

KABBALAH – GENERAL

28 Questions

1 ***What does the word Kabbalah mean?***

The word Kabbalah has its root in the Hebrew verb *Lekabel* - to receive. It can also mean to accept or be accepted.

2 ***What is Kabbalah?***

The Kabbalah is the Jewish mystical and esoteric wisdom. It teaches the unfolding of the worlds, the various ways of guidance of these worlds, the role of man in the creation, the will of the Creator and so on. No other writings explain in details; the creation of this world and the ones above it, the lights or energies that influence its guidance, nor the final goal of everything. These writings are based on the Torah, on ancient and newer Jewish texts, and mostly on the Zohar.

3 ***What does it mean “to receive”?***

Kabbalah comes from the verb *Lekabel* (to receive), but to receive, it is first necessary to want, and to become a *Keli* (recipient) able to receive and contain this knowledge. A person has to merit and be accepted to receive this knowledge, and hold it by living in the path of *Torah* and rightness to strengthen himself constantly.

4 ***What are the subjects covered in the Kabbalah?***

Beside the main subjects covered in the Kabbalah as the unfolding of the worlds and their guidance, the real meaning and goals of the *Mitsvot*³ and prayers, it comprises of numerous other sciences as: astrology, cosmology, *Gematria*⁴, metaphysics, demonology, physiognomy, palmistry, healing, alchemy, reincarnation, exorcism, prophecy etc.

5 ***What are the writings that make the Kabbalah?***

The base of all the writings of the Kabbalah is the Zohar, written in the second century by Rabbi Shim'on Bar Yo'hai. Other important works are the "Sepher HaYetsira" - the Book of Formation, Kitve HaAri" – the Writings of the Ari Z'al etc. All these writings try to explain and comment on the secrets hidden and alluded in the Torah.

6 ***What is "Practical Kabbalah"?***

It is the "other" type of Kabbalah, where names or combinations of names of angels are used with special signs or incantations, sometimes written on parchment, to invoke particular powers and alter normal states of events

³ Commandments

⁴ Numerology

7 ***What is the history of the Kabbalah?***

The first book that mentions a system of ten lights called *Sephirot* is “*Sepher HaYetsira*” - The Book of Formation, is attributed to Avraham Avinu (Aprox. 1750 B.C.E)

During the second century, Rabbi Shim'on Bar Yo'hai composed the Zohar which is the esoteric and mystical explanation of the Torah, and the base of most of the Kabbalah writings.

In the twelfth century, after having disappeared for about one thousand years, the book of the Zohar is found and printed by Rabbi Moshe de Leon in Spain.

In Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in the cities of Provence in France, Gerona in Spain and Worms in Germany were formed three of the main centers of Kabbalah of that period. It is also the period of the “Prophetic Kabbalah” as taught by Rabbi Abraham Abul'afia.

After the expulsion from Spain in 1492, was founded in the city of Tsfat in Israel, a school of Kabbalah named “New Kabbalah” or “Kabbalah of Tsfat”, it is the golden period of the Kabbalah under Rabbi Its'hak Luria Ashkenazi; the Ari Z'al.

During the 16th century with the coming of Shabbetai Tsevi who was called the “Kabbalistic Messiah”, the Jewish community was divided between his followers and the non-believers. After converting to Islam, this false Messiah caused a big deception and mistrust in the teachings of the Kabbalah. The rabbinical authorities of the time became

even more severe with the learning of Kabbalah and some were persecuted for learning or writing on the subject.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Kabbalah becomes more popular in east Europe with the '*Hassidic* movements. Their founder; the Ba'al Shem Tov and others, try to give the possibility to every Jew to get closer to his creator, by becoming more spiritual and studying with more profundity.

In the beginning of this century, Rabbi Yehudah Ashlag translated all the Zohar from Aramaic to Hebrew, this allowed an even better dissemination of its teachings.

8 ***What is a Kabbalist?***

As said above, the word Kabbalah comes from the verb *Lekabel* (to receive), but to receive it is first necessary to be prepared, and to be a *Keli* (recipient) able to receive and contain this knowledge.

A Kabbalist is a person who is accepted to receive this knowledge, and is able to hold it by living in the path of Torah and rightness to strengthen himself constantly. He is a spiritual person who will give utmost importance to the higher meaning of things, and continually try to advance in his learning. For him, the main goal of this existence is to get closer to the Creator and serve him to the best of his possibilities.

9 ***Who are some of the most important Kabbalists?***

Rabbi Shim'on Bar Yo'hai lived in Galilee in the second century, he composed the Zohar which is the esoteric and mystical explanation of the Torah, and the base of most of the Kabbalah writings.

Rabbi Moshe de Leon who reprinted the Zohar after it had disappeared for a thousand years. (1270)

The heads of the three Kabbalah schools in Europe: Rabbi Its'hak the Blind in France, Rabbi Ezra of Gerona in Spain and Rabbi El'azar of Worms, in Germany. (1200)

Rabbi Abraham Abul'afia and Rabbi Yosef Giktalia. They created the school of "Prophetic Kabbalah". (1200 – 1300)

The first generation of the Kabbalists of Tsfat in Israel: Rabbi Moshe Kordovero, Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz and Rabbi Yoseph Karo. After this first generation, Rabbi Its'hak Luria Ashkenazi; the Ari Z'al became the leading Kabbalist in Tsfat. He explained and clarified all the main concepts of the Kabbalah, and also innovated in the explanation of the *Sephirot* and *Partzufim* (configurations). He is the author of the corpus "'Ets 'Haim" which is today the major reference in Kabbalah. (1500)

The Ba'al Shem Tov was the founder of the '*Hassidic* movement, his teachings were largely based upon the Kabbalistic teachings of the Ari Z'al, but his approach made the benefits of these teachings accessible even to the simplest Jew. Some of the other important leaders that founded their own '*Hassidic* movement are Rabbi Na'hman

of Breslev, great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the “*Ba'al HaTanya*”, founder of the ‘Habad Lubavitch movement. (1600 – 1700)

Rabbi Moshe ‘Haim Luzzatto – Ram’hal who lived in Italy and Amsterdam. He was a very prolific writer and wrote on all the aspects of the Torah and the Kabbalah, but because of false accusations, was sadly persecuted for most of his short life. (1700)

Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna - The Gaon of Vilna who was born in Lithuania. He was one of the main leaders of the *Mitnagdim* (opponents to the ‘*Hasidic*’ movement). He is considered to be one of the greatest Torah scholar and Kabbalist of the past two centuries. (1700)

Rabbi Shalom Shar’abi - The Rashash. He is known as the “Master of the *Kavanot*”⁵. His “*Siddur HaRashash*” is the *Siddur*⁶ used by some Kabbalists in their everyday prayers, and is based on the *Kavanot* of the Ari Z’al. (1700)

Rabbi Ya’acov Abe’htsera was a Kabbalist renowned for his piety and for performing miracles. He composed works on all facets of the Torah including important commentaries on the Kabbalistic explanations of the Torah. (1800)

Rabbi ‘Haim Ben ‘Atar – Or Ha’Haim. The Ba’al Shem Tov was convinced that the Or Ha’Haim was the Moshia’h of that generation. His main work is the commentary on the Torah; “Or Ha’Haim” where he commented the Torah on the four

⁵ Praying with concentration and with the permutation of names.

⁶ Prayer book

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levels of comprehension, from the *Pshat* (simple), to the Kabbalistic meaning. (1800)

Rabbi Yosef 'Haim –The Ben Ish 'Hai. He was a prolific author who wrote at incredible speed. It is known that he would finish writing a complete page before the ink at the top of the page had dried. He explained the *Halakhot* (laws) on the Kabbalistic level but in an accessible language. (1900)

Rabbi Yehudah Ashlag. His main work is the translation of all the Zohar from Aramaic to Hebrew called "*HaSulam*"⁷. (1950)

This list is not exhaustive, but each one of these great Kabbalah scholars brought his own explanations and innovations to the Kabbalah.

10 ***How about Madonna, Kabbalah and show business?***

For some Kabbalah has become a "show business" word. If you learn Kabbalah, you belong to the same circle of friends as Madonna, Britney Spears, Demi Moore, Elizabeth Taylor etc. Today, these and other show business personalities claim to study Jewish mysticism; the Kabbalah.

In a recent interview on CNN, Madonna declared: "I am a Kabbalist, there is definitely a Kabbalistic approach to life, or a Kabbalistic point of view..."

⁷ The ladder

Is it possible to study Kabbalah so easily and claim to be a Kabbalist? Or could the actual enchantment manifested by Madonna and others, be only momentary or a fade, knowing the intensity and the necessary investment required to study the authentic Kabbalah?

Wanting to get closer to G-od is very noble, and this, from whatever religion or background. I am sure that Madonna and the others sincerely want to do good, as she also declared: "I also believe that all paths lead to G-od". The problem is the people that allegedly show these seekers "the way" and take (a lot of) their money on the way. When we see Madonna flashing Hebrew names of G-od (which normally are so saintly that they should not even be pronounced) on the back wall of her rock concert, we wonder if she realizes the gravity of her actions.

If Madonna thinks that she is a Kabbalist, she is certainly not. If her teachers told her she was, they do not go by any recognized standards, and I personally think that she is being taken advantage of, because if she really wants to learn the authentic Kabbalah she would have to be taught very differently.

Her main contribution is the greater awareness of a very beautiful and powerful Jewish mysticism.

11 ***What is the "Tree of life"?***

During the night the "Tree of Life" ascends higher and the "Tree of death" governs. According to the *Zohar*, it is only

in the morning that the governance is given back to the Tree of Life and that all the souls return in men's bodies. (Zohar, Bamidbar)

It is also the name of the master work of the Ari Z'al.

12 ***What is the "Tree of death"?***

During the night the "Tree of Life" ascends higher, the souls leave the bodies and the "Tree of death" governs.

13 ***What is "ATBaSH"?***

It is a permutation of the letters of a word to understand its hidden meanings. The first letter is replaced by the last, second by the before last etc.

א by ת - ב by ש etc.

14 ***What is "Notrikun"?***

Notrikun is a method of interpretation in which initials of different words make a new word.

אל מלך נאמן = אמן

15 ***What is a Kmi'a (Amulet)?***

Names, or combinations of names of angels with special signs or incantations, written on parchment to protect, or to invoke particular powers.

By writing various permutation of letters or names of angels, one could make these superior forces act according to his will. There is danger of using these names without a proper preparation and a good knowledge of their forces and limits.

16 ***Why is there free will for men?***

Since the intention of the Creator is to bestow goodness on His creatures, all the levels of creation were put in place so His kindness could emanate to them, yet in such a way that they would be able to receive it. Complete rigor will be the destruction of anything not perfect, while complete kindness will permit everything without restriction. However, these two aspects are necessary to make the guidance of kindness and justice and to give man the possibility of serving the Creator by their free will.

After the *Shvirat HaKelim* (breaking of the vessels) with the emanation of the lights of the name *MaH (45)* and *BaN (52)*, G-od could have done the *Tikun* (repair) of all the worlds, but then, there would not have been a reason for the participation of man in this *Tikun* and a possibility to acquire merit.

For man to have a possibility to act and repair the creation, G-od restrained in a way, his outflow of kindness to this world, to give men the merit of doing the *Tikun* with their free will. It is by their free will to get closer to their Creator and learn His ways, that men merit their place in the higher worlds when they depart.

17 ***What are the good and bad impulse in man?***

The *Yetser Hatov* corresponds to the good or positive impulse in man, the *Yetser Hara'* is his bad or negative impulse.

The good deeds of man have an effect on the four higher worlds, his bad deeds; on the four lower worlds. It is only when man sins, that the negative side can grow in strength. The negative aspect grows inside him; this is his *Yetser Hara'*, it cuts him off from the higher worlds, and uproots him from the *Kedushah*⁸.

The *Yetser Hara'* almost constantly tries to seduce him, and make him stumble, while the *Yetser Hatov*, on the other side, tries to attract him to *Torah* and *Mitsvot*⁹ and to help him do the *Tikun* (rectification) of his *Neshama*¹⁰.

The two aspects of *Yetser Tov* and *Yetser Hara'* were created to allow man to choose good over bad by his own free choice.

18 ***What is the Garden of Eden?***

It is the place of rest for the *Neshamot* (souls) after their separation with their former physical bodies. There is a lower and a higher *Gan 'Eden*.

⁸ Holiness

⁹ Commandments of the Torah

¹⁰ Soul

19 ***What is the lower Gan 'Eden?***

In the lower *Gan 'Eden*, the *Neshamot* (souls) are enjoying spiritual pleasures but still have a spiritual body resembling their former bodies.

20 ***What is the higher Gan 'Eden?***

In the higher *Gan 'Eden*, the *Neshamot* (souls) are enjoying pure spiritual pleasures, and do not have any spiritual image resembling their former bodies

21 ***What is time in the Kabbalah?***

There is a higher dimension where there is not a notion called time. Past, present and future are one. Man being a limited entity physically and temporally, it is not possible for him to comprehend this reality.

Everything, past, present and future has a purpose, and in the end, all that is and happens, will be clear and comprehensible.

22 ***What difference is there for each day?***

Each new day, is of a new emanation that governs it. For each day, there are new *Zivugim* (unions) of different aspects of *Z"uN (Zeir Anpin and Nukvah)*¹¹.

¹¹ Masculine and feminine configurations of *Sephirot*

Each day, according to the actions of man, the *Tefilot*¹² during the week, *Shabbat* or Holidays, and depending on time, various configurations allow different *Zivugim* - unions, and therefore outflows of abundance of variable intensities.

Each day can also be described in term of permutation of the names of G-od, and by the various *Sephirot and Partzufim* – configurations that govern on this day.

23 ***What is a Yi'hud (unification)?***

A *Yi'hud* is the unification of names or letters, as to provoke a specific action or reaction. In his book “*Sha’ar Rua’h HaKodesh*” the Ari Z’al explains the significance of the *Yi’hudim*, their different actions, and also warns of the danger of using these names without a proper preparation. By concentrating on various permutation of letters or names of angels, one could make these superior forces act according to his will.

The union of the *Sephirot* and configurations for the descent of the abundance is also called *Yi’hud*.

24 ***Is there creation from nothing?***

There is a special force called “*Tsu’r T’K*”, which has the power to create separate entities from nothing.

¹² Prayers

This force is not related to the *Sephirot*. It was first explained in the “*Sepher HaYetsrira*”¹³, which is the oldest Kabbalistic writing. It is only after being created that the guidance is taken over by the *Sephirot*.

25 *How is each Jew a guarantor for his fellow Jew?*

“*Kol Israel ‘Arevim ze la ze*”, every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow Jew. The majority of the *Tikunim* (rectifications), as explained in the Kabbalah, are not realized by one, but more by the actions of many. The *Geulah* (liberation) will come as a result of the efforts of all Israel.

26 *How is man at the image of the supernal form?*

Man is as the image of the *Sephirotic* tree and the higher lights, his soul has 613 parts and he has 248 limbs and 365 veins for a total of 613. Correspondingly, a *Sephira* or a configuration comprise of 613 main forces or lights, which afterward divide into many parts. This structure is also similar in the Torah, which has 248 positive and 365 negative commandments.

27 *What is the name of 72?*

The name of ‘A”V (72) is made of seventy two triplets of letters from three verses of the *Torah*.

¹³ “Book of Formation” attributed to Abraham

It is hinted in the book of *Shemot*¹⁴ chapt 14, from the three *Pesukim* (verses) 18, 19, 20, which have 72 letters each. From these three verses, we take the first letter of verse 18, the last letter of verse 19, the first letter of verse 20, than the second of verse 18, the before last of verse 19 and the second of verse 20, and so on to get 72 triplets. Each one of these triplets of letters, as explained in the *Zohar*, has particular powers.

28 ***What are the different levels of prophecy?***

The prophecy originates from the *Sephira Netsa'h* or the *Sephira Hod*. These *Sephirot* have three parts each. The difference between the levels of the prophets, depends from which one of the three parts of these *Sephirot*, they receive the prophecy.

¹⁴ Exodus