

Class One

Magic is generally thought to be unkosher. The Hebrew Bible bans it (or at least we think it does). It is irrational and idolatrous, and is not the same thing as simple trust in God. Pure Judaism consists of prayer, study, and good deeds, not magic.

If the above is true, however, the actual history of Jewish practice presents some questions. According to the Hebrew Bible itself, the Jewish people were commanded to purify material things and people with living water, hyssop, ash, and blood; to sacrifice animals and birds; and to invest a goat with the sins of the people and send it off into the desert as an offering to a destructive spirit. Moses influences a battle by keeping his arms lifted into the air; splits the sea with his staff; and heals the people by having them look at an image of a copper snake. Joshua stops the sun in the sky. Elijah calls down fire from heaven and resurrects a young boy from the dead. Even YHVH proves his power by changing staffs into snakes, whitening people's skin, turning water into blood, blackening the sky, sending plagues of locusts and boils, and swallowing people into the earth.

Of course YHVH's "supernatural" alterations of reality are miracles, not magic, but there is a resonance. What exactly is it then, when a human being, made in the divine image, alters reality? Are these two things really as distinct as we think? We may be surprised by the answer of Jewish tradition.

The Tanakh famously condemns something, but we're not sure exactly what it is. Exodus/Shemot 22:18 says, "Machshefah lo tehiyeh." This was infamously translated in the King James Bible as "You shall not suffer a witch to live," but this translation is highly questionable. The phrase literally means, "You shall not sustain/give life to a machshefah." This probably *does* mean that a machshefah should be killed, though Gershon Winkler and others have argued that it means that the community should not support them; i.e. they should not be given donations or payment for doing the work of a "machshefah."

But what is a machshefah? Kenneth Kitchen, a bible scholar at the University of Liverpool, translates the root as “to cut” and thinks it might refer to cutting herbs, i.e. to being a poisoner. An article in Ha’aretz quoted Prof. Yitshak Sefati, senior lecturer of Bible and Assyriology at Bar-Ilan University, as pointing out that in Deuteronomy 18:9-10, *mekhashepha* are mentioned in a list of those whose practices YHVH considers to be abominations. “This list includes necromancers, those who cast spells, those who summon spirits, and practitioners of divination, among others. While this does not make them sorcerers, it puts them in the same category.”

As the article points out, the more extensive list in Deuteronomy likely comes from a later time, reflecting the period when King Josiah was actively attempting religious “purifications”, such as eliminating "God's wife," Asherah. Archaeological evidence suggests that prior to the Babylonian exile a pantheon of deities was worshiped in Israel, and YHVH was frequently coupled with a female deity as His Wife. From the period of King Josiah to the finalization of an early manuscript of the Hebrew Bible in the time of Ezra, a campaign was waged against other deities and anything that smacked of non-Jewish practices.

Shemot may reflect an earlier ban on poisoners, or perhaps, as some argue, practitioners of black magic, that was later expanded. Laws against black magick were common in the ancient Middle East, after all. The Code of Hammurabi, an 18th century B.C.E. Babylonian code of law from Mesopotamia, placed a death sentence on anyone who used magic to harm another. Mesopotamians divided practitioners between evil and good: “White magic” practiced by *baru* (diviner) or an *asipu* or *masmassu* (exorcist); and “black magic” performed by a *kassapu* or *kassaptu* (harmful sorcerer). The word *Kassapu*, it should be noted, has a root that sounds similar to the KSP like sound at the heart of Machshefah (Mem-**Het-Shin-Feh**-Heh).

The law from Shemot and Deuteronomy, so tragically used as a way to weed out non-Christian magickal practices in Europe and elsewhere, was likely originally a ban on black magic and poisoncraft, or at most a ban on Jews practicing non-Jewish magick. This was in fact the way it was understood in the Talmud, as we shall see.

Looking beyond the Tanakh, the Talmud depicts Rabbis who can heal people, bring rain, resurrect the dead, and conjure animals to be killed and eaten for dinner with sacred words. When Rabbis share the esoteric secrets they know about creation and the divine realm, trees burst into radiant heavenly fire, rainbows spontaneously appear, and angels sing. The Rabbis of the Talmud also offer incantations, potions and ritual acts for protection and healing.

Alongside Talmudic culture, Merkavah mystics went soul traveling to the upper realms and reporting on the angels, spirits, and celestial palaces they found there. They contributed to the map of the otherworlds as being written, including the sacred numbers and energies of the cosmos, its primal elements, and the spirits of the four directions.

As the Jewish esoteric tradition, or Kabbalah, grew from the time of the Talmud onwards, Rabbis were said to be able to make magical amulets and potions, and to create or alter realities with the secrets of the alef-bet of creation. Great tzadikim were said mysteriously to be able to “create worlds.” With the onset of the Hasidic tradition, the Rebbe, an intermediary between this world and the Otherworld of spirits and heavens, was said to be able to read minds, see the future, understand the speech of animals and birds, heal, resolve infertility, change divine decrees, cover large distances at superhuman speed and be in two places at once.

To add to the above, by the 19th century the mitzvot, the disciplinary architecture of normative Judaism itself, were widely understood to be precise ritual and physical actions which when done properly brought blessing into the world and healed the cosmos. Various prayers were said to have innate power when chanted even without understanding, like the book of Psalms, which was said to be entirely composed of secret names of power.

As for non-Jews, from the Medieval period to the modern they considered Jews to be sorcerers *par excellence*, a view which was more often a curse than a blessing. As tolerance grew, many non-Jews esteemed the Kabbalah as a great source of magical wisdom and used it to underpin and inform the broad range of movements now known as “Western Esotericism.” This includes esoteric and magical practices undertaken by Christians and quasi-Christian European wizards, magicians and hermeticists. This would only increase going into the 20th century, when great

esoteric and occult movements in Europe and America drew on Jewish Kabbalah and Angelology to design new traditions like Tarot, neo-Alchemy, Magick, Hermeticism, and modern Witchcraft.

Today, after a century where Jews in the West tried to bury their embarrassing (and sometimes endangering) mystical and magical past, there is a massively renewed interest in Kabbalah, neo-Hasidut, Jewish esotericism, Jewitchery, Priestesscraft, and Shamanic Judaism. So if all of this is true, is magic kosher or not?

Well, first of all, what is magic, anyway?

One definition which might strike home is “the attempt to manipulate reality by supernatural means.” This definition has some philosophical problems, but let’s leave that aside for now.

Is not all of Judaism then magic, though? The act of covenanting oneself to a god and promising to follow their taboos and stipulations in return for power and blessing is a recognizable form of magic from many cultures. Doesn’t that perfectly describe the primal Judaism of the Tanakh?

Yet this God is not just a “god”, but *the* God, the source, substance, creator, designer and overseer of all reality. Ok, but have we done more than made a distinction between polytheistic magic and monotheistic magic? This is where things get muddier, or perhaps, clearer. A clear distinction between Judaism and non-Judaism is whether one lives in an exclusive covenantal relationship with YHVH or not. Perhaps it’s not magic or non-magic that’s the problem, then, but rather *avodat Hashem* (God’s work) and *avodah zarah* (idolatry). In fact this seems to be the distinction that held throughout much of Jewish history until the modern era. Magic is not the problem, for Jews, but rather *non-Jewish magic*.

In fact, as referenced above, the last great flowering of Orthodox Jewish practice in the 18th-19th century, theorized by such great works as the Tanya (mystical Hasidic theology), the Nefesh HaChayyim (Lithuanian mystical theology), and HaSulam (radical Zoharic theology), could also be said to present the whole of Judaism as a basically magical system. According to the Nefesh

HaChayyim, for instance, when God (YHVH) created the universe out of itself, it then gave a reflection of its powers (tzelem elohim) to the human being. The human became the “soul of life” (nefesh chaya) whose actions determined the flow of blessing or curse throughout the cosmos. The Torah was given so that humans could merge their mind with that of the Creator’s and release blessing into the world, and the mitzvot are all ritual actions (even the ethical ones) which when performed precisely according to halacha heal the soul and the cosmos.

Thus when praying, for example, whether one understands the words is irrelevant- chanting the precise Hebrew prayers set by the mages, er, I mean, sages, as an offering to the Shechinah is what matters. The chant itself will bring healing.

The Tanya presents the mitzvot as primarily a way to union with God, invocation of divine presence in the world, and summoning of the Mashiah. Rav Yehuda Ashlag, the Baal HaSulam, (1885-1954) presents Torah and Mitzvot as means to union with God, but also as ways to invoke a higher level of soul power from celestial worlds to inhabit one’s body. The highest level of soul power, by the way, is invoked not just from higher worlds but *from the future*- one’s already perfected soul from the end of one’s incarnations, when one has attained perfect unity with God.

In future classes we will cover not only the development of the Kabbalistic-Magical worldview I am describing here, but also the prevalence of folk or practical magic in Jewish communities- where until recently it was very, very prevalent indeed. For now, however, rather than a history of Kabbalah or magic I want to look at how Kabbalists themselves have understood Jewish history.

A Kabbalistic History of the Jewish People (and the Cosmos)

In the beginning was divine fullness. In this limitless divine effulgence there was no room for anything else, so the Ein Sof (limitlessness) created a place where it was not (or where it *appeared* not to be). In that womb, the *halal panui* or *teheru* (empty space, etheric chaos) the divine emanated Adam Kadmon (primordial Adam), the primordial Being and archetype of humanity, which was itself limitless light.

The light of the En Sof is continually emanating into creation and then withdrawing so as not to overwhelm it. This motion has been compared to the diastolic beating of a heart. Inner light (*or penimi*) descends into creation, and enveloping light (*or makif*) ascends. The light that has suffused creation leaves a trace, gently altering creation. So *tsimtsum* (contraction of divine effulgence) is both what begins creation and an ongoing aspect of God's relation to the cosmos.

In Its own act to create, the divine limits Itself (*din*, judgement, *gevura*) and also undertakes risk. Evil is based on *din* (the withdrawal of the fullness of divine being) and lies hidden in the act of *tsimtsum* itself. It is God's self-limitation (*tzimtzum*) which allows evil to exist, and all evil takes its nourishment from the side of *din*, the "other side" (*sitra achra*) of divine effulgence.

Sefirot are vessels for the light of en sof, which is in them. They are like the garments for the light of en sof and form the vessels that give specific qualities to each divine emanation when light spreads to the lower worlds. The sefirot both reveal and conceal divine reality.

The light of en sof forms the light of Adam Kadmon and he is the inner being of the sefirot. The World of Emanation (*Atzilut*) is the vessel, or container, for the light of Adam Kadmon. That is the first of four sefirotic worlds, which are *Atzilut* (Nearness), *Beriyah* (Creation), *Yetzirah* (Formation), and *Assiyah* (Action). Each of the three worlds below *Atzilut* contain all ten sefirot, receiving and transmitting the higher sefirot in an increasingly mediated form. Therefore a vessel (*kli*) is a reality that mediates or transmits between one reality and another.

When the thin ray of light moved into the *teheru* (etheric or empty space), it assumed the mystical shape of Adam Kadmon. Lights issued from his head and body to form harmonious and unified higher worlds, but the divine equilibrium was soon to be broken by that which emanated from his eyes. Each of the ten points of light that exited the eyes of Adam Kadmon generated the sefirot. The vessels that possessed *tikkun* (harmony, beauty) sustained their lights and lived. The vessels without *tikkun* shattered and "died" (became cut off from the divine source).

Each sefira then became separate and distinct, disconnected from the whole. As divine emanations formed the lower vessels, *din* was concentrated in the vessels to such an extent that the tension between it and divine lights caused them to break. The emanations—or vessels—that were created to clothe, sustain and give the light specific characteristics failed. Only the vessels of the three highest sefirot survived undamaged. The last sefira, *malkhut* (*shekhinah*) survived but was damaged. This was a profound crisis: *shevirat ha-kelim*—breaking of the vessels.

Cataclysmic disharmony descended through the primal space. This disharmony awakened *din*, which, in turn, activated evil. The glow of divine sparks were hidden in the *klippot* (shells or husks obscuring divinity). The tenth sefira, *Malkhut* or *Shekhinah*, torn apart from the undifferentiated unity in the inner world and trapped in the outer world, remains as the spiritual home of each being, the exiled realm of God. Our world is a manifestation of *Assiyah*, which is in turn a manifestation of *Yetzirah*, and so on.

The *tzimtzum* (contraction of divine light) had a side effect, as we have mentioned, a kind of chaotic offshoot of *gevurah* which gave rise to the *Sitra Achra*, the opponent of *Kedusha* (holiness), a dark mirror image of the sacred cosmos willed by God, whose energies and devotees would seek to subvert God's plan. That plan, the animating desire behind Creation, is to create a being God could give its goodness to. The *Sitra Achra* would feed off the *klippot*- the husks which hide divinity and make the phenomena of the cosmos seem like independent, material entities devoid of divine being.

When Adam was first created, it was a hermaphroditic being of light which could see from one end of the universe to another. It contained aspects of all the animals, and its body was a microcosm of the universe reflecting *Adam Kadmon*. The body is also a reflection of the metaphysical being of the Torah, which was to be its preoccupation. Adam had a power of knowledge and naming beyond that of the angels, as demonstrated by knowing the animals names/essence. This was a proto-magical ability. The angels wanted to worship this new being, but were dissuaded by *YHVH*, who decided to make Adam many so as to make it clear it was not “a god below.” Adam was split into Adam and *Chavah*.

After the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which mixed good and evil together beyond discernability, Adam and Chavah lost their bodies of light and were clothed in skin.

When Adam and Chavah left Gan Eden, they took with them a stone which contained the light created on the first day, which was passed down to Seth and onwards until it reached Noah, who used its light to illuminate the Teva (ark) during the Mabul (flood).

An angel named Raziel appeared to Adam and Chavah, and taught them secrets of the cosmos which were the beginning of the Kabbalah. Angels were created by YHVH before the creation of the earth, to be messengers and servants of the Divine. Raziel was angel of the world of B'riyah, and was later noted by Maimonides in Mishneh Torah as a teacher of Adam. Raziel's book, *Sefer Raziel HaMalakh*, a book of theoretical and magical Kabbalah first entered history as a printed book appearing in several forms written in Hebrew and Aramaic in the 13th century. Sefer Raziel contains extensive information on divine names and their use in creation and the ongoing flow of energies in the universe, as well as astrological and angelological information. It also contains information about the spiritual structure of the cosmos and life after death.

The Zohar, the most revered work of Kabbalah, discusses the Sefer Raziel: "In it was written all the secret wisdom and knowledge concerning the divine name of 72 letters and its esoteric 670 mysteries. It also contained the 1500 keys, the knowledge and understanding and use of which had never been imparted to anyone, not even to angels, before it came into the possession of Adam. As he read and studied its pages, angelic beings assembled around him and acquired the knowledge of Hochma, or divine wisdom, and in their delight exclaimed "Be Thou exalted, oh God above the heavens, and let thy glory be above all the earth (Psalm 37:5)."

The Zohar goes on to explain that the book disappeared after the expulsion from the garden, but Adam, in a kind of shamanic asceticism, submerged himself up to his neck in the river Gihon until YHVH sent the angel Raphael to return the book. Eventually the *Raziel HaMalakh* would be studied by Enoch, of whom it is said he "walked with God" and who later ascended to

become the angel Metatron (an important figure in Jewish and Western mysticism and magic). There have been many streams of Enochian Magic practiced within and without the Jewish community, and this continues today.

Sefer HaRazim ("Book of Secrets") is another ancient work of Kabbalistic magic. This one was given to Noah by the angel Raziel, and passed down until it ended up in the possession of Solomon, for whom it was a great source of his wisdom and purported magical powers. Sefer HaRazim first appeared in written form around the same time as Sefer Yetzirah, i.e. the 4th century AD. Sefer HaRazim:

This is a book, from the Books of Mysteries, which was given to Noah....by Raziel the Angel before he entered the Ark. And Noah inscribed it upon a sapphire stone very distinctly, and he learned from it how to do wondrous deeds, and secrets of knowledge, and categories of understanding and thoughts of humility and concepts of counsel, to master the investigation of the strata of the heavens, to go about in all that is in their seven abodes, to observe all the zodiac signs, to examine the course of the sun, to explain the observations of the moon, and to know the paths of the great Bear, Orion, and Pleiades, to declare the names of the overseers of each and every firmament and the realms of their authority, and by what means they cause success in each thing, and what are the names of their attendants and what is to be poured out to them, and what is the proper time at which they will hear you so as to perform the requests of anyone who comes near them in purity.

Noah learned from it rituals which cause death and rituals that give life, to understand the evil and the good, to search out seasons and moments, to know the time to give birth and the time to die, the time to strike and the time to heal, to interpret dreams and visions, to arouse combat and to quiet wars, and to rule over spirits and demons and to send them so they will go out like servants, to watch the four winds of the earth, to be learned in the speech of thunderclaps, to tell the meaning of lightning flashes, to foretell what will happen each month or year, whether for plenty or for hunger, for harvest or for draught, for peace or for war, to be as one of the awesome ones and understand the songs of heaven.

Noah learned to construct the Ark from this book and kept it within in a golden cabinet, and later passed it down. It eventually reached Solomon, who became a master of it. Solomon attained to unparalleled wisdom in Torah, worldly knowledge, and magic. He commanded spirits and demons, and was a master of riddles and parables.

The secret knowledge of Kabbalah would be passed down to the prophets and then to the Rabbinic leaders of the people whose words were immortalized in the Mishna and Talmud. Although the Talmud contains hints at esoteric knowledge (*ma'aseh berieshit* and *ma'aseh merkavah*) as well as folk magic, the next books to appear making this knowledge openly available would be the *Sefer Yetzirah* (first to sixth century) and the works of Merkavah mysticism such as *Heichalot Rabbati* from the same time period. The Rabbis of the Talmud were said to study from the *Sefer Yetzirah*:

“What magic is permissible?” asks Masechet Sanhedrin (67a). “The kind performed by Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Oshaya, who spent every Erev Shabbat studying the Sefer Yetzirah, and by means of which they created a third-year calf and ate it.”

As an aside, this anecdote belies the idea that kosher magic would be done only, for instance, entirely selfless purposes. The Rabbis here use their precious knowledge to make themselves a good beef dinner. It is done, though, *lichvod Shabbat* (to honour Shabbat) so it is connected to a mitzvah. Seemingly kosher magic can bring oneself pleasure or make life easier, but should be in the service of a mitzvah.

Aside from Halachic pursuits, some Rabbis were using ecstatic and trance states to journey to the celestial realms and gain knowledge of the upper worlds and its angels. This pursuit was considered dangerous, and the Rabbis discoveries would shape the ongoing revelation of Kabbalah in the world. Other Rabbis wrote the *Shiur Komah*, a book revealing the esoteric symbolism of God’s “body” in a riot of mind-bending visualizations. One Talmudic Rabbi, R’

Nehuniah ben HaKana of the first century AD, wrote a very important mystical text further revealing secrets of Kabbalah called *Sefer HaBahir*, the Book of Brightness.

Rabbi Nehunia was the teacher of Rabbi Ishmael, who wrote *Heikhalot Rabbati* about the soul journeying of the Merkavah mystics into the celestial chambers of the heavens. R' Ishmael said R' Nehuniah had taught him of the heavenly chambers and the names of the angels who guarded their gates. Rabbi Nehuniah left us the prayer Ana B'Koach which is featured in Hasidic and Sefardic prayerbooks, and contains the 42 letter name of God, visualized while one recites it. It is usually said towards the end of all daily davening periods:

← SCANNING DIRECTION									
Removal of time, space and motion Removing the negative influence of physical matter from our lives Unconditional Love	אבג יתן	צְרוּרָה	תְּתִיר	יְמִינֶךָ	גְּדוּלַת	בְּכוּחַ	אָנָּה	חסד Chesed	1
Restricting the reactive system Closing the gates from Satan Forgetting all limited thoughts	קרע שטן	נֹרָא	טַהֲרֵנוּ	שַׁגְּבֵנוּ	עֲמֶךָ	רִנַּת	קָבֵל	גבורה Gevurah	2
Opening the channel of sustenance Retrieving the Light from the <i>Klipot</i> Removing hatred for no reason	נגד - יכע	שַׁמְרֵם	כְּבָבַת	יְחִידֶךָ	דֹּרְשֵׁי	גִּבּוֹר	נָא	תפארת Tiferet	3
The power to persevere	בטר צתג	גַּמְלֵם	תַּמִּיד	צִדְקָתֶךָ	רַחֲמֵי	טַהֲרֵם	בָּרַחֵם	נצח Netzach	4
Clairvoyance – to be able to see the connection between cause and effect To see the Big Picture	וזקב טנע	אֲדַתְךָ	נָהַל	טוּבְךָ	בְּרוּב	קָדוֹשׁ	וְזָסִין	תוד Hod	5
Spreading spirituality throughout the world, enlightening others particularly through Kabbalah	יגל פזק	קְדוּשַׁתְּךָ	זוֹכְרֵי	פְּנֵה	לְעַמְּךָ	גֵּאָה	יְחִיד	יסוד Yesod	6
The power to manifest things in the right way Renewal and restoration	שקו צית	תַּעֲלוּמוֹת	יֹדְעֵי	צִעֲקָתְנוּ	וּשְׁמַע	קָבֵל	שְׁוִעָתְנוּ	מלכות Malchut	7
וְעַד: לְעוֹלָם מַלְכוּתוֹ, כְּבוֹד שֵׁם בְּרוּךְ (בְּלִחְשׁ) va'ed le'olam malchuto kevod shem baruch (silently)									

The Sefer Bahir of Rabbi Nehuniah is more discursive and philosophical than other ancient Kabbalistic works, and less cryptic. It explains the Sefirot in detail for the first time, and also is the first to reveal the secret of reincarnation.

Another Talmudic Rabbi, Shimon Bar Yochai, was a great mystic who taught a circle of disciples. They wandered about ancient Roman Palestine having visions, delving into the secrets

of the Torah, and finding wisdom in conversations with surprising strangers. Their wisdom focused on the secret inner life of the divine and the ways of bringing divine blessing and Torah revelation into the world. They also understood the secrets of the Sitra Achra and the demonic forces of unholiness. Their secret wisdom would be passed down for centuries before finally being revealed to the wider world by Moshe de Leon in Spain in the 12th century. This became the books of the Zohar, which would remake the Kabbalistic tradition and have a huge impact on the Hasidic masters.

As knowledge of the secret tradition of Kabbalah gradually came to be known by the Jewish public in Medieval times, more and more Rabbis wrote about it openly- greats such as Isaac of Acco and Nachmanides.

The next great visionary of the Kabbalah was Isaac Luria (1534-1572), usually known as the Ari z"l. The Ari taught briefly but intensely, quickly becoming the leader of the Sfardic mystics of Sfat in the 16th century. The Ari taught in-depth about the secrets of the creation of this universe (and ones before it) and the process of world redemption, where Jews, by performing the magical-ritual actions of the mitzvot, would reunite lost sparks of divinity with their source and repair the broken cosmos. The Ari could see the past lives of his disciples and taught them of their process of soul-rectification. He wrote almost nothing, but his great disciple Chaim Vital (1543-1620) wrote them down in secret manuscripts which were eventually made public against his will.

By the time of the 18th century magical Kabbalah was common throughout the Jewish world, but the inner secrets of high esoteric Kabbalah were thought to be reserved for the Rabbinic elite. A baal shem (wonder worker, literally, "master of the divine name") from the Carpathian mountains would change all that when he fused the roles of baal shem, mekubal (kabbalist) and Rabbi in one, starting the Hasidic movement. Known as the Baal Shem Tov, he had journeyed to the celestial world to meet the waiting Messiah, who told him he would come when the Baal Shem spread the innermost Kabbalah outward to all Jews (or possibly to all humanity, depending on your interpretation).

The Baal Shem began teaching his students simple methods for yichudim (the use of divine names and letter combinations), ecstatic d'veyikut (union with the Holy One). He began training others to be tzadikim, meaning mediators between heaven and earth. His main disciple, the Maggid of Mezritch, ordered his teachings and showed their connections to the spectrum of Kabbalah, and had many disciples of his own. Though they met opposition from those who wished to reserve Kabbalah for the elite out of fear of misuse, the Hasidic movement conquered the religious Jews of Eastern Europe quickly.

Tragically much Kabbalah was lost in the Shoah, both masters and books, and today the tradition is still being reconstructed and renewed. Many, many secret books remain untranslated. The Hasidic movement has played a key role in teaching Kabbalah to Jews and non-Jews, and though we live in the time of “heels of Mashiach”, seemingly the low of the low, the work of the great Jewish magicians continues. Even in the dark, they continue to do deeds of light. Souls are healed, secrets revealed, and the rectification of the world moves ever closer.

In the last century, a revolution in Jewish Kabbalah-Magick has taken place with the Pheonix-like renewal of women's Kabbalah and Majick. Throughout much of Jewish history, as we shall discuss more later, women practiced folk magic, medicine craft, and “wise womanry” but were unable to study the mainstream Kabbalah or contribute directly to its revelation and development. In early times women were warriors, prophetesses and leaders, but with the rise of the centralized, Jerusalem based priesthood and its patriarchal, androcentric religious vision, women were gradually disempowered.

There were occasionally glimpses of feminine aspects of the divine- for example Hochmah as the divine daughter of YHVH, YHVH itself as a divine mother (as in the prophet Isaiah's vision) or the indwelling feminine divine presence in the world as the Shechinah. The Shechinah, first mentioned in the Talmud, gradually became a more important concept of divinity and was finally raised to a fundamental part of the Kabbalah in the medieval Zohar. Nevertheless, only when

Torah study was opened (or re-opened) to women in the latter half of the 20th century would women begin again, en masse, to shape the traditions of Kabbalah and Jewish Majick. We will return to that story in a later class.

Kosher Magic Exercise #1

For this exercise we will use the following chant either in Hebrew or English:

B'shem Havaya Elohei Israel

Mimini Micha'el

Mismo'li Gavri'el

U'mil'fanai Uri'el

U'me'achorai Refa'el

V'al roshi Scheenat El

בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיְמִינֵי מִיכָאֵל וּמִשְׁמָאלֵי גַבְרִיאֵל וּמִלְּפָנַי אֱוִרִיאֵל וּמֵאַחֲרָי רֵפָאֵל וְעַל רֵאשִׁי שְׁכִינַת אֵל.

In the name of YHVH, Source of Powers of Israel, on my right is Micha'el, on my left is Gavri'el, in front of me is Uri'el, behind me is Refa'el, and above my head is the Divine Presence (Shechinah).

The Four Archangels

Take some moments to settle your attention in the body and breath. Press your right fist to your heart and enclose it in your left. Imagine will gathering there. It becomes a point of light in the heart; it draws in the Or Ein Sof. The light slowly expands to a bubble which extends beyond

your skin and then beyond your body several feet in every direction. The four archangels exist energetically at the cardinal points; the Shechinah above.

The chant is done:

B'shem Havaya Elohei Israel

Mimini Micha'el

Mismo'li Gavri'el

U'mil'fanai Uri'el

U'me'achorai Refa'el

V'al roshi Scheenat El

בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיְמִינֵי מִיכָאֵל וּמִשְׁמָאלֵי גַבְרִיאֵל וּמִלְּפָנַי אוּרִיאֵל וּמֵאַחֲרַי רִפְאֵל וְעַל רֹאשִׁי שְׁכִינַת אֵל.

In the name of YHVH, Source of Powers of Israel, on my right is Micha'el, on my left is Gavri'el, in front of me is Uri'el, behind me is Refa'el, and above my head is the Divine Presence (Shechinah).

Picture the angelic presences collapse again into light in the heart, the ball of light dissolves. We sit in stillness.