

## • The Four Worlds

The Four Worlds are not places such as planets, but rather correspond to four "stages of removal" from *Eyn Sof*. These stages are another aspect of the "creation process" and do not conflict with the "six days" of Creation listed in Genesis. As the light of Eyn Sof move progressively further away from its source (from Azilut through Asiyah), it becomes "more physical" and more laws are necessary.

The four worlds are:

1. [Azilut](#) (Emanation) - the eternal unchanging Divine world
2. [Beriah](#) (Creation) - considered "Heaven" proper, it is the first separation from the Divine, and "location" of the Throne of God and archangels
3. [Yezerah](#) (Formation) - the abode of the "lower angels," men's souls and the Garden of Eden
4. [Asiyah](#) (Action) - the material universe in which we live

A simple way of understanding the four worlds is to compare it to someone building a house:

1. The person determined that one day they would build their own house (emanation)
2. They planned the style they would design it to (creation)
3. They drew up the specific blueprints to fulfill this design (formation)
4. They acquired the materials and constructed it according to the above (making)

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## The Three Types of Kabbalah

Generally speaking, Kabbalah is divided into three categories: **the theoretical**, which concerns itself primarily with the inner dimensions of reality; the spiritual worlds, souls, angels, and the like, and the **meditative**, where the goal is to train the person who is studying to reach higher elevated meditative

states of consciousness and, perhaps, even a state of prophecy through employing the Divine names, letter permutations, and so forth.

The third type of Kabbalah is **the magical**, which concerns itself with altering and influencing the course of nature. It also uses the Divine names, incantations, amulets, magical seals and various other mystical exercises.

With regards to the latter, the vast majority of the more important texts of magical Kabbalah have never been published, and perhaps for good reason. Besides being a highly complex issue to master, even when mastered it can be at times dangerous. **Many of the earlier Kabbalists have deemed the magical Kabbalah as a precarious discipline.** R. Joseph Della Reina (1418 - 1472) was one of the great masters of the magical Kabbalah. Legend has it that he attempted to utilize his spiritual powers to bring the ultimate redemption, and in the process of failure became spiritually injured. Some say he committed suicide, while others say that he transmogrified as an apostate. Others say that he simply went mad.

Many Kabbalists in the generations that followed took his actions as a warning sign against practicing advanced transcendental and magical Kabbalah. From therein, the magical elements of Kabbalah have, for all intents and purposes, become extinct, and its knowledge has been completely forgotten.

**For whatever reason, meditative Kabbalah was also never really a popular discipline.** One of the great proponents of meditative Kabbalah was R. Abraham Abulafia (1240-1296). The mystical school he headed was primarily interested in a method of reaching higher meditative states. He believed that through his method of meditation, one was able to attain a level of prophecy. He proposed using a writing mantra, meaning instead of the usual verbal or visual mantra, one should write a word repeatedly over and over again in various styles and configurations. One should attempt to alter the sequence of the word and to

permute and cycle the letters of the word in every which way possible: combining and separating the letters, composing entire new motifs of letters, grouping them and then joining them with other groups, and so on. This was done until one attained a heightened state of consciousness.

Now, although Abulafia was a prolific writer and authored over forty books in his lifetime, nonetheless most of his works were never published. In fact, even during his life, many of the other great Kabbalists opposed him and his teachings. **Therefore, the Kabbalah, wherein the aim was to reach the transcendental state of consciousness, never became mainstream even though on an individual level, there were Kabbalists, especially the Kabbalists from 16th century Safed, who incorporated his teachings as a way to achieve elevated states of awareness and consciousness.**

**What we are left with is the theoretical dimension of Kabbalah.** The vast majority of the Kabbalah that has been and is continuously being produced are all within the domain of the theoretical. **The main body of this type of Kabbalah is the sacred work of the Zohar, a book of teachings of the second century Talmudic mystic, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, which were handed down from one generation to the next until they were published in the late 13th century by the Kabbalist R. Moshe De Leon.**

### **The Three Stages of the Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah**

It is the theoretical aspect of the Kabbalah that has been developed throughout the ages in various stages. For practical purposes, the tradition of this style of Kabbalah can be divided into three basic stages.

**The FIRST is the era of the publication of the Zohar, with the mystics of that and the following generation who articulated these teachings.**

The **SECOND** would be the 16th century mystics who lived in the city of Safed. This particular period in history is referred to as the *great Kabbalistic Renaissance*. The movement was steered by the profound and systematic teachings of R. Moshe Corodovero, known as the Ramak (1522-1570), and particularly by the teachings of R. Yitzchak Luria, (1534-1572) whose sobriquet was *Ha-Ari*, which means “the Lion.”

Ultimately, the **THIRD DEVELOPMENT** development of the Kabbalah was with the birth of R. Yisrael Ben Eliezer, (1698-1760), known as the *Baal Shem Tov*, the Master of the Good Name, who was the founder of the Chassidic movement, which in a direct or indirect way has steered all the other mystical movements up until this present day.

One who has only seen glimpses of the theoretical Kabbalah—the novice—tends to view it as a writing replete with fantasy, strange happenings and images, fantastical mythical landscapes, seemingly irrational, unrealistic, and unrelated to reality.

Opening the classic work of theoretical Kabbalah, the Zohar, one is amazed at the authors' imagination, but perhaps the fascination ends there. It seems to the novice to be a book of fantasy, nothing more. A famed Kabbalistic Master, the Tzadik of Zitshav, once observed regarding the Kabbalah that these three stages in its development can be related to a parable:

*In a time when travel was a perilous and arduous venture and most people had never been outside their little village, a man journeyed to a distant land. Upon his return, he gathered together the people of his village and enthusiastically related the great adventures of his voyage. He spoke of a bird he had seen in a distant land, whose features were remarkable. For example, the bird's face was*

*human; his legs were that of a giraffe. The villagers scoffed and dismissed his story as utter fantasy.*

*Inspired by the adventurers of his tales, a fellow villager set out on the same voyage determined to see the world for himself. Years later he returned to his village, a man of the world. Like the traveler who had so inspired him, he gathered the village folk and related his adventures. He too spoke of this fantastic bird, but the description was slightly different. The face of the bird, he said, was not actually human, although it closely resembled one, and the legs were long and spindly and definitely brought to mind the giraffe; however, they were most certainly not actual giraffe's legs. Upon hearing this man's story, the villagers were divided. Some wholeheartedly believed this man whose story was more convincing than the first traveler. Yet there were plenty of skeptics, to whom the story still sounded entirely contrived and unrealistic.*

*One of the villagers was determined to bring a final conclusion to the matter of this strange bird and undertook the arduous journey himself. Upon his return he gathered together the villagers and triumphantly proclaimed, the matter is settled! Whereupon he reached into his large bag and withdrew this strange and fantastic bird. This time there was not a skeptic to be found.*

**This parable relates to the three stages in the development of the theoretical domain of Kabbalah.**

The author of the Zohar, the main body of Kabbalistic thought, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, was the first to describe the Divine presence and our relationship with the Ein Sof. In the Zohar, we find such strange and fantastic tales, such mythical and mystical configurations and images, that we can hardly believe.

In the 16th century, in Safed, the city of mystics, the Kabbalah began to take on a more comprehensive, detailed form and analysis. Patterns and systematic thought processes began to appear in Kabbalistic literature.

Finally, with the birth of the Chassidic movement, Kabbalah has come to its full fruition. Chassidism is the mystical movement founded by R. Yisrael Ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov. He brought the image of the Creator into reality.

No longer were these mystical concepts farfetched and unrealistic, rather they became a concrete part of our everyday lives, affecting every facet of creation. Heaven was brought down to Earth.

### **The Kabbalistic Journey Comes Full Circle**

The purpose of the Kabbalah is fraught with misconceptions. A popular misunderstanding is that the study of Kabbalah is meant to transform one into a psychic, or perhaps a clairvoyant, capable of miraculous and otherworldly abilities. This, however, is a misconception.

**The ultimate purpose in the study of Kabbalah is the perfection of the Self. Making the Self into a better, more expanded individual, more transcendent, more attuned to the essence and roots of one's soul, this is what Kabbalah comes to offer those who truly wish to receive it.**

The criterion of the authentic and Kabbalistic journey is one that comes full circle and where one returns ultimately to the world of the here-and-now.

The Talmud tells of four sages who entered the mystical orchard and experienced a transcendental experience:

*“Ben Azzai gazed and died. Ben Zoma gazed and was stricken. In other words, he went insane. Acher (the other) (née Elisha Ben Avuyah) gazed and cut off his plantings, that is, transmogrified into a heretic. Rabbi Akiva entered and exited in peace.”*

The orchard represents the higher spiritual realms. Rabbi Akiva was the only sage, amongst these four great sages, who was able to enter and exit the mystical orchard without being scarred. Being a man of great spiritual stature, a true and well-balanced master, he realized that the objective is not to identify with the light and not return, physically, as Ben Azzai did, or mentally as Ben Zoma did. Nor, was it to feel personal release or ecstasy, but rather to go there and return here, with the proper wisdom to serve in the here-and-now. The journey is to come full circle into one's day-to-day life behaviors.

**The core of all Kabbalah is the distinct goal and objective to draw down the Infinite Light from the abstract and anchor holiness into one's day to day reality.**

The early Kabbalists were known as "Men of toil"--their exertions were not of the physical sort, rather they labored throughout their lifetimes to improve themselves and elevate their level of consciousness to the point of a spiritual perception of reality. With the arrival of Baal Shem Tov, this notion took on a new and fresh meaning. With the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the path became ever so clear as to how this refinement could be achieved.

1. The world is filled with God.
2. God is constantly creating and sustaining the world for the purpose of bestowing good in the world.
3. Everything is for the best.

4. Our bodies don't have souls, our souls have bodies. The soul's task is to repair the world and itself. Every soul has an assignment and must discern what it is and then fulfill it. (103)
5. Everything has meaning.
6. Three daily tasks of the Kabbalist: Study, Prayer, Acts of Lovingkindness.