

Embracing the Spiritual: The Integrative and Necessary Role of Kabbalah



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Introduction & Background Information

In the course of my doctorate studies under Dr. Leonard Sweet at Portland Seminary as well as the custom coursework focused on Jewish semiosis, I have diligently worked on studying Judaism and its comprehensive culture. In module one, I focused on Jewish history and culture. Module two examined the different subcultures of Judaism and its conclusion that for every group and culture on the planet there is a Jewish subset as well. Module three looked at the larger dissertational goal of building a bridge between Judaism and Christianity within a theological framework, establishing the leniency promoted by Aryeh Kaplan that non-Jewish Christians are a modern approach to the Noachide faith as long as the theological framework and missionary approach is adapted to be more compatible.¹ In this module, I have investigated the spiritual component of Judaism.

Judaism, especially Orthodox Judaism, has done an excellent job at promoting itself as a religious framework based on a people group, history, and scores of Seforim.² With five books of Torah, and over seventy-five books of Oral Torah to complement,³ there are still hundreds, if not thousands, of books that discuss the complexity of

¹ Aryeh Kaplan, Pinchas Stolper, and Berel Wein, *The Real Messiah?: A Jewish Response to Missionaries* (Toronto: Jews for Judaism, 2004); Jonathan Esterman, *Bridging the Gap: Finding Middle Ground in Judeo-Christian Expression* (Portland, OR: Portland Seminary, 2017).

² Hebrew for Jewish books. Seforim is the plural form of Sefer.

³ The Oral Torah has been codified and elucidated into the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli) and Jerusalem Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi). The main Talmud used in study today is the Talmud Bavli, which is based on the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah is the written form of the Oral Torah and the Gemara is the individual attributed to the discussion and interaction of the Mishnah with other contemporary sages.

Judaism and Jewish life. At the Portland Kollel in Portland, Oregon, several hundred books are on display, and Rabbi Tzvi Fischer once commented that all the knowledge contained in all the books at the Kollel represent less than ten percent of the totality of Jewish knowledge and study.⁴ Needless to say, Judaism is vastly complex and knowledgeable. The extent of halacha⁵ can seem overwhelming and infinitely detailed to the untrained eye. The downfall to the seemingly unending library of knowledge is the spiritual component can often be overlooked or ignored. Judaism is, at its core, a relationship with the Creator.

As has already been covered in prior works, Christianity's birth from Judaism makes it a prime comparison to better understand components of the ancient faith, despite the significant differences that clearly outline the two as different religions as people groups. The claim to having a relationship with something beyond humanity is not unique to Judaism, however, as both Judaism and Christianity advertise that their respective religious faith is a relationship with G-d.⁶ Christianity promotes this relationship has a spiritual nature to it, which is seen via its practice of prayer, worship, and devotion times. This can range from very conservative liturgical approaches to charismatic practices of faith healing and collapsing during worship. In comparison,

⁴ This statement in written form does not seem overly impressive, but having met and learned from Rabbi Fischer on numerous occasions, he can recite exact Tractates of Talmud that deal with any one issue. For example, can one grind pepper on Rosh Hashanah? He states what he thinks the ruling is, then pulls out the exact text that provides the ruling to confirm. From my experience, he has most likely forgotten more than most people have ever learned on Jewish law and practice.

⁵ Jewish Law

⁶ Name is abbreviated as a Jewish custom of respect.

Judaism is a closer match to Islam or Catholicism in its observance with set times for liturgical prayers and a clear outline without deviation on all services.⁷ One's personal prayer life is usually limited due to the different understanding of HaShem.⁸ To compensate for this, Kabbalah is the mystical end of Judaism in which one develops their personal relationship with HaShem via spiritual practices that include meditation and prayer. Kabbalah, however, is easy to misunderstand and view incorrectly. The term itself even comes with a negative connotation for many due to the variants of Kabbalah visible in Hollywood and elsewhere. Kabbalah as a whole has a negative stigma within Christian and yeshivish⁹ circles in due to the Hollywood version that is stripped of context and used as a gateway to new age spirituality. Within Orthodoxy, however, Kabbalah is a valid practice that retains Torah-based principles. For example, all modern observances of Shabbos¹⁰ are based in Kabbalah.¹¹ This essay will elucidate the topic of Kabbalah via examination to provide: (i) a review on Kabbalah, a brief history, and the different types, (ii) a clear definition of Kabbalah within the framework of

⁷ As this essay will examine and point out, the observances on davening (liturgical prayer) are not the whole of Jewish prayer. Davening reflects the modern replacement for the sacrifices in the Temple. Jewish prayer also includes personal

⁸ Hebrew, "The Name," a title of reverence.

⁹ In Orthodox Judaism, there are two main fields of approach and study: Yeshivish and Chassidism. Chassidism, or Hasidic Jews, focus on spirituality at the cost of study, while Yeshivish (those who attend Yeshiva, the Jewish seminary after high school) tend to focus on study at the cost of spirituality. While a holistic approach would be to find balance and harmony between the two fields, it is easier said than done.

¹⁰ Shabbat, Sabbath.

¹¹ The service to start Shabbat, "Kabbalat Shabbat," is the welcoming of the "Sabbath Queen" as a spirit of rest in the congregation.

Orthodox Judaism, (iii) an evaluation of the benefits and risks of Kabbalah praxis, (iv) a comparative analysis of Kabbalistic and Christian spiritual practices, and (v) a recommendation of Kabbalistic application in light of Christian praxis and thought.

Disclosure Regarding Lashon Hara

Within halacha, there is significant discussion on the matter of lashon hara. Lashon hara, in simplest terms, is “evil speech.” The Chafetz Chaim¹² discusses the avera¹³ at length to help one understand its complexity and issue. This essay is not the place for a detailed explanation but suffice it to say that a Torah-mandate¹⁴ is to avoid lashon hara and there are serious spiritual consequences for engaging in it. A general approach to the rules of lashon hara forbid the following: (i) speaking negatively about a Jewish individual, even if it is true, (ii) repeating anything about another without consent, regardless if it seems negative or positive,¹⁵ (iii) one may not listen to lashon hara or they are guilty of it as well, (iv) it is forbidden to believe any lashon hara, (v) one may not make a derogatory motion toward a Jewish individual, (vi) one may not retell a negative event, even without using names, if the listeners may be able to ascertain the identity of the individual, (vii) under certain circumstances sharing

¹² Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, *Chafetz Chaim* (1873).

¹³ Sin

¹⁴ Mitzvoth and prohibitions come from two sources: deoraisa (Torah obligation) and derabanan (rabbinic obligation). In cases where one is unsure of an action (such as forgetting a blessing), they are machmir (stringent) on deoraisa obligations and lenient on derabanan obligations (such as one would repeat a Torah blessing but not a rabbinic blessing if they do not recall if they said it already).

¹⁵ This is known as rechilut, or gossip.

negative information is permitted and required but due to the complexity of the situation one should consult a competent local Orthodox rabbi.¹⁶

The definition and clarification of lashon hara is given here due to the nature of the content of this essay. In the process of study, many sources on Kabbalah were consulted, both Jewish and non-Jewish. It is the goal of this essay to not report anything negative about an individual but to rather clarify which practices are biblically-based and consistent and which are not to provide a clear guide as to the proper role of Kabbalah within Orthodox Judaism. This essay will find practices that are beneficial in a variety of traditions and give a general recommendation on practice today. In keeping with the traditional approach regarding identifying valid sources within Orthodoxy, any source or practices discussed that do not find benefit and biblical basis will simply be identified as “not recommended” without specific identification as to the reason for not being recommended. It is up to the reader to evaluate this determination for themselves and consult a valid competent local Orthodox rabbi on matters of halacha or application to one’s own Jewish walk. I am not an Orthodox rabbi and cannot comment as if I am one – I can only provide guidance and feedback based off my education, experience, and research.

What is Kabbalah?

¹⁶ Aryeh Citron, "Laws of Lashon Hara," Chabad, accessed April 17, 2018.
https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/922039/jewish/Laws-of-Lashon-Hara.htm.

As Rabbi Eli Deutch explained in a class,¹⁷ Kabbalah, in simplest terms, is the “why” to the “hows” and “whats” of Judaism. From nothing, nothing comes. Nothing finite can create itself. These are not just platitudes from a Rabbi that lives in the Old Quarter in Jerusalem – they are scientific laws. So how did the world get started if it couldn’t create itself? There needs to have been a source of creation, something beyond finite. Simply put, Kabbalists call this source the Ein Sof, which means “no end” or “the infinite.” The Ein Sof, by nature, is not limited by time and space. It is not a blob, either. It is something more, something beyond. In our finite state, we are limited to our ability to study and understand something that transcends the limits of our own existence. Nonetheless, we try. The human attempt to understand the Ein Sof is religion, and the Ein Sof is commonly referred to as “G-d.” Kabbalah is nothing more than the Jewish attempt to understand and connect with this Infinite source.¹⁸ In Hebrew, Kabbalah means “to receive.” Kabbalah is related to *machpiel*.¹⁹ We learn from the parallel of the relationship in our lives to connect with the Infinite. Inter-relationships and study of relationships should be able to have principles that can apply to the Infinite. Kabbalah is about a deeper level of understanding of Torah.²⁰ Rabbi Deutch helps clarify with examples on *machpiel*:

“Think of a relationship you did not choose: parents. In a healthy situation, the parents will love the kids more than the kids love the parents. What do the

¹⁷ Rabbi Eli Deutch, *What Is Kabbalah and Why Should I Care?* (Portland, Oregon: 2017).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Parallel.

²⁰ Deutch.

parents do for the kid when it is born? Everything. What is the kid doing for the parent? Nothing. In the western world there is a screwed up understanding. The love we truly want is not about what we get, but what we give. We extend our identity toward that other and love the other like we love ourselves. Fast-forward: little kid grows up. Does Jacob want to get married at some point? Yes. Growing up, did your parents feed you? Clothe you? House you? Did you do anything to upset these people? Make them cry? Did parents still take care of you? Yes. Yes. And yes. Jacob leaves this primary relationship in life to a spouse where if he treats her how he treated his parents it would not work out well. So why do this? It seems fairly idiotic (leaving physical conditions and societal conditioning aside, looking only at emotional support and connection). Why make this choice? Under your own control? Little bit. There is something that this relationship offers that the parent relationship never could. In a health situation, the relationship with the parents is so stable that it is almost like it is not even there (loved and treated same regardless of how we behave). We transition from the stability of the parent relationship to the delicacy of the spousal relationship. The spousal relationship can be very good but also has the risk of going negative if not invested in correctly. Only when one can destroy a relationship is that choice a real choice. Thus free will.”²¹

There are two principles that Rabbi Deutch discusses to help propel the thought process forward. The first principle is that the idea that we are shooting for with the infinite is the spouse-like relationship. The second principle is the level of the relationship is going to depend on the lower of the two in the relationship.²² As a result, the finiteness of humanity limits the level of relationship to a finite status. Additionally, this is where the Jewish concept of mitzvot comes in.²³ Rabbi Deutch argues that we do not need to understand the rules themselves, only that obedience to these rules enhance the relationship. Thus, following Torah, regardless of how we feel or

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Following commandments. The word also has a dual function: it describes actions that one commits in obedience to draw one closer in relationship and status to the giver of the commandments. In this case, it would be HaShem.

understand it, we choose observance to grow closer and lack of observance to distance ourselves from G-d.

History and Traditions of Kabbalah

Kabbalah has existed within Judaism as long as Judaism itself has existed – it just has not always been called Kabbalah.²⁴ Kabbalah is nothing more than the received tradition of spirituality to connect to the Infinite (as has already been established).

Kabbalah is attributed to have originated with Avraham.^{25, 26} In fact, the first book on Kabbalah is attributed to Avraham: *Sefer Yetzirah*.²⁷ As with everything Jewish, there are different traditions of observance in Kabbalah. The main traditions practiced today are: Hasidism, Orthodox (non-Hasidic), Jewish Renewal, and secular popular (such as the Kabbalah Centre).²⁸ Hasidism was founded by the Baal Shem Tov in the early 18th century and is oriented around integrating Kabbalah into daily Jewish life. The main Hasidic group in existence today is Chabad.²⁹ While yeshivish typically disapprove of Chabad and Hasidism, there are many Kabbalistic practices within this movement that have a contemporary value. From personal experience, Chabad does great introducing a

²⁴ Rabbi Chanan Spivak, *Kabbalah Primer* (Portland, Oregon: 2018).

²⁵ Abraham

²⁶ Rabbi Nachman Breslov, *Outpouring of the Soul*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (Jerusalem, Israel: Breslov Research Institute, 1980).

²⁷ Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 1997), xii.

²⁸ Arthur Kurzweil, *Kabbalah for Dummies* (Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2007), 24-26.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

topic but does not dive deep in the topic, much like a kiddie pool, so their resources are excellent to begin learning but one should really develop connections to competent local Orthodox rabbis. Orthodox (non-Hasidic) is typically assumed to not study Kabbalah, but such is a result of the approach of discouraging Kabbalah learning among most. Some study Kabbalah, but many do not actively know much of Kabbalah, despite its integration into everyday Jewish practices.³⁰ That stated, there are some rabbis that excel in Kabbalah, but the notion of “danger” and “secrecy” is typically assumed by many, reserving Kabbalah for those well-learned and over forty years of age. Jewish Renewal is attributed to Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and was founded in 1962. Based in Chasidism, this approach seeks to renew Judaism instead of restoring it, matching Reform Judaism more than another other subset.³¹ This approach is contrary to Orthodoxy and would strain Christian acceptance as well. This approach is not recommended. The last tradition, the secular popular approach, is the one made popular by Hollywood icons and is based on Rabbi Philip Berg’s foundation of the Kabbalah Centre in 1969.³² A secular approach to Kabbalah is much like jumping into a deep pool without first learning how to swim. To engage in serious Kabbalistic study without having a firm foundation of Judaism is therefore not recommended. Even though many Jewish practices exist from Kabbalah, in these cases it is better to practice without understanding than it is to attempt to understand without wisdom.

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ Ibid., 25-26.

³² Ibid., 26.

Dangerous and Secretive

Kabbalah has historically been known as something dangerous and secretive. According to Rabbi Gadi Levy, there were two main Orthodox approaches to Kabbalah. One group viewed Kabbalah as dangerous while the other group did not. There are many anthropomorphisms found in Kabbalah, which is considered dangerous within Judaism since one must be careful in their understanding of HaShem. Thus, the first primary group was rather outspoken on the dangers of Kabbalah. The second group, the minority, did not voice objection to Kabbalah and did not bring argument on the topic, perhaps to avoid lashon hara.³³ Rabbi Deutch expands on what is meant by the “secrecy of Kabbalah:”

“Why is Kabbalah a secret? It’s not a secret in terms we are familiar with. Imagine a person in university and doing their thesis on the concept of love. Locked in dorm room and researches love throughout the ages. Sits there and puts thoughts together. After ten months, prints 300 pages and submits thesis: “What is love?” Goes out dorm room to submit to professor. As he’s walking across campus he meets a girl and falls in love. Reads through paper and chucks it in the fire. Why? What’s the problem? Looking back at the paper, the words were technically true but they don’t do justice to the experience he is experiencing. The external words do not do justice to the internal experience. Until he entered into the world and realm of love, he could write about it but still be on the outside. We can only understand it from the inside. Note: we can only understand Judaism by experiencing it. We learn Kabbalah by experiencing it since no one can tell one “the secret.”

The Kabbalist takes a theory and puts it into practice. Take from mind and put into matter. “The biggest distance is the distance from the head to the heart.” The childish view is the checklist. The more mature view is the relationship and life found in it that guides us to Yiddishkeit³⁴ and mitzvot observance.

³³ Rabbi Gadi Levy, *Kabbalah* (Portland, Oregon: Portland Kollel, 2017).

³⁴ Jewish cultural heritage.

So what are the Kabbalists? The concept of Kabbalah is a deeper level of understanding of the Torah. What does that mean? Simply, there is the story of the Jews in the land of Egypt. There's movies about it but the book is better. It's part of Jewish history. It's in the Torah. The Torah isn't here to teach us Jewish history. So why is it there? It teaches us teachings for our own lives. Another layer: Egypt in Hebrew means narrow borders or "that which is holding you back." Breaking out of Egypt is breaking free to the desert where there is nothing. We all have our own Egypts that hold us back. When we break free of these constrictions we find ourselves in a desert. A place of nothingness/openness (not the "openness" of the safe spaces on campus). From that place we are able to receive a new piece of information: when we are open to receive something. We have to all come to openness to receive new information to help us live in a way that is fulfilling and growth-oriented. So, Talmud & Kabbalah teaches PaRDES (four levels) which is different layers of understanding. Kabbalists seek to study the deeper layers via study and meditation, etc."³⁵

Modern Application of Kabbalah

There are many components to Kabbalah. The expansiveness of the topic prohibits a decent summary of every Kabbalistic practice. The main Orthodox application of Kabbalah today is its practical existence in the different components of daily Jewish life. That said, for Kabbalists there is much more. Kabbalah changes one's way of thinking and viewpoint of life as a whole. Mitzvoth are no longer just commandments but rather spiritual practices that has long-lasting impact.³⁶ In order to have a fuller understanding of how Kabbalistic living works, one must first know about the emanations of G-d.

The Sefirot

³⁵ Deutch.

³⁶ Esther G. Chasin, *Mitzvot as Spiritual Practices: A Jewish Guidebook for the Soul* (Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997).

Kabbalah teaches, and it is well accepted within Judaism, that there are ten emanations or manifestations of G-d, known as the Sefirot. It is by these ten Sefirot that one can travel, or transcend, from concealment to revelation. The Sefirot are: Keter (Crown), Chochmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding), Da'at (Knowledge), Chesed (Kindness), Gevurah (Strength), Tiferes (Beauty), Netzach (Victory), Hod (Splendor), Yesod (Foundation), and Malchus (Kingship).³⁷ Each Sefirah represents a different part of the tree of life (as well as the tree of knowledge of good and evil). It is through these Sefirot that one understands how HaShem works. For example, rain is given in response to prayer by HaShem extending Chesed to us and restraining Gevurah.³⁸ All the Sefirot must work in balance, however, or there would be chaos. Too much Chesed would result in flooding and too much Gevurah would result in drought. The Kabbalist looks at the impacts of each Sefirah and correlates them to units of measurement: time, distance, and direction. Additionally, depending on expressions, Sefirot could potentially be manipulated to accomplish great deeds such as the creation of the Golem.^{39, 40} Today's practices, however, are less magical and more spiritual.

Comparative Analysis

³⁷ Tamar Frankiel, *Kabbalah: A Brief Introduction for Christians* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), 26-27; Kaplan, 44-45.

³⁸ Gevurah is the keeper of Din, judgement, which is how HaShem disciplines.

³⁹ There was more than one Golem in history. The one cited here is an earlier version by Rava and Rav Zeira.

⁴⁰ Kaplan, xxi.

The spirituality of Judaism rests solely within Kabbalah. From an outsider's perspective, it can be viewed as witchcraft or magic and wholly inappropriate. There are some traditions that have this history and are not recommended practices. There are, however, plenty of practices that both Judaism and Christianity share that are valid and impossible without spirituality. Meditation is a modern Jewish practice that is rooted within Tefillah.⁴¹ Meditation is a touchy subject within Christianity as a result of Indian, Hindu, Wiccan, and secular practices. Jewishly-speaking, however, meditation can be accomplished via mindfulness, chanting, prayer, etc.⁴² Many of these have a Christian counterpart: *meditating* on a passage of Scripture such as a Psalm, finding silence in prayer to be closer to G-d, and repeating "scripted prayers" to bring one into a greater spiritual state. Prayer, Jewishly-speaking, is expressed in one of ten different ways:

Bitzur,⁴³ Shav'ah,⁴⁴ Tze'akah,⁴⁵ Ne'akah,⁴⁶ Rinah,⁴⁷ Pegi'ah,⁴⁸ Keri'ah,⁴⁹ Nipul,⁵⁰

⁴¹ Prayer

⁴² Breslov.

⁴³ Calling out in distress.

⁴⁴ Hysterical outcry.

⁴⁵ Wordless scream.

⁴⁶ Groaning.

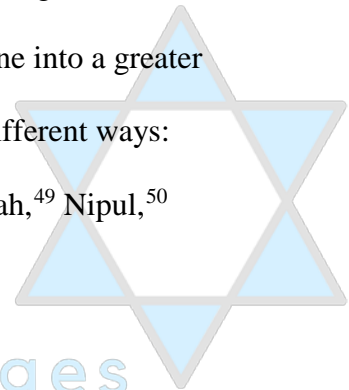
⁴⁷ Singing.

⁴⁸ Relentlessly entreating.

⁴⁹ Calling to.

⁵⁰ Throwing oneself down.

YidBrik
Building Jewish Bridges



Pulil,⁵¹ Tachunanim,⁵² Chilui,⁵³ Amidah,⁵⁴ and Itur.^{55, 56} While Christianity does not necessarily define these ten types as prayer, each of these types is also visible within contemporary Christian praxis such as worship music at a church, prayer groups, reading verses, altar calls, etc.

There are no doubt differences between Jewish and Christian praxis which help contribute to the existence of two different religions. It would behoove Christians, however, to learn more about Kabbalah and find meaning in their own spiritual practices.

Conclusion

Kabbalah is a large topic that requires years of study and diligence, which could be why it is a topic best reserved for those who are settled and ready for deeper study. Kabbalah is essential to Jewish spirituality in the past, present, and future. Kabbalah provides the Jewish individual with the attempt to connect to HaShem and having a relationship with G-d, which transcends the limitations of our own finite existence. Frequently misunderstood, Kabbalah is not paganism or witchcraft. Kabbalah is the path from human knowledge to divine wisdom and more. Kabbalah is a relevant Orthodox

⁵¹ Prayer.

⁵² Repentance; begging for grace.

⁵³ Making an appeal.

⁵⁴ Standing. The Amidah is also the Shemoneh Esrei.

⁵⁵ Beseeching repeatedly.

⁵⁶ Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, *Gates of Prayer: The Ten Terms of Tefillah* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2013).

practice that has practical application for both Jews and Christians. After all, Kabbalah is nothing more than the received tradition from Avraham, the first after a period that chose monotheism and to have a relationship beyond this temporary realm. Kabbalah permits us to learn from the greats before us and stand on the shoulders of giants in a hope to reach ever closer to the heavens.



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Appendix I: Practical Application Addendum

In the reading, field research, and active participation in this module's studies, it is clear that Kabbalah is misunderstood and inappropriately rejected by many. Kabbalah is the essence of Jewish spirituality, and as a result, the source of spirituality in all Judaic-based faiths.

It is negligent for the Christian to write off Jewish practice since Christianity originated from a Jewish sect. Additionally, according to Christian texts, Jesus was Jewish and observant. Thus, it would make sense for Christians to naturally engage roots of their faith. Further, to write off Kabbalah would subsequently deny the validity of any Jewish and/or Christian practice that is spiritual in nature. Without spirituality, there is no connection. Without connection, there is no life. Without life, there is no continuation of the movement or reason for existence.

How can one practically apply Kabbalah? It's rather simple, really. Prayer is the most common application of Kabbalah. There are many levels to Kabbalah and a near-infinite amount of credible sources to read and learn from. In my experience, credibility is the greatest struggle. In the process of writing this essay, I encountered numerous sources I would not personally consider for my studies. Based on the advice of Rabbi Gadi Levy and Rabbi Kenneth Brodtkin, I would recommend works by Aryeh Kaplan, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, Rabbi Nachman Breslov, and Rabbi Dressler. These are solid Orthodox sources that do not stray from basic Torah practice. *Sefer Yetzirah* is a foundational read, as well as the *Zohar*, however both of those texts are quite advanced. To learn how to think Kabbalistically, one must first learn the basics and interact with Kabbalists regularly. Luzzato's work, *Derech*

HaShem, gives the Jewish foundations of everything, and as a result, Kabbalah as well.

Rabbi Eli Deutch has a WhatsApp podcast that provides daily thoughts from a Kabbalist. The first step in learning is becoming literate on the subject.

For those committed to the approach, there are also practices one can implement to help grow their spirituality while learning at the same time. Prayer being already addressed, meditation is an excellence step. Breslov's work, *Outpouring of the Soul*, is a great short read to guide one in the different forms of meditation. Kaplan also has several works on meditation that help expand and educate on the topic while having one apply the lessons during their learning process. After one spends considerable time with the basics, advancing to the foundational texts is helpful but also caution must be heeded: there is a lot in the texts that, from personal experience, need a good local Orthodox rabbi for guidance so one does not veer off-course. Judaism is not lived in a bubble but rather a community. There is a Jewish warning to not learn alone. When one does not have an active study partner, their *yetzer hara*⁵⁷ becomes their study partner, and that is not something I would advise, especially with Kabbalah.

⁵⁷ Evil Inclination; Jewish view of a sin nature.