

T.F.S.

Three, five, and seven

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#210

“The new meaning of soul is creativity and mysticism. These will become the foundation of the new psychological type and with him or her will come the new civilization”. -----Otto Rank

Mysticism and the Kabbalah

Several brothers have asked about the Kabbalah which some Masons believe has much Masonic symbolism. It seems appropriate to write a short article about it.

Mysticism is a phenomenon in the historic development of all religions. The way mystical insight is attained varies from religion to religion, and its expression depends on the history, symbols, rituals, ethics, and principles of the particular religious tradition.

The Kabbalah (meaning to receive or literally “the received or traditional lore”) was originally composed entirely of traditional lore and included the prophetic books of the Bible and early Christian literature, which were supposed to have been given by the power of the Holy Spirit rather than from God’s hand. It is comprised of not one but many books on Jewish Mysticism. However it is also a vast collection of Jewish teachings, symbols, rituals, folklore and customs. The Kabbalah explores Gods relationship to human beings in the world and “the inner life of God”. Its exploration was born of a profound longing to know and grasp the nature of God and the unity of all creation. It focuses on many subjects: human nature, Jewish religious life, creation, the essence of reality and the nature of evil. The insights of the Kabbalah are not logical or intuitive like those in philosophy but have mystical wisdom which is spiritual, intuitive and tolerant of paradox.

Some of the great Jewish mystics include: the prophet Ezekiel; Rabbi and scholar Akiba; the philosopher and physician Maimonides; Moses De Leon the author of

The Zohar, and the philosophers and theologians Marin Buber and Abraham Joshua Herschel. Some of their favorite topics were creation, revelation and redemption.

One of the best Kabbalistic books for study is The Book of Enlightenment or Zohar (which means brilliance in Hebrew). The Zohar is a multivolume collection and presents the world as a multi-faceted mysterious symbol of God's inner life. It emphasizes the supreme value and secret meaning of every word and commandment in the Torah. Within a century after it was published, it was widely regarded to have the authority equivalent to the Talmud, which is a 300 year record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs, history and interpretations of the meaning of the Torah.

The following is an example from the Zohar (I 134b): "There is not a member in the human body that does not have its counterpart in the created world. For as a person's body may be divided into members and organs, each performing a hierarchy of functions, each acting and reacting so as to form one organism, so is it with the entire world. Each one of its created parts are likewise members meant to exist in a hierarchy and when properly arranged, one with the other, form one organic body".

Aside from books the Kabbalistic knowledge can be gleaned from the teachings of particular Rabbis and learned scholars. The following example is from On The Kabbalah & Its Symbolism (Mysticism in the Kabbalah) by Gershon Sholom : Mysticism is "the fundamental experience of the inner self which enters into immediate contact with God." The following is an example from The Sabbath by Abraham Joshua Herschel "The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments....to have more does not mean to be more....We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things."

One of the late offshoots of the Kabbalah movement was the Gematria, the belief that each letter of the Torah is holy. The Gematria grew out of the fact that each number in the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical equivalence. By computing the numerical value of different words and phrases, one could gain new insight into the meaning of the Torah text. The following example is from Genesis 23:1 The Life

of Sarah. In the first Hebrew word the letters add up to the number 37 which is the number of years since Sarah gave birth to Isaac. The Gematria then might interpret this to mean Sarah's life (or any woman's life) really did not begin until the birth of her child.

Words to Live By: *“Racial history is therefore natural history and the mysticism of the soul at one and the same time; but the history of the religion of the blood, conversely, is the great world story of the rise and downfall of peoples, their heroes and thinkers, their inventors and artists.”* Alfred Rosenberg

*“What does **mysticism** really mean? It means the way to attain knowledge. It's close to philosophy, except in philosophy you go horizontally while in **mysticism** you go vertically.”* --Elie Wiesel

If you have any comments, suggestions, or questions, please send them to shapiro.stanley@gmail.com

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