

Kabbalah - A Very Short Introduction by Joseph Dan.
OUP 2006.

Kabbalah, thanks to the interest of 'celebrities', is a much bandied around word these days. Yet understanding of what Kabbalah REALLY comprises is much more restricted. Thanks to this book that position may now change.

Joseph Dan is the Gershom Scholem Professor of Kabbalah at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and as such is one of the world's most renowned experts on the subject. In view of the complexities of Jewish mysticism, a very short introduction of 130 pages might be expected to do little more than scratch the surface, and it is testimony to Professor Dan's scholarship and excellent style that he achieves much more than might be imagined.

The book is divided into 9 short chapters, explaining the meanings of the term Kabbalah and the ancient origins of Jewish mysticism before tracing the history of its development through the Middle Ages, taking in Jewish messianism and culminating in its manifestation in modern Hasidism. The final chapter is concerned with the synergy between Kabbalah and new age 'religion', in which guise the essence of true Kabbalah is so frequently traduced. Dan also illuminates the way Kabbalah was swallowed by Christianity at the end of the fifteenth century and then evolved into a specific Christian as well as a Jewish phenomenon.

For a short book this packs a mighty punch and will be a delight for all students of the truth as well as those with a more than passing interest in Jewish mysticism.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh