

THE WESTERN MYSTERIES: QABALAH



The word Qabalah (also spelled Kaballah and Cabala) is from the Hebrew root, QBL - cabal meaning "to receive". Qabalah means "the reception". The word refers to the reception of an energy that quickens the mind and enlivens the heart of the one who receives.

Throughout our history, steps and tests of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual progress have been called initiations. Formal initiations are a universal part of the teachings in the so called "mystery schools". What are these mystery schools and what relation do they have to orthodox religions?

There are three levels of religious teachings. I'll use Judaism as an example. In Judaism, the outermost level of religious belief and practice is embodied in the Torah, the five books of the law at the start of the Old Testament. This level is for people who can read (or hear), believe and follow the rules. These beliefs made a working social life, civilisation possible for the Jewish people. But this is not enough for all. Thinkers want to know why they should follow the rules. In Judaism, the thinkers study the Talmud, a series of learned interpretations of the Torah. Here they learn, for example, that they shouldn't kill because "As you sow, so shall you reap", the law of action and reaction applied to morals and ethics.

But there is another level of religious person. These are the people who aren't satisfied to read of another's experience of God on the mountain, nor by knowing how and why the laws work. These people want to experience God for themselves. These people are sometimes referred to as mystics. They seek the mystical experience of personal contact with "the ground of all being", with what I call Source. These are the people who seek and treasure experiences of true initiation.

Seldom does the main body of the religion regard these people as more than madmen, at least while they are alive. After death, they may become officially holy or be canonised as saints. But while they are alive, they are most often a disruption, an embarrassment for the official temple, mosque or church.

Unfortunately, the orthodox leaders of the three main world religions generally find their own mystics and mystical teachings unacceptable and disruptive. The leaders of

orthodox religions generally prefer that only they seek personal contact with deity. They believe that the congregation shouldn't even attempt it. Perhaps their motivation is to prevent individuals from being overwhelmed by direct contact with deity. More likely, they prefer to keep a monopoly upon contact with the divine. Their doctrine is: If you want to know what God wants you to do, you have to join the church, mosque or temple, submit to their rules and give them your money.

The orthodoxy often regards the teachings of their mystics as blasphemous and even dangerous to those who practice them. Qabalah (or Kaballah) is the teaching of the sacred wisdom of Judaism. Sufism carries the mystical teachings of Islam. The Gnostics were the mystical Christians. They had access to the written and unwritten teachings of Qabalah, which they used to attain their enlightenment. However, the early Catholic Church forbid Gnosticism, excised most of the Gnosis from the Bible, disbanded groups of Gnostics and had any further followers of Gnosticism, let us politely say, disappear.

In all these traditions, secret mystery schools initiated students into the personal experience of Source. Although many officials of the faith may anguish over this statement, Qabalah does embody the mystical teachings of Judaism.

Most Western mystery schools today use the teachings of Qabalah for both instruction and for the rituals of initiation for enlightening their pupils. Why do we go to the root of Judaism for contact with Source? New dispensations do not arise out of thin air, but rather emerge from existing ones. Judaism was the matrix for the spiritual culture of the Western world. It was the only monotheistic religion available. And when you recall that Jesus was a Jew, it becomes clear that our Western religious culture does have Judaism as its root. Christianity emerged from Judaism just like Buddhism arose from the matrix of Hinduism.

This short introduction to Qabalah is limited to how it is used by modern students of the mysteries. Although we won't go deeply into the traditional Qabalah of the Rabbis, a small look at its origins will enrich our tour.

As to the original source of Qabalah, the authorities are unanimous. The angels gave Qabalah to humankind. Particularly, it was **Metatron**, God's number-one, the Archangel of Kether, the highest sphere of the Tree of Life. Before we scoff at this idea, let's look more deeply into the matter.





Hebrew mysticism arose from the star worshippers of ancient Chaldea. Then a magical figure, the great priest-king Melchizedek who was neither born nor died, arrived on the scene to teach Abraham, the father of the Hebrew race. Melchizedek initiated Abraham into the mysteries and gives him the first Eucharistic feast of bread and wine. His influence continues unabated. The Bible even says that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Many of the leaders of the Hebrew race studied with the adepts of the mystery schools in **Egypt**, Tyre, Babylon and elsewhere. Many influences flowed into and enriched the esoteric wisdom of Israel. This adding to and expanding of the wisdom teachings continues to this day.



At the time of Jesus, there were three main religious movements in Palestine. The Pharisees and the Sadducees are often spoken of in the Bible. Of the third group, the Essenes, all mention in the Bible has been excised. The mystery schools teach that when his merit was recognised, he was sent to live in the Essene community where he was trained in the esoteric lore. He is said to have lived there until he was thirty when he visited John the Baptist and began his mission openly. Whether this is exactly true or not is open to question. However, the man who wrote the Lord's prayer knew his Qabalah. Malkuth (the Kingdom), Hod (Splendor - the Power), and Netzach (Victory - the Glory) form the triangle at the bottom of the tree of life.

Esoteric Christianity (Gnosis) flourished for four centuries after Christ. The Gnosis has strong roots in the Greek and Egyptian mysteries. It was a powerful mystery teaching that attracted many followers.



Gnostic Blessing Symbol



However, at the **council of Nicea** in 325 AD, the officials of the Christian Church decided to eliminate all trace of esoteric (mystical) Christianity. They removed whole books from the Bible (25 gospels), changed others, persecuted the Gnostics and destroyed every bit of the literature that it could. Clearly, it was the decision of the Church to do its very best to eliminate even the memory of mystical Christianity.

Most of the wisdom of the ancient world was gathered together in the great **libraries of Alexandria**. Although there is still controversy as to whether it was the Christians or the Moslems who burned the library, it is said that the burning of the books and manuscripts for six months fuelled the great baths and bakeries of Alexandria. Our spiritual history, our esoteric wisdom, was nearly eliminated.



Only in this century have discoveries been made of ancient manuscripts that were hidden in caves or covered by seas since before the Christian purge. In these we find clues and treasures of true spirituality that orthodox Christianity tried so hard to destroy. The Nag Hammadi Scrolls of Egypt and the Dead Sea scrolls are examples of these recently found treasures. Below the cliffs of Nag Hammadi were found gospels of Thomas and Phillip that greatly predate any of the gospel versions in the Bible. A complete version of the book of Isaiah, the **Isaiah Scroll**, dating to about 400 years before Christ was found. In it, we can read of the secrets or prayer that could have

enriched our culture before and at last now can again.

However, there was also an unwritten tradition that has also survived the test of time. Around the time of the burning of the libraries of Alexandria, a group of magi (elders or wise men) from many countries and traditions were meeting near Alexandria in Fez, which is today in the country of Morocco. Since they spoke many different languages, communication between them was at times difficult. To solve this problem, they used the language of symbols.

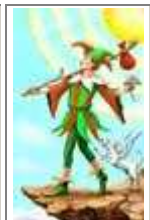
Many symbols have a pre-existing meaning, independent of conscious understanding. They are to the subconscious mind what words are to the conscious mind. However, unlike words, symbols already exist and their root meaning does not need to be learned by the subconscious. To the subconscious mind, meaning is multi-faceted and global. When trying to understand a symbol with the conscious mind, one finds that its meaning changes with the reference frame. It's rather like the blind men describing an elephant. Each touches a very different part and comes up with a very different definition. Unlike words which each have discrete meanings, symbols imply and cast veils of allusion, taking on different meaning in different contexts. Like dreams, individual symbols are interconnected with others and form a field of knowing, a way of apprehending that which one does not yet comprehend.

Beyond their inherent subconscious meaning, when symbols are used by groups of people for years or even generations to embody a specific teaching, they become imbued with extra meaning. Later students with no personal instruction can, by meditating upon such symbols, retrieve the meaning that was imbued into them.

As the Christian Church and the Moslems were systematically eliminating all their "competition", there was a real danger that the wisdom gathered by the adepts for thousands of years of human history could have been lost forever. The magi who met in Fez devised a method to assure that their collective teachings would survive the test of the times. They embodied their wisdom in a series of combinations of symbols. They imbued meaning into the symbols with their shared meditations. And they devised ways to use this series of pictures for games and for fortune telling.



These pictures are the major arcana of the Tarot, the root of our modern playing cards. The very first Tarot key, key zero – the **Fool** is the **Joker** in our modern decks of cards. Like the fool who represents the life-breath that takes form as all things, the joker is a "wild card" that can be any other card as defined at the start of a game.





Making a game and a way to tell fortunes insured the popularity of the Tarot, which quickly spread throughout Europe. Some of the symbolism was modified so as to not arouse Church opposition. For example, in popular early Tarot decks, the name of the **Hierophant** (spiritual teacher, inner teacher) was changed to be "the **Pope**".





The **Tarot** and the **Tree of Life** are the central symbols that embody the mystery teachings of Qabalah. It is upon these that the student of the Western mysteries contemplates and meditates. The 22 major "arcana" of the Tarot correspond precisely to the 22 paths connecting the ten spheres of the Tree of Life. Together, the 22 major keys and the 10 spheres make up the famous "32 paths of wisdom" of Qabalah.

Although the Christian Church did try to stamp out all things mystical, the mystical urge exists in all and cannot be eliminated. People will always find a way to make contact with the Source of all being. Some in the Catholic Church found a way to do so through devotion. Very lovely and inspirational literature has been written by these Catholic mystics. However, only a certain sort of person is attracted to the life of devotion. Having "burned the bridges" to God, the Church is bereft of its own esoteric (hidden, secret, sacred, mystic) tradition. What a tragedy it is that the living fire that could have made the Church an instrument for the awakening of Christ-consciousness in the world has been almost extinguished by the Church itself.

Because our Western esoteric tradition was nearly annihilated, many of mystical inclination in the West have attempted to adopt the methods of eastern traditions. The East is rich with many different paths suitable to the many types of humans. However, unless you are willing to live away from the mainstream of social life and have an advanced guru to supervise your efforts, Eastern methods of spiritual awakening may do more damage than good. Many Westerners have adopted a vegetarian diet, a celibate

lifestyle, and breathing exercises from Eastern traditions with less than optimal results! Some become so sensitive that they cannot emotionally withstand the hustle and bustle of Western life and may experience nervous breakdowns.

Qabalah is truly the "yoga of the West". Its methods are perfectly suitable to the Western race type and life style. Eastern methods train the student to become more and more sensitive until a point is reached where the student becomes aware of the subtle divine energies. The Western mystery method is to use ritual and ceremonial to intensify the divine energies to the point where you cannot help but perceive them. Then the ritual ceremony is ended and the energy levels return to normal, leaving the student able to return to his busy life and work. The ceremonies include much use of symbolism, colour, movement, spoken words and the chanting of divine and archangelic names. Through the use of such ceremony and ritual, the divine energies make a profound impression in the subconscious mind of the student and continue to work there, gradually transforming the student and awakening the divine within.

In Qabalistic training, the teacher rarely answers the students' questions directly. Instead, the teacher will tell the student a story that contains a principle of truth. The student must then apply this principle to his circumstances and thereby derive his own answer. The teachings of Qabalah do not so much inform the mind as teach the student how to think. Beyond that, they direct the student where to extend consciousness so as to eventually be able to consciously go far beyond the limitations of thought.

One cannot precisely define that consciousness which is beyond thought. For those who have learned to consciously operate in that realm, no explanation is necessary. For those who haven't, none is possible. The method of Qabalah is to give the student a series of related symbols to meditate upon and think about. Gradually, the student begins to learn to "think" in symbols while awake. The average person is only vaguely aware of doing so in dreams while asleep. The Qabalistic student learns to consciously direct a similar process to dreams, and to do so while awake. Gradually, this process guides the student into direct contact with the root of all being, with Source. It is this direct contact with Source that is the goal of the seekers. Through this process, the successful student of Qabalah learns to consciously move in realms beyond thought and thereby becomes one of those for whom no proof is necessary.

How do you recognise those in whom the "spirit has been quickened" by contact with Source? In *Sexual Energy and Yoga*, **Elisabeth Haich** says, "It is difficult to find them, for in appearance they are no different from other men, and they are recognised and understood only by those who are at the level immediately below their own. Others may worship them because they feel their greatness, but they cannot understand them. Some even hate them because they feel their greatness and imperviousness to all temptation, and therefore feel inferior and insignificant beside them. And yet he who seeks God from the depths of his heart finds these men, for 'by their fruits ye shall know them' (Matt. 7:20)."



<p>For those who are ripe for spiritual awakening, being in personal contact with those who are already in contact with Source is infectious. The "awakened" have a peculiar enthusiasm and vitality that makes them very charismatic. And they all have a very well developed sense of humor! Being in their presence is a truly magical experience. There is a no-nonsense style about them that gets to the root of any matter directly. The energy of their presence is often quite like a breath of fresh air or a splash of cold water in the face. It startles and awakens. However, it will also energise and stir up any immature behavioural patterns in the student. Unresolved problems of character will be magnified, often to the chagrin of the student. Under the impact of the presence of one who has more direct contact with source, the student is put into a kind of spiritual hot-house and will be forced to spiritually "grow-up" far more swiftly than otherwise.</p>	