

Moses de Leon

Moses de Leon (1250-1305) was a Spanish Jew and redactor of the most important Kabbalistic tract of the middle ages, the *Zohar*. For a period of several medieval centuries, the *Zohar* ranked with the Bible and the Talmud as one of the canonical Jewish texts. His specific influences – well hidden beneath the double-talk, historical allusions and mystical patina of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai's (c. 150) circle (into whose mouth de Leon had put his novel ideas) – included many Sufi influenced Jews such as Abraham Ibn Ezra, Moses Maimonides, Judah Halevi, Bahya Ibn Pakuda, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, as well as the Sufis themselves.

Indeed, Sufi scholar, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) presaged many of the ideas that became central to the *Zohar*. Specifically, both Ibn Arabi and de Leon: Used the same mystical imagery to limn the spiritual quest; considered mystical revelation as superior to all other oral religious tradition; continued to develop a system whereby letters and numbers had mystical values; believed that dreams offered a window into the shrouded mystery of death – and spiritual realization and believed that creation took place from a point emanating from the Infinite (herein lay the genesis of the Kabbalistic idea of the Tree of Life).

De Leon even went so far as to utilize ideas from some of the most important myths surrounding Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, to expound on the *Jewish* mystical ideal! Ultimately, the *Zohar* threaded Sufi inspired ideas into its 2400 pages from a variety of sources, some of them authentically Islamic, and others via Sufi-inspired Jews. By the time of de Leon's writing, Sufism had become so endemic to Jewish mysticism – and the burgeoning Kabbalistic system – that it would be impossible to continue developing the new Jewish spiritual path *without*

touching on Sufi precursors. Through de Leon's tract, Sufism filtered even deeper into medieval Jewish mysticism.