

IN CASE YOU'RE CURIOUS . . .

The ancient history behind

THE BOOK OF NAMES

The Book of Names, a listing of the names of all creatures, was written by the biblical Adam. He passed down through his sons and it eventually ended up in the hands of Moses, the leader of the Jewish people →

Whose brother, Aaron, was the High Priest. Aaron wore a special garment, **The Breastplate of the High Priest**, when he entered the Temple's Holy of Holies. The breastplate was adorned with twelve magical stones, one representing each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel →

To whom God gave **The Torah**, via Moses, on Mt. Sinai. The Torah is the Jewish bible, the five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Torah led to →

The Talmud, which is the main body of Jewish religious writings -- a collection of scholarly writings by hundreds of Jewish sages. It includes 63 tractates (volumes) of Jewish law, history, philosophy, moral teachings and legends. And The Torah also led to →

The Zohar, which is a book written in the 13th century which sets down in writing the principles of Kabbalah. It is the classic work on the Torah's hidden lore and mysticism, explaining →

Kabbalah, which is the popular term for Jewish mysticism, and the Hebrew word that means "to receive." From earliest times, its secret teachings and meditations on the mystery of the Torah were passed down orally. Kabbalah employs →

Gematria, which is Jewish numerology. Each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet has a corresponding number. Viewed as numbers, Hebrew words can be compared and contrasted with other Hebrew words to find correlations and mystical meanings. A perfect example of Gematria is the name of →

The Lamed Vovniks, who are the 36 righteous souls for whom, the Talmud says, God continues to keep the world in existence. (Lamed and Vov are the Hebrew letters used to write the number 36.) Unknown to everyone, even to themselves, the Lamed Vovniks are so vital to the world that if even one of them were killed, the world would begin to spin out of balance. The Gnosteos, who want to kill the Lamed Vovniks to end the world, is our fictional evil sect descended from →

Gnosticism, which is an ancient religious movement that employed passwords and secret handshakes and originated in the first few centuries A.D. It takes its name from the Greek "gnostikos" – one who has "gnosis" or secret knowledge.

THE BOOK OF NAMES

Q&A with Jill Gregory and Karen Tintori

Q: What was your inspiration for THE BOOK OF NAMES?

We have been fascinated by the concept of the Lamed Vovniks (the “Hidden Ones”) since we first learned about them fourteen years ago while Karen was in an adult bat mitzvah class. The Talmud says that in every generation there are 36 righteous souls on whose merit alone God continues to keep the world in existence and if even one of them were killed, the world would begin to spin out of balance.

Each of us has long been intrigued by Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism. From the time we learned of the Lamed Vovniks, we were convinced their importance to the world would be a superb premise for a thriller. However, we were stymied in developing a plot because no one knows the identities of the Lamed Vovniks -- not even the Lamed Vovniks themselves. So how would our villains know who they must target for death, and our heroes identify who they needed to save?

Two years ago we decided we had to tell this story and put all of our efforts into overcoming this plotting dilemma. We came up with an exciting solution that launched THE BOOK OF NAMES.

Q: What is THE BOOK OF NAMES about, from your perspective as the authors?

This thriller is about a race to save the world from the Gnoseos -- a sect of the pre-Christian Gnostics -- who are bent on destroying the world to triumph over God. It is about Professor David Shepherd, who doesn't believe in Jewish mysticism, but who, due to a near-death childhood accident, holds the key to saving the Lamed Vovniks and thereby the world. His involvement becomes desperately personal when his step-daughter's name is discovered to be one of the 36 endangered Lamed Vovniks on the Gnoseos' hit list.

With the help of Yael HarPaz, a beautiful Israeli ancient texts researcher, David must elude Gnoseos assassins pursuing him from Washington, D.C. to New York, to the mystical Israeli city of Safed, and then to London, as he struggles to crack the secrets encoded in an ancient holy scroll. With 33 of the 36 Lamed Vovniks already dead, David's running out of time -- and so is the world.

Q: What's this about a connection between Kabbalah and Tarot?

The tarot deck was patterned after the Kabbalah's Tree of Life. A nineteenth century French occultist named Eliphas Levi was the first to explore the similarities between the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which make up the pathways on the Tree of Life, and the 22 tarot cards that make up the Major Arcana. Also, just as there are ten Sephirot in the Tree of Life, there are ten numbered cards in each suit of the tarot's Minor Arcana.

Q: Is gematria an active part of Judaism today?

Absolutely, and it will always be so, even if some people aren't aware of it. Since the characters of the Hebrew alphabet also serve as Hebrew numbers, words and numbers intertwine in subtle ways. For example, many Jews give charity in multiples of \$18, such as \$36, \$72. Why? Because the Hebrew letters that represent the number 18 also spell out the word "chai," which means "life."

You might better understand how gematria works if you text message with your cellphone. The same principle applies – the telephone keypad groups letters of the English alphabet with numbers. If you want to type the word "home," you use the numbers 4-6-6-3. The same numbers, however, also spell out "good," "gone," "hood," and a list of other words.

The kabbalists look at words like these, which have the same numerical value, and search out mystical connections between them.

Type in 2-6-6-5 and the first two words you can choose from are "book," and "cool." You don't need to be a mystic to conclude that "cool book" refers to THE BOOK OF NAMES.

Q: What kind of research did you do for the book?

We did extensive reading on the Kabbalah, gematria (Jewish numerology), the Tarot, the Gnostics, the breastplate of Aaron the High Priest (Moses' brother), the mystics of Safed and the city itself, and the unused tunnels beneath the city of London. We also took a Sunday morning introductory class on Kabbalah to supplement our independent research.

We both have visited London, New York and D.C, and Karen has also been to Safed.

Q: How do you work together? Do you split up chapters? Does one write, the other polish?

We plot and write our books together, seated side by side at the computer, alternating each day who sits at the keyboard. We have been best friends for 25 years and writing partners for 17 years. We finish each others' sentences, our brains are in sync (a scary thought) and we write every line together. Sometimes, we call or email each other at midnight (or later) when we come up with an idea or plot twist.

Q: How did the two of you meet and become friends?

Twenty-five years ago, when Karen's son and Jill's daughter were in mother-toddler class together and always greeted each other in class by kissing on the lips, we decided we needed to be friends in case we eventually ended up in-laws. Though it didn't work out that way, our friendship remained steady throughout the years.

Just as no one really knows the identities of the Lamed Vovniks, we had no idea that we were destined to write this book together. We didn't even know we were both writers for several years and began our first collaboration thanks to questions our kids asked us about God and Judaism.

Q: What do you like to do when you're not writing?

We both love to read, but have precious little time to read merely for pleasure these days. Most of our reading is for research.

Jill enjoys walking, movies, theater, surfing the Net, and travel.

Karen paints on silk, is active in her synagogue, enjoys international travel, cooking and entertaining.