

Key concepts



Kabbalah is the mystic tradition that is to be found in Judaism; its purpose being to experience the divine nature and presence of God. It is esoteric in nature.

Great emphasis is placed upon meditation as the foremost method of achieving a true understanding of hidden truths. A significant exponent was Abraham Abulafia who focused on letters of the Hebrew alphabet and names of God. He also advised setting oneself apart from others and undertaking specific breathing exercises so as to avoid distraction. The mitzvot are also a focus for meditation as they represent the contact point between a person and God.

Visual aids can be employed such as visualising the ten Sefirot through colours. Tefillin also take on a deeper significance as aids to worship as the means by which to connect the mind and heart at a deeper spiritual level.

References to magic are also evident, and the concept of the golem is one of the most noteworthy examples.

The Zohar is the classical text of the Kabbalah which emphasises that the Torah contains higher truths. It covers many themes such as the nature of God; the creation of the world through the ten Sefirot; the nature of good and evil; the importance of the Torah. However, its authorship is debatable.

God is described as En Sof and is revealed to human beings through the holy texts as well as in many forms through the Sefirot which act as filters between a person and God. There are ten Sefirot, each linked in a complex figure with a part of the body, one of the names of God, and for the majority, a colour.

Devekut is fundamental in Kabbalah, denoting the concept of 'clinging on', which signifies achieving communion with God; a state in which all other thoughts, senses and experiences are cast aside. Tikkun is another key concept which means 'repair', and which aims for the restoration of cosmic harmony through prayer and ritual.

Key quotes



'The Kabbalah, according to kabbalists, is never new; it can be newly discovered or newly received, but essentially it is millennia-old divine truth.' (Dan)

'Heaven connects to earth, spiritual to physical, Creator to creation. Everything starts to get into harmony with its essence and inner purpose.' (Freeman)

'We are not allowed to visualise the ten Sefirot ... Therefore, you should always visualise the colour (attributed to the Sefirah) ...' (David)

'Follow none but the Lord your God, and revere none but Him; observe His commandments alone, and heed only His orders; worship none but Him, and hold fast to Him.' (Deuteronomy 13:4)

'All the words that a man utters through his mouth in that prayer ascend aloft, and split atmospheres and firmaments until they reach the place that they reach, and they form themselves into a crown upon the king's head, and a crown is made from them.' (Zohar)

Key words

Kabbalah	esoteric	Sefirot	golem
Zohar	En Sof	Devekut	Tikkun

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key questions, arguments, and debates

The possibility of a personal mystic unity with God in Judaism.

It is possible to achieve a personal mystical union with God in Judaism through the mystic tradition of Kabbalah. The focus in traditional Judaism is different from that of Kabbalah and does not involve any such mystic union with God, but more a sense of experiencing the 'otherness' of the divine. Could it be argued that the practices of Kabbalah are too far removed from traditional Judaism in the opinions of many, and that claims for 'mystic union' with the divine are a distortion of the original teachings of Kabbalah?

The value of visual aids to worship in Kabbalah.

Aids to worship are of value due to the esoteric nature of Kabbalah, however, use of aids to worship are accepted and are regularly used within other Jewish denominations too. It all depends upon whether or not one considers Kabbalah to be a credible tradition within Judaism or not.