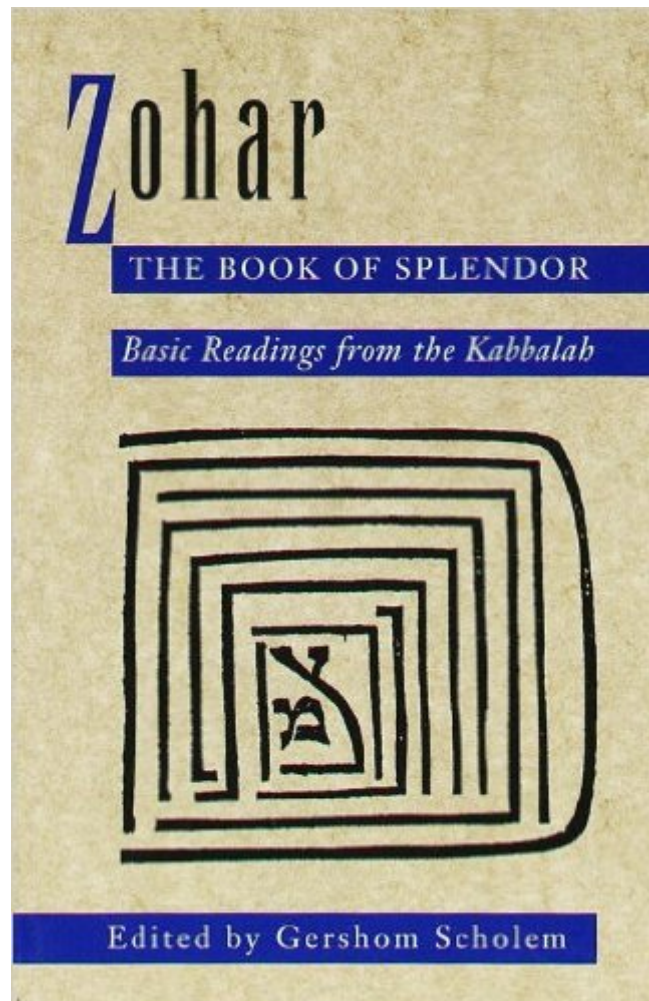


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Zohar: The Book Of Splendor: Basic Readings From The Kabbalah



Synopsis

One of the great masterpieces of Western religious thought, the Zohar represents an attempt to uncover hidden meanings behind the world of appearances. It is the central work in the literature of the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. This volume of selected passages from the Zohar, culled by the greatest authority on Jewish mysticism, offers a sampling of its unique vision of the esoteric wonders of creation; the life and destiny of the soul; the confluence of physical and divine love; suffering and death; exile and redemption.

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Customer Reviews

This book was primarily written for those people that want to get a flavor for the large compilation of writings known as the Zohar. The Zohar is the most widely used text in the study of Kabbalah. This book, written by Gershom Scholem, takes various excerpts from the Zohar to give the reader a basic idea of what manner of instruction and knowledge one can find in the Zohar. His selections are chosen to cover most of the stages of life and the major questions concerning what lies after and possibly our return. For taking such a small selection, Scholem masterfully picked his selections to provide a smooth transition between subjects. This book is very short and can be read in a couple of days without too much effort. Let the reader beware, if you choose to obtain the full version after reading this book, you might be surprised to find that much of the text is extremely difficult to understand. Scholem definitely chose those excerpts that are not too difficult to understand for this book. In spite of its brevity, I would recommend this book because it adequately portrays the Jews

rich scholarship over the centuries and their constant striving to understand the more mysterious matters of their existence.

This was an intense book and was frightfully challenging at times. Part of the challenge was due to a lack of cultural relevance. The book makes reference to all kinds of Jewish history and culture without any explanations. It felt as though I were missing huge chunks of important references. But, that being said, what I was able to grasp was enormous. This book really put a new spin on the Old Testament for me. It made me think about allegory and allusion in a whole new light. The layers and layers of mythic and mystic knowledge that it hints at being concealed in the various Scriptures is both tantalizing and invigorating. And, perhaps most importantly of all, it has left me wanting more.

I enjoy this small book by Herr Doktor Gershom Scholem. "Zohar : The Book of Splendor : Basic Readings from the Kabbalah" is a collection of passages from the Zohar. The Zohar is a five volume set which is the central work in the literature of the Kabbalah. It was written in the late 13th Century CE in Spain. As such, this little book is much too small to be considered as anything but snippets and favourite passages. At the same time, I find solace in the meditations. Like many prayer books, I find it helps to centre myself spiritually as I conform my conscious mind to my faith. If you are interested in a book of meditations to strengthen a prayer life, this book may be interesting to you.

"The old God whom Kabbalistic gnosis opposed to the God of the philosophers proves, when experienced in all his living richness, to be an even older and archaic one." Mythical Dimension of Judaism "Woe to those who look upon the Torah as simply tales pertaining to things of the world, seeing thus only the outer garment. But those whose gaze penetrates to the very Torah, happy are they." Hidden Meaning of the Torah Jewish Mystical Definitions: Zohar: The Zohar consists of mystical commentaries and homilies on the Pentateuch. It was written by Moses de León, in the 13th century, who attributed it to Simon ben Yohai, a great scholar of the second century, A.D. The two principal sources for the kabbalists are the Zohar (The Book of Enlightenment, The Book of Splendor), and the Sefer Yezirah (Book of Creation), developed in a series of monologues allegedly delivered by Abraham. The doctrine of the Sefirot, the powers emanating from God, through which the world was created and its order is being sustained, was probably written in the third century. The primordial numbers of the later Pythagoreans were used in a system of numerical interpretation. Kabbalistic interpretation of Scripture was transformed, based on the belief that every number, word, or even letter, embraced mysteries unveiled only by those who conceived the secret. The

names for the Lord of hosts were believed to contain miraculous power that even each letter of the divine name was regarded as potent; that kabbalistic signs and writings were used as amulets and in magical practices. Kabbalah: קַבְּבָלָה (Heb., reception), esoteric system of interpretation of the Scriptures based upon a tradition claimed to have been handed down orally from Abraham. The system appears to have started by Philo of Alexandria, in Alexandria, Egypt, using allegories to interpret scripture exposing its mystical meaning. It has been further developed in the eleventh century in France, and from there spread to Spain. Yet, kabbalistic elements are earlier discernible in the literature of second century Merkavah mysticism inspired by the vision of the chariot-throne (merkavah) in the Book of Ezekiel. Beyond the specific Jewish notions, philosophy scholars debate that Kabbalah reveals a dominant Neoplatonic influence, especially in its doctrines of emanation and the transmigration of souls. Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, in 1492, kabbalah became more messianic in its emphasis, as developed by the school of mystics at Safed, Palestine. In this form, Kabbalah had a major influence in the development of Hasidic thoughts and teachings, and still has adherents, especially among Hasidic Jews.

Jewish Mysticism & Philosophy: One of the most significant contributions that Gershom Scholem's prolific research has added to the field of Judaica, is the parametric broadening of the Jewish intellectual history since late antiquity to our times. Such expansion of intellectual horizons is most apparent in his study of the richest period of mystical creativity in Jewish history of medieval Jewish culture. He studied the forms of philosophical expression, in particular the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic legacies transmitted through Arabic translations of Greek and Syriac works. Scholem introduced a roster of texts approaching most of the parallel problems in cosmology, epistemology, and metaphysics as works of traditional philosophy. In his attempt to legitimate the mystical vitality of Judaism, Scholem ironically reiterates the overly simplistic distinction between rationalistic philosophy and pietistic mysticism in the Jewish Middle Ages. The dissection of mysticism and philosophy led Scholem to such distinctions as typology versus allegory that break down under the weight of textual detail, following Philo of Alexandria of AD Alexandria. Despite the fact that Scholem was avidly aware of the philological, textual, and historical dominance of philosophical systems on Jewish mystics in the Middle Ages, he dichotomized the intellectual currents of mysticism and philosophy in such a simplistic fashion. Scholem argued repeatedly that the mystical sources, and not the philosophical, tapped the deepest recesses of religious consciousness by reviving what he considered to be the long-suppressed mythical dimension of Judaism.

An Introduction to Zohar: To approach 'A Work of Secret Wisdom, Inaccessible and Silent,' needs a meticulously prepared mystical guide, whom I sought in Gershom Scholem, the foremost Jewish scholar of the twentieth century. I am aware that some Jewish

assumptions could shock 'Sola scriptura' Christians. So, in the Introduction, he wrote, "Zohar..., as a source of doctrine and revelation equal in authority to the Bible and Talmud, and of the same canonical rank-..." pp. viii In his elaborate introduction the eminent scholar expounded the main issues to clarify the mystical subject, the historical setting, the literary character, Origin and authorship, and his presented selection. He has chosen passages that throw light on the mystical ideas on God, the soul, and its destiny. He left a room for the readers imagination, not only the interpretation of symbolical and technical terms. He concludes in his mission statement, "This small volume will have fulfilled its task if it succeeds in conveying to the reader some notion of the power of contemplative fantasy and creative imagery hidden within the seemingly abstruse thinking of the Kabbalists."

Three Standards of Spirit: "Rabbi Judah said: Nefesh and Roah are conjoined, while neshamah has its abode in the character of a man, which place remains unknown and undiscovered. ... if he does not strive to be righteous and pure of life, there does not animate him holy neshamah, but only the two grades, nefesh and roah. ..." pp. 89

In ancient Egypt, where the Habiru were sent by the Lord to have social and physical education, that extended to 400 years, they only believed in two, the soul Ba, and the spirit Ka. Rabbi Judah did know some philology, but what he did not know is what is a biblical scholarly fact that, the Creation story of Genesis is a copy of the Heliopolitan cosmology, creation out of Chaos.

Holy Communion: Jesus the Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman saying, " Salvation is from the Jews." But Rabbi Abba thinks that, "God chose Israel, and none other from among the peoples and established them in the world as a single unique nation. ... To crown them, he bestowed upon them a multitude of precepts, and with these the phylacteries of the head and the arm, which makes a man one and complete." The problem for the non Jewish reader is the The Book of Enlightenment, boast on material glorifications, which along the history has proven to be void. It is hard to import Semitic concepts (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Arabic) and try to portray them to, even a Western Jew as, Book of Splendor or the like!

Gershom Scholem: The new insights, according to Professor Maccoby, which Gershom Scholem revived, "has produced a far-reaching revolution in our understanding of Judaism that his work cannot yet be assessed in its entirety." As the foremost Jewish scholar of the twentieth century, is the author of numerous books (Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and On Jews and Judaism in Crisis). He radically revised, and aspired fresh life to, the entire field of Jewish studies. Scholem brought to his reading of Jewish experience and ideology a home run of all thoughtful Jews to their own tradition and to the core of their religious heritage. A true "master thinker," Scholem represented a force in the intellectual life of our century, and not only in Jewish intellectual life, whose influence will

be felt for a long time to come.

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