

# Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

## Hebrew 3210 and Comparative Studies 3210 THE JEWISH MYSTICAL TRADITION

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 not Comparative Studies). Bible translations are available at many bookstores (including the Augsburg-Fortress Bookstore at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Cokesbury Bookstore in the Graceland shopping center), in the reference sections of the OSU libraries, and in the Middle Eastern and Jewish Studies reference area in the Great 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. **Four 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, March 28 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 Thursday March 7, and a **final exam**, to be held on **Friday, April 26 at 2:00 PM, in our regular classroom.** 20% each.

### IV. PLEASE NOTE:

A. **University policy regarding academic misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism will be strictly enforced.** It is imperative that you understand what constitutes

plagiarism and academic misconduct. Please review the University's rules and definitions at:

[http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource\\_csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp)

- B. This course is designed so that much of our learning will take place in the classroom. Therefore, **your attendance at classes will be critical to your success in the course.** You are responsible for information and assignments given in class, whether you were present or not. Late papers and exams will not be accepted.
- C. Therefore, please **do not schedule any travel or appointments for the dates and times of the midterm and final exams.** They cannot be rescheduled.
- D. So that we can all engage directly with the texts and class discussions, **all personal electronic devices must be turned off in the classroom.** This includes laptops, cell phones, including Blackberries and iPhones, tablet computers, e-book readers, ipod/MP3 players, and PDAs.
- E. Please check your OSU email account regularly or be sure that you have forwarded your OSU email to your personal account. You may receive important announcements about the course and the class schedule through that account.
- F. Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss his or her specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at (614) 292-3307, or visit 150 Pomerene Hall, to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.
- G. 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"
4. The Book of Formation **9/25**
  - Blumenthal I. ch. 3

### 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.

#### 10/2: SECOND QUIZ: On Magic and Philosophy

1. Moses de Leon and the Zohar 10/7  
- Zohar, Introduction  
- Zohar, 43-45 and notes (pp. 204-207)

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

#### 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

##### 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: THIRD 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: FOURTH 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 conferences or 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 typed or printed on a printer. 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.

### **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

### **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

### **November 19**

Professor J. Albert Harrill

Title TBA

7:00 PM Page Hall 010