



# Kabbalat Torah

5779

2018-19



# Content

Contacts.....	3
Kabbalat Torah – an Introduction .....	4
The History of Kabbalat Torah .....	4
Aims of Kabbalat Torah .....	4
Kabbalat Torah at NPLS.....	6
Jewish Studies: Being Jewish in the ‘Real World’.....	7
Hadracha training .....	8
KT Trip to Czech Republic .....	9
Kabbalat Torah Services .....	10
Term Dates.....	10

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NPLS takes seriously its responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of children and young people entrusted to its care. NPLS is committed to:

- Listening to, relating effectively to and valuing children and young people whilst ensuring their protection during synagogue activities;
- Ensuring that all personnel are given relevant support and training;
- Having a system for dealing with concerns regarding possible abuse.

In line with government guidelines, NPLS carries out DBS checks on all personnel working with children and young people at NPLS who are over the age of 16 at the beginning of the Cheder year. Any questions concerning DBS checks should be addressed to Debbie Davies ([debbie@npls.org.uk](mailto:debbie@npls.org.uk)). A copy of the safeguarding policy can be obtained from Rabbi Lea, who is the designated safeguarding lead for NPLS.

# Kabbalat Torah – an Introduction

## The History of Kabbalat Torah<sup>1</sup>

The earliest reforms in Judaism took place, not in the synagogues, but in schools. While Bar Mitzvah took place at the age of thirteen and demonstrated a boy's ability to read Hebrew from the scroll and to discourse on religious practice, confirmation (as it was then called) placed greater emphasis on religious principles. Not only did confirmation extend Jewish education beyond the early teenage years to sixteen and sometimes seventeen, but it also included girls. The earliest confirmation ceremony is believed to have taken place in Dessau in 1803. The earliest evidence for the inclusion of girls dates back to Berlin in 1814. By 1831, the service had moved into the synagogue in Berlin and the leading nineteenth century American Reform Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise introduced confirmation to the United States in 1846. Thereafter it was practised widely and generally held on the festival of *Shavuot*, which celebrates the giving of the Torah and the Israelites' acceptance of the commandments (hence the Hebrew name Kabbalat Torah). *Shavuot* gave the confirmation ceremony a particular poignancy because of its emphasis on religious faith and principles. To this day, Kabbalat Torah enables the young Jewish adult to re-enact as an individual in community the dramatic moment at Sinai when the Israelite people said "yes" to the Torah.

## Aims of Kabbalat Torah

Bar/Bat Mitzvah centres upon the attainment of *ritual* proficiency—reading from the Torah and understanding liturgy and services—Kabbalat Torah, by contrast, places an emphasis on a more general engagement with Judaism, challenging young Jewish adults to articulate their questions about faith and belief and to connect those questions with the way they see the world and how they wish to lead their life.

Rabbi John Rayner, *z"l*, once likened Kabbalat Torah to the preparation for embarking on a journey into Jewish adult life and asked "what does it take to travel?".<sup>2</sup> He highlights five requirements, which can help us to describe the rationale for our KT programme:

Firstly, it takes a certain kind of discontent. You have to be dissatisfied with where you are, impatient to get away, eager to explore the unknown. We Jews have always been a people on the move, not only literally, but also metaphorically. We have always refused to accept the world as it is; we have always been convinced that there is to be a better world towards which we must progress. We hope that the young adults in our community want to join us on this journey; that they are not content merely to live, that they

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a text by Rabbi Alexandra Wright

<sup>2</sup> "Have Torah, will Travel," sermon 11 April 1970, published in J. D. Rayner, 1998, *A Jewish Understanding of the World*, Berghahn Books, pp. 5

want to question the world around them and their religion and that they can find in Judaism something to help them to do so constructively.

Secondly, embarking on a journey requires us to be well prepared. While their learning until Bar/Bat Mitzvah has provided our young adults with a good basis of Jewish knowledge, the KT programme aims to teach them not just more knowledge but also skills for life. As well as gaining youth work and leadership skills, the young adults will learn how to make Jewishly informed decisions in their lives.

Thirdly, in order to travel safely you need an efficient vehicle. Judaism did not receive its final form at Mount Sinai. It went on developing, and Liberal Judaism is part of this development. None of us want to embark on our Jewish journeys in an outdated model. We therefore invite the young adults to make their contributions to shaping Judaism to be the most up-to-date it can be so that it remains an efficient vehicle for the journey into our future.

Next, the traveller needs persistence. It is not always easy to lead a Jewish life. We must overcome many obstacles: antisemitism, the pressures of secularism, the enticements of materialism, apathy and a temptation just not to bother. Becoming part of a community of like-minded Jews will offer the young adults support when facing obstacles and give them strength for this life-long journey.

Finally, travellers need to know their destination. Judaism formulated a clear conception of the goal of human history: an age of freedom and justice, compassion and peace. That is the ultimate destination of the journey on which we Jews set forth some four thousand years ago. It is still very distant and might at times disappear from view but we must, nonetheless, move towards it, step by step. The social action component of the KT programme will offer each participant the opportunity to make a contribution towards reaching our final destination.

We can summarise our aims to be:

- Encourage participants to question the world and our traditions and framing their answers in a Liberal Jewish context
- Provide participants with youth work and leadership skills and the ability to make Jewishly informed decisions
- Allow the participants to make their contribution to shaping Judaism
- Support the participants in finding their own Jewish identity
- Offer an opportunity for each participant to engage in social action work

## Kabbalat Torah at NPLS

**Mishnah Avot (1:2): 'The world stands on three things—  
Torah (Jewish learning), *Avodah* (Leadership) and  
*Gemilut Chasadim* (Social Engagement).'**

**עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה  
וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים:**

The Kabbalat Torah programme at NPLS runs over 5 terms (KT1 and KT2) and culminates in the class leading their own Kabbalat Torah service at the end of the second term of year 2.

The KT programme consists of 3 elements:

- a) A Jewish studies programme (**see p. 7**)
- b) *Hadracha* (leadership and youth work) training (**see p. 8**)

Sessions will generally be held **on Saturday mornings during term time from 9.45am to 12.15pm**. As part of the Saturday morning sessions, the class will regularly attend services.

There will be a short weekend trip within the UK for both year groups to meet up with KT groups from Nottingham, Birmingham and Kingston. The trip will take place from **19 to 20 January 2018** and cost about £75 (financial support will be available for those who need it).

At the beginning of the second year of the programme, there will be a trip to Kolin, Terezin (Theresienstadt) and Prague (**see p. 9**). The estimated cost will be about £400 (financial support will be available for those who need it).

The Kabbalat Torah programme culminates in the KT services (**see p. 10**). For the class starting the programme in September 2017 the creative Friday night KT service is provisionally scheduled for **20 April 2018** with the formal KT service taking place on **Saturday, 21 April 2018**.

## **Jewish Studies: Being Jewish in the 'Real World'**

This element of the Kabbalat Torah programme is designed to help participants explore their identity through a Jewish lens. It will be looking at the challenges of growing up Jewish within a secular society and aims to help participants make more informed 'Jewish' decisions in their everyday lives.

Participants will discuss and learn Jewish attitudes in relation to varying topics including illegal substances; social justice; tattoos and the body; and relationships and lifestyle. For the first half of the morning the group will work together using a variety of methods to learn about these topics within a Progressive context.

In this part of the programme we will explore a variety of teaching methods including:

- Discussion
- Role Play
- Debate
- Media

### **Research Project**

In the second half of the morning students will research the plethora of views on the given topics throughout the Jewish religion helping them to become familiar with different sects within Judaism. In class time they will compile a research project on the variety of beliefs and their own Jewish identity.

This should allow students to form their own opinions on these different topics, helping them to make informed Jewish decisions in their future lives as they come into contact with them in the 'real world'.

## Hadracha training

*Hadracha* means leadership. As a youth movement run by its members for its member, two of LJY-Netzer's most important values are youth leadership and empowerment. Developing leadership skills through a youth movement is an incredibly rewarding process.

The *Hadracha* training, which forms part of the KT programme, will be provided by *madrichim* either from our own synagogue or via Liberal Judaism. As well as preparing participants for taking on leadership responsibilities for LJY-Netzer events, they will gain important skills to enable them to work as teaching assistants in the cheder upon completion of the KT programme.



Graduates of our KT programme will be able to participate in the annual LJY *Hadracha* Seminar, for members in school years 11-13. This seminar helps the participants to further develop the skills relevant and necessary to leading events. At 16, LJY-Netzerniks get their first opportunities to plan and lead weekends. After this, there are loads of other opportunities for them to lead on our longer events and in synagogues.

NPLS values LJY-Netzer's programmes as an important contribution to the education provided through the cheder. LJY-Netzer offers valuable leadership training (*hadrachah*) for teenagers, which can be used in the classroom by assistants when they come back to help and to organise informal youth activities for younger children. Some financial help is available from NPLS to participate in the summer schemes and the UJIA offers help to families whose sixteen-year old wishes to participate in the Israel Tour.

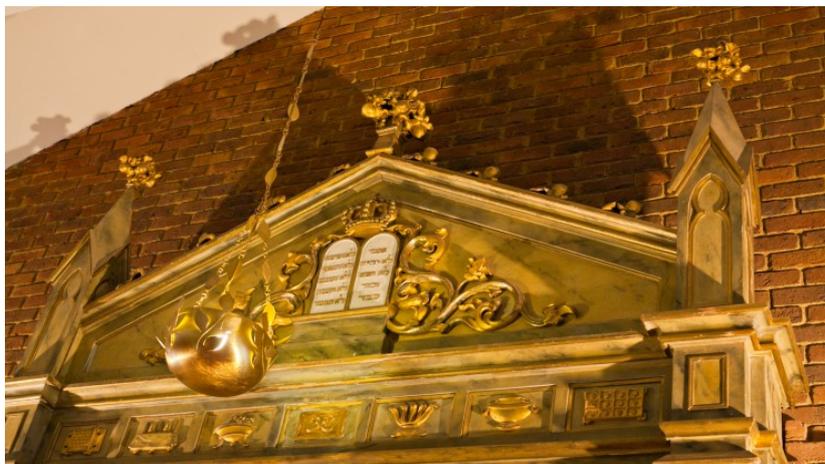
## KT Trip to Czech Republic

For over 30 years NPLS has been researching the history of its four Czech and Slovak Torah scrolls and has developed close ties with the communities whence they came. For many years this project has been part of the Kabbalat Torah programme.

Every year the class has been taken on a long weekend to Prague. They have visited the many sites of Jewish interest to begin to understand the enormity of the Holocaust and how it devastated so many communities across Europe. But also to witness the richness of the heritage lost and, thankfully the revival of the Jewish community since the end of communism. Erev Shabbat is spent with the Liberal congregation, Bejt Simcha, and on Saturday morning the group travel to Kolin to hold a service in the synagogue built in 1696. There are no Jews left in Kolin and our visit helps to keep alive the memory of the lost community. A visit is also made to Terezin (Theresienstadt) to further understand the fate of the Czech Jews.

Despite the serious nature of the itinerary, time is found to explore a few of the other "must see" sights in Prague, have fun and bond socially. The weekend is always voted the highlight of the KT year.

The trip for the class starting the Kabbalat Torah programme in September 2018 has been scheduled to take place from the evening of the 1 to the late evening of 3 November 2018.



The Kolin arch – now over the ark at NPLS

## **Kabbalat Torah Services**

The Kabbalat Torah services are an annual highlight for all at NPLS. The group leads a creative Friday night service and the Shabbat morning service. The class is encouraged to invite family and friends to celebrate with them.

Following the KT services, each individual becomes a member of the synagogue in their own right and takes their place in the adult community. Most importantly, they are now eligible to become teaching assistants in the Cheder and many continue to undergo training and become more involved in LJY-Netzer's youth programmes.

The KT service also marks a spiritual threshold. Knowledge, community, friendships, social action are all of critical importance at this stage. In addition, questions about how we relate to God, to our community, what we make of our spiritual heritage, become much more apparent and more real at this stage of Jewish education and awareness.

### **Term Dates**

**5779-2018/19**

(Dates subject to change)

#### **Term 1**

1<sup>st</sup> Day of Term: Classes will start on 22 September 2018

Half Term Break: No classes on 27 October & 3 November 2018

Last Day of Term: Last day of classes will be 8 December 2018

**KT trip to Czech Republic: 1 – 3 November 2018**

#### **Term 2**

1<sup>st</sup> Day of Term: Classes will start on 12 January 2019

Half Term Break: No classes on 16 and 23 February 2019

Last Day of Term: Last day of classes will be 30 March 2019

**KT trip to Birmingham: 18– 20 January 2019**

**KT creative service on 26 April 2019**

**Formal KT service on 27 April 2019**

#### **Term 3**

1<sup>st</sup> Day of Term: Classes will start on 27 April 2019

Half Term Break: No classes on 25 May and 1 June 2019

Last Day of Term: Last day of the Cheder year will be 29 June 2019



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