

How the Study of Halakha Prepares One to Successfully Study & Practice Kabbalah

**There are more people today studying Kabbalah than ever before.
At the same time there is less known about the Kabbalah than ever before.
Is there a relationship between the numbers and the ignorance?**

*by Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
Copyright © 1999 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.*

This is a topic well known amongst the practicing Kabbalists throughout the Torah observant world, yet it is almost completely unknown outside of it. So many people have jumped on the "Kabbalah bandwagon" recently.

Indeed Kabbalah has now become the religious "fad" of choice for the secular Israeli, non-religious Jew and even a number of interested Gentiles. All of these different types of people crave to learn the mysteries and secrets of the Torah. Yet, with all the exposure that they have to what they have been told is Kabbalah, none of them have even come close to the real thing.

None of them, and I mean NONE of them, even have a clue as to what real Kabbalah is and wouldn't recognize it even if it smacked one of them HARD right in the face.

Of course, there are very important spiritual reasons why this state of affairs is the way it is. In all due respect, as wise King Solomon said, "there is nothing new under the sun" (Kohelet 1:9). Even during the days of the First Temple, the number of dabblers in Kabbalah was staggering. The results then were even worse than they are now.

It was these dangerous dabblings that led to the destruction of the Holy Temple, the removal of the Divine Presence and the concealing of the holy Ark and Temple vessels to this very day.

The dangerous dabblings in Kabbalah during the days of the First Temple is clear to anyone who reads the section of the N'vi'im in the TaNaKh (Bible). Then, in Biblical times, Kabbalah wasn't called Kabbalah. It had another name, it's original and correct name.

During First Temple times, Kabbalah, the study of Jewish metaphysics, was an integral part of the training of the Biblical prophets. Kabbalah was a part of prophecy.

Our Sages teach that during First Temple times there were possibly over a million students studying this prophetic-Kabbalistic material.¹ Yet out of this vast, vast number only a few dozen succeeded in becoming true prophets of HaShem.

Unfortunately, the number of false prophets and false prophecies were far more numerous. It was these false Kabbalistic visions and teachings, coming from false prophet-teachers that blinded the eyes of the nation and led them away from the true path of repentance.

When this occurred the wrath of HaShem was sealed upon us. Thus, we see from history that the study of false Kabbalah lulls its students into a sense of false security. They begin to think that teshuva (repentance) is not of paramount importance as long as they are studying Kabbalah.

At the same time this contamination & misalignment of the worlds arouses the wrath of HaShem against these false teachers and their students. The result is devastating punishment.

One cannot “play” with spiritual powers and expect not to be harmed by them when one is not holy enough to interact with them correctly, as defined by Torah.

Let us explore why this is so. Indeed this state of false learning and false spiritual practices is much worse than if nothing at all was studied or practiced. This requires an explanation.

Prophecy is the study of how the human soul (and mind) broadens its horizons to encompass and experience the reality of the Presence of G-d. In order for this lofty goal to be achieved, many steps must be taken along the way. Each of these steps has to do with the expansion of mental capacity and intellectual function.²

Prophetic training educated its students and taught them how to think and how to clearly recognize metaphysical reality from metaphysical falsehoods. This manner of training was accomplished through the study of the physical laws, what we call today Jewish Law, the Halakha.

¹ Ref. Aryeh Kaplan's "Handbook of Jewish Thought" Moznayim Pub. NY Section: Prophecy.

² Ref. RaMBaM, Hilkhot Yesodei Torah, chapters 7-10. These outline the path of the prophet. A taped lecture series on this material is available in the Y.B.N. catalogue.

It is taught throughout the TaNaKh and all later Torah literature that there are two levels in creation.³ We refer to these two as the physical and the spiritual. The two are integrally connected. One “fits” over the other like a hand in a glove. The two dimensions interact together as body and soul. What occurs in the one affects the other.

The natural order of creation, therefore, is for both the physical and spiritual dimensions to exist in complete harmony with one another. Yet, just as someone can abuse their physical bodies and thus cause themselves both physical and spiritual harm, so too do our physical actions in this world reverberate great help or harm in the spiritual plane.

Now, due to the fall of our father Adam collective mankind no longer has the ability to consciously interact with the spiritual plane. We are, in essence, cut off from it.

If collective mankind was to remain cut off from its spiritual source and counterpart then the physical world would no longer be able to survive. Mankind and our physical world around us would disintegrate at the sub-atomic level. Nothing would be left. The world would return to Tohu & Bohu as it was before creation.

The Holy One, blessed be He, in His great mercy, however, reestablished the link broken by Adam. After his expulsion from Eden, Adam was given specific instructions as to how to regain and maintain the spiritual world-physical world relationship. These instructions were written down for him in a book that was delivered to him by HaShem’s faithful messenger, Raziel HaMalakh.⁴

Ten generations of mankind arose and only a small few followed the edicts as laid down by father Adam. In the seventh generation from Adam, there arose a great and holy soul, Hanokh Ben Yared. He lived 365 years and “was not” for G-d had taken him (ref. Gen. 5:24).

Prior to Hanokh’s ascent into heaven, he also received a “book” which gave instructions on Divine service.

These books of Adam and Hanokh were eventually passed down to Noah and from Noah to his son Shem, eventually reaching our holy father Avraham. It was Avraham was decided to speak out to the masses and instruct them in the ancient wisdom and to restore their paths to HaShem.

³ Ref. Rabbi Moshe Haim Luzzato’s Derekh HaShem (The Way of G-d).

⁴ This scenario is outlined in Sefer Sha’ar HaEmunah V’Yesod HaHasidut by Rabbi Gershon Hanokh Henekh of Radzin

Our Sages have taught that Avraham too wrote a book, some 400 chapters long, explaining to the members of his generation the way of G-d and how to avoid idolatry. All that we have left of this great work are five short and brief chapters that we today call the "Sefer Yetzirah."

This manual of knowledge was passed down to Avraham's son Yitzhak and from Yitzhak to Ya'aqob. Ya'aqob passed it onto his 12 sons, who, as we all know, went down into Egypt.

The story of the exodus is well known to us all, as is the experience of our receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Yet, we must understand that the giving of the Torah at Sinai was something G-d had planned from the very beginning of creation. Israel was the reason for G-d's originally creating the universe.

The role of Israel is to live the Torah and by doing so establishing the balance between the physical and spiritual worlds. Adam, Hanokh, Avraham, Yitzhak and Ya'aqob, all received instructions and guidance that were parts of the Torah, but Moshe Rabbeynu received the whole package.

The Torah of Moshe would not only align the balance between the spiritual and physical dimensions, it would enable mankind to cultivate the forces in the universe and to harvest them, thereby making manifest all the best in creation.

As the Jewish people stood at Mt. Sinai the culmination of creation was at hand. The entire universe had been waiting for this moment when Israel would receive the Torah and, thereby, receive all the necessary instructions as to how best to operate creation.

The children of Israel had been prepared to recognize metaphysical reality and how best to integrate it with the physical, thus completing the links in the chain of creation. However, a "minor" problem arose. There were those members among the people who didn't achieve the spiritual insight to deal with an invisible universe and an abstract G-d. While Moses was atop of Mt. Sinai receiving the Torah, this minority managed to convince Aharon the Kohen to create for them a concrete form of abstract reality.

This might not sound like such a bad idea. After all, we all need assistance in perceiving the invisible and concretizing the abstract. Well, G-d did not agree. Actually, G-d viewed the sin of the Golden Calf as having nullified His purpose for creation.

Had it not been for the intercession of our teacher Moses, none of us would have ever lived. Indeed, G-d had planned to scrap the world and start all over again. Moses pleaded with G-d to give us another chance. So like with Adam before hand, G-d forgave us and instructed Moses, giving him a book. This book, which we still read to

this day, is our holy Torah. Yet, the Kabbalists have taught us that the Torah we read today is but a cloak and veil for the real concealed Torah.

The Torah that we read is multi-leveled. The Kabbalists instruct us that the Torah can be compared to the layers of an onion. We see and interact with its surface. Yet, deep beneath its surface lie layer upon layer of meanings and secret powers awaiting our discovery.

The key to discovering the Torah's latent powers lie within the recesses of the human mind. As we cultivate and develop our individual human intelligence, we enable ourselves to penetrate deeper and deeper into the Torah's true depths.

Yet, alas for us humans, a species of lazy minds. If we would only invest the energy into the cultivation of our deepest potentials, we would begin to see the wonders that G-d has waiting for us. Thus, we were commanded to study the Torah by both day and by night.

The first thing that becomes apparent when studying the surface of the Torah is that there appears to be many loose ends and unexplained things. In order to understand the simple meaning of the Torah text one must delve deeper into the text in order to discover its true meaning.

This requires of us effort, an effort of mind and an effort of time. This process of effort and discovery is what we call "study." Its purpose is to sharpen the mind, to enable it to see the relationship between apparently unrelated things. Without this sharpening of human intellectual abilities, the world will continue to remain a mystery to us and we will remain as an enigma unto ourselves.

In order to penetrate into the depths of the Torah one must first peel away the surface layers. This general rule is well understood and accepted. But who is willing to invest the time and the mental effort to perform this great and heavy task? Only the holy Sages rise up and accomplish this. They are the Rabbis who study the Torah, live it and eventually are introduced to its secrets, which are the Kabbalah.

It is for this reason that one can never successfully study Kabbalah without first being an expert in Halakha (Jewish Law). The Halakha is indeed the surface level of the Torah referred to above. It is these very same levels that must be toiled over and peeled away in order to get into the deeper layers. There are no shortcuts.

Let me provide an example. One cannot one day have an I.Q. of 100 and then suddenly jump to an I.Q. of 150 without going through the grades of 110, 120, 130 and 140. This is simply the boundaries and limitations of nature. And indeed if one claims to have an I.Q. of such a lofty number as 150, it would be rather apparent. It is evident by how one

talks, how one thinks and how one acts. In other words, it is not something that can be faked. Either you have it or you don't. It is the same thing with studying Torah, either you have acquired the intellectual skills for deeper penetration or you haven't. The ability to study cannot be counterfeited. Either you have the brain for it or you don't. If you do, then you have the ability to penetrate into the depths of the Torah. If you don't, then you fool yourself if you believe otherwise.

This mistake of self-deception was what was so prevalent during First Temple times. Many attempted to penetrate the surface layers of the Torah. Some tried extremely hard and eventually succeeded. Others did not try hard enough. They slackened their efforts and eventually deceived themselves into believing that they had accomplished something that they did not. The true masters of Torah, the prophets, saw through these charlatans and spoke out against them. Yet, human nature is as it is and deception rules where there is a weak and lazy mind.

Rather than take the necessary steps, many chose to follow the path of the Golden Calf and substituted surface for substance and delusion for discipline. This is what led to the destruction of the holy First Temple. This is also why prophecy was removed from the people at this time. If the prophetic schools had remained open, the scenario would have quickly repeated itself and the result indeed would have been the destruction of the world.

Prophecy and metaphysical Judaism, i.e., the Kabbalah were forced into hiding. If the general public would not respect the holy path, they could not be allowed to walk it.

This can be compared to the use of a firearm. We live in a dangerous world and a firearm is very useful and necessary. Yet, if one wishes to use it arbitrarily and not simply for self-defense, then such a one is adding to the problem instead of helping to solve it. So it is with metaphysical prophetic Torah, i.e. the Kabbalah. Unless one is willing to learn it and use it correctly, one causes more harm than good. The masters of the Torah system, therefore, have the obligation to protect the general Jewish public by denying access to the holy powers to those who are not holy.

If this safeguard is violated, havoc is unleashed, upon mankind and upon the supernal worlds.

Now, let us delve a little deeper into the secrets of the Kabbalah so as to understand WHY this is all so.

The original sin of Adam, we remember, was his eating of the fruit from the Etz HaDa'at Tov V'Ra (Tree of Knowledge, good and evil). By doing so, Adam descended into the

realm of good and evil. Prior to this, Adam existed harmoniously in Eden, the place that is above evil.

As a result of the fall, Adam (collective mankind) became surrounded by good and evil on all sides. Yet, this is no cause for alarm, for although evil surrounds us, it is still, nonetheless, outside of us. We are not required to invite evil into our lives, thus harming ourselves. There is, however, one minor problem.

When Adam partook of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, he was cast out of Eden and not permitted to eat of the fruit of the Etz Haim (Tree of Life). This tree and its fruit would have given Adam the instinctual ability to separate from evil.

In Eden, this was not needed because evil did not exist there. One is not prepared to exit Eden, however, until one has tasted of the fruit of the Tree of Life. Now, collective mankind has lost that opportunity. We exited Eden completely unprepared to face the realities of what existed outside. That is why Adam was given his book from Raziel HaMalakh.

Upon our descent into the physical realms, which the Torah refers to as "good and evil" we are no longer equipped with sufficient spiritual knowledge to discern the difference between good and evil. Thus we end up quite inadvertently inviting evil into our lives, all the while believing it to be good. We find out only after it is too late and the damage to ourselves is done.

In the realm of the sefirot, the Tree of Life refers to Hokhma, the sefirah of intuition and spiritual, internal knowing. Hokhma provides us with an awareness of the invisible worlds unseen and unable to be seen with the physical eye (or by any other means of mere data gathering

The Tree of Knowledge refers to Binah; the sefirah of intellect where information is received and processed from external sources through the five sensory organs. Binah thus enables us to comprehend and interact with our external environment.

Thus, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge limits our reception of information to the physical plane, whereas the fruit of the Tree of Life connects one to the spiritual plane. It is this level of connection that we lost upon our exile from Eden.

Mankind thus has an inherent handicap in his spiritual senses. Torah was given to us as the means to rectify and overcome this. Yet, we must separate spiritual reality from religious myth and explain just HOW the Torah operates to accomplish this task of tikkun (rectification).

Indeed, the Torah is comprised of mitzvot, which are actions that we are to do and actions that we are not to do. Even the books of Adam and Hanokh contained actions and rituals of this nature. The mere performance of these mitzvot opens the channels between the spiritual and physical worlds and enables Divine radiance to flow from above to below. Thus, the performance of mitzvot provides for us the framework and boundaries that safeguard us from the penetration of evil.

Nevertheless, we must do more than mere rote actions. These only open the channels at the most basic of levels. We also must repair our initial blemish, which is the eating of the fruit of the wrong Tree. As it was our knowledge that was blemished (from the Tree of Knowledge) so must our knowledge (i.e., intellect) be repaired. Repair of knowledge is defined as intellectual refinement. In other words, learning to be smart, very smart. Tikun HaSekhel (rectifying the mind) requires of us humans to learn HOW to use our minds.

Simple book learning and memorization is not enough for Tikun HaSekhel (rectifying the mind). We are required to expand our thinking abilities and to comprehend all that we study. If something comes along that we do not understand, we must make all efforts possible to “break our skulls” in order to make sense out of the unclear and to make order out of confusion.

Indeed the great Kabbalistic master, the Ari'zal would spend a great portion of his day studying Talmud and other Torah legal texts. It is reported of him that he would break out into a profuse sweat every day attempting to understand apparently conflicting Halakhic matters.⁵

He would not stop his analysis of a Halakhic topic until he finally achieved full comprehension of the matter from beginning to end. The Ari'zal said that any difficulty of understanding as well as any and all confusion have their source in the klipot (forces of evil). Only by one pushing oneself to one's intellectual limits and thereby discovering the order in the chaos does one accomplish Tikun HaSekhel (rectifying the mind).

Indeed, in the introduction to his Sefer Etz Haim, Rabbi Haim Vital, the Ari'zal's prime disciple demands that any aspiring student of Kabbalah must first study Talmud and Halakha for at least five years!

When one's mind has developed the necessary analytical skills to penetrate and resolve all conflicts and apparent contradictions in the surface teachings of the Torah, only then is one's mind prepared to delve deeper beneath the Torah's surface.

⁵ Ref. Sha'ar HaMitzvot, parashat V'ethanan.

The study of Halakha exposes the human mind to a wide variety of real-life human situations. Whether the examples come from the Talmud, the Shulkhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law) or other Torah sources, not all of them are clear and evident. Many times Jewish Law is as confusing as is life itself. By one becoming a master of understanding Jewish Law, one becomes a master of understanding life (i.e. the life we live here in the physical world). Such a Torah Sage is called a "Hakham" (a wise man). For such a Sage has mastered the skills of understanding Binah. His knowledge and perceptions of physical reality are honed. He is now prepared to delve into metaphysical reality.

As mentioned above the physical and spiritual dimensions lie on top of one another, fitting over each other like a hand in glove. Once a Hakham has learned the mastery of the Torah in this physical world, he is ready to encounter the Torah's spiritual counterpart. The Hakham applies all the lessons that he has learned from surface Torah, coupled with his now fine tuned intellect and he is ready to grasp the invisible and to see the unseen.

And how can he see the unseen? Because the Hakham knows the Halakha (ways) of Torah! He knows its patterns, methods and laws, here in the physical world. All he need now do is follow the same pattern of Halakha and of logic and the unseen spiritual Torah will appear before his eyes.

But the secrets of the Torah will not appear before his physical eyes, they will only appear to his inner eye, the spiritual "eye" that is now trained to perceive and understand inner, intuitive Hokhma wisdom. Indeed a Sage is rightly called a Hakham (wise man). For only a Hakham can approach Hokhma.

So, what becomes of one who attempts to delve into the depths of Torah by studying Kabbalah before they have been properly prepared? Obviously, they become spiritually lost. There is no other option or alternative.

Unless a person has learned to use his brain for himself, rectifying it through the study of Torah and the observance of the mitzvot, no spiritual entity from the realm of Holiness has the ability to make contact with him/her. Simply put, unless one has cultivated a relationship with the Torah and the mitzvot here in this world, it is an impossible task to connect with the Torah's messengers who dwell in the spiritual realms. One simply doesn't have the mental faculty necessary to be able to connect with an Angel of holiness. There can be no congruency of brain frequencies without the necessary mental preparations and attunements to holiness.

The attunement to holiness can only come about through the Torah and mitzvot because this is how G-d ordained it to be. G-d told this to Adam, to Hanokh and to Moshe Rabbeynu. It was this same message that he repeated throughout the centuries to his

prophets. When the people failed to hear the words of the prophets, G-d had them stop speaking.

When the ways of the prophetic-Kabbalah were known to the masses during First Temple days, countless thousands endeavored to delve into the depths of the Torah. Yet, most of these people did not invest the proper time in mental preparations. Many of these people did not lead holy lives following all the laws outlined by the Torah and her mitzvot. Many of these people attempted to take a "spiritual shortcut." Yet, such a thing does not exist. All these people ended up finding what was false prophecy and false hope.

They kindled the spiritual flames of severity and judgment against themselves. They met their end in the flames that destroyed holy Jerusalem. They paid the price burning in the fire that their intransigence kindled.

Now you can glimpse an understanding why Kabbalists are upset when they see masses of unprepared people coming to study Kabbalah. These Kabbalists are the first to perceive that Kabbalah is not bringing these people closer to Torah and mitzvot. Indeed, many times' premature Kabbalah study turns people away from the importance of fulfilling the Torah's commandments.

In spite of this admonition I do not expect many to be persuaded by such a clear and logical explanation. Let me, therefore, digress and explain this matter in Kabbalistic terms. Maybe by viewing this matter in a deeper light will it become more palatable.

A SEFIROTIC VIEW OF TIKUN

Hokhma and Binah express two different functions of human thinking as well as two distinct phases of human spiritual development. Tiferet expresses the gamut of human emotions. Malkhut expresses the physical side of human existence.

Originally in the Garden of Eden, Adam traversed the three upper worlds (here referred to sefirotically as Hokhma, Binah and Tiferet). Adam was created by G-d to serve as the rectifier of the level of Malkhut, the physical universe. Originally Adam, prior to the fall was not a physical being. His body was made out of light and not flesh.⁶

If Adam had first eaten of the Etz Haim, he would have maintained his spiritual stature of light and been able to descend into the physical realm, without any harm to himself. Yet, being that he first partook of the Etz HaDa'at, he was unprepared for entry into the physical world. Instead of elevating Malkhut like he was supposed to, Adam instead would cause it to descend even further.

⁶ The source of this is the Kitvei Ari'zal, but is also mentioned in Sefer Ben Ish Hai, S.R. Bereshit.

We are all sparks of the soul of Adam. As his children, both spiritually and physically, we are now stuck here in the physical world. In order to accomplish our Adamic task, we must travel the sefirotic pattern in ascent to regain that, which has been lost to us.

The first step is Tikun HaMalkhut. This entails our performing specific physical actions (mitzvot) whose purpose it is to act as channels to draw down spiritual radiance from the upper worlds to the earth. Without this first step, the Earth remains without guidance and nourishment.

The lack of Divine radiance brought about by the lack of mitzvah observance causes the physical world not to yield its produce and abundance. Also, when there are not enough mitzvot being performed there is a psychological gap left open in the Jewish collective unconscious. This manifests itself externally as all types of social problems and as imbalances in nature.

Left to our own devices, we humans do not have the spiritual insight to correct this, or to recognize how to maintain the physical-spiritual balance. Without a Divine "book" for directions, we will forever be at the mercy of our own imbalances.

Tikun HaTiferet requires a rectification of emotions and personality attributes. Anything relating to the heart has its origins in Tiferet. Therefore, even if the body of all the mitzvot were performed, but there was no heart in them, the Divine radiance still could not flow.

The secret of Tikun HaTiferet is spoken about throughout the Bible, where G-d commands us to love Him with all our hearts (emotions), with all our souls (bodies) and all our might (wealth). We are equally commanded to love one another and to act as a united people.

National unity leads to psychic unity. Psychic unity leads to Tikun HaTiferet. With this accomplished half the battle against evil is won.

Tikun HaBinah occurs with the study of Talmud and Halakha, that which we call the pshat (surface) of the Torah. With study comes understanding. With understanding comes insight. With insights comes awareness. With awareness comes discipline. With discipline comes the fulfillment of responsibility. The responsibility of which I speak is the awareness of and respect for the value of Torah and its mitzvot.

At the level of Tikun Binah, one observes the mitzvot with a full understanding of their value and a full appreciation of G-d for giving them to us in the first place. Tikun HaBinah enables there to be a rectification of the eating of the fruit of the Tree of

Knowledge, good and evil. For knowledge acquired through the turmoil and effort of study is able to separate good from evil and clarity from confusion.

A full Tikun HaBinah will lead to complete human emancipation and the coming of Mashiah.

Hokhma does not need a Tikun. Hokhma is the source of the Divine radiance for the lower worlds. All we need do is open the channels that will enable the Divine radiance to flow. This is accomplished through the study of Kabbalah and the practice of prophecy.

Thus we see that this course of study indeed plays a great role in the workings of creation. Yet, not everyone has completed the tikunim of Malkhut, Tiferet and Binah. Until these three tikunim are complete as manifest through full Torah observance (Malkhut) with all ones heart (Tiferet) and with all ones intent (Binah), then one is not in position spiritually to reach Hokhma. Any attempts therefore, are by definition, doomed to failure.

The greatest problem is when people are deceived into believing that they are indeed performing some spiritual, invisible task, that, in fact, they are no where near able to perform. This self-deception, thereby, adds klipot to all three worlds, Malkhut, Tiferet and Binah.

In conclusion, the many students who attempt a study of Kabbalah all the while that they do not faithfully fulfill G-d's laws will never be able to understand or practice true Kabbalah.

If they do not repent and accept upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven (the obedient observance of the commandments), they will forever be learning something other than Kabbalah and encountering something other than G-d.

Regardless of what one believes to the contrary and regardless of what one has experienced, the violators of the covenant Laws cannot channel holiness. Whatever "Kabbalah" the violators learn is not truly Kabbalah. Their teachers, like the false prophets of the days of the First Temple are deceiving them.

The role of the Biblical prophet was to serve as a watchman. The true Kabbalists of our generation bemoan the degradation of our holy traditions. Let this serve as a warning to all students of Kabbalah. Repent! Turn back to HaShem! Fulfill the covenant and Law that he gave to you! Then come and learn how to truly be a human being and a Torah faithful Jew. Then will the teachers of Kabbalah welcome you with open arms.

If you choose not to do what is right according to Torah, this then is your choice. But at least give honor to HaShem and abandon any false pursuits of Kabbalah. If not, then HaShem will be your judge. This is not my threat, G-d forbid. This is G-d's promise. And unlike man, G-d does not lie or deceive and He most definitely keeps His promises.