

Philip Berg (1929-2013)

Philip Berg, the founder and "spiritual leader" of the contemporary →Kabbalah Centre, was born as Shraga Feival Gruberger in 1929 in Williamsburg, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. His father, who immigrated to the U.S. from the Ukraine, settled with his family in the Orthodox Jewish and Hasidic environment of Brooklyn, where Philip Berg grew up. Philip Berg studied at the Beth Medrash Govoha Yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey and received his Rabbinic ordination at the Torah VaDaat Yeshiva in Williamsburg in 1951. He changed his name to Philip Berg when he started working as an insurance agent.

In 1953 he married his first wife, Rivka Brandwein, with whom he had eight children. In the early 1960s Berg visited Israel where he met his wife's uncle, Yehuda Zvi Brandwein (1903-1969), in Tel Aviv. Brandwein was one of the students of Yehuda Ashlag (1885–1954), an important Kabbalist of the twentieth century, and the leader of a small Hasidic group called Haside Stratin. Berg proceeded to study Kabbalah with Y. Z. Brandwein and Levi Krakovsky (1891-1966), another disciple of Ashlag.

In 1965 he founded the National Institute for Research in Kabbalah in New York, which was the precursor for the international Kabbalah Centre. After Brandwein's death in 1969 Berg claimed to be the successor of Brandwein's school, the Yeshivat Kol Yehuda. In 1970 he changed the name of the National Institute for Research in Kabbalah into Research Centre of Kabbalah and designated himself President. Berg published kabbalistic texts by Ashlag and Krakovsky (who died in 1966). In the 1970s he edited some books and wrote some prefaces.

Together with his second wife Karen Mulchin (→Karen Berg), whom he married in 1971, he moved to Israel where he organized Kabbalah study groups, attracting an audience of secular Jews. In Berg's version of Kabbalah students found a combination of Judaism, Ashlagian Kabbalistic ideas, and →New Age thought. In 1981 Philip and Karen Berg returned to the USA with their two sons, Yehuda (b. 1972) and Michael (b. 1973). They set up residence in a large house in Queens, New York, from where they launched the teaching of Kabbalah throughout North America. From that time onwards, Kabbalah Centre offices were opened in different cities in the US, Canada, and eventually all around the globe. Berg started to publish his own kabbalistic writings, in which he developed a popularized and modified version of Ashlag's Kabbalah. Berg's books include *The Essential Zohar* (2004), *The Kabbalah Connection* (1999), *Energy of the Hebrew Letters* (2010), *Immortality* (2007), *Kabbalistic Astrology* (2006), *Wheels of a Soul* (2005), *Taming Chaos* (2010), *Education of a Kabbalist* (2004), and many more.

As director of the international Kabbalah Centre Philip Berg had the highest position in the organisation's spiritual hierarchy. After his stroke in 2004, his wife Karen became the new director. Nonetheless, Philip Berg remained the "spiritual leader" of the Kabbalah Centre until his death in 2013.

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