



Rothberg International School  
בית הספר לתלמידים מחו"ל ע"ש רוטברג  
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM  
האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים



Department of Summer Courses  
and Special Programs

המחלקה לקורסי קיץ  
ותוכניות מיוחדות

## **Jewish Spirituality and Mysticism in the 21st Century: Meetings with Remarkable People (48892)**

*Dr. Eliezer Shore*

June 30-July 24, 2025

45 Academic Hours, 3 Academic Credits

**Tentative syllabus**

### **Course Description**

- Understand the nature of mystical experience and the unique approach of Kabbalah and Hasidism.
- Study Jewish texts, both ancient and modern, that seek to understand the nature of spirituality.
- Meet living teachers of the Jewish esoteric tradition, who are developing new philosophies and practices.

For centuries, the Jewish mystical tradition was a highly guarded, orally transmitted body of knowledge. Today, Kabbalah is everywhere, from the internet, to Hollywood, to popular charms and amulets. This course presents both an introduction to the basic principles of Jewish mysticism, as well as the way in which Kabbalah and Jewish spirituality has entered diverse forms of contemporary spirituality, new-age thought, religious cross-fertilization, art, cinema, and even politics.

The course will examine how thinkers across the entire range of Jewish experience have drawn upon Kabbalistic ideas to enrich the spirituality of their adherents. Primary texts will be read and discussed (Hebrew texts in translation) and guest speakers will be invited regularly, providing students with a unique opportunity to meet leading spirituality thinkers in Israel and around the world.

The course will be specifically geared to online study and will make use of advanced educational technologies to maximize student interest and involvement: pre-recorded videos, online quizzes and reviews, clickers, flipped-class learning, Prezis, and more. Students will not only meet cutting-edge thinkers in the Jewish tradition but have a chance to meet and interact with searching and intelligent students from around the world.

### **Course Requirements:**

- Class participation
- Short quiz on Jewish topics
- Several short writing assignments
- Final exam (written paper option available for graduate students).

### Grade breakdown

1. Class participation is an integral part of this course. Both in-class participation and between-class preparation of texts count toward this. (A workbook of primary sources used in class will be made available at the beginning of the course). (20%)
2. Multiple choice exam (early in semester) covering basic concepts of Judaism (15%)
3. Several opinion papers on various topics under discussion. (30%)
5. Final exam, or research paper for graduate students. (35%).

### Earning graduate credits for this course

- o Graduate students are expected to inform the Rothberg International School at [rissummer@savion.huji.ac.il](mailto:rissummer@savion.huji.ac.il) of their interest in earning graduate credits for their summer course(s).
- o Graduate students must complete a 25-page, double-spaced, seminar paper with a bibliography, instead of the course's standard final assessment. The students will discuss this paper in class. The topic and bibliography for these papers must be chosen in agreement with each course instructor. Students must approach course instructors by the end of the first week of the course and arrange a time to meet and define their paper topic and bibliography.
- o The seminar paper must make use of at least five scholarly sources (books or academic articles), in addition to Internet resources.
- o The graduate seminar papers must be submitted within 2 months following the course completion.

### Required Text

- *Sparknotes* on Kabbalah - Available online, or in pdf format, from instructor
- Several films with Kabbalistic content will be assigned for viewing during the semester. These can be viewed on Youtube, or iTunes.

Students should also download the following apps (as well as bookmark the corresponding sites on their computers): Nearpod; Socrative.

## **Syllabus:**

### **Part I – Experiential Kabbalah**

**Class 1 & 2:** What is mysticism?

**Primary Sources** (for classroom discussion):

- Collected sources on mystical experience.

**Reading:**

- David Stendel-Rast, “The Monk in Us,” in *Epiphany* (Spring 1981) 15-30.
- Shrader, Douglas W. “Seven Characteristics of Mystical Experiences.” *Proceedings of the 6th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities*, 2007, pp. 1–28. **Online access**
- Robert Forman. "Of Capsules and Carts." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 1.1 (1994): 38-49. **Ereserve**
- "Perennial Philosophy." *Perennial Philosophy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Feb. 2014.

Optional

- Paul Oliver. “Chapter 1: The Concept of Mysticism,” in *Mysticism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London, England: Continuum, 2009) 7-18. **Ebook**
- SparkNotes Editors. “SparkNote on Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).” SparkNotes.com. SparkNotes LLC. 2005. Web. 28 Feb. 2017. **Online access**
- Watch: *The Matrix*, The Wachowski Brothers (1999). iTunes. (Suggested viewing). **Access from reading list**

**Class 3:** Is there mysticism in the Bible? Is prophecy a mystical experience? How do later Kabbalists read earlier texts?

**Primary Sources**

- Collected sources from the Torah
- Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Part I: Chap. LIX.

**Reading:**

- John Sawyer. *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993, pp. 1-25. **Ebook**

- Isidor Thorner, "Prophetic and Mystic Experience: Comparison and Consequences," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 5, No. 1 (Autumn, 1965), pp. 82-96. **Ejournal**
- Veselin Kesich, "Via Negativa." *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14 York & London, Macmillan. 1987, 252-254. **Ereserve**

**Class 4:** Beginnings and endings: How Kabbalists view history.

**Primary Sources:**

Collected Scriptural quotes.

**Reading:**

- Afterman, Allen B, *Kabbalah and Consciousness* (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: Sheep Meadow, 2005) 5-15, 35-44. **Overseas library 296.65 A258; Ereserve**
- Morrow, Jeff, "Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1-3," Seton Hall University.
- "The Return of Prophecy" Temple Institute,
- Sundaram, Mark. "Linear and Cyclical Time: Time's Arrow or Boomerang?" *The Endless Knot*. N.p., 11 June 2013. Web. 22 June 2014.  
<<http://endlessround.wordpress.com/2013/06/11/cyclical-and-linear-time/>>.

**Optional:**

- Eliade, Mircea. "Misfortune and History," chapter in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959) 95-137 (particularly 102-112). **Overseas Library 907 E42; Ereserve**

**Class 5:** A brief overview of early Mystical schools. Talmudic mystics, the Work of the Chariot. The dangers of mystical experience.

**Primary Sources:**

- Collected Scriptural quotes
- Powerpoint presentation.

**Reading:**

- Greenspahn, Frederick E. *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship*. New York: New York UP, 2011, pp. 33-48. **Main library BM 526 G744 J4 2011; Ebook**
- Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Wisdom of Kabbalah*, OneWorld Publications, pp. 66-91. **Overseas library 296.65 C678; Ereserve**
- Kaplan, Aryeh, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, Weiser Books, 1982, chaps. 1, 3, 4. **Overseas library 296.65 K17; Ereserve (ch. 1,3)**

**Optional viewing:**

- “Decoding the Past: Secrets of Kabbalah” (Youtube, 50 min.)
- “Treehouse of Horror XVII,” The Simpsons, episode 18:4. iTunes.

### **Class 6: Mysticism, Magic and the Language of Creation**

#### **Reading:**

Dan, Joseph. “The Language of Creation and Its Grammar.” *Jewish Mysticism. Late Antiquity*, 1998. **Ebook (Tradition und translation)**

Idel, Moshe. “The Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism.” *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven T. Katz, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, pp. 42–79. **Overseas library 291.4 K19; Ereserve**

Katz, Steven T. “Mystic Speech and Mystical Meaning.” *Mysticism and Language*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1992, pp. 3–41. **Overseas library 291.4 K19**

### **Class 7: Abraham Abulafia with guest speaker – R. Avraham Leader**

#### **Reading:**

- Orit Sen Gupta, *Abraham Abulafia – A Jewish Yogi*,
- Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, pp. 55-114. **Overseas library 296.65 K17; Ereserve**
- Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken, 1941, pp. 119-155. **Overseas library 296.65 S368; Ereserve**

Watch: Trailer to the movie *Bee Season*.

### **Class 8: A brief historical overview of mystical movements. Intro to chasidic thought – with PowerPoint presentation**

#### **Reading:**

- Stuckrad, Kocku Von. “3. The Kabbalah: Understanding the Hidden in the Revealed.” *Western Esotericism a Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, Routledge, Oakville, CT, 2005, pp. 31–43. **Overseas library 130 S932; Ereserve**

### **Class 9-10: Field trip**

- The Temple Institute – Institute for rebuilding the Third Temple, Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem
- Ms. Sarah Schneider – world leader in feminist approaches to Kabbalah.

- R. Dov Laimon – world class scribe, for a discussion and hands-on demonstration of the scribal arts

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## Part II – Theosophic Kabbalah

**Class 11-12: Worlds, Creation, Macrocosm and Microcosm.** Principles of theosophic Kabbalah.

### Primary Sources:

- Popular definitions of Kabbalah, excerpted from the Web.

### Reading:

- Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (Maine; Weiser 1982) 1-3. **Overseas library 291.4 K19; Ereserve**
- Yehuda Ashlag, “The Essence of the Wisdom of Kabbalah,” in *Kabbalah for the Student*, Laitman Pub. pp. 21-29. **Ebook**
- Kerry Gordon. "Worlds within Worlds: Kabbalah and the New Scientific Paradigm." *Zygon?* 37.4 (2002): 963-83. **Ejournal**
- Ḥayyim Ben Isaac Volozhiner. *Nefesh Hachaim: Rav Chaim of Volozhin's Classic Exploration of the Fundamentals of Jewish Belief*. Brooklyn, NY: Judaica, 2009. pp. 29-41. **Overseas library 296.18 H427**
- Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *The Way of G-d (Derech Hashem)*, Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1988, part 1:5; 2:5; 3:2. **Overseas library 296.657 L979; Ereserve**

### Assignment:

- There are five steps to this assignment:
  - Write down, in a file, your own definition of Kabbalah, based upon our discussions until now. One or two lines is enough.
  - Research, online, the question: “What is Kabbalah,” and find an interesting site. Don’t just jump to the first answer that Google gives you.
  - Copy the answer (or paraphrase it, if it is too long).
  - Compare that definition to you own. Are they similar? Different? How so?
  - Upload your findings to Google docs and send me the link.

## Class 13: The Way of the Sefirot.

### Reading:

- Jacob Immanuel Schochet, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism* (New York: Kehot Publications, 1968) 59-115 **Overseas Library 296.65 S363**, also <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/15600>

- Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, trans. Yehuda Hanegbi (New York: Basic Books, 1980) 35-47. **Overseas Library 296.19 S823; Ereserve**
- Lawrence Fine, "Kabbalistic Texts" from *Back to the Sources* (Simon & Schuster: 1986) 305-359. **Overseas Library 296.08 H758; Ebook**
- Dubov, Nissan Dovid. "The Sefirot." *Kabbalah, Chassidism and Jewish Mysticism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2017. <[http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/361885/jewish/The-Sefirot.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/361885/jewish/The-Sefirot.htm)>.
- "Four Worlds." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 03 Jan. 2017. Web. 21 Mar. 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_worlds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_worlds)

#### **Class 14: The Zohar and Biblical Interpretation: Kabbalistic hermeneutics**

##### **Reading**

- David Blumenthal, "How to Decipher a Zoharic Text," in *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Ktav, 1978) 113-119. **Overseas Library 296.65 B658; Ereserve**

##### **Optional Reading:**

- R. Moses Cordovero, *The Palm Tree of Devorah*, (tran. Louis Jacobs) (Sepher-Hermon) 70-121. **Overseas Library 296.653.11 C796; Ereserve (70-101)**

#### **Class 15-16: The use of the Sefirot in contemporary Kabbalah: the teachings of R. Yitzchak Ginsburg and others.**

##### **Reading:**

- Jonathan Garb, *The Chosen Will Become Herds: Studies in Twentieth-century Kabbalah*, trans. Y. Berkovits-Murciano (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009) 11-20. **Ebok**
- R. Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *Rectifying the State of Israel*, (Jerusalem: Gal Einai) 21-124. **E041 G493; Ereserve**

##### **Research & Writing Assignment:**

- Explore the website: <http://www.inner.org>. Read several articles and/or watch videos, and write up your thoughts on one of them. 1-2 pages.

#### **Class 17-18: Further uses of the Sefirot: Art, Architecture and Healing – possible guest speaker**

##### **Reading:**

- J. Zohara Meyerhoff Hieronimus. *Sanctuary of the Divine Presence: Hebraic Teachings on Initiation and Illumination* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2012) 36-67. **Overseas Library 296.65 H633; Ereserve**
- Sarah Yehudit Schneider, “The Golden Thread: A Kabbalistic Remedy,” 1-24 [http://www.thegoldenthread.org/kabbalah\\_homeopathy/HomeopathyAndKabbalah.pdf](http://www.thegoldenthread.org/kabbalah_homeopathy/HomeopathyAndKabbalah.pdf)

**Class 20: The Living Community – who’s who in Jerusalem**

A PowerPoint presentation of the various groups in Jerusalem, what they believe, how they dress (including Kabbalistic nuances), how to identify them, etc.

**Field Trip:**

Meah Shearim, shops, bookstores, Kabbalistic yeshivot, possible visit with chasidic family

**July 23**

Review and Final exam

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*Reference works for basic Jewish knowledge:*

Blech, Benjamin. *Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Judaism*. Indianapolis, IN: Alpha, 2003. Print. **Overseas library 296.19 B646**

Blech, Benjamin. *Understanding Judaism: The Basics of Deed and Creed*. Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1991. Print. **Overseas library 296.02 B646**

Falcon, Ted, and David Blatner. *Judaism for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. Print. **Overseas library 296.19 F178**

Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals*. New York: Pocket, 2000. Print. **Overseas library 296.02 R655**

Steinberg, Milton. *Basic Judaism*. Northvale, NJ U.a.: Aronson, 1987. Print.

**Overseas library 296.12 S820**



Wouk, Herman. *This Is My God: A Guidebook to Judaism*. New York: Walker, 1991.

Print. **Overseas library 296.02 W938**

Wyllen, Stephen M. *Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism*. New York: Paulist,

1989. Print. **Overseas library 296.02 W983**

Judaism 101 :

Robinson's book, *Essential Judaism*, is particularly recommended.

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