4960 - Kabbalah: Jewish Mysticism, Myth, and Magic
Last revised 11-13

This course is an introduction to Jewish mysticism, presented in historical survey. Through lectures and readings from seminal texts: The Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice, III Enoch, Sefer Yetzirah, the Bahir, Sefer Chasidim, The Treatise on the Left Emanation, the Zohar, and Sefer ha-Gilgulim, the course will explore the major topics of Jewish Kabbalah, including mystical cosmogony, apocalypse, and eschatology, theosophy, word-mysticism, meditation, and mystical-magical rituals of power.

No class meeting April 1

Required Texts (combined, these should cost you less than $75):

*Text reader* – selected texts as assigned by the professor.

Recommended Text:

Weeks (more or less – there is no before or after in matters of Torah)

1. **What is Kabbalah?**

2. **Seeds of the Esoteric: The Bible**
   - Cosmogony (Gen. 1-2; Psalm 74; Job 38-40)
   - Apocalypse (Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; Zechariah 1-4;14)
   - Eschatology (Isa. 9; 11; 25; 40-66; Daniel 4-10)
   - Deeds of Power (Ex. 7)
   - Knowing the Mind of God (Deut. 18; Song of Songs)

3. **Apocalypse may be now! Apocalyptic Literature**
   - I Enoch
   - Jubilees

4. **God is in His Temple: Priestly Mysticism of the Dead Sea Scrolls**
   - Rule of the Community
   - Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice
The War Scroll

5. **Maasei Bereshit u’Maasei Mervakah**
   Mysticism in the Talmud
   Myth - Chag. 12b-15b
   Magic - Shabbat 67a-b
   Mysticism - Berakhot 7a

6. **Little Lower than the Angels: Hechalot Mysticism**
   “Do not cry ‘water, water’”… Mystical Ascent: (Enoch III; Hechalot Rabbati)
   You Bring Down Captives…How to Summon Angelic Assistance: (selected Hechalot texts)
   …and to Enslave Demons too! (Testament of Solomon)

7. **Rituals of Power: Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity**
   He Spoke and It Was (Sefer Yetzirah)
   Combating Evil (DSS anti-demonic psalms)
   If you Wish to Give your Enemy Insomnia…(Sword of Moses; selected incantation bowl inscriptions and Cairo Geniza magical recipes)

8. **Cherubs, Nuts, and Vampires: The German Pietists**
   Witchcraft, monsters, and how to combat them (Sefer Chasidim).
   The Secret of Prayer (Or Zarua).
   Seeing God’s Glory (Oxford Ms. 1567)
   Excursus: Golem Recipes

9. **The Rebirth of Myth: Early Kabbalah**
   The Ten Sefirot and Divine Emanation (Sefer ha-Bahir)
   The Left Side of Creation (Treatise on the Left Emanation)

10. **Abraham Abulafia and Prophetic Mysticism**
    Tzeruf Meditation (Or ha-Sechel)

11. **A Mystical Gospel: The Zohar**
    The King in His Beauty (Zohar).
    The Meaning of Torah and the Commandments (Zohar)

12. **Safed: Broken Vessels, Repaired Souls**
    Holy Sparks (Etz Chayyim)
    The Journey of the Soul in this World and the Next (Sefer ha-Gilgulim).
    Exorcism as Cosmic Therapy (Zera ha-Kodesh).
    Unifications: Meditation and Theurgy (Shivhi ha-Ari)
    Women mystics (Sefer ha-Hezyonot).

13. **Kabbalists vs. Qabbalists: The Renaissance Encounter**
    Pico della Mirandola on the first word of Genesis
14. Crisis and Consolidation: Kabbalah and the 17th-18th Centuries
Reincarnation as dogma (Nishmat Chayyim)
Nathan of Gaza – Visionary as Revolutionary
The Secret Meaning of Food (Shnei Luchot ha-Brit)
Woman as High Priest (Tkhine Shifrei bat Yosef of Poznan)

15. In the Palace of the King: Hasidism
The internalization of the Torah (Sefat Emet)
The popularization of Kabbalah (Shevhi ha-BeSHT).

16. Kabbalah Today: Conclusion?

Topics: TBD
Course Requirements:

A midterm 30%
A final 30%
An Essay or Book Reports 20%

Class participation 20% (Your offered opinion, no matter how goofy, enhances your grade).

CLASS PARTICIPATION IS REQUIRED.
Come to class having read ahead and prepared to say something about it. To further this goal, you are required to bring an Entry Ticket to class each day.

3. ENTRY TICKETS. For each class, prepare at least one question or comment about the reading (especially the reader texts themselves) for that class and hand in a 3x5 index card (no alternative mediums – no folded notes, no 3M stickies, no 4x6) with your name at the beginning of class. It should always look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Question or observation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of the entry tickets is to get you thinking about the reading and the questions it raises for you – not all questions will necessarily be answered directly in class.
Periodically, I may read out selected questions to the class. Do not neglect this – the cards I gather will help determine your participation grade – 20% of the total class grade.

The Essay –

For those interested in a specific topic, they may write 4-6 pages literature search/summary on one topic, using (but not limited to) the bibliography provided with this syllabus (these materials are either in the UNT library, available electronically, or through ILL. Please review UNT policies on plagiarism. Even if not stated in the proposed title, the focus of all these topics must be on Judaism and Jewish texts.

God as portrayed in Jewish apocalyptic texts
God as portrayed in Hechalot texts
God as portrayed in Kabbalah.
The Sefirot.
The Kabbalistic notion of divine ‘emanation.’
Kabbalistic theories of the soul.
The Lurianic creation myth.
Reincarnation in Early Kabbalah and Zohar.
Reincarnation in Lurianic Kabbalah
Ghostly possession (Dybbuk).
Beneficent possession (Maggid).
Exorcism accounts.
Meditation, ecstasy, or trance practices in Judaism.
Interpretations of visionary experiences.
The “Elijah” tradition in Judaism
Spiritual disciplines and pietistic practices (hanhagot).
Women’s spiritual expression in Judaism before the 20th Century.
Women in roles of mystical leadership before the 20th Century.
The concept of “Witch” and “Witchcraft” in Judaism.
Fallen angels in Early Jewish (only Jewish) literature.
Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
Angels in Hechalot texts.
The demonic in Jewish tradition.
Hebrew magical texts.
Jewish magical responses to illness.
The mystical significance of Hebrew.
Mystical beliefs about the name(s) of God.
The Temple as a focus of mystical interest.
The interpretation of Ezekiel’s chariot in Jewish mysticism.
Fabulous beasts in Jewish myth.
Monsters in Jewish myth.
The golem tradition.
The mythic/mystical significance of light.
The mythic/mystical significance of fire.
Sexuality in Jewish mystical thought.
A spiritual biography (history and ideas) of any of the following:
Rabbi Akiba
Simon ben (or bar) Yohai
Samuel heHasid
Moses Cordovero
Abraham Abulafia
Moses deLeon
Eleazar of Worms
Nachmanides
Ariel of Gerona
Isaac Luria
Joseph Caro
Chayyim (Chaim) Vital
The Baal Shem Tov
Nachman of Bratzlav
Levi Yitzkhak of Berditchev
Menachem of Chernobyl
Shenur Laydi of Lubavitch

**Book Reports -**

If you are not interested in actual research, then you must instead submit book reports on one book and or two scholarly articles. Each book/article must be approved by the instructor (books and articles listed in the bibliography below may be considered pre-approved). Each report should be 250-500 words. We try to find time to read a selection of the reviews aloud in class and discuss the books.

**Plagarism**
Don’t do it. If you are not sure what it is, look it up.

**Using the Internet for research**

The internet can be a very useful research tool. It can quickly guide you or give you access to:

- Useful online encyclopedias, such as the old but still valuable *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

- Articles published online by universities or by academics. Some scholars have most of their periodical available online. Some journals also offer articles online.

- Bibliographies citing books or articles of interest.
However, it is a mistake to use the Internet as your sole source of research, especially in Jewish studies, because:

- Some articles appear there only because, rightly, they could never be published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Information often appears as part of a religious-advocacy website. Much of such information is skewed or selectively presented for apologetic or polemical purposes.
- Even a familiar source, such as *Wikipedia*, can contain a mix of valid information along with specious information written by amateur scholars, people with a specific agenda, or plain wackos.

Finally, the fact remains that the best, most comprehensive works on Jewish mysticism continue to exist and be published hardcopy form (you know - books), so be sure to include those in your research.

**Disability Access**

“The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at [http://www.unt.edu/oda](http://www.unt.edu/oda). You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.”

**Bibliography**

**English Reference Works:**


**Online Reference Material:**

*The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, A linguistic and textual resource online at http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/aramaic_language.html
*Jewish Heritage Online Magazine* at www.jhom.com
*Practical Kabbalah* at www.atomick.net/fayelevine/pk/

**English Monographs, Anthologies, and Articles:**

Arbusch, Ra’anun, “The Figure of Rabbi Ishmael in the Hekhalot Literature and in Jewish Martyrology as Competing Models of Heavenly Ascent,” Paper for 2001 SBL Conference. Published online at www.iwu.edu/~religion/ejcm/
Bar Ilan, M., “Exorcism by Rabbis: Talmud Sages and their Magic,” *Bar Ilan University Online Articles*, faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/exorcism.html.


Davila, James, “Ancient Magic(The Prayer of Jacob),” Lecture online at www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~www_sd/magic.html.


Davila, James, “Ritual in the Jewish Pseudepigrapha,” Draft article online at www.st-andrews.ac.uk/academic/divinity/ritual_pseud_paper.htm


Ruderman, D. B., *Kabbalah, Magic and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-
Scholem, G., Kabbalah, New York: Meridian Books, 1974
Zimmels, H.J., Magicians, Theologians, and Doctors, Northvale: