

Kabala, The : A Hebrew and Jewish system of theosophy. The word signifies "doctrines received from tradition." In ancient Hebrew literature the name was used to denote the entire body of religious writings, the Pentateuch excepted. It is only in the early Middle Ages that the system of theosophy known as Kabbalism was designated by that name. We will first consider the *Kabala* as a literary production before proceeding to examine it in the light of a hand-book of Hebrew occultism. The main sources which went to the making of the *Kabala* are the *Sepher Yesirah* or Book of Creation, which is a combination of medi2eval mysticism and science. The date of origin of this work has been matter of great argument, but it is perhaps safest to say that it seems to be earlier than the ninth century A.D. The *Bahir* or brilliant is first quoted by Nahmanides, and is usually attributed to his teacher, Ezra. It owes much to the *Sepher Yesirah*, and to a great extent foreshadows the *Zohar*, which is a commentary on the *Pentateuch*, including eleven dissertations on that book,—the most important of which are the *Book of Secrets*, the *Secret of Secrets*, the *Mysteries of the Pentateuch*, and the *Hidden Interpretation*. It pretends to the authorship of Simon ben Yohai in the second century, and it is alleged that he drew his sources from traditional dialogues between God and Adam in Paradise. It is further stated that it was discovered in a cavern in Galilee where it had been hidden for one thousand years. It has been proved almost beyond doubt, however, that it was written in the thirteenth century, and the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusades is alluded to. It is also believed that Moses de Leon (1240 – 1305), who died in 1305, and who circulated and sold the *Zohar*, was himself its author. At the same time there is no doubt that it enshrines a large number of very ancient and important Hebrew traditions. The matter contained in the *Kabala* deals with the nature of God, the *sephiroth* or divine emanations, of angels and of man. God, known in the *Kabala* as *En Soph*, fills and contains the universe. As he is boundless, mind cannot conceive him, so in a certain mystical sense he is non-existent. The doctrine of the *sephiroth* is undoubtedly the most important to be met with in the pages of the *Kabala*. To justify his existence the Deity had to become active and creative, and this he achieved through the medium of the ten *sephiroth* or intelligences which emanated from him like rays proceeding from a luminary. The first *sephiroth* or emanation was the wish to become manifest, and this contained nine other intelligences or *sephiroth*, which again emanate one from the other—the second from the first, the third from the second, and so forth. These are known as the Crown, Wisdom, Intelligence, Love, Justice, Beauty, Firmness, Splendour, Foundation and Kingdom. From the junction of pairs of *sephiroth*, other emanations were formed: thus from Wisdom and Intelligence proceeded Love or Mercy and from Mercy and Justice, Beauty. The *sephiroth* are also symbolical of primordial man and the heavenly man, of which earthly man is the shadow. They form three triads which respectively represent intellectual, moral, and physical qualities: the first, Wisdom, Intelligence and Crown; the second Love, Justice and Beauty; the third Firmness, Splendour and Foundation. The whole is circled or bound by Kingdom, the ninth *sephiroth*. Each of these triads symbolises a portion of the human frame: the first the head; the second the arms; the third the legs. It must be understood that though 'those *sephiroth* are emanations from God they remain a portion, and simply represent different aspects of the One Being.

Kabbalistic cosmology posits four different worlds, each of which forms a sephiric system of a decade of emanations, which were verified in the following manner: the world of emanations or the heavenly man, a direct emanation from the *En Soph*. From it is produced the world of creation, or the *Briatic* world of pure nature, but yet not so spiritual as the first. The angel Metatron inhabits it and constitutes the world of pure spirit. He governs the visible world and guides the revolutions of the planets. From this is formed the world of formation or the *Yetziratic* world, still less refined, which is the abode of angels. Finally from these emanates the world of action or matter, the dwelling of evil spirits, which contains ten hells, each becoming lower until the depths of diabolical degradation is reached. The prince of this region is Samael,

the evil spirit, the serpent of Genesis, otherwise "the Beast." But the universe was incomplete without the creation of man; the heavenly Adam, that is the tenth *sephiroth*, created the earthly Adam, each member of whose body corresponds to a part of the visible universe. The human form, we are told, is shaped after the four letters which constitute the Jewish tetragrammation, *Jhava*, thus, the letters J h a v a. The souls of the whole human race pre-exist in the world of emanations, and are all destined to inhabit human bodies. Like the *sephiroth* from which it emanates, every soul has ten potentces, consisting of a trinity of triads—spirit, soul, cruder soul or *neptesh*. Each soul, before its entrance into the world consists of male and female united into one being, but when it descends to this earth, the two parts are separated and animate different bodies. The destiny of the soul upon earth is to develop the perfect germs implanted in it, which must ultimately return to *En Soph*. If it does not succeed in acquiring the experience for which it has been sent to earth, it must re-inhabit the body three times till it becomes duly purified. When all the souls in the world of the *sephiroth* shall have passed through this period of probation and returned to the bosom of *En Soph*, the jubilee will commence; even Satan will be restored to his angelic nature, and existence will be a Sabbath without end. The *Kabala* states that these esoteric doctrines are contained in the Hebrew scriptures, but cannot be perceived by the uninitiated; they are, however, plainly revealed to persons of spiritual mind.

Next considering the *Kabala* as occult literature, we find it stated that the philosophical doctrines developed in its pages are found to have been perpetuated by the secret method of oral tradition from the first ages of humanity." The *Kabala*," says Dr. Ginsburg, when explaining the story of its birth,

"was first taught by God Himself to a select company of angels, who formed a theosophic school in Paradise. After the Fall the angels most graciously communicated this heavenly doctrine to the disobedient child of earth, to furnish the protoplasts with the means of returning to their pristine nobility and felicity. From Adam it passed over to Noah, and then to Abraham, the friend of God, who emigrated with it to Egypt, where the patriarch allowed a portion of this mysterious doctrine to ooze out. It was in this way that the Egyptians obtained some knowledge of it, and the other Eastern nations could introduce it into their philosophical systems. Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, was first initiated into the *Kabala* in the land of his birth, but became most proficient in it during his wanderings in the wilderness, when he not only devoted to it the leisure hours of the whole forty years, but received lessons in it from one of the angels. By the aid of this mysterious science the lawgiver was enabled to solve the difficulties which arose during his management of the Israelites, in spite of the pilgrimages, wars, and frequent miseries of the nation. He covertly laid down the principles of this secret doctrine in the first four books of the Pentateuch, but withheld them from Deuteronomy. Moses also initiated the seventy Elders into the secrets of this doctrine, and they again transmitted them from hand to hand. Of all who formed the unbroken line of tradition, David and Solomon were the most deeply initiated into the *Kabala*. No one, however, dared to write it down till Schimeon ben Jochai, who lived at the time of the destruction of the second. After his death, his son, Rabbi Eleazar, and his secretary, Rabbi Abba, as well as his disciples, collated Rabbi Simon Ben Jochai's treatises, and out of these composed the celebrated work called Z H R, *Zohar*, Splendour, which is the grand storehouse of Kabbalism."

The history of Kabbalistic origins, however, is as has been shown almost wholly fabulous, and no evidence worthy of the name can be adduced in its support. The mysticism of the *Mishna* and the *Talmud* must be carefully distinguished from that of the Kabbalistic writings, as they are undoubtedly of very considerable antiquity. But the *Kabala* has certain claims upon the modern student of mysticism. Its philosophical value is not depreciated by its modern origin, and it is regarded by many as an absolute guide to knowledge in

all the most profound problems of existence. Its thesis is extensive and profound, but examination unfortunately proves it to be merely a series of dogmatic hypotheses, a body of positive doctrine based on a central assumption which is incapable of proof. This tradition, says Eliphas Levi, wholly reposes on the single dogma of magic, that the Visible is for us a proportional measure of the Invisible. In fact it proceeds by analogy from the known to the unknown. At the same time, it is a most interesting effort of the human mind.

Mediaeval magic was deeply indebted to Kabalistic combinations of the divine names for the terms of its rituals, and from it it derived the belief in a resident virtue in sacred names and numbers. Certain definite rules are employed to discover the sublime source of power resident in the Jewish scriptures. Thus the words of several verses in the scriptures which are regarded as containing an occult sense, are placed over each other, and the letters are formed into new words by reading them vertically; or the words of the text are arranged in squares in such a manner as to be read vertically or otherwise. Words are joined together and re-divided, and the initial and final letters of certain words are formed into separate words. Again, every letter of the word is reduced to its numerical value, and the word is explained by another of the same quantity. Every letter of a word too is taken to be an initial of an abbreviation of it. The twenty-two letters of the alphabet are divided into two halves, one half is placed above the other, and the two letters which thus become associated are interchanged. This *a* becomes *1*, *b*, *m*, and so on. This cipher alphabet is called *albm* from the first interchanged pairs. The commutation of the twenty-two letters is effected by the last letter of the alphabet taking the place of the first, the last but one the place of the second and so forth. This cipher is called *atbah*. These permutations and combinations are much older than the *Kabala*, and obtained amongst Jewish occultists from time immemorial.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that the *Kabala* has been condemned nowhere more strongly than among the Jews themselves. Jewish orthodoxy has always been suspicious of it, and as Mr. A. E. Waite has well said: "The best lesson we can learn from it is the necessity of scrupulously separating the experimental knowledge of the mystics from their bizarre fields of speculation."

Lewis Spence, *An Encyclopedia of Occultism* (New York, NY: Carol Publishing, 1993), 240-242.

The following drawings are included in the original 1920 edition:

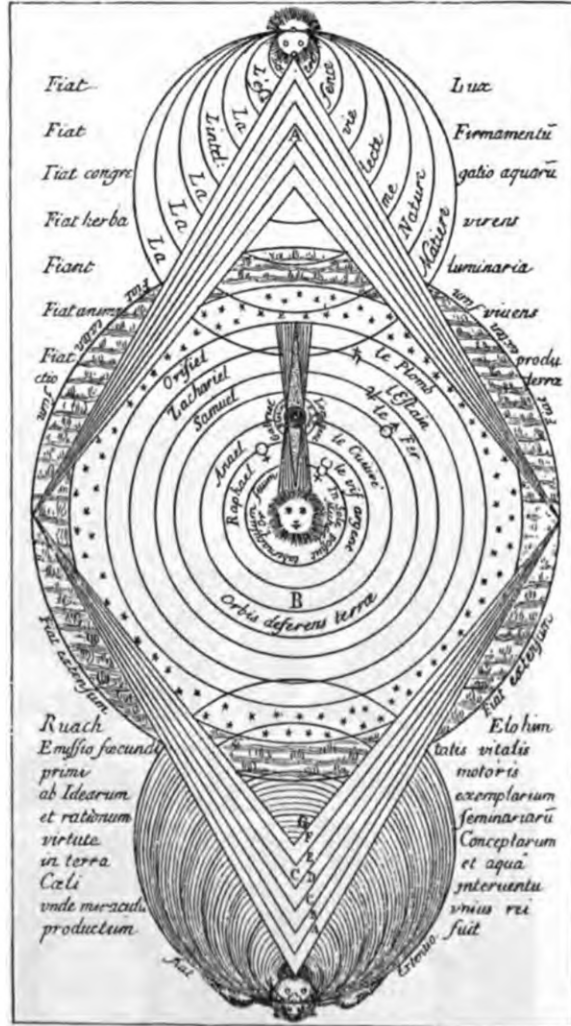


Pantacle of Kabalistic letters



The Magical Head of Zohar

The diagram below illustrates the doctrine of Emanotinos, and has also an alchemical significance in its metallurgical nomenclature of the several circles.



General plan of Kabalistic doctrine

KABALISTIC DIAGRAMS AND SYMBOLS (I)

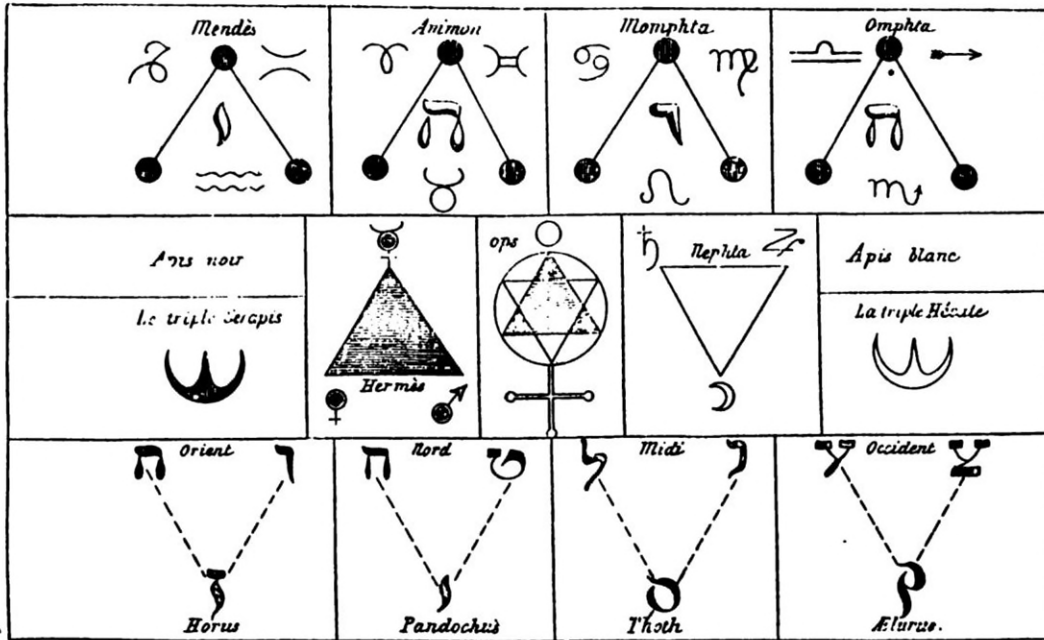
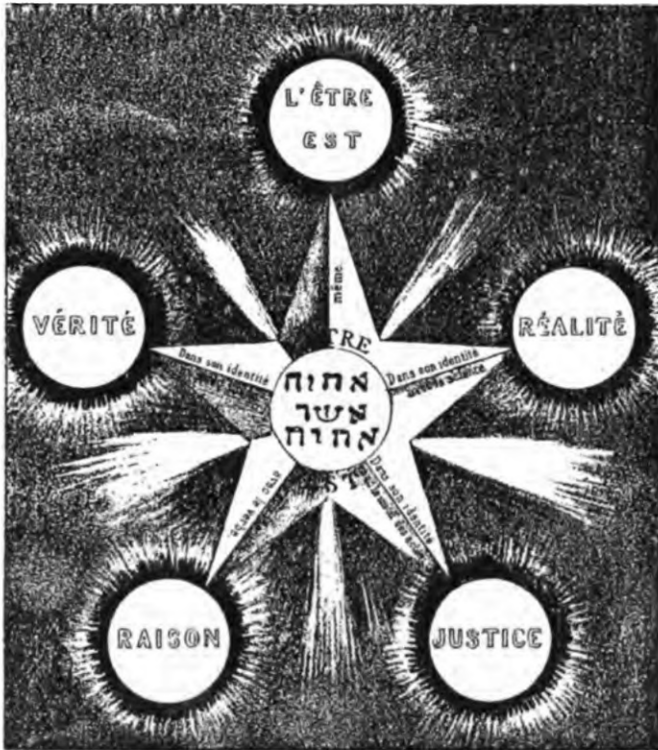


Diagram of the astronomical and alphabetical Tablet of Bembo



Pentagram of the Absolute



The Seven Planets and their genii

KABALISTIC DIAGRAMS AND SYMBOLS (II)