

On page 63 of the Jan-March 2000 issue of PT, I inadvertently besmirched the reputations of James Trimm and Avi ben Mordecai. In a reply to a letter from Cliff Robertson in Montana, I might have given the impression that both James Trimm and Avi ben Mordecai are involved in the occult practices of Kabbala such as soul travel, etc. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Although much of Kabbala is occult in origin, there are also biblical truths and insights taught in Kabbalistic circles from which we can benefit. We shouldn't paint all of Kabbala with the broad brush of "heresy." James Trimm and Avi ben Mordecai have used some of the Zohar and other texts of Kabbala as additional proof texts of some truths taught in both the Tanakh and the New Testament. They have both been very careful to avoid the occult aspects of Kabbala. I humbly apologize to both James Trimm and Avi ben Mordecai for any wrong impressions that others might have gotten from my comments in the Jan-March 2000 issue of Petah Tikvah.

I haven't done any articles on Kabbala. I have studied it, both privately and under local rabbis. However, I have only scratched the surface; there is so much to it. I do not recommend it. Some is biblical, even good meditation. Some of it is quite frankly very boring. But most of it is occult. Some might call it Jewish occult, but that would be a misnomer, since it borrows so heavily from Hinduism, Babylonianism, and pagan Greek and Egyptian thought with the doctrines of reincarnation, transmigration of the souls, magical incantations, magic amulets, etc. Tacking "Jewish" onto it doesn't make it kosher. Karl Marx was Jewish, but what he did was very un-kosher. Advanced students of Kabbala even throw "curses" on others.

The following article, by Randolph Parrish, concentrates on the occult aspects and origins of Kabbala. It is far beyond the scope of this article this size to also include the positive aspects of Kabbala (also spelled "Kabballah").

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Origins of the Kabballah, Part 1

by Randolph Parrish

MUCH of what was to become known as Traditional Judaism was formed in the first few centuries of the Common Era against the background of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt (Alexandria) and Babylonia. Naturally any people will be affected by the culture in which they live; and yet, in this instance it is to be regretted that the Sages failed to keep Judaism free from the absorption of ideas which were both foreign to Judaism and to the commands of Moses.

For example, the peoples of both "Babylonia" (and by this I mean the general geographic region including both modern-day Iraq and Persia, and not the ancient nation of Babylon) and Egypt believed in magical spells. They thought that they could invoke the gods by using magical incantations, and thereby effect spells, work magical deeds, and protect themselves or harm their enemies. Amulets might provide protection against such an attack, but only if the amulet were properly made, by one skilled in the magical arts. And when we study the literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans, we find ample evidence of this.

If you needed to ward off an attack by demons, for instance, a recommended pagan remedy was to hold onto your thumbs and repeat a magical formula. (This also worked against the evil eye.) In one example of a Greek incantation for success, you were advised to grab your thumbs and recite a particular charm seven times. [See Greek Pagan Magic in Translation--hereafter noted as GPMiT-- p. 273, PGMXXXVI. 161-77] In another incantation, this one to gain power, the same injunction was repeated: hold onto your thumbs, and recite the charm seven times. [GMPiT, p. 297, PGM LXIX. 1-3]

Unfortunately, when we study the Jewish writings of roughly the same period, we can find evidence of the same belief. To avoid the evil eye, a sage recommended, that a man should hold his thumbs in opposite hands, while repeating, "I, (recite your name), belong to the House of Joseph, over whom the evil eye has no power." (Berakoth 55b)

Another ancient pagan custom was to make up incantations by using a single word, repeated over and over, but reducing it by one letter each time it was spoken. Thus, "Gorgo-phonas, Orgophonas, Rgophonas, Gophonas, Ophnas, Phonas, Onas, Nas, As, S" was one such chant. Another example: "Rakanarba, Akanarba, Kanarba, Anarba, Narba, Arba, Rba, Ba, A." [Examples from GMPiT, p. 255, PGM XVIIIb 1-7; and p. 14, PGM II 64-183 . See also p. 267, PGM XXXIII 1-25; p. 279, PGM XXIX 1-21; p. 272; etc. for further examples.]

Again, this sort of magical chant finds reflection in the Talmud. The sages advise that a man who has drunk water at night--a time thought to be of special activity for demons--could ward them off by repeating, "Shab-iri,bariri,riri,iri,ri." (Pesahim 112a)

The ancient pagans also believed that, by using the proper formulas, they could summon the gods, and then appropriate their power to achieve what they wished. Whole books of these "magic" rituals and formulas existed; and a good magician might charge very dearly for the right to use his book, and to be taught the proper methods of summoning the gods.

In one example of such a book, [GMPiT, pp. 172ff, PGM XIII. 1-343] a petitioner is told how to seek a vision from the gods in order to find out about his future. After abstaining (from food or sex?) for 41 days, he was to enter a house which was in a high place, but on level ground, the entrance to which faced west, and in which no one had died during the past year. (The gods must be picky about their accommodations!) Then, after constructing an altar inside, he was to have seven proper forms of incense ready. (After all, each god required a different incense; and you could never be sure, with visions of this sort, which of the gods might happen to drop in on you.) Next, after a bit more magic and preparations (involving preparing some more incense precisely twenty-one days before the expected vision), the devotee can then be ready for his night of meeting with the gods. But first he has to know the wondrous Name of the great (single, original) god, which is really nine names, and consists of his name plus the names of his eight facets, as represented in the eight lesser gods which emanated from him. This great Name uses seven special Greek letters, the vowels (these same vowels appear in much of Greek magic).

Now, this name is to be written in a special way, because it can only be pronounced in a special way. Part of it has to be made with a popping sound, part with a hissing sound, part with bellowing, and so forth. (Ordinary speech won't work.) In any event, if you had done all of that correctly, as well as a few other things, then the gods would come to you; otherwise, they might regard you as

not really being initiated, and not possessed of the required knowledge, and then they would reject you. Eventually, though, if you did all of this correctly (and there was very much more involved, as well), then you would be able to get what you wished. With this ritual you could make yourself attractive to someone--or unattractive. You could become invisible. You could kill a snake. Or break a spell. Or influence kings and rulers. And even--if by chance you wanted--you could arrange to cross the Nile on a crocodile. All you had to do was to give the order to the crocodile, as though you were the god himself; and the poor lizard would have to obey, since, even if you were not the god, you had acquired the god's power, which was good enough. [GMPiT, p. 180, PGM XIII. 283-287])

UNFORTUNATELY, because the sages of the Talmudic era were so steeped in magical practice already, they did not reject something like this, but accepted it to such an extent that they even professed belief in the same kind of rituals. That is, they believed that, by manipulating the proper kinds of magical formulas, they could summon the very power of God Himself, and then use it for their own purposes:

"Rabba created a man, and sent him to Rabbi Zira. He spoke with him, but when the other one did not answer him, he said, 'You are from the companions [note: the Soncino edition here translates, 'You are from the magicians'], return to your dust.'

"Rav Hanina and Rav Oshaia used to sit every Sabbath eve and study the Book of Yet-zirah, and then created for themselves a three-year-old calf, and ate it." (Sanhedrin 65b)

Here these sages are said to have created both men and animals. Even the very same word used for "create," which is used in the scripture only of God, is here applied to these rabbis. Their powers were secured after having studied the Book of Yetzirah. Rashi, commenting on this passage, says "He created a man by means of the Book of Yetzirah, for it taught him the combination of the letters of the name of God."

Now, what was this "Book of Yetzirah"? It--or the teachings it is said to contain--is one of the major foundations for the later Kaballah. The title means, "The Book of Creation," (or "The Book of Foundation"), and it was a short (less than 2000 words) book of magical formulations, dating probably from sometime anywhere from 100 B.C. to 100 A.D. Its later devotees claimed that it had been authored by Abraham (but if that were so, then Abraham must have known Greek, as well as a few other subjects not generally credited to him, since some of its formulations appear to derive from that language).

It is not very different from similar pagan magical books of the period; and by taking the time to compare the two, we will be able to see even more closely the similarities between this and these pagan magic books. For example:

In the Book of Creation, it is told how the world was first made, and then "sealed" in six ways (for the six directions--the four cardinal points, plus up and down). The Name of God was pronounced at each "sealing" only each time the letters of the Name were spoken jumbled up in a different fashion. (Thus, the secret of how God actually "made" the world is revealed.) And this same sort of "sealing" to the six directions occurs in pagan magic; and again, the various letters which represent the Name of the supreme god are to be repeated six times, each time in a different combination. (This sort of jumbling of the letters of the names of the various gods is very common in ancient magical texts.) [See, for example, GMPiT, pp. 191-2, PGMXIII. 824-270]

According to the Book of Creation, it is by the power inherent in the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew Alphabet that the world and all things in it were created and sustained. That is, the letters actually possess the reality of the thing they describe (So that the word "table," for example, written in Hebrew, actually contains the substance of what makes a "table." It is not just a descriptive word.) And thus if you knew how to manipulate these letters properly, like any good magician, you could actually "create" real table, using only the power of the letters. And it is those letters which form the name of God which are the original source of all creative power. (Naturally, since these letters represent God.)

And if we look at pagan Egyptian mythology, we will find that the original creator god began his creation by uttering his own name as a "word of power," or "charm;" and thus, after a fashion, he himself comes into being--at least in a form through which he can relate to the world he is about to create. Like most ancient gods, his very name itself contained great power, and if you knew what that name was, and how to pronounce it, then the power of the god could be yours to manipulate. [See "Gods of the Egyptian," E. A. Wallis Budge, pp. 301,306,315]

(As well, if you knew the proper magical names and formulas to write, you might place these on the forehead of an idol, and so cause it to come to life for you, to speak to you, to tell you the future, give you an omen, and so forth. In the later Kaballah, this sort of "power" is used to give life to the "golem," a sort of "man" created by a learned scholar, usually in order to protect his community.)

At any rate, according to this concept, the gods (or God) do not really have any independent power of their own; they too are subject to the "nature of the universe," that is, the power inherent in their names, or in the letters of their magical alphabets; and if a man could learn to use these letters properly, he could appropriate the very power of the gods for his own use (the particular god or gods in question having no say about the matter). Thus such a magician could become all-powerful, and even create life, as did the two rabbis in the Talmud passage above.

In addition, in the Book of Creation, we find that certain letters have more "power" than others. There are seven "double" letters in Hebrew; that is, letters which can have two sounds. These are considered especially significant--among other things, they correspond to the seven planetary powers. (Alas, it develops that there are really more than seven planets, but that is a discussion for another place.)

SIMILARLY, in Greek there are seven vowels, which in pagan magic likewise identified with the seven planetary powers and also with the great Name; the jumbling up of which is a powerful charm. (Hebrew doesn't have vowels, so the double letters were used instead.) A sample pagan text relates how the petitioner for an omen is advised to bring along with him a list of which gods

control the hours and days of the weeks; and also a copy of the great Name of seven letters--corresponding to the seven Greek vowels--through which Name all power really comes. [GMPiT, p. 189, PGM XIII. 734-1077]

But as well, the Book of Creation shows a great affinity with Egyptian mythology. It asserts, for example, that God did not "create" the world directly, or ex nihilo ("out of noth-ing"); or by simply speaking it into existence ("Let there be light"). Rather, at first only a series of "emanations" issued forth from him. Then it was through these "emanations" ("sefirot"--a word which is thought to derive from the Greek word "sphere"--an odd choice for Abraham to use, if he indeed was the supposed author of this book) that the world was actually made. These emanations (ten in all) did not all issue forth at once, but proceeded one from another, so that there were degrees of emanations, unfolding like an accordion; or like "the skins of an onion," as one later commentary would put it. So, some of these were "closer" to God, and some "farther away;" or, better put, some were "higher," and some were "lower."

In Egyptian mythology, the original great primal god did not "create" the world directly, but did so through a series of lesser gods, which "emanated" from him. (Sometimes he did this by spitting them out; and in other versions, by laughing them out of himself.) These lesser gods married and had children, thus creating more gods, until there were a total of eight "descendants" of the original god.

In the Book of Creation, the ten "emanations" ("sefirot") were seen as only extensions of God himself; or as differing aspects of him: justice, mercy, kindness, and so on.) In later Egyptian mythology, the eight lesser gods came to be seen as only differing aspects of the same primal god (justice, mercy, kindness, fate, and so on.) Sometimes these were described as "echoes," and sometimes they were described as being from an "utterance" of the original creator God; but in any case, they either were emanations from him--or emanations from emanations. [See, for example, GMPiT, p. 186, PGM XIII. 524-550ff.]

So there is no question but that the Book of Creation contained pagan and occultic magical teachings. Accompanying all the earliest copies of the Book of Creation are tales about a sample magical ritual, a kind of graduation exercise, for those who had finished their studying of the Book. These initiates into the world of magic were to take a clod of earth, and animate it (showing that they had learned their lessons well). Sometimes the were to dance around this clod, or utter magical formulas around it--incorporating various permutations of the name of God--and afterwards their clod was supposed to come to life. It might walk around a little bit; and after its creator walked away from it, repeating the magical formulas in reverse order (a good magical practice), the living thing was to cease to live, and collapse back into the soil. Or so they said. (It is quite possible, of course, that the celebrants were in such a state of artificially-induced ecstasy--meaning, that they had been indulging in what would today be called prohibited substances--that they were not quite aware of what they were doing or of what was going on around them.) But such was the final test for these sorcerer's apprentices, a kind of rite of passage for the students of the Book.

And it is said to note, that the sages of the Talmudic era accepted the Book of Creation as genuine, and that this stamp of approval resulted in its being studied and commented upon by generation after generation, for centuries to come. How many thousands of hours, and weeks and years of study, went into this perusal, can only be guessed. But the best minds of Israel bent themselves to this hopeless task, and produced immense speculations about nothing.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Randolph Parrish, the author of this article, also has many books and articles available to our readers which would be useful for your studies, all available at very reasonable cost. We recommend that you contact him for a list of available materials. Contact him directly by writing to: Randolph Parrish, 6813 E Loma Land, Scottsdale AZ 85257

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