



Jewish History 11

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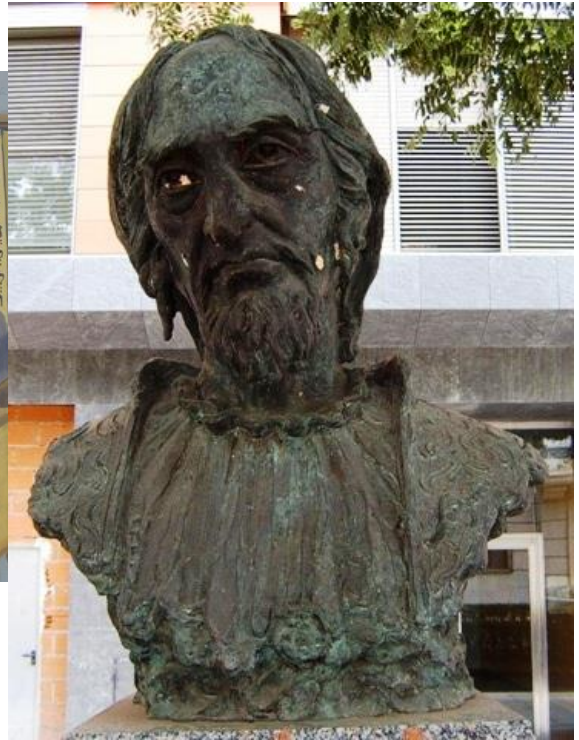
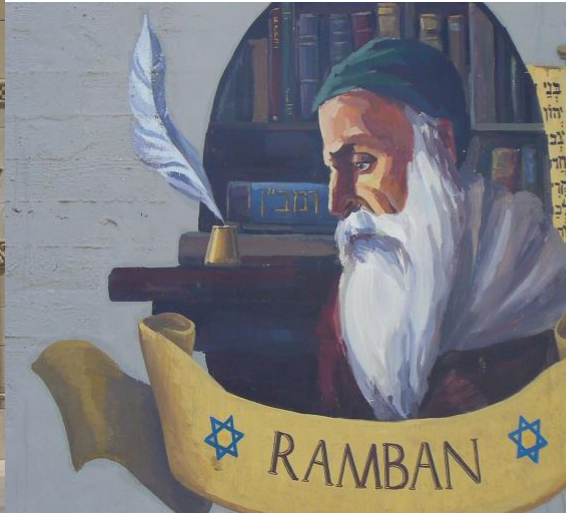
Sefer HaBahir

Whoever delves into mysticism cannot help but stumble, as it is written, “The stumbling block is in your hand.” (Isaiah 3:6) You cannot grasp these things unless you stumble over them



Professor Moshe Idel

The rationalistic reconstructions of Judaism prompted, in turn, a powerful reaction wherein an amalgam of older traditions, including the same mystical, mythical, and magical elements, came to the surface in more overt and crystallized forms.



Medieval Spanish Mystical Thinkers

- 1) Judah Halevi: 1075-1141
- 2) Ramban/Nachmanides: 1194-1270
- 3) Moses de Leon: 1240-1305

The Kuzari by Judah Halevi:

Intro: When the King of Khazar (as is related) dreamt that his way of thinking was agreeable to God, but not his way of acting, and was commanded in the same dream to seek the God-pleasing work, he inquired of a philosopher concerning his religious persuasion.

The Rabbi: I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having brought them through the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way. ...

Now ask the philosophers, and thou wilt find that they do not agree on one action or one principle, since some doctrines can be established by arguments, which are only partially satisfactory, and still much less capable of being proved.

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Moshe Halbertal:

The *Kuzari* was the response to *Guide for the Perplexed*, before it was even written.

Menachem Kellner

Halevi sees Jewishness as a matter of hardware; Maimonides insists that it's software.

Ramban

Deut 18:9-13

When you enter the land that your God יהוה is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations.

Let no one be found among you who consigns a son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead.

For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to יהוה, and it is because of these abhorrent things that your God יהוה is dispossessing them before you.

You must be wholehearted with your God יהוה.

Commentary to Deuteronomy 18:9

Know and understand concerning the subject of sorcery, that when the Creator, blessed be He, created everything from nothing; He made the higher powers guides for those below them. Thus He placed the earth and all things that are thereon in the power of the stars and constellations, depending on their rotation and position as proven by the study of astrology. Over the stars and constellations He further appointed guides, angels, and “lords” which are the souls [of the stars and constellations]. Their behavior from the time they come into existence for eternal duration, is according to the pattern the Most High decreed for them. However, it was one of His mighty wonders that within the power of these higher forces, he put configurations and capacities to alter the behavior of those under them. Thus if the direction of the stars towards the earth be good or bad to a certain country, people, or individual, the higher dominions can reverse it of their own volition, as they have said, “The opposite of the word oneg (pleasure) is nega (plague).” G-d ordained it because He, blessed be His Name, changes the times and the seasons

He calls for the waters of the sea to do with them at His Will, and brings on the shadow of death in the morning without changing the natural order of the world, and it is He Who made the stars and

constellations move about in their order. Therefore, the author of the Book of the Moon, the expert in [the field of] necromancy, said, “when the moon, termed ‘the sphere of the world’ is, for example, at the head of Aries (the Ram) and the constellation thus appears in a certain form, you should make a drawing of that grouping, engraving on it the particular time [when this relative position appears] and the name of the angel - one of the names mentioned in that book - appointed over it. Then perform a certain burning [of incense] in a certain specified manner, and the result of the influence [of the relative position of the stars] will be for evil, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to overthrow. And when the moon will be in a position relative to some other constellation you should make the drawing and the burning in a certain other manner and the result will be for good, to bud and to plant.” Now this, too, is the influence of the moon as determined by the power of its [heavenly] guide. But the basic manner of its movement is by the wish of the Creator, blessed be He, Who endowed it so in time past, while this particular action is contrary thereto.

This then is the secret of [all forms of] sorcery and their power concerning which the rabbis have said that “they contradict the power of the Divine agency,” meaning that they are contrary to the simple powers [with which the agencies have been endowed] and thus diminish a certain aspect of them. Therefore, it is proper that the Torah prohibit these activities in order to let the world rest in its customary way, which is the desire of its Creator. This is also one of

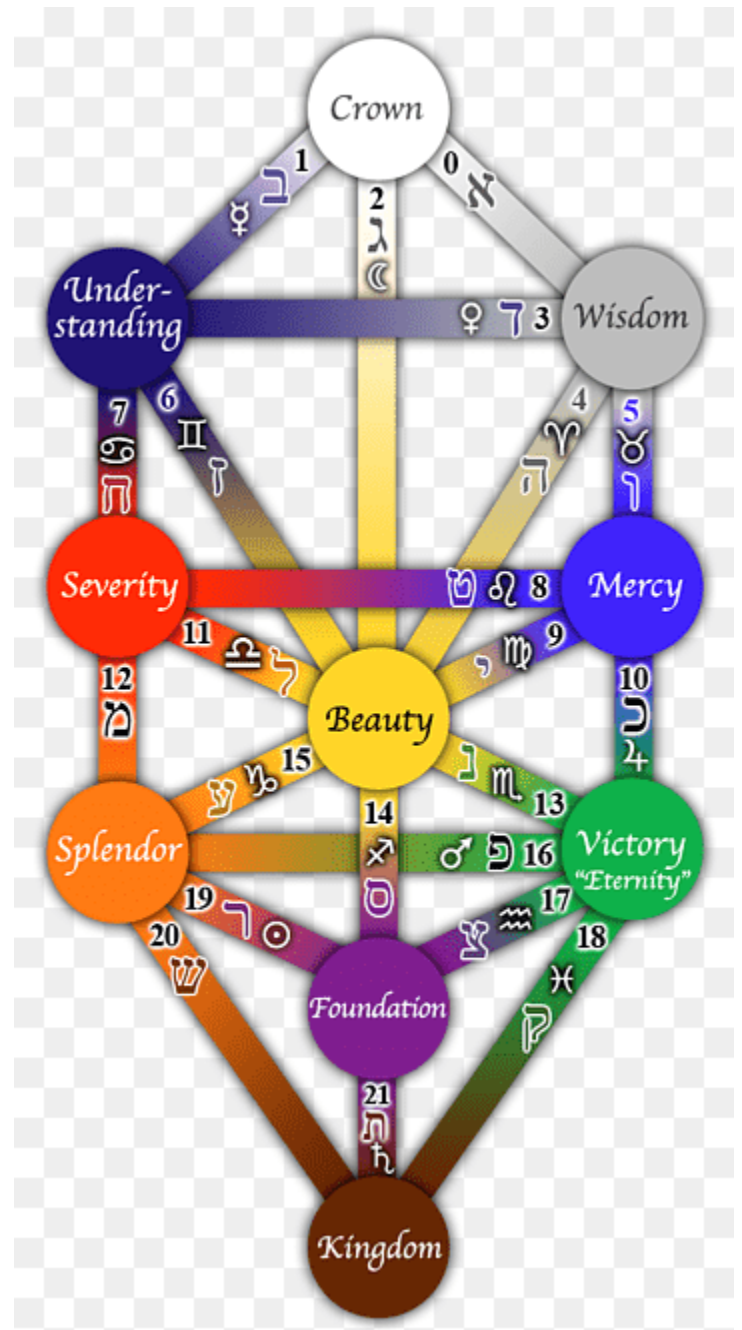
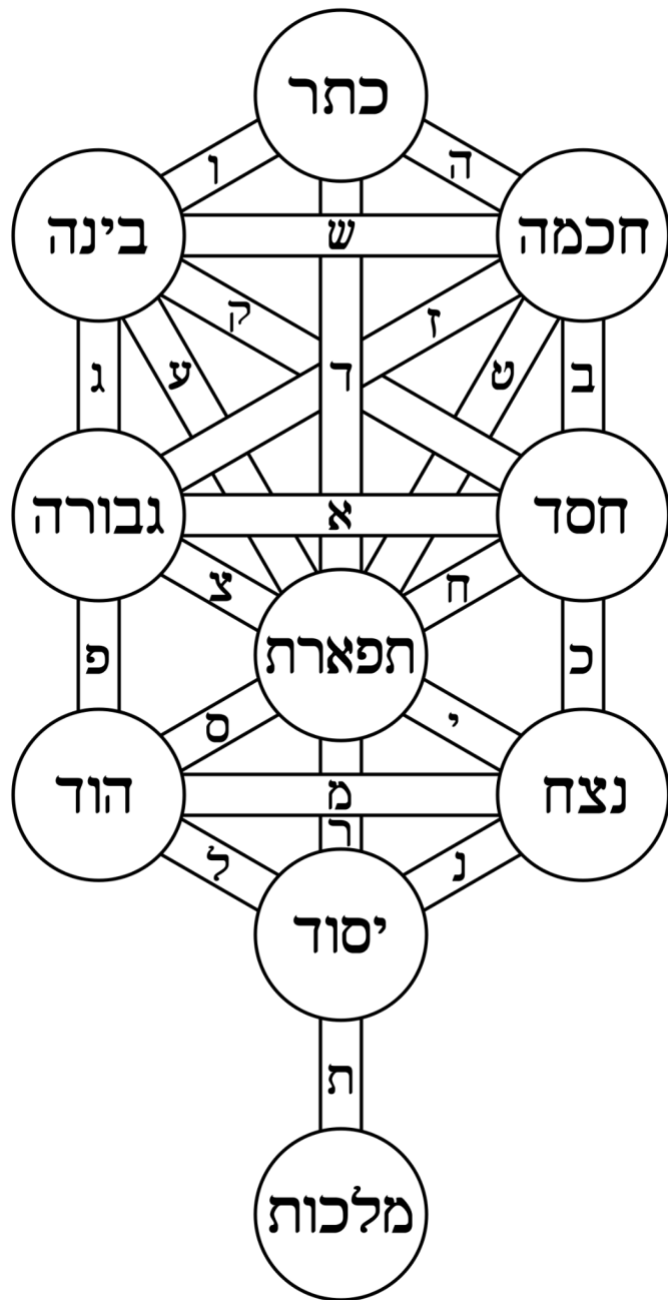
the reasons for the prohibition of kilayim (mixing seeds), for the plants resulting from such grafting are strange, giving rise to changes in the ordered course of the world for bad or good, aside from the fact that they themselves constitute a change in Creation, as I have already explained...

Now many scholars dispose themselves to be liberal with regard to these enchantments by saying that there is no truth in them whatsoever

But there is a secret to this matter. We have already made known that the constellations have lords that lead them, these being “the souls” of the circuits of the spheres, and the lords of the tail and [head of] Aries (the Ram) are near the earth, these being termed “the princes of the quiver,” that make the future known. It is through them that the signs in the birds indicate things to come, not for long duration or distant future do they tell, but only of events that are about to happen. Some make them known by utterance of bitter sounds [resembling wailing] over the dead, and some by spreading their wings. This is what has been said, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice - a reference to those who suggest by their wings.

The Zohar

Central Kabbalistic Text (though not technically the first)!



Panentheistic

Commentary on / lens through which to view the Torah

God - or characteristics of God - are tangible,
approachable, and interactive!

Ein Sof - God as infinity

Sefirot - divine emanations

Male and Female parts of God

God as dynamic. Not being but becoming

Applied Kabbalah: Arizal

Know that before the emanations were emanated and the creatures were created, there was one simple supernal light that filled the all existence. And there was no empty place, no empty space or void, all reality was filled with that simple infinite light. There was no category of beginning, no category of end. All was one, unified, simple, undifferentiated, ubiquitous, and homogenous infinite light called *Or Ein Sof*.

When it arose in His simple will to create worlds and emanate emanations, to bring to light the perfection of His actions, His Names and His attributes, for the purpose for creating all the universes... He constricted His infinite essence away from the center point of His being, that is, from the very center of His light. He thus constricted that light, distancing it to the extremities around this center point, leaving a vacated space and hollow void.

Behold, after this constriction, which resulted in the creation of a vacated space and hollow void in the very midst of the Infinite Light, there was a “place” for all that was to be emanated, created, formed and completed. He then drew forth a single, straight ray from His infinite encompassing light into the vacated space....

When God decided to bring this world into being, to make room for creation, He first drew in His breath, contracting Himself. From that contraction darkness was created. And when God said, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3), the light that came into being filled the darkness, and ten holy vessels came forth, each filled with primordial light.

In this way God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they all arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But the vessels were too fragile to contain such a powerful, divine light. They broke open, split asunder, and all the holy sparks were scattered like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else.

That is why we were created — to gather the sparks, no matter where they are hidden. God created the world so that the descendants of Jacob could raise up the holy sparks. That is why there have been so many exiles — to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity. In this way the Jewish people will sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth.

And when enough holy sparks have been gathered, the broken vessels will be restored, and tikkun olam, the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally be complete. Therefore it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their soul.

Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism

Undoubtedly both the mystics and the Philosophers completely Transform the structure of ancient Judaism; both have lost the simple relation to Judaism, that naiveté which speaks to us from the Classical documents of Rabbinical literature. Classical Judaism expressed itself: it did not reflect upon itself.

By contrast, to the mystics and the Philosophers of a later stage of religious development, Judaism itself has become problematic. Instead of simply speaking their Minds, they tend to produce an ideology of Judaism, an ideology moreover which comes to the Rescue of tradition by giving it a new interpretation.

It is not as though the rise of Jewish Philosophy and of Jewish mysticism took place in widely separated ages, or as though the Kabbalah was a reaction against a wave of rationalism. Rather the two movements are interrelated and interdependent. Neither were they

from the start manifestly opposed to each other, a fact which is often overlooked. On the contrary, the rationalism of some of the philosophical enlighteners frequently betrays a mystical tendency; and conversely, the Mystic who has not yet learned to speak in his own language often uses and misuses the vocabulary of Philosophy.