

קבלה | The Kabbalah of You

Discover what you're made of

Course Objective

As diverse as people's talents and interests may be, there is an underlying core that is common to all. All people share that humanity, that dignity that makes life immeasurably valuable. *The Kabbalah of You* addresses that core, building on the foundations of the well-developed psychology that is such a crucial part of Jewish mystical thought.

The masters of the Kabbalah developed a profound systematic understanding of how the divine manifests itself in all levels of being and consciousness. The Hasidic masters took that and translated it into an understanding of how consciousness is manifested in us. Human psychology is a key to understanding the workings of the Creator, for we are created in the divine image.

The Kabbalah of You is meant for everyone who can be called "you." Although based on disciplined scholarship, this course is not limited to professionals or intellectuals, but accepts the task of communicating to all. Because everyone is a "you," this course seeks to make universal the profound insights of the masters.

The Kabbalah of You will enable students to discover new depths of meaning that will have an impact on every aspect of their existence. Joy, contentment, courage, self-control, a meaningful relationship with the Supreme Being, beautiful relationships with others—these are some of the benefits of being in sync with one's deepest self.

The Kabbalah of You is designed to be a journey of discovery, which asks—and seeks to answer—the most fundamental question of all: Who is the mysterious being at the heart of what it is to be ... you? The same Kabbalah that leads up and beyond the highest heavens also leads deep within to explore the divine mystery of the soul.



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Lesson 1: Uniquely Human

No matter where, no matter when, humanity searches for the ultimate. Despite the best attempts of positivists and behaviorists to portray us as machines, with no real self underneath our bodily phenomena, we are transfixed by a sense of self. And despite the enduring mystery of what a self actually is, people still assign it the greatest importance. People have a sense that there is goodness and that they are meant to be aligned with it. The Jewish mystics teach that we have a drive towards the good and the holy because that is who we are—nothing less than divinity in disguise. This means that human possibilities are, in principle, boundless; our limitations are but symptoms of the disguise that we are meant to shed.

Lesson 2: If I Am So Good, Why Am I So Bad?

From Hume to Skinner, philosophers and psychologists have tried to relieve existential pain by denying the reality of the soul or of absolute good. Surely therapists have had the noble intention of relieving pain, but Jewish mystical masters show a way to be free of paralyzing depression without wreaking such heavy damage. One need not deny the integral center of our being—or of the universe—to alleviate the pain. Instead, the need is to weave a web of concrete awareness that assures that every aspect of life is imbued with the core consciousness. This doesn't happen naturally; all must partner in their own creation. Each person must be an artist, making every brushstroke an expression of the infinite beauty and truth that is one's very identity.



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Lesson 3: A Question of Joy

Scripture speaks often about the importance of joy. Others have also recognized its crucial nature: Aristotle sees it as characterizing the divine being; Indian philosophers see it as united with the core of consciousness and existence. And while Schopenhauer exulted in his own despair, most people are not content to rest in the feelings of sadness and misery; instead, people seek a good that they can *experience* as good. People are guided towards the experience of good by the questions they ask in their search. What do we seek? If people seek *what they want*, their search will yield pleasure, physical delight—powerful, but short-lived, and often leading to self-destructive behavior. If people seek rather *what they need*, they will find a more lasting happiness. They could then be satisfied with very little—but can stagnate and become complacent in that satisfaction. But if people seek *what they are*, then they will find energizing joy.

Lesson 4: A Question of Faithfulness

If faith is so simple, why is it so hard? Complexities come easily to the rationalizing human mind. It crafts its own sophistication and takes pride in it, thinking itself, like Protagoras, the measure of all things. Faithfulness to something beyond its own control, something larger than its own achievements and deeper than its own thoughts demands much more. This is what drove Kierkegaard to his lonely stand, seeing that all philosophical systematics could be simply complex evasions; this is what compelled Buber to teach that the most important of all distinctions is whether we are relating to something we fancy under our control or to someone beyond it.

What humans ultimately seek tolerates no clichéd response and can be satisfied by no mere intellectual answer. The most important knowledge will be knowing what we seek. Implicit within that knowledge is that answers can only come with a full existential commitment of the whole of our being.



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Lesson 5: The Self That Loves Your Neighbor

Even if I can love someone else, how could I love him or her as I love myself? I take myself for granted, but the one I love is different, emerging each moment from the unknown. Surely Fromm was right in calling love an art, but what art can bring us to feel for another as we feel for ourselves? The Jewish mystics teach that to truly feel love for the other—and not just to mold our actions—we need to realize that we ourselves are emerging each moment from the Infinite unknown as well (a thought paralleled in modern times by Nishida Kitar). That is really who human beings are. When we embrace that in ourselves, then our love of our fellow human beings is the living process of the Infinite coming to dwell in our own lives, whether at the solitary core of our soul or in the myriad relationships that are interwoven with every aspect of creation.

Lesson 6: Perfectly Imperfect

If all knowledge is mediated by the knower, as Berkeley insists, then, no matter how clever the talk about the soul and its supernal source, we know ourselves well enough to be secret experts in our own shortcomings. Others might not know our faults, but we do. Necessarily, then, would not an ideal of perfection produce cognitive dissonance within anyone who entertains it?

Freudian analysis portrayed us as incapable of perfection, only of maintaining an exhausting stalemate between blind erotic or self-destructive imperatives and the pretensions of the ego and superego. Rather than settling for a standstill, the mystics instead embrace a dynamic. They say there is something better than being perfect. The one who gropes in the dark, whose life is a perpetual struggle, is greater than one who is “perfect.” True, such a person will always know himself as one who fails—but this person more than compensates



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with heightened passion and unquenchable thirst. Such a person will be creative on the highest order, as portrayed by such modern thinkers as Whitehead and Hartshorne. Ultimately, only such a person can make perfection stretch beyond its narrow boundaries and fill the actual world and the entirety of one's own life.



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