

לא יכוון המקריב ולא יעלה במחשבתו רק לשם המיוחד': ביקורת הקבלה במשנתו של ר' משה בן נחמן

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Abstract

Kabbalah has included directives on the proper forms of prayer intentions (*kavvanot*) since the earliest appearance of the historical Kabbalah in the Middle Ages. For example, we know very little about the world of Kabbalists in twelfth-century Provence, but the little we do know is related to the *kavvanot*.

In the same period that these discussions were occurring in Provence, we find fierce opposition there to the use of such techniques, at times as part of a broader reaction against the Kabbalah as a whole. The best-known critique of the Kabbalah in Provence was leveled by R. Meir ben Shimon of Narbonne, reflecting the viewpoint of an outsider. In this study, I will discuss a critique similar to Meir ben Shimon's, but originating from within the Kabbalistic community itself. Such a critical stance can be found—surprisingly—in the teachings of the most famous Kabbalist of the thirteenth century: Moses Nahmanides. This article uncovers Nahmanides' attitude as it was reflected in his writings and focuses specifically on his well-known Kabbalistic explanation of the reason for the sacrifices (Lev. 1:9). I claim that while Nahmanides agreed with his colleagues that by utilizing the power of the commandments it is possible to affect the realm of the *sefirot* and harness it for one's own benefit, it is forbidden to turn to the *sefirot* themselves. Therefore, while performing the act of sacrifice, the priest is required to ignore this power and focus his intention solely on the one and only God, who stands above everything. Through this approach, Nahmanides was able to lay the foundation for a traditional Kabbalistic consciousness that was nonetheless moderate and humble, and which could be defined as “orthodox Kabbalah.”