

Quest for Meaningful Living Through Mysticism: *Kabbalah* as Jewish Mystical Experience

Instructor: Rav Aubrey L. Glazer (rav@bethabrahamdayton.org)

Dates: 10 Sessions –

12/5/, 12/12, 12/19 (2022); 1/16, 1/23, 1/30, 2/6, 2/13, 2/20, 2/27 (2023)

Time: 12-1PM EST

Location: Zoom (BAS Zoom Room)

Course Description:

In the quest for meaningful living how might mysticism bring new-ancient light to our journeys? Join us as we explore major themes in the Jewish mystical tradition—*Kabbalah*—including various understandings of God, *Torah*, the *mitzvot*, and prayer. Our study will involve close readings of primary sources from different mystical figures—all of which will be made available in English translation—insights from modern scholars and theologians, and personal reflection on the meaning of these ideas in contemporary life.

As the authors of the great medieval mystical work, *Sefer ha-Zohar* (“The Book of Splendor”), said of their spiritual undertaking, we will seek together to uncover “New-Ancient Words” for the journey. Each topic will be addressed and studied for two sessions. Students are strongly encouraged to have their own personal copies of both required texts to use in each session and reflect upon afterwards.

Course Goals:

- Introduce key terms, concepts, figures, and texts from Jewish mysticism
- Examine the relationship of *Kabbalah* to other Jewish movements and genres Judaism, as well as other religious traditions
- Investigate various post/modern interpretations of *Kabbalah* (with emphasis on Hasidism and Neo-Hasidism)
- Reflect on the potential significance of *Kabbalistic* traditions in our lives

Course Materials:

- Matt, Daniel C. "The essential Kabbalah: The heart of Jewish mysticism." Harper Collins, 1995.
- Rose, Or N., and Ebn D. Leader, eds. *God in All Moments: Mystical & Practical Spiritual Wisdom from Hasidic Masters*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.

Topics & Readings:

Introduction:

- Daniel Matt, "Introduction: A Glimpse into the Orchard," *The Essential Kabbalah* pp. 1-19
- Arthur Green, Interview, "Fresh Air with Terry Gross," NPR, <https://freshairarchive.org/guests/arthur-green> (December 13, 2004)

Topic I: The One & the Many:

How do our mystical forebears envision God? How do they conceive of the classical theological categories of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption?

- “The Ten *Sefirot*” – **Diagram**, *The Essential Kabbalah*, p. xviii
- “Water, Light, and Color,” *The Essential Kabbalah*, p. 38
- “The Aroma of Infinity,” *The Essential Kabbalah*, p. 54
- “The Creation of God,” *The Essential Kabbalah*, pp. 52-53
- “The Righteous Pillar,” *The Essential Kabbalah* pp. 78
- “Knowing God,” *God in All Moments*, p. 7

Topic II: Our Place in Creation:

What is the relationship of humankind to the rest of created world? What is the relationship of Israel to the nations of the world? How can the cultivation of a mystical consciousness help guide one in living meaningfully in these nested realms of existence?

- “The Hidden Light,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 90
- “*Tsimtsim*: Creative Withdrawal,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 93
- “*Tsimtsim* & *Shevirah*: Withdrawal & Shattering,” *The Essential Kabbalah* 94-95
- “Traces,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 97
- “The Song of Songs,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 154
- “Many Paths to God,” *God in All Moments*, p. 49
- “Holy Sparks,” *God in All Moments*, p. 55
- “All God’s Creation,” *God in All Moments*, p. 71-73
- Arthur Green, “A Kabbalah for the Environmental Age,” *Tikkun*, vol. 14, no. 5 (September-October 1999), https://www.academia.edu/35959252/Arthur_Green_A_Kabbalah_for_the_Environmental_Age_Tikkun_vol_14_no_5_September_October_1999_33_38

Topic III: Torah Study in a Mystical Key:

How do the mystics conceive of Torah study? What are their methods of study? How do these relate to their understandings of revelation—past and present? How do they engage the classical theological/hermeneutical categories of “Written” and “Oral” Torah?

- “Letters of Creation,” *The Essential Kabbalah*, p. 102
- “In the Beginning,” *Sefat Emet*
- “The Essence of Torah,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 134
- “Without Vowels,” *The Essential Kabbalah*, p. 146
- “The First Meeting of the Ba’al Shem Tov & the Maggid of Mezeritch,” *God in All Moments*, pp. 146-148
- “Fear, Love, & Torah Study,” *God in All Moments*. p. 91
- “A Divine Study Partner,” *God in All Moments*, p. 95
- “Choose Silence, Not Torah,” *God in All Moments*, p. 115

Topic IV: The Mitzvot & Halakhah:

How do the mystics understand Jewish law & practice? Do they observe the *mitzvot* similarly to other members of the Jewish community? When and why did they introduce ritual innovations?

- “Bringing Forth Sparks,” *The Essential Kabbalah* 149
- “The Secret of Sabbath,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 80
- “Sexual Holiness,” *The Essential Kabbalah* p. 155
- “Piercing the Heavens: Sounding the *Shofar*,” *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim*
- “Welcoming Guests into the Sukkah,” *Back to the Sources* (photocopy)
- “Lighting the Hanukkah Candles,” *Kedushat Levi* (photocopy)
- “Waters of Renewal,” *God in All Moments*, p. 11

Topic V: Prayer & Meditation:

What is the role of prayer and meditation in the Jewish mystical quest? How do the prayer intentions (*kavvanot*) meditative practices of the mystics relate to the standard prayers—daily, weekly, holiday, etc.?

- “A Meditation Upon Rising,” *God in All Moments*, p. 3
- “The Eros of Prayer,” *God in All Moments*, p. 27
- “The Word: Body & Soul,” *God in All Moments*, p. 29
- “Eyes Open or Closed,” *God in All Moments*, p. 33
- “The Gift of Inner Focus,” *God in All Moments*, p. 35
- “The Humble Way,” *God in All Moments*, p. 69
- “Mystical Engagement,” *God in All Moments*, p. 119

Closing:

Having now explored a range of topics and texts from Kabbalistic traditions, how do these ideas and practices speak to us? What do we find meaningful, curious, or problematic? What do we want to explore further?

- Or Rose, “Kabbalah & Contemporary Jewish Life” (PDF)
- Aubrey L. Glazer, “Touching God: Vertigo, Exactitude, and Degrees of Devekut in the Contemporary Nondual Jewish Mysticism of R. Yitzhaq Maier Morgenstern.” *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 19.2 (2011): 147–192.

https://www.academia.edu/80946359/Touching_God_Vertigo_Exactitude_and_Degrees_of_Devekut_in_the_Contemporary_Nondual_Jewish_Mysticism_of_R_Yitzhaq_Maier_Morgenstern