

RelS / JwsS / MdES 108

Jewish Mysticism, Magic and Folklore
Fall Semester, 2011

Course Information

Instructor: Dr. Mira Z. Amiras
Department: Comparative Religious Studies, Humanities Department
Course Codes: RelS 108: 47548 || JwsS 48516 || MdES 108: 48523
Class Time / Location: Tues 6:30 – 9:15 / SH 238
Office Hours: Tues & Wed 4:30-5:30 PM
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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 gammatria (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 class.

Required and Recommended Readings

Primary Texts — Select at least ONE of the following:

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|-------------------------|---|
| Cohen, A., trans./com. | EVERYMAN'S TALMUD |
| Kaplan, A., trans./com. | THE LIVING TORAH (bilingual edition only) |
| Kaplan, A., trans./com. | THE BAHIR |
| Kaplan, A., trans./com. | SEFER YETZIRAH |

Secondary Texts — Select at least TWO of the following:

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|-----------------------|---|
| Abrams, J. | THE WOMEN OF THE TALMUD |
| Biale, D. | EROS AND THE JEWS: FROM BIBLICAL ISRAEL TO CONTEMPORARY AMERICA |
| Buber, M. | LEGENDS OF THE BAAL SHEM TOV |
| Davies, T. | MAGIC, DIVINATION, AND DEMONOLOGY AMONG THE HEBREWS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS |
| Dresner, S. | THE WORLD OF A HASIDIC MASTER: LEVI YITZHAK OF BERDITCHEV |
| Erlanger, G. | SIGN OF THE TIMES: THE ZODIAC IN JEWISH TRADITION |
| Ginzberg, L. | THE LEGENDS OF THE JEWS (multiple volumes) |
| Ginzberg, Y. | THE ALEPH-BET: JEWISH THOUGHT REVEALED THROUGH THE HEBREW LETTERS |
| Graves, R. & R. Patai | HEBREW MYTHS: THE BOOK OF GENESIS |
| Green, A | JUDAIC ARTIFACTS: UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF JUDAIC CHARMS & AMULETS + CD |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Halevi, Z. | THE ANOINTED (novel) / (and other works) |
| Halevi, Z. | SCHOOL OF THE SOUL: ITS PATH AND PITFALLS |
| Halperin, D. | SEEKING EZEKIEL: TEXT AND PSYCHOLOGY |
| Hiebert, T. | THE YAHWIST'S LANDSCAPE: NATURE AND RELIGION IN EARLY ISRAEL |
| Idel, M. | THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN ABRAHAM ABULAFIA |
| Idel, M. | KABBALAH AND EROS (and other works) |
| Kaplan, A. | MEDITATION AND KABBALAH |
| Karmi, Y. | THE GODDESS ASHERAH IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND HER PILLAR FIGURINES (thesis) |
| Leet, L. | RENEWING THE COVENANT: A KABBALISTIC GUIDE TO JEWISH SPIRITUALITY |
| Lévy, I & R. Zumwalt | RITUAL MEDICAL LORE OF SEPHARDIC WOMEN: SWEETENING THE SPIRITS, HEALING THE SICK |
| Naveh, J. & S. Shaked | AMULETS AND MAGIC BOWLS: ARAMAIC INCANTATIONS OF LATE ANTIQUITY |
| Patai, R. | THE HEBREW GODDESS (and other works) |
| Patai, R. | TENTS OF JACOB: THE DIASPORA, YESTERDAY AND TODAY |
| Rabow, J. | 50 JEWISH MESSIAHS: THE UNTOLD LIFE STORIES OF JEWISH MESSIAHS SINCE JESUS |
| Rivlin, L. | WHICH LILITH? FEMINIST WRITERS RECREATE THE FIRST WOMAN |
| Schwartz, H. | THE FOUR WHO ENTERED PARADISE (novella) |
| Scholem, G. | KABBALAH AND ITS SYMBOLS (and other works) |
| Scholem, G. | SABBATAI SEVI: THE MYSTICAL MESSIAH |
| Schrire, T. | HEBREW MAGIC AMULETS: THEIR DECIPHERMENT AND INTERPRETATION |
| Seidman, N. | A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN: THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF HEBREW AND YIDDISH |
| Sharot, S. | MESSIANISM, MYSTICISM, AND MAGIC: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS |
| Steinsaltz, A. | THE ESSENTIAL TALMUD |
| Trachtenberg, J. | JEWISH MAGIC AND SUPERSTITION: A STUDY IN FOLK RELIGION |
| Wex, M. | BORN TO KVETCH: YIDDISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN ALL OF ITS MOODS |
| Winkler, G. | MAGIC OF THE ORDINARY: RECOVERING THE SHAMANIC IN JUDAISM |

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. Be forewarned, however, that English language texts on Kabbalah sometimes contain errors, some of which are deliberate in order to discourage dabblers in mysticism.

Course Requirements

Class will meet Tuesday evenings from 6:30 to 9:15 PM in SH 238. Lectures, discussion, and class exercises will follow the course syllabus and include the week's recommended readings. Students will all be reading different sources, and will be expected to be able to share their understanding and questions regarding their own readings with others in the class. Lectures, discussion, and questions are essential to understanding and being able to work with the material. Please be prompt. Participation in class is essential, and will be evaluated along with written work and class exercises in determining final grades.

Exams will cover lectures, discussions, class activities, films, slides, and student presentations. The Course Guidelines—especially helpful for written work, oral presentations, and grading criteria—is available for download at my faculty website (see below). Participation includes asking questions, positive contribution to class process, consideration of the ideas of others, appropriate discourse, insight, facilitation of class activities, and creativity. If you have questions, please bring them up in class and/or office hours. In this class, your questions, no matter how 'simple' (or 'strange') are vital to our consideration of kabbalistic principles.

Please read THE COURSE GUIDELINES for further information. It can be downloaded from the link below:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/people/mira.amiras/>

Please download course materials and staple Cover Sheets to the front of your assignments.

Click the Courses link at the top of the page. Click on 'Jewish Mysticism, Magic and Folklore' All course Assignments, Guidelines and Cover Sheets will be posted except exams.

Grading

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Class Participation | 100 points | 100 points |
| 2 Quizzes | 50 points each | 100 points |
| 1 Term Paper / Research Project | 100 points | 100 points |
| Final Presentation of Term Project | 100 points | 100 points |
| Final Examination | 100 points | 100 points |

Participation: Class participation is critical to the learning process in this class. For much of the material, there will be no other way to acquire the knowledge and skills you will need except through lecture, discussion and class activities. We will use class time in part to quiz you to be sure we're all on the same page with the material at hand. Participation will also be used to assess borderline grades, and to raise final grades for students whose contributions significantly enhance class process and understanding throughout the term.

Individual Term Paper / Research Project: An individual project is required in this class. This can take the form of a creative production based upon the material covered in class and your own research (art, music, poetry, performance, storytelling, etc.) or it can entail a term paper on a problem of interest to you on our topic. This project will allow you to explore in depth a particular issue in Jewish Mysticism, Magic and Folklore. Be sure to discuss which concepts we covered in class and/or your readings that relate to your project. Students focusing on creative projects must also submit a (shorter) paper and bibliography explaining the relationship of your work to the concepts we are studying: Do not assume it is obvious (as with musical compositions or abstract painting!). You will be asked to submit an abstract of your proposed project for approval. Note: Creative projects for this class may be projects that you are already doing for another class only with the written approval of the other instructor, and only if it meets criteria for our own class. All projects must be approved by the instructor.

Student Presentations: Your class presentation should be based upon your individual term project. The presentation can be analytical, creative, folkloric, historical, linguistic. Be prepared to be able to explain the connection to course content, especially if you present a creative project (e.g. music, art). A handout will be circulated in class for scheduling presentations.

Final Exam: The final exam will be either an in-class or a take-home essay to be typed directly on the exam sheet provided. It will encompass the entire course and your own specific readings and projects. The final will be handed out the last day of class and the take-home option will be due in class at the beginning of our scheduled final exam period. In-class exams will include a group (oral) effort graded collectively. See Course Guidelines for more general information.

Guests: This class is for registered students only. Guests are not permitted in the class without the prior consent of the instructor. 'Prior' means at least a week in advance—not minutes before class starts with your guest already present. Admitted guests should observe quietly, and be respectful of all speakers, students, course material and activities.

RelS 108 Learning Objectives

1. Understanding of basic language, terms, and concepts in Jewish mysticism, magic and folklore.
2. Ability to participate in Talmudic/Socratic method of study.
3. Demonstrable entry into the PARDES model of multi-layered engagement with the material.
4. Demonstrate ability to utilize specific course concepts and ideas within one's own research study and/or creative endeavor.

Schedule of Lectures

Week Topic

Assignments/Due Dates

Please note that this is a very ambitious schedule. We will go more slowly when needed in consideration of material.

Aug 30 INTRODUCTION: JEWISH MYSTICISM, MAGIC AND FOLKLORE

Course requirements, readings, and expectations. Problems of definition. Introduction to basic concepts and the readings. An introduction to Jewish thought and 'Talmudic method.' Introductions.

Please watch at least two of the films listed below throughout the term.

8/30 Look over, select and order your selected readings. In addition, the readings listed below are recommended.

Specific Readings listed below show you where we are in class. Your own selected readings may differ.

Part I THE MYSTICAL SHAPE OF THE GODHEAD

Sep 6 VOID, CHAOS AND CREATION

The letter *BET* and the 'filling' of the universe. Contemplation of void, chaos & Creation. Interpretations of Talmud, Sefer Yetzirah and Bahir. Be sure to read the commentaries and notes in your selected readings. The *PARDES* model and entering into Paradise.

FILM: FOUR WHO ENTERED THE GROVE

9/6 Select and order your Readings
All term: Watch at least two of the Recommended Films which follow.

Torah. Kaplan Intros. Talmud Ch.1

Research assignment posted. Start thinking about the project you'd like to focus on.

Sept 13 THE ALEPH-BET AS EMANATION OF THE DIVINE

ALEPH, dance and meditation. The importance of each letter of the alphabet, including vowels. What are 'secret' meanings, symbolic incantations, amulets and numerology. (This will take a while). The Tetragrammaton. *ALEPH-BET* mysticism, magic and folklore. *ALEPH-BET* tales.

FILM: THE MYSTICAL ALPHABET / BEE SEASON

9/13 First reading. Continue second readings. Study your aleph-bet.

Ask questions about Term Project.

Sefer Yetzirah. Talmud Ch. 9

Work on your Aleph-Bet

Sept 20 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 problems of the sun and the moon. What's the difference between mysticism, magic and folklore? REVIEW LECTURES AND READINGS

9/20 First reading. Continue second readings.

Submit proposal / abstract for your Individual Project.

Torah. Sefer Bahir. Halevi

Sept 27 THE FEMALE ASPECT OF THE DIVINE / WOMEN, SEXUALITY AND THE DIVINE

The *SHEKHINAH* as the 'Hebrew Goddess' or 'simply' as the dwelling-place of the Divine? Grammar and the Goddess debate. The feminist discovery of the *SHEKHINAH*. Reinterpreting the sun and the moon. Relationship between women and the Divine.

FILMS: MIRIAM'S DAUGHTERS NOW / THE SECRETS (HA-SODOT) / YENTL / TREMBLING BEFORE G-D /

9/27 First reading. Continue second readings. Prepare bibliography for your Term Project.

Patai, Chs. 3 and 4

Torah. Sefer Bahir, Zohar

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Oct. 04 THE SHEKHINAH, THE SABBATH, AND THE MESSIAH

Notions regarding the return of the Goddess-in-Exile. The Sabbath, the mystical Sabbath and the Sabbath Bride or Queen. Sabbath ritual. Visitations by the *SHEKHINAH*. Conditions for the permanent return of the *SHEKHINAH*. Is Patai right about the 'return' of the Hebrew Goddess? Jewish expectations of the *MASHI'ACH*. Case study: Shabbatei Tzvi: Messiah or Apostate? Conditions for the coming of the *MASHI'ACH*.

FILMS: A STRANGER AMONG US / LUBOVITCH /

10/04 First reading. Continue second readings and your own research.

Resubmit adjusted proposal, including bibliography. Staple to original proposal.

Patai's Hebrew Goddess, especially Chapters 6, 9, 11

Oct. 11 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 *DO*? Is the Tree mystical, magical, or 'just' plain folklore—and does it matter? Visible and hidden paths on the Tree.

10/11 First reading. Continue second readings and own research project.

Sefer Yetzirah. Bahir.

Continue to practice your letters and key terms

Part II EARTHLY CONCERNS: THE HERE, THE HEREAFTER, PROPHECY AND DIVINATION

Oct. 18 SOULS, SPIRITS, ASTRAL BODIES, THE UNDEAD & EXORCISM

Humankind and Divine Grace. Perceiving the astral body. Five aspects of the soul or five separate souls? Ru'ach breathing. How to receive an extra soul (while still alive). The *GOLEM* and the *DYBBUK*. Communication with the dead. Protection. Dreams and visions. Amulets and incantations. When protection doesn't work.

FILMS: DER GOLEM (1920/silent) / THE DYBBUK / THE DYBBUK OF THE HOLY APPLE FIELD (extra credit if you can find it!) / X-FILES EPISODE: 'KADDISH' / FORGIVENESS /

10/18 First reading. Continue second readings and your own project.

Term Project Outline due. (Optional)

Sefer Bahir.

Talmud Ch. 3 and 9

Oct. 25 PARADISE AND THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

Reincarnation as the ultimate sanction. Cleansing of impure souls. The role of the *SHEKHINAH* 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.

FILM: THE FOUNTAIN / (THE ORDER) /

10/25 First reading. Continue second readings and your own research.

Sefer Yetzirah. Bahir. Zohar.

Talmud Ch. 11

Nov. 01 KABBALAH, CALENDRICS, AND THE ZODIAC

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. Calendrics and history: is history always NOW?

FILMS: USHPIZIM / I LOVE YOU ROSA / WALK ON WATER /

11/01 First reading. Continue second readings and your own project.

Torah. Sefer Yetzirah. Sefer Bahir.

Schedule of Lectures

Week Topic

Assignments/Due Dates

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Nov. 08 TORAH, TAROT AND CORRESPONDENCES

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.

FILMS: THE RED VIOLIN / THE NINTH GATE /

11/08 First reading. Continue second readings and working on your own project.

Part III RESEARCH, INTERPRETATION AND COMMENTARY

Be sure you have signed up for a presentation date/time

Nov. 15 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Please take notes on all student presentations and ask questions that you may have.

11/15 Student Presentations.

Nov. 22 FILM TONIGHT

11/22 Film tonight

Nov. 29 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Please take notes on all student presentations and ask questions that you may have.

11/29 Student Presentations. All individual Term Projects due today.

Dec 6 REVIEW LECTURES, PRESENTATIONS AND READINGS — FILM PANEL

Review: Please come to class with all your questions, comments and thoughts.

Film Panel: Discussion of class themes as manifest or embedded within assigned films.

12/06

Receive Final Exam. Note that the final will not be available online. You must be in class to receive it.

Dec 13 FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED 7:45–10:00 PM IN CLASS TONIGHT

Grading Information

Grading Percentages Breakdown

Grading is not on a curve in this class. See Course Guidelines for additional information about writing requirements, research and analysis, style guides and bibliographic format, and grading.

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|---------------|----|
| 94% and above | A |
| 93% - 90% | A- |
| 89% - 87% | B+ |
| 86% - 84% | B |
| 83% - 80% | B- |
| 79% - 77% | C+ |
| 76% - 74% | C |
| 73% - 70% | C- |
| 69% - 67% | D+ |
| 66% - 64% | D |
| 63% - 60% | D- |
| below 60% | F |

University, College, or Department Policy Information

Disabilities

Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the Disabilities Resource Center (DRC) to establish a record of their disability.

This syllabus and course assignments posted online are designed to be compliant with SJSU Accessibility Requirements for preexisting courses and accessible to JAWS Readers. If you have additional needs for special accommodation because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please discuss your needs with me at the beginning of the term, either at my regularly scheduled Office Hours or at another time scheduled by appointment, to discuss your needs.

Academic Integrity Policy (from the Office of Judicial Affairs)

From the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development: "Your commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development." The full policy on academic integrity can be found at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/AS1350.pdf>.

Honor Code: "I have read the Honor Code and agree with its provisions. My continued enrollment in this course constitutes full acceptance of this code. I will NOT:

- Take an exam or quiz, or write a paper in place of someone else, or have someone take an exam in my place, or give my work out to be copied.
- Give information or receive information from another person during a written quiz or exam.
- Use more reference material during an exam or quiz than is allowed by the instructor.
- Plagiarize: i.e., knowingly or unknowingly incorporate the ideas and/or words of another without giving appropriate credit, and representing the product as one's own work.
- Obtain a copy of an exam or quiz prior to the time it is given.
- Discuss the contents of a quiz or exam with students who have not yet taken the exam in question.
- Alter an exam, quiz or paper after it has been graded, and then return it to the instructor for re-grading.
- Leave the classroom without returning the quiz or exam to the instructor.

Cell Phones: Students will turn their cell phones off or put them on vibrate mode while in class. They will not answer their phones in class. Students whose phones disrupt the course and do not stop when requested by the instructor will be referred to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University.

Eating: Eating and drinking (except water) are prohibited in the classroom. Students are expected to eat outside of the classroom and/or building. Students who disrupt the course by eating or drinking and do not leave the building are to be referred to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University.

Computer Use: In the classroom, students are allowed to use computers only for class-related activities. These include activities such as taking notes on the lecture underway, following the lecture on Web-based PowerPoint slides that the instructor has posted, and finding Web sites to which the instructor directs students at the time of the lecture. Students who use their computers for other activities or who abuse the equipment in any way, at a minimum, will be asked to leave the class and will lose participation points for the day, and, at a maximum, will be referred to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University for disrupting the course. (Such referral can lead to suspension from the University.) Students are urged to report to their instructors computer use that they regard as distracting and/or inappropriate (i.e., used for activities that are not class related).

Academic Honesty: Faculty will make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct in their courses. They will secure examinations and their answers so that students cannot have prior access to them and proctor examinations to prevent students from copying or exchanging information. They will be on the alert for plagiarism. Faculty will provide additional information, ideally on the green sheet, about other unacceptable procedures in class work and examinations. Students who are caught cheating will be reported to the Judicial Affairs Officer of the University, as prescribed by [Academic Senate Policy S04-12](#).

Appendix

You are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, withdrawal, etc. found at <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/S04-12.pdf>

For expectations regarding classroom behavior; see [Academic Senate Policy S90-5](#) on Student Rights and Responsibilities.

See the university policies regarding plagiarism, as that found on Judicial Affairs website at <http://www2.sjsu.edu/senate/plagiarismpolicies.htm>

If you would like to include in your paper any material you have submitted, or plan to submit, for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Integrity policy S04-12 requires approval by instructors.

Please be cognizant of the evacuation plan for the classroom in case of emergency.