

Kabbalah FAQ

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This Kabbalah FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) was prepared for the Usenet/Internet newsgroup "alt.magick". It is intended to provide a brief introduction to Kabbalah, and pointers to additional sources of information. This FAQ may be freely copied as long as this header is retained. The contents are copyright and may not be abridged or modified without the written permission of the author. Printed copies may be made for personal use. Where third-party contributions are included they are clearly marked and are copyright of the authors.

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The author would appreciate feedback on the accuracy of the material, modulo variations in the Anglicised spellings of Hebrew words.

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Section 1: General

Q1.1 : What is Kabbalah?

Kabbalah is an aspect of Jewish mysticism. It consists of a large body of speculation on the nature of divinity, the creation, the origin and fate of the soul, and the role of human beings. It consists also of meditative, devotional, mystical and magical practices which were taught only to a select few and for this reason Kabbalah is regarded as an esoteric offshoot of Judaism. Some aspects of Kabbalah have been studied and used by non-Jews for several hundred years - see What is Hermetic Kabbalah.

Q1.2 : What does the word "Kabbalah" mean, and how should I spell it?

The word "Kabbalah" is derived from the root "to receive, to accept", and in many cases is used synonymously with "tradition".

No-one with the slightest interest in Kabbalah can fail to notice that there are many alternative spellings of the word, the two most common being Kabbalah and Qabalah. Cabala, Qaballah, Qabala, Kaballah (and so on) are also seen. The reason for this is that some letters in the Hebrew alphabet have more than one representation in the English alphabet, and the same Hebrew letter can be written either as K or Q (or sometimes even C). Some authors choose one spelling, and some choose the other. Some (the author for example) will even mix Q and K in the same document, spelling Kabbalah and Qlippoth (as opposed to Qabalah and Klippoth!). A random selection of modern Hebrew phrase books and dictionaries use the K variant to represent the letter Kuf, so anyone who claims that the "correct" spelling is "Qabalah" is on uncertain ground.

There has been a tendency for non-Jewish books on Kabbalah published this century to use the spelling "Qabalah". Jewish publications are relatively uniform in preferring the spelling "Kabbalah".

The author takes the view (based on experience) that the spelling "Kabbalah" is recognised by a wider selection of people than the "Qabalah" variant, and for this purely pragmatic reason it is used throughout the FAQ.

Q1.3 : What is the "Tradition"?

According to Jewish tradition, the *Torah* (Torah - "Law" - the first five books of the Old Testament) was created prior to the world and she advised God on such weighty matters as the creation of human kind. When Moses received the written law from God, tradition has it that he also received the oral law, which was not written down, but passed from generation to generation. At times the oral law has been referred to as "Kabbalah" - the oral tradition.

The *Torah* was (and is) believed to be divine, and in the same way as the *Torah* was accompanied by an oral tradition, so there grew up a secret oral tradition which claimed to possess an initiated understanding of the *Torah*, its hidden meanings, and the divine power concealed within it. This is a principle root of the Kabbalistic tradition, a belief in the divinity of the *Torah*, and a belief that by studying this text one can unlock the secrets of the creation. Another aspect of Jewish religion which influenced Kabbalah was the Biblical phenomenon of prophecy. The prophet was an individual chosen by God as a mouthpiece, and there was the implication that God, far from being a transcendental abstraction, was a being whom one could approach (albeit with enormous difficulty, risk, fear and trembling). Some Kabbalists believed that they were the inheritors of practical techniques handed down from the time of the Biblical prophets, and it is not impossible or improbable that this was in fact the case.

These two threads, one derived from the study of the Torah, the other derived from practical attempts to approach God, form the roots from which the Kabbalistic tradition developed.

Q1.4 : How old is Kabbalah?

No-one knows. The earliest documents which are generally acknowledged as being Kabbalistic come from the 1st. Century C.E., but there is a suspicion that the Biblical phenomenon of prophecy may have been grounded in a much older oral tradition which was a precursor to the earliest recognisable forms of Kabbalah. Some believe the tradition goes back as far as Melchizedek. There are moderately plausible arguments that Pythagoras received his learning from Hebrew sources. There is a substantial literature of Jewish mysticism dating from the period 100AD - 1000AD which is not strictly Kabbalistic in the modern sense, but which was available as source material to medieval Kabbalists.

On the basis of a detailed examination of texts, and a study of the development of a specialist vocabulary and a distinct body of ideas, Scholem has concluded that the origins of Kabbalah can be traced to 12th. century Provence. The origin of the word "Kabbalah" as a label for a tradition which is definitely recognisable as Kabbalah is attributed to Isaac the Blind (c. 1160-1236 C.E.), who is also credited with being the originator of the idea of sephirothic emanation.

Prior to this (and after) a wide variety of terms were used for those who studied the tradition: "masters of mystery", "men of belief", "masters of knowledge", "those who know", "those who know grace", "children of faith", "children of the king's palace", "those who know wisdom", "those who reap the field", "those who have entered and left".

Q1.5 Do I need to be Jewish to study Kabbalah?

Some aspects of traditional Kabbalah are so deeply intertwined with Jewish religious beliefs and practice that they are meaningless outside of this content. Other aspects of Kabbalah (what I refer to below as Hermetic Kabbalah)

have been studied and practiced outside of Judaism for so long that they have a distinct identity in their own right, and no, you do not have to be Jewish to study them, any more than you need to be English to study the Law of Gravitation.

However, if you choose to study Kabbalah by name you should recognise that Kabbalah was and is a part of Judaism, and an important part of the history of Jewish people, and respect the beliefs which not only gave rise to Kabbalah, but which are still an essential part of Jewish faith..

Q1.6 : Is there an Obstacle to a Woman studying Kabbalah?

Within Judaism the answer is a resounding "Yes!": there are many obstacles. Perle Epstein relates some of her feelings on the subject in her book on Kabbalah (see the Reading List below).

The obstacles are largely grounded in traditional attitudes: it is less easy for a woman to find a Rabbi prepared to teach Kabbalah than it would be for a man. Persistence may reward (see below).

Outside of Judaism the answer is a resounding "No!": there are no obstacles. For the past one hundred years women have been active both in studying and in teaching Kabbalah.

Q1.7 : I've heard that one shouldn't study Kabbalah unless one is over forty years old? Is this true?

The great Kabbalist R. Isaac Luria (1534-1572), began the study of Kabbalah at the age of seventeen and died at the age of thirty-eight! His equally famous contemporary R. Moses Cordovero (1522-1570) began at the age of twenty. Many other famous Kabbalists also began the study early.

This prohibition has come from Ashkenazic (East European) Jews and has never applied to Sephardic (Middle Eastern) Jews. The historical basis for the "rule" comes from opponents of Kabbalah within Judaism who (successfully) attempted to restrict its study. At the root of this was the heresy of false messiah Shabbatai Tzevi (17th. C) which resulted in large numbers of Jews leaving the orthodox fold. This heresy had deep Kabbalistic underpinnings, and in the attempt to stamp out Shabbateanism, Kabbalah itself became suspect, and specific prohibitions against the study of Kabbalah were enacted (e.g. the excommunication of the Frankists in Poland in 1756).

A further factor was the degeneration (in the eyes of their rationalist opponents) of 18th. century Hasidism, which had roots both in Kabbalah and Shabbateanism, into "wonder working" and superstition. The rationalist faction in Judaism triumphed, and the study of Kabbalah became largely discredited, to the extent that many Jewish publications written earlier in this century discuss Kabbalah (if at all) in a very negative way.

Greg Burton has supplied this (mildly amusing) post from America OnLine, from a Rabbi Ariel Bar-Zadok:

" One thing I assure you, I am not a "new ager", nor am I sympathetic to anything that is not pure, authoritative Kabbalah. Remember, Kabbalah means "to receive". I am an Orthodox Sephardic Rabbi, ordained in Jerusalem. I teach only from the true texts, many of which most Rabbis for whatever reasons have never read. I document all my sources so as to verify to you that these teachings are authentic. (I must also admit that I have studied other religious and meditative systems, in this way I feel comfortable and confident to discuss them). My classes are open to all, Jew and Benei Noah alike, men and women, (in accordance to Tana D'vei Eliyahu, Eliyahu Raba, Chapter 9). By the way, according to the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabi Ovadiah Yosef (Yehaveh Da'at 4,47) quoting Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, one only has to be 20 years old to study Kabbala, and not 40. THIS IS THE HALAKHA!!"

This still leaves R.Isaac Luria looking embarrassed, but R. Moses Cordevero scrapes in under the bar ;-)

Q1.8 : Do I need to learn Hebrew to study Kabbalah?

A Jewish Kabbalist would maintain that it is impossible to study Kabbalah without knowing Hebrew. Most Hermetic Kabbalists learn some Hebrew, but there are many practical exercises and ritual techniques which can be employed with only a minimal knowledge of Hebrew.

There is no question that a knowledge of Hebrew can make a very large difference. Non-Jewish texts on Kabbalah abound in simple mistakes which are due largely to uninformed copying. Thousands of important Kabbalistic texts have not been translated out of Hebrew or Aramaic, and the number of important source texts in translation is small.

The difficulties in trying to read the archaic and technically complex literature of Kabbalah should not be discounted, but it is well worthwhile to acquire even a superficial knowledge of Hebrew. Four useful books are: Levy, Harold, "Hebrew for All", Valentine, Mitchell 1976

Harrison R.K. "Teach yourself Biblical Hebrew", NTC Publishing Group 1993

Kelley, P.H., "Biblical Hebrew, an introductory grammar", Eerdmans 1992

Brown, F, "The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon", Hendrickson 1979

Many Kabbalists view the Torah as the word of God and Hebrew as the language of creation. In this view the alphabet and language are divine and have immense magical power. Many of the source texts of Kabbalah are commentaries on the Bible, and derive their insights using a variety of devices, such as puns, anagrams, gematria (letter manipulations) and cross references to the same word in different contexts. The reader is presumed to be adept at playing this game, which becomes completely inaccessible in translation.

Q.1.9 What is Hermetic Kabbalah?

Many people who study Kabbalah are not Jewish. This has been happening for 500 years or so. It is difficult to know what to call this variant of Kabbalah. "Non-Jewish" is inaccurate, as I have personally known several Jews who opted for Hermetic Kabbalah in preference to the traditional variety! At one time it was called "Christian" Kabbalah, but this is also very misleading.

The origin of this variant can be placed in Renaissance Italy in the last decade of the 15th. century. It was an amazing decade. In 1492 Christopher Columbus set sail for America. In that same year the King of Spain expelled all Jews from Spain on pain of death, bringing to an end centuries of Jewish culture in Spain, and causing a huge migration of dispossessed Jews through Europe, many of whom were welcomed by the Turkish sultan, who is reputed to have observed that the King of Spain had enriched Turkey by beggaring his own country.

At around the same time, at the court of the great banking family of the Medicis in Florence, Marcello Ficino had established the Platonic Academy under the patronage of the Medicis and was translating the works of Plato. A bundle of manuscripts, lost for centuries and dating back to the 1st. and 2nd. centuries A.D. was discovered; this was the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a series of documents relating to Hermes Trimegistus, identical with the Egyptian god Thoth, god of wisdom. Cosimo de Medici told Ficino to stop translating Plato and to concentrate on the *Corpus* instead.

At the time it was believed that the *Corpus* really was the religion of the ancient Egyptians, and that Hermes was a kind of Egyptian Moses. The fact that they were written much later, and heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, had the effect of convincing readers at that time that Greek philosophy was founded on much older, Egyptian religious philosophy - this had a huge influence on liberal religious and philosophical thinking at the time. Into this environment came the Kabbalah, brought in part by fleeing Spanish Jews, and it was seized upon as another lost tradition, the inner, initiated key to the Bible.

Two figures stand out. One was Giovanni Pico, Count of Mirandola, who commissioned several translations of Kabbalistic works, and did much to publicise Kabbalah among the intellectuals of the day. The other was Johannes Reuchlin, who learned to read Hebrew and became deeply immersed in Kabbalistic literature. It must be said that Jews were suspicious of this activity, finding that Christian scholars were using the Kabbalah as a bludgeon to persuade them to convert to Christianity.

It was out of this eclectic mixture of Christianity, Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, Kabbalah and Renaissance humanism that Hermetic Kabbalah was born. Over the centuries it has developed in many directions, with strong influences from Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, but continued input from Jewish Kabbalah has meant that many variants are not so different in spirit from the original. Its greatest strength continues to be a strong element of religious humanism - it does not attempt to define God and does not define what an individual should believe, but it does assume that some level of direct experience of God is possible and there are practical methods for achieving this. In a modern world of compartmentalised knowledge, scientific materialism, and widespread cultural and historical illiteracy, it provides a bridge between the spirit of enquiry of the Renaissance (the *homo universalis* or - in Hebrew - *hakham kolel*) and the emergence of a similar spirit of enquiry in our own time.

Q1.10 : Is Hermetic Kabbalah really Kabbalah?

On the basis of my own beliefs and practice I would say yes, but others might contradict me, and ultimately it is a matter of definition.

Jewish writers on the subject tend to downplay aspects of Kabbalah which conflict with orthodox rabbinical Judaism, so that we do not see the heretic Nathan of Gaza classed as an important Kabbalist, despite the fact that he was very influential for almost two hundred years. We hear little about the non-rabbinic "Baal Shem" or "Masters of

the Name" who used Kabbalah for healing and other practical purposes. There is ample evidence that many magical practices currently associated with Hermetic Kabbalah were widely used and well understood by some of the most famous rabbinic Kabbalists.

It is the author's opinion that Hermetic Kabbalah has preserved up to the current day many practical techniques, and R. Aryeh Kaplan makes the following significant comment:

"It is significant to note that a number of techniques alluded to in these fragments also appear to have been preserved among the non-Jewish school of magic in Europe. The relationship between the practical Kabbalah and these magical schools would constitute an interesting area of study."

A more difficult question is whether Hermetic Kabbalah conforms to the spirit of Jewish Kabbalah. One of the most visible distinctions is that between theurgy and thaumaturgy, between the attempt to participate in the workings of the divine realm for the betterment of the creation, and the attempt to interfere with its workings for personal betterment. Modern Kabbalah outside of Judaism appears in many guises, and is often associated or combined with ceremonial or ritual. It may be mixed with a wide range of theosophical traditions. This does not in itself set it apart from historical Kabbalah. Ritual has always been an integral part of Kabbalah, and Kabbalah has absorbed from cultures and traditions all over Europe and the Middle East. Even the distinction between theurgy and thaumaturgy may be meaningless, as similar techniques can be used for both - only by examining intention could one begin to judge which was which.

Given the lack of a dogmatic tradition in Kabbalah it is not clear that the question about the legitimacy of Hermetic Kabbalah is meaningful. Even within Judaism it is unclear what the authentic spirit or tradition is - there are large differences in outlook between someone like Abraham Abulafia and Isaac Luria.

There is no good answer. One person will be reassured that the tradition is alive and going off in many different directions - that is the sign of a living tradition. Another person will feel threatened by outsiders and dilettantes who are bringing the tradition into disrepute. About the only thing which can be said with complete certainty is that there is a great deal of prejudice. Just about everyone who studies Kabbalah seems to be certain that someone else hasn't a clue what Kabbalah is about!

Q1.11 : How can I find someone who teaches Kabbalah?

It is not possible to recommend specific people or organisations as what is right for one person may not be right for another. In general, (good) teachers of Kabbalah are not easy to find and never have been. There is a tradition that when the pupil is ready, a teacher will appear.

The difficulty in finding a teacher can be viewed as a nuisance or a positive part of learning Kabbalah. A thing is valued more when it is hard to find. Associate with people who share your interests, go to lectures and public meetings, go to workshops, go to whatever happens to be available, (even if it is not entirely to your taste), and sooner or later someone will "turn up".

Many Kabbalists are people with strong personal convictions of a religious nature, and may see their teaching as a personal obligation (see "What is the Great Work?"). Those who do not charge money for their teaching may require a strong commitment from pupils, and are unlikely to welcome "flavour of the month" mystical aspirants.

A word of advice: a genuine teacher of Kabbalah will help you to develop your own personal relationship with God. Beware of a teacher who has preconceived and well-developed ideas about what is good for you, or who tries to control the development of your beliefs.

Section 2: Specifics

Q2.1 : What is the Great Work?

"Do not pray for your own needs, for your prayer will not then be accepted. But when you want to pray, do so for the heaviness of the Head. For whatever you lack, the Divine Presence also lacks."

"This is because man is a "portion of God from on high." Whatever any part lacks, also exists in the Whole, and the Whole feels the lack of the part, You should therefore pray for the needs of the Whole."

The term "the Great Work" has many definitions, and is not a term from traditional Kabbalah, but it has a modern usage among some Kabbalists. The quotation above, from a disciple of the Kabbalist R. Israel Baal Shem Tov, is a traditional Kabbalistic view: that the creation is in a damaged and imperfect state, and the Kabbalist, by virtue of his or her state of consciousness, can bring about a real healing. A name for this is "*tikkun*" (restoration). There are many traditional forms of *tikkun*, most of them prescriptions for essentially magical acts designed to bring about a healing in the creation.

This view of the Great Work also exists outside of Judaic Kabbalah and survives today, namely that the creation is in a "fallen" state, and each person has an individual role to play in bringing about a general restoration.

"When someone stands in the light but does not give it out, then a shadow is created."

This is a modern restatement of an old Kabbalistic idea. In this view, God gives life to the Creation: from second to second the Creation is sustained by this giving, and if it were to cease even for an instant, the Creation would be no more. If someone wants to know God then they have to resemble God, and this means they must give to others. Kabbalah is not a self-centred pursuit; it pivots around the Kabbalist's relationship with all living beings.

Q2.2 : I want to know more about the Archangels.

The following information was derived initially from a discussion on alt.magick where several people contributed pieces, in particular, (in no order) Le Grand Cinq-Mars, Amanda Walker, Leigh Daniels, Patric Shane Linden, B.A. Davis-Howe, Mark Garrison, Baird Stafford, and myself. Apologies if you said something and I missed it.

Angels are found in the Judaic, Christian, Islamic and Zoroastrian traditions. The word "angel" is derived from the Christian Latin "angelos", itself derived from the Greek "aggelos", which is a translation of the Hebrew word "mal'akh", a messenger.

Angels are typically found in groupings of four, seven and twelve, reflecting their role in mediating the divine influence via the planets and the stars. For example, in Zoroastrianism there was a belief in the Amesha Spentas, seven holy or bounteous immortals who were functional aspects of Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord. In Islam four angels are well known: Jibril (Gabriel), the angel of revelation; Mikal (Michael), the angel of nature; Izrail (Azrael), the angel of death, and Israfil, the angel who places the soul in the body and sounds the last judgement.

The sources for the angels used in Kabbalah and ceremonial magic are primarily Jewish. The canonical Old Testament books mention only Michael and Gabriel, but apocryphal and Talmudic literature provide richer sources, and there is a suspicion that this was a result of contact with Zoroastrianism during the period of the Babylonian Exile (6th-5th centuries BC). The four best-known angels are

Michael

According to one source his name is his war-cry: "Who is like God?". Michael is at war with the great dragon or serpent, often identified with Samael in Jewish sources. Michael's original position in the celestial hierarchy has been progressively eroded by angels such as Metatron. In medieval Kabbalah he is attributed to Chesed, but in modern Kabbalah he is attributed to Tipheret, and sometimes to Hod.

Uriel/Auriel

Uriel means "Fire of God", from the word "oor" meaning "fire" and Auriel means "Light of God", from the word "or" meaning "light". Both names tend to be used synonymously, and the association with light is common in Kabbalah. In medieval Kabbalah Uriel is attributed to Truth and the middle pillar of the Tree, in Tipheret. The association with light is significant because of the importance of light in practical Kabbalah, where several different kinds are distinguished, including: nogah (glow), tov (good), bahir (brilliant), zohar (radiant), kavod (glory), chaim (life), and muvhak (scintillating). In Christian times Uriel may have been

identified with Lucifer ("light-bearer") and Satan, an odd identification as the diabolic angel according to Jewish tradition is Samael.

Raphael

Raphael means "Healing of God". Raphael is sometimes attributed to Hod and sometimes to Tipheret.

Gabriel

Gabriel means "Strength of God" and in medieval Kabbalah was attributed to Gevurah (the words share a common root). In modern Kabbalah Gabriel can be found further down the Tree in Yesod, using his strength to hold up the foundations.

The four archangels can be found in a variety of protective incantations where they guard the four quarters, an almost universal symbolism which can be found in guises as diverse as nursery rhymes ("Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, bless this bed that I lie on") to ancient Egyptian protective deities. A well-known incantation can be found in the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (see below).

The angel Samael is also important in Kabbalah. Scholem shows (in "The Origins of the Kabbalah") that in early medieval Kabbalah, Samael retained some of the characteristics of the Gnostic demiurge Ialdebaoth (the blind god), and derives the name from "sami", meaning "blind". He is attributed consistently to the planet Mars and the sephira Gevurah, and is the source of all the nastiness in the world. He appears in various guises as the Dark Angel and the Angel of Death. The suffix -el betrays his divine origin, and Kabbalists have been divided between placing him at the head of a demonic hierarchy (alongside his wife Lilith), and viewing him as an unpleasant but necessary component of creation. Samael is identified with the serpent in the Garden of Eden, a tempter and a poisoner of life. The archangel Metatron does not appear in many lists of archangels, but has an important role in Kabbalah as the archangel of the Countenance. Legend has it that Metatron is none other than the Old Testament sage Enoch, lifted up to Heaven by God. Scholem comments that "...there is hardly a duty in the heavenly realm and within the dominion of one angel among the other angels that is not associated with Metatron". Metatron is usually associated with Kether.

There are many lists of seven archangels. Almost all of them differ from each other. Mark O. Garrison (ORMUS@SORINC.CUTLER.COM) kindly provided the following information which clarifies the difficulty:

--Mark's material begins here--

The problem lies in from whence the author goes to research the names of the 7 Archangels. The earliest sources giving the names of all Seven Archangels is ENOCH I (Ethiopic Enoch) which lists the names as following:

Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Zerachiel, Gabriel, and Remiel

The next two sources which originate within a few decades of each other list quite different names of the Seven Archangels. In ENOCH 3 (Hebrew Enoch) the Archangels are listed as:

Mikael, Gabriel, Shatqiel, Baradiel, Shachaqiel, Baraqiel, Sidriel

While the TESTAMENT OF SOLOMON mentions:

Mikael, Gabriel, Uriel, Sabrael, Arael, Iaoth, Adonaei

The Xtian Gnostics changed things a bit further, but they still mention Uriel (though, in some cases they called him Phanuel). The complete listing of the Archangels according to their tradition is:

Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Barachiel, Sealtiel, Jehudiel Pope

Gregory the Great wrote the Archangels as being these 7:

Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Simiel, Orifiel, Zachariel

Likewise, the Pseudo-Dionysians used a similar grouping, mentioning Uriel also. They list the following as the Seven Archangels:

Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Chamuel, Jophiel, Zadkiel

It was not until much later times, around the 10th century C.E. when the name Uriel was replaced by other names in these much latter sources. In Geonic Lore, Uriel is replaced by Samael (The Angel of Light, or THE Lightbearer, from whence the ideology of Lucifer had originated from also). In Geonic Lore the seven are noted as being:

Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Aniel, Kafziel, Samael, and Zadkiel

Around the 12th to 15th centuries C.E. the name of Haniel came to replace the name of Uriel. However, the two being quite different in their Natures. The name Haniel is common to the Talismanic Magical Tradition and other forms of Medieval Ceremonialism. These Medieval Traditions mention the seven as being:

Zaphkiel, Zadkiel, Camael, Raphael, Haniel, Michael, Gabriel

Also, a late sourcebook titled THE HIERARCHY OF THE BLESSED ANGELS mentions a different list of the seven archangels. They list them as following:

Raphael, Gabriel, Chamuel, Michael, Adabiel, Haniel, Zaphiel

It need be remembered, that the Judaeo/Xtian tradition originates from several religions and traditions, each having its own legends and thusly, its own hierarchies and namings of the angels. In Islam, there are only four archangels: Gabriel, Michael, Azrael (the Angel of Death, often interchanged with Uriel since the 15th century in some European traditions) for instance. One can easily determine the sources and origins of an book on Qabala or Ceremonial Magick by what angels they use, obviously.

I personally have drawn up a TREE OF LIFE for each of these traditions, based upon much research, for reference purposes. Note though, the differences do not stop with just the names of the Seven Archangels. These sources also do not agree on the Orders of the Celestial Hierarchy, The Ruling Princes, The Throne Angels, and the Names of God, just to name a few! Are you starting to get the idea yet, or are you more confused! [GRIN] :))

--Mark's material ends here--

Baird Stafford (BSTAFFORD@BSTAFFORD.ESS.HARRIS.COM) provides the following list of references to archangels for those who would like to read the original source material:

--Baird's material begins here--

And here is an expanded list of references to the Archangels, including those cited by Br'anArthur. I've included verses from the Pseudepigrapha (which are the apocryphal books of the Bible not included by the Roman church in its version of the Apocrypha, although I understand that some of them are included in the Orthodox Bible). Uriel had a number of stand-ins who appear to have been other angels who took over his duties for a while: their names are Sariel, Strahel, and Suriel. I've not included their references. And, just for the fun of it, I've also included some references from the writings of the early Christian gnostics. In all cases, the verses I've cited are only those in which the Archangelic Name actually appears; in some cases, subsequent verses refer to the original listing without naming Names.

Raphael:

- 3 Baruch, 4:7 1
- Enoch 10:4; 20:3; 32:6; 40:9; 54:6; 68:2-4; 71:8-9,13
- Apocalypse of Ezra 1:4; 6:2
- Apocalypse of Adam and Eve 40:2
- Sibylline Oracles 2:215
- Testament of Solomon 5:9 (24 in F.C. Conybeare's translation); 13:6 (59 in Conybeare); 18:8 (75 in Conybeare)
- Tobit 3:16; 5:4; 7:8; 8:2; 9:1; 9:5; 11:7; 12:15

Michael:

- Daniel 10:13; 10:21; 12:1
- Jude 9
- Revelations 12:7 3
- Baruch 4:7; 11:2,4,6,8; 12:4,6-7; 13:2-3,5; 14:1-2; 15:1,3; 16:1,3 4
- Baruch 9:5 1
- Enoch 9:1; 10:11; 20:5; 24:6; 40:9; 54:6; 60:4-5; 68:2-4; 69:14-15; 71:3,8-9,13 2
- Enoch 22:1,6,8-9; 33:10; 71:28 (Recension J); 72:1,3,8-9 (Recension J) 3 Enoch 17:3; 44:10
- Apocalypse of Ezra 1:3; 2:1; 4:7,24; 6:2
- Life of Adam and Eve 13:3; 14:1-3; 15:2; 21:2; 22:2; 25:2; 29:1-3; 43:3; 45:1; 51:2
- Apocalypse of Adam and Eve 3:2; 22:1; 37:4,6; 40:1-2; 43:1-2

- Sibylline Oracles 2:215
- Testament of Solomon 1:6 (5 in Conybeare); 18:5 (73 in Conybeare)
- Apocalypse of Abraham 10:17
- Apocalypse of Sedrach 14:1
- Martyrdom and Ascension of Isiah 3:16
- Testament of Abraham 1:4,6; 2:2-14:7
- Testament of Isaac 2:1
- Testament of Jacob 1:6; 5:13
- Vision of Ezra verse 56
- Gnostic Texts (Nag Hammadi Scrolls)
- Apocryphon of John 17:30

Gabriel:

- Daniel 8:16; 9:21
- Luke 1:19; 1:26 3
- Baruch 4:7 1
- Enoch 9:1; 10:9; 20:7; 40:9; 54:6; 71:8-9,13 2
- Enoch 21:3,5; 24:1; 71:11 (28 Recension A); 72:1,3,8-9 (Recension A) 3 Enoch 14:4 (referred to as Angel of Fire); 17:3
- Apocalypse of Ezra 2:1; 4:7; 6:2
- Apocalypse of Adam and Eve 40:2
- Sibylline Oracles 2:215; 8:455
- Testament of Solomon 18:6 (74 in Conybeare)
- Vision of Ezra verse 56
- Apocalypse of Elijah 5:5
- Testament of Jacob 5:13
- Questions of Ezra (Recension B) verse 11
- Gnostic Texts (Nag Hammadi Scrolls)
- Gospel of the Egyptians 52:23; 53:6; 57:7; 64:26
- Zostrianos 57:9; 58:22

Uriel:

- 3 Baruch 4:7 (Phanuel in ms Family B)
- Testament of Solomon 2:4 1
- Enoch 19:1; 21:5; 27:2; 33:3; 40:9 (as Phanuel); 54:6 (as Phanuel); 71:8-9,13 (as Phanuel); 72:1; 80:1; 82:7 (text tells what Uriel's in charge of)
- 4 Ezra 4:1
- Apocalypse of Ezra 6:2
- Apocalypse of Adam and Eve 40:2
- Life of Adam and Eve 48:1,3
- Prayer of Joseph verses 4, 7
- Sibylline Oracles 2:215,225
- Apocalypse of Elijah 5:5
- Testament of Solomon 2:4 (as Ouriel) (10 in Conybeare); 7 (as Ouriel) (11 in Conybeare); 8:9 (as Ouriel) (40 in Conybeare); 18:7 (as Ouriel) (75 in Conybeare); 27 (as Ouriel) (93 in Conybeare)
- Esdras 4:1; 5:21; 10:28
- Gnostic Texts (Nag Hammadi Scrolls)
- Apocryphon of John 17:30 (as Ouriel)

Two further notes: the early fathers of the Roman church appear to have rewritten the Sibylline Oracles to conform to their vision of what a proper prophesy for Rome ought to have been. Also, The Apocalypse of Adam and Eve is also known as The Apocalypse of Moses.

--Baird's material ends here--

Lastly, Leigh Daniels (Leigh@alexandria.com) writes:

A great book is Gustav Davidson's "A Dictionary of Angels" (including the fallen angels) published by Free Press, 1967. It is available in paper for US\$17.95 and in my opinion worth every penny. It includes a 24-page bibliography of sources used in compiling it.

[Colin comments: it is a useful book, but the author was uncritical in choosing his sources of information]

Q2.3 : What is the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram and where does it come from?

The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram is a protective formula which can be used to banish unwanted influences, to "clear the air" as a preliminary to ritual or meditative work. It can be carried out physically, but it can also be used as a concentration exercise which is performed in the imagination prior to going to sleep (for example). The ritual exists in a number of variant forms, the best known being the Golden Dawn variant given below. The Golden Dawn version is based on (or is at least strongly influenced by) Jewish sources.

The version of the ritual below was posted by Rodrigo de Ferres(rodrigo@vnet.net) and is included here with his permission. [I have altered a couple of Hebrew transliterations to make them consistent with normal Hebrew vowel pointing.]

--Rodrigo's contribution begins--

The following is derived from numerous GD sources.

The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram

This ritual can be done to purify a room for further ritual work or meditation and can be used for protection. Its effects are primarily on the Astral (IMHO) though it uses the Earth pentagram. It also promotes a still mind, free of outside influences which is a useful aid in meditation. It is therefore recommended that the ritual be used as part of a daily meditation work.

1. Stand facing East.
2. Perform the Qabalistic Cross
 1. Touch forehead with first two (or index) fingers of right hand and visualizing a sphere of white light at that point, vibrate: Atah (translates roughly - Thou Art)
 2. Lower hand to solar plexus and visualize a line extending down to your feet, vibrate: Malkuth (the Kingdom)
 3. Raise hand and touch right shoulder visualizing a sphere of light there. Vibrate: Ve Geburah (and the power)
 4. Extend the hand across the chest tracing a line of light and touch the left shoulder where another sphere of light forms. Vibrate: Ve Gedulah (and the glory).
 5. Clasp hands in center of chest at crossing point of horizontal and vertical lines of light. Bow head and vibrate: Le Olam, Amen. (for ever - amen.)
3. Facing east, using either the extended fingers or a dagger, trace a large pentagram with the point up, starting at your left hip, up to just above your forehead, centered on your body, then down to your right hip, up and to your left shoulder, across to the right shoulder and down to the starting point in front of your left hip. Visualize the pentagram in blue flaming light. Stab your fingers or dagger into the center and vibrate: YHVH (Yod-heh-vahv-heh - which is the tetragrammaton translated into latin as Jehovah)
4. Turn to the south. Visualize that the blue flame follows your fingers or dagger, tracing a blue line from the east pentagram to the south. Repeat step three while facing South, except vibrate: Adonai (another name for god translated as Lord)
5. Turn to the West, tracing the blue flame from south to west. Repeat step 3, but vibrate: Eheieh (Eh-hay-yeah more or less - another name of God translated as I AM or I AM THAT I AM.) (Or "I will be" - Ed.)
6. Turn to the North, again tracing the blue flame from west to north. Repeat step 3, but vibrate: AGLA (Ah-gah-lah - a composite of Atah Gibor le olam Amen - see step 2)
7. Return again to the east, tracing the blue flame from North to East. Stab the fingers or dagger back again into the same spot as in step 3. You should now visualize that you are surrounded by four flaming pentagrams connected by a line of blue fire.
8. Extend your arms out to your sides, forming a cross. Vibrate (visualizing each Archangel standing guard at each station):
Before me RAPHAEL (rah-fah-yell)
Behind me GABRIEL (gah-bree-ell)
On my right hand, MICHAEL (mee-khah-ell)

On my left hand, AURIEL (sometimes URIEL aw-ree-ell or ooh-ree-ell) for about me flames the Pentagrams, and in the column stands the six-rayed star. (Alternatively the last two lines can be: before me flames the pentagram, behind me shines the six-rayed star)

9. Repeat the Qabalistic Cross (step 2). As can be seen, Raphael is in the East, Gabriel in the West, Michael in the South and Auriel/Uriel in the North.

For more detailed information I refer the reader to: *The Practical Qabalah* by Charles Fielding *Ceremonial Magic* by Israel Regardie, *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic* also by Regardie *The Golden Dawn* as well by Regardie

--Rodrigo's Contribution ends--

There has been some interest in knowing where the LBRP comes from. The answer appears to be that it is inspired, at least in part, by particular Jewish prayers and meditational exercises.

There are alternative versions extant, and one such is taken from a modern Jewish source. The source is a pamphlet called "*A First Step - a Devotional Guide*" which was written by Zalman Schachter and reprinted in "*The First Jewish Catalogue*" by Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld, published by the Jewish Publication Society of America in 1973, ISBN 0-8276-0042-9.

The blurb describing the pamphlet states:

"A First Step by Zalman Schachter is not a translation. It was first written in English. It is a contemporary attempt to make accessible spiritual and devotional techniques from classic Jewish sources, sources on which the pamphlet was based."

[Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, (PhD and Professor Emeritus of Religion at Temple University, founder of the Jewish Renewal movement) is a very important teacher and scholar - Greg Burton]

The author of the pamphlet states

"The approach used here is that of classical Jewish mysticism, as refined by Hasidism, and in particular, by the Habad school."

[Chabad comes from Chokhmah, Binah, Daath - Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge - and is usually associated with the Lubavitch tradition of Chassidism - Colin]

Now to the exercise given:

"On other nights, after a short examination, screen yourself off from sounds and cares by visualising an angel - a spiritual force field - of grace at your right, this force field being impenetrable by care or worry; at your left, an angel of power and strength; before you, an angel of soft light and luminousness, and behind you an angel of healing. Over your head, picture the very presence of the loving God. As you visualise this, say: "In the name of YHVH The God of Israel: At my right hand Michael At my left Gabriel Ahead of me Oriel Behind me Raphael Above my head the Shekinah of God!"

"Imagine yourself plugging into Michael for love - so that you can love more the next day; Gabriel for strength - to fill you for the next day; Oriel filling you with the light of the mind; Raphael healing all your ills."

Greg Burton (gburt@aol.com) comments on this exercise:

--Greg's contribution begins here--

This particular exercise is derived from the practice of saying the Sh'ma 'before lying down' - the 'kriyat (bedtime) Sh'ma'. A full traditional Sephardic version, in Hebrew and English, and with some commentary, can be found beginning on page 318 of the 'Artscroll Siddur' (nusach Sefard), Mesorah, ISBN 0-89906-657-7. Traditional Hassidic kavvenot (intentions/directions/way to do it) can be found in 'Jewish Spiritual Practices' by Yitzhak Buxbaum, Aronson, ISBN 0-87668-832-6.

The attributes listed in the so-called 'Qabalistic Cross' comes from Psalm 99, verse 5, and are part of the Shachrit (morning) Torah service. The attributes assigned for the movements are not traditional, and the order has been changed. If using the traditional assignments (Gevurah left, Gedulah or Chesed right), and saying the sephirotic names in the proper order, it more properly would describe the Lightning Flash in the lower 7 Sephirot, rather than a cross. (Note in the kriyat Sh'ma that Michael (Chesed) is on the right and Gabriel (Gevurah) is on the left. The

implication is that one is facing Keter). Due to changes in directional / elemental / archangelic positioning, it is not obvious (but clearly implied) that physically one is facing North. Another change is that the LBRP does not bless the Divine, while the Jewish service does. This lack of blessing may reflect the not-so-covert Christian/Rosicrucian bias in G.D. liturgy and a particular theology, or it may not. In any event, it changes what was originally an theurgic act into a thaumaturgic act.

You might also note that many Jews coming across the LBRP are deeply offended that the liturgy has been so grossly distorted, and is being used (from their perspective) sacrilegiously. Telling them that it's "just different" carries about as much weight as telling traditional Native Americans that Lynn Andrew's work is "just different". Combining aspects of two completely different aspects into one ritual can be done, but it really is better if you know what you're working with.

--Greg's contribution ends--

In confirmation of what Greg says, the prayers to be said before retiring to rest at night are a standard part of Jewish liturgy, and the British Commonwealth Authorised Daily Prayer book of the United Hebrew Congregations has (as part of a lengthy prayer which includes the 3rd., 91st., and 128th. psalms) the following:

"In the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, may Michael be at my right hand; Gabriel at my left; before me Uriel; behind me Raphael; and above my head the divine presence (lit. Shekhinah) of God."

Lastly, the rudiments of the LRPB have spread beyond ceremonial magic and can be found in places as diverse as a Kate Bush album and Katherine Kurtz's novels. It is even possible to see a version carried out by Christopher Lee in the film version of Dennis Wheatley's novel *The Devil Rides Out*.

The following extract was provided by Robert Farrow (farrow@b4pphf5.bnr.ca).

--Robert's contribution begins--

Not a scholarly source, try *The Adept: Book Three, The Templar Treasure*, by Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris. There is a scene where a Jewish scholar is in the hospital dying and his son is reciting a Jewish prayer. The words are almost identical to the LBRP attributes of the Archangels, except the attributes are reversed. Sir Adam Sinclair, the hero, thinks how close it is to that used in his tradition. Its on page 40.

"Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Achad. Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One...Go since the Lord sends thee; go, and the Lord will be with thee; the Lord God is with him and he will ascend."

"May the Lord Bless thee and keep thee; May the Lord let his countenance shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; May the Lord lift up his countenance upon the, and give the peace."

"At thy right hand is Michael, at thy left is Gabriel, before thee is Uriel, behind thee is Raphael, and above thy head is the divine presence of God. The angel of the lord encampeth around them that fear Him, and He delivereth them. Be strong and of good courage; be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee, withersoever thou goest."

--Robert's contribution ends--

Q2.4 : What are the Qlippoth?

The word "qlippah" or "klippah" (plural "qlippoth") means "shell" or "husk".

The idea of a covering or a garment or a vessel is common in Kabbalah, where it used, at various times and with various degrees of subtlety, to express the manner in which the light of the En Soph is "encapsulated". For example, the sephiroth, in their capacity of recipients of light, are sometimes referred to as kelim, "vessels". The duality between the container and the contained is one of the most important in Kabbalistic explanations of the creative moment.

The word "qlippah" is an extension of this metaphor. A qlippah is also a covering or a container, and as each sephira acts as a shell or covering to the sephira preceding it in the order of emanation, in a technical sense we can say the qlippoth are innate to the Tree of Life. Cut a slice through a tree and one can see the growth rings, with the bark on

the outside. The Tree of Life has 10 concentric rings, and sometimes the qlippah is equated to the bark. The word is commonly used to refer to a covering which contains no light: that is, an empty shell, a dead husk.

It is also the case that the qliphoth appear in Kabbalah as demonic powers of evil, and in trying to disentangle the various uses of the word it becomes clear that there is an almost continuous spectrum of opinion, varying from the technical use where the word hardly differs from the word "form", to the most anthropomorphic sense, where the qliphoth are evil demonesses in a demonic hierarchy responsible for all the evil in the world.

One reason why the word "qlippah" has no simple meaning is that it is part of the Kabbalistic explanation of evil, and it is difficult to explain evil in a monotheistic, non-dualistic religion without incurring a certain complexity.... If God is good, why is there evil?

No short essay can do justice to the complexity of this topic. I will indicate some of the principle themes.

The "Zohar" attributes the primary cause of evil to the act of separation. The act of separation is referred to as the "cutting of the shoots". What was united becomes divided, and the boundary between one thing and another can be regarded as a shell. The primary separation was the division between the Tree of Life (Pillar of Mercy) from the Tree of Knowledge (Pillar of Severity).

In normal perception the world is clearly characterized by divisions between one thing and another, and in this technical sense one could say that we are immersed in a world of shells. The shells, taken by themselves as an abstraction divorced from the original, undivided light (making another separation!) are the dead residue of manifestation, and can be identified with dead skin, hair, bark, sea shells, or shit. They have been referred to as the dregs remaining in a glass of wine, or as the residue left after refining gold. According to Scholem, the Zohar interprets evil as "the residue or refuse of the hidden life's organic process"; evil is something which is dead, but comes to life because a spark of God falls on it; by itself it is simply the dead residue of life.

The skeleton is the archetypal shell. By itself it is a dead thing, but infuse it with a spark of life and it becomes a numinous and instantly recognisable manifestation of metaphysical evil. The shell is one of the most common horror themes; take a mask, or a doll, or any dead representation of a living thing, shine a light out of its eyes, and becomes a thing of evil intent. The powers of evil appear in the shape of the animate dead - skulls, bones, zombies, vampires, phantasms.

The following list of correspondences follows the interpretation that the qliphoth are empty shells, form without force, the covering of a sephira:

Kether	Futility
Chokmah	Arbitrariness
Binah	Fatalism
Chesed	Ideology
Gevurah	Bureaucracy
Tipheret	Hollowness
Netzach	Routine, Repetition, Habit
Hod	Rigid Order
Yesod	Zombieism, Robotism
Malkut	Stasis

A second, common interpretation of the qliphoth is that they represent the negative or aversive aspect of a sephira, as if each sephira had a Mr. Hyde to complement Dr. Jekyll. There are many variations of this idea. One of the most common is the idea that evil is caused by an excess of the powers of Din (judgement) in the creation. The origin of this imbalance may be innate, a residue of the moment of creation, when each sephira went through a period of imbalance and instability (the kingdoms of unbalanced force), but another version attributes this imbalance to humankind's propensity for the Tree of Knowledge in preference to the Tree of Life (a telling and precognitively inspired metaphor if ever there was one...).

The imbalance of the powers of Din "leaks" out of the Tree and provides the basis for the "sitra achra", the "other side", or the "left side" (referring to pillar of severity), a quasi or even fully independent kingdom of evil. This may be represented by a full Tree in its own right, sometimes by a great dragon, sometimes by seven hells. The most lurid versions combine Kabbalah with medieval demonology to produce detailed lists of demons, with Samael and Lilith riding at their head as king and queen.

A version of this survives in the Golden Dawn tradition on the qliphoth. The qliphoth are given as 10 evil powers corresponding to the 10 sephiroth. I referred to G.D knowledge lectures and also to Crowley's "777" (believed to be largely a rip-off of Alan Bennett's G.D. correspondence tables), and found several inconsistencies in transliteration and translation. Where possible I have reconstructed the original Hebrew, and I have given a corrected list.

The Orders of the Qlippoth

Sephiroth	Qlippoth	Meaning
Kether	Thaumiel	Twins of God (TAVM, tom - a twin)
Chokmah	Ogiel	Hinderers (? OVG - to draw a circle)
Binah	Sataiel	Concealers (STR, satar- to hide, conceal)
Chesed	Gash'khalah	Breakers in Pieces (GASH Ga'ash - shake, quake KLH, khalah - complete destruction, annihilation)
Gevurah	Golachab	Flaming Ones (unclear)
Tipheret	Tagiriron	Litigation (probably from GVR, goor - quarrel)
Netzach	Orev Zarak	Raven of Dispersion (ARV, orev - raven ZRQ, zaraq - scatter)
Hod	Samael	False Accuser (SMM, samam - poison)
Yesod	Gamaliel	Obscene Ass (GML, gamal - camel? alt. ripen?)
Malkut	Lilith	Woman of the Night (Leilah - Night)

Most of these attributions are obvious, others are not. The Twins of God replace a unity with a warring duality. The Hinderers block the free expression of the God's will. The Concealers prevent the mother from giving birth to the child - the child is stillborn in the womb. The Breakers in Pieces are the powers of authority gone berserk - Zeus letting fly with thunderbolts in all directions. The Flaming Ones refer to the fiery and destructive aspect of Gevurah. Lilith is the dark side of the Malkah or queen of Malkuth.

Why Samael is placed in Hod is unclear, unless he has been christianised and turned into the father of lies. In Kabbalah he is almost always attributed to Gevurah, sometimes as its archangel. Yesod is associated with the genitals and the sexual act, but why Gamaliel is unclear to me. I could easily concoct fanciful and perhaps even believable explanations for the attributions to Tipheret and Netzach, but I prefer not to.

In "777" Crowley also gives qlippoth for many of the 22 paths. If the transliterations and translations are as accurate as those for the sephiroth, I would be tempted to reach for my lexicon.

The G.D. teachings on the qlippoth are minimal in the material in my possession, but a great deal can be deduced from those fascinating repositories of Kabbalistic myth, the twin pictures of the Garden of Eden before and after the Fall. There are so many mythic themes in these pictures that it is difficult to disentangle them, but they seem strongly influenced by the ideas of Isaac Luria, and it is now time to describe the third major interpretation of the qlippoth.

Luria's ideas have probably received more elaboration than any others in Kabbalah. The man left little in a written form, and his disciples did not concur in the presentation of what was clearly a very complex theosophical system - this is a subject where no amount of care will ensure consistency with anyone else.

Luria made the first step in the creation a process called "tzim tzum" or contraction. This contraction took place in the En Soph, the limitless, unknown, and unknowable God of Kabbalah. God "contracted" in a process of self-limitation to make a space (in a metaphorical sense, of course) for the creation. In the next step the light entered this space in a jet to fill the empty vessels of the sephiroth, but all but the first three were shattered by the light. This breaking of the vessels is called "shevirah". The shards of the broken vessels fell into the abyss created by contraction, and formed the qlippoth. Most of the light returned to the En Soph, but some of it remained in the vessels (like a smear of oil in an empty bottle) and fell with the qlippoth.

Scholem describes the shevirah and the expulsion of the qlippoth as cathartic; not a blunder, an architectural miscalculation like an inadequately buttressed Gothic cathedral, but as a catharsis. Perhaps the universe, like a new baby, came attached to a placenta which had to be expelled, severed, and thrown out into the night.

One way of looking at the shevirah is this: the self contraction of tzim tzum was an act of Din, or Judgement, and so at the root of the creative act was the quality which Kabbalists identify with the source of evil, and it was present in such quantity that a balanced creation became possible only by excreting the imbalance. The shevirah can be viewed as a corrective action in which the unbalanced powers of Din, the broken vessels, were ejected into the abyss.

Whether cathartic or a blunder, the shevirah was catastrophic. Nothing was as it should have been in an ideal world. The four worlds of Kabbalah slipped, and the lowest world of Assiah descended into the world of the shells. This can be seen in the G.D. picture of the Eden after the Fall. Much of Lurianic Kabbalah is concerned with corrective actions designed to bring about the repair or restoration (tikkun) of the creation, so that the sparks of light trapped in the realm of the shells can be freed.

The final word on the shells must go to T.S. Eliot, who had clearly bumped into them in one of his many successful raids on the inarticulate:

"Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;"

"Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us - if at all - not as lost,
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men."

Q.2.5: Why is Gevurah feminine?

There is a common belief that certain sephiroth are "masculine" and other sephiroth are "feminine". This belief causes many problems in comprehending the Tree of Life, and is a source of questions. For example, why is Gevurah, a martial and aggressive sephira, depicted as feminine, and why is Netzach, the nurturing, caring, emotional and aesthetic sephira, depicted as "masculine".

No convoluted explanations are required. The difficulties occur because of a carelessness in choosing words, and a misunderstanding about planetary correspondences. In other words, the above depictions are inaccurate.

Masculine and feminine are acquired behaviours which have changed over time, and many people are learning their Kabbalah from books written several decades ago. These stereotype views of masculine and feminine were not shared by Jewish authors, who not only did not use these terms, but placed an entirely different meaning on the terms they did use. If you take "feminine" to imply emotional, caring, and passive, and "masculine" to imply active, aggressive, and intellectual, then not only do you risk offending a large number of people who find this stereotype insulting, but you may also have great difficulty in reconciling various correspondences for the sephiroth.

A more appropriate characterisation of the difference between sephira is that of "giving" and "receiving". Kether is a sephira that only gives, and Malkuth is a sephira which only receives, and all other sephiroth are both giving and receiving, so that Binah receives from Chokhmah but gives to Chesed. [Things are not so simple; there is a tradition that when a current reaches Malkuth, it reflects and travels back up the Tree again, so that even Malkuth and Kether play a part in giving and receiving. When human beings carry out simple acts in their daily life with full consciousness, then this results in a small "tikkun" or restoration in the upper worlds - in other words, it is our own actions which cause the reflection within Malkuth, and by doing so cause the "spiritualisation of matter"]

Kabbalists have used a sexual metaphor for this giving and receiving; they have observed that from a biological point of view, the male "gives", and the female "receives", and have given the sephira Chokhmah the title "Father" and the sephira Binah the title "Mother". In time, this distinction between male and female has been lost, and carelessness has led to the substitution of masculine and feminine, which entirely changes the original meaning.

A second difficulty is caused by a common tendency in people to use the astrological correspondence of a planet as the primary means for understanding a sephira, so that for many people, Gevurah and Mars are synonymous. This is equivalent to saying that because a sunflower reminds me of the sun, the sun *is* a sunflower. The fact that one is a luminous ball of gas and the other is a plant with yellow petals should give a clue as to the magnitude of this kind of error. The metaphorical relationship between the sephira Tipheret and the sun is no closer than that between the sun and a sunflower. Likewise the relationship between Gevurah and Mars, and between Netzach and Venus - this is an example of the finger pointing at the moon: look at the finger and you don't see the moon.

What follows is a very brief characterisation of each sephiroth, with a brief rationale for the corresponding planetary association.

Kether	Unity
Chokhmah	Unconditioned Creativity
Binah	Possibility of Boundaries
Chesed	Conditioned Creativity
Gevurah	Response to Boundaries
Tipheret	Self-Consciousness
Netzach	Response to Creativity
Hod	Appreciation of Boundaries
Yesod	Ego
Malkuth	Diversity

This is an abstract approach which concentrates on the polarity of force/creativity and form. In Kabbalah this is expressed as the polarity of Chokhmah and Binah. Chokhmah is the unconditioned creativity that explodes out of unity of Kether. Binah is concealed in this duality, in the separation between Kether and Chokhmah, and expresses the possibility of duality, of separation between one thing and another. Binah is the Mother of Form, the root of separation which forms the basis for all distinctions and finiteness. The Mother receives the creative outpouring of Chokhmah and gives birth to it in Chesed. Chesed reflects the creativity of Chokhmah, but is conditioned by the boundaries and distinctions of Binah. Chesed creates within the realm of the possible; Binah defines what *is* possible.

Gevurah is the response to boundaries. Chesed wants to move existing boundaries around, and Gevurah is the response to that. This response is typically reactionary, a defense of the status quo, an attempt to keep the boundaries where they were. Chesed is active - it changes the status quo. Gevurah is receptive - it takes the existing status quo and defends it.

Netzach is the response to creativity. It is the place of aesthetic judgements, of likes and dislikes, of passions for this and that. It is the adulation of a fan for a band, or an artist, or a politician. Hod is the appreciation of boundaries, a passion for classification, rules, detail, hair-splitting definitions. Netzach is active; feelings tell us what we should like. Feelings direct our behaviour. Hod is receptive, in that it elaborates what it is given.

The more confusing planetary associations should now (I hope) be clearer. Saturn is the sphere of limitation, old age, death, and corresponds to Binah, the Mother of Form, from whose womb all finiteness comes. Jupiter, the leader, corresponds to Chesed. Mars (as the warrior defending the law and the State) corresponds to Gevurah (but not Mars as the bloodthirsty berserker - this is an aspect of Chesed). Venus, the romantic aesthete, goddess of love and sensual beauty, corresponds to Netzach. Mercury, the god of trade, science, communication, medicine, discourse, trickery, corresponds to Hod.

Do not expect to find a detailed consistency between a sephira and its planetary correspondence: the sun is not a sunflower. There is a subtlety and generality, not to mention coherency, in the idea of sephirotic emanation which is not to be found in the planetary correspondences.

Section 3: A Potted History of Kabbalah

Kabbalists and scholars disagree on the date of the origins of the Kabbalah. Many Kabbalists trace the tradition back to 1st. century A.D. Palestine. Scholars tend to identify Kabbalah with specific ideas which emerged in 12th. century Provence in the school of R. Isaac the Blind, who has been called "the father of Kabbalah". What is abundantly clear however is that there is a continuous thread of Jewish mysticism running from early times, and these strands have become so intertwined with Kabbalah that it is difficult to know where one ends and another begins. For example, the highly influential text, the *Sepher Yetzirah*, was the subject of widespread commentary by medieval Kabbalists but the text may have been written as early as the 1st. century. Again, ideas from Jewish Gnosticism from the 2nd. and 3rd. centuries have also become deeply embedded in Kabbalah.

The earliest documents associated with Kabbalah come from the period ~100 to ~1000 A.D. and describe the attempts of "Merkabah" mystics to penetrate the seven halls (Hekaloth) of creation in order to reach the Merkabah (throne-chariot) of God. These mystics appear to have used what would now be recognised as familiar methods of shamanism (fasting, repetitious chanting, prayer, posture) to induce trance states in which they literally fought their way past terrible seals and guards to reach an ecstatic state in which they "saw God". An early and highly influential document, the *Sepher Yetzirah*, or "Book of Formation", originated during the earlier part of this period.

By the early Middle Ages further, more theosophical developments had taken place, chiefly a description of "processes" within God, and the development of an esoteric view of creation as a process in which God manifests in a series of emanations, or sephiroth. This doctrine of the sephiroth can be found in a rudimentary form in the "Sepher Yetzirah", but by the time of the publication of the book "Bahir" in the 12th. century it had reached a form not too different from the form it takes today.

A motive behind the development of the doctrine of emanation can be found in the questions:

"If God made the world, then what is the world if it is not God?"

"If the world is God, then why is it imperfect?"

It was necessary to bridge the gap between a pure and perfect being, and a manifestly impure and imperfect world, by a series of "steps" in which the divine light was successively diluted. The result has much in common with

Neoplatonism, which also tried to resolve the same difficulty by postulating a "chain of being" which bridged the gap between the perfection of God, and the evident imperfection of the world of daily life.

One of most interesting characters from the early period was Abraham Abulafia (1240-1295), who believed that God cannot be described or conceptualised using everyday symbols. Like many Kabbalists he believed in the divine nature of the Hebrew alphabet and used abstract letter combinations and permutations (*tzeruf*) in intense meditations lasting many hours to reach ecstatic states. Because his abstract letter combinations were used as keys or entry points to altered states of consciousness, failure to carry through the manipulations correctly could have a drastic effect on the Kabbalist. In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* Scholem includes a fascinating extract from a description of one such experiment. Abulafia is unusual because (controversially) he was one of the few Kabbalists to provide explicit written details of practical techniques.

The most influential Kabbalistic document, the *Sepher ha Zohar* or "Book of Splendour", was published by Moses de Leon (1238-1305), a Spanish Jew, in the latter half of the thirteenth century. The *Zohar* is a series of separate documents covering a wide range of subjects, from a verse-by-verse esoteric commentary on the *Pentateuch*, to highly theosophical descriptions of processes within God. The *Zohar* was highly influential within mainstream Judaism (in some communities it was ranked as highly as the *Talmud* as a source of interpretation on the *Torah*), and within the more orthodox sects it still is.

An important development in Kabbalah was the Safed school of mystics headed by Moses Cordovero (1522-1570) and his successor Isaac Luria (1534-1572). Luria, called "The Ari" or Lion, was a highly charismatic leader who exercised almost total control over the life of the school, and has passed into history as something of a saint. Emphasis was placed on living in the world and bringing the consciousness of God through *into* the world in a practical way. Practices were largely devotional.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Judaism as a whole was heavily influenced by Kabbalah, but two influences caused its decline. The first event was the mass defection of Jews to the cause of the heretic and apostate pseudo-messiah Shabbatai Tzevi (1626-1676), an event Scholem called "the largest and most momentous messianic movement in Jewish history subsequent to the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba Revolt." The Shabbateans included many prominent rabbis and Kabbalists, and from this point Kabbalah became inextricably mired with suspicions of heresy.

A second factor was the rise in Eastern Europe of a populist Kabbalism in the form of Hasidism, and its eventual decline into superstition, so that by the beginning of this century a Jewish writer was able to dismiss Kabbalah as an historical curiosity. Jewish Kabbalah has vast literature which is almost entirely untranslated into English.

A development which took place almost synchronously with the translation and publication of key texts of Jewish Kabbalah was its adoption by many Christian mystics, magicians and philosophers. Some Christians thought Kabbalah held keys that would reveal mysteries hidden in the scriptures, and others tried to find in Kabbalah doctrines which might be used to convert Jews to Christianity. There were some who recognised in Kabbalah themes with which they were already familiar in the literature of Hermeticism and Neoplatonism.

The key figure in what has been called "Christian Kabbalah" is Giovanni Pico, Count of Mirandola. The liberal atmosphere in Florence under the patronage of the Medici family provided a haven for both Jewish scholars (usually employed as translators or physicians) and humanist philosophers. The fall of Byzantium provided a rich source of Greek texts such as works of Plato and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Giovanni Pico not only popularised Kabbalah, but influenced humanist scholars such as Johannes Reuchlin to learn Hebrew and study important source texts.

Kabbalah was progressively bundled with Pythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism to form a snowball which continued to pick up traditions as it rolled down the centuries. It is probably accurate to say that from the Renaissance on, virtually all European occult philosophers and magicians of note had a working knowledge of some aspect of Kabbalah, and we are not talking about obscure individuals - there was a time when science, philosophy, metaphysics, theology and so-called "occult sciences" inter-mingled in a way which baffles the compartmentalised modern mind, and biographers of Isaac Newton still have difficulty in accepting the things he studied when not laying the foundations of modern theoretical physics!

Non-Jewish Kabbalah has suffered greatly from having only a limited number of source texts to work from, often in poor translations, and without the key commentaries which would have revealed the tradition associated with the concepts described. It is pointless to criticise non-Jewish Kabbalah (as many writers have) for misinterpreting Jewish Kabbalah; it should be recognised as a parallel tradition with many points of correspondence and many points of difference. Its strength is that a practical tradition has evolved, which many find effective and worthwhile, and the original Renaissance humanism out of which it grew has remained intact, so that while it is broadly Judeo-Christian in background, it is largely free of dogma, and places the task of self-actualisation firmly in the hands of human beings.

Very little information has survived about the Practical Kabbalah in the Jewish tradition, but there is abundant evidence that it involved a wide range of practices and included practices now regarded as magical - the fact that so many Kabbalists denounced the use of Kabbalah for magical purposes is evidence in itself (even if there were no other) that the use of these techniques was widespread. It is highly likely that many ritual magical techniques were introduced into Europe by Kabbalists or their less scrupulous camp followers.

The most important medieval magical text is the *Key of Solomon*, and it contains the elements of classic ritual magic - names of power, the magic circle, ritual implements, consecration, evocation of spirits etc. No-one knows how old it is, but there is a reasonable suspicion that its contents preserve techniques which might well date back to Solomon. The combination of non-Jewish Kabbalah and ritual magic has been kept alive outside Judaism until the present day, although it has been heavily adulterated at times by Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism, Rosicrucianism, Christianity, Tantra and so on. The most important "modern" influences are the French magician Eliphas Levi, and the English *Order of the Golden Dawn*. At least two members of the Golden Dawn (S.L. Mathers and A.E. Waite) were knowledgeable Kabbalists, and three Golden Dawn members have popularised Kabbalah - Aleister Crowley, Israel Regardie, and Dion Fortune. Dion Fortune's *Order of the Inner Light* has also produced a number of authors: Gareth Knight, William Butler, and William Gray to name but three.

An unfortunate side effect of the Golden Dawn is that while Kabbalah was an important part of its "Knowledge Lectures", surviving Golden Dawn rituals are a syncretist hodge-podge of symbolism in which Kabbalah seems to play a minor or nominal role, and this has led to Kabbalah being seen by many modern occultists as more of a theoretical and intellectual discipline, rather than a potent and self-contained mystical and magical system in its own right.

Some of the originators of modern witchcraft (e.g. Gerald Gardner, Alex Saunders) drew heavily on medieval ritual and Kabbalah for inspiration, and it is not unusual to find modern witches teaching some form of Kabbalah, although it is generally even less well integrated into practical technique than in the case of the Golden Dawn. To summarise, Kabbalah is a mystical and magical tradition which originated nearly two thousand years ago and has been practiced continuously during that time. It has been practiced by Jew and non-Jew alike for about five hundred years. On the Jewish side it has been an integral and influential part of Judaism. On the Hermetic side it has created a rich mystical and magical tradition with its own validity, a tradition which has survived despite the prejudice generated through existing within a strongly Christian culture.

Section 4: Reading Material

The following list contains books which are representative of both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions. There are books which are utterly fanciful or derivative which have not been included.

Many books have not been included simply because no one has suggested that they should. If you feel strongly that a book should be included in this list then mail its details and some (relatively) factual comments on its contents to cal@hplb.hpl.hp.com I'd like to thank the following for their contributions:

- Le Grand Cinq Mars
- Greg Burton

Bar Zadok, R. Ariel, *"Yikrah B'Shmi (Call Upon My Name)"*, Yeshivat Benei N'vi'im, 1992

[Merkabah practices]

Bischoff, Erich, *"Kabbala"*, Weiser

[An interesting and generally well-informed little book written as an extended FAQ. Refers only to traditional Jewish material. Originally published in German c. 1910]

Brown, Francis, *"The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon"*, Hendrickson 1979

[The last word in Biblical Hebrew. Amaze and astound your friends with each and every usage of every word in the Bible. Hold an audience entranced with your knowledge of Arabic, Aramaic, Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian, and Greek referents]

Crowley, Aleister, "777", Metaphysical Research Group 1977

[Tables of Kabbalistic correspondences, some from the Golden Dawn, some from Crowley, many traditional]

Epstein, Perle, "*Kabbalah*", Shambhala 1978

[Information on traditional Jewish Kabbalah by a student of Aryeh Kaplan. It contains many biographical details, and useful information on practical techniques.]

Fortune, Dion, "*The Mystical Qabalah*", Ernest Benn Ltd, 1979

[One of the first books to relate the Sephirothic Tree to everyday experience, and for this reason a useful beginners' book. It contains many digressions on matters circa 1930 which now appear extremely dated. Dion Fortune was strongly influenced by Theosophy and Esoteric Christianity as well as Kabbalah, and it shows.]

Gikatilla, R. Joseph, "*Sha'are Orach*", Harper Collins, 1994

[*The Gates of Light* by Joseph of Castille is one of the great expositions of Kabbalah, written in the thirteenth century by a pupil of Abraham Abulafia. Because of its early translation into Latin it is also one of a small number of texts to exert a strong influence on Christian Kabbalah. It provides an exposition on the divine names through the 10 sephiroth and is exceedingly heavy going. This translation lacks a commentary.]

haLevi, Ze'v ben Shimon, "*Kabbalah & Exodus*", "*Work of the Kabbalist*", "*School of Kabbalah*", Weiser ???

[Good non-technical material - though he has an aversion to magick. A sort of inbetween - Wesoteric and Jewish. Very practical material for the sincere beginner.]

Locks, Gutman G., "*Gematria, Spice of Torah*", Judaica Press, ??

[Gematria values for the Torah - the real thing]

Idel, Moshe, "*Kabbalah: New Directions*", Yale University Press 1988

[Outstanding scholarship - a MUST read for theoretical background, and to put Scholem into perspective.]

Idel, Moshe, "*Ecstatic Kabbalah*", Yale, ???

[Outstanding scholarship - a MUST read for understanding the work of Abraham Abulafia.]

Jacobs, Louis, "*The Jewish Mystics*", Kyle Cathie Ltd. 1990 (also published in the US as "Jewish Mystical Testimonies")

[A fascinating compilation of texts spanning the history of Kabbalah from the earliest times, an eclectic mixture which includes extracts from the Talmud and Zohar, letters, personal diaries, legend, short lectures, visions, mystical experiences etc.]

Kaplan, Aryeh, "*The Bahir Illumination*", Weiser 1989

[A key Kabbalistic source text with an extensive and informed commentary by Kaplan]

Kaplan, Aryeh, "*Meditation and Kabbalah*", Weiser 1992

[Essential reading for the experienced Kabbalist. Not an introductory text. Many biographical and historical details worth reading for their own sake.]

Kaplan, Aryeh, "*The Sepher Yetzirah*", Weiser 1991

[A key Kabbalistic source text with an extensive and informed commentary by Kaplan.]

Kaplan, Aryeh, "*The Living Torah*", Moznaim 1981

[A key Kabbalistic source text with an informed commentary by Kaplan. Contains both Kaplan's translation and the Hebrew source text of the five books of Moses.]

Kaplan, R. Aryeh, "*Innerspace*", Moznaim, 4304 12th Ave. Brooklyn, NY.11219 1-800-364-5118

[Superb Introduction]

Kaplan, R. Aryeh, "*Jewish Meditation*", Weiser ???

[Introductory practices - can be used before "*Meditation and Kabbalah*" or "*Meditation and the Bible*".]

Knight, Gareth, "*A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism*", Vols 1 & 2, Helios 1972

[Volume 1 provides an introduction to the Tree of Life and the sephiroth, and follows the correspondences of the Golden Dawn and Dion Fortune. Volume 2 covers the paths on the Tree, draws on the same basic correspondences, but contains more personal meditational material. At the level of a personal commentary it provides many insights into the G.D. correspondences.]

Levi, Eliphas, "*Transcendental Magic*", Rider, 1969

[A key text by an important and influential magician. Levi's factual information should not be taken at face value]

Mathers, S. L., "*The Kabbalah Unveiled*", Routledge & Kegan Paul 1981

[A translation of a translation of three texts from the "Zohar", with an introduction by both Moina and Samuel Liddel Mathers, which is interesting not only for what it says about Kabbalah but also as a source of insight into two key members of the Order of the Golden Dawn.]

Mathers, S. L., "*The Key of Solomon the King*", Routledge & Kegan Paul

[Classic magical grimoire with a Kabbalistic flavour.]

Mathers, S. L., "*The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*", Dover 1975

[The authenticity of this text has been questioned, but its influence on 20th. century magic and practical Kabbalah cannot be. It may be based on an authentic technique for acquiring a "Maggid" or angelic teacher, something widely employed by Jewish Kabbalists in the past.]

Ponce, Charles, "*Kabbalah*", Garnstone Press, 1974

[A straightforward and not too fanciful introduction to Kabbalah with a Jewish flavour. A good all-round introduction.]

Regardie, I., "*The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*", Falcon Press 1984

[Essential reading for anyone interested in the development of non- Jewish, "Hermetic" Kabbalah this century.]

Schachter, R. Zalman, "*Fragments of a Future Scroll*" (out of print)

[Introduction to Jewish Renewal, which includes a great deal of kabbalistic underpinning.]

Scheinkin, David, "*Path of Kabbalah*", Shambala ???

[Excellent introduction by another student of Kaplan's. A great one to read first]

Scholem, Gershom G. "*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*", Schocken Books 1974

[This is the seminal work by the founder of 20th. century Kabbalah scholarship. Scholem is a writer who can transform difficult topics by writing with great clarity and beauty, and his extraordinary erudition makes him essential reading for anyone with an interest in the historical basis for Kabbalah.]

Scholem, Gershom G., "*Origins of the Kabbalah*", Princeton 1990

[Traces the origins of Kabbalistic thought through the book "Bahir", the Kabbalists of Provence, and the Kabbalistic circle of Gerona. Gripping stuff for the academically and historically minded]

Scholem, Gershom G. "*Kabbalah*", Dorset Press 1974

[I believe this is a compilation of essays, combined with articles written for the Encyclopedia Judaica. Good for its breadth and its biographical information. Essential reading for anyone with an interest in the historical basis for Kabbalah.]

Scholem, Gershom G. "*Sabbatai Tzevi, The Mystical Messiah*", Princeton University Press 1973.

[A massive, minutely researched book describing the lives and heresies of Sabbatai Tzevi and Nathan of Gaza. A good source of information on Nathan's unusual and highly influential version of Lurianic Kabbalah]

Scholem, Gershom G. "*Kabbalah and its Symbolism*", Schocken 1969.

[A selection of very readable essays on a wide variety of topics, including Kabbalistic ritual and the idea of the Golem]

Scholem, Gershom G. "*On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*", Schocken 1991

[More deeply researched essays on the Kabbalah, including as topics good and evil, the Shekhinah, the transmigration of souls, and the astral body.]

Simon, Maurice & Sperling, Harry, "*The Zohar*", Bennet 1959 (also recently reprinted by Soncino)

[A translation a major part of a key Kabbalistic text. Oh, that Kaplan had lived long enough to translate The Zohar! You might be better with Tishby's superb anthology of *Zohar* texts and extensive commentaries]

Suares, Carlos, "*The Quabala Trilogy*", Shambala,??

[Heavy going, but it can give you a good sense of what's going on kabbalistically in the Torah from a gematria perspective.]

Tishby, Isaiah, & Lachower, Yeruham Fishel, "*The Wisdom of the Zohar*" Oxford University Press 1989

[An anthology of texts systematically arranged and rendered into Hebrew by Fischel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby ; with extensive introductions and explanations by Isaiah Tishby; English translation by David Goldstein. An expensive three volume set which contains a definitive translation of large parts of the Zohar, the texts arranged by subject matter and greatly clarified by a voluminous commentary and extensive footnotes. An essential text.]

Waite, A.E., "*The Holy Kabbalah*", Citadel

[A large volume on Kabbalah by a key member of the Golden Dawn, greatly diminished by Waite's verbose and circumlocutious writing style. Scholem thought this book was the best example of Kabbalistic commentary in the Hermetic camp, but personally I find Arthwaite's prose style about as attractive as a patent attorney's love letters.]

Zalewski, Pat, "*Golden Dawn Kabbalah*", Llewellyn, 1993

[Very good exposition of additional Golden Dawn material, and some interesting thoughts]

Section 5: Information Available on the Internet

FTP Sites:

ftp.funet.fi has an ftp archive on various occult and magical topics. Some material on Kabbalah can be found in
pub/occult/occult/magick/qabalah

Ceci Heningsson (ceci@lysator.liu.se) has created an ftp archive of magical and occult material which is available via anonymous ftp to pub/magick on ftp.lysator.liu.se.

rtfm.mit.edu has an archive from soc.culture.jewish in pub/usenet/news.answers/judaism. A very useful reading list for Jewish Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism can be found in pub/usenet/news.answers/judaism/reading-lists/chasidism

WWW

Shawn Clayton Knight's WWW page is very good and references many other WWW pages on <http://www.contrib.andrew.cmu.edu/~eclectic/occult.html>

Usenet Newsgroups:

Useful information and discussion on Jewish sources and Judaism in general can be found in soc.culture.jewish Information and discussion on Kabbalah as a part of the framework for modern (non-Jewish) ritual or ceremonial magic can be found in alt.magick, a site which was once very active but which has become a haven for Bible-Thumping cross-posts and individuals who have opinions on every subject under the sun, and a burning desire to air them.