

The White Spaces between the Black Letters: Lernen the Kedushat Levi. (One credit, Hasidism and Kabbalah)

Rabbi Elliot K. Ginsburg, Smicha Week 5770

In this course, we will explore the mystical teachings of one of the most beloved of all the hasidic masters, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev. Focus will be on refining our Hebrew text-reading skills and gaining intimacy with this great rebbe. The key text is the 2 volume edition of the *Kedushat Levi*; I will provide supplements from cognate works and from the *Mayseh* (Tale) literature. Themes might include: Hasidic prayer, serving through Devotion (*mesirut nefesh*), Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*, *Tzimtzum* and *Tikkun*, Love of the Other, and Entering the White Spaces. Our text work will be supplemented by *niggun* and brief meditations.

(A) Required books for purchase:

(1) *Kedushat Levi*. The recommended edition is the 2 vol. set edited by Michael Aryeh Rand (5768, *Mechon Hadrat Chen*, Ashdod). If you already own another edition, that is fine, although it will be important to be able to locate the text on your own.

(2) **Recommended:** Reb Zalman and Netanel Miles-Yepez, *A Merciful God. "Stories and teachings of the much-beloved Holy Rebbe, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev."* Available for purchase at the Aleph Website store.

Note: We will be working from the original Hebrew text in class. Students should be aware that there is a serviceable 3 volume translation of the lion's share of the *Kedushat Levi* by Eliyahu Munk, which is now available and which may be found on the Web or at Jewish bookstores. This translation is **not** required.

(B) Required, and provided gratis for all students:

Sourcebook of additional texts, maysehs (tales), and required articles. This will be sent to students by late April-early May, and also placed on a special website created for the class.

Students should either print out the textual portions of this resource or have electronic access to the document during class.

(C) Readings (in the Sourcebook), to be done before Smicha Week. About 160 pages.

(1) Gershon Hundert, two chapters on the history of hasidism: "The Contexts of Hasidism" and "Hasidism, a New Path"

(2) Rachel Elijor, *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism*: chaps. 4, 8-10

(3) Bio material on Levi Yitzhak (TBA, likely excerpted from S. Dresner's book on Levi Yitzhak and Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk*)

(4) Arthur Green, "Hasidism: Discovery and Retreat" (discusses Levi Yitzhak)

(5) Arthur Green, Excerpt from "Teachings of the Hasidic Masters" in B. Holtz, ed. *Back to the Sources*: 361-386. Here Art Green masterfully takes the reader through the history of Hasidic discourse and unpacks one teaching of Levi Yitzhak.

(D) Deep Library: Recommended for Follow-up Reading (after Smicha Week, optional):

(1) Arthur Green, *Devotion and Commandment*

(2) Samuel Dresner, *Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev* (the only full-length study, currently, alas, o.p.)

- (3) Moshe Idel, "White Letters: From Levi Isaac of Berditchev's Views to Post-Modern Hermeneutics" (this article will be in our Sourcebook)
- (4) Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk* (Excellent social history on the spread of Hasidism, but focuses on Congress Poland/Polish Hasidism; does discuss Levi Yitzhak *en passant*)
- (5) Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (s.v., Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev in the index)
- (6) On the teachings of the Maggid of Mezritch (Levi Yitzhak's teacher), Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*
- (7) Miles Krassen, *Uniter of Heaven and Earth*. On the Rise of Hasidism in Eastern Galicia. Much material on devekut and spiritual practice in the radical mystical vein of the Maggid of Mezritch.

(E) Musical Resources: will be online on our Class Website

(F) Books to Bring to Smicha Week: Kedushat Levi; **plus** the *Sourcebook*; a TaNaKH and Siddur (nusah sefard, ideally); a good Hebrew/Aramaic Dictionary (either Jastrow, Alcalay, or Sokoloff, e.g.); and a *Rashei Tevot Dictionary* such as *Otzar Rashei Tevot* of Shmuel Ashkenazi and Dov Yarden. If you have a laptop, bring it: I will show you how to access important WebResources too! **Recommended:** Zalman and Netanel's *A Merciful God* and if you are so inclined, the Munk translation of *the Kedushat Levi*. (You may prefer *not* to use this!)

(G) Final assignment: There are several options here, e.g.

- (1) Translation and Commentary of a Kedushat Levi text: approx. 4-8 pages total.
 - (2) Comparative Study: Reconciling the Levi Yitzhak of the Mayseh Literature and the Drushim
 - (3) Thematic study, e.g. focusing on: The Role of Tzaddik; the ebb and flow of Consciousness: Ratzon va-shov; tzimtzum; the Torah of the White Spaces, etc. Suggested length: 7-12 pages for a research paper.
 - (4) A creative project: Turn a text into a play/dialogue/Musical; a refreshing snack (Just teasing about this one.) Or: Translate a KL text, and then recast/re-write that text in a post-Paradigm Shift light.
- Or: Discuss Levi Yitzhak and the phenomenon/challenges of popularization of mystical teachings, both in his day and ours.
- Or: Levi Yitzhak, the Graphic Novel (as in avant-garde comics)