

# An insight into KABBALAH

Known for its celebrity devotees and spiritual mysticism, praised by some and critiqued by others, HANNAH SMITHSON finds out more

**12** Stratford Place, London. I'd finally found the Kabbalah Centre in the big smoke, after darting around on tubes having discovered that Bond Street Station (my desired stop) was closed, and that I'd have to walk a couple of blocks to reach my destination. 'Was this a good or bad omen?' I wondered as I opened the door, and stepped inside the London Kabbalah Centre.

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Despite having done some research, I had very little idea of what to expect on my visit. All I could think about was what I'd read in magazines; I knew that Gwyneth Paltrow was rumoured to be a fan of Kabbalah and that Madonna was an advocate. Admittedly, I was more au fait with showbiz news about Kabbalah than the reality of it all.

Welcomed by a hospitable lady, I was asked if I'd like any refreshment while I waited to be introduced to Ruth Nachmias, a Kabbalistic Astrologer and the person I was here to see. I'd been invited along to have a reading with Ruth and she'd been given details of my birth day, time and location to enable her to work up my astro charts.

Surrounded by books on numerology, astrology and the Zohar, I reminded myself that Kabbalah began thousands of years ago and claimed to combine cosmic mysticism and universal wisdom, which stemmed from the traditional routes of Judaism. I was interested to find out how this 'western mystery tradition' (as it was described in *The Encyclopedia of Mind Body Spirit*), had grown up alongside its more traditional and religious Jewish partner, attracting superstars to its centre.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- The London Kabbalah Centre receives approximately 1,000 students a week through its doors
- Celebrity names such as Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow have recently been associated with it
- A copy of Isaac Newton's Zohar is housed in Cambridge University
- Ancient Kabbalah teachings incorporate eastern ideas like auras and chakras as well as astrology and numerology
- The word itself derives from the ancient Aramaic work 'kabel, which means 'to receive'
- Kabbalah is a spiritual wisdom, not a religious one. Modern day Kabbalists say it can sit alongside any religious faith or none at all

## MY KARMIC PATH

Ruth, a striking woman with long, black hair, deep eyes and clothed in a black shift dress, greeted me and invited me in. Her spiritual bureau had a mixed feel about it; in one sense it was her professional place of work, but I also got the feeling that this was the spiritual sanctuary of a very powerful woman, who sat behind her altar (decorated with crystals) and took her place as intuitive astrologer.

I was intrigued to hear how Ruth had discovered Kabbalah. "I had a good friend

who'd met one of the Kabbalah teachers who opened the centre in France, so I first talked to him, and started to understand that maybe this would be a path that I would get answers on - and that was 23 years ago."

Although she'd been involved with the wisdom for a great deal of time, it was only a few years ago, when she experienced a turning point of her own, and began sharing her gift for astrology: "I always had intuition, so I always looked for a spiritual insight. I got answers but if

they were good answers, they were not full answers. So I was still searching. Once I discovered a higher path, I wanted to go deeper into helping others," she said, as I sat down face-to-face with her. She went on to explain a little more about how she had produced my astrological charts and revealed that conventional astrology suggests our characters are determined by the position of the planets and stars, whereas Kabbalah teaches that we have choices which can influence where we end up.

I have to say, I liked the idea of not having a pre-determined future and being armed with a good dose of freewill, so opened my mind to my 'tikkun', (or personal 'correction' as it translated in the ancient language of Aramaic). By understanding this concept I was set to identify excess baggage in my life and avoid future roadblocks, so that my trip to my desired destination would be a less bumpy ride. It sounded like a journey I curiously wanted to take, so Ruth hit the accelerator, picked up the speed and began to map out my karmic route.

## A SPIRITUAL SOUL

Firstly I was presented with my natal chart which illustrated the picture of the universe when I was born, then I was shown my progression chart, which related to my current state of affairs in the cosmos and provided a glimpse of my future. On first sight they reminded me of my orienteering days at school and looked like an upside down map written in a foreign language, but I was still intrigued as to what all the astrological symbols meant. Immediately, I wanted to find out more about what my stars said and had in store for me.

As she deciphered the significance of the moon and the sun in orbit on my birth day, Ruth began to unravel my life's story in front of me, picking out significant moments from my past and revealing



some of my greatest challenges. She explained how life lessons were designed to bring out the best in us and proceeded to tell me, as a Capricorn with Scorpio rising in my astral chart when I was born, that I was a very sensitive soul - this certainly was true!

She pointed out some other accurate information about me and added a number of other revelations to my reading. She even delved into the subject of past lives and detailed struggles that I had brought over with me to this lifetime. Interestingly, she said that I had been forced into religion in a past life and so was wary of it in this lifetime, but that I was still very much a spiritual person. All rang true with me so far!

Finally, she highlighted specific points in relationships coming my way and milestone moments to look out for.

Post-reading, I was happily encouraged but wanted to know more about Kabbalah and the origins of it; was it a religion, a mystical organisation or spiritual belief system? I wasn't completely sure, so couldn't wait to speak with a teacher at the centre.

## JARGON BUSTER

**Kabbalah** is said to be an ancient wisdom that explains how life works. Kabbalists believe it describes the underlying, spiritual rules of our universe, so helps us to better understand ourselves and our circumstances

**Kabbalist astrology** teaches that we're born at the precise moment that gives us the best chance at being the best we can be. The sages of Kabbalah teach that our past choices (which can be read through astrology) have determined where we start out, and our present choices will determine where we end up

**The Zohar** presents spiritual principles to help with everyday life. It is thought to decode the secrets of the Old Testament,

and is put together in the form of conversations among a group of spiritual masters. It includes thoughts on the origins of the universe, interpersonal relationships and more

**Tikkun** translates as 'correction' in Aramaic, and Kabbalists believe it to be one of the most powerful tools for pulling down personal barriers. By understanding it, they say we can identify past weaknesses and become 'all that we can be'

**Aramaic** is a family of languages or dialects, belonging to the Semitic family. It is the ancient language in which the Zohar is written and encompasses 3,000 years of written recorded history

## What is the Zohar?

The equivalent of the Bible for Kabbalists, the book of the Zohar was revealed two thousand years ago by mystic Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and is the central tenet of Kabbalist teachings



### EXPLORING KABBALAH

After my impressive hour-long astrology reading came to an end, Marcus Weston jumped in to answer some of my more probing questions.

A former successful financier, Marcus sold his business in 2001 and decided to devote himself to teaching Kabbalah at the London Centre. Known for his 'straight-talk', Marcus' worldly application has seen him invited as the guest-speaker at various international peace meetings and business conferences, discussing solutions for business social enterprise and world peace initiatives. I couldn't wait to find out more from him...

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### HOW IS KABBALAH RELEVANT TO SPIRITUALISTS?

“Many of us dream of a congruent society where mysticism and mechanics actually come together. Imagine a world where science and religion would join. The spiritual wisdom of Kabbalah de-mystifies religion to be actually something very misunderstood. The wisdom comes through 4,000 years of the most critical sources via credible masters, so the wisdom has gravitas to it.

“If you look at the old testament through the lenses of Kabbalah and the Zohar, it explains to you all the secrets of creation. If you just read the old testament for what it is, it purposely contradicts itself on many occasions to demand that you look deeper. So when you look at the Zohar, all of a sudden you do find very scientific secrets of cosmology, astronomy and astrology. Pythagoras, Plato, Freud, Einstein, Leibniz, Aristotle and Newton were great individuals who shaped and formed what we consider to be science today and are all thought to have studied Kabbalah.

“Newton's second law of thermodynamics, for example, talks about cause and effect – the idea that what you put out there comes back to you, which is the ultimate spiritual concept. So these great minds theorised that whole kind of spiritual fabric of life.”

### DOES IT MIRROR OTHER SPIRITUAL SYSTEMS?

“First of all, if it's going to be a wisdom of truth, it must be universal. Anything spiritual is of value to everyone. With regard to the Jewish link, the first book on Kabbalah existed 4,000 years ago, and that spiritual wisdom got passed down 3,500 years ago through Judaism.

“That said, spiritual wisdom also got passed down 2,000 years ago through Christianity, Islam and so on. And, clearly, you look at not just monotheistic religions, but at Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, too – it's the same concept; how you treat your neighbour is how the universe will treat you. So there's clearly a congruent spiritual message.

“Where Kabbalah is different is it goes back to the origin of creation, sets up the game of life and what we call 'tikkun' – that kind of karmic end game where the universe comes back together. What's so unique about it is that it takes 'big picture' information and puts it in a very bite-size context.”

### ARE THERE ANY RULES TO KABBALAH?

“There are set principles on how to treat another person. We believe that nothing that happens in creation is random, nothing happens by accident; everything happens according to certain spiritual principles of cause and effect. As well as being about understanding how things work around you, the second spiritual principle is centred around how things work inside of you.

“We all have an ego – a part of us which debilitates, which diminishes and which lets us down. When we get angry or frustrated for the wrong reasons, when we get jealous and controlling and those fears and judgements come out, we're planting the wrong seeds and creating the wrong outcomes. So that's the second rule, to understand yourself. Then it goes into the teachings of the Zohar and so forth, so there is a spiritual growth, progression and evolution to the study.”

### WHY DO YOU BELIEVE MORE PEOPLE ARE SHOWING AN INTEREST IN KABBALAH?

“Kabbalah is not a fad. It always will be a very grounded and practical wisdom for people to embrace for the reason that, in today's society, there are very few answers and people are asking more questions. Traditionally, I think those questions are not being answered. Certainly, when I was growing up, I never could find a person who could answer all my annoying questions about science and religion.

“People are much more mindful now, even in consumer choice, in the political vote, people are much more aware. The information age makes one very much more

educated as to what is going on out there. I think really with that kind of growth of intelligence and consciousness people are flocking towards where there is depth and answers, which is the centre and, I'm sure, many other places as well.

“I think if you look statistically at what is happening to religion, there are flocks of people moving away from congregations and from traditional services – I think that is partly why we see many religious leaders coming here to study as well. We'll teach many Rabis, Priests and other spiritual leaders but even they think what they have is quite flat. And it's not to put one thing above the other, but there is so much depth to religion spiritual in origin which has been lost.”

### DOES THE CELEB FOLLOWING HELP OR HINDER?

“There has been a fashion brand association because of celebrity, and I'm always in two minds as to whether that is a good or a bad thing. On the one hand, people do come because they've followed a movie star who has mentioned Kabbalah, but on the other people have an association like 'oh, it's just fashionable'.

“One student went through a really fantastic journey and his life changed after he woke up spiritually. When asked how he discovered the centre he said: “I was actually at a Madonna concert and she threw a t-shirt into the audience that said 'Kabbalists do it better'”.

“At first he didn't understand what that was, so he googled it and found the Kabbalah centre, so he applied to do a course and his life turned around. So there are good stories and there are bad stories.”

## My experience

I was impressed to say the least, mostly with my astrology reading from Ruth and later with Marcus' no-nonsense explanation of a concept sometimes so complex it's unfathomable to comprehend. But, as I left the centre behind, the most important nugget of wisdom I'd learned, aside from my personal astrology reading, was that it's important to view and practice spirituality with balance and a positive outlook.

Kabbalah might have depth and downsides, like many other religious and spiritual belief systems, but it deserves to be explored by those who choose to explore it. Newton may have been a heretic interested in theology and Kabbalah, but his ideas seemed to have some gravity to them after all (pun intended)!



Ruth and Hannah on the day of the reading