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# Notes on the Kabbalah

Rooted in the ancient Egyptian Mysteries, three different versions of essentially the same teachings can be identified by three different spellings: Kabbalah, Cabala and Qabalah.

The Kabbalah is an essentially Jewish mystical or esoteric school. Although the Christian Church Fathers of the first century were demonstrably Kabbalists, mystical or gnostic elements within the Church largely disappeared within the first three centuries, only to reappear as a Christian Cabala during the European Renaissance. A third, often hidden, stream of mystical Western philosophy absorbed many Egyptian, Jewish and Christian mystical elements and termed them the Qabalah.

The Christian writers such as Agrippa, in his *De Occulta Philosophia Libri III* (1533), or

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and also the Catholic Church, spell it "Cabala", the Latin spelling transferred over to English. Contemporary neo-hermeticists, following masonic author MacGregor Mathers and occultist Aleister Crowley, will use "Qabala" or some other derivative.

The word comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to receive". According to Ben-Yehudah's *Hebrew-English Dictionary*, in context it is a received body of knowledge, passed down orally, which serves as an exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly the Torah or Pentateuch. A direct experience of God is central to the ideas of Kabbalah.

Albert G. Mackey's *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* devotes almost three pages to the Kabbalah, noting "It has



The seal of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon was adopted at a meeting held in Victoria on 27 December 1871. The central figure is Queen Victoria on her throne which rests on a platform on which is drawn seven five-pointed stars; seven being a significant number in masonic tradition. The five-pointed star, or pentagram, refers to both Pythagoras and the Golden Ratio. Above is the square and compasses, in masonic symbolism referring to the freemason's duty to the Craft and to himself. Within this is the pentalpha, identified by some masonic writers with the masonic five points of fellowship. On either side of the throne are pillars surmounted by globes, illustrating the pillars at the porch or entrance to King Solomon's Temple. Flanking them are cherubim, the second order of angels. Below is an English red rose, emblematic of the homeland of this jurisdiction's first Grand Master, Israel Wood Powell—who was actually born in Wales but raised in England. The date is in the traditional masonic style, *Anno Latomorum*. For more information on our seal, visit [freemasonry.bcy.ca/grandlodge/seal/index.html](http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/grandlodge/seal/index.html).

sometimes been used in an enlarged sense, as comprehending all the explanations, maxims, and ceremonies which have been traditionally handed down to the Jews; but in that more limited acceptance, in which it is intimately connected with the symbolic science of Freemasonry, the Cabala may be defined to be a system of philosophy which embraces certain mystical interpretations of Scripture, and metaphysical and spiritual beings."

"Buxtorf (*Lexicon of the Talmud*) defines the Kabbalah to be a secret science, which treats in a mystical and enigmatical manner of things divine, angelical, theological, celestial, and metaphysical; the subjects being enveloped in striking symbols and secret modes of teaching. Much use is made of it in the advanced degrees, and entire Rites have been constructed on its principles. Hence it demands a place

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## *Kabbalah* from page one

in any general work on Freemasonry."

These quotes from the nineteenth century, and others like them, give anti-masons free rein to claim Freemasonry is cabalistic without really understanding either Freemasonry or the Kabbalah.

### *The Kabbalah defined*

The Kabbalah is divided into two kinds, the Practical and the Theoretical. The Practical is occupied with the construction of talismans and amulets and is of no interest to Freemasonry.

Practical Kabbalah has its ancient roots in the *Thirteen Enochian Keys of Enoch, son of Qain*, along with a highly eclectic admixture of material taken from Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and other non-Hebrew sources. The *Thirteen Enochian Keys of Enoch son of Qain* are reflected in such works as *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage, the Greater and Lesser Keys of Solomon*, and mediæval grimoires such as the *Armadel, Goetia/Lemegeton, etc.*

The primary text of the mystical Kabbalah that appears to occupy a central place of importance in the hermetic Kabbalah is the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation). The two most prominent contemporary schools of Practical or Hermetic Kabbalah are the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.).

The bulk of the mainstream orthodox Jewish Kabbalists focus primarily on the *Sefer HaZohar* (Book of Splendor) and the *Etz HaChayyim* (Tree of Life). They engage in practices of spiritual refinement (avodah) and meditation (devekut, "cleaving to God") gleaned from the writings left by Abraham Abulafia, Azriel of Gerona (disciple of Yitza'aq the Blind), Chayyim Vital (recorder of the teachings of Yitza'aq Luria), Dov Baer (Mezhirecher

Maggid and successor to Israel ben Eliezer), Nachman of Breslav, and others. These practices include a variety of visualization techniques, breathing exercises, movements coördinated with permutations and combinations of Hebrew letters, mantric intonation of sacred phrases, meditative prayer, and chanting devotional songs.

The Theoretical Kabbalah is divided into the Dogmatic, which is a summary of rabbinical theosophy and philosophy, and the Literal, which teaches a mystical mode of explaining sacred things by assigning numerical values to the letters of words.

The Literal Cabala — divided into Gematria, Notaricon, and Temura — was made use of in the writing of what Mackey termed the "Advanced" degrees of Freemasonry. These more properly should be termed the additional degrees of concordant masonic bodies. The Kabbalah plays no rôle in regular Craft Freemasonry.

### *History of the Kabbalah*

After the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem (70 CE), many Jews who relocated to Egypt were influenced by the Alexandrian Pythagoreans. Jewish leaders and intellectuals such as Artapanos, Philon the Alexandrian, the historian Josephus Flavius, the Hasmoneans, Johanan Hurcanus, Alexander Jannean, Hanoch, Hillel, Johanan ben-Zakkai, and others, were central figures of this spiritual-scientific development.

An esoteric Jewish theosophy, or religious mystic philosophy, developed from about this time. In the absence of a central spiritual leadership, under foreign and hostile rule, some regional Jewish schools developed into sects such as the Essenes, Nazarenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

The Jewish Kabbalah reached its peak during the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries, arguably responsible for the development of both science and mysticism in Europe. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the greatest contributions to science were made by Jewish scholars, especially in Spain. Names known from religious sources as "Rabbis" and "Kabbalists", are known in history books of mathematics and science as outstanding inventors and developers.

A distinctly Christian Cabala may be said to have started with the work of Ramon Lull (1232-1317) during a period of religious tolerance in Spain. Starting in the late fifteenth century, a movement arose among some Jewish converts to Christianity in Spain to ascribe a distinctly Christian context to the hidden meanings of Kabbalistic doctrines. This movement gained momentum from speculation among Florentine Platonists that the Kabbalah contained a lost revelation that explains the secrets of the Catholic faith.

This cross-pollination led to the emergence of a distinctly Christian Cabala founded by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). Pico saw in the Cabala a link to the Greek philosophers as well as a proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Pico's writings, and subsequently those of John Reuchlin (1455-1522), created an interest that spread throughout the intellectual European community.

In the sixteenth century, the appearance of Kabbalistic texts in Latin translation enhanced attempts to draw further parallels between esoteric Jewish doctrines and Christianity. Guillaume Postel translated and published the *Zohar* and *Sefer Yetzirah* into Latin even before they were published in Hebrew. Latin texts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were influential in standardizing "Cabala" as the spelling commonly associated with the

Christian perspective on Kabbalistic teachings.

In the seventeenth century, the centre of Christian Cabala study moved to England and Germany, where its status was boosted by the theosophical writings of Jacob Böhme and the compendium of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. Von Rosenroth and Athanasius Kirchner extrapolated the Cabalistic allusion of Adam Kadmon to be a reference to Jesus as the primordial man in Christian theology. In the final phase in the development of the Christian Cabala in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it became permeated with alchemical symbolism and conjoined with the emerging doctrines of Theosophy and Rosicrucianism.

Those prepared to believe Freemasonry's roots are found in Rosicrucian and hermetic teachings will therefore see the influence of the Kabbalah in its development.

### *Claims and accusations*

Those who claim Kabbalistic roots for Freemasonry are of two, widely different perspectives. The first group is mostly composed of religious fundamentalists who, *a priori*, condemn Freemasonry, Judaism, and the Kabbalah as being anti-Christian and often equate the whole with Satanism.

They will also make such accusations as "Freemasonry and the New World Order are Nazism revived." ; "...that one key ritual in freemasonry involves drinking from human skulls...." ; and "Freemasonry is the instrument created to carry out this return to paganism."

They will also quote, out of context, from Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma*: "all the Masonic associations owe to their Secrets and their Symbols." and claim that Freemasonry is divided into two branches: "There is the branch of the Scottish Rite and the branch of the Shriners. Scottish Freemasonry is the Christian

branch while the Shriners are actually the Islamic branch." The Prophecy Institute in Keene Texas will, for a "donation" of \$26, "inform you of what is the Cabala, and how it influences Today's governments." To anyone who has made an objective study of either Freemasonry or the Kabbalah, these accusations and claims are patently ridiculous.

The second group is composed of those freemasons and kabbalists who promote the theory of Freemasonry's link to the Kabbalah. They are entitled to their opinions, but it must be stressed that they do not speak for Freemasonry. They are only expressing their opinions. They view the study of both as enhancing their relationship with God and have come to some personal conclusions about what they perceive as similarities. Whatever intellectual or spiritual similarities there may be between Freemasonry and the Kabbalah, any historical links are strictly conjectural and unsupported. ■

*Citations for further study are available on our website.*

## Chaplain's corner

by *VW Bro. Mark S. Dwor*

In the First Degree we refer to the Book of Ruth for two main reasons: genealogy and the making of a binding contract.

The genealogy is straightforward; the Book of Ruth 1:1 starts in Bethlehem, the city of David (and Jesus) and at the end 4:13-22 outlines Boaz, Ruth and their lineage down to David. David's son Solomon builds the temple and names the right pillar after Boaz. Just to show the importance of Ruth, she is named in Jesus' genealogy in Mathew 1:5.

The act of kissing the Volume of Sacred Law, to signify consent, goes back to the *Old Charges*. As for the

binding contract, this is the act of taking off a shoe and handing it to another in front of witnesses 4:7-10. This is the only specific example of this process in the Bible. Picture the scene. You are an eighteenth century gentleman deprived of all worldly goods. Your chest is bare. One knee breach is askew and your stocking is rolled down. You don't look the way you should in public, you are dishevelled, which is an alternative meaning for the word "slipshod".

The word "slipshod" also means wearing a slipper, not a shoe. So you have taken off your shoe, and offered it metaphorically to witnesses about the lodge to confirm, in a biblical sense, the binding nature of your obligation. These acts of debasement, change and then acceptance are completely put into the system of biblical justice. ■

## "Quote"

Freemasonry, in brief, was never intended to be anything other than a profound quest by man for participation in the nature and purpose of God and the Universe. As a unique layering of human aspiration for ultimate meaning and moral behaviour in the process of that aspiration, it combines four strata of symbolism, ceremonial, and spiritual insight, all of which point to one essential, ancient insight—that is that humankind is at one, spiritually and materially with the ultimate nature of reality and of all creation. ■

*W. Stemper, New York : Royal Arch Mason, Spring 1980.*

## Tools

by *MW Bro. Edward Burness Paul*

The working tools were not placed in our hands to be merely looked at and then put aside to rust in idleness. They are for daily and hourly use. Let us not forget their divine

symbolism, by which we are taught that we must so divide our time that we may give due attention to our duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, that renunciation must precede all spiritual progress; that our lives should be upright, honest, moral; that pride and arrogance should give way to humility and respect; and above all that we should be bound to each other by Brotherly Love, which is the cement of our spiritual building, and without which that building could not endure. ■

*MW Bro. Edward Burness Paul (1856-1937) was our Grand Master for 1910-11.*

## Our history

Our Grand Historian, VW Bro. Trevor W. McKeown, is compiling a list of British Columbia and Yukon place names related to freemasons or Freemasonry. Any assistance the brethren may offer will be gratefully received. Contact him at [admin@freemasonry.bcy.ca](mailto:admin@freemasonry.bcy.ca) or forward information through our Grand Secretary's office. ■

## Lodge notes

As has been their annual custom since 1952, again this year **Prince David Lodge No. 101** in Maple Ridge has awarded five bursaries of \$500 each to deserving students of the senior secondary schools in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows to assist them in their post secondary education. The total amount awarded since the programme started is nearly \$85,000

This past September, Richmond Chapter No. 73, Order of the Easter Star, paid **Pythagoras Lodge No. 194**, a fraternal visit.

There were four Chapters represented: Burrard Chapter; Vancouver No. 2; Friendship Chapter and Richmond Chapter.

Worthy Matron Daphne

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Keith informed those present that to the best of her knowledge this was the first time the Order of the Eastern Star has paid a masonic lodge a fraternal visit in this jurisdiction.

She spoke on the origin of the Eastern Star; its membership; Principles; charities and volunteer work as well as its rules and regulations. ■

## In memoriam

We regret to inform the brethren of the passing of two well-known members of Grand Lodge.

VW Bro. Ian D. Paton, Grand Chaplain (2004-05), was initiated, passed and raised in 1988 into Ancient Light Lodge No. 88, where he served as Worshipful Master in 1988-89. Born on 7 June 1928, he Passed to the Grand Lodge Above on 16 September 2006

RW Bro. Charles H. Oxley (Grand Director of Ceremonies (1991-92), was initiated into Capilano Lodge No.164 on 28 February 1979. He affiliated with Mount Hermon Lodge No. 7 on 39 March 1990 and with Mount Begbie Lodge No. 183 on October 12 2004. District Deputy Grand Master of District 24 (2002-03), he was also a long-time member of the Grand Lodge Regalia Committee and was of great assistance to our Grand Secretary's office. Born on 27 July 1940, he Passed to the Grand Lodge Above on 19 September 2006. They were our brothers. They will be missed. ■

## Our Grand Master comments

by MW Bro. Isaac Brower-Berkhoven

This past July, my wife, Deidre, and I accepted an invitation to join Illustrious Sir

Ivan Chittick, Potentate of the Shrine Freemasons of BC & Yukon, in Tampa Bay, Florida, at the Imperial Session of the Shrine of North America.

It was an exciting experience, with enjoyable times spent with the Potentate, the Divan, and the whole group from British Columbia. We would like to extend our most sincere appreciation for the many kindnesses shown to both of us, and I would like to express my pride in the Shrine-Freemasons as hard-working members of the masonic family. With the wonderful care offered to children in their hospitals, I see them as an example of Freemasonry made visible, providing an invaluable service to society, and wish to remind you that, as freemasons, may we all continue to 'Let Our Light so Shine', using our individual talents to the benefit of our fellow man. ■

## Mithraism

by Bro. H. L. Haywood

The theory that modern Freemasonry is in some sense a direct descendant from the ancient mysteries has held a peculiar attraction for masonic writers.

Mithraism—the principal pre-Christian religion of the Roman world—spread up and down the world with amazing rapidity: all along the coast of northern Africa and even in the recesses of the Sahara; through the Pillars of Hercules to England and up into Scotland; across the channel into Germany and the north countries; and down into the great lands along the Danube.

Masonic writers have often professed to see many points of resemblance between Mithraism and Freemasonry. Albert Pike once declared that Freemasonry is the modern heir of the Ancient Mysteries. It is a dictum with which I have never been able to agree. There are similarities between our fraternity and the old mystery cults,



## Grand Master's Itinerary NOVEMBER 2006

2	Thu	Lafayette Lodge	Seattle
10	Fri	Scottish Rite	Vancouver
11	Sat	Remembrance Day Ceremony, Cenotaph	Vancouver
13	Mon	District No. 13 Maple Leaf-Park No. 63	Vancouver
14	Tue	Coffee with the Craft	Vancouver
17	Fri	Installation Ymir Lodge No. 31	Salmo
21	Tue	District No. 25, Centennial-King George 171	Rchmnd
24-25	F-S	Fall Ceremonial Shrine	Burnaby
28	Tue	Blighty Night Comox No. 188	Comox
29	Wed	Coffee with the Craft	Comox
29		Board of General Purposes	Comox

but most of them are of a superficial character, and have to do with externals of rite or organization, and not with inward content. When Sir Samuel Dill described Mithraism as "a sacred Freemasonry" he used that name in a very loose sense. Nevertheless, the resemblances are often startling.

Membership in Mithraism was as democratic as it is with us, perhaps more so; slaves were freely admitted and often held positions of trust, as also did freedmen.

Membership was usually divided into seven grades, each of which had its own appropriate symbolical ceremonies. Initiation was the crowning experience of every worshipper. He was attired symbolically, took vows, passed through many baptisms, and in the higher grades ate sacred meals with his fellows. A dramatic representation of a dying and a rising again was at the head of all these ceremonies. Charity and Relief were universally practised and one Mithraist hailed another as "brother."

Manichaeism sprang from the ashes of Mithraism, and St. Augustine, who did so much to give shape to the Roman Catholic church and theology

was for many years an ardent Manichee, and through him many traces of the old Persian creed found their way into Christianity. It may very well be, as has often been alleged, that there are faint traces of the ancient cult to be found here and there in our own ceremonies or symbolism. Such theories are necessarily vague and hard to prove.

The ancient mysteries were among the finest things developed in the Roman world. They stood for equality in a savagely aristocratic and class-riddled society; they offered centres of refuge to the poor and the despised among a people little given to charity and who didn't believe a man should love his neighbour; and in a large historical way they left behind them methods of human organization, ideals and principles and hopes which yet remain in the world for our use and profit.

If a man wishes to do so, he may say that what Freemasonry is among us, the ancient mysteries were to the people of the Roman world, but it would be a difficult thing for any man to establish the fact that Freemasonry has directly descended from those great cults. ■

Excerpted from *The Builder*.