

Great Controversies



**A Changing World
1500's - 1700's**

**Kabbalists and
Rationalists**

**Rabbi Asher
Yablok**

**Monday
1/13/14**

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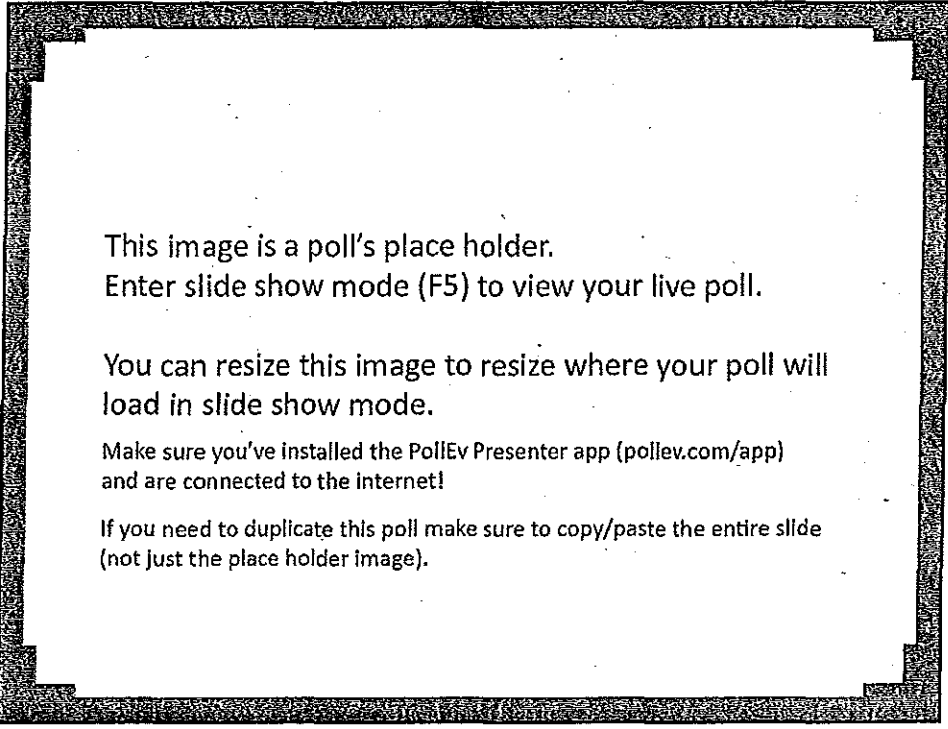
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KABBALISTS VS. RATIONALISTS

Rabbi Asher Yablok
Shimon Shlomo & Margalit Ovadia Great
Controversies in Jewish History

Beth Jacob Atlanta
January 13, 2014

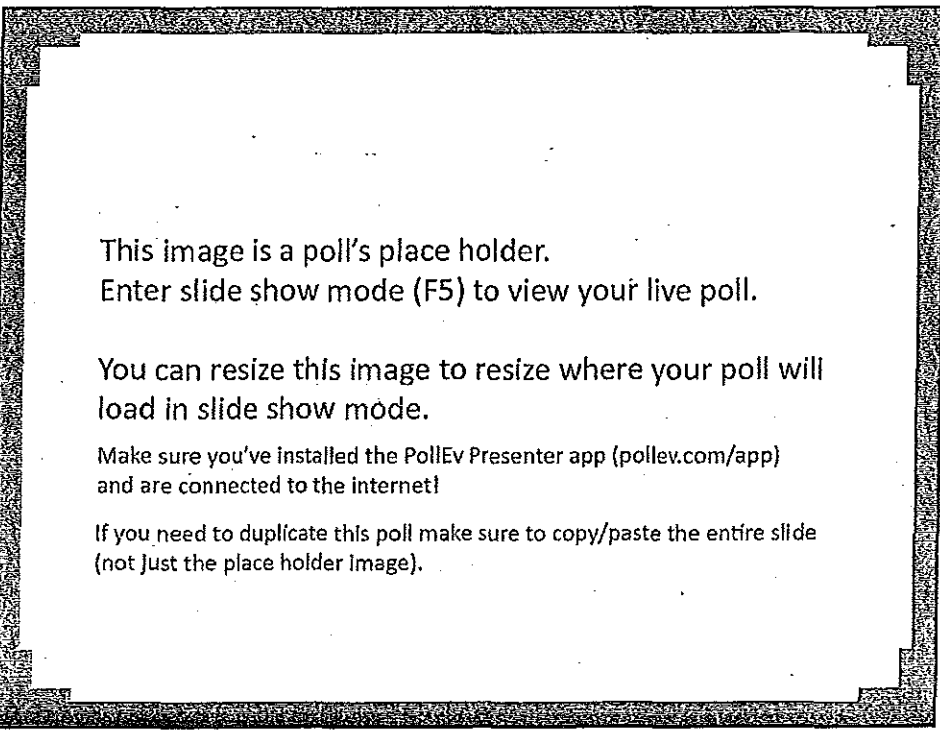


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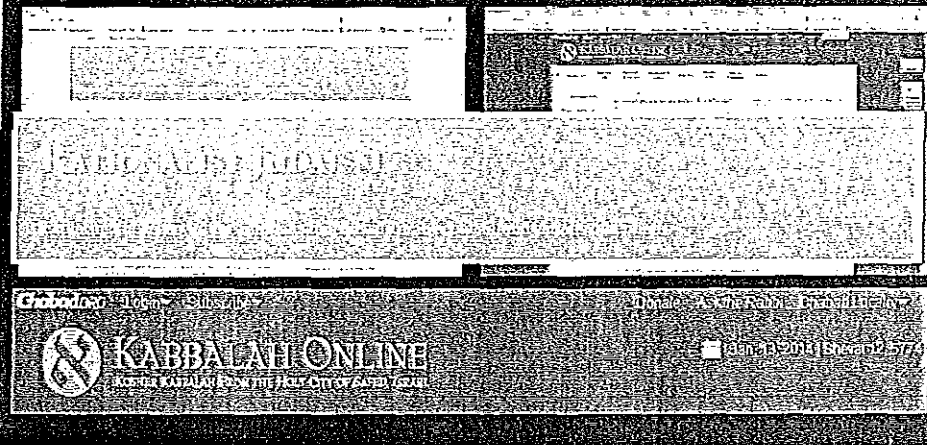
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DUAL NATURE OF MAN

בראשית פרק ב פסוק ז
וַיִּצַר יְהוָה אֱלֹקִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עֹפָר מִן-הָאָדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח
בְּאַפָּיו, נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.

Genesis Chapter 2 Verse 7
The LORD G-d formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

NOT JUST JEWISH HISTORY



GOALS FOR THIS EVENING:

- To identify and describe the difference of opinion between Kabbalists and Rationalists in their historical context.
- To apply our understanding of the two camps to contemporary Jewish life.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Maimonidean Controversy

- Physical revival of the dead
- Life after death
- The world to come
- Reason for mitzvah performance



Who won?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT (CONT.)

Rabbi Berel Wein:

"Because of such attacks on the works of the Rambam, there were those who now attempted to substitute Kabbalistic mysticism for the prevalent philosophical rationalism of Jewish Spain and parts of Provence...

...an open battle about the role of Kabbalah in Jewish life erupted in the 13th and 14th centuries and, though it would abate for long periods of time, there always existed a tension within Israel about public study of Kabbalah and mysticism"

(Harold of Destiny, p. 229)

DEFINITIONS:

Rationalists:

- Believe that knowledge is legitimately obtained by man via his reasoning and senses, and should preferably be based upon evidence or reason rather than faith, especially for far-fetched claims.
- Value a naturalistic rather than supernatural interpretation of events, and perceive a consistent natural order over history – past, present and future. They tend to minimize the number of supernatural entities and forces.
- Understand the purpose of mitzvos, and one's religious life in general, primarily (or solely) as furthering intellectual/moral goals for the individual and society.

<http://www.rationalistjudaism.com/2010/09/rationalist-vs-mystical-judaism.html>

DEFINITIONS:

Kabbalists:

- Are skeptical of the ability of the human mind to arrive at truths, and prefer to base knowledge on revelation, or – for those who are not avowed of revelation – on faith in those who do experience revelation.
- Prefer miracles, and believe them to be especially dominant in ancient history and the future messianic era. They tend to maximize the number of supernatural entities and forces.
- See mitzvos as primarily performing mechanistic manipulations of spiritual or celestial forces, with their reasons being rather to accomplish this or ultimately incomprehensible.

<http://www.rationalistjudaism.com/2010/09/rationalist-vs-mystical-judaism.html>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT (CONT.)

Rationalists:

- Rambam – Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204)
- Rabbag – Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344)
- Rivash – Isaac ben Sheshet Perfet (1326 – 1408)
- Hasdai ben Judah Crescas (1340-1411)
- Joseph Albo (1380–1444)
- Isaac ben Judah Abrabanel (1437–1508)

Kabbalists:

- Ramban – Moshe Ben Nachman (1194–1270)
- Bahye ben Asher – (1255-1340)
- “ARI” – Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534–1572)
- Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575)
- Maharal – Judah Loew ben Bezalel (c. 1520–1609)

APPLICATION

Interpretation of the Torah

Abraham's three guests:

- Rambam: Vision
- Ramban: Actual experience

Jacob's struggle with mysterious figure

Commentary of Ramban to Gen. 18:1

APPLICATION

Life Cycle Events

Exile

- Rationalist: unfortunate consequence
- Kabbalist: Opportunity

Illness

APPLICATION

The end of days:

- Rambam: allegorical
- Ramban: actual

Gan Eden