



The World of Kabbalah

Revealing How Its Mystical
Secrets Relate to You

JLI FLAGSHIP COURSE
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What is Kabbalah? What are its core concepts?

How do they apply in real life?

Many Jews searching for spirituality are intrigued by Kabbalah. They wonder if the centuries-old esoteric study can illuminate some of their ontological questions or contemplative thoughts.

The cryptic language in the formative works of Kabbalah makes its secrets nearly indecipherable to the uninitiated. *The World of Kabbalah*, a six-week adult education course, introduces key terms and concepts to open the door to study further.

The course will initiate participants to the *seder hishtalshelut*—the Kabbalistic chain of worlds that bridge the initial Divine creative impulse with the material world, from the infinity of *Ein Sof*, through the process of *tzimtzum*, constriction, to the ten Divine emanations, or *sefirot*. The course will introduce the chaos of the worlds of *Tohu* and their reparation, *tikkun*, and finally, *Atzmut*, essence, as discussed in *Chasidut*.

LESSON 1

The Evolution of Ego

We begin the course with an introduction to the spiritual chain, *hishtalshelut* of the four *olamot*, worlds, that enables an imperfect and diverse material world to emerge from a perfect Divine will, a system the Kabbalist, Moshe Alshich, compares to “a ladder:”

We outline the seminal work of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*'s description of the three lower worlds—*Asiyah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Beriyah*—and, drawing on later Kabbalistic interpretations, the gradual development of *yeshut*, self-consciousness, that orders these realms. We examine the gradations of *unio mystica* experiences, which correspond variously to the three worlds.

LESSON 2

The Dawn of Limitation

In Lesson Two, we are initiated into the ten *sefirot*, Divine emanations. We survey Kabbalah's concept of the *sefirot* that reconciles biblical depictions of Divine attributes or emotions with the philosophical conviction that G-d transcends definition.

We explore the description of the *sefirot* in *Tikunei Hazohar*, and the mystic Moshe Cordevero's etymological association of *sefirah* with numerical limitation. We review Meir ibn Gabai's assertion that articulation in defined Divine attributes is a feature of G-d's perfection, not a compromise.

We introduce the *sefirotic* tree, a diagram depicting the ten *sefirot* of *Atzilut* and their three columns. We explore the symbols, creatures, and rituals that Kabbalah associates with the *sefirot* and these traits' embodiment in the varieties of human experience.

LESSON 3

The Infinite Light:

Lesson three journeys beyond the form of the four *olamot*, to explore Kabbalah's concept of Divine transcendence, *Ein Sof*. We introduce the *Or Ein Sof* with a well-known passage in Chaim Vital's *Etz Chaim* describing the original "simple Divine light." We examine the use of light as a metaphor for Divinity, contrasting it to the metaphor of "flow" commonly employed in other Kabbalistic contexts.

We consider the *Zohar's* description of G-d as simultaneously transcendent, *sovev kol almin*, and immanent, *memalei kol almin*. This concept is alluded to in the *seraphim's* prayer "Holy, Holy, Holy," as described in the prophet Isaiah's vision, an example of the influence of Kabbalistic thought on Jewish liturgy.

LESSON 4

The World of Chaos:

The fourth lesson introduces the Kabbalistic depiction of the chaotic world of *Tohu*, the primeval shattering of consciousness, and its attribution to the human experience of inner conflict.

We explore the Kabbalistic dynamic of *orot* and *keilim*, lights and vessels, as predispositions to transcendence and embodiment; how the shattering of *Tohu* originates in the vacuum of purpose in *orot* and *keilim*.

And then, *tikkun*, a process of cosmic repair that is *Tohu's* purpose. We consider the *Etz Chaim's* assertion that man's mission is to repair and elevate the world and how this idea fueled the ideology of early Chasidism, such as the *Me'or Einayim's* articulation of the value of "holy service" and Chabad philosophy's emphasis on transforming the *nefesh habehamit*, man's "animal" soul.

LESSON 5

The Great Concealment:

Lesson five explores the central Lurianic doctrine of *tzimtzum*. We study Chaim Vital's mysterious depiction of the vacuum *tzimtzum* creates, enabling the emergence of the *kav*, ray, and a transition to finite reality.

Addressing the controversy around *tzimtzum*, we consider the view of Yosef Irgas in *Shomer Emunim*, who asserts that the *tzimtzum* is not literal, and early Hasidic masters view *tzimtzum* as allegorical.

We further explore the recurrence of the *tzimtzum* process throughout the chain of worlds, most notably *Etz Chaim's* description of the "dividing curtain" between *Atzilut* and *Beriyah*, and discuss a contemporary interpretation of *tzimtzum* as a healthy dynamic in relationships.

LESSON 6

The Essence

On the foundation of the previous lessons' exploration of *hishtalshelut*, we discuss *Atzmut*, the Divine essence that transcends the qualities attributed to the *Or Ein Sof*. We examine *Atzmut's* lack of definition as aligning with the Jewish philosophical conviction that G-d can possess no defined qualities. We explore how G-d's transcendence of moral categories corresponds to the human quality of free choice.

We study the *Sefer Yetzirah's* formula that "the end is wedged in the beginning," and see how it feeds the Hasidic philosophy, as articulated in *Tanya*, that the ultimate purpose is in *tikkun olam* and cultivating *Asiyah* into a G-dly abode.