

Religion 330: Seminar in Kabbalah Spring 2012

Professor: Marla Segol

Meetings: M/W 2:30-4:20 Ladd 106

Office Hours

My office hours are Mondays from 12-1, and Wednesdays from 4:30-5:30 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:

RE 330: Seminar in Kabbalah

What is kabbalah? How does it work? Whose is it anyway?

In this course we will explore Jewish Mysticism from its earliest sources in the Torah and the Talmud to its manifestations on the internet in the present. We'll focus on the development of its symbols, where they came from, and how they signify. We'll look at the role that bodies play- how much does it matter what its practitioners do, and how they do it? In that same vein, we'll look at gender categories, and how they organize thought and action in a kabbalistic cosmos. Finally we'll consider the notion of authenticity. Who has a right to claim its symbols, its texts, its cosmological models, and its powers as their own? By the end of the course students will be familiar with the core texts in kabbalah, they will have a good grasp of its cosmological models, knowledge of the range of ideas about how the texts work, for whom, and why people think so.

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. Dan, Joseph and Kiener., Ronald. *The Early Kabbalah*. New York : Paulist Press, 1986.
3. Fine, Lawrence, tr.; ed. *Safed Spirituality : Rules of Mystical Piety: The Beginning of Wisdom* New York : Paulist Press, c1984
4. 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

Course Requirements:

1. Participation (10%) You know what to do. Read everything. Think, ask, listen, talk.
2. Reading and topic selection. You will choose one reading ideally related to your final paper, and you will lead discussion that day. You'll also assign the reading question, in consultation with me, two weeks before the day you present.
3. Seminar Paper (20%). Each student will lead a class discussion on the reading related to his or her topic research topic. Each discussion leader will need to prepare a "seminar paper" which will guide the discussions. All seminar papers will be sent to the class list two full days prior to the presentation. All students are expected to print these out and to bring them to class with their own questions and comments.
4. Reading Responses x3 (5 points each for a total of 15%).
5. Annotated Bibliography and Paper Outline (10%) The bibliography should contain at least ten to fifteen sources, depending on your topic. It should contain a mix of primary sources, and secondary sources such as books, book chapters, and scholarly articles. Some of you will probably also use interviews as primary and secondary sources.
6. Final Paper (45%) It will be 15-20 pages long. We'll talk about it. At length.

Reading Schedule:

1/23: The four who entered (Handout)

1/25

1. Introduction, pp 1-23
2. Ezekiel's Vision of the Heavenly Throne: Biblical Sources of Mysticism

1/30

- A. Revelation of the Secret World, pp 49-54
- B. Deification of Enoch, pp. 61-74

2/1

- A. Dan on Shiur Qomah (CP-2)
- B. Shiur Qomah (Coursepack-1)

Choices for Seminar Papers due 2/1

2/6

- A. Sefer Yetsirah: from Kaplan (CP-3)
- B. Segol on SY: Chapter 6: The Secret Life of the Golem (CP-4)

2/8

Naomi Janowitz. On Letters and Numbers: (CP-5)

2/13

Donnolo on the SY (CP-6)

2/15

Saadya on the SY (CP-7), plus my translation of the Otiot Shel Metatron (The Magical Alphabet of the Angel Metatron)

Question 1, due 2/15: What are the different views of the power of language, the role of the human body, and on the relation of the divine to the material world? Categorize them and explain them.

Seminar Presentations Start 2/20

2/20

- A. Dan, Intro, pp 23-31
- B. Dan, pp 75-95, Bahya and Ibn Gabirol
- C. Alfonso: The Body, its Organs, and its Senses: A study of Metaphor in Medieval Hebrew Poems of Praise

2/22

- A. Maimonides: *Guide for the Perplexed*: 1:1-8; 1: 58-9; Maimonides: Guide of the Perplexed: 3:51 (CP-8)
- B. *Imitatio Dei* in Maimonides (CP-9)

2/27

Idel: Maimonides' Guide and the Kabbalah (CP-10)

3/1

- 1. Dan: Abulafia pp121- 128; The Mystical Immersion in Names and Letters
- 2. Lancaster: On Spiritual Models and Cognitive Maps (CP-11)

3/5

- A. Shaarey Zedek: Dan: 129-138;
- B. Judah al-Botini (CP-12)

Question 2, due 3/5: In these sources: What can symbols do? (Letters are a sort of symbol) What can't they do? Why?

3/8

Early Kabbalah: Intro, plus *Book Bahir*

3/10-18: Spring Break

3/19:

- A. Isaac the Blind, pp 71-86
- B. Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, pp 87-108

3/21: The Other Kohen Brothers

- A. Early Kabbalah, pp 151-182
- B. **Optional:** Joseph Dan: Samael, Lillith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah (CP-13)

3/26: Dan, Heart and Fountain, pp 139-159

3/28: Account of creation (Tishby, CP-14)

4/2:

- A. Shekhinah: from Tishby, (CP-15)
- B. Zohar on Soul (CP-16)

Paper Abstracts and Annotated Bibliographies due today, 4/2

4/4

- A. Zohar: Saba de Mishpatim (CP-17)
- B. Leviticus: 22:12; Exodus 21:8 (CP-18)
- C. **Optional:** Segol on Saba (CP-19)

4/6 **Safed School Kabbalah**

A. Fine, Safed Spirituality, Intro, Rules of Mystical Piety, pp. 27-61

B. **Optional:** Coffee, Coffeehouses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Safed. This is more for fun than profit. (CP-20)

What is the purpose of the rules? What do they encourage and discourage and why? How might that affect a community practicing them?

4/11: Cordovero: Tomer Devorah, Part 1, pp 1-76

4/13: Cordovero, Tomer Devorah, Part 2, pp 77-141

Question 3: due 4/13 Sefirot: What are they, where do they come from, and what do they do? How do they relate to human beings? (discuss gender, cosmology, symbols, and bodies)

4/18:

A. Dan, Heart & the Fountain, Messianic Dreams of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, pp203-212

B. Hayyim Vital, Daughter of Raphael Anav (CP-21)

C. Bilu: Dybbuk and Maggid (CP-22)

4/20:

A. Baal Shem Tov and Nahman: Dan, Heart, pp 231-250

B. Tzaddik as Axis Mundi (CP-23)

4/25: Winkler: The Magic of the Ordinary, pp xvii-14; 190-206 (CP-24)

4/27: Michaelson: God in Your Body, (CP-25)

4/30: Huss: The New Age of Kabbalah (CP-26)

Last Class

Papers due 5/6

<i>Assignment Instructions</i>

Seminar Papers: (20%)

They should last approximately half the class time.

These are meant to be the jumping-off point for your final papers.

They pose a question central to the work we're studying, and one that helps you pursue your interest in that particular source.

1. First, in preparation for your seminar presentation, meet with me two weeks prior to your presentation.

2. Next, decide upon your discussion questions, and circulate them one week in advance, by email.

3. For your presentation, you will present relevant background to the material.
4. Then you will present your discussion question, and break that question down into its constituent parts.
5. For each of the parts of the question, you will provide references to the text relevant to that question. For example, if you want to know about the different meanings attributed to the gazelle in poetry, you provide the names of the poems that discuss it, along with page and line numbers. With your guidance, the class will draw their own conclusions about this. You can consider them while writing your final paper.
6. Do the same for each part of the question.
7. Draw some conclusions, ask some questions for further discussion if you'd like.
8. That's it. You're done.

Annotated Bibliography, plus paper outline (10%)

The bibliography should contain at least ten to fifteen sources, depending on your topic. It should contain a mix of primary sources, and secondary sources such as books, book chapters, and scholarly articles.

Besides bibliographical information, each entry should contain a paragraph explaining three things:

1. The main argument of the source.
2. The way the author develops the argument (what are the sources, how are they used, what is the methodology?)
3. What good is it to you? You should explain how this source will help you write your paper.

Final Paper (50%)

The final paper should be 15-20 pages long. It should be thematically related to material we've studied in this course. We will talk about this.

Goals for the Paper:

- 1) write an essay that is clear, well-organized, and driven by a specific thesis relevant to the paper's topic.
- 2) effectively utilize primary and secondary source to develop the paper's argument
- 3) define and properly use technical terms and concepts
- 4) make distinctions between the presentation of relevant data and/or arguments made by others and the critical analysis of these materials.
- 5) accurately apply theoretical models and/or disciplinary methods to specialized content.