

A Taste of Kabbalah
Rabbi Michael Lotker

I get asked lots of questions about Kabbalah. For example: Is it pronounced ka-bah-LAH or ka-BAH-lah? [Actually both are correct; the former is the Sephardic pronunciation and the latter Ashkenazi.] What are the essential teachings? How can I become more kabbalistic or spiritual? What is the Zohar? Are there Jewish meditative practices? What's up with the red string bracelets, etc., etc.?

In response, I have engaged in my own study of Kabbalah, its teachings and its central texts. I have studied on my own, with small groups led by a scholar and at spiritual retreats. Although it is always a struggle for me to give my left brain, scientific side a rest so that I may fully engage the spiritual, it is important to be aware of this central aspect to Judaism.

The study and practice of Kabbalah takes Judaism to a new dimension. I love the way that it sheds new light on familiar concepts and phrases from our tradition. For example, the *Shema* reads: "Here O Israel, *Adonai* Our God, *Adonai* is One!" This is generally understood to be a proclamation of monotheism, an affirmation that we worship one God and not many. The mystics, especially the Hasidic mystics, take this a giant step further. They interpret the statement from the Torah as teaching that *Adonai* (the word Jews use for God's name) is unity itself, that everything is contained within God and nothing is outside of God. This leads to comforting insights (all of nature is sacred and holy, from your child to your pet to the flower and even the rock in your garden) as well as troubling ones (can God be in the disease, the tragedy and the suffering?). Whatever your take on Kabbalah, you should know that it infuses Judaism from our *Erev Shabbat* song *L'cha Dodi* to the way the knots (*tzit tzit*) of the *tallit* are tied to making gifts in units of 18.

If you are curious to learn more about Kabbalah, I hope you will join me in my four session course, beginning February 7th and continuing on February 14, 28 and March 7 (these are Monday evenings), from 7-9PM at the Temple. The suggested donation is \$20 for members and \$40 for non-members with scholarships cheerfully granted. Please call the Temple office (805-388-3824) or send me an email (rabbi@templenerami.org) to let me know that you plan to attend.