

Judaism, kabbalah



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Your Lecturer Importance of Kabbalah and its Role in Middle Age Europe

Kabbalah is “ the mystical, esoteric side of Judaism that delves into a deeper understanding of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) beyond its literal interpretation to provide us with information about the soul; the nature of God, Creation and the spiritual world...” (Zetter 1). Kabbalah is mainly encoded in the Jewish books of Zohar and Babir, which are attributed to Shimon Bar Yochai and Nehunia ben Ha-Qanah respectively, both of them being students of Rabbi Akiva (Kiener 4). In the Middle Ages, Europe was under the influence of The Catholic Church. This was a period before the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment which saw the development of empiricism and science. Thus things were often explained on the basis of spirituality and mysticism. At such a period, the Kabbalah was an important source of explanations in the Jewish community around Europe because it was seen as the authoritative source of interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. And due to the emphasis placed on spirituality, it had a very strong appeal amongst Jews and Christians alike. Kabbalah practiced amongst the Jews in Europe especially in Italy in the Middle Ages mixed principles of Aristotlean philosophy and Sufism in a way that provided a strong body of knowledge in mysticism that was helpful in the interpretation of Christianity and Judaism in that era (Idel 21). This mix gave a practical guide and reasonable system for explaining things in Europe at that time. Due to this feature, it became widely accepted by most people in Middle Age Europe since it gave explanations to things that the Church was preaching throughout Europe. Although Kabbalah was a Jewish system, the Catholic Church created units within the Church that applied some of the principles of Kabbalah (Idel 22). The Kabbalah was therefore a very popular exegesis that explained the roots

of creation and the Bible for the wider Christian community in Europe (Leon Jones 20). Scholars like Giordano Bruno were involved in several writings that sought to use Kabbalah as a supplementary texts for the explanation of Biblical texts in the Christian Community. In Middle Ages Europe, medicine and mysticism were not separated (Weinstein & Monselice 72). Most people relied on mysticism to remain healthy and solve numerous problems. In most places, Kabbalah was accepted as a legitimate health system by both Christians and Jews because it was a helpful system of curing people's health problems (Weinstein & Monselice 72). Due to this, many mystical formulas for cures were documented, kept carefully and handed down from generation to generation amongst sages (Weinstein & Monselice 73). As the Jews were expelled from different parts of Europe, they moved about with the science of Kabbalah. This helped in the spread of Kabbalah particularly from Southern Europe to parts of Central and Northern Europe like Germany and Poland. This made Kabbalah more popular throughout the continent in the Middle Ages. Also, with the coming Isaac Luria's moralistic theme of Kabbalah, many people become interested in studying it and incorporating it into their daily lives and actions (Szarmarch 328). This made Kabbalah more popular on the individual level and helped in the personalization of the study of Kabbalah. In conclusion, Kabbalah is an original Jewish mystical system. It was widely accepted as authoritative in Europe in spite of the antagonism Jews faced in that part of the world. It was used to help in the curing of diseases and solving of problems in an era where mysticism was popular in Europe. The dispersal of Jews to different parts of Europe made it more popular whilst the personalization of Kabbalah made it seep into the roots of the European society. Works Cited Idel, Moshe. Kabbalah in Italy, 1280 –

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