Kabbalah: The Doctrine of Soul and Spirit

Introduction to Gnostic Studies
Our Purpose

- Examine how religion is structured in three levels: introductory, intermediate, and advanced.
- The nature of Jewish doctrine and how it encodes a universal path.
- The scriptures, practices, and traditions that once embodied the spirit of initiation.
- Mystical interpretation: the need for intuitively extracting the spirit of the letter that kills.
Why Study Kabbalah?

- It is a spiritual language of higher worlds conveyed through meditation and visions.
- Kabbalah is the basis of Christianity, since it is eternal and predates all religions.
- Tradition divorced from its spirit is dead.
- When religion becomes impractical and ineffective for reducing or eliminating the causes of suffering, it dies.

The Qabalistic cosmology is the Christian Gnosis. Without it we have an incomplete system in our religion, and it is this incomplete system which has been the weakness of Christianity.

—Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*
Why Study Kabbalah?

- A true initiate understands the spirit of a given thing, not merely its literal meaning.
- Kabbalah is the spirit of scripture, which conveys oneiric symbolism.

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. —Matthew 13:10-13
The Principles of Kabbalah

- Body (גוּף Guf)—Introductory: Ethics
- Soul (שׁנ Nephesh)—Intermediate: Compassion
- Spirit (רוּחַ Ruach)—Advanced: Wisdom
Levels of Interpretation
The Body, Soul, and Spirit of Scripture

- Everyone interprets scripture according to their level.
- Ethical, moral, psychological, philosophical, spiritual, and initiatic interpretations.
- If we want to understand scripture more deeply, we need to transform our level of being.
- Initiatic interpretations fly in the face of conventional wisdom while informing their bases.

The Jews had three sacred books: the first is the body of doctrine, that is to say, the Bible. The second is the soul of the doctrine, the Talmud, where the national Jewish soul is. The third is the spirit of the doctrine, the Zohar, where the entire rabbinical Kabbalah is.

The Bible, the body of doctrine, is written in code. Thus, if we want to study the Bible by combining verses, we will proceed in an ignorant, empirical, and absurd manner. We find the key to interpret the Bible only in the third book, in the Zohar, written by Simon Ben Jochai, the great enlightened rabbi. —Samael Aun Weor, Alchemical Symbolism of the Nativity of Christ
The Three Greatest Books of Kabbalism

- Kabbalists claim their writings come from antiquity, like the Zohar, while scholars contextualize them within 12th century Spain and Southern France.
- Scriptures have divine origins in the higher worlds.
- Unadulterated symbolism is more potent, but less decipherable.
- Greatest spiritual works always are symbolic, to avoid censorship and preserve their meaning for initiates.

According to Eliphas Levi, the three greatest books of Qabbalism are the Sepher Yetzirah, The Book of Formation; the Sepher ha Zohar, The Book of Splendor; and the Apocalypse, The Book of Revelation. The dates of the writing of these books are by no means thoroughly established. Qabbalists declare that the Sepher Yetzirah was written by Abraham. Although it is by far the oldest of the Qabbalistic books, it was probably from the pen of the Rabbi Akiba, A.D. 120. —Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*
The body of scripture is dead, whereas the spirit of the letter resuscitates.

Rabbi Simeon says: "Woe to the man who says that the Torah came to relate stories, simply and plainly, and simpleton tales about Esau and Laban and the like. If it was so, even at the present day we could produce a Torah from simplistic matters, and perhaps even nicer ones than those. If the Torah came to exemplify worldly matters, even the rulers of the world have among them things that are superior. If so, let us follow them and produce from them a Torah in the same manner. It must be that all items in the Torah are of a superior nature and are uppermost secrets." —Zohar
Humanity despises divine knowledge.

"Come and behold: the world above and the world below are measured with one scale. The children of Yisrael below correspond to the lofty angels above. It is written about the lofty angels: 'who makes the winds his messengers' (Psalms 104:4). When they descend downwards, they are donned with the vestments of this world. If they had not acquired the dress for this world, they would not be able to exist in this world, and the world would not be able to stand them. And if this is so for the angels, how much more so is it for the Torah that created these messengers and all the worlds, that exist due to her. Once it was brought down to this world, if it had not donned all these covering garments of this world, which are the stories and simplistic tales, the world would not have been able to tolerate it." —Zohar
Individual Revelation and Religion

- Spiritual experience precedes historical occurrence.
- Historical narrative conveys universal truths.
- Kabbalah is spiritual experience that transcends time.

Revelation, for instance, is to the mystic not only a definite historical occurrence which, at a given moment in history, puts an end to any further direct relation between mankind and God. With no thought of denying Revelation as a fact of history, the mystic still conceives the source of religious knowledge and experience which bursts forth from his own heart as being of equal importance for the conception of religious truth. In other words, instead of the one act of Revelation, there is a constant repetition of this act. This new Revelation, to himself or to his spiritual master, the mystic tries to link up with the sacred texts of the old; hence the new interpretation given to the canonical texts and sacred books of the great religions.

—Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*
Sacred geography, narrative, and temporality convey initiation.

Genuine mysticism is personal experience, portrayed through scriptural allegory.

The historical aspects of religion have a meaning for the mystic chiefly as symbols of acts which he conceives as being divorced from time, or constantly repeated in the soul of every man. Thus the exodus from Egypt, the fundamental event of our history, cannot, according to the mystic, have come to pass once only and in one place; it must correspond to an event which takes place in ourselves, an exodus from an inner Egypt in which we all are slaves. —Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*