

AS.100.256 History of Kabbalah
Mondays 1:30pm-4:00pm
Gilman Hall 308

Classroom:

Prof. Pawel Maciejko
Office: Gilman 338F
Office Hours: by appointment
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Course Description:

This course is a survey of the history of Jewish magic, mysticism, and secret tradition from the Middle Ages till the 19th century. We shall explore the concept of the *sod* (mystery) and its historical variants. We shall read excerpts from the most important texts of Jewish esotericism, such as *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Bahir*, and the *Zohar*. We shall also discuss “practical Kabbalah”, i.e. the preparation and use of amulets and charms, as well as the demonic (and angelic) possession.

Learning Goals:

The course will acquaint the student with the basis concepts, personalities, and trends in the history of Jewish esoteric tradition.

Course Requirements:

This seminar puts heavy emphasis on discussion and participation based on careful analysis of the reading assignments. The reading assignments listed below a given session should be completed by the date under which they appear. In order for us to have the intense, exciting give-and-take that a class like this allows and deserves, we need to talk to each other and pay attention to our shared texts. **I will ask you to put away your laptops, phones, and other multi-use screens for the duration of each class session.**

The final decision on any grade derives from my global assessment of your work and cannot be quantified exactly. Roughly speaking, however, the breakdown is as follows:

Participation: 40%

One 5-page paper, topic to be announced: 20%

One 10-page final paper: 40%

No extensions will be granted without my *prior* permission, and late papers will be graded lower at the rate of one grade-step per day (A to A-, A- to B+, etc). Needless to say, complete honesty and probity in your work is a must. For information, see <http://ethics.jhu.edu>

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact Dr. Richard Sanders, in Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

1/23: What is Kabbalah?

Readings:

- Scholem, Gershom, Jonathan Garb, and Moshe Idel. "Kabbalah." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 586-692. Vol. 11. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*
<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2587510514/GVRL?u=balt85423&sid=GVRL&xid=cdff1b1d>
- Gershom Scholem, "Religious Authority and Mysticism" and "Kabbalah and Myth", *On The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, New York: Schocken, 1996.

1/30: Histories of Kabbalah

Readings:

- Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Volume IV, Chapter I "Cultivation of Kabbalah and Proscription of Science".
- Gershom Scholem, "Philosophy and Jewish Mysticism", *Review of Religion*, 2 (4)/1938, 385-402.
- Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, 1-34.
- Boaz Huss, "Jewish Mysticism - The Invention of an Unbroken Jewish Tradition", https://www.academia.edu/19719457/Jewish_Mysticism_-_The_Invention_of_an_Unbroken_Jewish_Tradition

2/06: Sefer Yetzirah

Readings:

- Sefer Yetzirah trans. Isidor Kalisch, Chapter I and II
- "The Book of Creation," in *The Poetry of Kabbalah : Mystical Verse from the Jewish Tradition*, edited by Peter Cole, Yale University Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jhu/detail.action?docID=3420799> , pp. 37-47.
- Victoriannahannah, "Twenty-two Letters"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcnxRi0s_DM

2/13: The Spanish and Provençal Kabbalah

Readings:

- Joseph Dan (ed.), *The Early Kabbalah*, New York: Paulist Press, 1986, 71-108, 151-182.
- Daniel C. Matt, "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Medieval Spain", in: Lawrence Fine (ed.), *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, New York and London: New York University Press, 1995, 67-109.

02/20: The Book Bahir

Readings:

- *The Bahir - The Book of Illumination*, Translation, Introduction, and Commentary by Aryeh Kaplan, York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1979, ## 11, 22, 76, 108, 128-132, 141- 146, 156-157, 162-172.
- Gershom Scholem, “Sitra Ahra: Good and Evil in the Kabbalah”, in: *On The Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, New York 1991, 56-87.
- Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Tree That is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in Sefer ha-Bahir, in *Along the Path*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, 63-88.

02/27: Ecstatic Kabbalah; Abraham Abulafia

- Joseph Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, Oxford: OUP, 2002, 121-138.
- *The Poetry of Kabbalah : Mystical Verse from the Jewish Tradition*, edited by Peter Cole, Yale University Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jhu/detail.action?docID=3420799> , pp. 113-120.

03/06: The Zohar

Readings:

- Zohar: the Pritzker Edition, Vol. 1, 107-111; 282-298; 313-314; Vol. V, 530-534; Vol. IX, 245-254.
- Arthur Green, “The Zohar: Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Spain”, in: Lawrence Fine (ed.), *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, New York and London: New York University Press, 1995, 27-66.

03/13: Safed Spirituality

Readings:

- Hayyim Vital, “The Book of Visions”, in Morris M. Faierstein (ed.), *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, New York: Paulist Press, 1999, 43-75, 156-188.
- Louis Jacobs, “The Uplifting of Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism”, in: Arthur Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*, 99 – 127.

03/18-03/26 SPRING BREAK

03/27: Lurianic Kabbalah

Readings:

- Isaiah Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil and the “Shell” in Lurianic Kabbalah*, Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2022, 21-58.
- Shaul Magid, “From Theosophy to Midrash. Lurianic Exegesis and the Garden of Eden,” *AJS Review* 22/1 1997, 37 - 75.
- Shalom Rosenberg, “Exile and Redemption in Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century: Contending Conceptions”, in: Bernard Dov Cooperman (ed.) *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, Ma. and London: Harvard University Press, 399 – 431.

04/03: Sabbatianism

Readings:

- Paweł Maciejko (ed.), *Sabbatian Heresy: Writings on Mysticism, Messianism, and the Origins of Jewish Modernity*, Boston: Brandeis University Press, xi-xxxiii, 1-45.
- Abraham Miguel, Cardozo, *Selected Writings*, trans. D. J. Halperin, New York: Paulist Press, 2001, 109-167.
- Scholem, Gershom. “Redemption through Sin”, in: *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York: Schocken, 1995, 78–141.

04/10: Frankism

Readings:

- Paweł Maciejko (ed.), *Sabbatian Heresy: Writings on Mysticism, Messianism, and the Origins of Jewish Modernity*, 151-160.
- Paweł Maciejko, “Jacob Frank and Jesus Christ” in Neta Stahl (ed.) *Jesus among the Jews: Representation and Thought*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2012), 19-139.

04/17: Hasidism

Readings:

- The Holy Epistle of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov’, in: Louis Jacobs, (ed.) *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, New York: Schocken, 1987.
- ‘The Mystical Prayer of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov’, in: Joseph Dan (ed.), *The Heart and the Fountain*, 231- 237.
- Arnold J Band (ed.) *Nahman of Bratslav: The Tales*, New York: Paulist Press, 1988, 189-282.

04/24: Contemporary Kabbalah

Readings:

- Yehuda Berg, “A Brief History of Kabbalah” in: *The Power of Kabbalah: This Book Contains the Secrets of the Universe and the Meaning of Our Lives*, Los Angeles: Kabbalah Center, 2004.
- Michael Leitman, *Kabbalah for Beginners*, Bnei Brak: Bnei Baruch, 2007, 15-24, 160-177.
- Boaz Huss, “All You Need Is LAV: Madonna and Postmodern Kabbalah”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 95, 4/2005, 611-624.
- Madonna – Die Another Day <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlbaJA7aO9M>