The Zohar teaches that Genesis presents the revelation of parallel universes, a notion that has only recently been confirmed by science. It has taken some 2,000 years for science to catch up to what Kabbalah had known all along! (Berg, P., 2003: XXXIII).

For some reason, the hypothetical multiverses and hyperdimensions of modern physics, which remain purely theoretical, are accepted by science, while the experiential reports of mystics throughout the ages of transcendent (i.e. supernatural) realities are dismissed or ignored (Haisch, 2009: 37).

“Nobody asks when physics started; it has always been there. It’s the same with Kabbalah. The work of the Kabbalist consists in discovering the rules which govern the world we live in”. The rabbi lets his gaze wander over the group of potential new students who have turned up for the Kabbalah Centre’s free introductory lecture at the Centro Cultural San Martín in Buenos Aires. His Spanish is steady, though now and then he searches for the correct words; the accent reveals an Israeli background, mixed with the characteristic Buenos Aires jargon. His tall stature, a greyish beard, the Jewish kippah and a firm, yet mild, voice give him an air of authority and wisdom, but rarely in an intimidating way. “2000 years ago”, he continues, “the Zohar stated that the world is round like a ball and that people live on the lower side but do not fall down. And if you walk into the Trinity College in Cambridge, you

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1 I am grateful to John Chr. Knudsen, Margit Ystanes, Kristine S. Fauske, Thomas Mountjoy and Kathinka Frøystad for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.
2 Skullcap.
3 The Zohar, the Book of Splendour, is an Aramaic text, accredited by the Kabbalah Centre to Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, who lived in Palestine during the first and second century CE. It constitutes the principal Kabbalistic text and contains interpretations of the codes and metaphors hidden in the Torah.
can see Isaac Newton’s Latin translation of this central Kabbalistic text. It is said that he spent more time studying this than anything else”. This information usually has an impressing effect on the audience who are about to be introduced to the secrets of life; well-selected pieces of information that awaken the modern appetite for mysticism.

The Buenos Aires Kabbalah Centre is one out of 25 local Centres which form part of the transnational Kabbalah Learning Centre, and was established formally in 2001 with the arrival of a rabbi from the Centre in Chile. The Centre has since then experienced increasing popularity among the middle and upper middle classes of the Argentine capital, but also dramatic reorganisation. During my fieldwork, over three periods between 2007 and 2009, there was an air of optimism in the Buenos Aires Centre, both leaders and students spoke of expansion and the possibility of reaching status as Latin America’s most important Kabbalah Centre, and in early 2009 new teachers arrived in order to broaden the course schedule. In 2010, however, the situation was quite different; the leaders and teachers had been transferred to more promising communities in Miami and Panama, and the Buenos Aires students were left managing the Centre through virtual classes and considerably reduced resources.

During my fieldwork, I heard a number of references to science; as parallels and explanatory metaphors in the courses and in the books, or sometimes merely as curious digressions. The Kabbalah Centre International’s spiritual leader Philip Berg has shown a passionate interest in science since the start and is convinced of the scientific validity of the Kabbalistic knowledge. “From his earliest writings, he explained that the Zohar and other Kabbalistic writings constitute the most complete scientific textbook in existence, containing the information necessary for understanding the root causes for the functioning of the physical world” (Myers, 2007: 105).

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4 The number of Centres varies due to local circumstances. In December 2009 there were ten Centres in the US, as well as centres in Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Germany, Poland, UK, Israel, Russia and the Ivory Coast (http://www.kabbalah.com/16.php).

5 The Kabbalah Learning Centre is lead by Philip Berg, his wife Karen and their sons Yehuda and Michael, and has its main location in Los Angeles.

6 The Centre in Santiago de Chile was later closed due to internal differences, but an active study group still carries out gatherings and classes in improvised locations.