

## **IPT5/713 (1.5 credits) Kabbalah: A Jewish Theology**

**Instructor:** Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan

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**Purpose:** Kabbalah (“received tradition”) is a metaphorical tapestry of Jewish texts, practices, and ideas that invite deep spiritual and theological reflection. Together, we will enter this tapestry, following the shape of its historical development. Using primary and secondary texts along with reflective experiences, we will explore kabbalistic interpretations of creation, God’s nature, prayer, and Hebrew Bible.

**Format:** Monday-Friday July 4-8 2016, 2:00 - 5:00 pm. Course activities will include lecture, large group discussion, small group discussion, close reading, visualization, and in-class writing. Students taking the course for credit will each take on one small homework task.

**Competence Objectives:** *Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:*

- Articulate a network of core ideas in Kabbalah: God, Creation, Torah
- Recognize key characteristics of three historical stages of Kabbalistic thought
- Explain how Kabbalistic theology is expressed in contemporary Jewish practice
- Compare and contrast Kabbalistic ideas with their own spiritual vocabularies

**Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken:** Audit, Certificate, Basic (Diploma/MA/M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

**Prerequisites:** None.

### **Required Texts:**

Dan, Joseph. *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Green, Arthur. *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003.

Prager, Marcia. *The Path of Blessing*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003.

Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

*Excerpts from the following will be posted on moodle:*

Matt, Daniel C, trans. *Zohar: Annotated and Explained*. Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002.

## **Recommended Texts:**

If you are not an experienced student or practitioner of Judaism, please introduce yourself to one of the following texts.

Rabbi Ted Falcon and David Blatner. *Judaism for Dummies*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Publishing, 2001.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi with Joel Segel. *Jewish With Feeling*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.

## **Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

### **Monday July 4: Introduction**

Green, "Kabbalah Old and New" (9-18)

Dan, "Kabbalah: The Term and Its Meanings" (1-10)

Steinsaltz, "Worlds" (3-31)

### **Tuesday July 5: Reading Torah (Hebrew Bible)**

Matt, "The Essence of Torah" (2-3); "How to Look at Torah" (4-9) [posted on moodle]

Green, "Torah: Creation's Truth Revealed" (29-38)

Steinsaltz, "Torah" (87-98)

### **Wednesday July 6: Creation**

Matt, "The Creation of God" (10-13); "The Hidden Light" (14-17) [posted on moodle]

Green, "There Is Only One" (19-28)

Dan, "Modern Times II: Safed and the Lurianic Kabbalah" (71-84)

### **Thursday July 7: God**

Green, "Sefirot: The One and the Ten" (39-60)

Steinsaltz, "Divine Manifestation" (35-50)

### **Friday July 8: Hassidism, Prayer**

Prager, pages 2-89, seven short chapters from "Introduction" to "YHWH: The Name Beyond Name"

Dan, pages 93-112, two chapters, "Modern and Contemporary Hassidism" and "Some Aspects of Contemporary Kabbalah"

## **Assignments:**

*For all students:*

- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion and activities

- Completion of assigned readings

*For Certificate-level students:*

- One 750-word reflection paper demonstrating mastery of course material and engagement with it, due no later than August 15.

*For Basic-level students (MATS, M.Div, MAPPL, MAIIS):*

- One written “homework assignment” of your choice, to be presented in class on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday (see below).
- Attendance at a 1-hour seminar meeting to discuss paper topics on Thursday July 7, 12:15-1:15 pm. I will ask those who are already formulating ideas to begin the discussion. Bring your lunch! The location will be our classroom, unless another location is announced.
- A 2000-word research paper on a topic of the student’s choice, demonstrating engagement with some combination of Talmudic, apocalyptic, biblical, and historical sources, and involving research (5 sources) beyond the assigned course readings. Due no later than August 15.

Additional for Advanced-level students (Th.M.): Same as Basic level, except the research paper guidelines are 3000 words and 10 sources.

### **Homework Assignments: For students seeking course credit**

The purpose of these tasks is to (1) enable the students taking the course for credit to contribute to our in-class learning; and (2) facilitate the flow of creative thought that will eventually be expressed in the written paper.

Each task has a different due date, and is keyed to the day’s reading. Please choose ONE task to sign up for. Sign-ups will be formalized on the first day of class.

For your assignment: On the due date, present the instructor with a one-page written version, and prepare to be called on in class.

*Due Tuesday July 5:*

Compare the three different translations of the opening section of Genesis that will be handed out on the first day of class. In your comparison, answer the following questions:

- What theological differences and similarities do you see?
- How does each author imagine the opening moment of creation?
- Which is closest to your own imagining?

*Due Wednesday July 6:*

- Create 3 interpretive questions about one of today’s selections from Matt.

An interpretive question is a question about a text that can be answered more than one way – simply based on the text. An example of an interpretive question about “The Creation of God” is: “How does the author want us to picture the ‘spark of...darkness’?” Possible answers suggested by the text include: “as a metaphor for the inconceivable,” “as the darkest color of the rainbow,” “as a splitting of the atom.” – These sample answers are only one phrase long, but please develop yours in greater detail!

- Choose one of your questions, and offer two different answers to it.
- Explain how you base each answer on what is in the text.

*Due Thursday July 7:*

At home, immerse yourself in one of the two “meditations” described by Green. (Either “A Guided Meditation” pp. 44-45 or deep repeated reading of the poem on pp. 59-60.)

Afterwards, answer the following questions:

- What was your experience of the “meditation”?
- How did it contribute to your understanding of one of the ideas in Green’s chapter on “Sefirot”?
- What new questions did it raise for you?

### **Recommended Reading: For Students Writing Papers**

#### ***Scholarly Explorations of Kabbalah***

*Students who learn best through reading secondary sources may find these core scholarly studies useful for identifying and exploring paper topics.*

Gershom Scholem. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken Books, (1946) 1995.

Moshe Idel. *Kabbalah: New Directions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

*Additional bibliography:* Please feel free to make use of the bibliography at the end of Joseph Dan’s book, *Kabbalah*.

#### ***Primary Source Readings***

*Students who learn best by studying primary sources may choose to explore one of these accessible short books in their papers.*

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. *The Palm Tree of Devorah*. Trans. Rabbi Moshe Miller. Spring Valley, New York: Feldheim, 1993. [A discourse on developing the attributes of God in ourselves and using those in our ethical practice. Originally published in 1588 by one of history’s most famous kabbalists.]

Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira. *Conscious Community: A Guide to Inner Work*. Trans. Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 1996. [A manual for spiritual growth in times of adversity written by a great Hassidic educator. Found in the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto in 1945 and published shortly thereafter.]

Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn of Lubavitch. *True Existence*. Brooklyn, New York: Kehot, 2002. [A philosophical work, in the style of traditional Jewish scholarship, arguing that there is nothing in the universe outside of God. Delivered as a lecture by the fourth rebbe (spiritual leader) of Chabad-Lubavitch Hassidism in 1869.]