

RELS 126 (JWST 126; NELC 186): INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH MYSTICISM

Fall 2009
Professor Talya Fishman

Tues. – Thurs. 10:30-Noon
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Office Hours: T, Th. 1:30-3

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Survey of expressions of Jewish mysticism from Hebrew Scripture through Madonna. Topics include rabbinic concerns about mystical speculation, the ascent through the celestial chambers [*heikhalot*], the *Book of Creation*, the relationship of Jewish philosophy and mysticism, techniques of letter permutation, schematization of the Divine Body, the prominence of gender in kabbalistic thought, the relationship of kabbalah to the practice of the commandments, Lurianic kabbalah, Hasidism, New-Age Jewish spirituality. All readings will be in English translation.

**ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE FOUND ON THE COURSE Blackboard SITE.
PLEASE PRINT OUT THESE READINGS & BRING THEM TO CLASS.**

Each student will write three 5-7 pp. essays. These will be due on Oct. 13th, Nov. 10th and Dec. 14th. The topics of these essays will be discussed in class.

1) Sept. 10th: General Remarks on Jewish Mysticism

[Handouts from Eliezer Azikri, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Mansur al-Hallj and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi]

2) Sept. 15th: Mysticism in Scriptures

[Readings from Gen. 28:10-22; Ex. 3:1-15; Ex. 24: 9-11; Ex. 33; Dt. 30:11-14; Isaiah 6:1-8; Ezekiel 1:1-28; Song of Songs]

3) Sept. 17th: Rabbinic Warnings About the Dangers of Mystical Pursuits:

[*Mishna*, Tractate *Hagiga*, chapter 2:1; selections from *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Hagiga*, pp. 11b-12a; 12b-13a; 14a-14b; 16a.]

4) Sept. 22nd: Contemplation of the Chariot Throne

[Joseph Dan, “The Religious Experience of the *Merkavah*”; selections from *Hekhalot* writings in J. Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*; selections from *Hekhalot Rabbati* in B.Z. Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*]

5) Sept. 24th: Sefer Yetzira

[from Aryeh Kaplan, *The Book of Creation*, “long Version”, pp. 285-293.]

6) Sept. 29th: Bahya Ibn Paquda

[Introduction to Bahya’s *Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart* (translated by M.Mansoor).]

7) Oct. 1st: Overlapping Goals of Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism

[G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 18-38; selections from Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, “Basic Principles of the Torah, chap’s 2, 4 and 5.]

8) Oct. 6th: Maimonides as Mystic?

[Maimonides’ Introduction to Part One of the *Guide of the Perplexed*; *Guide* III.51 in L. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*.]

9) Oct. 8th: Abraham Abulafia

[selections from J. Dan, *The Heart & the Fountain*; L. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*.]

10) Oct. 13th: Mystical Techniques

[Moshe Idel, “Mystical Techniques” in L. Fine, ed., *Essential Papers in Kabbalah*.]

11) Oct. 15th: God’s Names & Inner Meanings of Torah

[Rashi on BT Suk. 45a re Ex. 14:19-21; Nahmanides, Introduction to *Commentary on the Torah* (Charles Chavel, translator); *Zohar* III. 152a in L. Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy & Mysticism*.]

12) Oct. 20th: Zohar as Mystical Midrash

[D. Matt, Introduction to *The Zohar*; “The Rose and the Lily” (Zohar III: 107a)]

13) Oct. 22nd: The Synergy of Kabbalah and Mizvot

[Pinhas Giller, “The Theurgic Dimensions of the Mizvot”; “Agencies of Unification: Sabbath and Prayer”; Elliot Ginsburg, “Kabbalistic Rituals of Sabbath Preparation”]

14) Oct. 27th: Negotiating the Authorities of Halakha and Kabbalah

[Pinhas Giller, “Halakha and Kabbalah”; Jacob Katz, “Halakha and Kabbalah as Competing Disciplines of Study”.]

15) Oct. 29th: Safed Kabbalists

[R. Elijah, “Messianic Expectations & Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century”; selections from Hayyim Vital, *Book of Visions*, parts I and IV.]

16) Nov. 3rd: Lurianic Kabbalah

[“The Lurianic Myth”: selections from G. Scholem, L. Jacobs and M. Faierstein; G. Scholem, “Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists”; Liturgical creations of 16th century Safed in B.Z. Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*; .

17) Nov. 5th: Sabbateanism & Its Aftermath

[David Halperin, Introduction to *Sabbetai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah*; Baruch of Arezzo, selections from *Memorial to the Children of Israel*.]

18) Nov. 10th: Hasidism: From the Ba’al Shem Tov to the Tzadikim

[“The Mystical Epistle of the Ba’al Shem” in L. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*; on hasidic prayer, in L. Jacobs, *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy & Mysticism*; selections on the *tzaddik* in J. Dan, ed., *The Teachings of Hasidism*.]

19) Nov. 12th: Film: “Hasidism in America: A World Apart”

20) Nov. 17th: Habad & the Psychologization of the Sefirot

[Herbert Wiener, “The Lubavitcher Movement”, in *9-1/2 Mystics*]

21) Nov. 19th: The Mysticism of Habad A

[Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, *Sha'ar HaYihud viha-Emunah* = Portal of Unity and Faith]

22) Nov. 24th: The Mysticism of Habad B

[Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, *Sha'ar HaYihud viha-Emunah* = Portal of Unity and Faith]

23) Dec. 1st: Study with Habad Emissary

24) Dec. 3rd: Bratzlav Hasidism

[J. Weiss, “Mystical Hasidism and the Hasidism of Faith”; Nahman of Bratzlav, *Liqqutei Moharan* #6; A.Green, *Tormented Master*, pp. 301-307; 316-330; D. Biale, “Between Melancholy & A Broken Heart: A Note on Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav’s Depression”.]

25) Dec. 8th: Kabbalah & New Age Spirituality

[Boaz Huss, “The New Age of Kabbalah and Postmodern Spirituality”; Jody Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest: The Kabbalah Centre in America*, pp. 109-135; 17-175; selections from Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*.]

26) Dec. 10th: Is There a Jewish Mysticism?

[Boaz Huss, “The New Age of Kabbalah and Postmodern Spirituality”; Shaul Magid, "Is Kabbalah Mysticism? Response to Boaz Huss"; B. Huss, "Paying Extra: Response to Shaul Magid".]