

Hebrew 2210 and Comparative Studies 2210
THE JEWISH MYSTICAL TRADITION
Professor Michael D. Swartz

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Office Hours:
T 1:00-2:00
Th 4:00-5:00
and by appointment

Jewish mysticism has been a constant yet controversial undercurrent in Jewish history, ranging from antiquity to the present day. Its adherents have pursued striking visions of God enthroned on a huge chariot; sought to penetrate the mysteries of the divine personality, perceiving both male and female in the One God; followed a manic-depressive false messiah; worshipped God through joyful song and dance; and imbued classical Judaism with meaning and life its originators could never have imagined. The Jewish Mystical Tradition is a look into this way of interpreting Judaism and how it has affected Jewish history.

Jewish mystical texts also provide a rare look into the personal religious experience of individual Jews. Using William James's classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* as our guide, we will probe the human dimensions of these forms of religious expression. We will also learn how to read a mystical text, and to interpret the rich symbolism of the Kabbalah and other systems of Jewish mystical religion.

The Jewish Mystical Tradition is also a course in the comparative study of religion and culture. In exploring Jewish mysticism, we will address questions essential to the cross-cultural study of religion: Are all mystical experiences essentially the same? How can we tell the rational from the irrational? Can we reconstruct a person's individual experience from a written text? Is spirituality a force for stability or anarchy in society?

I. Goals of the Course

By the end of this course you should:

- A. Have an understanding of the most important stages in the history of Jewish mysticism, their main ideas, and how historical forces have shaped them;
- B. Learn about central themes in classical Judaism such as creation, revelation and redemption, Torah, and ritual and how they relate to Jewish mysticism;
- C. Have explored a wide range of phenomena in the history of from religions, spanning from antiquity to the modern period;
- D. Have met an astounding variety of philosophers, poets, visionaries, legislators and eccentrics from these periods;
- E. Know how to interpret the mysterious symbolism, imagery, and world-views of Jewish mystical texts;
- F. Be familiar with key issues in the cross-cultural study of mysticism and religious experience;
- G. And you will learn how to express your understanding through well-argued essays and analyses.

II. Texts

All textbooks (except for translations of the Hebrew Bible, which are available in the reference section of the Main Library) are available at Student Book Exchange (SBX) and are also on reserve. Because most of our classes will include in-class readings of Jewish mystical texts in translation, **it is essential that you bring the reading to the class session for which it is assigned.**

A. Required texts:

All required texts are available at the Student Book Exchange (SBX) on High St. and are on reserve at Thompson Library (they are listed under Hebrew 2210). Bible translations are available at many bookstores (including the Augsburg-Fortress Bookstore at Trinity Lutheran Seminary), and in the Grand Reading Room at Thompson Library.

1. Blumenthal, David. *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* vols. I and II. Bring the appropriate volume of Blumenthal to the class session for which it is assigned.
2. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. (Page numbers are listed here according to the Penguin edition, which is available at SBX. Other editions have different numbering).
3. Matt, Daniel (ed.) *Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment*; bring to class for units E and F.
4. Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.
5. Bible. Any reliable translation. Recommended translations: *Tanakh: The Jewish Publication Society Translation of the Holy Scriptures*; *The New Revised Standard Bible* and the *Revised Standard Bible* (also contained in the *Oxford English Bible*); *Revised English Bible*. The following translations are **not** acceptable for this course: *The Good News Bible*; *New International Version*; the King James Version (also called the Authorized Version); Translations published by Artscroll Press; and paraphrases such as *The Book* and the *Reader's Digest Condensed Bible*. Please consult with me if you have any questions.

B. Other required readings:

6. Additional required readings, consisting of articles and translations of primary texts, will be available on CARMEN for downloading:

<https://carmen.osu.edu/>

The course is listed under HEBREW 2210 in CARMEN.

These readings are marked with an asterisk (*) in the syllabus. **Please print out each of these readings and bring it to class on the day it is assigned.**

7. At least one article from *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (second edition, edited by Lindsay Jones) will be assigned. This article is available online. To read the article, follow these instructions:
 - Go online to OSCAR (the OSU online library catalog) and do a title search for **Encyclopedia of Religion**,
 - Click on the link for “**Encyclopedia of Religion (online)**”

- When you arrive at the encyclopedia of religion entry click on the “**connect to web site**” link. (If you are off campus you may have to sign in using your OSU ID.)
- This will get you to the Encyclopedia e-book site. Click on the **eTable of Contents** and go to the appropriate volume to find the article.

Alternatively, the article is available in the print edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, which is available in the reference stacks of Thompson Library. The call number is: **BL31 .E46 2005**. You may photocopy the article in the library. Please contact me if you have any difficulty finding the article.

C. Recommended readings and resources:

A good, reliable introduction to Judaism can be found in Jacob Neusner, *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism* (on reserve at Thompson Library). This book presents the structure of Jewish religion and history. You may also look at the article “Judaism: An Overview,” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, which is available online (see instructions above).

III. Course Requirements

A. **Timely preparation of readings and participation in class discussion** are essential requirements of this course. Class sessions will usually include in-class discussions of the subject matter and assigned texts. Your willingness to learn and to participate can make a significant difference in your grade. 20%.

B. **Five short (10-15 minute) quizzes**, in which you will be asked to identify important concepts and persons briefly. Each quiz will be held **at the beginning of class. No allowances will be made for taking it afterward.** 20%.

C. **One 5-page essay** on a subject to be assigned by the instructor. The essay will address a key issue in the interpretation of Jewish mystical texts, using a text in translation as an example. You may do outside reading in preparation for this essay; however you must consult with me about a bibliography. Further details about the essay will be provided by the fourth week of class and it is due on **Thursday, October 30 at the beginning of class. There will be no exceptions.** The paper must be typed or printed on a printer and *stapled*. **Papers sent electronically will not be accepted.** You are **required** to meet with me at office hours or another arranged time to discuss your selection and how to approach the assignment. 20%.

E. To gain a deeper understanding of Judaism and the study of religion and how it is studied in the University, students will be required to attend a **lecture** at the University relevant to Jewish Studies and religious studies and to write a **one-page report** on that lecture. Events that will fulfill this requirement are listed at the end of the syllabus. More will be announced as information becomes available. The report is due a week after the lecture and will count as much as one quiz.

D. **A midterm exam** to be held in class on **Tuesday, October 21**, and a **final exam**, to be held on **Thursday, December 4 at 2:20 PM** (our last class session), **in our regular classroom.** 20% each.

IV. Course Policies

A. Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

It is important that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct. For details, please review the University’s guidelines at: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>. If you have any questions, please contact me.

B. Attendance

This course is designed so that much of our learning will take place in the classroom. Therefore, **your attendance at classes and preparation for in-class readings will be critical to your success in the course.** You are responsible for information, assignments, and texts given in class, whether you were present or not. Late papers will not be accepted.

C. Communication

All email communication will be sent to your **OSU email address**. If you do not use this address regularly, please arrange to have your email forwarded from your OSU email account to your usual address.

D. Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

E. GE Requirement

This course fulfills a GE requirement in the categories of Cultures and Ideas and Diversity: Global Studies by developing students’ capacities for interpreting writings from the Jewish mystical tradition and modern studies of religious experience and understanding their role in the cultures of the Mediterranean, Europe, and North America. The University’s criteria for fulfilling these requirements are as follows:

Cultures and Ideas:

Goals: Students evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas in order to develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; and interpretation and evaluation.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression.
2. Students evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

Diversity

Goals: Students understand the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States and across the world in order to become educated, productive, and principled citizens.

Expected Learning Outcomes (Global Studies):

1. Students understand some of the political, economic, cultural, physical, social, and philosophical aspects of one or more of the world's nations, peoples and cultures outside the U.S.
2. Students recognize the role of national and international diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values as global citizens.

For more information see:

<http://asccas.osu.edu/curriculum/ge-goals-and-learning-outcomes>

V. Class Schedule

In this schedule, individual class sessions are represented by Arabic numerals (1, 2, etc.). This schedule is subject to change; you will of course be notified in advance. Updates to the syllabus will also be posted on Carmen. As discussion of the class material is an important element in this course, you should write down any questions about words, facts, or issues that arise in your reading and raise them in class.

A. Introduction

1. What is Mysticism? **8/28**
- Recommended: Blumenthal I, Foreword (pp.xv-xviii)
2. Mysticism and Religion **9/2**
- James, pp. 1-77
3. Defining Mysticism **9/4**
- James, pp. 379-429

B. Mysticism and Judaism

1. Understanding Judaism **9/9**
- *Neusner, Way of Torah, 1-20
9/9 FIRST QUIZ: on the concept of mysticism
2. The Roots of Jewish Mysticism **9/11**
- Scholem, ch. 1
- Bible, Genesis chapters 1-3, Exodus 19-20
- Bring Bibles to class.
- Assignment: Make a list of questions raised by your reading of Genesis 1-3

C. Mysticism and Rabbinic Judaism

1. Pardes: The Secret Garden **9/16**
- Blumenthal I, ch. 5
2. The Riders to the Chariot **9/18**

- Major Trends, Ch. 2
- Bring Blumenthal vol. I to class.

9/18: SECOND QUIZ: On Judaism and Merkavah Mysticism

3. Jewish Magic **9/23**
 - *Swartz, "Scribal Magic and Its Rhetoric"

9/25: NO CLASS

D. Mysticism and Philosophy

1. The Philosophical Problem **9/30**
 - James, "Philosophy" (430-457)
2. Moses Maimonides **10/2**
 - *Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*
 - Blumenthal II ch. 2 (pp. 5-23)

THE KABBALAH:

E. The Zohar

- It is recommended that you bring Bibles to class for the following four sessions.

1. Moses de Leon and the Zohar **10/7**
 - Zohar, Introduction
 - Zohar, 43-45 and notes (pp. 204-207)
10/7: THIRD QUIZ: On Magic and Philosophy

2. The Literary Style of the Zohar **10/9**
 - Scholem, Ch. 5
 - Zohar, 49-53 and notes

3. Male and Female **10/14**
 - Scholem, ch. 6
 - Zohar, 54-56, 153-162 and notes

4. The Personality of God **10/16**
 - Blumenthal I, 113-125
 - *Fishbane, "The Zohar: Masterpiece of Jewish Mysticism"

10/21: MIDTERM EXAM

F. Lurianic Kabbalah

1. History, Theodicy, and Cosmology **10/23**
 - Major Trends, ch. 7
 - *Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 1-48
2. Ritual and Redemption **10/28**

- Blumenthal I, ch. 10
- *Fine, “New Approaches to the Study of Kabbalistic Life in 16th-century Safed”

H. Shabbatai Zvi

1. Who was Shabbatai Zvi? **10/30**
- Major Trends, ch. 8

10/30: ESSAYS DUE

I. Hasidism

1. The Birth and Life of Hasidism **11/4**
- Online reading: *Encyclopedia of Religion*, volume 6, “Hasidism: An Overview”
(See instructions above.)
- Blumenthal, II, 87-97

11/4: FOURTH QUIZ: on Luria and Shabbatai Zvi

2. The Kabbalah Transformed **11/6**
- Major Trends, ch. 9

11/11: VETERANS DAY: NO CLASS

3. Worship and Joy **11/13**
- Blumenthal II, chs. 8, 9

J. Mysticism and Modern Judaism

1. Feminist Spirituality **11/18**
- *Umansky, “(Re)imaging the Divine” and Gottlieb, “Speaking into the Silence”

11/18: FIFTH QUIZ: on Hasidism

2. Why Does Madonna Study Kabbalah? **11/20**
- **Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest: The Kabbalah Centre in America* (excerpts)

11/25 AND 11/27: NO CLASS

K. Conclusions

1. What is Jewish Mysticism? **12/2**
- James, Lectures XIX and XX

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, December 4 at 2:20 PM, in our regular classroom.

LECTURE ASSIGNMENT

You may choose one of the following lectures in Jewish studies and religious studies to fulfill the lecture requirement. You are to write a one-page report on that lecture. The report must be printed out. It will be graded with a check (✓) for good or satisfactory work; a plus (+) for exceptionally good work; or a minus (-) for weak assignments. The report is due on the week following the lecture. Other lectures will be announced as they become available.

Wednesday, September 17

Professor Dan Reff, Department of Comparative Studies, OSU

“Why Mexico and Not Japan: Jesuit Missionaries and Conversion to Christianity during the Sixteenth Century”

7:00 PM Page Hall 010

Sunday, September 21

Judaism in Transition: How Economic Choices Shape Religious Tradition, with author Carmel Chiswick, research professor of Economics, George Washington University and Research Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Labor in Bonn, Germany.

7:00 PM, Jewish Community Center (1125 College Ave., Columbus)

Thursday, October 2

Joshua Dubler (U. of Rochester), "Prisoners, Religion, and the Cultural Logic of Mass Incarceration"

4:30pm 165 Thompson Library

October 15

Professor David Brakke, Department of History, OSU

“Mary Magdalene from *The Gospel of Mary* to *The Da Vinci Code*: Jesus’ Favorite Apostle”

7:00 PM Page Hall 010

Thursday, October 23

Sally Promey (Yale University), “Religion in Plain View: The Public Aesthetics of American Belief”

4:30 PM 165 Thompson Library

Sunday, October 26

Professor Yitzhak Melamed (Johns Hopkins University), “Lost Libraries and the Law: Issues in the Recovery of Nazi Looted Books”.

The Nazis looted millions of books from across Europe, many of them treasures of the Jewish community. While art and money have been the subject of concerted recovery efforts, a large number of these books—perhaps the majority—have neither been recovered nor even located and catalogued. Professor Melamed will speak about efforts to find these lost Jewish libraries and the legal entanglements involved.

7:00 PM, Jewish Community Center (1125 College Ave., Columbus)

November 11

Janet Gyatso (Harvard University) – “Religion, Science, and the Ethical in the History of Tibetan Medicine”

4:30 PM 165 Thompson Library

November 19

Profesor J. Albert Harrill

Title TBA

7:00 PM Page Hall 010