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## Exploring Contemporary Kabbalah: Divine Names, Dolphins and Sexual Magic

Sara Møldrup Thejls

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## **Exploring Contemporary Kabbalah: Divine Names, Dolphins and Sexual Magic**

**Sara Møldrup Thejls**

The question of authorization is intrinsic to religious groups and the construction of tradition thus tends to play a crucial role in religious self-promotion. This is not least the case when dealing with a phenomenon such as kabbalah, a word which literally means reception or transmission, first used as a designation for the transmission of the doctrine of the divine names in the Gaonic period (Idel 1992: 101). In fact kabbalah can be said to represent a certain mode of transmission of Jewish esoteric knowledge – or more precisely a claim of transmission – rather than denoting specific doctrines and contents (Thejls 2008: 24-45). When examining contemporary kabbalah this becomes even more evident than in medieval kabbalah. And so in many instances of New Age kabbalah the term “kabbalah” simply denotes an supposedly ancient and universal esoteric teaching used in order to provide the group with authenticity and authority. Consequently kabbalah becomes a universal source of esoteric knowledge.

In order to fruitfully examine contemporary uses of kabbalah the term must be understood in the widest possible sense, sometimes indicating only the self-identification of the respective group, rather than any historical affinity with the medieval kabbalah. My emphasis on this approach is not an attempt to argue that there exists a “true” or “original” kabbalah, but rather an attempt to clarify the different uses of the term kabbalah. In the present article I will give a selective overview of the different directions the use of kabbalistic discourses have taken in recent years. More precisely I will analyze the use of kabbalah

by three groups: The Kabbalah Centre, the Kamadon Academy and the teachings of Samael Aun Weor. Obviously this is an extremely eclectic selection, but due to the enormous popularity of kabbalah within contemporary esotericism, a thorough treatment of all the variations would be an impossible task.

### **The Academic Study of Contemporary Kabbalah**

The scholarly attention given to the different varieties of contemporary kabbalah is sporadic at best, although it is currently improving considerably.<sup>1</sup> To find the reasons for the neglect of contemporary kabbalah as a worthy field of study we have to turn to Gershom Scholem, whose attitude towards his contemporary practitioners of kabbalah was marked by disdain. Scholem's students, even those who on other points have distanced themselves from their former teacher, have long upheld this stance.

In the article 'Authorized Guardians' Boaz Huss shows how Scholem and his successors see themselves as being the "authorized guardians" of contemporary Kabbalah (Huss 2007a: 93). Scholem hardly paid any attention to contemporary kabbalists, though several kabbalistic communities flourished during his time, both in Jerusalem and in Eastern Europe. For Scholem these groups were nothing more than a once precious tradition that now had degenerated and lost any

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<sup>1</sup> Within the last few years two conferences have been arranged dedicated the topic of contemporary Kabbalah: One in Amsterdam, July 2007 and one in Israel, May 2008. Furthermore several research projects have been undertaken both in and outside Israel and already a few books have been published or are at least coming soon. These are Jody Myers: *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest* published in 2007 and the recent publication *Kabbalah and Modernity* (2010) edited by Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi and Kocku von Stuckrad.

cultural value and historical significance (Huss 2007a). This disdain for contemporary Kabbalah is closely connected with Scholem's overall view of modern culture as inherently secularized, leaving no room for any kind of mysticism in Judaism, Christianity or Islam (Scholem 1997:6). As Huss explicitly states: 'Scholem's disregard of contemporary kabbalists is dependent on his claim that it is the Zionist movement, and not traditional Kabbalah, that continues the historical national role of Jewish mysticism' (Huss 2007a: 87).

Scholem mainly directs his critique at contemporary (Jewish) kabbalah and occultist kabbalah<sup>2</sup> as being misinterpretations and a degeneration of kabbalah "proper", but interestingly, the Renaissance Christian kabbalah is not subject to critique. The occultist kabbalah as expounded by Eliphas Lévi (pseudonym of Alphonse Louis Constant), Arthur Edward Waite and Aleister Crowley is dismissed as forgery or at best fanciful misrepresentation, as this well-known quote from *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* shows:

The natural and obvious result of the antagonism of the great Jewish scholars was that, since the authorized guardians neglected this field [i.e. Kabbalah], all manner of charlatans and dreamers came and treated it as their own property. From the brilliant misrepresentations of Alphonse Louis Constant, who has won fame under the pseudonym of Eliphas Lévi to the highly coloured humbug of Aleister Crowley and his followers, the most eccentric and fantastic statements have been produced purporting to be legitimate interpretations of kabbalism (Scholem 1961: 2).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Occultist kabbalah' refers to the interpretation of traditional kabbalah as it is expressed in occultism. With regard to occultism I follow the definition made by Marco Pasi (Pasi 2005).

<sup>3</sup> As Boaz Huss adds, Scholem later writes in a note to this lecture that 'No words should be wasted on the subject of Crowley's "Kabbalistic" writings [...]' (Scholem 1961: 353, quoted in Huss 2007a: 93, n.38).

In his Eranos lecture in 1977 Scholem continues:

Insebesondere haben noch im 19. Jahrhundert die französischen Theosophen der martinistischen Schule (Eliphas Lévi, Papus und viele andere) und in diesem Jahrhundert Scharlatane wie Aleister Crowley und seine Bewunderer in England das Menschenmögliche an allgemeiner Konfusion aller okkulten Disziplinen mit der „Heiligen Kabbala“ geleistet. Ein grosser Teil der Schriften, auf der Titelblatt das Wort Kabbala prangt, hat gar nichts oder so gut wie gar nichts mit ihr zu tun (Scholem 1981: 2).

This attitude is continued by Joseph Dan, who states the following regarding the Kabbalah Centre:

A distressing example of this phenomenon [i.e. New Age forms of Kabbalah] is the vast enterprise of “kabbalistic” publications initiated and directed by “kabbalist Rav Berg”. Originally he based his teachings on the work of one of the last authentic kabbalists of the twentieth century, Rabbi Ashlag, who wrote a voluminous commentary to the *Zohar*, based on the teachings of Isaac Luria. It was heartbreaking to observe how this authentic enterprise deteriorated into a New Age mishmash of nonsense (Dan 2002: 285, n. 56).<sup>4</sup>

Dan’s dismissal of the kabbalah of Rabbi Berg is interesting for several reasons. Most importantly, Dan opposes the teachings of the Centre to the “authentic kabbalah” and accuses the Kabbalah Centre of having no connection to this. Now, this is a problematic statement when looking at the material promoted by the Centre or the themes around which their main teachings revolve; namely the *Zohar* and the 72 names of god. Part of the interpretation is different from tradi-

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<sup>4</sup> This is also noted by Huss in (Huss 2007a: 97).

tional kabbalah,<sup>5</sup> but as will be shown below the connection is definitely still there.

What is worth noting about this disdain towards contemporary non-traditional kabbalah is the implicit conception of “tradition”. Dan himself argues that medieval kabbalah is an innovative branch of Judaism that is radically creative in its interpretation of ancient Jewish material. What, then, makes the Kabbalah Centre’s creative interpretation of the medieval kabbalistic material so different from what the medieval kabbalists themselves were doing? Structurally speaking there is hardly any difference. For Dan the difference must be that the medieval kabbalists in his opinion were developers of and partakers in an *authentic* tradition as opposed to the *artificial* and *constructed* tradition of the Kabbalah Centre. As a kabbalah scholar this presumption is untenable since it builds rather on Dan’s personal preference for the traditional kabbalah than on a scholarly analysis of the actual topic in question. In the following section, I will deal with the Kabbalah Centre and especially focus on its interpretation of the medieval kabbalistic material.

## **The Kabbalah Centre**

### *A General Presentation*

According to its own perception the Kabbalah Centre is

a spiritual and educational organization dedicated to bringing the wisdom of Kabbalah to the world. The Centre itself has existed for more than 80 years, but its spiritual lineage extends even further — to Rav Isaac Luria, in the 16th

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<sup>5</sup> With this term I refer to the Jewish kabbalah in the middle ages and renaissance. It does not imply any value judgment regarding “authenticity”.

century, and through Rav Luria to Rav Shimon Bar Yochai, who revealed the principal text of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, more than 2000 years ago.<sup>6</sup>

The claimed connection to Isaac Luria and Shimon Bar Yohai as the direct lineage of the Centre is not surprisingly an important part of the Centre's strategy of authorization and self-legitimization. Since kabbalah cannot be separated from the act and history of transmission this is an extremely important factor for a kabbalistic movement. Now, it is one thing to construct a spiritual lineage using actual historical persons as pinpoints as the Kabbalah Centre does; it is quite another to ascribe the mythical authorship of the *Zohar* to Shimon Bar Yohai, thus moving the origins of Kabbalah back to Antiquity. As Olav Hammer has shown, this extensive use of emic historiography is a common trait of esoteric traditions which transform pieces of actual history into what is needed for the organization to establish its legitimacy. As he writes:

Clearly, emic historiography rarely builds its narratives *ex nihilo*. Elements recognizable from a non-esoteric tradition of historiography are reinterpreted and find their way into accounts of mythologized or emic history (Hammer 2004: 157).

The Kabbalah Centre not only uses actual historical facts such as the existence of the two rabbis, they combine these details with well-established mythologized narratives regarding the historical figures. Thus they reconfirm the claim made by Moses de Léon in 13<sup>th</sup> century Spain that the *Zohar* was an ancient document handed down through generations from the well-esteemed rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai. This is a statement which has been adhered to by kabbalists ever since,

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<sup>6</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/03.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/03.php) (accessed February 2, 2008).

despite numerous convincing scholarly arguments that the book could never have been written by Shimon Bar Yoḥai (Green 2004: LIV-LVIII). The authenticity of the pseudepigraphic work was also upheld by Isaac Luria himself, who proposed a direct lineage between himself and Bar Yoḥai. While retaining a traditional kabbalistic account of transmission, the interpretation of the material as promoted by the Kabbalah Centre is radically different from that of Luria. The Kabbalah Centre relies heavily on the Lurianic tradition, especially in the interpretation of Yehuda Ashlag; however, an entirely new perspective is added as a fundamental part of their Kabbalah:

The startling truth is that Kabbalah was never meant for a specific sect. Rather, it was intended to be used by all humanity to unify the world.<sup>7</sup>

The claim of the universality of Kabbalah is a relatively new phenomenon, introduced but never really popularized by occultism. However, with the growth of the New Age,<sup>8</sup> the focus on the universal character of spiritual teachings became increasingly incorporated into the teachings of groups like the Jewish Renewal Movement - and likewise, kabbalistic ideas became more and more common in mainstream New Age culture.

Before going further into the doctrines of the Kabbalah Centre I will turn my attention to the history of the movement.<sup>9</sup>

The historical foundation of the Kabbalah Centre lies in the

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<sup>7</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/03.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/03.php) (accessed February 2, 2008)

<sup>8</sup> Here as well as in the remaining article I use the term New Age in accordance with Hanegraaff 1998 and Hammer 2005.

<sup>9</sup> This part of the article is to a large extent dependent on the thorough presentation in Myers 2007.



teachings of the Polish kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag. Born in Warsaw in 1885, Ashlag was an avid socialist and he combined Marx's rejection of capitalism with a strong conviction in the necessity of religion in a healthy society. In 1921 he moved to Palestine to teach and study kabbalah, which for him meant the teachings of Isaac Luria. He was even convinced that the soul of Luria had transmigrated into his own by the will of god in order to enable him to continue the exact understanding of kabbalah as begun by Luria (Myers 2007: 18). Naturally the teachings of the old kabbalist were transformed to fit the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century socialist. Thus the most important of Luria's doctrines, that of *tikkun*, the restoration of god and cosmos, was transformed into a social and ethical quest for achieving equality and justice in the world. Only then would the individual human being be able to elevate itself and return to its divine roots. Consequently the attention was moved from the restoration of the divine realm to the perfection of the material world (Cohen & Cohen 2002: 38-42). As Jody Myers writes:

He [Ashlag] understood the cataclysmic "breaking of the vessels"<sup>10</sup> in social terms, as an event that resulted in the creation of self-centered, destructive human beings. For Ashlag, *tikkun* moves forward when individuals become altruistic, promote economic justice and reshape society to be just and peaceful (Myers 2007: 19).

Ashlag never gained much acknowledgement in his own time and he had only a few faithful disciples. What became the most important product of his kabbalistic enterprise was his translation of the *Zohar*

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<sup>10</sup> A concept invented by Luria as a cosmogonic event, resulting in the divine sparks being captured in the human body and in a larger framework in an unbalance in the divine realm.

into Hebrew, including extensive commentaries. The dissemination of Ashlag's teachings in America was undertaken by one of his devout students, Levi Krakovsky, who tried to introduce the study of kabbalah to Jews in New York. However, American Jewish culture in the twenties was radically different from that in Jerusalem or in Eastern Europe. Hardly anybody knew Hebrew, and kabbalah was basically unknown. Whereas in Europe and Palestine individuals who were interested in kabbalah were devout, orthodox Jews, in America it was the non-orthodox Jews and even non-Jews with an involvement in spiritualism and occultism who showed interest in the kabbalistic teachings.

In Krakovsky's version kabbalah became a "science" (Krakovsky 1939)<sup>11</sup>. This is an extremely important shift in the rhetorical promotion of kabbalah, since this is exactly what the later New Age-inspired proponents of kabbalah would argue. Furthermore, Krakovsky seems to be the first Jewish kabbalist to advocate the idea of a universal kabbalah, albeit still in a restricted sense. In his rendering kabbalah was the foundation of all religion and spirituality, and in the messianic age (in which he believed he was living) everybody would learn kabbalah.

In the years before Krakovsky's death in 1966 he taught kabbalah to young orthodox Jewish men. Among these was Shraga Feival Gruberger, who is better known by the English equivalent of his name: Philip Berg. With the help of Krakovsky Berg founded the National Institute for Research in Kabbalah, the foundation which would later become the Kabbalah Centre.

To this day Berg and his family reject any link to Krakovsky. As

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the designation of kabbalah as a science see Thejls 2009 and Asprem 2007.

already noted, the question of lineage is of immense importance when it comes to kabbalah, and the only way of obtaining authority is to have the teachings of kabbalah passed down through reliable sources. In this respect it is of greater value for a kabbalistic teacher to be able to show a direct link to a kabbalistic master in Israel than to an unsuccessful rabbi in Brooklyn. Thus Berg claims his teacher is another of Ashlag's students, namely Yehuda Zvi Brandwein, with whom he had studied in Israel.<sup>12</sup>

In the early seventies Philip Berg moved to Israel together with his wife Karen. They taught kabbalah to both religious and non-religious young Jews, men and women alike. To the Bergs the broad teaching of kabbalah was an attempt to introduce young people to a spiritual type of Judaism more appealing than strict dogmatic Judaism, which apparently made young Jews feel alienated towards their own religion and prompted them to flee to "more mystically inclined eastern religions" (Berg 1981: 11 and Myers 2007: 51). The enterprise in Israel was almost entirely directed towards Jews, and for these students Berg edited and published Hebrew and Aramaic texts primarily by Isaac Luria and Yehuda Ashlag; in America, on the other hand, they published English translations of the texts and books in English written by Berg himself. The Kabbalah Centre promoted itself as a form of spirituality rather than as a religion, and thus they reached an audience skeptical towards institutional religions but nevertheless interested in religious topics. Berg offered a new interpretation of the Jewish scriptures and especially of the *mitzvot* (the Jewish religious commandments), which he understood not as commandments but as suggestions or gifts from god to humanity: Those who choose to

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<sup>12</sup> Myers offers an overview of the controversy between Krakovsky and Berg in Myers 2007: 30-31.

follow the *mitzvot* will receive the benefits from them, but those who do not will not have to feel guilty (Myers 2007: 54-55). This new approach to Judaism filled a religious vacuum between orthodoxy and secularism and the movement quickly gained many followers.

However, a major controversy in the 1980s between the orthodox Jewish powers in Israel and the Kabbalah Centre resulted in a drastic loss of students and the split between Berg and one of his main students, Michael Laitman. Laitman was also a close follower of Yehuda Ashlag's still-living son, Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, and his more orthodox teaching. With Laitman's final break from the Kabbalah Centre several members followed him and joined Laitman's own kabbalistic movement, *Bnei Baruch*, which still exists (Myers 2007: 60).

Despite the internal crisis of the Kabbalah Centre in Israel, its popularity in America was increasing, especially among non-Jews and secular Jews. Parallel to and maybe as a consequence of the shift in audience, Berg became progressively more polemical against orthodox rabbis, accusing them of denying important kabbalistic teachings to their students and restricting the transmission of kabbalah to their own narrow religious circles (Myers 2007:61-62).

The teaching of the Kabbalah Centre is aimed at two different kinds of audience. The first is a very narrow Jewish group that observes orthodox Jewish practices and is highly dedicated to the religious education within the Centre. The other and more dominant group consists of more loosely connected people whose engagement ranges from occasional attendance at a course or meditation, buying a book or two and maybe wearing a red string around their wrist, to the dedicated followers who attend services every Friday and Saturday, participate in the high holiday retreats and generally follow the more expanded education program offered by the Centre without necessarily being Jewish.

At the core of the Kabbalah Centre's teaching we find a number of "spiritual tools," that is, kabbalistic tools for increasing one's spiritual level. The most important ones revolve around the doctrine of the

famous red string that followers wear around their wrist to remove evil, the seventy-two names of god, and finally the text of the *Zohar*. In the next sections I will focus on each of these subjects.

*The Red String and its cosmological framework*

On the front page of the Kabbalah Centre's website the red string is listed side-by-side with the *Zohar* as one of the fundamentals of kabbalah. It is called a "powerful technology" whose purpose is two-fold:

to protect us from the envious looks of others, and to help us eliminate feelings of jealousy and resentment in ourselves. The technology is the Red String: a strand of red wool worn around the left wrist. This technology is an indispensable tool for spiritual and physical protection.

The teachings of Kabbalah do not include prohibitions or commandments. Instead, the kabbalists speak of positive and negative energies<sup>13</sup>.

This reflects the general anthropology of the Centre, which perceives the human being as essentially receiving and giving different types of energies. Unsurprisingly, the goal is the ability only to give and receive positive energy and avoid the bad energies. This demonstrates an explicit turn towards a typical New Age rhetoric instead of traditional kabbalistic terms. Not only is the emphasis on energies which can be manipulated through spiritual elevation a common trait in much New Age religion, but the very perception of the spiritual teachings and

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<sup>13</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/13.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/13.php) (accessed April 16, 2008).

tools as a technology or science<sup>14</sup> is a very important key to the universalizing of the Kabbalah Centre's teachings. It has to be recognizable and appealing to a certain audience, namely the "spiritual seekers" of the New Age milieu. I do not think one should underestimate the importance of the highly competitive character of the spiritual market and its influence on the different movements' choice of rhetoric and self-promotion.

The red string itself symbolizes danger and evil usually attributed to the realm of *Sitra Ahra* – The Other Side. By wearing the red string one gains control over the chaotic forces, though not every piece of red string will do. It has to be properly prepared in order to gain its efficacy, and furthermore one has to observe a specific ritual for tying the string around the wrist. The Kabbalah Centre explains that to infuse the red thread with protective energy they take it to the tomb of Rachel, the biblical matriarch, and wind it around the tomb. The protective forces that she stood for while alive are thus transferred to the woolen string wound around her tomb, since "according to kabbalah, the burial sites of the righteous are a portal to the energy they created in their lifetimes"<sup>15</sup>. When the string is impregnated with Rachel's protective energies it is sold in small packages with a specific guide to the ritual fastening of the string around the wrist. The string should be placed around the left wrist because this is where the negative energies enter the body:

By wearing the Red String on the left wrist, negative energies are intercepted at the precise point of entry. The string is tied in a carefully prescribed sequence of

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<sup>14</sup> Though I will not term the Kabbalah Centre a New Age Movement per se it is beyond doubt that they are highly inspired by New Age rhetoric. On the case of the relationship between New Age and science see Hammer 2004 and Lewis 2007.

<sup>15</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/13.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/13.php) (accessed April 17, 2008)

seven knots, each of which symbolizes a separate spiritual dimension that infuses our reality. It's important that someone who loves us—someone we deeply trust—ties the string around our wrist. As they do, we should ask for the power to radiate kindness, compassion, appreciation, and absence of the Evil Eye to everyone around us<sup>16</sup>.

The reason why the “Red String Technology” holds such a central position within the practice of the Kabbalah Centre can be found in their interpretation of the cosmogony and anthropogony of Isaac Luria. According to Luria all creation began when the only existing “thing” *En Sof* (without end) made a contraction, leaving an empty space. This is the process which in kabbalistic terminology is called *tzimtzum*. In this empty space the primordial man *Adam Kadmon* was formed out of light emanating from *En Sof*, and from him the light flowed into special vessels. However, the divine light proved too powerful for the vessels and they broke into pieces unleashing the sparks of light. Some of these sparks attached themselves to the fragments of the vessels which then became the *klippot*, evil shells, whereas others entered human bodies, forming semi-divine beings. Therefore the human being consists of a divine soul trapped in a material body, living in a chaotic world where the link to the divine has been broken. The fragmented nature of the material world is a mirror of the state of the divine realm, and the theurgical task of the kabbalist is to restore the divine balance by observing the *mitzvot* and engaging in restorative meditations. The individual's goal is to make sure that the divine soul could in death be re-integrated with its divine source, but this was only possible for the extremely righteous man, the *tzaddik*. For those who had not gained the spiritual elevation necessary for this the soul would be reincarnated, a process which in kabbalistic ren-

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<sup>16</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/13.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/13.php) (accessed April 16, 2008).

dering is referred to as *gilgul*, until complete righteousness would be achieved.

This detour around Luria's mythologized interpretation of kabbalistic material is meant to show the context in which the Kabbalah Centre inscribes itself. It is in this context that the remaining discussion of the Centre should be seen.

### *The 72 Names of God*

Apart from the red string the doctrine of the seventy-two names of god is highly important in the teachings of the Kabbalah Centre. Ruminations concerning the names of god have always been central to Jewish thought and we find several treatises of the *Heikhalot* literature dealing with the theurgical use of the divine names<sup>17</sup>. In the medieval kabbalah the theme reappeared, and as mentioned above, kabbalah has been characterized as the transmission of the secret doctrine of the pronunciation of the divine names. The specific case of the seventy-two names of god has its roots in rabbinic speculations concerning different secret divine names, among which is an unknown name of seventy-two letters by which god rescued the Israelites from Egypt (Huss 2005: 612-613). But the idea of seventy-two different names of god was first presented by Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzaki) in the eleventh century when he explained that a certain passage of Exodus exposes these secret names. In chapter 14:19-21 we find three sequential verses, each containing seventy-two letters.

According to Rashi these can be combined to form the seventy-two divine names by taking the first letter of the first verse, the last letter

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<sup>17</sup> See Peter Schäfer *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* and *Hekhalot Studien* and in particular the brilliant analysis of the magical and theurgical aspects of this literary corpus in Michael Swartz' book *Scholastic Magic*.



of the second verse and the first letter of the third verse, giving the first name ויהו; the second name is constructed by taking the second letter of the first verse, the last but one letter from the second verse and the second letter of the third verse, thus forming the second name ילי. When continuing this process throughout all seventy-two letters the following scheme of names can be arranged (Figure 1: The 72 names of god. Read and counted from right to left):

Figure 1. The 72 names of god.

כהת	אכא	ללה	מהש	עלם	סיט	ילי	והו
הקם	הרי	מבה	יזל	ההע	לאו	אלד	הזי
חהו	מלה	ייי	נלך	פהל	לוו	כלד	לאו
ושר	לכב	אום	ריי	שאה	ירת	האא	נתה
ייז	רהע	חעם	אני	מנד	כוק	להח	יחו
מיה	עשל	ערי	סאל	ילה	וול	מיכ	ההה
פוי	מבה	נית	ננא	עמם	החש	דני	והו
מום	היי	יבם	ראה	חבו	איע	מנק	דמב

Each of these names is perceived to possess certain divine powers and thus they can be used for ritual purposes. A famous example is the thirteenth century kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, who used the different names in meditative practices aimed at achieving prophecies. He did not restrict himself to the tradition of the seventy-two divine names,

but extended his usage to include – for example – the doctrine of seeing the whole Torah as consisting of one single divine name.

The Kabbalah Centre reaffirms the inherent efficacy of the names by stating that the names themselves radiate divine power just by being looked at:

Because of their Divine source and the superhuman power contained in them, these three-letter combinations came to be known as the Names of God.

But these aren't "names" in the ordinary, earthly sense of the term. They're actually energy fields, visual mantras that are activated spiritually rather than vocally. In other words, you don't have to know how to pronounce them. And you don't need to understand exactly how or why they work.

All you have to do is look at them. Incredibly, mysteriously, in that simple act, enormous power is unleashed.<sup>18</sup>

As noted earlier the New Age type of rhetoric is obvious. The names are not just names enhanced with divine power; they are "energy fields" and "visual mantras." And furthermore, where the perception of the ritual efficacy of the names might be the same as in the more traditional kabbalistic renderings, the promotion of them is, unsurprisingly, radically different. In medieval kabbalah, the knowledge of the divine names was a dangerous and consequently restricted knowledge that was only passed on to those wise enough to possess it. Contrary to this, the Kabbalah Centre makes the acquisition of the names a universal right: "This is truly technology for the soul – amazing spiritual power that no one is meant to live without!"<sup>19</sup>. Once more we can notice the emphasis on 'technology,' a strategy which should

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<sup>18</sup> [http://store.Kabbalah.com/product\\_info.php?cPath=150\\_202&vcats=150&page=2&products\\_id=166](http://store.Kabbalah.com/product_info.php?cPath=150_202&vcats=150&page=2&products_id=166) (accessed April 11, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> [http://store.Kabbalah.com/product\\_info.php?cPath=150\\_202&vcats=150&page=2&products\\_id=166](http://store.Kabbalah.com/product_info.php?cPath=150_202&vcats=150&page=2&products_id=166) (accessed April 11, 2008).

assure the consumer that this is a tool that works by itself, belief and knowledge being irrelevant. The Kabbalah Centre continues the description of the wondrous capabilities of the divine names:

In *The 72 Names of God*, you'll find a remedy for just about every challenge that's likely to come up in the course of a lifetime. Simply by properly meditating on the appropriate Name, you will be able to: \* Bring more money into your life whenever you need it. \* Ignite sexual energy and passion unlike anything you've experienced before. \* Eliminate guilt forever and undo the damage it has caused you. \* Recharge physical energy and heal illnesses – your own, and others'. \* Radiate beauty to everyone who sees you. \* Stop attracting the wrong people into your life. \* Meet your true soul mate. And so much more!<sup>20</sup>

This catalogue of properties of the divine names could have been found in almost every New Age group and has no strict connection to kabbalah apart from the medium of the divine names. The peculiar thing, however, is that the Kabbalah Centre promotes as a central teaching the elimination of the ego, and the above qualities seem ego-enhancing rather than ego-diminishing.

The process of eliminating the ego is connected to a specific divine name: לֵאָו or LAV. There is no literal meaning to the Hebrew word, but if the English word “love” were to be transliterated into Hebrew letters the result would be לֵאָו. This fact is played upon in the Kabbalah Centre's explanation of the divine powers attributed to this particular name, since LAV designates charity, love for humankind and the will to bestow instead of the egocentric wish to receive. Since this individual spiritual development is crucial with regard to a larger

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<sup>20</sup> [http://store.Kabbalah.com/product\\_info.php?cPath=150\\_202&vcats=150&page=2&products\\_id=166](http://store.Kabbalah.com/product_info.php?cPath=150_202&vcats=150&page=2&products_id=166) (accessed April 11, 2008).

scale cosmic redemption, LAV is one of the most important of the seventy-two divine names.

As is well known, the pop star Madonna is involved with the Kabbalah Centre and their teachings have made their way into her creative work. Thus we find that the name LAV is an essential element in her video performance of the theme song for the James Bond movie 'Die Another Day'<sup>21</sup>. The movie shows Madonna with the Hebrew letters לֵאָו tattooed on her right arm, being tortured in a prison similar to the one in which James Bond is held in the movie. The scene shifts between this and a fencing duel displaying a white and a black Madonna fighting each other (in the movie Madonna plays a role as a fencing instructor named Verity!). As the fighting increases in intensity the imprisoned Madonna straps her arms in *tefillin*, the leather straps Jewish men bind around their arms and forehead before prayer, just before she is tied to an electric chair. At the end of the video the white Madonna kills the black Madonna and simultaneously the electric chair is switched on, leaving a thick cloud of smoke in the room. When her executioner enters the room the chair is empty, but the name לֵאָו appears in flaming letters on its back while we see Madonna escaping down the corridor. Among the lyrics to the song we find the important sentences: 'I'm gonna break the cycle, I'm gonna shake up the system, I'm gonna destroy my ego.' The connection between the lyrics and the divine name is unmistakable and Huss arrives at the following conclusion:

The significance of the letters LAV, according to the teaching of the Kabbalah Centre, enables us to read Madonna's "Die Another Day" video clip as a Bergian kabbalistic text. The power of the seventy-two names of God saves

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<sup>21</sup> In his article 'All You Need is LAV' Boaz Huss offers a splendid analysis of the music video. Thus the following is more or less a summary of his main points.

Madonna, in the prison sequence, from the suffering and death caused by the external, evil powers of this world. Yet, as we learn from the dueling sequence and the lyrics of the song, the victory over the evil powers is contingent upon an internal victory, a destruction of the ego, the victory of the white Madonna (the divine light, the will to bestow) over the black Madonna (the evil side, the will to receive, the ego). This victory can be achieved through the power of the letters LAV (Huss 2005: 617-618).

What is surprising is that while Huss in his analysis acknowledges the postmodern symbolism in Madonna's constant blurring of boundaries – she dissolves the boundaries between religion and popular culture, between different religions by being the Catholic Madonna *and* the Jewish Esther – he does not discuss the gender dichotomy that she disrupts by the laying of the *tefillin*. This practice is a strictly male *mitzvah* and thus basic gender roles are being torn down.<sup>22</sup>

The function of the divine names can be divided into two different practices: meditative scanning and talismanic usage. The first of these involves the visual skimming of the table of the divine names in order to activate the healing light of the names. It is a ritual which can be practiced in solitude for one's own benefit, or better still in communion with others in order to spread the healing divine energy around the world to people or places in need of healing. It is not necessary to understand the letters or to be able to pronounce the names. The simple activity of looking at them is enough to release their power (Myers 2007: 131-133). The talismanic usage involves choosing the name appropriate to one's needs: LAV (לאו) to eliminate the ego; ELAD (אלד) for protection against the evil eye; or MAHASH (מהש)

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<sup>22</sup> Kocku von Stuckrad discusses the deconstruction of stereotype gender roles by Madonna (Stuckrad 2009). However I do not agree with his view of the kabbalistic image of god as basically andropomorphic. For a more nuanced viewpoint see the works of Daniel Abrams: Abrams 2004 & 2006).

for physical protection, just to take a few popular examples. These names can be written on amulets, t-shirts or directly on the body if the purpose is to heal physical pain. The names can thus be used as tools aiding the practitioner in a spiritual quest, the completion of which would be impossible without the divine power inherent in the names.

### *The Zohar*

The essential purpose of reading and scanning THE ZOHAR is to restore both our lives and our universe to their natural balanced state.<sup>23</sup>

Besides the red string and the divine names there is another important spiritual tool promoted by the Kabbalah Centre. This is the medieval literary masterpiece, the *Sefer ha Zohar*, meaning the *Book of Splendor*. The *Zohar* was written in the late thirteenth century as a pseudepigraphic work mainly by the Spanish kabbalist Moshe de Leon. He portrayed it as an ancient work by the rabbi Shimon bar Yohai and this allowed him to pass the sacred authoritative teaching piecemeal on to his own students. It developed into a huge compilation of kabbalistic exegeses on the *Torah* written in the style of ancient *midrashim* combined with legendary tales of the lives and teachings of the ancient, honored rabbis. It quickly achieved a canonical status among the kabbalists, a status which has been maintained until today. Despite the academic consensus concerning the pseudepigraphic character of the book, most contemporary kabbalists believe the *Zohar* was written by Shimon bar Yohai and not Moshe de Leon. This is also the case with the Kabbalah Centre, which even promotes the *Zohar* to a far greater extent than the *Torah* itself. While the *Zohar* holds a place

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<sup>23</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/scanchart07-08.pdf](http://www.Kabbalah.com/scanchart07-08.pdf) (accessed May 4, 2008).

on their website as part of the central teachings of the center, and a whole section of their online store is devoted to the book itself in different languages and with various commentaries, hardly any references to the *Torah* are to be found. The only exception is the presence in their store of a two-volume Hebrew commentary on the *Torah* by Yehudah Berg.

Furthermore, in practice the *Zohar* has taken on a similar function to the *Torah*: the center disseminates a special chart specifying when to read which portion of the *Zohar* over a period of one year, exactly as it is common practice in a traditional Jewish synagogue to read a designated chapter of the *Torah* each Shabbat.

As with the divine names, the Kabbalah Centre emphasizes that understanding the language of the text is of minor importance. The efficacy of the *Zohar* is embedded in the physical representation of the letters, not just in its literary meaning:

The Zohar is a spiritual book—the most powerful tool that has been given to us for revealing the Creator’s Light in our lives. This power does not depend on understanding or belief. Rather, it is imbued in every word and letter of The Zohar, and from every letter and word it passes to us.<sup>24</sup>

The reason for the elevated status of the *Zohar* vis-à-vis the *Torah* can be found in the Kabbalah Centre’s distinction between Judaism and kabbalah, in which Judaism is a narrowly defined religion contrary to kabbalah which is perceived as universal wisdom. Thus studying the *Torah* is only relevant for the very small circle of orthodox Jews attending the higher educational programs within the Centre, whereas the *Zohar* is available for everybody. It is highly interesting to note how the differen-

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<sup>24</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/scanchart07-08.pdf](http://www.Kabbalah.com/scanchart07-08.pdf) (accessed May 4, 2008).

tiation between what is conceived as esoteric and exoteric has been reversed in the practical teachings of the Kabbalah Centre. In traditional kabbalah the number of people deemed worthy to study the kabbalah was severely restricted, and it was only a theoretical possibility after several years of intensive study of the traditional orthodox Jewish curriculum, that is the *Torah*, *Mishnah*, *Halakhah* and so on. Today everybody can attend service at the synagogue, listening to the reading of the *Torah*. In the Kabbalah Centre this has been turned upside down. It is far more complicated to get to study the *Torah* in the context of the Kabbalah Centre than the formerly esoteric teachings of the *Zohar*. Everybody can attend the weekly readings of the *Zohar* and everybody is encouraged to buy a copy of the *Zohar* to achieve the spiritual benefits inherent in the book:

*The Zohar* not only reveals and explains, it literally brings blessings, protection, and well-being into the lives of all who come into its presence. Nothing is required but worthy desire, the certainty of a trusting heart, and an open and receptive mind. The *Zohar's* ultimate purpose is to draw Light into our lives, and thereby bring complete fulfillment. The *Zohar*, therefore, is an opportunity for us to transform our natures. To bring about this transformation is why all the teachings of Kabbalah exist, and why The *Zohar* should always be in our homes, our thoughts, and our hearts<sup>25</sup>.

And as is written in the sales description of the pocket size edition of the part of the *Zohar* which is attributed to the function of healing and protection:

The *Zohar* is not only a book of Kabbalistic teachings and wisdom. It is a powerful tool for protection from physical illness and danger in all forms [...] By keeping it with you or giving it to those you love, you can insure health in a world fraught with chaos and negativity. This miniature volume is ideal for

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<sup>25</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/11.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/11.php) (accessed May 4, 2008).



travel bags, your car, children's backpacks, and even in your purse. Don't leave home without it!<sup>26</sup>

The *Zohar* actually functions in the same way as the divine names and they compliment each other in the everyday practice of the Kabbalah Centre attendee. Different sections of the book are said to be connected to different spiritual functions – like the names of god – and both the book and the names are believed to pave the way for the spiritual perfection of the individual and thus of the world itself. The theurgical utility of the *Zohar* is reminiscent of the teachings of Yehuda Ashlag, who thought of himself as the one who had completed the understanding of the *Zohar* and made it available to all of humankind (Myers 2007: 118). Ashlag was convinced that he lived in the messianic age, a time in which the connections between the physical and the divine worlds were closer than ever, and he saw it as his task to bring the knowledge of god and of kabbalah out into the world. To this end the understanding and spreading of the *Zohar* was mandatory for the complete spiritual fulfillment of the physical world. In the Kabbalah Centre the *Zohar* along with the divine names become the key tools to achieve the individual and thus cosmological completion and purification:

For us to manifest complete fulfillment, we need to evolve into our greatest selves. In our thoughts, feelings, and actions, we need to erase negativity and replace darkness with Light. It is for this purpose that the teachings and tools of Kabbalah were given to all humanity—and the greatest of these tools is *The Zohar*<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> [http://store.Kabbalah.com/product\\_info.php?cPath=164&vcats=164&products\\_id=258](http://store.Kabbalah.com/product_info.php?cPath=164&vcats=164&products_id=258) (accessed May 4, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/11.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/11.php) (accessed May 4, 2008).

It should be noted however, that for Ashlag the task of individual and cosmological purification was solely a duty for the Jews, albeit the effect would embrace all of humanity. But Ashlag thought of the Jews as being on a far higher spiritual level than non-Jews, a level that non-Jews would never be able to attain. He would never have thought of teaching kabbalah to gentiles. So the Kabbalah Centre's adaptation of Ashlagian teachings and viewpoints is certainly eclectic and transformative. According to the Kabbalah Centre the designations of Jew and gentile only refer to different spiritual levels, and thus everybody can overcome their "gentile status". As Myers explains:

The Centre rejects the Bible's explanation that the name Yisrael was given to Jacob after he wrestled with God's angel and was not defeated, and rejects any genealogical or national associations. It is a spiritual designation only. It refers to people who struggle with Satan and try to connect to the Light. In short, everyone at the Kabbalah Centre is Yisrael (Myers 2007: 119).

This allegorical interpretation of the designation of Israel as a universal spiritual category instead of a strictly Jewish one is part of the Centre's strategy of spreading kabbalah to all humankind. They persistently promote kabbalah not as a religion and certainly not as a branch of Judaism but rather as a universal wisdom available to everybody regardless of gender, religion and age:

It is quite understandable that kabbalah could be confused with Judaism. Throughout history, many scholars of kabbalah have been Jewish. But there have also been many non-Jewish scholars of this wisdom, such as Christian Knorr-von-Rosenroth [sic], Pico Della [sic] and Sir Isaac Newton, just to name a few. [...] It is a way of life that can enhance any religious practice. Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews use Kabbalah to improve their spiritual experience<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> [www.Kabbalah.com/03.php](http://www.Kabbalah.com/03.php) (accessed May 5, 2008).

In this way kabbalah in the rendering of the Kabbalah Centre has become a universal spirituality as opposed to the traditional concept of religion. This distinction is a common way for religious groups to distinguish themselves from some particular “other,” which in this case is Orthodox Judaism. The differentiation between religion and spirituality has been adopted by the academic study of religion as well. As Boaz Huss writes:

The eclectic nature of postmodern spirituality involves a blurring of distinction between science, religion and popular culture. Both New Age and contemporary kabbalistic movements blur and challenge the accepted, modernist distinctions between religion and magic, theology and science, religious ritual and show business. New Age and contemporary Kabbalah combine diverse themes such as Tarot cards and quarks, *sefirot* and chakras, pop culture celebrities and Nobel laureates (Huss 2007b: 118).

He does not, however, get involved in a discussion or definition of the term spirituality, and I think he misses an important distinction between kabbalistic movements which use New Age concepts and religious strategies on the one hand and New Age movements which employ kabbalistic material into their eclectic systems on the other. Without doubt kabbalah has become a religious buzzword, and to incorporate kabbalistic concepts into New Age teachings gives the movement a widely recognized authority. Kabbalah has become *the* universal wisdom in contemporary esotericism, including the New Age, and holds a position as divine knowledge and tradition similar to the status that was previously given to Indian, Tibetan or Egyptian religious traditions.

### **The Gnostic Teachings of Samael Aun Weor**

#### *Sexual Magic and Apocalyptic*

Samael Aun Weor (pseudonym of Víctor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez) was born in Colombia in 1917 and raised as a Jesuit. In his early teen-

age years he became interested in spiritualism and after studying this for some years he joined the Theosophical Society in 1933. Thence he enrolled in Arnaldo Krumm-Heller's Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua which had come to South America in 1927.<sup>29</sup> His extensive studies included the work of prominent thinkers such as Helena Blavatsky, Rudolph Steiner, Gurdjieff, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Eliphas Levi, from whom he drew heavily when composing his own teachings. In his autobiographical book *The Three Mountains* Weor describes how he was born a more conscious being compared to other people, and that from an early period he had memories of past incarnations. These included a period on Lemuria, Atlantis, as well as spending time as a member of an esoteric Tibetan order (in his Lemurian body), an Egyptian priest, as Julius Caesar and the equivalent of Jesus on the Moon.<sup>30</sup> He tells of his initiations of fire (that is, the sexual fire) that allow him to get rid of his ego and earthly attachments. He also describes an early meeting with a highly illuminated master who explains to Weor what his mission on earth should be:

You will have to draw the multitudes, and form the Army of World Salvation to initiate the new Aquarian Era [...] Your specific mission is to create Men, to teach the people to fabricate the astral, mental and causal bodies so that they can incarnate the Human Soul.<sup>31</sup>

This is closely connected to the name Samael, which is explained as follows:

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<sup>29</sup> Zocatelli: 'G.I. Gurdjieff'. See also Peter König: 'Ordo Templi Orientis'.

<sup>30</sup> Zocatelli: 'G.I. Gurdjieff'.

<sup>31</sup> Weor: *The Three Mountains* p. 162.

Samael, the inner Being of Samael Aun Weor, is a great Archangel who has been assisting humanity for ages. He has been known by many names throughout our history, but he is perhaps best known as Ares, Mars, the God of War. His war is always a spiritual one, the war against the corruption of the human mind.<sup>32</sup>

Everybody is said to have an innermost being that can be found through the work of sexual magic. By entering the abyss of oneself, one can encounter and free the sparks of one's innermost being, sparks which are captured in the demonic 'I's and egos. With the alchemical transmutation of the 'Ens Semini', the essence of the semen, one can dissolve the 'I's and reach higher states of conscious being. The inner being is the only one who can make the true Human being - without consciousness of this one is only an 'intellectual animal'.

Weor saw himself as the bodhisattva of Samael and the messenger of the new era, which is said to have begun on 4th February, 1962, between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon:

Since long ago, all the spiritualist brethren of the world have been waiting for the great Avatar of Aquarius; listen, do not wait for another messenger, because I am the Initiator of the new era.<sup>33</sup>

In 1950 Weor published *The Perfect Matrimony of Kinder* or *The Door to Enter into Initiation*, later named *The Perfect Matrimony*, which contains his sexual magical teachings. Published in Catholic Mexico it is no surprise that the book caused immense aversion and Weor was even sent to jail because of the book. The prosecution is probably also one of the reasons why Weor's teachings became very apocalyptic in the following years, as exemplified in his lecture 'Final Catastrophe':

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<sup>32</sup> [www.gnosticteachings.org/content/view/163/75/](http://www.gnosticteachings.org/content/view/163/75/) (accessed July 10, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> [www.gnosticteachings.org/content/view/536/43/](http://www.gnosticteachings.org/content/view/536/43/) (accessed July 10, 2007).

Then, let it not be strange for you that the future Earth will have light and wisdom. However, the present moment is the critical moment, my dear brothers and sisters; these are terrible times. People of other planets of infinite space know the present state in which we are living; it is clear that they will assist us. However, only those who deserve it will be saved.<sup>34</sup>

According to this lecture the end of the world will take place in the year 2500, a date that can be calculated on the basis of kabbalistic readings of the numbers:

Humanity is completely mature for the supreme punishment. The end of this shameful humanity is near.

The Kabbalistic analysis demonstrates that in the numbers two (2), five (5), zero (0), and zero (0), the secret of the great catastrophe is enclosed. Whosoever has understanding, let him understand for there is wisdom therein.

Unfortunately, people do not know how to comprehend the profound meaning of certain Kabbalistic numbers. Lamentably, they interpret everything literally.

We must wait in cold blood for the supreme hour of punishment for many and of martyrdom for others<sup>35</sup>.

However, in other texts the date is determined according to the Maya calendar and is set at the year 2043.<sup>36</sup>

According to his Christmas message of 1952, the single path to redemption is walking on the 'razor's edge', which is the direct path of

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<sup>34</sup> [www.gnostic teachings.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=43](http://www.gnostic teachings.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=43) (accessed July 10, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> [www.gnostic teachings.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=43](http://www.gnostic teachings.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=43) (accessed July 10, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> This is different from most other interpretations of the end of the world according to the Maya calendar which usually arrives at the year 2012. See Sacha Defesche (Defesche 2007).

sexual magic. Only in this way can one become 'christified' and thus eligible for salvation.<sup>37</sup>

In the following years Weor managed to publish extensively on a wide range of esoteric subjects, all of them related to the pivotal topic of sexual magic. He also established the AGEAC (Asociación Gnóstica de Estudios Antropológicos Culturales y Científicos), a school with the purpose of spreading his gnostic teachings to all humankind. The organization still exists today with branches all over the world. However, several other institutions also claim to be the proper heirs of Weor's gnostic teachings, and this sometimes seems to cause tensions between the different groups. Weor himself did not claim monopoly over one single school. A multitude of schools could exist as long as they kept to his teachings and kept three initiatory chambers, corresponding to the three mountains of his initiatory autobiography.

It is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in the records of the life of Weor. This is due to the material available, which mainly consists of more or less hagiographic descriptions given by his followers on one hand, and Weor's autobiographical statements on the other. It is not even possible to find any consensus concerning the number of books written by Weor. Some sources claim that he has written 49 books and some claim 70.<sup>38</sup> Be this as it may, it is beyond any doubt that he was very productive and wanted his teachings to reach all the corners of the world. For this reason he chose to relinquish all copyright to the material, a fact that facilitates research, since most of his books are disseminated in a variety of languages on the Internet.

Using the words of Weor himself we can say that he presents a 'doctrine of synthesis.' He sees all religions as expressions of a single

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<sup>37</sup> Weor: 'Christmas Message 1952'.

<sup>38</sup> Zoccatelli: 'G.I. Gurdjieff'.

universal truth, but he himself is the one to present the correct path to this truth. As stated, this path is the practice of sexual magic by which one becomes 'christified' and a 'real (conscious) human being.'

### **Kabbalah in the doctrine of synthesis of Weor**

At first sight kabbalah does not play any prominent role in the writings of Weor. However, a closer examination of his texts reveals an underlying system of references which to a large extent makes use of kabbalistic terminology and symbolism.

While perusing Weor's books it becomes fairly clear that he did not have any direct knowledge of the medieval kabbalistic literature, not even in any of the available translations. It is evident that he did not know Hebrew, and the very rare references to any primary kabbalistic sources indicate that he did not have immediate knowledge of any of these treatises. Now and then references are given to the *Zohar*, but the references are extremely vague and could in reality refer to any theosophical kabbalistic treatise. Though never stated explicitly, it seems likely that Weor arrived at most of his knowledge of kabbalah through the teachings of Eliphas Lévi whom he studied in his early days. Furthermore, as a member of the Theosophical Society he probably inherited Madame Blavatsky's views on kabbalah. Weor himself defines kabbalah accordingly:

[Kabbalah is] an ancient esoteric teaching hidden from the uninitiated, whose branches and many forms have reached throughout the world. The true Kabbalah is the science and language of the superior worlds and is thus Objective, complete and without flaw (Weor 2006: 240).

In the doctrine of Weor every human being incarnates the ten *sefirot*. These should be 'activated' through the practice of sexual magic in order to awaken the *sefirotic* crown, the three upper *sefirot* (Weor 2006: 143).

The *sefirotic* tree is seen as a map of the universes, both the created, material universe and the inner universe of the human soul. The three



upper *sefirot*, *Keter*, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, serve as the first, second and third Logos respectively, corresponding to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The third Logos, *Binah*, is then further divided into a feminine and masculine principle, serving as the divine Mother and Father.

The seven lower *sefirot* are seen as corresponding to the seven different bodies of the human being (Weor 2006: 74):

- 7:4 *Hesed*: The body of the Innermost.
- 6:5 *Gevurah*: The body of the Consciousness.
- 5:6 *Tiferet*: The causal body/ the body of Will.
- 4:7 *Netzah*: The mental body.
- 3:8 *Hod*: The astral body.
- 2: 9 *Yesod*: The ethereal/ vital body.
- 1:10 *Malkhut*: The physical body.

The *sefirot* are counted with two numbers each in order to show how they emanate step-by-step from *En Sof* and simultaneously function as a ladder to be reached from below. Thus *Malkhut* is both number one, as the first step from the physical world and number ten, as the final divine emanation. A similar structure is known from Gikatilla's *Gates of Light*. According to Weor the initiate should descend in his own inner worlds in order to ascend the *sefirotic* tree. This can only be done with the practice of sexual magic, a practice he calls the *Arcanum A.Z.F.* The purpose of this is to move from one type of body to the next, the final goal being the solar body which is achieved when the practitioner reaches the three upper *sefirot*: the divine Logos. When this ascent is accomplished it results in a *second birth*, the birth of the solar body. Only when one has reached this state can one call oneself a Human Being (Weor 2006: 1).

The second *sefirah* *Hokhmah* is said to be the second Logos, the Christ. Christ is not seen as an individual being but rather as a cosmic entity or principle:

Christ is a cosmic force that can express Himself through any human being who is properly prepared [...] A human being is Christified when the Christ substance is assimilated physically, psychologically and spiritually. Then the human being becomes a Christ; then the human being is converted into a living Christ (Weor 2006: 147).

Among the examples of Christs who have appeared in different cultures are Quetzalcoatl, Ahura-Mazda, Osiris, Hermes Trismegistos and obviously Jesus.

The three upper *sefirot* symbolize the sexual union between the second *sefirah Hokhmah*, the Christ symbolized by the Lingam, the erect phallus and the third *sefirah Binah*, The Holy Spirit and the Divine Mother symbolized by the Yoni and the Chalice. The union of the two, performed within the human being, is the awakening of the Divine Serpent, the Kundalini that rises towards the Father, the first *sefirah Keter*. It is this accomplishment that gives birth to the solar body in the human being.

### **The Kamadon Academy and the Melchizedek Method**

In 1997 the spiritual teacher Alton Kamadon channeled a new method for spiritual enlightenment: a teaching which was called the Melchizedek Method. It was received from the ascended master Thoth or Enoch. This teaching was said to have first been practiced by the cetaceans (that is, dolphins and whales) in the Temples of Higher Learning in Atlantis. Kamadon is also said to have constantly received new information from and worked with The Ascended Masters, The Angelic Realms, Lord Sananda and Lord Melchizedek in the Inter-galactic Council of the Great White Brotherhood. He also had memo-

ries of his deep connection to the ancient Mystery Schools of Lemuria, Atlantis and Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

The teaching itself consists of five initiatory levels, of which the first two are always taught together. Of the benefits gained from the different initiatory levels the following can be highlighted (with their own words):

Levels 1 & 2:

- Activating the Hologram of Love 3 Breath Merkaba lightbody.
- Accessing the time-space continuum through the spine.
- Instant holographic chakra balance.
- Encoding the five sacred key languages of Egyptian, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Tibetan & Chinese through the pineal gland.
- Opening dimensional doorways to time travel with teleportation.
- Retrieving beneficial aspects and talents from past lives on Earth and other planets.
- Amplifying the 33rd Degree Energies of your Adam Kadmon light body with rotational light colour rays.

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<sup>39</sup> [www.kamadonlove.com/Alton\\_Kamadonx.html](http://www.kamadonlove.com/Alton_Kamadonx.html) (accessed May 21, 2008)

- Opening up the ancient seals of wisdom within the Great Pyramid and the Sphinx.

Levels 3 & 4:

- Opening your Superconsciousness to Star Languages and God's Light Mansion Galaxy Worlds.
- Interaction with the Galactic Councils that Oversee the Ascension of our Soul.
- A conversation with God.
- A visit to the Intergalactic Melchizedek University on the Pleiades.

What exactly these achievements entail and how they are taught is still unclear to me as I have not been allowed access to the actual written materials used in the workshops and interviews have not revealed any details of the more specific contents of these teachings. Consequently the following analysis is based on material available freely on the internet or through a few e-books that I have been allowed to by from a Kamadon teacher. The main teaching concerns the activation of one's "33<sup>rd</sup> degree Merkaba Adam Kadmon Light Body", also called the "Zohar Body"<sup>40</sup>.

Merkaba is explained as follows:

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<sup>40</sup> [www.holisticwebs.com/orbital/level4.html](http://www.holisticwebs.com/orbital/level4.html) (Accessed May 19, 2008).

MerKaBa is a term which translated means 'chariot' in Hebrew. In ancient Egyptian (18th dynasty) means MER= rotating fields of light, KA= spirit and BA= soul.

When the MerKaBa is activated around a person's body, he or she is in a place of complete protection, generated by the Love of the Universe<sup>41</sup>.

The notions of Merkaba and Adam Kadmon are central to the teachings of the Academy with the Merkaba as the “technology” by which to reach one’s own Adam Kadmon Light Body. Adam Kadmon is basically perceived through Lurianic kabbalistic glasses and is thus seen as the primordial divine being stemming from *Ein Sof* and through which all creation began. Also in Lurianic terms, mankind is considered to contain sparks of this divine being which can be awakened through spiritual practice. This is what is called the Light Body and with the intervention of YHVH the powers of Adam Kadmon can be bestowed upon the individual so as to transform the person into an “extension of YHWH”<sup>42</sup>. It is no coincidence that ‘Kamadon’ is an anagram of Adam Kadmon:

“Kamadon” is the anagram of Adam Kadmon, the name given to our light body, the ‘archetypal’ or prototype of humanity. It is this divine human form that contains the essence of YHVH, God.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Adam Kadmon has the ability to manifest himself physically in whatever guise he finds necessary in order to transmit the divine truths. Obviously this is where any connection with traditional kabbalah has evaporated. Adam Kadmon is also connected to the

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<sup>41</sup> [www.4dshift.com/back/july99.htm](http://www.4dshift.com/back/july99.htm) (accessed May 19, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Richardo Serrano: *Reaching to Kamadon*.

<sup>43</sup> [www.holisticwebs.com/orbital/level3info.html](http://www.holisticwebs.com/orbital/level3info.html) (accessed July 13, 2007).

Kamadon Temple which is said to be an ethereal temple hovering above the earth and waiting to be drawn down through human consciousness. It contains all the wisdom of Adam Kadmon and is even perceived to be the ‘temple of the soul of Adam Kadmon’.<sup>44</sup>

Amongst other kabbalistic terms the Kamadon Academy employs the doctrine of the ten *sefirot*, which is identified with kabbalah in general. Furthermore, the universal status of kabbalah can only be revealed directly by a divine mediating agent:

Kabbalah is the science of the many universes of higher intelligence that serve the Godhead. Kabbalah cannot be understood exclusively in the languages of Man and, according to Enoch, must be revealed directly by the angel/ emissary of YHWH<sup>45</sup>.

Strangely, the functionality of the Hebrew letters and the divine names (mainly YHVH) is not connected to kabbalah but has a status of its own. Thus we find the following words from the text *Keys of Enoch*:

Key 202:1 The name of YHWH is coded within every biochemical function in our body, especially within the life-giving DNA/RNA matrix.

Key 202:29 The Hebrew “letters” are used because they are, in actuality, thought-forms of Light vibrations which control the higher force fields used to evolve all forms of intelligibility from the divine mind.

Both these ‘keys’ sound very much like a rewording of some basic kabbalistic notions of language and the tetragrammaton. In the *Sefer Yetzirah* all creation stems from the Hebrew letters and the ten num-

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<sup>44</sup> [www.kamadonacademy.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=151&Itemid=60](http://www.kamadonacademy.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=151&Itemid=60) (Accessed May 19, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Richardo Serrano: *Reaching to Kamadon*.

bers, and in Medieval kabbalah this is transferred to the tetragrammaton, since it is the essence of the Torah as the foundation of all creation. This theme is also prevalent in Gikatilla's *Gates of Light*. And in paragraph 202:29 the Hebrew letters achieve the same hyposemantic qualities as Abulafia attributed them, that is, as containing an inherent efficacy.

Now, I am certain that most practitioners of the Melchizedek Method are absolutely unaware of these traditional kabbalistic elements, and maybe that even counts for Alton Kamadon himself. However, this shows how traditional kabbalah basically has become a structural element in Western esotericism and as such can be reused in a more or less recognizable shape.

Obviously the Melchizedek Method shows a high degree of eclecticism and gives the impression of being a theosophical doctrine combined with New Age rhetoric and UFO religion. Kabbalistic terms as employed by the Kamadon Academy are mere buzzwords meant to provide the method with attractiveness for a certain audience. The general rhetoric chosen by the Academy is marked by an extreme predilection for rolling together as many similar buzzwords as possible into one concept (sometimes resulting in a meaningless redundancy) such as "God's Light Mansion Galaxy Worlds"<sup>46</sup>, "New Meta-Galactic Luminous Zonalight"<sup>47</sup>, "Activation of the Metatronic Waveform Cell Recorder Crystalline Frequency"<sup>48</sup>. This pseudo-scientific language has the effect of providing the specific benefits of the method an air of un-

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<sup>46</sup> [www.kamadonacademy.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=60](http://www.kamadonacademy.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=60) (accessed May 19, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> [www.kamadonlove.com/zonalightx.html](http://www.kamadonlove.com/zonalightx.html) (accessed May 19, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> [www.kamadonacademy.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=60](http://www.kamadonacademy.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=60) (accessed May 19, 2008).

intelligibility and mystery on one hand and scientific authority on the other. Kabbalah is not an explicitly dominant part of this tradition. However, when spoken of, kabbalah always has a highly elevated status of universal esoteric truth. Knowledge of 'traditional' kabbalah is restricted to a few central concepts like Adam Kadmon and the *sefirot*, but any deeper knowledge is very rare. Thus a Kamadon teacher in Denmark could inform me that Zohar was an ascended master and not a kabbalistic literary masterpiece.

## **Conclusion**

The attribution of a universal esoteric wisdom to kabbalah has been prevalent ever since the appearance of traditional Jewish kabbalah in medieval Europe, albeit under different guises. However, the role of kabbalah in the construction of traditions in contemporary religion has to a large extent gone unnoticed by academic scholarship due to a dismissive attitude among kabbalah scholars. Thus it is only in recent years that contemporary kabbalah in its various forms has begun to be considered worthy of attention.

The case studies analyzed in this article were chosen in order to exemplify the variety of creative interpretations of kabbalah that we can witness in contemporary religion. Thus we have examined the largest kabbalistic movement of today, the Kabbalah Centre, which presents traditional kabbalistic teachings transformed into postmodern consumer-oriented 'spirituality.' The kabbalah found in the sexual magic taught by Samael Aun Weor is highly inspired by *fin de siècle* occultism. Weor did not share the same primary knowledge of traditional kabbalistic material as the Kabbalah Centre, but relied on the interpretations he received through his religious education within the different esoteric movements that he consulted throughout his life. The last group that has been examined is the Kamadon Academy and its Melchizedek Method. This proved to be the movement which had the least connection to traditional kabbalah among the groups under scrutiny. This is also mirrored in the minor role that kabbalah plays in



their teachings. In the Melchizedek Method kabbalah has been wrapped in so many layers of New Age symbolism that the kabbalistic content is barely recognizable. But this has not only happened to the kabbalistic material. Since their teaching is comprised of bits and pieces of every conceivable part of the New Age milieu, all these fragments have been decontextualized and reworked into a new context. Obviously this is nothing unusual for the history of religions, in which the invention of new traditions happens all the time. But in the present context the Kamadon Academy is the most radical example of that process.

Now, I am perfectly aware that this is far from being a representative selection. However, what I have striven to do in the present article was primarily to introduce and exemplify this vast field of understudied currents within contemporary Western esotericism and to show the importance of kabbalah within these diverse movements. In this way kabbalah can fruitfully be viewed as a structural element within Western esotericism.

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Sara Møldrup Thejls holds an MA in History of Religions from the University of Copenhagen and University of Amsterdam. She is currently employed as external lecturer at the University of Copenhagen, History of Religions Section.