

Religion 330: Seminar in Kabbalah Fall, 2007

Professor: Marla Segol

Meetings: M/W 4-5:50 Tisch 304

Office Hours

My office hours are Mondays from 10-11, and Thursdays from 1:30-2:30 in 215 Ladd Hall or by appointment.

Getting in touch:

I can be reached by e-mail at msegol@skidmore.edu My office phone is x5405, but e-mail is usually better.

Description:

This course explores Jewish Mysticism from its earliest sources in the Torah and the Talmud to its manifestations on the internet in the present. In this course we will focus on the historical development of kabbalistic symbolism, on the role of gender and embodiment in kabbalistic thought, and on hermeneutics. By the end of the course students should be familiar with the core texts in Jewish mysticism and the history of Jewish mystical thought and symbols.

The Structure:

This class will be organized around your presentation of seminar papers. These papers will be presented most classes.

Books for Religion 330: Seminar in Kabbalah

1. Joseph Dan: *The Heart and the Fountain*. Oxford, 2000
2. *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*. Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Translated by Peter Cole. Princeton University Press. Paper 2001
3. Dan, Joseph and Kiener., Ronald. *The Early Kabbalah*. New York : Paulist Press, 1986.
4. Fine, Lawrence, tr.; ed. *Safed Spirituality : Rules of Mystical Piety: The Beginning of Wisdom* New York : Paulist Press, c1984
5. Cordovero, Moses ben Jacob, 1522-1570. *The Palm Tree of Deborah [Tomer Deborah]* Moshe Cordovero ; translated and annotated by Moshe Miller. Southfield, Mich. :Targum Press ; Spring Valley, N.Y. : distributed by Feldheim Publishers, 1993

Optional:

7. David R. Blumenthal, ed., *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: The Merkabah Tradition and the Zoharic Tradition*. Volume 1 Ktav Publishing House (June 1978)
8. **NOTE: optional critical articles will be available on WebCt. They're required when you're doing your seminar paper presentation.**

Course requirements:

A. Oral Presentation/Seminar Papers: 30% (2x15%)

Each student will lead two class discussions on the course reading. Each discussion leader will need to prepare a "seminar paper" which will guide the discussions. These should begin by considering the assigned reading question, and use it as a point of departure for independent inquiry. All seminar papers will be posted to WebCT one week prior to the presentation. All students are expected to print these out and to bring them to class with their own questions and comments. Participation in these discussions by the rest of the class amounts to 10% of the grade.

B. Participation 10%

C. RESEARCH PAPER: 15-18 pages, 60%

1. Preliminary thesis & bibliography due November 5; 5%
2. Paper abstract (1-2 p. summary) due November 14; 5%
3. rough draft due November 28: (optional)
4. Final paper due December 10: 50%

Course Schedule:

Week 1:

Session 1: Wednesday, September 5

General Introduction

1. Ezekiel's Vision of the Heavenly Throne: Biblical Sources of Mysticism
2. Four who entered

Week 2: Biblical and Talmudic Foundations of Mysticism

1. 9/10:

A. Introduction from Joseph Dan's *The Heart and the Fountain*, pp 1-44

B. Dan: 49-60: Revelation of the Secret World, and Visions of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael

2. 9/12 NO CLASS ROSH HASHANAH

Compare and contrast the accounts of the heavenly realm, especially in terms of the way these mystics have evaluated their experiences.

Week 3: Sefer Yetsirah: Magic?

1. 9/17:

A. Sefer Yetsirah: from Blumenthal

2. 9/19

B. Article: From Janowitz. On Letters and Numbers: coursepack

First day: Think about the way you made sense of the Sefer Yetsirah. What were the rules you made in your own mind about how it works? How did you derive them?

Second day: How do these rules compare to the rubric that Janowitz uses for reading this text?

Week 4: Sefer Yetsirah: Poetry, Kabbalah

Sefer Yetsirah Continued:

1. 9/24: Peter Cole: Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Introduction.

Keter Malchut: Parts 1 and 2, including notes when needed

2. 9/26: Cole: Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malchut*, parts 2 and 3, until the end including notes when needed.

Optional: Alfonso: The Body, its Organs, and its Senses: A study of Metaphor in Medieval Hebrew Poems of Praise

Question: First day: Describe the cosmology that Ibn Gabirol imagines in this poem. Where does it come from, what are the different elements of it, and how do they work together? Second day: How does it work as a whole?

Week 5: Maimonides

1. 10/1: Maimonides: *Guide for the Perplexed*: 1:1-8; 1: 58-9; Maimonides: *Guide of the Perplexed*: 3:51
2. 10/3: Maimonides: *On Being With God*, Jacobs pp. 45-60 (coursepack)

Optional: *Imitatio Dei* in Maimonides

The cosmos described in the *Sefer Yetzirah* has important implications for the way human beings imagine their relationship with the divine. Maimonides' ideas about this are very different. How does he think people should relate to God? Can he be considered a mystic?

Week 6:

NOTE for week 6: You are REQUIRED to attend the lectures for the conference on Contemporary Kabbalah, (Kabbalah: Right Now!) occurring at Skidmore College, Monday evening at 7 pm, and Tuesday evening at 7 pm in Davis Auditorium.

1. 10/8 Boaz Huss visits class

Boaz Huss' article on Contemporary Kabbalah (coursepack)

2. 10/10 Idel: Maimonides' *Guide* and the Kabbalah, plus Questions and debriefing from conference

Have questions for Professor Huss.

Week 7: Philosophy and Mysticism

1. 10/15 Abulafia: *Dan*: pp121- 128; *The Mystical Immersion in Names and Letters*: Shaarey Zedek: *Dan*: 129-138; Judah al-Botini- from Blumenthal

Optional: Lancaster *On Spiritual Models and Cognitive Maps*: on WebCT

2. 10/17: Early Kabbalah: Intro, plus *Book Bahir*

What do Abulafia and al-Botini do with the *Sefer Yetzirah*? What are they trying to accomplish?

Week 8: Early Kabbalah

1. 10/22: *Book Bahir*- read it again.
2. 10/24: *Treatise on the Left Emanation*," p 165

Optional: Joseph Dan: *Samael, Lillith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah*

First day: How is the *Bahir* different from other sources we've read so far? What is the significance of these differences?

Second day: Where does evil come from in the *Treatise*? What are the implications of this for those who believe it?

Week 9: Early Kabbalah continued

1. 10/29: *Dan*: pp 139-174
2. 10/31: *Account of creation* (Tishby, coursepack)

Optional: Arthur Green: *A Guide to the Zohar*, pp28-101 coursepack

The *Zohar* is in many ways a huge work of mystical fiction (though not necessarily a unified one). As in fiction, these passages of the *Zohar* are aimed at creating a world. What makes this world special, and how do the humans living in this world get to know God?

Week 10: Zohar preliminaries

Annotated Bibliography due today, 11/5

1. 11/5: Tishby: *The Sefirot* (coursepack)
2. 11/7: *Shekhinah*: from Tishby, (coursepack)

Optional: *Body in the Text*

Why is gender important in these passages? Why is the presence of male and female together important?

What kinds of characters are given the sefirot, and what kind of affect are they meant to produce? Why is that important?

Week 11: Zohar 2:

1. 11/12: *Soul* (coursepack)
2. 11/14: *Evil* (coursepack)

Optional: *Body and Soul in Medieval and Modern Philosophy*

Reading Question: What is the nature of the soul, and how does it relate to the material and to the immaterial, to the human body and the material world, and to God?

Paper Abstracts due today, 11/14

Week 12: Zohar 3

1. 11/19:

- A. Zohar: Saba de Mishpatim
- B. Leviticus: 22:12; Exodus 21:8

How does the Saba address doctrines of the soul? What does he have to say about the soul, and how does it interact with the ideas we've just read? How does he account for suffering?

2. 11/21: **NO CLASS THANKSGIVING**

Week 13: Safed School Kabbalah

1. 11/26: Fine, Safed Spirituality, Intro, Rules of Mystical Piety

2. 11/28: Cordovero: Tomer Devorah, Part 1

Optional: Coffee, Coffeehouses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Safed. This is more for fun and interest than profit. What is the purpose of the rules? What do they encourage and discourage and why? How might that affect a community practicing them?

Week 14: Zohar 4

1. 12/3: Cordovero, Tomer Devorah, Part 2

2. 12/5: Lurianic kabbalah: Fine, and *Etz Hayyim* (coursepack)

Optional: Dan: Messianic Dreams of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, pp203-212 and Chajes, Egodocuments

What's the difference between these two texts, especially in terms of their aims? Why does it matter?

Week 15:

1. 12/10: Myers article (coursepack)

2. Web kabbalah

Papers Due Today, 12/10

Assignment Instructions

Seminar Papers:

These presentations, modelled on "seminar papers" in the UK, will be at the heart of our discussions about the topics at hand, and their success will depend upon your preparation for and participation in the presentations and discussions. Your preparation (whether you are presenting the paper or participating in the discussion) should include

- doing the reading prior to the class discussion
- doing the optional reading, and using it to help you
- identifying key terms that frequently occur, and asking yourself what they mean and how they're used
- determining if there are different schools of thought on the topic and what the different arguments "for" and "against" are
- making a list of points you want to raise and the questions you want to ask before you go to the seminar.

Reading critically:

As you grapple with a topic, ask yourself some of the following:

- when was the piece written? does it reflect the views of its time in any way?
- from what intellectual standpoint (Aristotelian, neoplatonist, kalamist, etc.) was it written?
- what does it omit? Does the author ignore religious, economic, intellectual, social, cultural or literary perspectives? Whose voices are ignored?

Preparing the Presentation:

A seminar paper is neither a research paper nor an essay, but a piece intended to introduce and provoke discussion. With that in mind,

- give your paper a clear structure. State its theme, make the central section easy to follow (you might bullet the main points), make the conclusion sharp and controversial when possible.
- produce the paper in a word processor. Feel free to organize it for a presentation - you might number the paragraphs, for example, for reference during the discussion. When you present the paper, speak clearly and slowly and to the group, not down at your notes.
- stick to the topic. Do not give lots of detail and do not pad out a paper with irrelevancies. DO NOT

SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE READ. Assume that all of us have read the piece and are familiar with the factual details of the topic.

REMEMBER: A seminar paper is neither a research paper nor an essay, and so need not be in narrative form. Its purposes are to prepare your readers in advance for a discussion, to guide them through a discussion, and to focus your thoughts for your presentation.

Seminar Paper Presentations:

- Arrive on time, whether you are presenting or participating. Have a copy of the text, a copy of the seminar paper, and your notes handy.
- Listen carefully, take notes during the seminar paper and the discussion that follows, but you're there to participate, so keep your notes succinct during the discussion and write them out more fully after class.
- Join the discussion early on (commenting on a portion of the seminar paper is a good place to begin) so that you don't feel like a spectator.
- You don't always have to be negative or critical; you can intervene to agree with someone. You can also use stating your agreement to introduce another point or question.
- ASK QUESTIONS IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING. If you're confused, others probably are, also.

Don't be embarrassed by silences. Short pauses will occur, when an issue has been exhausted. This is a good opportunity to look at your notes and see if you have other questions or points you wish to make. If you haven't spoken yet, this is the time.

Final Paper:

The final paper should be 15-18 pages long. In it, I will ask you to focus on one text or group of texts in cultural context. I expect you to use both primary and secondary sources in your analysis. More extended guidelines will be available on WebCT.

Mysticism Bibliography: Selected Works in English

Primary Texts

1. David Blumenthal: Understanding Jewish Mysticism vols 1 and 2: a source reader edited] by David R. Blumenthal New York : KTAV, 1978-1982 BM526 .U52 1978
2. Blumenthal, Vol. 2 (*The Philosophical-Mystical Tradition and the Hasidic Tradition* New York: KTAV 1982 BM526.U5 1982
3. Cordovero, Moses ben Jacob, 1522-1570. *The Palm Tree of Devorah [Tomer Devorah]* / Moshe Cordovero ; translated and annotated by Moshe Miller. Southfield, Mich. : Targum Press ; Spring Valley, N.Y. : distributed by Feldheim Publishers, 1993
4. Moses Ben Jacob Cordovero, Ira Robinson. Moses Cordovero's Introduction to Kabbalah: An Annotated Translation of His or Ne'Erav
5. Joseph Dan: The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences. Oxford University Press 2002
6. Joseph Dan, ed. The Early Kabbalah. Paulist Press, 1986
7. Fine, Lawrence: Jewish Mystical Autobiography.
8. Fine, Lawrence, tr.; ed. Safed Spirituality : Rules of Mystical Piety: *The Beginning of Wisdom*. New York : Paulist Press, c1984.
9. Fine, Lawrence. Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos. 2004
10. Joseph Gikatilla: *Sha'are Orah (Gates of Light)/ Rabbi Joseph, the son of Abraham Gikatilla ; translated with an introduction by Avi Weinstein ; with a foreword by Arthur Hertzberg and an historical introduction by Moshe Idel.* San Francisco : HarperCollins, c1994
11. Bernard Glotzer, *The Fundamentals of Jewish Mysticism: the Book of creation and its commentaries*. Northvale, N.J. : J. Aronson, c1992
12. Peter Heyman. *The Sefer Yesirah: a critical edition*. Tubingen 2004
13. Jacobs, Louis. *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*. New York: Schocken Books, 1977
14. Kaplan, Aryeh. Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation, Rev ed. (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997).
15. Kaplan, Aryeh. The Bahir: Illumination (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1989). Matt, Daniel. *Zohar, the book of enlightenment* / translation and introduction by Daniel Chanan Matt ; preface by Arthur Green. New York : Paulist Press, c1983
16. Klein, Eliyahu: **Klein**, Eliahu (trans/comm). *Kabbalah of Creation. Isaac Luria's Earlier Mysticism*. Northvale / Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 2000
17. Luzzatto, Moses Chayyim. Derech Hashem (The Way of God), Aryeh Kaplan, trans. (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim, 1977).
18. Luzzatto, Moses. General Principles of the Kabbalah, Phillip Berg, trans. (Jerusalem: Research Centre of Kabbalah, 1970).
19. Maimonides, The Guide For The Perplexed, M. Friedlander, trans. (New York: Dover, 1956).
20. Matt, Daniel. Essential Kabbalah.
21. Matt, Daniel. *The Zohar*. The Pritzger Edition. Stanford University Press, vols 1-3. 2004-6
22. David Meltzer, The Secret Garden: An Anthology in the Kabbalah (Barrytown, NY: Stanton Hill, 1998)
23. Roy Rosenberg *Anatomy of God* Ktav 1972
24. Selected poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol / translated from the Hebrew by Peter Cole. Princeton [N.J.] : Princeton University Press, c2001
25. Scheindlin, Raymond P. *The Gazelle: medieval Hebrew poems on God, Israel, and the soul*. Philadelphia : Jewish Publication Society, 1991.
26. Sefer ha-Razim (ShR) [Book of the Mysteries] Translation: Morgan, Michael. *Sefer ha-Razim. The Book of the Mysteries*. [Texts and Translations 25; Pseudepigrapha Series 11]. Chico: Society of Biblical Literature/Scholars Press, 1983
27. Tishby, Isaiah : *The wisdom of the Zohar : an anthology of texts* / vols 1-3. English translation by David Goldstein. Oxford [England] ; New York : Published for the Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1989
28. Mark Verman, ed. The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources, SUNY Press 1992
29. Wexelamn, David. *The Jewish Concept of Reincarnation and Creation: based on the writings of Hayyim Vital*. Northvale, N.J. : Jason Aronson, c1999.

Secondary Literature

5. Gil Anidjar: *Our Al-Andalus*
6. Joseph Dan: *Jewish Mysticism: General Characteristics and Comparative Studies*, vols 1-3.
7. Dan, Joseph, "Samuel, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah, *AJS Review* 5 (1980), 1-16.
8. Fine, Lawrence, ed. . *Essential Papers on Kabbalah* . New York : New York University Press, 1995
9. Lawrence Fine, "The Art of Metoscopy: A Study in Isac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," *AJS Review* 11 (1986), 79-102.
10. Fine, Lawrence. *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*. Stanford 2005.
11. Talya Fishman, "A Kabbalistic Perspective on Gender-Specific Commandments: on the Interplay of Symbols and Society," *AJS Review* 17 (1992), 199-246.
12. Pinhas Giller: *Reading the Zohar* (Oxford, 2001)
13. Pinhas Giller: *The Enlightened will Shine* (SUNY Press 1993)
14. Arthur Green. *Keter*. Princeton University Press, 1997
15. Arthur Green. *A Guide to the Zohar*. Stanford 2004
16. Gruenwald, Ithamar *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 1980 BM 723 G77 1980
17. Goodman, Len (ed.), *Neoplatonism in Jewish Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).
18. Elijior, Rachel. Chabad:The Contemplative Ascent to God, in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*, ed. by Arthur Green (New York: Crossroads, 1987), pp. 157-205.
19. Elijior, Rachel. The Concept of God in Hekhalot Mysticism. In *Binah: Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. by J. Dan, (New York, 1989), pp. 97-120
20. Handelman, Susan. *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem Levinas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1991).
21. Hecker, Joel. *Eating and Embodiment in Classical Kabbalah*. March, 2005.
22. Elliott Horowitz, "Coffee, Coffeehouses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Early MODern Jewry," *ASS Review* 14 (1989), 17-46.
23. Hundert, Gershon David, ed. *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present*. New York: New York University Press, 1991.
24. Moshe Idel. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* SUNY Press 1988
25. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow. *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*. Jason Aronson Press 1998
26. Moshe Idel: *New Perspectives in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*
27. Moshe Idel: *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*: SUNY Press 1989
28. Idel, Moshe. *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* . Albany : State University of New York Press, c1990.
29. Idel, Moshe *The mystical experience in Abraham Abulafia* State University of New York Press : Albany, 1988 BM 526 I24 1988
30. Idel, Moshe *Studies in ecstatic kabbalah* State University of New York Press : Albany, 1988 BM 526 I234 1988 02 Assorted topics
31. Idel, Moshe *Kabbalah* Yale University Press : New Haven, 1988 BM 526 I22 1988
32. Idel, Moshe, *Language, Torah, and hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* State University of New York Press : Albany, 1988 BM 526 I23 1988 Hermeneutics
33. Janowitz, Naomi. *The Poetics of Ascent* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
34. Ephraim Karnfogel: *Peering Through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietist Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*
35. Stephen Katz: *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*. Oxford University Press 2000
36. Rebecca Macy Lesses. *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*
37. Yehuda Liebes. *Studies in the Zohar*. Suny Press 1993
38. Schaefer, Peter. *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Aubrey Pomerantz, trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
39. Scholem, Gershom G. *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965 (Not in U of C library)
40. Scholem, Gershom G. *Origins of the Kabbalah* [2] Jewish Publication Society of America : Philadelphia, 1987 BM 526 S3613 1987
41. Scholem, Gershom G. *On the Kabbalah and its symbolism* Routledge & Kegan Paul : London, 1965 BM 525 S3413 1965
42. Scholem, Gershom G./Urbach, Efraim E. (Efraim Elimelech) *Studies in mysticism and religion presented to Gershom G. Scholem on his seventieth birthday by pupils, colleagues and friends* 1967 BL 25 S68 1967
43. Scholem, Gershom Gerhard. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York : Schocken Books, 1961, 1974 printing.

44. Scholem, Gershom G. *The Messianic idea in Judaism* Schocken : New York, 1971 BM 615 S26 1971
45. Scholem, Gershom G. *Zohar*^[6] Schocken : New York, reprinted 1978, 1949 BM 525 A52
46. Eliezer Segal, "The Exegetical Craft of the *Zohar*: Towards an Appreciation," *AJS Review* 17 (1992), 31-50.
47. Steinsaltz, Adin. The Mystic as Philosopher. *Jewish Review*, 3:4. March 1990, p. 14-17.
48. Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, trans. by Yehuda Hanegbi (New York: Basic Books, 1980).
49. Steinsaltz, Adin. Worlds, Angels and Men. In his *The Strife of the Spirit* (Northvale, NJ, Jasan Aronson, 1988), pp. 42-53.
50. Michael D. Swartz, "'Like the Ministering Angels': Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic," *AJS Review* 19 (1994), 135-68
51. Stephen G. Wald: *The Doctrine of the Divine Name: An Introduction to Classical Kabbalistic Theology* (Scholars Press, 1988; keyed SGW on the chart).
52. Wasserstrom: *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)
53. Wasserstrom: "Sefer Yesira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal (in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 3 no. 1: 1993)
54. Wolfson, Elliot. *Circle in the square : studies in the use of gender in Kabbalistic symbolism*. Albany : State University of New York Press, c1995
55. Wolfson, Elliot R. *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton, 1994.
56. Wolfson, Elliot R. *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
57. Wolfson, Elliot R. *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
58. Wolfson, Elliot R. Woman--The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah: Some Philosophical Observations on the Divine Androgyne." In *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Identity and Culture*, ed. by L. Silberstein and R. Cohn (New York: 1994), pp. 166-204.
59. Wolfson, Elliot R.. Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth. in *Circle In The Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
60. Elliot Wolfson, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986), 27-52