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](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:


1/30: Histories of Kabbalah

Readings:

• Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews, Volume IV, Chapter I “Cultivation of Kabbalah and Proscription of Science”.
• 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
• Victoriah Hannah, “Twenty-two Letters” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcnxRi0s_DM

2/13: The Spanish and Provençal Kabbalah

Readings:

02/20: The Book Bahir

Readings:

02/27: Ecstatic Kabbalah; Abraham Abulafia


03/06: The Zohar

Readings:

03/13: Safed Spirituality

Readings:

03/18-03/26 SPRING BREAK

03/27: Lurianic Kabbalah

Readings:
04/03: Sabbatianism

Readings:


04/10: Frankism

Readings:


04/17: Hasidism

Readings:


04/24: Contemporary Kabbalah
Readings:

- Madonna – Die Another Day [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlbaJA7aO9M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlbaJA7aO9M)