



# **The Cabala, its influence on Judaism and Christianity & The Guide for the Perplexed**

*Moses Maimonides , Bernhard Pick*

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The Cabala, its influence on Judaism and Christianity.

Author:Bernhard Pick

This is a short monograph on the Kabbalah, written from a purely academic and somewhat critical point of view. The literature about the Kabbalah in the public domain in English is very limited. Most of the key texts and scholarly studies are in Hebrew, German, and other languages. So this well-crafted review of the literature is a real find.

Pick traces the origins and background of the Kabbalah to Jewish scholars of mediaeval Spain. He does not attribute any deeper roots to it historically, nor does he examine the roots of Jewish mysticism except for a brief mention of the Merkabah. Pick represents the Kabbalah as a backlash to the rationalism of Maimonides. He also discusses it as if it were purely of historical interest, ignoring the ongoing and lively popular interest in this belief system even in his day.

Pick provides a dissenting view to much of the uncritical literature produced at the turn of the 20th century by more mystically inclined authors, and as such is worth reading to get a more rounded view of the subject. If you are looking for an introduction to the subject written by an advocate of the Kabbalah, it might be better to start with some of the other books on the subject available at this site. But if you need a starting point for further academic study, this is a good place to begin.

The Guide for the Perplexed

by Moses Maimonides

translated by M. Friedländer

Maimonides' masterful summation of theology, natural philosophy and divine law.

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There is a saying that the history of Jewish doctrine goes runs from 'Moses to Moses'; the second of which is Moses Maimonides. Maimonides (1120-1190) was a brilliant Hispanic Jewish scholar who lived in Spain and Egypt in the 12th century. In addition to being a philosopher, Maimonides also worked as a medical doctor. The Guide for the Perplexed, originally written in Arabic, and soon translated into Hebrew and widely read, is his best known work. The framing story is that it is a letter written to one of his students, to prepare him to understand the background of the Merkabah (the Chariot of Ezekiel) narrative. In the course of this, Maimonides delves into the most difficult questions of theology and reality itself, many of which are still controversial today. Did the universe have a beginning? Will it ever end? What is the nature of evil? Does the complexity of organic life imply some kind of rational design?

The Guide consists of three books. The first book deals with the nature of God, concluding that God cannot be described in positive terms. He uses this argument to systematically deconstruct the Islamic Kalam literalist school of thought, which anthropomorphized God. The second book examines natural philosophy, particularly Aristotle's system of concentric spheres, and theories of the creation and duration of the universe, and the theory of angels and prophecy. In the last Book, he expounds the mystical Merkabah section of Ezekiel, skirting the traditional prohibition of direct explanation of this passage. After this he covers the 613 laws of the Pentateuch, organized into 14 branches, attempting to present rational explanations for each law. Throughout, Maimonides stresses that the student needs to consider all theories.

He draws from Jewish, Islamic and ancient Greek philosophers, and evaluates each one on their merits. Most notably, he scrutinizes Aristotle's natural science in the light of scripture and physical evidence--sometimes critically, foreshadowing the spirit of the Renaissance. The seed of the scientific method is also present in his discussion of permitted cures (p. 335), reflecting his medical background: "the Law permits as medicine everything that has been verified by experiment." Controversial when it was written, the Guide continues to be a key reference point in the evolution of philosophy, a

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