

—SAMPLE SYLLABUS—
RELS/JWSS/MDES 108

JEWISH MYSTICISM, MAGIC AND FOLKLORE
—FROM TALMUD TO KABBALAH—

Course Description

This course introduces Jewish sacred texts, cosmological concepts, mystical language, folklore, and magical beliefs and practices from ancient times to the present. We will be using primary sources in translation, including Talmudic commentary, debate, grammatical analysis, allegory and analogy as means of reaching underlying meaning and altered experience. We will contrast Talmudic legalism with the ecstatic, mystical traditions elaborated in Kabbalistic texts and explore the folklore in both Talmud and Kabbalah. Concepts covered include notions of masculine and feminine aspects of the Godhead, competing understandings of the nature of the Shekhinah (Patai's 'Hebrew Goddess'), Adam Kadmon (the 'Primordial Man' or 'Evolving Human'), mystical symbols embedded in the Hebrew alphabet and grammar, the Tree of Life, Sephirot, Tarot, and gamatria (numerology). Ancient, Talmudic and Kabbalistic approaches to spirituality will be compared. We will be interested in correspondences and contradictions, as well as in the universalism of Jewish mysticism. We will explore the relationship between mysticism and *TIKKUN OLAM*, global healing, throughout the term.

No prior knowledge of Hebrew, Bible or Jewish studies is required for this introductory class.

Readings

PRIMARY TEXTS TO BE INTRODUCED IN CLASS. SELECT ONE.

Cohen, A., trans./commentary	<i>EVERYMAN'S TALMUD</i>
Hammer, J., trans./commentary	<i>RETURN TO THE PLACE (SEFER YETZIRAH)</i>
Kaplan, A., trans./commentary	<i>THE BAHIR</i>
Kaplan, A., trans./commentary	<i>SEFER YETZIRAH</i>
Matt, D., trans./commentary	<i>ZOHAR (Vol. 1 PRITZKER EDITION)</i> (to page 181)

SECONDARY TEXTS TO BE INTRODUCED IN CLASS. SELECT AT LEAST ONE.

Abrams, J.	<i>THE WOMEN OF THE TALMUD</i>
Aczel, A.	<i>THE MYSTERY OF ALEPH: MATHEMATICS, THE KABBALAH, AND THE SEARCH FOR INFINITY</i>
Amiras, M.Z.	<i>MALKAH'S NOTEBOOK: A JOURNEY INTO THE MYSTICAL ALEPH-BET</i>
Buber, M.	<i>LEGENDS OF THE BAAL SHEM TOV</i>
Davies, T.	<i>MAGIC, DIVINATION, AND DEMONOLOGY AMONG THE HEBREWS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS</i>
Erlanger, G.	<i>SIGN OF THE TIMES: THE ZODIAC IN JEWISH TRADITION</i>
Ginzberg, Y.	<i>THE ALEPH-BET: JEWISH THOUGHT REVEALED THROUGH THE HEBREW LETTERS</i>
Halevi, Z.	<i>THE ANOINTED (novel)</i>
Halevi, Z.	<i>SCHOOL OF THE SOUL: ITS PATH AND PITFALLS</i>
Halperin, D.	<i>SEEKING EZEKIEL: TEXT AND PSYCHOLOGY</i>
Hiebert, T.	<i>THE YAHWIST'S LANDSCAPE: NATURE AND RELIGION IN EARLY ISRAEL</i>
Idel, M.	<i>THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN ABRAHAM ABULAFIA</i>
Idel, M.	<i>KABBALAH AND EROS</i>
Kaplan, A.	<i>MEDITATION AND KABBALAH</i>
Karmi, Y.	<i>THE GODDESS ASHERAH IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND HER PILLAR FIGURINES (thesis)</i>
Leet, L.	<i>RENEWING THE COVENANT: A KABBALISTIC GUIDE TO JEWISH SPIRITUALITY</i>
Naveh, J. & S. Shaked	<i>AMULETS AND MAGIC BOWLS: ARAMAIC INCANTATIONS OF LATE ANTIQUITY</i>
Patai, R.	<i>THE HEBREW GODDESS</i>
Rivlin, L.	<i>WHICH LILITH? FEMINIST WRITERS RECREATE THE FIRST WOMAN</i>
Schwartz, H.	<i>THE FOUR WHO ENTERED PARADISE (novella)</i>
Scholem, G.	<i>KABBALAH AND ITS SYMBOLS</i>
Scholem, G.	<i>SABBATAI SEVI: THE MYSTICAL MESSIAH</i>
Schrire, T.	<i>HEBREW MAGIC AMULETS: THEIR DECIPHERMENT AND INTERPRETATION</i>
Winkler, G.	<i>MAGIC OF THE ORDINARY: RECOVERING THE SHAMANIC IN JUDAISM</i>

This is a small selection of texts that represent diverse approaches to our topic. Some of the above authors have many other books on Jewish mysticism, magic and folklore. You are welcome to explore on your own as much as possible. Online study guides and annotated biblio will be provided.

Course Requirements

REQUEST ORIGINAL SYLLABUS AND WRITING GUIDELINES

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS
NOTE: THIS IS A RATHER AMBITIOUS SYLLABUS. WE WILL GO AS SLOWLY OR AS QUICKLY AS WE NEED TO IN CONSIDERATION OF OUR TOPICS		
AUG. 28	INTRODUCTION: JEWISH MYSTICISM, MAGIC AND FOLKLORE FROM TALMUD TO KABBALAH Course requirements, readings, and expectations. Problems of definition. Introduction to basic concepts and the readings. An introduction to Jewish thought and 'Talmudic method' The <i>PARDES</i> model and entering into Paradise.	Look over and select your readings. To follow along see readings listed below.
SEPT. 4	LABOR DAY—NO CLASS	
<i>PART I</i>	<i>THE MYSTICAL SHAPE OF THE GODHEAD</i>	
SEPT. 11	VOID, CHAOS AND CREATION The letter <i>BET</i> as symbol of the filling of the universe. Contemplation of void, chaos & Creation. Interpretations of Talmud and Bahir. Be sure to read the commentaries and notes in your selected readings.	Kaplan Intros Talmud 1
SEPT. 18	THE ALEPH-BET AS THE EMANATION OF THE DIVINE <i>ALEPH</i> as dance and meditation. The importance of each letter of the alphabet, including vowels. Secret meanings, symbolic incantations, amulets and numerology. (This will take a while). The Tetragrammaton. <i>ALEPH-BET</i> mysticism, magic and folklore. <i>ALEPH-BET</i> tales. <i>FILM: THE DAY BEFORE CREATION</i>	Sefer Yetzirah Talmud 9
SEPT. 25	CONTEMPLATION OF THE UNIVERSE Introduction to the Schools of Hillel and Shammai. Separation of heaven and earth. Travel between the two worlds: ladders, towers, dreams, numbers and letters. The problem of the sun and the moon. What's the difference between mysticism, magic and folklore?	Bahir Halevi
OCT. 2	THE FEMALE ASPECT OF THE DIVINE The <i>SHEKHINAH</i> as the 'Hebrew Goddess' or 'simply' as the dwelling-place of the Divine? Grammar and the Goddess debate. The feminist discovery of the <i>SHEKHINAH</i> . Reinterpreting the sun and the moon. REVIEW LECTURES AND READINGS MIDTERM—IF WE'RE READY	Patai 3 & 4 Bahir / Zohar
OCT. 9	THE SHEKHINAH AND THE MESSIAH The return of the Goddess-in-Exile. The mystical Sabbath and the Sabbath Queen. Conditions for the permanent return of the <i>SHEKHINAH</i> . Is Patai right about the 'return' of the Hebrew Goddess? <i>FILM: MIRIAM'S DAUGHTERS NOW</i>	Finish Patai, esp. 6, 9, 11
<i>PART II</i>	<i>EARTHLY CONCERNS</i>	
OCT. 16	THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE TEN SEPHIROT The universality of the concept of the Tree of Life. Attributes of the ten sephirot. Do the sephirot have anything at all to do with humans, and if so what do I <i>DO</i> ? Is the Tree mystical, magical, or 'just' plain folklore?	Sefer Yetzirah
OCT. 23	SOULS, SPIRITS, ASTRAL BODIES, THE UNDEAD & EXORCISM Humankind and Divine Grace. Perceiving the astral body. Five aspects of the soul. Ru'ach breathing. How to receive an extra soul (while still alive). The <i>GOLEM</i> and the <i>DYBBUK</i> . Communication with the dead. Protection. Dreams and visions. Amulets and incantations. When protection doesn't work. TERM PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE	Bahir Talmud 3, 9

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS
OCT. 30	<p>PARADISE AND THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS</p> <p>Reincarnation as the ultimate sanction. Cleansing of unpure souls. The role of the <i>SHEKHINAH</i> in the transmigration of souls. Two kinds of holy sparks. Debates over resurrection of souls. Is there a Jewish concept of the 'Holy Spirit'? Functionalist and other approaches to Paradise.</p>	<p>Sefer Yetzirah Bahir / Zohar Talmud 11</p>
NOV. 6	<p>KABBALAH, CALENDRICS, AND THE ZODIAC</p> <p>Babylonian roots of the calendar. Mysticism and divination techniques. What is calendric attunement and is it possible to achieve it? Biblical correspondences associated with the calendar and the zodiac.</p>	<p>Sefer Yetzirah Bahir</p>
NOV. 13	<p>FOLKLORE AND POP KABBALAH—TAROT AND CORRESPONDENCES</p> <p>What is Tarot, and in what way is Tarot related to Torah? If Judaism forbids divination, what is the function of calendrics, astrology, and Tarot? Are all these concepts related to each other, and if so, how? Dissemination of kabbalistic principles outside of Judaism.</p>	<p>Sefer Yetzirah Bahir, Zohar</p>
NOV. 20	<p>AMULETS, PROTECTION, AND MAGICAL PURPOSE</p> <p>The hows, whys, wherefores and language of Jewish magical practice. Fear and attempts to master uncertainty. Health, fertility, childbirth, and conflict.</p>	
NOV. 27	<p>THE PATH OF THE GOOD NAME</p> <p>Names as destiny vs names of transformation. When and why do names change in Torah. Following the path of your own. And yes, in following the path of your name, spelling counts.</p>	
DEC. 4	<p>STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF TERM PROJECTS</p> <p>ALL TERM PROJECTS DUE IN CLASS</p>	
DEC. 11	<p>REVIEW OF READINGS AND COURSE TOPICS</p> <p>RECEIVE TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM</p>	<p>Finish all of your selected readings</p>
DEC. 18	<p>FINAL EXAM 7:45-10:00 PM IN CLASS</p> <p>TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE BY 7:45 IN CLASS</p>	