

Getting Closer to God & Studying Kabbalah

There's a lot of interest in Kabbalah these days. Rock stars and others are embracing this form of Jewish mysticism and its symbols with red strings tied around their wrists, drinking "Kabbalah Water" (yes, there really is such a thing!), chanting Hebrew and Aramaic phrases, etc. So the question is: What's going on here and what is Kabbalah all about?

Kabbalah is a broad term used to describe Jewish mysticism. It's origins date back to the Bible itself, although its central text is the Zohar, written in the 12th century. Like most forms of mysticism, its central goal is to get closer to God, to have a better appreciation of what God wants us to do and to even become united and unified with the Holy One. This is the key difference between Kabbalah and magic. Magic is the attempt to get God to do what we want; Kabbalah is the attempt to become so connected with God that God's wishes become our wishes and, more importantly, our actions.

Traditionally only married men over 40 were permitted to study Kabbalah. Why? Because only they would have the maturity to understand the subtle concepts and, being married with a family, only they would have the ability to resist the temptation to leave the reality of this world for the ecstasy of the mystical world. This underlines another important element of Kabbalah. It is Jewish and like all traditional Jewish practice, emphasizes mitzvot, commandments. We can have a wonderful, supernatural, ecstatic vision and experience of God, but God's greatest demand upon us is that we return to the world to do God's work in it. Another interesting requirement of traditional study of Kabbalah is that it was only to be taught by one teacher to one student at a time to avoid misunderstanding the difficult concepts.

If you would like to learn a bit more about Kabbalah (even if you are not a married Jewish man over 40), I have good news for you. Beginning on October 5th I will be teaching a four week class called "Introduction to Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism." The class will be from 7:00PM to 9:00 PM on Oct. 5, 12, 26 and Nov. 2nd.

Our plan is to learn about the history of Kabbalah, study a bit of the Zohar (the classic text of Kabbalah), learn a little about Lurianic Mysticism and address the question: "What Can I do to Enhance My Jewish Spirituality?" A fee of \$20 for members and \$40 for non-members will apply with scholarships cheerfully granted. For more info or to register, please call the Temple (388-3824) or e-mail the rabbi (Lotker@aol.com). Future classes will cover Israel; Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Jewish Prayer; Jewish Law and Tradition and more.

I look forward to studying with you.

Rabbi Michael Lotker