

## Isaac Luria

Isaac Luria (1534-1572) developed a profoundly personal and esoteric Kabbalistic vision, which wrapped Jewish and Jewish/Sufi ideas in with his own novel conceptions. Born in Jerusalem to German and Polish Jewish parents, Isaac Luria was orphaned at an early age, whereupon he moved to Egypt, where he was raised and educated by an uncle. Attracted as a youth to the ways of the mystics, he proceeded to spend 13 years living as a hermit on a small island in the middle of the Nile River, studying the *Zohar*. He made his way to Safed, in the Holy Land in 1569, eventually gathering a group of students and impressing his ideas upon them in the two short years before his death. His followers there regarded him with such respect that they considered him a forerunner of the Messiah and a performer of miracles.

Luria himself borrowed many of his concepts from his contemporary, the Sufi-inspired Kabbalist, Moshe Cordovero. Through the teachings of Cordovero, and his own ideas, he continued to solidify the important position of the Sufi meditation techniques as central to Jewish prayer. He is quoted in the book of one of his followers as stating: “Solitary prayer is helpful to the soul seven times more than study.” This valuation of meditation clearly reflects the Sufi appreciation for that practice – and runs counter to the ancient Jewish tradition of finding God through study and intellectual wisdom. Luria’s statement also resembles a saying attributed to the Sufi as-Suhrawardi, who said “contemplation for one hour is better than ritual worship for a whole year.”

Luria also took the Sufi-inspired idea concerning man as microcosm of the macrocosmic God, to its furthest philosophical implications. He personalized the Sufi idea that humans are

microcosmic representations of God by completely enshrouding it in Jewish lore, rendering it a vital Jewish mystical response to this bizarre world in which we find ourselves.