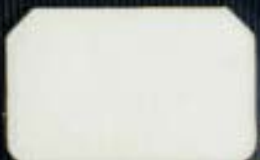


THE CABALA

—
BERNHARD PICK



**THE CABALA
ITS INFLUENCE ON JUDAISM
AND CHRISTIANITY**

**BY
BERNHARD PICK**

1913

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This edition was created and published by Global Grey

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meaning, and says, "But if you join the initial letters of these five Greek words, they will make the word *ichthus*,⁶⁵ that is 'fish,' in which word Christ is mystically understood, because he was able to live, that is, to exist, without sin in the abyss of this mortality as in the depth of waters." It is worthy of notice that Augustine only gives twenty-seven lines⁶⁶ of the thirty-four, as contained in the *Oracula Sibyllina*, VIII, 217 ff., where the acrostic reads: Jesus Christ, Son of God (the) Saviour, (the) Cross.⁶⁷ In its full form it is also given by Eusebius in the *Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*. For the benefit of the reader we subjoin Neale's translation of the acrostic as given in the *Christian Remembrancer*, October, 1861, p. 287:

"Judgment at hand, the earth shall sweat with fear.
Eternal king, the Judge shall come on high;
Shall doom all flesh; shall bid the world appear
Unveiled before his Throne. Him every eye
Shall, just or unjust, see in majesty.

"Consummate time shall view the Saints assemble
His own assessors, and the souls of men
Round the great judgment seat shall wait and tremble
In fear of sentence, and the green earth then
Shall turn to desert. They that see that day
To moles and bats their gods shall cast away.

"Sea, earth, and heaven, and hell's dread gates shall burn;
Obedient to their call, the dead return;
Nor shall the judge unfitting doom discern.

"Of chains and darkness to each wicked soul:
For them that have been good, the starry pole.

"Gnashing of teeth, and woe, and fierce despair
Of such as hear the righteous Judge declare
Deeds long forgot, which that last day shall bare.

⁶⁵ ἰ χθύ ς.

⁶⁶ English translation by M. Dodd, *City of God*, Edinburgh, 1871, where the Greek letters at the beginning of the lines are retained.

⁶⁷ σταυρός.

"Then when each darkened breast He brings to sight,
Heaven's stars shall fall, and day be changed to night;
Effaced the sun-ray, and the moon's pale light.

"Surely the valleys He on high shall raise;
All hills shall cease, all mountains turn to plain;
Vessels shall no more pass the watery ways;
In the dread lightning parching earth shall blaze,
Ogygian rivers seek to flow in vain.
Unutterable woe the trumpet blast,
Re-echoing through the ether, shall forecast.

"Then Tartarus shall wrap the world in gloom,
High chiefs and princes shall receive their doom,
Eternal fire and brimstone for their tomb.

"Crown of the world, sweet wood, salvation's horn,
Rearing its beauty, shall for man be born,
O wood, that Saints adore, and sinners scorn!
So from twelve fountains shall its light be poured;
Staff of the Shepherd, and victorious sword."

We may also state that words of those verses which are regarded as containing a peculiar recondite meaning are ranged in squares in such a manner as to be read either vertically or boustrophedonally beginning at the right or left hand. Again the words of several verses are placed over each other, and the letters which stand under each other are formed into new words. This is especially seen in the treatment of three verses in Exod. xiv. 19-21 (each containing 72 letters), which are believed to contain the three Pillars of the Sephiroth and the Divine Name of seventy-two words. Now, if these three verses be written out one above the other, the first from right to left, the second from left to right, and the third from right to left, they will give 72 columns of three letters each. Then each column will be a word of three letters, and as there are 72 columns, there will be 72 words of three letters, each of which will be the 72 names of the Deity. By writing the verses all from right to left, instead of boustrophedonally, there will be other sets of 72 names obtainable. The reader who is interested in these niceties will find ample information in Bartolucci, *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinnica*, IV, pp. 230 ff.

3. *Temurah* or permutation.--According to certain rules, one letter is substituted for another letter preceding or following it in the alphabet, and thus from one word another word of totally different orthography may be formed. Thus the alphabet is bent exactly in the middle, and one half is put over the other; and then by changing alternately the first letter or the first two letters at the beginning of the second line, twenty-two permutations are produced. These are called the "Table of the Combinations of Tziruph."

For example's sake we give the method called Albath, thus:

A B G D H V Z Ch T Y K

L Th Sh R Q Tz P Ay S N M

The method abgath is thus exemplified:

A G D H V Z Ch T Y K L

B Th Sh R Q Tz P Ay S N M

The names of the twenty-two permutations are: Albath, Abgath, Agdath, Adbag, Ahbad, Avba, Azbav, Achbaz, Atbach, Aibat, Achbi, Albach, Ambal, Anbam, Asban, Aaybas, Afba, Azbaf, Akbaz, Arbak, Ashbar, Athbash. To these must be added as (23) Abgad; (24) Albam.

I will only remark that by the system called Athbash, it is found that the word *Sheshhach* in Jer. xxv. 26 is the same as Babel, and that Jerome is said to have confidently applied this system.⁶⁸

Besides these canons the Cabala also sees a recondite sense in the form of the letters, as well as in the ornaments which adorn them. The more multifarious these trifles, the easier it is to arrive in every given case at a result, and the less wit or thought is required.

Although the canons mentioned above are already applied in the Talmud and Midrash, the Cabalists made a more copious use of them. The names of God became a special object of their fancy. With them they imagined they could accomplish everything and perform miracles, heal the sick,

⁶⁸ Hottinger possessed an entire Pentateuch explained on the principle of Athbash.

extinguish the fire, etc. The most miraculous effects were ascribed to the Tetragrammaton.

Whoever was in possession of the true pronunciation of that name could enter in relation with the upper world and receive revelations. Each letter of the sacred name was considered as something mysterious. The letter Y (of YHVH) referred to the father as creator (*abba*) and H to the mother (*imma*). Because the letter H occurred twice, they distinguished an upper and a lower mother. The permutation of the letters of the Tetragrammaton brought about a multitude of new divine names which, either spoken or written, influenced the course and laws of nature. As was the case with the name of God consisting of four letters, so it was with that consisting of twelve, twenty-two, forty-two and seventy-two letters. All were believed to contain great mysteries.⁶⁹

The names of angels were treated in like manner. Thus the Cabalists greatly misused the Old Testament, especially the Thora. And, as says Professor Wünsche, by making the Bible a text-book to elicit deeper ideas, the greatest nonsense and rubbish came to light. The so-called hidden mysteries and revelations were nothing but fancies whirling in the heads of the Cabalists. The exegetical literature of the Cabala clearly proves that its representatives had completely lost the sense for a suitable understanding of the words of scripture.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Compare what we stated above in connection with Abulafia.

⁷⁰ A somewhat different view on the cabalistic treatment of scripture is given by the late Jewish scholar Zunz (died 1886) in his *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge* (Berlin, 1832), p. 403: For the passage in English see my article "Scripture Interpretation" in McClintock and Strong, vol. IX, p. 480.

CHAPTER 6. THE CABALA IN RELATION TO JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

It must be acknowledged that the Cabala intended to oppose philosophy and to intensify religion. But by introducing heathenish ideas it grafted on Judaism a conception of the world which was foreign to it and produced the most pernicious results. In place of the monotheistic biblical idea of God, according to which God is the creator, preserver and ruler of the world, the confused, pantheistically colored heathenish doctrine of emanation was substituted. The belief in the unity of God was replaced by the decade of the ten Sephiroth which were considered as divine substances. By no longer addressing prayers directly to god, but to the Sephiroth, a real Sephiroth-cult originated. The legal discussions of the Talmud were of no account; the Cabalists despised the Talmud, yea, they considered it as a canker of Judaism, which must be cut out if Judaism were to recover. According to the Zohar, I, 27b; III, 275a; 279b, the Talmud is only a bondmaid, but the Cabala a controlling mistress.

The Cabalists compared the Talmud to a hard, unfruitful rock, which when smitten yields only scanty drops that in the end become a cause of controversy; whereas the study of the Cabala is like a fresh gushing spring, which one needs only to address to cause it to pour out its refreshing contents.⁷¹

And as the Cabalists treated the Talmud, they likewise treated philosophy, which defined religious ideas and vindicated religious precepts before the forum of reason. Most Cabalists opposed philosophy. She was the Hagar that must be driven from the house of Abraham, whereas the Cabala was the Sarah, the real mistress. At the time of the Messiah the mistress will rule over the bondmaid.

⁷¹ A collection of passages abusing the Talmud is given by Landauer in the *Orient*, 1845, pp. 571-574; see also Rubin, *Heidenthum und Kabbala*, Vienna, 1893, pp. 13 f.; also his *Kabbala and Agada*, *ibid.*, 1895, p. S, where we read that according to Abulafia the Cabalists only were genuine men, and the Talmudists monkeys.

But the study of the Bible was also neglected, Scripture was no longer studied for its own sake, but for the sake of finding the so-called higher sense by means of mystical hermeneutical rules.

Even the rituals were variously changed and recast. The putting on of the phylacteries and prayer-mantle (*talîth*) was accompanied by the recitation of cabalistic formulas and sentences; special prayers were also addressed to the Sephiroth. Connected with all this was an extravagant, intoxicating superstition. To enable the soul to connect itself with the realm of light and its spirits, or to be transplanted after death into its heavenly abode, one underwent all manner of austere ascetical exercises. With the mysterious name of God they believed themselves enabled to heal the sick, to deliver demoniacs and to extinguish conflagrations. By application of the right formulas of prayer, man was to have power and influence on both the kingdoms of light and darkness. When the Cabalist prays, God shakes his head, changes at once his decrees, and abolishes heavy judgments. The magical names of God can even deliver the condemned and free them from their torments in their place of punishment. In this respect we even meet with the doctrine of the Catholic mass for the souls.⁷² The Book of Psalms with its songs and prayers was especially considered as a means of producing all manner of miracles and magic, as may be seen from the *Sepher Shimmush Thehillim* (literally, "the Book of the Cabalistic Application of the Psalms"), a fragment of the practical Cabala, translated by Gottfried Selig, Berlin, 1788.

This sketch of Professor Wünsche is by no means exaggerated.⁷³ *Mutatis mutandis* we find the cabalistic notions among the Chasidim, a sect founded in 1740 by a certain Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer Baalshem,⁷⁴ also called Besht. Baal-Shem made his public appearance about 1740 in Tlusti, in the district of Czartkow, from whence he subsequently removed to Medziboze, in Podolia. The miraculous cures and prophecies attracted attention in large circles; his mode of life, consisting of contemplation,

⁷² Wünsche, whom we have followed, evidently refers to the prayer called Kaddish, for which see my article s.v. in McClintock and Strong, vol. XII. A very interesting article on "Jüdische Seelenmesse and Totenanrufung" is given by Dalman in *Saat auf Hoffnung* (Leipsic, 1890), pp. 169-225.

⁷³ Orelli in his article "Zauberei" in *Realencyklopädie für protest. Theologie and Kirche*, vol. XXI, 1908, p. 618, remarks: "The Jewish Cabala has promoted the magic degeneration of the religion; to a great extent it furnished profound expressions and formulas for the exercise of superstitious arts."

⁷⁴ "Lord of the name" = θεοῦ πύος, a man who by words of conjuration and other formulas knows how to exercise a power over the visible and invisible world.

study of the Zohar and frequent washings in rivers, soon spread a halo around him. Added to this were the many miraculous reports circulated by his disciples; for instance, that his father had been visited by the prophet Elijah to predict his birth, and that his mother was a hundred years old when she was delivered of him; that, when a youth, he had victoriously struggled with evil spirits, etc.--all of which may be found in the Book *Shibche ha-Besht*, published in 1815 by the grandson of Baal-Shem, Rabbi Bar Linz. Baal-Shem⁷⁵ and his successors received the name *Tsaddik*, "Saint," and his fame attracted multitudes of Jews from all parts of Poland, who submitted themselves to his guidance. As long as he lived, the sect formed one great whole, of which he was the head. After his death, which took place in 1780, it was divided into separate congregations, each of which had its own Rabbi or Tsaddik or Saint, unreserved devotion to whom is the most important of all the principles of the sect. In a word, before Pius IX was declared infallible, the Chasidim⁷⁶ already had their infallible popes, whose number is still very large in Poland, Wallachia, Moldavia, Galicia, and Palestine. Of these popes of the Chasidim, a modern Jewish writer, the late David Cassel (died 1893), says: "To the disgrace of Judaism and modern culture the Tsaddikim still go on with their disgraceful business, and are thus the most essential hindrances to the dissemination of literary progress in Galicia and Russia. There are still thousands who behold in the Tsaddik the worker of miracles, the prophet, one who is in close communion with God and angels, and who present him with rich gifts and promulgate the wonders which they have seen. Covetousness on the one hand and spiritual narrowness on the other are the channels through which the evil is fed anew."

Christianity.--As soon as the Cabala became better known, Christians betook themselves to its study and paid it the greatest attention because of the supposed agreement of its teachings with the dogmas of the Christian church. It was thought that the Cabala was the connecting link between Judaism and Christianity. The dogmas of the Trinity, of the Messiah as the Son of God and his atonement, were the salient points which especially attracted attention. The first to be drawn to the Cabala

⁷⁵ Compare Kahana, *Rabbi Israel Baal Schem-Tob, sein Leben, kabbalistisches System and Wirken*, Sitomir, 1900.

⁷⁶ Compare Perl, *Megalleh temirin, or Die enthüllten Geheimnisse der Chassidim*, Lemberg, 1879; Ch. Bogratschoff, *Entstehung, Entwicklung and Prinzipien des Chassidismus*, Berlin, 1908.

Messiah for the sins of the people, which are given in the Zohar as the explanation of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, Professor Dalman⁸⁴ remarks that the Jews reject and object to cabalistic statements as something foreign to genuine Judaism. The theosophic speculations of the Cabala are at least just as Jewish as the religious philosophical statements of Bachja or Maimonides; yes, it seems to us that the God of revelation and of scripture is more honestly retained in the former than in the latter, where he becomes a mathematical One without attribute and thereby may satisfy a superficial reason, but leaves the heart empty. That these Jewish thinkers, influenced by Aristotle, had no inclination to find in Is. liii an expiating mediator, is only too inexplicable. He, who by his own strength can soar into the sphere of "intelligences" and thus bring his soul to immortality, needs no mediator. But we are concerned here not with a philosophical or theosophical thought-complex, but the simple question whether the prophet speaks in Is. liii of a suffering mediator of salvation. The answer of the Cabalists at any rate agrees with the testimony of many of them.

What are we to think of the Cabala? That there is a relationship between it and neo-Platonism is obvious. Erich Bischoff⁸⁵ thinks that the Cabala represents a peculiar monism, which in some degree has influenced modern philosophy. In ethical respects it contains many fruitful and sublime thoughts, often indeed in fanciful wording. But as magic it has been of great influence on all kinds of superstitions and even on occultistic tendencies. It offers a highly interesting object of study whose closer investigation is rendered more difficult on account of the abstruse manner of representation and the many magic and mystic accessories. But that which is valuable is sufficient to insure for it a lasting interest.

⁸⁴ In his *Jesaja 53, das Prophetenwort von Sühnleiden des Heilandes mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der synagogalen Literatur*, Leipsic, 1890.

⁸⁵ The author of *Die Kabbalah. Einführung in die jüdische Mystik and Geheimwissenschaft*, Leipsic, 1903.

