity of God. For example, in all discussions of Male and Female, the hidden nature of God exists above it all without limit, being called the Infinite or the "No End" ([Ein Sof](#))—neither one nor the other, transcending any definition. The ability of God to become hidden from perception is called "Restriction" ([Tzimtzum](#)). Hiddenness makes creation possible because God can become "revealed" in a diversity of limited ways, which then form the building blocks of creation.

Kabbalistic texts, including the *Zohar*, appear to affirm dualism, as they ascribe all evil to the separation from holiness known as the Sitra Achra^[55] ("the other side") which is opposed to *Sitra D'Kedushah*, or the Side of Holiness.^[56] The "left side" of divine emanation is a negative mirror image of the "side of holiness" with which it was locked in combat. [*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Volume 6, "Dualism", p. 244]. While this evil aspect exists within the divine structure of the Sefirot, the *Zohar* indicates that the Sitra Achra has no power over Ein Sof, and only exists as a necessary aspect of the creation of God to give man free choice, and that evil is the consequence of this choice. It is not a supernatural force opposed to God, but a reflection of the inner moral combat within mankind between the dictates of morality and the surrender to one's basic instincts.

Rabbi Dr. David Gottlieb notes that many Kabbalists hold that the concepts of, e.g., a Heavenly Court or the Sitra Achra are only given to humanity by God as a working model to understand His ways within our own [epistemological](#) limits. They reject the notion that a [satan](#) or [angels](#) actually exist. Others hold that non-divine spiritual entities were indeed created by God as a means for exacting his will.

According to Kabbalists, humans cannot yet understand the infinity of God. Rather, there is God as revealed to humans (corresponding to [Zeir Anpin](#)), and the rest of the infinity of God as remaining hidden from human experience (corresponding to Arich Anpin).^[57] One reading of this theology is monotheistic, similar to [panentheism](#); another reading of the same theology is that it is dualistic. [Gershom Scholem](#) writes:

It is clear that with this postulate of an impersonal basic reality in God, which becomes a person—or appears as a person—only in the process of Creation and Revelation, Kabbalism abandons the personalistic basis of the Biblical conception of God....It will not surprise us to find that speculation has run the whole gamut—from attempts to re-transform the impersonal *En-Sof* into the personal God of the Bible to the downright heretical doctrine of a genuine dualism

between the hidden Ein Sof and the personal Demiurge of Scripture.
—*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* Schocken Books (p.11–12)

Distinction between Jews and non-Jews^[edit]

A number of medieval Kabbalistic sources contain statements to the effect that the Jewish soul is ontologically different from the soul of non-Jews; for example, it is held by some that Jews have three levels of soul, *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah* while non-Jews have only *nefesh*. The Zohar comments on the Biblical verse which states "Let the waters teem with swarms of creatures that have a living soul" as follows: "The verse 'creatures that have a living soul,' pertains to the Jews, for they are the children of God, and from God come their holy souls....And the souls of the other nations, from where do they come? Rabbi Elazar says that they have souls from the impure left side, and therefore they are all impure, defiling anyone who comes near them" (Zohar commentary on Genesis).

Such theologically framed hostility may have been a response to some medieval demonization of Jews which developed in some parts of Western and Christian society and thought, starting with the Patristic writings.^[58] According to [Isaac Luria](#) (1534–72) and other commentators on the [Zohar](#), [righteous Gentiles](#) do not have this demonic aspect and are in many ways similar to Jewish souls. A number of prominent Kabbalists, e.g., Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu of Vilna, the author of *Sefer ha-Brit*, held that only some marginal elements in the humanity represent these demonic forces. On the other hand, the souls of Jewish heretics have much more satanic energy than the worst of [idol worshippers](#); this view is popular in some Hasidic circles, especially [Satmar Hasidim](#).

Some later Kabbalistic works build and elaborate on these ideas. One point of view is represented by the Hasidic work [Tanya](#) (1797), in order to argue that Jews have a different character of soul: while a non-Jew, according to the author Rabbi [Shneur Zalman of Liadi](#) (b. 1745), can achieve a high level of spirituality, similar to an angel, his soul is still fundamentally different in character, but not value, from a Jewish one.^[59] A similar view is found in early medieval philosophical book [Kuzari](#), by [Yehuda Halevi](#) (1075-1141 AD).

On the other hand, many prominent Kabbalists rejected this idea and believed in essential equality of all human souls. [Menahem Azariah da Fano](#) (1548–1620), in his book *Reincarnations of souls*, provides many examples of non-Jewish Biblical figures being reincarnated into Jews and vice versa; the contemporary [Habad](#) Rabbi and mystic [Dov Ber Pinson](#) teaches that distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in works such as the [Tanya](#) are not to be understood as literally referring to the external properties of a person (what religious community they are born into), but rather as referring to the properties of souls as they can be re-incarnated in any religious community.^[60]

Another prominent Habad Rabbi, [Abraham Yehudah Khein](#) (b. 1878), believed that spiritually elevated Gentiles have essentially Jewish souls, "who just lack the formal conversion to Judaism", and that unspiritual Jews are "Jewish merely by their birth documents".^[61] The great 20th-century Kabbalist [Yehuda Ashlag](#) viewed the terms "Jews" and "Gentile" as different levels of perception, available to every human soul.

David Halperin^[62] argues that the collapse of Kabbalah's influence among Western European Jews over the course of the 17th and 18th century was a result of the cognitive dissonance they experienced between the negative perception of Gentiles found in some exponents of Kabbalah, and their own positive dealings with non-Jews, which were rapidly expanding and improving during this period due to the influence of the Enlightenment.

However, a number of renowned Kabbalists claimed the exact opposite. In their view, Kabbalah transcends the borders of Judaism and can serve as a basis of inter-religious theosophy and a universal religion. Rabbi [Pinchas Elijah Hurwitz](#), a prominent Lithuanian-Galician Kabbalist of the 18th century and a moderate proponent of the [Haskalah](#), called for brotherly love and solidarity between all nations, and believed that Kabbalah can empower everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike, with prophetic abilities.^[63]

The works of [Abraham Cohen de Herrera](#) (1570–1635) are full of references to Gentile mystical philosophers. Such approach was particularly common among the [Renaissance](#) and post-Renaissance [Italian Jews](#). Late medieval and Renaissance Italian Kabbalists, such as [Yohanan Alemanno](#), [David Messer Leon](#) and [Abraham Yagel](#), adhered to [humanistic](#) ideals and incorporated teachings of various [Christian](#) and [pagan](#) mystics.

A prime representative of this humanist stream in Kabbalah was Rabbi [Elijah Benamozegh](#), who explicitly praised Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, as well as a whole range of ancient pagan mystical systems. He believed that Kabbalah can reconcile the differences between the world religions, which represent different facets and stages of the universal human spirituality. In his writings, Benamozegh interprets the [New Testament](#), [Hadith](#), [Vedas](#), [Avesta](#) and [pagan mysteries](#) according to the Kabbalistic [theosophy](#).^[64]

For a different perspective, see Wolfson.^[65] He provides numerous examples from the 17th to the 20th centuries, which would challenge the view of Halperin cited above as well as the notion that "modern Judaism" has rejected or dismissed this "outdated aspect" of the religion and, he argues, there are still Kabbalists today who harbor this view. He argues that, while it is accurate to say that many Jews do and would find this distinction offensive, it is inaccurate to say that the idea has been totally rejected in all circles. As Wolfson has argued, it is an ethical demand on the part of scholars to continue to be vigilant with regard to this matter and in this way the tradition can be refined from within.

However, as explained above, many well known Kabbalists rejected the literal interpretation of these seemingly discriminatory views. They argued that the term "Jew" was to be interpreted metaphorically, as referring to the spiritual development of the soul, rather than the superficial denomination of the individual, and they added a chain of intermediary states between "Jews" and idol worshippers, or spiritualised the very definition of "Jews" and "non-Jews" and argued that a soul can be re-incarnated in different communities (whether Jewish or not) as much as within a single one.^[60]

Medieval views[\[edit\]](#)



[Golden age of Spanish Judaism](#) on the [Knesset Menorah](#), [Maimonides](#) holding [Aristotle's](#) work



Kabbalah mysticism on the [Knesset Menorah](#), which shared some similarities of theory with [Jewish Neoplatonists](#)

The idea that there are ten divine *sefirot* could evolve over time into the idea that "God is One being, yet in that One being there are Ten" which opens up a debate about what the "correct beliefs" in God should be, according to Judaism.

Rabbi [Saadia Gaon](#) teaches in his book [Emunot v'Deot](#) that Jews who believe in [reincarnation](#) have adopted a non-Jewish belief.

[Maimonides](#) (12th century) rejected many of the texts of the [Hekalot](#), particularly [Shi'ur Qomah](#) whose starkly anthropomorphic vision of God he considered heretical.

[Nachmanides](#) (13th century) provides background to many Kabbalistic ideas. His works, [Torah](#), offer in-depth of various concepts. In fact, an entire book, entitled [Gevuras Aryeh](#), was authored by Rabbi [Yaakov Yehuda Aryeh Leib Frenkel](#) and originally published in 1915, specifically to explain and elaborate on the Kabbalistic concepts addressed by [Nachmanides](#) in his commentary to the Five books of Moses

Rabbi [Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon](#), in the spirit of his father Maimonides, Rabbi [Saadiah Gaon](#), and other predecessors, explains at length in his book *Milhhamot HaShem* that the Almighty is in no way literally within time or space nor physically outside time or space, since time and space simply do not apply to His Being whatsoever. This is in contrast to certain popular understandings of modern Kabbalah which teach a form of [panentheism](#), that His 'essence' is within everything.

Around the 1230s, [Rabbi Meir ben Simon of Narbonne](#) wrote an epistle (included in his *Milhhamet Mitzvah*) against his contemporaries, the early Kabbalists, characterizing them as blasphemers who even approach heresy. He particularly singled out the [Sefer Bahir](#), rejecting the

attribution of its authorship to the *tanna* [R. Nehhunya ben ha-Kanah](#) and describing some of its content as truly heretical.

[Rabbi Yitzchak ben Sheshet Perfet](#) (The *Rivash*), 1326–1408. Although as is evident from his response on the topic (157) the *Rivash* was skeptical of certain interpretations of Kabbalah popular in his time, it is equally evident that overall he did accept Kabbalah as received Jewish wisdom, and attempted to defend it from attackers. To this end he cited and rejected a certain philosopher who claimed that Kabbalah was "worse than Christianity", as it made God into 10, not just into three. Most followers of Kabbalah have never followed this interpretation of Kabbalah, on the grounds that the concept of the Christian Trinity posits that there are three persons existing within the Godhead, one of whom became a human being.^{[[citation needed](#)]} In contrast, the mainstream understanding of the Kabbalistic *Sefirot* holds that they have no mind or intelligence; further, they are not addressed in prayer and they cannot become a human being. They are conduits for interaction, not persons or beings. Nonetheless, many important [poskim](#), such as Maimonides in his work [Mishneh Torah](#), prohibit any use of mediators between oneself and the Creator as a form of idolatry.

Rabbi [Leone di Modena](#), a 17th-century [Venetian](#) critic of Kabbalah, wrote that if we were to accept the Kabbalah, then the Christian trinity would indeed be compatible with Judaism, as the Trinity closely resembles the Kabbalistic doctrine of the *Sefirot*. This critique was in response to the knowledge that some European Jews of the period addressed individual *Sefirot* in some of their prayers, although the practise was apparently uncommon. Apologists explain that Jews may have been praying *for* and not necessarily *to* the aspects of Godliness represented by the [Sefirot](#).

[Yaakov Emden](#), 1697–1776, wrote the book *Mitpahhath Sfarim* (*Veil of the Books*), a detailed critique of the [Zohar](#) in which he concludes that certain parts of the *Zohar* contain heretical teaching and therefore could not have been written by [Shimon bar Yochai](#).

Orthodox Judaism^{[[edit](#)]}



Tikun for reading through the night of [Shavuot](#), a popular Jewish custom from the [Safed](#) Kabbalists

[Yihyah Qafahh](#), an early-20th-century [Yemenite Jewish](#) leader and grandfather of [Yosef Qafih](#), also wrote a book entitled [Milhamoth ha-Shem](#) (*Wars of the Name*) against what he perceived as the false teachings of the *Zohar* and the false Kabbalah of [Isaac Luria](#). He is credited with

spearheading the [Dor Daim](#) who continue in Yihyah Qafahh's view of Kabbalah into modern times.

[Yeshayahu Leibowitz](#) 1903–1994, brother of [Nechama Leibowitz](#), though [Modern Orthodox](#) in his world view, publicly shared the views expressed in R. Yihyah Qafahh's book *Milhamoth HaShem* and elaborated upon these views in his many writings.

There is dispute among modern [Haredim](#) as to the status of [Isaac Luria](#)'s, the [Arizal](#)'s Kabbalistic teachings. While a portion of [Modern Orthodox](#) Rabbis, [Dor Daim](#) and many students of the [Rambam](#), completely reject Arizal's Kabbalistic teachings, as well as deny that the *Zohar* is authoritative, or from [Shimon bar Yohai](#), all three of these groups completely accept the existence and validity of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and *Ma'aseh B'resheet* mysticism. Their only disagreement concerns whether the Kabbalistic teachings promulgated today are accurate representations of those esoteric teachings to which the Talmud refers. Within the Haredi Jewish community one can find both rabbis who sympathise with such a view,^{[[citation needed](#)]} while not necessarily agreeing with it, as well as rabbis who consider such a view absolute heresy.

Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism[[edit](#)]



A version of [Lekhah Dodi](#) song to welcome the [Shabbat](#), a cross denomination Jewish custom from Kabbalah

Kabbalah tended to be rejected by most Jews in the [Conservative](#) and [Reform](#) movements, though its influences were not completely eliminated. While it was generally not studied as a discipline, the Kabbalistic *Kabbalat Shabbat* service remained part of liberal liturgy, as did the *Yedid Nefesh* prayer. Nevertheless, in the 1960s, Rabbi [Saul Lieberman](#) of the [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#) is reputed to have introduced a lecture by Scholem on Kabbalah with a statement that Kabbalah itself was "nonsense", but the academic study of Kabbalah was "scholarship". This view became popular among many Jews, who viewed the subject as worthy of study, but who did not accept Kabbalah as teaching literal truths.

According to Rabbi [Bradley Shavit Artson](#) (Dean of the Conservative [Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies](#) in the [American Jewish University](#))

Many western Jews insisted that their future and their freedom required shedding what they perceived as parochial orientalism. They fashioned a Judaism that was decorous and strictly rational (according to 19th-century European standards), denigrating Kabbalah as backward, superstitious, and marginal.^{[[66](#)]}

However, in the late 20th century and early 21st century there has been a revival in interest in Kabbalah in all branches of liberal Judaism. The Kabbalistic 12th-century prayer [Anim Zemirot](#) was restored to the new Conservative *Sim Shalom* [siddur](#), as was the *B'rikh Shmeh* passage from the [Zohar](#), and the mystical *Ushpizin* service welcoming to the [Sukkah](#) the spirits of Jewish forbearers. *Anim Zemirot* and the 16th-century mystical poem *Lekkah Dodi* reappeared in the Reform Siddur [Gates of Prayer](#) in 1975. All Rabbinical seminaries now teach several courses in Kabbalah—in Conservative Judaism, both the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Ziegler School of Rabbinical Studies of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles have full-time instructors in Kabbalah and *Hasidut*, Eitan Fishbane and Pinchas Geller, respectively. In the Reform movement Sharon Koren teaches at the Hebrew Union College. Reform Rabbis like Herbert Weiner and [Lawrence Kushner](#) have renewed interest in Kabbalah among Reform Jews. At the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the only accredited seminary that has curricular requirements in Kabbalah, Joel Hecker is the full-time instructor teaching courses in Kabbalah and Hasidut.

According to Artson:

Ours is an age hungry for meaning, for a sense of belonging, for holiness. In that search, we have returned to the very Kabbalah our predecessors scorned. The stone that the builders rejected has become the head cornerstone (Psalm 118:22)... Kabbalah was the last universal theology adopted by the entire Jewish people, hence faithfulness to our commitment to positive-historical Judaism mandates a reverent receptivity to Kabbalah. ^[22]

The [Reconstructionist](#) movement, under the leadership of Arthur Green in the 1980s and 1990s, and with the influence of Zalman Schachter Shalomi, brought a strong openness to Kabbalah and hasidic elements that then came to play prominent roles in the Kol ha-Neshamah siddur series.

Contemporary study[\[edit\]](#)



The Kabbalah Tree (1985), oil on canvas by the Italian artist Davide Tonato

Teaching of classic esoteric kabbalah texts and practice remained traditional until recent times, passed on in Judaism from master to disciple, or studied by leading rabbinic scholars. This

changed in the 20th century, through conscious reform and the secular openness of knowledge. In contemporary times kabbalah is studied in four very different, though sometimes overlapping, ways:

- The traditional method, employed among Jews since the 16th century, continues in learned study circles. Its prerequisite is to either be born Jewish or be a convert and to join a group of kabbalists under the tutelage of a rabbi, since the 18th century more likely a [Hasidic](#) one, though others exist among [Sephardi-Mizrachi](#), and [Lithuanian](#) Rabbinic scholars. Beyond elite, historical esoteric kabbalah, the public-communally studied texts of [Hasidic thought](#) explain kabbalistic concepts for wide spiritual application, through their own concern with popular psychological perception of Divine Panentheism. In recent times, many [Orthodox Jewish outreach](#) organisations for secular Jews teach Kabbalistic and Hasidic texts.
- A second, new universalist form, is the method of modern-style Jewish organisations and writers, who seek to disseminate kabbalah to every man, woman and child regardless of race or class, especially since the Western interest in mysticism from the 1960s. These derive from various [cross-denominational](#) Jewish interests in kabbalah, and range from considered theology to popularised forms that often adopt [New Age](#) terminology and beliefs for wider communication. These groups highlight or interpret kabbalah through non-particularist, universalist aspects.
- A third way are non-Jewish organisations, [mystery schools](#), initiation bodies, fraternities and [secret societies](#), the most popular of which are [Freemasonry](#), [Rosicrucianism](#) and the [Golden Dawn](#), although hundreds of similar societies claim a kabbalistic lineage. These derive from [syncretic](#) combinations of Jewish kabbalah with [Christian](#), [occultist](#) or contemporary [New Age](#) spirituality. As a separate spiritual tradition in Western esotericism since the [Renaissance](#), with different aims from its Jewish origin, the non-Jewish traditions differ significantly and do not give an accurate representation of the Jewish spiritual understanding (or vice-versa).^[67]
- Fourthly, since the mid-20th century, [historical-critical](#) scholarly investigation of all eras of Jewish mysticism has flourished into an established department of university [Jewish studies](#). Where the [first academic historians](#) of Judaism in the 19th century opposed and marginalised kabbalah, [Gershom Scholem](#) and his successors repositioned the [historiography](#) of Jewish mysticism as a central, vital component of Judaic renewal through history. Cross-disciplinary academic revisions of Scholem's and others' theories are regularly published for wide readership.

Universalist Jewish organisations[[edit](#)]

The two, unrelated organisations that translate the mid-20th century teachings of Rabbi [Yehuda Ashlag](#) into a contemporary universalist message, have given kabbalah a public cross-religious profile:

- *Bnei Baruch* is a group of Kabbalah students, based in Israel. Study materials are available in over 25 languages for free online or at printing cost. Michael Laitman established Bnei Baruch in 1991, following the passing of his teacher, Rabbi Ashlag's son Rav [Baruch Ashlag](#). Laitman named his group Bnei Baruch (sons of Baruch) to

commemorate the memory of his mentor. The teaching strongly suggests restricting one's studies to 'authentic sources', kabbalists of the direct lineage of master to disciple.^{[68][69]}

- [*The Kabbalah Centre*](#) was founded in the United States in 1965 as The National Research Institute of Kabbalah by [Philip Berg](#) and Rav Yehuda Tzvi Brandwein, disciple of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag's. Later Philip Berg and his wife re-established the organisation as the worldwide Kabbalah Centre.^[70] In recent times its outreach teaching in [New Age](#) style has attracted a cross-religious celebrity following and media profile, though the organisation is led by [Orthodox Jewish](#) teachers.^[71]

Other prominent Jewish universalist organisations:

- [*The Kabbalah Society*](#), run by [Warren Kenton](#), an organisation based instead on pre-[Lurianic](#) Medieval Kabbalah presented in universalist [New Age syncretic](#) style. In contrast, traditional kabbalists read earlier kabbalah through later Lurianism and the systemisations of 16th-century Safed.
- *The New Kabbalah*, website and books by Sanford L. Drob, is a scholarly intellectual investigation of the [Lurianic symbolism](#) in the perspective of [modern](#) and [postmodern](#) intellectual thought. It seeks a "new kabbalah" rooted in the historical tradition through its academic study, but universalised through dialogue with modern philosophy and psychology. This approach seeks to enrich the secular disciplines, while uncovering intellectual insights formerly implicit in kabbalah's essential myth.^[72]

"By being equipped with the nonlinear concepts of [dialectical](#), [psychoanalytic](#), and [deconstructive](#) thought we can begin to make sense of the kabbalistic symbols in our own time. So equipped, we are today probably in a better position to understand the [philosophical](#) aspects of the kabbalah than were the kabbalists themselves."^[73]

Neo-Hasidic^[edit]

From the early 20th century, [Neo-Hasidism](#) expressed a non-Orthodox Jewish interest in Jewish mysticism, becoming organisational among Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist [Jewish denominations](#) from the 1960s, through [Jewish Renewal](#) and the [Chavurah](#) movement. The writings and teachings of [Zalman Schachter-Shalomi](#), [Arthur Green](#), [Lawrence Kushner](#), [Herbert Weiner](#) and others, has sought a Kabbalistic and Hasidic study and spirituality among modernist Jews.

Hasidic^[edit]

Since the 18th century, Jewish mystical development has continued in [Hasidic Judaism](#), turning kabbalah into a social revival with texts that internalise mystical thought. Among [different schools](#), [Chabad-Lubavitch](#) and [Breslav](#) with related organisations, give outward looking spiritual resources and textual learning for secular Jews. The Intellectual Hasidism of Chabad most emphasises the spread and understanding of kabbalah through its explanation in [Hasidic](#)

[thought](#), articulating the Divine meaning within kabbalah through human rational analogies, uniting the spiritual and material, esoteric and exoteric in their Divine source:

"Hasidic thought instructs in the predominance of spiritual form over physical matter, the advantage of matter when it is purified, and the advantage of form when integrated with matter. The two are to be unified so one cannot detect where either begins or ends, for 'the Divine beginning is implanted in the end and the end in the beginning' (Sefer Yetzira 1:7). The One God created both for one purpose – to reveal the holy light of His hidden power. Only both united complete the perfection desired by the Creator."^[74]

Rav Kook^{[[edit](#)]}

The writings of [Abraham Isaac Kook](#) (1864–1935), first Chief Rabbi of Mandate Palestine and visionary, incorporate kabbalistic themes through his own poetic language and concern with human and divine unity. His influence is in the [Religious-Zionist](#) community, who follow his aim that the [legal](#) and [imaginative](#) aspects of Judaism should interfuse:

"Due to the alienation from the 'secret of God' [i.e. Kabbalah], the higher qualities of the depths of Godly life are reduced to trivia that do not penetrate the depth of the soul. When this happens, the most mighty force is missing from the soul of nation and individual, and Exile finds favor essentially... We should not negate any conception based on rectitude and awe of Heaven of any form—only the aspect of such an approach that desires to negate the mysteries and their great influence on the spirit of the nation. This is a tragedy that we must combat with counsel and understanding, with holiness and courage."^[75]

See also^{[[edit](#)]}



[Kabbalah portal](#)

- [Aggadah](#)
- [Jewish mysticism](#)
- [Kabbalah: Primary texts](#)
- [List of Jewish Kabbalists](#)

Notes^{[[edit](#)]}

1. [Jump up](#) [^] [KABBALAH? CABALA? QABALAH?](#) from kabbalaonline.org
2. [Jump up](#) [^] *Kabbalah: A very short introduction*, [Joseph Dan](#), Oxford University Press, Chapter 1 "The term and its uses"
3. [Jump up](#) [^] ["Imbued with Holiness"](#) - The relationship of the esoteric to the [exoteric](#) in the fourfold [Pardes](#) interpretation of Torah and existence. From [www.kabbalaonline.org](#)
4. [Jump up](#) [^] ["The Freedom"](#) by [Yehuda Ashlag](#), "Baal HaSulam"
5. [Jump up](#) [^] Shnei Luchot HaBrit, R. Isaiah Horowitz, Toldot Adam, Beit haChokhma, 14
6. [Jump up](#) [^] [Jewishencyclopedia.com - ZOHAR](#)
7. [Jump up](#) [^] [The Written Law \(The Torah\)](#)

8. [Jump up](#) [^] *Kabbalah: A very short introduction*, Joseph Dan, Oxford University Press, Chapters on "the emergence of Medieval Kabbalah" and "doctrines of Medieval Kabbalah"
9. [Jump up](#) [^] Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, p. 31
10. [Jump up](#) [^] *Megillah 14a, Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:22, Ruth Rabbah 1:2*, Aryeh Kaplan Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide pp.44–48
11. [Jump up](#) [^] *Yehuda Ashlag; Preface to the Wisdom of Truth* p.12 section 30 and p.105 bottom section of the left column as preface to the "Talmud Eser HaSfirot"
12. [Jump up](#) [^] See *Shem Mashmaon* by Rabbi Shimon Agasi. It is a commentary on *Otzrot Haim* by Haim Vital. In the introduction he list five major schools of thought as to how to understand the Haim Vital's understanding of the concept of *Tzimtzum*.
13. [Jump up](#) [^] See *Yechveh Daat* Vol 3, section 47 by Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef
14. [Jump up](#) [^] See *Ktavim Hadashim* published by Rabbi Yaakov Hillel of Ahavat Shalom for a sampling of works by Haim Vital attributed to Isaac Luria that deal with other works.
15. [Jump up](#) [^] *Kabbala goes to yeshiva* | [Jerusalem Post](#)
16. [Jump up](#) [^] *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, Joseph Dan, Oxford University Press 2007. Chapters: 5 Modern Times-I The Christian Kabbalah, 9 Some Aspects of Contemporary Kabbalah
17. [Jump up](#) [^] *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, [Louis Jacobs](#), Oxford University Press 1995. Entry: Kabbalah
18. [Jump up](#) [^] Introduction to [Raziel Hamalach](#).
19. [Jump up](#) [^] Stern, Schneur Zalman. [Active vs. Passive Meditation](#)
20. [Jump up](#) [^] [SparkNotes: The Kabbalah: Ma'aseh merkavah](#)
21. [Jump up](#) [^] [SparkNotes: The Kabbalah: Ma'aseh bereshit](#)
22. [^] [Jump up to:](#) ^a ^b [Artson, Bradley Shavit](#). *From the Periphery to the Centre: Kabbalah and the Conservative Movement*, United Synagogue Review, Spring 2005, Vol. 57 No. 2
23. [Jump up](#) [^] Urbach, *The Sages*, pp.184ff.
24. [Jump up](#) [^] Later, Elisha came to be considered [heretical](#) by his fellow [Tannaim](#) and the rabbis of the [Talmud](#) referred to him as *Acher* (אחר "The Other One").
25. [Jump up](#) [^] Babylonian Talmud [Hagigah](#) 14b, [Jerusalem Talmud Hagigah](#) 2:1. This translation based on Braude, Ginzberg, Rodkinson, and Streane.
26. [Jump up](#) [^] A. W. Streane, *A Translation of the Treatise Chagigah from the Babylonian Talmud* [Cambridge University Press](#), 1891. p. 83.
27. [Jump up](#) [^] Louis Ginzberg, [Elisha ben Abuyah](#)", *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1901–1906.
28. [Jump up](#) [^] *Mishneh Torah*, Yesodei Torah, Chapters 2-4.
29. [Jump up](#) [^] [The Zohar](#)
30. [Jump up](#) [^] Rabbi Abraham Ben Mordechai Azulai, [Introduction to the book, Ohr HaChama \[Light of the Sun\]](#)
31. [Jump up](#) [^] Rabbi Avraham Azulai quoted in Erdstein, Baruch Emanuel. [The Need to Learn Kabbala](#)
32. [Jump up](#) [^] [The Kabbalah Centre](#)
33. [Jump up](#) [^] Shulhan Arukh YD 246:4
34. [Jump up](#) [^] Shulhan Arukh 246:4 S"K 19^{[[unreliable source?](#)]}
35. [Jump up](#) [^] *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, [Louis Jacobs](#), Oxford University Press 1995: entry on Judah Loew
36. [Jump up](#) [^] Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, chapter on the Contemporary Era
37. [Jump up](#) [^] Such as the theological novel *The Town Beyond The Wall* by Elie Wiesel. Norman Lamm gives a Biblical, Midrashic and Kabbalistic exegesis of it in *Faith and Doubt: Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought*, Ktav pub.
38. [Jump up](#) [^] [Zohar](#) I, 15a English translation from *Jewish Mysticism – An Anthology*, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Oneworld pub, p.120-121
39. [Jump up](#) [^] See *Otzrot Haim: Sha'ar TNT"A* for a short explanation. The vast majority of the Lurianic system deals only with the complexities found in the world of Atzilut as is explained in the introductions to both *Otzrot Haim* and *Eitz Haim*.
40. [Jump up](#) [^] *The Song of the Soul*, Yechiel Bar-Lev, p.73
41. [Jump up](#) [^] J.H.Laenen, *Jewish Mysticism*, p.164
42. [Jump up](#) [^] Wineberg, chs. 20–21
43. [Jump up](#) [^] [\[1\]](#) ban on Practical Kabbalah in our times, [\[2\]](#) practical use of amulets by Sages

44. [Jump up](#) ^ Piero Cantoni, "Demonology and Praxis of Exorcism and of the Liberation Prayers", in *Fides Catholica* 1 (2006. [\[31\]](#))
45. [Jump up](#) ^ Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, chapter on "Christian Kabbalah"
46. [Jump up](#) ^ (Otzar Eden Ganuz, Oxford Ms. 1580, fols. 163b-164a; see also Hayei Haolam Haba, Oxford 1582, fol. 12a)
47. [Jump up](#) ^ Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, tentative analysis of Gershom Scholem and Isaiah Tishby of Luria's scheme
48. [Jump up](#) ^ Moshe Cordovero, *Or Ha-Hammah* on Zohar III, 106a
49. [Jump up](#) ^ *Sirach* iii. 22; compare Talmud, *Hagigah*, 13a; Midrash *Genesis Rabbah*, viii.
50. [Jump up](#) ^ [Overview of Hasidut](#) from www.inner.org
51. [Jump up](#) ^ The Founder of [Hasidism](#), the [Baal Shem Tov](#), cautioned against the layman learning Kabbalah without its Hasidic explanation. He saw this as the cause of the contemporary mystical heresies of [Sabbatai Zevi](#) and [Jacob Frank](#). Cited in *The Great Maggid* by [Jacob Immanuel Schochet](#), quoting *Derech Mitzvosecha* by [Menachem Mendel Schneersohn](#)
52. [Jump up](#) ^ [Moshe Idel](#)
53. [Jump up](#) ^ [Daniel C. Matt](#)
54. [Jump up](#) ^ Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, p.28
55. [Jump up](#) ^ [Sitra Achra](#)
56. [Jump up](#) ^ Chabad.org: *Kelipot and Sitra Achra*, Nissan Dovid Dubov [Chabad.org](#)
57. [Jump up](#) ^ [Arich Anpin](#)
58. [Jump up](#) ^ Fundamentals of Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah By Ron H. Feldman. Pg. 59
59. [Jump up](#) ^ סידור הרב, שער אכילת מצה
60. ^ [Jump up to: ^a ^b](#) Dov Ber Pinson, Reincarnation and Judaism
61. [Jump up](#) ^ ר' אברהם חן, ביהדות התורה
62. [Jump up](#) ^ article, *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth*
63. [Jump up](#) ^ Love of one's Neighbour in Pinhas Hurwitz's Sefer ha-Berit, Resianne Fontaine, Studies in Hebrew Language and Jewish Culture, Presented to Albert van der Heide on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday, p.244-268.
64. [Jump up](#) ^ Israel and Humanity, Elijah Benamozegh, Paulist Press, 1995
65. [Jump up](#) ^ Wolfson, E.R. *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, Oxford University Press, 2006, ch.1.
66. [Jump up](#) ^ [Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson](#), *From the Periphery to the Center: Kabbalah & Conservative Judaism*
67. [Jump up](#) ^ Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, chapters on Christian Kabbalah and the Contemporary Era
68. [Jump up](#) ^ "On Authentic Sources" by Rav Michael Laitman
69. [Jump up](#) ^ "The Teaching of the Kabbalah and Its Essence" by Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, the "Baal HaSulam"
70. [Jump up](#) ^ [Kabbalah.com](#)
71. [Jump up](#) ^ "Rabbi Philip Berg". *Daily Telegraph*. 2013-09-20. Retrieved 2013-09-21.
72. [Jump up](#) ^ [newkabbalah.com website](#) including the published English-language books of Sanford Drob
73. [Jump up](#) ^ Sanford Drob, *Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Jason Aronson publishers, p.xvi-xvii. Comparisons of the Lurianic scheme to Hegel, Freud and Jung are treated in respective chapters of Sanford Drob, *Kabbalistic Metaphors: Jewish Mystical Themes in Ancient and Modern Thought*, Aronson. The modern disciplines are explored as particular intellectual/emotional perspectives into the inclusive supra-rational Lurianic symbolism, from which both emerge enriched
74. [Jump up](#) ^ [HaYom Yom](#), Kehot publications, p. 110
75. [Jump up](#) ^ [Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook](#) (*Orot* 2)

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