

# In Defense of the Magical Kabbalah (Ma'asit)

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Some of today's most contested Torah teachings, (in certain religious circles), have very ancient, authentic, Israelite origins. While modern-day religious rationalists make every attempt to re-invent the Torah in their own image, they will be forever faced with the reality, however unknown, that the magical/prophetic teachings of Torah, that they so hotly deny and ignore, are historically the oldest Torah teachings that can be verified in the historical record. One can just look into the Dead Sea Scrolls for proof of this.

While today, religious rationalists of all kinds proliferate in the world, and make every effort to delegitimize the original forms of Torah mysticism, the historical record from the Second Temple period, and the early Tanaaic period, clearly show that the most cherished beliefs of the rationalists were definitely not shared by the ancient Sages of Israel. Indeed, such religious rationalist views were themselves often condemned, and those who embraced them shunned.

Centuries ago, when the great Sage Maimonides penned his work on Jewish philosophy, the Moreh Nebukhim, (Guide to the Perplexed), it was considered so controversial that, in many places, not only was it banned, it was often publicly burned. To this very day, there are religious groups that while they will embrace Maimonides' code of law, at the same time they strongly continue the ban on his Guide to the Perplexed. While Maimonides might be well accepted today, in his own day, and in the generations to follow, his path was condemned by many, and his views, based on Aristotelian philosophy hotly contested, with many condemning them as being non-Jewish. Those who read Hebrew can look into the commentaries to Maimonides' work for proof of how what he said is definitely not considered the final word on Jewish beliefs.

Rationalism as a philosophy is clearly of Greek origins. After the persecutions suffered under the hands of those influenced by the Grecian way of life in Second Temple times, the last thing in the world those Torah faithful Jews were going to do was to adopt a way of Grecian thinking, and (in their eyes) God forbid, apply such a foreign style to anything as sacred as the Torah.

The Torah literature of this period was prolifically magical and prophetic/apocalyptic in nature. It is this genre of literature that molded the history of the close of the Second Temple period. The surviving literature from this period clearly became the foundation of what we call today the Kabbalah. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we have uncontested proof of the antiquity of many ancient Torah teachings, which some religious rationalists have sought to distance themselves from and call non-Jewish. There is nothing better than uncontested historical proof to silence those who only talk, but have nothing actual with which to defend their ideas.

Teachings about reincarnation and astrology are found even the in Dead Sea Scrolls. It is no wonder that we also find them in later Torah literature. Indeed, these two topics were

even found in early Christian literature, until they were censored out, and declared evil and demonic (for political and polemic purposes). Rationalists have always tried to reinterpret and explain away that which they do not understand and what they do not like. This only goes to show how limited and narrow is their world view. With such a limited understanding of reality, it is no wonder that the rationalists are long on words and ideas, but at the same time very short on experience and actual answers to the wonders of creation.

Reincarnation, as a theory, answers a lot of questions about morals and spiritual growth. Those who experience reincarnation, either in themselves or in another, see with inner eyes that which no other can see or understand. Astrology was for the longest time considered a science in conjunction with astronomy. Even the likes of the famous 17<sup>th</sup> century scientist, Sir Isaac Newton of Cambridge was an adept astrologer and considered it a part of the scientific pursuits. Indeed, Sir Isaac was a very adept mystic of the magical school, and very much involved with prophetic predictions. Many of his writings on these subjects have never been published until recently.

That which today we call mysticism, and by mysticism, I mean the most magical application of the term, was widespread, in both belief and practice, during the period of the Second Temple. Great Talmudic (and Qumranic) Sages were renown for their miraculous powers. This comes through clearly to us from the legends recorded in the Talmud. Although Talmudic legends may very well have embellished a story or two, nevertheless, one can turn to other historical sources of the time, such as Josephus, to verify that such magical practices were well within the domain of the ancient Sages, and they were indeed renown for their supernatural powers. This was commonplace in Second Temple period Israel, and Sages of this type have survived, to this very day, in many of the Oriental Jewish communities, that until the last century thrived in the Islamic world.

Today, most Torah mysticism is philosophical in nature. Any true scholar can research and discover that much of philosophical Torah mysticism has its similarities, and possibly its origins, in Grecian metaphysics. One can study the writings of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, and discover a metaphysics far different from the later teachings made popular by Aristotle. Yet, as different as these earlier Grecian philosophers were to Aristotle, scholars can clearly see the similarities (if not influence) of these writers on later philosophical Jewish mystics.

For example, my readers may be shocked to discover that a concept so basic to philosophical Kabbalah as the Ten Sefirot is not found in any ancient Jewish literature, but concepts similar to it, can indeed be found in the writings of these ancient Greeks. Granted religious apologists will cry out in loud voice, that, if this is true, then the Greeks learned this from the Jews. This indeed may be true. There is historical evidence of Pythagoras traveling to the land of Israel and dialoging with the children of the prophets. This comes from a historical Greek source. Yet, we must confess that such a meeting cannot prove anything to anyone. But since when has a lack of proof silenced the voice of apologists?

Metaphysical contemplations discussed in Greek literature have their merit, nevertheless this was not what the ancient Sages of Second Temple times delved into. Today, the most ancient, and most likely authentic forms of Torah "mysticism," are the meditative practices referred to as the prophetic Kabbalah (ma'aseh merkava) and the magical practices referred to as magical Kabbalah or Kabbalah Ma'asit (ma'aseh bereshit). It is this last style

especially which can be proven to be the most ancient in Torah circles, and it is equally the school of learning most avoided and shunned by almost all modern day Rabbis. I have identified these schools of learning by the name they are given in the Talmud. Nevertheless, Maimonides and his like, apply to these terms definitions that clearly do not match the historical record.

Most modern-day Jewish philosophical mystics stick exclusively to the Zoharic writings, and the genre of mystical literature that sprang forth from them. This includes all the teachings of the Ari'zal, which for the most part, formed the vast majority of the Sephardic Kabbalah today. Yet, unknown to most is that the famous redactor of the Ari'zal's system, his trusted and faithful student Hayim Vital, was himself a rather eclectic Kabbalist.

Rabbi Vital wrote prolifically on topics of the magical Kabbalah and the prophetic Kabbalah. However, after his death in 1620, the dark hand of the censor arose and concealed a great deal of Hayim Vital's writings. It has only been in very recent times, in this last generation, that Rabbi Vital's writings on prophetic Kabbalah, magical Kabbalah and alchemy have seen the light of publication. Even though they have been published, the dissemination of these works are subject to limitations, and many modern-day Rabbis, although acknowledging their authenticity, still demand that their students shun these materials and to have nothing to do with them. The excuse perpetuated is that we are not worthy of such lofty materials, and that no one today is holy enough to understand them or to use them. Needless to say, such scare tactics work very well on a superstitious religious audience, trained to blindly follow their leaders without question.

Of course, if anyone were to pick up these books, study them well in order to understand them, and then to put into practice what is written therein, we would have an entirely new generation of tried and true magical Kabbalists. Yet, these brave God fearing, men and women, following in the footsteps of the most ancient Sages of Torah to become modern-day descendents before the Merkava, and masters of the "good Name" (ba'al shem tov), would then not succumb to being under the domineering hands of the present religious leaders. Therefore, their rise had to be stopped, before it began, and so it has. Censorship thus continues, and with it a markedly noticeable emasculation of spiritual power and spiritual accomplishment in modern-day Judaism.

A rationalist who refuses to look beyond the confines of the physical senses can rightfully be called psychically retarded. Essentially, the rationalist mentality refuses to look into a greater spectrum of reality, and thus cannot see what is there, unlike the many others who do look and see. Scientific studies into what is called the sixth sense are discovering wondrous abilities that are locked up inside of us. Ancient Second Temple times Torah mystics knew of these latent powers, and used them, so too did many peoples from many nations throughout human history. Modern science is only playing catch-up with what the ancients have known since time immemorial.

Anyone with experience in the magical and prophetic domains clearly recognizes the psychological component of their experiences. Indeed, it is only those with magical and prophetic experience who recognize that there really is nothing magical about magic. All that exists is the natural world that God has made, and the laws Divinely ordained to operate it. One who delves into, and explores the natural ways of the mind discovers the hidden realms deep within. One then exercises the mind, to strengthen it, as one would

with body building in a gym. The strong mind explores inner space, the domain of the psyche, and such experience is what leads one to actual knowledge and closeness to God.

With a trained and strong balanced mind, one can become aware of, and interact with, the greater reality of our world that surrounds us all. One can become aware of the other non-human entities that also inhabit this world, and the domains parallel to it, and see how we have always interacted with them on a regular basis since the beginning, all by Divine design. Angels and other entities are real, and they can be communicated with. It is not they who block communication with us, it is we who are mentally incapable to communicate with them. This can be changed by anyone wanting to walk the path of change and actual spiritual evolution. This is why we have been given Torah in the first place.

One with experiences knows with an inner knowledge. For such a one there is no more need of theoretical speculations, without any foundations of proof. One with experience has an inner knowing, and an internal verification that makes one's inner world as real as the outer. Usually such adepts are also very well capable of manifesting some hidden powers in the outer world to the awe and wonderment of all who would behold. These are called in Torah tradition, ba'al shem tovs, masters of the good name. The good name being the Name of God, that they have embraced and used as the fundamental tool for all spiritual interactions with the physical world.

Biblical prophets, Mishnaic Tana'im and many Talmudic Amora'im were all ba'al shem tovs. Many later Torah Sages were also. Although the name Baal Shem Tov is popularly ascribed to Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, founder of the Hasidic movement in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, he was just one link in a chain (mesorah) of adepts that stretched before him and after him. These adepts know and practice the ancient teachings, and they are not afraid to put them into practice. This, by no means, makes such an adept anyone special, all it means is that such a one has developed a power that lies latent within each of us.

In conclusion, we can confess that rationalism does have its good side, in that it encourages the mind to think clearly. Yet, religious rationalism must be connected to the practical side of metaphysical experience, or otherwise it loses its place, and takes on a half-life all its own. Such a half-life cannot lead to beyond. It is a prison that locks one's mind inside a fallacy of fantasy from which one cannot escape.

Those with power over others maintain that power by first imprisoning their minds. Thus, the first step to spiritual and actual freedom is actual spiritual experience. Magical and prophetic pursuits, when understood and pursued properly in the ancient holy path of Torah, are not dangerous, bad, or evil. Indeed, embracing their realities is what makes us human, and what brings us closer to God. Anyone wishing these things should discontinue the religious rationalist path, and start the long walk towards discovery and eventual truth.

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