

Kabbalah Today

*By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok
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So Kabbalah has now been in the mainstream for quite a while. It is in almost every Jewish circle, Orthodox and otherwise. What was once shunned and rejected is now warmly embraced and accepted. Why this has come about I don't care. Leave that to the sociologists to discuss. What the proliferation of Kabbalah will mean to both the public and to the Kabbalah itself, this is more my concern.



As much as Kabbalah is now popularized and quoted almost everywhere, very little of it do I see explained properly. The original writers be they Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai and the Arizal of the philosophical schools of Kabbalah and the many others of the meditative and scientific schools each obviously had an agenda of their own and wrote and taught what they did with specific intent. Each author wrote down teachings that had specific meanings. As much as the words of Kabbalah have proliferated, the original meanings behind them are as hidden and unknown as they always have been.

To put it bluntly, as much as people are exposed to Kabbalah today, including many of its so-called teachers, almost none of them understand anything about what it is they are exposed to. They simply have no clue what it is they are reading or studying. I do not view this as being positive in any way. On the contrary, I think this is one of the worse things that can happen. It is sure way to eventually destroy the Kabbalah once and for all.

Originally what has become known as Kabbalah was simply a branch of Torah study devoted to the pursuit of natural science (the name Elokim) and transpersonal psychology (the name YKVK). Mysterious Hebrew names were applied to these pursuits; they were called Ma'aseh Bereshit (the Work of Creation, i.e., science) and Ma'aseh Merkava (the work of the Chariot, i.e., the mind, thus psychology). The Hebrew word Ma'aseh actually means action or doing. This implies that these disciplines were actual hands-on experiential types of activities and not just some academic philosophical pursuit.

The original students of Ma'aseh Bereshit and Ma'aseh Merkava were trained in developing the powers of their minds; to delve into the unconscious and explore its inner potentials. Yet, no potential is of value until it becomes actual; or as the later Kabbalists would say, one must penetrate into the concealed light and reveal it.

The students of these original disciplines could do just this. The adepts of Ma'aseh Bereshit could use the power of their minds, coupled with specific techniques, to bend

the forces of nature and actually alter one reality for another. Through the power of their minds the original adepts of Ma'aseh Merkava could delve so deep into meditation that they could leave their bodies behind and travel to different worlds and dimensions, bringing back with them full reports of what they experienced and often bringing back with them entities from those worlds who stayed on Earth and taught them many things.

No one studying Kabbalah today has even a clue how to do any of these things. All they do is learn about what others have said is real and they never develop the mental disciplines to learn how to see and experience for themselves. Anybody can read a book; anybody can write a book expressing their thoughts and ideas; yet, only the rare few can write and detail what they have seen and experienced for themselves, beyond that which anyone else has written about.

Today more and more Kabbalah books are being written. Indeed, even many ancient, never before published Kabbalistic texts are now being published for the very first time. One can go into any Hebrew bookstore and find shelves and shelves of books just on Kabbalah. One would think this is a great thing. However, just because words have been put on a page does not mean that the human mind reading those words understands them and knows what to do with them. So in spite of their now being so many books available, real Kabbalah still stays as hidden as it always has been.

The original Torah teachings now called Kabbalah were built upon a common denominator; this being the training of the human mind and the sharp discipline of behavioral character. These two pursuits, the honing of both mind and body were the necessary prerequisites one was required to achieve in order to successfully use the scientific powers concealed in Torah and unleashed by the properly trained human mind. The properly trained human mind can tap into all sorts of extra sensory perceptions and through them interact with a much greater segment of our universe.

This was the purpose of Torah all along, to train us how to be full human beings, created in G-d's Image and healed of the damage caused by eating the forbidden fruit in Eden. Following this line of metaphors, this is why Torah is called the Tree of Life. For one who truly taps into its resources can transcend the limitations of the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil. It all depends upon the disciplines of both mind and body.

Needless to say, modern Kabbalah teaches nothing about how this is actualized. So I wonder, is the modern proliferation of Kabbalah such a good thing; when in fact the modern Kabbalah is not really the original Kabbalah at all. In my personal experience, I have seen how pursuit of the modern philosophical Kabbalah has actually served as a distraction, derailing individuals from discovering the real thing. I have seen how modern interest in Kabbalah, for the most part, actually distracts individuals away from Torah and mitzvot and does not bring them towards true character refinement. So then, I am left to ponder, maybe this modern revelation and proliferation of Kabbalah does more harm than good?

The modern student of Kabbalah may consider my concerns to be sacrilege. But, then again, he is only able to view what I say from his viewpoint of philosophical Kabbalah and not the real thing. It makes me sad, but I cannot even take the modern students

seriously. They are for the most part so far removed from the reality of things that we even lack a bridge of communications. What will come of this, Heaven only knows!

Torah is all about life in this world. The original teachings of Ma'aseh Bereshit and Ma'aseh Merkava were also about life in this world and how life in other places interacts with us here. Everything revolved around the here and now. There was never really much interest in the future or in other worlds. The ancients followed Torah and mitzvot. They lived in this world; they were practical in this world and devoted their lives to making this world a better place.

The original Kabbalah, before it became known as such, was taught by Biblical prophet and Sage alike. We read their words in the Torah, Prophets and Writings. All their teachings revolve around the common point that we as individuals have to be better human beings. If one were only to focus on this then all the metaphors and symbols of the philosophical Kabbalah would become obsolete.

Before we learn how to control the laws of science and nature, we had better first learn how to control ourselves. This is Torah; this is the original Kabbalah. I don't see this being emphasized in all the modern mumbo-jumbo calling itself Kabbalah. What a shame; what a scandal.

As long as individuals follow the glitter they will not find the gold. Real gold is buried deep under the ground and needs to be mined. Real Kabbalah knowledge is learned from within; it requires great effort, solitude, introversion, humility and most of all strong character in order to extract it. Who today is willing to make the investment in what is real, as opposed to the majority who just want the quick and easy?

