

Introduction and Overview

Objectives of the Course

The immediate purpose of this course is to give students a better understanding of the Kabbalah: what it is, how it evolved, and what support there is for its major concepts. A larger goal, shared by all programs offered by the School for Esoteric Studies, is to help students evolve spiritually. Accordingly we hope that taking the course will be a transformative experience. We hope that students may find this exploration of the Kabbalah useful in a quest for greater self-awareness, identification with our collective humanity, and commitment to the spiritual development of the planet.

Correspondingly, students may approach the subject from a purely detached, intellectual standpoint. They will doubtless be enriched by what they learn. However students are encouraged to go further, to view Kabbalistic study as a way to acquire and apply new skills, new perspectives, and new understanding of humanity's role in the world. The latter approach should be still more enriching.

We shall examine at some length the Kabbalah's evolution from its Judaic roots. Then we shall explore the broadening in scope, in which the Kabbalah embraced concepts from Hermetic and Christian sources, and its most recent expansion into a multicultural system of esotericism. Emphasis will be placed on integrating the Kabbalah into the larger worldview that previous studies may already have nurtured.

What is the Kabbalah?

The Kabbalah is an ancient esoteric system that lends itself, according to seekers' inclinations, to philosophical study, mystical contemplation, ecstatic meditation, and magical ritual. It explores the manifestation of the Divine from transcendent levels all the way down to the everyday world in which we live. It provides avenues for meditation, the attainment of elevated states of consciousness, even perceptions of union with God. It offers the potential to transcend the ordinary limits of experience and ability. It contributes a dynamic model of human psychology and a roadmap for personal and/or collective transformation.

The *Kabbalah*, a Hebrew word that means "received" or "tradition," has its primary roots in Judaism. It can be traced back to biblical times, perhaps to Moses or even Abraham. Jewish Kabbalists view it as part of divine revelation, interpreted and commented upon by generations of prophets, priests, rabbis and magi. In the late biblical period and the early centuries of the Common Era, the Kabbalah was overlaid by Greek metaphysics. It also overlapped and interacted with other mystical and magical movements within Judaism and with the Gnostic-Hermetic mysticism that flourished in the Greco-Roman world. During the Renaissance a distinctive branch of Kabbalah emerged that incorporated major elements of Hermeticism and Christianity.

As we look back over the history of the Kabbalah, three main branches can be identified:

1. The Judaic Kabbalah whose roots go back to antiquity, and which reached its present form in the 16th and 17th centuries. In turn, the Judaic Kabbalah can be subdivided into:
 - (a) the mystical Kabbalah, an approach to devotional and mystical exploration

- (b) the ecstatic, or prophetic, Kabbalah, a system of disciplined meditation designed to stimulate elevated states of consciousness
 - (c) the theoretical Kabbalah, a framework for theological, philosophical and psychological inquiry
 - (d) the practical Kabbalah, a system of magic, with application to ceremonial ritual.
2. The Hermetic Kabbalah which dates from the Italian Renaissance. Incorporating elements of the already vibrant field of Hermeticism, it promised new insights into Christian teachings and even a basis for reform of institutional Christianity. Like the Judaic Kabbalah it has mystical, theoretical and practical components, though they are less distinct.
 3. The Modern Kabbalah, which draws its inspiration from all earlier Kabbalistic traditions, further overlaid by concepts from the Tarot, eastern religions, Theosophy and its offshoots, psychology, and New Age culture.

Kabbalists trace their teachings primarily to three classical texts: the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (“Book of Illumination”), the *Sefer Yetzirah* (“Book of Formation”), and the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (“Book of Splendor”). These works were compiled and published in the 12th and 13th centuries, but likely they were based on earlier manuscripts or fragments. Since the Middle Ages, additional texts have appeared, and over the last 200 years, thousands of books and articles have been written on all aspects of the Kabbalah.

Distinct mystical/ecstatic, theoretical and magical branches of Kabbalah may have emerged before the classical texts were published, but certainly they gathered momentum in the centuries that followed. The mystical/ecstatic Kabbalah focused on the invocation of divine names for devotional purposes and also in a quest for higher states of consciousness. The magical Kabbalah used those same names for magical invocation. The theoretical Kabbalah focused on understanding the divine nature, God’s manifestation or revelation in the world, and humanity’s response to that revelation. The Kabbalah emphasizes that humanity is made in the image of God; humanity in the microcosm and God the macrocosm.

The Hermetic/Christian Kabbalah emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries. Hermeticism combined elements of magic, alchemy and astrology, and its merger with the Kabbalah created a body of knowledge and practice that differed in important ways from the earlier Judaic Kabbalah. Jewish authorities regarded it as a perversion of their tradition, and, despite the involvement of prominent churchmen, institutional Christianity never embraced it. Nevertheless, efforts to suppress the Hermetic/Christian Kabbalah were unsuccessful, and it reemerged in the 19th century to form a basis for the modern Kabbalah.

The Kabbalah has always been a major component of the western esoteric system. Now it has become a vital component in esotericism as a whole. The mystical Kabbalah continues to offer powerful spiritual exercises, and a revival of interest in the ecstatic Kabbalah has occurred in recent years. The theoretical Kabbalah, by far the most familiar form, is a subject of intense study by esotericists, Judaic scholars, academic philosophers, historians, Jungian psychologists, sociologists, and many others. The practical Kabbalah may have important applications in areas such as esoteric healing.

This course emphasizes the mystical and theoretical aspects of Kabbalah. The ecstatic Kabbalah and practical Kabbalah must both be approached with caution and will not be discussed in great detail. Nevertheless, what is presented in this course should be adequate to encourage individuals to explore those areas on their own.

Key Concepts

The Tree of Life

The 16th century saw the introduction of the schematic diagram, or *glyph*, known as the Tree of Life. The Tree soon became central to discussion of the theoretical and practical Kabbalah, and it has become a kind of Kabbalistic trademark. More than one form of the glyph has been proposed, but a common form is shown in Figure 1. Ten *sefiroth* are interspersed between the Godhead, or *Ain Sof* (literally “Limitless”), and the physical world. The word *sefiroth* (singular: *sefirah*) has multiple linguistic roots, including “number,” “writing,” “revelation,” and “luminosity.” Some important meanings of the term are:

- stages in the emanation of divine essence or light from the Godhead
- the vessels into which the emanations flow
- divine intermediaries between the Godhead and humanity
- powerful potencies to which divine names, as well as the names of angelic beings, have been assigned and which can be invoked for mystical or magical purposes
- successive levels of human consciousness
- archetypal challenges face by humanity on its evolutionary journey.

The sefiroth are: *Kether*, *Chokmah*, *Binah*, *Chesed*, *Geburah*, *Tifareth*, *Netzach*, *Yesod*, *Hod* and *Malkuth*. An 11th, *Daath*, is sometimes interposed between *Binah* and *Chesed*. Table 1 lists the Hebrew names of the sefiroth, the conventional English translations of those names, and the types of human experience they offer.

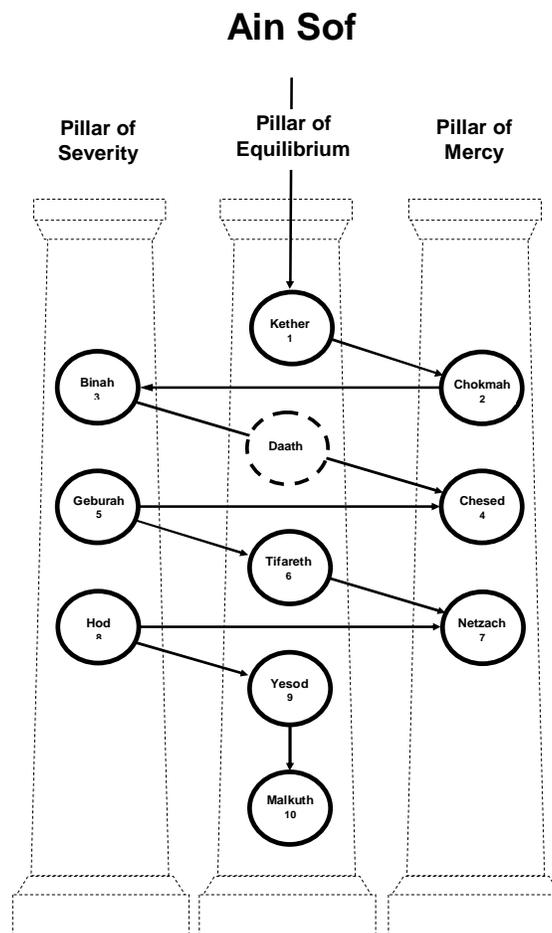
Table 1.
The Sefiroth

No.	Hebrew Name	Conventional English Translation	Human Experience
1	<i>Kether</i>	The Crown	Absorption into the Divine
2	<i>Chokmah</i>	Wisdom	Primal masculine force
3	<i>Binah</i>	Understanding	Primal feminine form
--	<i>Daath</i>	Knowledge	Gnosis, intuition
4	<i>Chesed</i>	Mercy	Grace, compassion
5	<i>Geburah</i>	Severity or Judgment	Severity or Judgment
6	<i>Tifareth</i>	Beauty or Harmony	Beauty or Harmony
7	<i>Netzach</i>	Victory or Eternity	Creativity
8	<i>Hod</i>	Splendor	Intellect, rationality
9	<i>Yesod</i>	Foundation	Emotion, desire
10	<i>Malkuth</i>	The Kingdom	Physical reality

The names of the sefiroth, all of which appear in the Hebrew Bible, can be translated into English. But the English words fail to capture their richness of meaning, and Kabbalists prefer to use the Hebrew names. The names soon become so familiar that few people would bother with the translations except as a quick reminder of what the sefiroth represent. We shall see that divine names, archangels, astrological influences, magical symbols, and many other things are associated with the sefiroth.

Viewing the sefiroth as stages in divine manifestation, the first manifestation from the Ain Sof is Kether. From there, the primary line of descent is through the sefiroth in numerical order, all the way down to Malkuth. This line of descent is known as the “Lightning Flash” (Figure 1). Conversely, viewing the sefiroth as stages in the expansion of human consciousness, the seeker has opportunities to ascend from Malkuth to Yesod, to Hod, to Netzach, and so forth.

Figure 1.
The Tree of Life



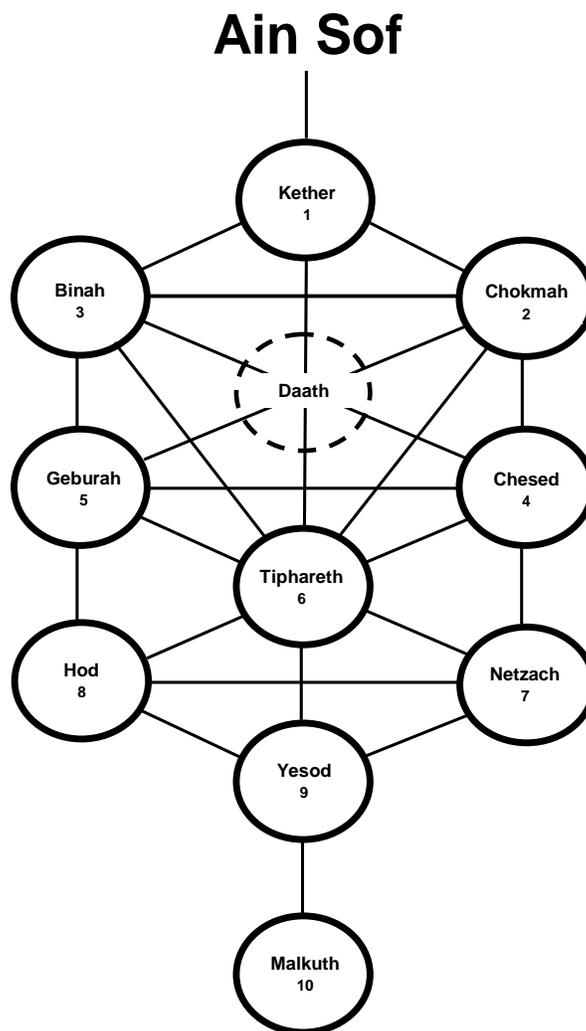
As Figure 1 shows, the sefiroth are arranged in three vertical columns, or “pillars.” The column on the right, containing Chokmah, Chesed and Netzach, is known as the “Pillar of Mercy,” taking its name from the English translation of “Chesed.” The column on the left, containing Binah, Geburah and Hod, is the “Pillar of Severity,” taking its name from Geburah. The column

containing Kether, Daath, Tifareth, Yesod and Malkuth, is known as the “Pillar of Equilibrium,” or simply the “middle pillar.”

The sefiroth on the outer pillars form pairs of opposites in eternal tension. They can represent contrasting aspects of divinity; alternatively they can represent contrasting human experiences. Wisdom is achieved not only by advancing up the Tree but also by experiencing the pairs of opposites and bringing them into harmony. For example, the cold reason of Hod needs to be brought into balance with the exuberant creativity of Netzach; the abundant generosity of Chesed needs to be harmonized with the stern judgment of Geburah; and the raw, masculine potency of Chokmah needs to be captured by the feminine “womb” of Binah. The pairs of opposites and their resolution will be examined in much greater detail later in the course.

In the “vertical” direction, spirit (Kether) and matter (Malkuth) need to be brought into equilibrium in Tifareth, the mediating principle or Logos. Resolving this vertical duality has a strong ethical dimension. Christian Kabbalists associate Tifareth with Christ.

Figure 2.
Tree of Life and Paths



Paths, or pathways, connect pairs of sefiroth on the Tree of Life. These represent challenges the human pilgrim faces as he or she moves from one sefiroth to another. Figure 2 shows one of several possible arrangements of the paths. From an early date 22 paths were identified, one for each letter in the Hebrew alphabet. More recently, the paths have been associated with cards in the Tarot deck. There is no universally agreed-upon set of correspondences either with the Hebrew letters or with Tarot cards. Individual teachers propose correspondences to suit their own purposes. The actual pattern of paths also varies; some teachers omit certain paths or include additional ones.

In addition to the sefiroth, Kabbalistic teachings discuss four levels of reality, or “worlds.” The four worlds are: *Atziluth* (“Emanation”), *Briah* (“Creation”), *Yetzirah* (“Formation”), and *Assiah* (“Action”). *Atziluth*, the highest world, is the domain of the divine emanations. *Briah* and *Yetzirah* are, respectively, the domains of the archangels and lesser angels. *Assiah* is the everyday world of human affairs.

Just as the divine force descends through the sefiroth from Kether to Malkuth, it descends through the worlds—from the *Atziluth* to *Assiah*. In response, human consciousness can ascend through the sefiroth, from Malkuth toward Kether, and also through the worlds from *Assiah* toward *Atziluth*. How far an individual rises depends on his or her commitment to spiritual growth. It could also be expected to depend on the purity of the seeker’s life and on karmic predispositions.

God, the Universe and Humanity

The Kabbalah offers, among much else, systems of theology, cosmology and psychology. We have already seen that God is understood in terms of the Ain Sof and its emanations. The divine light descended through the sefiroth to the plane of human activity.

The names of God were always important in Judaism and acquired even greater importance in the Kabbalah. Divine names were believed to have great power and were treated with corresponding caution. Most significant was the *Tetragrammaton*, consisting of the four Hebrew consonants: *yod* (Y), *he* (H), *vav* (V), *he* (H)—or in Hebrew script, reading from right to left: יהוה. The Tetragrammaton was considered so powerful that it was uttered only once a year by the high priest, in the seclusion of the Holy of Holies. Otherwise, people referred to it obliquely as “the Name” or used *Adonai* (“Lord”) as a substitute. Other divine names, taken from scripture, have been assigned to the sefiroth. Those names were believed to reside, along with the divine emanations, on the world of *Atziluth*.

Still other names were created by selecting and rearranging the Hebrew letters of existing divine names or the letters from passages of scripture. Complicated rules developed for creating these new “divine names.” In all cases the names provided opportunities for meditation and invocation. Invoking the divine names provided an important technique in the practical Kabbalah.

According to Kabbalistic teachings, God created the universe by a process of emanation, or “birthing.” However a catastrophe occurred requiring a cosmic act of redemption. Whether or not the catastrophe was associated with the Fall of Adam and Eve, the teachings insist that humanity must participate in the cosmic redemption. This is a crucial important point—and one that is most relevant to our work in the world. Modern Kabbalists assert that the “redemption” in which we must participate is not atonement for the primeval sin but the establishment of harmony at all levels of reality.

The Kabbalah portrays humanity as a pilgrim on a long spiritual journey. We came from Spirit, and eventually we shall return to Spirit. During our tenancy in physical reality our task is to understand our predicament, learn from experiences, develop meaningful relationships to God and our fellow human beings, and rise in consciousness—as measured by our progression through

the sefirot and the worlds. The Earth is not our ultimate home, but the Kabbalah regards it as divine, and we treat it as a cherished place of visitation. During our time here we are charged with raising its consciousness and that of the kingdoms with which we come into contact.

Kabbalistic teachings envision a multi-level soul, the lowest level giving us life or vitality, and the highest linking us intimately to God. An angelic figure, the Holy Guardian Angel, either forms one of the levels or is closely associated with our soul. The Holy Guardian Angel can be compared with the Solar Angel in the teachings of Helena Blavatsky and Alice Bailey. From an early date, many Kabbalists have promoted a belief in reincarnation, asserting that our spiritual journey requires more than one visit to the physical world. These two topics: the angelic presence and the cycle of rebirth, are of the utmost importance to our story.

Kabbalah, Judaism and Hebrew

At times in the past, study of the Kabbalah was permitted only for observant Jews. Moreover, they had to be married and over 40 years of age. The argument was that students had to be mature and must have attained harmony in their sexual lives. Kabbalistic study was prohibited altogether for women. In the modern world no such restrictions remain, and even in Jewish circles both men and women now study the Kabbalah. Prominent modern Kabbalists include a number of women, and many of both sexes are relatively young. Fortunately, the threshold of 40 years was not always enforced even in the past: some of the greatest Kabbalists died in their 20s or 30s. However we might interpret sexual harmony, we shall see that gender equilibrium plays an important role in Kabbalistic teachings.

Does study of the Kabbalah compromise existing religious beliefs or imply an embrace of Judaism? No; the modern Kabbalah is an esoteric system of universal application, compatible with—and with the potential to enrich—any religion or life of spirituality. As noted, a Christian Kabbalah emerged at the time of the Renaissance. The Kabbalah can provide people of all persuasions a basis for lifelong spiritual adventure.

That said, we have to recognize that the Kabbalah's roots lie in Judaism. The classical texts were written in Hebrew or its close relative, Aramaic. Hebrew is a sacred language with rich symbolism and spiritual value. Moreover, the Hebrew script is beautiful, and the words have a characteristic vibration, an almost magical quality.

Do we need to learn Hebrew to grasp Kabbalistic concepts that date back to Jewish roots? Again no; most western Kabbalists cannot read or write Hebrew. We need to learn a few Hebrew and Aramaic words (written in western, Roman script), and these are shown in Table 2. A lengthier glossary is provided for interested students in Appendix 2. Note that plural Hebrew words end in either *-im* or *-oth*. The former is the convention for grammatically masculine words, like *maggid* or *partzuf*, while the latter applied to feminine words like *sefirah* and *kelifah*. The Appendices need not be studied in detail at this stage, but they provide references that can be consulted as needed throughout the course.

Hebrew and Aramaic share a common alphabet. From time to time, it will be necessary to refer to specific letters in that alphabet. Occasionally letters will be shown in Hebrew script, but more often Roman equivalents, or transliterations, will be used. For example, the Hebrew letter *alef* (א) will be transliterated by A, and the letter *shin* (שׁ) by Sh. While Hebrew is written from right to left, transliterated words will be printed in the western style, from left to right. For example, the word *Chokmah* is written in Hebrew script as חכמה, but its transliterated form is written ChKMH. The Hebrew alphabet, with the rules for transliteration, is shown in Appendix 1.

The Hebrew alphabet consists only of consonants. Even *alef* (A), *ayin* (E) and *yod* (Y) are treated as consonants. In fact *alef* is a silent consonant, and some writers transliterate it simply as '. In

modern Hebrew vowels are shown by diacritical marks, called “vowel points,” which were introduced in late antiquity. The Hebrew Bible was written entirely without vowels, and pronunciation was just a matter of custom. The pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was known only to the high priest in Jerusalem.

Table 2. A Few Important Hebrew/Aramaic Words

Hebrew/Aramaic Word	Transliteration	English Translation
<i>Ain Sof</i>	AYN SVP	The Godhead, the utterly transcendent Deity.
<i>Sefirah</i>	SPYRH	A divine aspect, potency, principle, or vessel. Alternatively, an archetype describing human experience or challenge.
<i>Sefiroth</i>	SPYRVTh	The plural of <i>sefirah</i>
<i>Kether</i>	KThR	First sefirah, “The Crown”
<i>Chokmah</i>	ChKMh	Second sefirah, “Wisdom”
<i>Binah</i>	BYNH	Third sefirah, “Understanding”
<i>Daath</i>	DETh	Unnumbered sefirah, “Knowledge”
<i>Chesed</i>	ChSD	Fourth sefirah “Mercy”
<i>Geburah</i>	GBVRH	Fifth sefirah, “Judgment”
<i>Tifareth</i>	ThPARTh	Sixth sefirah, “Beauty”
<i>Netzach</i>	NTzCh	Seventh sefirah, “Victory”
<i>Hod</i>	HVD	Eighth sefirah, “Splendor”
<i>Yesod</i>	YSVD	Ninth sefirah, “Foundation”
<i>Malkuth</i>	MLKVTh	Tenth sefirah, “The Kingdom”
<i>Klifah</i>	QLYPH	Husk or shell
<i>Klifoth</i>	QLYPVTh	The plural of <i>klifah</i>
<i>Maggid</i>	MGYD	Angelic messenger
<i>Partzuf</i>	PRTzVP	“Face,” persona, divine “person”
<i>Partzufim</i>	PRTzVPYM	The plural of <i>partzuf</i>

Another point to remember is that, in classical Hebrew, letters were used as numbers. Use of the letters as numerical symbols served the utilitarian purpose of counting, but is also facilitated the method of textual analysis known as *gematria*. Numerical values are calculated for words and phrases by adding up the values of the individual letters. Some Kabbalists have discovered

profound meaning in the “arithmetic” that can be performed on passages from scripture and elsewhere. We shall refer to gematria later in the course and will cite several examples.

Pronunciation of Hebrew words is not an issue in a correspondence course, but some comments may be in order, particularly concerning the word “Kabbalah.” The most common pronunciation among modern, non-Jewish esotericists is ka-BAR-lah. However Jewish scholars pronounce it kabbal-AH, while some Christian seminary professors pronounce it KAR-balah. The choice, for the moment, is up to the student. With regard to spelling, which may be more important, we find “Kabbalah,” “Qabalah,” “Cabala,” and other variants. Most authorities view these simply as different ways to transliterate the Hebrew word קַבָּלָה, but a few writers have attached meaning to particular spellings. For example, “Kabbalah” is sometimes used to refer specifically to the Judaic tradition, “Cabala” to the Christian/Hermetic tradition, and “Qabalah” to the magical tradition that emerged in the late 19th century. Here, we make no such distinctions and use “Kabbalah” throughout the course.

Outline of the Course

The Kabbalah has evolved over a period of at least 2,000 years. Some of the concepts familiar in the modern Kabbalah were known in the Middle Ages, while others developed during the Renaissance or in the 16th and 17th centuries. New concepts have emerged during the last 200 years. This course is structured on historical lines, exploring the evolution of ideas in the major “schools” of Kabbalah. Such an approach allows us to “sit at the feet” of the great scholars, teachers, mystics and magi as the Kabbalah evolved and listen as they share their insights.

The Kabbalah forms part of the *ageless wisdom*, or *perennial philosophy*, believed to underlie all the world’s religions, philosophies and psychologies. It overlaps with other western esoteric systems, like Rosicrucianism and the teachings of the Society of the Golden Dawn. It also overlaps with and complements esoteric systems whose roots lie in south Asia. Among the latter are the work of the Theosophical Society and the writings of Alice Bailey, Helena Roerich, and Rudolf Steiner. Students can gain valuable insights from seeing how the Kabbalah addresses familiar concepts in other esoteric systems. For example, some commentators compare the sefiroth with the *logoi* of Theosophical teachings. The process is not always easy. One-to-one correspondences may be hard to discern, and terminology poses a major problem. Nevertheless, ultimate Truth is unified, and paradoxes or inconsistencies reflect humanity’s incomplete grasp of reality. A more comprehensive grasp of reality may emerge in the future. Perhaps also, a more inclusive terminology will be developed to facilitate comparisons.

The course is divided into seven segments:

1. Introduction and Overview

2. The Early Kabbalah

Jewish esotericism in biblical and later times; the golden age of Judaic Kabbalah in medieval Europe; the classical texts of Kabbalah; the sefiroth and the names of God.

3. Mystical and Ecstatic Kabbalah

Jewish mysticism and the Merkabah movement; emergence of the mystical Kabbalah; the Kabbalah of language; Abraham Abulafia and the ecstatic Kabbalah.

4. The Theoretical Kabbalah

The *Zohar*; the Safed community; divine emanations and the Tree of Life; the creation story and shattering of the vessels; the Shekinah, the feminine face of God; the human soul and its destiny.

5. Hermeticism and the Christian Kabbalah

Early development of Hermeticism; merging of Hermeticism, Kabbalah and Christianity; magic and the Kabbalah; major concepts of the Christian Kabbalah.

6. The Modern Kabbalah

Confluence of esoteric traditions; modern Judaic Kabbalah; modern Hermetic Kabbalah; the Golden Dawn tradition; Kabbalah and the Tarot.

7. Review and Synthesis

What the Kabbalah means to us; modern perspectives on the mystical/ecstatic Kabbalah; the Kabbalah and duality; Kabbalah, the Trinity, and the seven rays; the soul and the Holy Guardian Angel.

Each segment contains topic material, recommendations for additional reading, and student assignments. The assignments offer students opportunities to explore the material and to share insights. Several questions are listed at the end of each segment. Students can respond briefly to all of them, or respond in more depth to two or three questions of their choice. The arrangement gives students considerable latitude in how much time and effort to invest. However we believe that the serious student will want to make a significant investment. Thoughtful papers enhance the student's understanding of the material and encourage new insights. They also allow the instructor to offer more valuable feedback. Furthermore, well-written papers may merit publication as student papers—or full-length articles—in our journal, the *Esoteric Quarterly*.

The segments of this course are not all of the same length or complexity. Accordingly, students may wish to spend more time on some than on others. A student, who might feel able to submit the report on this first segment in 2-4 weeks, would likely want to devote more than a month on each of the later segments. A rigid schedule of reporting is not expected, and personal circumstances may dictate changes in schedule. However, rhythm is of the essence in esoteric work, and students are encouraged to pace themselves so that the course is completed within one year. To allow the work to extend much longer is to risk waning interest and the possibility that the course will never be completed. There are no “throw-away” segments in this course, and the last segment is considered the most important of all.

Resources

A bibliography of books and articles will be provided at the end of each subsequent course segment, offering serious students opportunities for further study. For the course as a whole, the following texts are recommended:

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| Adolphe Franck | <i>The Kabbalah: the Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews.</i> Bell Publishing Co., 1940. |
| Dion Fortune. | <i>The Mystical Qabalah</i> , revised edition. Weiser Books, 1935/2000. |
| Moshe Idel | <i>Kabbalah.</i> Yale University Press, 1988. |
| Aryeh Kaplan | <i>Meditation and the Kabbalah.</i> Weiser, 1982. |
| | <i>Sefer Yetzirah.</i> Weiser Books, 1997. |
| | <i>The Bahir.</i> Weiser Books, 1998. |
| Gershom Scholem. | <i>Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.</i> Schocken Books, 1946/1954. |
| | <i>Kabbalah.</i> Meridian Books, 1974. |

Arthur E. Waite. *The Holy Kabbalah*. Citadel Press, (1929).

Authorities

Since the authors of these books are our primary authorities for the course, it will be worthwhile to say a little about each one.

Adolphe Franck (1809–1893) was born in Liocourt, France. Originally planning to enter the rabbinate, he studied medicine instead, and then philosophy. He held many prestigious positions, contributed often to the journal “Archives Israélites,” and was named commander of the French Legion of Honor. Franck’s book, *The Kabbalah: The Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews* (1843), gave him a legitimate claim to be the founder of the modern Kabbalah. However, his exposition remained true to Judaic tradition and avoided many of the influences that molded later 19th-century Kabbalism.



Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942) was born in the United States but grew up in Britain. He became a Freemason and prominent member of the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn. Waite became uncomfortable with the Society’s involvement in ritual magic, and in 1903 he left to form a derivative organization, the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, whose main emphasis was on mysticism. Waite’s book *The Holy Kabbalah* was the most scholarly work of its time. Along with artist Pamela Coleman “Pixie” Smith, Waite designed the popular “Rider” Tarot deck (Rider was the publisher).

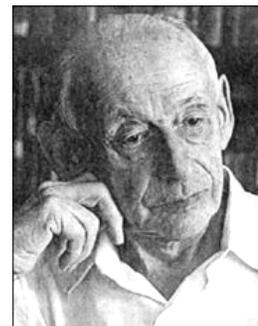


Dion Fortune (1890–1946), whose real name was Violet Mary Firth, was a noted occultist and trance medium and one of the first female Kabbalists. Her *nom de plume* evolved from the initiatory name *Deo non fortuna* (“[Trust in] God, not luck”) adopted when she was inducted into Alpha et Omega, a Golden Dawn derivative. Later she founded the Fraternity of the Inner Light. Fortune’s book *The Mystical Qabalah* became one of the most widely read introductory texts of the 20th century.



Dion Fortune wrote a number of other esoteric texts and also some occult novels which are partly autobiographical. A good conventional biography is *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light* (2000), by her student Gareth Knight.

Gershom Gerhard Scholem (1897–1982) led the Kabbalistic revival among Jewish scholars, in the face of widespread suspicion of its relevance or propriety. Born in Germany, he studied mathematics and philosophy before earning his doctorate in oriental languages. In 1923 Scholem was hired as a librarian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and later became its first professor of Jewish Mysticism. He was elected president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 1968.



Scholem is best known for his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (1965), *Kabbalah* (1974), and *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (1991). Scholem’s work inspired a whole

generation of Jewish Kabbalistic scholars.

Israel Regardie (1907–1985) was born in London of Jewish immigrants but spent most of his life in the United States. For four years he served as secretary to Aleister Crowley of Golden Dawn notoriety. He joined a Rosicrucian organization and later was inducted into Stella Matutina, a Golden Dawn derivative. Eventually he practiced as a chiropractor and also studied psychotherapy.

Regardie's writings include *A Garden of Pomegranates* (borrowing a title from the famous Safed scholar Moses Cordovero), *The Middle Pillar*, and *The Golden Dawn* (a compilation of four earlier books). Regardie's works provide ones of the best insights into the rituals of the Golden Dawn.

Aryeh Kaplan (1934–1983) was born in New York City, studied nuclear physics and was listed in *Who's Who in Physics*. Ordained a rabbi, he wrote 50 books on esoteric Judaism before his death at age 48. Among his books are translations and commentaries on the *Bahir* and *Sepher Yetzirah* and the major work *Meditation and the Kabbalah*. In addition to the two classical texts, Kaplan's other books include translations of many lesser-known Kabbalistic texts. Frequently he brings a mathematical and scientific approach to the interpretation of Kabbalistic concepts.

Moshe Idel (b.1947), who was born in Romania, emigrated to Israel in 1963. He is now Professor of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Idel's book *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* revisits and expands on many of the topics discussed by Gershom Scholem. He has also provided the only book in English devoted to the work of the ecstatic Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia.

An historian whose scholarship is of the highest order, Idel is arguably the foremost living Jewish Kabbalist.



Assignment

Instructions for preparing your report are provided below. Your report should be headed SES Kabbalah Course, Segment 1, and should include your name, email address, and date of submittal. The report should be formatted in Microsoft Word, rich text, or plain text. Send your report as an e-mail attachment to seselectives@gmail.com.

- Please tell us briefly what your expectations are in taking this course. Also, do you have any questions or comments about this segment, or about the course as a whole?
- Following are a number of issues raised in this segment of the course. Write a paper discussing two of the issues in depth, or all of them more briefly.
 - (a) Kabbalistic teachings envision a Godhead—the *Ain Sof*—that is infinite, eternal, unknown and unknowable. What other philosophical or religious system(s) embrace

a similarly transcendent deity? How does such a deity fit into your own belief structure?

- (b) The Kabbalah conceives of divine manifestations, or revelations, on levels of reality intermediate between the Godhead and humanity. What intermediate manifestations can you identify in other philosophical or religious systems? What roles do they play?
- (c) Discuss the notions that (i) the Earth is divine, (ii) this is not our ultimate home, and (iii) we have a responsibility to raise the consciousness of the planet and its lives.
- (d) What purpose do divine names serve? Why might it be necessary or desirable to have a name—or multiple names—for God? Cite examples of invocation of divine names in Christianity, Islam, or other world religions. Do divine names play any role in your own esoteric work or spiritual life?

The instructor will critique the report, respond to questions, offer suggestions for further study, and provide encouragement in your subsequent work in the course.