

Feature Article: JAK045

## KABBALAH: GETTING BACK TO THE GARDEN

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### SYNOPSIS

The publicity surrounding Madonna, Demi Moore, and other entertainers who are studying Kabbalah has brought this previously obscure teaching from medieval Judaism into the limelight. Traditionally, only married Jewish men over the age of 40 who have studied the Torah (the first five books of Hebrew scripture) are allowed to study this form of Jewish mysticism. Today, however, several teachers, including Rabbi Philip Berg who founded the Kabbalah Centre, are promoting Kabbalah as a tool for everyone. The Kabbalah Centre has several dozen locations worldwide and attracts students from a variety of faiths and backgrounds.

Kabbalah, an esoteric teaching that supposedly dates from the time of Abraham and reached its peak in medieval Spain, is based on the belief that the Torah is an encoded message with hidden meanings. In it, Kabbalists say, is information about *Ein Sof*, the creator God, whom we can know only in a limited way through the Tree of Life, which represents the 10 emanations of *Ein Sof*. God's light is flowing downward toward man through this tree and through the *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine aspect of God.

The worldview of Kabbalah is reminiscent of Eastern spirituality and Gnosticism in its teaching of reincarnation and mystical concepts. The goal in Kabbalah is to restore the lost garden of Eden by doing good deeds and working our way up the Tree of Life back to the divine source of all. The teachings of Kabbalah stand in contrast to the biblical concept of a personal God who redeems His creatures and His creation through the work of Christ on the cross.

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We are stardust, We are golden, We are billion-year-old carbon, And we've got to get ourselves  
Back to the garden. (Joni Mitchell, "Woodstock")

For a short while in 2004, Target department stores were selling a red string bracelet as part of a Red String Package for \$25.99. The source of this package was the Kabbalah Centre in Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> This bracelet, called a *bendel*, has adorned the wrists of entertainers such as Madonna and Britney Spears, who have been studying this form of Jewish mysticism at the Kabbalah Centre.<sup>2</sup> An authentic *bendel* is one that has been cut from a string that has been wrapped seven times around the tomb of the biblical matriarch Rachel in Bethlehem and purportedly brings its wearer protection and luck.<sup>3</sup> The Kabbalah Centre also sells Kabbalah water that is charged with "positive energy."<sup>4</sup>

The Kabbalah Centre, run by Rabbi Philip Berg (who writes as Rav P. S. Berg), has at least 50 locations around the world and has distributed millions of books in 20 languages.<sup>5</sup> Berg's son, Rabbi Yehuda Berg, authored *The Power of Kabbalah* and *The 72 Names of God: Technology for the Soul* (Kabbalah Publishing, 2003). Rabbi Michael Berg, Berg's other son, is editor of the 22 volumes of the Zohar, the sacred text of Kabbalah, and author of other books, including *The Secret* and *Becoming God*. According to Yehuda Berg,

more than 18,000 students are enrolled in Kabbalah Centre classes in the United States, and another 90,000 are active members. The organization's Web site is visited by 90,000 people monthly.<sup>6</sup>

Kabbalah, traditionally, is studied only by married Jewish men who are over the age of 40 and have studied the Torah.<sup>7</sup> Some traditional Kabbalists say Berg, who has popularized Kabbalah in recent years, has commercialized it, offering it to anyone who is willing to study; however, Kabbalah was already being presented to mainstream culture via other writers, such as Rabbi David Cooper, whose book, *God Is a Verb*, was a bestseller in the late 1990s, and Kabbalah scholar Daniel C. Matt.

### WHAT IS KABBALAH?

Kabbalah is a body of mystical and esoteric beliefs based on commentaries on the Torah, the first five books of Hebrew Scripture (Genesis to Deuteronomy). The term *kabbalah* comes from a Hebrew root word, *kbl*, which means "to receive."<sup>8</sup> The Jewish Talmud, a collection of ancient Rabbinic writings, teaches that the secrets of Kabbalah are to be "carefully controlled."<sup>9</sup> This is one reason its current popularity is unsettling to traditional Kabbalists.

Yehuda Berg states that Kabbalah is the "hidden wisdom" that has been kept secret for centuries, but now is coming into the open for a society fraught with social and spiritual problems.<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Cooper says that Jewish mysticism satisfies people's need for a "connection with the great unknown; we want to experience the secrets of other realities and the meaning of life."<sup>11</sup> Kabbalah "discusses angels and demons, souls' journeys after death, reincarnation, resurrection, and the goal of achieving messianic consciousness" – topics that make some Jewish teachers uncomfortable.<sup>12</sup>

According to Philip Berg, Kabbalah "predates and transcends" any religion or nation.<sup>13</sup> It is not about "rote obedience of laws and commands," he says; rather, it is a spiritual tool that enables us to regain unity with God, "to reenter the Eden from which we were exiled."<sup>14</sup> Berg explains that one must set aside "linear, mechanistic" ways of rational thought in order to fully grasp Kabbalah teachings.<sup>15</sup>

### THE ZOHAR: A MANY SPLENDORED PUZZLE

Kabbalah incorporates many writings, but its fundamental text is the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, commonly called the *Zohar*, which means "the Book of Radiance" or "the Book of Splendor." This multivolume text contains accounts of conversations between legendary rabbis interspersed with commentaries on the hidden meanings of the Torah. Kabbalists consider the Torah to be an encoded document with hidden truths or meanings that must be discovered (decoded) and interpreted.<sup>16</sup> In it is all the "wisdom of creation."<sup>17</sup>

Matt states that the Zohar is a commentary "written in the form of a mystical novel" that reveals the deeper level of meanings in the Torah.<sup>18</sup> One method of discovering the "deeper" or secret meanings of words in the Torah is through *gematria*. There are several variations of *gematria*, but essentially it is a system in which each Hebrew letter is assigned a numerical value and certain procedures are performed using these numbers in order to "decode" the underlying messages of the text.<sup>19</sup>

Cooper, like Matt, teaches that the Torah can be studied on four levels, represented by the acronym PRDS, which stands for *pardes*, meaning an "orchard" or "garden." *P* (*p'shat*) is the literal meaning of the text; *R* (*remez*) is the metaphors, allegories, and parables of the text; *D* (*drosh*) is the meaning found through using additional material to interpret the text; and *S* (*samekh*) is the "secret, hidden meanings that offer insights into the structure of the universe."<sup>20</sup> This last and deepest level is very difficult and can be grasped only after "considerable study."<sup>21</sup>

The earliest teachings of the Zohar are found in the Book of Formation, allegedly revealed to Abraham by God around 2000 BC.<sup>22</sup> Yehuda Berg claims that wisdom from this book was carried East and developed into the religions we know today as Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. He also says this book is cited in the Qur'an and the Book of Mormon.<sup>23</sup>

The next foundational piece of the Zohar was "revealed" in the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses. According to Kabbalists, these were not commandments, but a code for the 10 *sefirot*, which are emanations or aspects of God's nature. After Moses, then, Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle allegedly were

influenced by Kabbalah. The final revelation of Kabbalah was given around AD 160 to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who revealed the full body of knowledge in the Zohar. This in turn explained the secrets of the Book of Formation.<sup>24</sup> Shimon's master was the legendary Rabbi Akiva, who is often mentioned in Kabbalah teachings.

Concealed for centuries, Zohar manuscripts in the Aramaic language were uncovered by the Spanish Kabbalist Moses de Leon in the thirteenth century. He claimed to have copied these manuscripts, which contained "invented words" and "erotic symbolism."<sup>25</sup> It is believed, however, that he wrote some of the text, perhaps with other Kabbalists. Parts of the Zohar may have been transmitted through automatic writing, a technique familiar to Kabbalists, wherein one's hand is supposedly "guided" by spirits while in a trance.<sup>26</sup>

Further revelation came in the sixteenth century with the commentary of Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the *Ari*, or "Holy Lion." According to Yehuda Berg, Luria's teachings became the "definitive school of Kabbalistic thought."<sup>27</sup> Other students of Kabbalah whom Berg mentions were Dr. John Dee, royal astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I, and Sir Isaac Newton.<sup>28</sup>

Matt states that the Zohar has many unknown words, puzzles, grammatical mistakes, oxymorons, puns, parables, and contradictory statements that force the reader to search for the meaning and to examine common assumptions about God and about one's self.<sup>29</sup> Kabbalists believe that the Zohar itself has a mystical effect on the world when its teachings are revealed. When we learn to use the tools of Kabbalah, "we reveal Light in the world and hasten the return to Eden."<sup>30</sup>

### THE CREATOR AND CREATION: LIGHT AND VESSELS

In Kabbalah, the creator God is *Ein Sof*, which literally means "endless."<sup>31</sup> According to Rabbi David Cooper, *Ein Sof* "should not be called Creator, Almighty, Father, Mother, Infinite, the One, Braham, Buddhamind, Allah, Adonoy, Elohim, El, or Shaddai," and "should never be called He."<sup>32</sup> These names are merely aspects of *Ein Sof*; we can only know *Ein Sof* in ways that transcend thought.<sup>33</sup> According to Matt, the God of the Bible is one of the higher emanations of *Ein Sof*, since Genesis 1:1, he says, actually reads, "With beginning, It [*Ein Sof*] created God."<sup>34</sup> *Ein Sof* pervades all creation, so that even a stone has divinity; all existence is pervaded by Deity.<sup>35</sup>

Commentators on the Zohar offer various explanations of the creation account. One states that *Ein Sof* emanated a spark, "from which emerged and radiated all light," and this constituted the upper world. A lower world was created from a light "without brightness," which represents a lower consciousness.<sup>36</sup>

Another explains that the physical world came about from a spark or light, which expanded and gave birth through various points or emanations of the divine being. *Ein Sof* descended through these points until the physical world resulted. According to some commentators, this original light was hidden in the garden of Eden; according to others, it was hidden in the Torah.<sup>37</sup>

A third says that there was originally energy, a "Light" whose essence was joy and fulfillment. In order to share this essence, the Light created a "Vessel" that had an infinite desire to receive. The Vessel, however, received some of the Creator's (Light's) desire to share. This tension between a desire to give and a desire to receive shattered the Vessel and the Light withdrew. This caused the cosmological big bang, from which emanated matter. The Light stepped back to allow the Vessel "time and space in which to evolve its own divine nature."<sup>38</sup>

The Book of Formation teaches that the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are "energy" and "frequency patterns" that helped to mediate creation.<sup>39</sup> These letters are antenna that "arouse and harness the energy of the universe."<sup>40</sup> Meditating on, reciting, or merely scanning these letters with one's eyes creates a channel between the Light of the Creator and one's soul, and thus creates an internal change within the soul.<sup>41</sup>

According to Michael Berg, we receive Light by learning to share. We reconnect with the Light and are thus able to become vessels of Light. We must become like the Creator in our essence by changing from receiving to sharing and thereby attaining fulfillment and joy.<sup>42</sup> He states that sharing is not a matter of good deeds, righteousness, or enlightenment, but it brings us fulfillment through acting in "self-interest in the highest sense."<sup>43</sup> Phillip Berg writes that we must have the desire to "receive in order to share" so

that the Vessel will be able to receive the Light “in full force.”<sup>44</sup> Our actions in the physical world create “channels that connect us to the Divine.”<sup>45</sup>

There seem to be some parallels between this teaching and the emphasis in Gnosticism on the remote, unknowable divine being and on the Light. In one Gnostic account, for example, wisdom sends her daughter, Eve, to awaken Adam, who has no soul, so that “his descendants might become vessels of the light.”<sup>46</sup>

### THE TREE OF LIFE: A TREE OF LIGHT

Another core teaching of Kabbalah is the Tree of Life, which represents the 10 emanations and aspects of Ein Sof.<sup>47</sup> This is often graphically illustrated as an inverted tree, with the root (the first point) at the top growing downward into three “branches” that each have three points. The points on the right branch represent masculine, positive energy; the points on the left branch represent feminine, negative energy; and the points in the middle balance the ones on the right and left.<sup>48</sup> It is also illustrated by a chart of 10 interconnected points laid out in this same fashion (see fig. 1). The divine Light becomes less bright as it travels down through these emanations toward the bottom point.

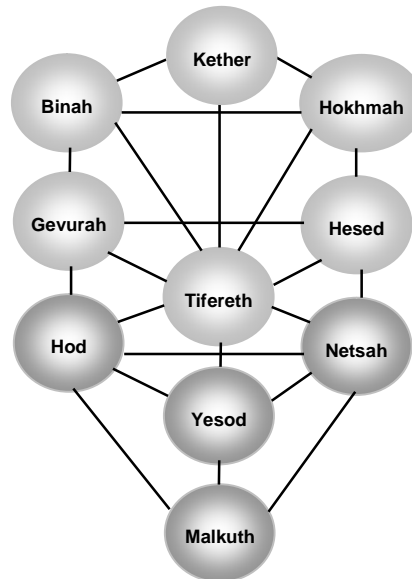


Figure 1

These emanations were a “primal beginning,”<sup>49</sup> and are called the 10 *sefirot* (*sefirah* in the singular). The *sefirot* represent the model of man’s original nature.<sup>50</sup> From the top down, the first one is *Keter* (crown), which adorns the head of Adam, who is made in the image of God. The next two are *Hokhmah* (wisdom) on the right and *Binah* (understanding) on the left.<sup>51</sup> *Binah* is the womb, the “Divine Mother,” who conceives the seven lower *sefirot*.<sup>52</sup> These seven lower *sefirot*, according to some, represent lower or ordinary consciousness and what happens in the physical world.<sup>53</sup> In order downward, the remaining seven are: First, on the right, *Hesed* (loving kindness) and on the left, *Gevurah* (strength); in the middle is *Tiferet* (beauty), son of *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. Second, on the right, *Netsah* (victory or eternity) and on the left, *Hod* (splendor), both being the source of prophecy; in the middle is the ninth *sefirah*, *Yesod* (foundation), which represents the phallus, the “procreative life force of the cosmos.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, the tenth point at the bottom and in the middle is *Malkhut* (kingdom), a manifestation of the material universe where we live.<sup>55</sup> *Gevurah*, the fifth emanation, is the beginning of physicality, and associated with this *sefirah* is the archangel Samael, known as the Adversary. *Gevurah* can thus be destructive.<sup>56</sup>

Philip Berg states that it is at the point of *Malkhut* (or *Malchut*) that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil “sinks its roots in a mirror image of the Tree of Life.”<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Matt calls this point *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine, and states that the union of the lower *Shekhinah* with the upper *Tiferet* is the goal of spiritual life, and is seen in the human marriage bonds.<sup>58</sup> (The breaking of this male/female tie is considered by some to have been Adam’s sin.) *Shekhinah* is often spoken of as the “Divine Feminine or the feminine face of God”<sup>59</sup> or “the female aspect of the Light”<sup>60</sup> or the feminine “Divine Presence.”<sup>61</sup> The *Shekhinah* is also referred to as the “Apple Orchard” or the “Mystical Garden of Eden.”<sup>62</sup>

Kabbalah teaches that God’s blessings flow to the world through the Tree of Life when there is ethical behavior among humans; evil actions disrupt the union of the sefirot and empower demonic activity. God and humankind are interdependent—God needs humans in order to manifest his attributes in the world.<sup>63</sup> Matt writes that humans are to be vessels for God’s power and creativity, and that without us, God is incomplete and cannot realize the divine “design in and for the world.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, we are “co-creators” with “God Itself.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Kabbalah, a person must metaphorically and spiritually ascend the 10 points of the Tree of Life to reunite with the Divine. As one increases his or her spiritual capabilities, one increases the capacity to contain more of the Light that pours down through these 10 emanations, and so draws nearer to the Creator as he or she ascends.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the Tree of Life symbolizes the Divine and offers the way for humans to be reunited with the source from whence we came. Kabbalah, according to one writer, is not about worship or belief, but rather “becomes a direct path of communion between the individual and the Divine.”<sup>67</sup>

### IN THE GARDEN: THE SHATTERING OF VESSELS

In Kabbalah, Adam and Eve are viewed as symbols of male and female energy, and as a metaphor for the “primordial Vessel” whose existence came before creation, thus encompassing all the souls of humanity to come.<sup>68</sup> The presence of the Serpent, considered a fragmenting force, was necessary for creation; otherwise, all would have remained united with God.<sup>69</sup> This gave man the opportunity to earn the Light on his own.<sup>70</sup>

One of the hidden meanings in the creation story, according to Kabbalah, is that there are two gardens of Eden—one above, and one below—and reuniting these two gardens is the goal of humankind.<sup>71</sup> Yehuda Berg believes that the forbidden fruit was a sexual act between Eve and the Serpent.<sup>72</sup> Matt interprets Adam’s sin as driving out the *Shekhinah* by eating only from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and not from the Tree of Life, thus separating the *Shekhinah* from her “husband,” *Tiferet*, and separating consciousness from unconsciousness.<sup>73</sup> This act caused Adam and Eve to lose their garments of light and fall into a lower physical form, becoming clothed with garments of animal skin.<sup>74</sup>

Philip Berg’s interpretation of the fall is that Adam and Eve chose with good intentions to have more Light, since this is what the Serpent offered. Their choice was wrong, but because the Serpent’s temptation enhanced the difficulty of their choice, it was also worthy.<sup>75</sup> This sounds contradictory, but Berg explains that evil comes from God and serves the Creator. Cooper says that everything, including evil, has a divine nature.<sup>76</sup> Adam and Eve took a second bite of the fruit, done out of self-serving motives, thus short-circuiting their ability to receive the fullness of the Creator’s Light and moving them back to the material level with a knowledge of death and evil.<sup>77</sup> God’s command that Adam must now work the land was not literal; rather, it meant that he must “rebuild the Vessel of [himself] through [his] own work in the world.”<sup>78</sup>

The Tree of Life, Kabbalah teaches, is a fountain of God’s light, flowing ever downward. This was free flowing in the garden of Eden, but humankind has disrupted this flow and is in shattered vessels, which it must rebuild on its own. The garden must be regained.

### THE ART OF CORRECTION AND REDEMPTION

Kabbalah, like Eastern religions, teaches reincarnation—the belief that we die and are reborn, living many lives, ever seeking to advance spiritually. Kabbalah explains this as a process of “repairing our broken vessels,” which may take many lifetimes. This process of reparation and “mending the world through intense soul-work and acts of creative love and justice” is called *tikkun*, and is also referred to as “healing” or “correction.”<sup>79</sup>

Kabbalists believe that a wise soul, called a *tzaddik*, is able to affect the upper world and help bring more light into creation. They view the biblical patriarchs as such people.<sup>80</sup> When a critical mass of humanity spiritually advances, they say, it tips the scale in favor of all humanity, and will bring everyone back to a connection with the immortality we had before the fall.<sup>81</sup> We all have sparks of the Divine and are shards, albeit broken ones, of the original Vessel in the Garden. We can fix ourselves and regain what was lost in the fall.<sup>82</sup> All will be readmitted to Paradise.<sup>83</sup> Our days spent doing good deeds are “woven into a garment of splendor that will clothe the soul as she enters God’s presence in the world to come.”<sup>84</sup>

On the practical level, Kabbalah teaches a person how to climb the Tree of Life, the branches of which are like “rungs on a ladder to enlightenment.”<sup>85</sup> Cooper explains that there are three ways to ascend to higher consciousness: through study and scrutiny of behavior; through seclusion, contemplation, and soul-searching; or through a constant awareness of the implications of everything one does.<sup>86</sup> Any action in the universe affects the rest of the universe; thus, we are to be mindful of our actions.<sup>87</sup>

Yehuda Berg gives detailed advice on how one can overcome selfish, reactive behavior with unselfish, proactive behavior. In fact, Berg considers *Satan* to be a code word for the “ego-driven, reactive behavior” through which we seek to receive for the self alone; this we must avoid.<sup>88</sup> He offers several principles for being proactive, such as: never blame others or external events, obstacles are an opportunity to connect to the Light, internal change is created through the Hebrew alphabet, and the negative traits one sees in others are reflections of one’s own negative traits.<sup>89</sup> Berg also teaches what he calls the “Certainty Principle.” Using the story of the exodus as an example, he explains that God did not part the Red Sea; instead, Moses and the Israelites proceeded with certainty and this gave them the power to part the waters. When one overcomes one’s reactive nature, one will be given the ability to overcome the natural laws, but one must act with certainty.<sup>90</sup> Berg also explains that one of the tools Moses used was the 72 names of God, a sequence of letters that gave him “access to the subatomic realm of nature.”<sup>91</sup>

Philip Berg emphasizes that we must accept responsibility for everything in our lives, even our own death.<sup>92</sup> We “print our own ticket” back to Paradise through our individual work.<sup>93</sup> Michael Berg advises us to rediscover who we truly are, to realize that we must share in order to take on the Creator’s essence. By doing this, we will bring about the world’s transformation, and can even bring about the end of pain, suffering, and death itself.<sup>94</sup> According to Philip Berg, this final transformation will happen upon the arrival of the Messiah.<sup>95</sup>

### KOSHER KABBALAH? THE CRITICS AND THE HYPE

The Kabbalah Centre has been severely criticized by some Orthodox Jewish rabbis for commercializing and undermining the teachings of the Kabbalah. The Bergs teach men and women of all ages and faith backgrounds, who have little or no knowledge of the Torah, and they do a brisk business of selling books and other Kabbalah products. The recent publicity has led traditional Kabbalists to decry the teachings of the Kabbalah Centre as watered-down, pop-culture Kabbalah. According to Adin Steinsaltz, a Hasidic rabbi in Jerusalem, the relationship between these teachings and authentic Kabbalah is like “the relationship between pornography and love.”<sup>96</sup> Another rabbi said that the two versions of Kabbalah are as different as the children’s TV character “Barney” and a prehistoric dinosaur.<sup>97</sup> (See the sidebar for an overview of traditional Kabbalah.)

What also has seemingly incensed so many rabbis against the Kabbalah Centre is its connection with entertainers like Madonna, which gives the appearance of a celebrity culture merrily partaking of an ancient wisdom. Orthodox Jewish rabbis consider Kabbalah to be a sacred treasure that should be approached with reverence and respect. They claim that this attitude is sorely lacking in those associated with the Kabbalah Centre.

The Kabbalah Centre’s connection to celebrities and its commercialization of Kabbalah products has made it a more visible target of criticism. It should be noted, however, that the Kabbalah Centre is not the first to offer Kabbalah outside of its usual tradition. Teachings on the Kabbalah have been available to the general public since the latter half of the twentieth century, including through several books cited in this article. In the 1980s, an organization in which I taught astrology offered a popular two-year course on Kabbalah.

## THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: ESOTERIC VERSUS CLEAR REVELATION

In order to respond to those who are studying or are interested in Kabbalah, Christians must understand and be able to explain how Kabbalah's teachings differ from essential Christian doctrines. The first step should be to show that Ein Sof and the God of the Bible are not the same. Ein Sof is considered to be remote and unknowable, and the Tree of Life is believed to be a revelation of Ein Sof's attributes. The biblical God, however, is not remote; He is intimately involved with His creatures and has revealed His attributes through nature (Rom. 1:20), His Word (Heb. 1:1), and Christ (John 14:9), not through mysterious puzzles.

Kabbalah presents Ein Sof's attributes more as abstract principles than as personal qualities. The God of the Bible, however, is revealed as having personal attributes; He can think (Ps. 147:5), feel (Ps. 116:15), and will (Rev. 4:11), and He relates to His creatures (humans) in whom He also placed those personal attributes (Gen. 1:26-27).

Ein Sof's attributes are said to be dualistic (male and female), and opposites are in balance within Ein Sof. The biblical God is *one* (Deut. 6:4); He is a perfect unity of righteousness, justice, truth, mercy, and love, but these do not coexist in balance with their opposites within God. The Bible clearly states, for example, that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5 NASB), and that the God of truth "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2 NASB).

Ein Sof is incomplete, since he needs man in order to complete his plan. An incomplete God, however, is an imperfect God, and cannot be God at all. If God is the standard for righteousness, He must be perfect and complete. The God of the Bible existed from all eternity (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:17) in complete perfection in Himself (Exod. 3:14; Matt. 5:48; Acts 17:25). His creation of man was not out of necessity, but for His pleasure (Rev. 4:11).

The second step is to explain the difference between the two understandings of the Torah. Kabbalah teaches that the Torah is encoded with hidden meanings. In contrast, historic Christian interpretation assumes that God communicated the Torah to Moses in a normal fashion, and that the text says what it appears to say; there is no hidden meaning. Understanding ancient Hebrew grammar, history, culture, and literary style is a sufficient method of interpreting the text. Seeking hidden meanings is a hallmark of gnosticism and occultism. Such a method can lead to imposing any foreign meaning on a text that one wishes. Furthermore, this understanding implies that the Torah is insufficient revelation, since the Zohar is needed to uncover its meaning; thus, the additional revelation (the Zohar) is more complicated than the Torah. An esoteric text, however, does not clarify a plain text. The God who created humans is able to communicate sufficiently to them in the Torah; no special key to unlock its meaning is needed.

Kabbalah is essentially gnostic; that is, one must learn the spiritual secrets of the Torah through the cryptic and intricate Zohar, and then advance through knowledge and actions. This is in strong contrast to biblical Christianity, which is essentially relational and is based on a clear, direct revelation from a personal God and on the historical death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. We do not need to delve into esoteric realms to find the truth; it is readily found in God's Word, and was declared by the Messiah, Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Nor do we earn redemption by doing good works; rather, redemption is provided through Christ's atonement. When one trusts Christ, one knows God and is adopted by Him as a child (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).

In Kabbalah, the *Shekhinah* is sometimes called Eden, and the Torah is the garden where the Creator hid the light. By becoming vessels of light, we can regain Eden. In contrast, the Bible teaches that it is God who will redeem all creation, making it a "new heaven" and a "new earth" (Isa. 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13). This redemption began with Christ's death on the cross, the greatest *tikkun* of all. His work provided healing for all who trust Christ and ultimately for the whole physical creation (Rom. 8:21-23).<sup>98</sup> In trusting Christ, we are reconciled with our Creator, delivered from His wrath on sin, and gain a relationship with God who loves us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:9; 2 Cor. 5:17-19). Light versus darkness is a theme in Kabbalah and in the Bible. The true light, however, is not in the Tree of Life, but in Christ, who proclaimed, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12).

## NOTES

1. Heather Svokos, "Kabbalah Bracelets Strung up in Serious Religious Debate," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 18, 2004, <http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/living/9380270.htm?1c>.
2. Various spellings for Kabbalah exist, including Qabala, Kabballa, Kabala, and others.
3. Svokos.
4. Jim Remsen, "Kabbalah Secrets on the Main Line," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 31, 2003 (<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/magazine/daily/6422453.htm>).
5. Michael Berg, *The Secret* (New York: The Kabbalah Centre, 2004), 89.
6. Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "A Surge in Popularity in Jewish Mysticism," *New York Times*, December 13, 2003 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/13/national/13RELI.html>).
7. Remsen.
8. Rabbi David A. Cooper, *God Is a Verb* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 11.
9. *Ibid.*, vii.
10. Yehuda Berg, *The Power of the Kabbalah* (Kabbalah Centre International, 2001), xix, xxv, xxvi.
11. *Ibid.*, viii.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Rav P. S. Berg, *The Essential Zohar* (New York: Bell Tower, Crown Publishing Group: 2002), 61, 211.
14. *Ibid.*, 4.
15. *Ibid.*, 3.
16. P. Berg, 61, 211; also Y. Berg, 46–47.
17. Cooper, 53.
18. Daniel C. Matt, *Zohar: Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, VT: Skylights Path Publishing, 2002), xxi. Matt is currently working on translating the Zohar into English.
19. Cooper, 52–53.
20. *Ibid.*, 47.
21. *Ibid.*, 50.
22. P. Berg, 5; also Y. Berg, 232.
23. Y. Berg, 232.
24. *Ibid.*, 234, 236.
25. Matt, xxiv.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Y. Berg, 241.
28. *Ibid.*, 241–42, 245.
29. Matt, xxv.
30. P. Berg, 118.
31. Matt, xxiii.
32. Cooper, 65.
33. Cooper, 67–68.
34. Matt, 12.
35. Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco and HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 24; Will Parfitt, *The Elements of the Kabbalah* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1991), 68.
36. Cooper, 35.
37. Matt, *Zohar*, 14, 16.
38. Y. Berg, 61.
39. P. Berg, 5; also Y. Berg, 185.
40. Y. Berg, 185.
41. *Ibid.*, 193.
42. M. Berg, 36, 51.
43. *Ibid.*, 36, 52.
44. P. Berg, 59, 246.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature & History of Gnosticism*, trans. R. McL. Wilson et al. (Leipzig, Germany: Koehler and Amelang, 1977; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984; New York: HarperSanFrancisco and HarperCollins Publishers, 1987), 98.
47. Also *Ain Soph*; some writers refer to *Ein Sof* by name; others use the term *God*, though these two are not always considered the same depending on what is meant by the term *God*.
48. P. Berg, 16.
49. Matt, *Zohar*, xxiii.
50. *Ibid.*, xxvi.
51. Spellings may vary; for example, *Hokhmah* can also be found as *Chochmah*.
52. P. Berg, 18; Matt, *Zohar*, xxvi.
53. Cooper, 91.
54. Matt, *Zohar*, xxvii.
55. P. Berg, 20.
56. *Ibid.*, 19.



57. Ibid., 21.
58. Matt, *Zohar*, xxvii.
59. Andrew Harvey and Anne Baring, *The Divine Feminine* (Berkeley: Godsfeld Press, 1996), 86.
60. P. Berg, 87.
61. Matt, *Zohar*, 8.
62. Harvey, 89.
63. Matt, *Zohar*, xxix.
64. Ibid., xvi.
65. Ibid.
66. P. Berg, 15.
67. Harvey, 86.
68. Cooper, 43; P. Berg, 245–46.
69. Cooper, 87.
70. Y. Berg, 217.
71. Ibid., 51.
72. Ibid., 49, 56.
73. Matt, *Zohar*, 18.
74. Ibid., 48.
75. P. Berg, 246–47.
76. Cooper, 160.
77. Ibid., 118, 248–49.
78. Ibid., 119.
79. Matt, xi; Cooper, 249.
80. P. Berg, 156–64; 193.
81. Ibid., 244.; also Y. Berg, 220.
82. P. Berg, 139, 249–51.
83. Ibid., 121.
84. Matt, *Zohar*, 46.
85. Ibid., 120.
86. Cooper, 171–72.
87. Ibid., 179.
88. Y. Berg, 109, 117.
89. Ibid., throughout book but summarized on 230–31.
90. Ibid., 173.
91. Ibid., 195.
92. P. Berg, 120.
93. Ibid., 121.
94. M. Berg, 51–52; 90–91.
95. P. Berg, 162.
96. Cohen.
97. Elihu Salpeter, “Pop Kabbalah,” Haaretz.com, uly 14, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArtVty.jhtml?itemNo=451278>.
98. Complete redemption of our bodies and of the physical creation is in the future after Christ’s return.