

TSM 584: Philosophers and Mystics

AJU Ziegler, Spring 2019/5779

Tuesdays 9:00-11:30

Dr. Tamar Ron Marvin

tamar.marvin@aju.edu

Course Description

Medieval Jews found themselves far from the Land of Israel, centuries after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. In these changed circumstances, the foundational texts of the Jewish tradition had to respond to new situations, both material and spiritual. This course will examine the creativity with which Jews approached questions of meanings that arose in the medieval context(s). One primary response, stimulated by the encounter with Greco-Islamic thought, was the production of rationalist philosophy and the codification of halakhah. Another primary response was the development of mystical theology in its medieval form, the Qabbalah. Through primary source readings and secondary analysis, we will explore these two contrasting though interrelated responses and their context, considering in what ways there were destined to shape Judaism into modernity.

Course Objectives

1. To attain a familiarity with the major Jewish intellectual responses to changing historical conditions, in both Ashkenazi and Sefaradi cultural spheres;
2. To gain facility with reading medieval to early modern philosophical and mystical texts, in the original Hebrew (if applicable);
3. To contextualize Jewish thought in premodernity;
4. To culminate with the ability to contribute knowledgeably and creatively to traditional materials.

Course Expectations

You are, first and foremost, expected to be an active participant in your own learning and in the formation of a respectful, engaged discussion space in the classroom. This means that you should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials, as follows:

- You should be comfortable reading the text and able to explain it, i.e., what is the context, what is happening in the text?;
- You should be able to identify central concerns that the text is responding to, as well as its core ideas;
- You should be able to capably read and translate the commentary;
- You will have looked up any references you identify within the texts, such as other *pesuqim* cited in the text.

Please note: This does *not* mean that you should be able to do all of the above flawlessly and without having any questions or doubts. Preparation means doing a careful, close reading of the material, a skill we will practice together and actively develop a process for in class.

Texts

All texts will be available to you as PDFs in the class Dropbox

Bahye b. Yosef ibn Paquda. *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*. Edited by Menahem Mansoor. Translated by Sara Arenson and Shoshana Dannhauser. Oxford, UK and Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004.

Carmi, T. *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*. New York: Penguin, 1981. [Note: An outstanding and affordable resource, if you are interested in premodern Jewish poetic expression. Includes Hebrew with English translations, and brief historical introductions.]

Crescas, Ḥasdai. *Sefer Or Hashem*. Edited by Shlomo Fischer. Jerusalem, 1990.

Kaplan, Aryeh. *The Bahir: Illumination, Attributed to Rabbi Nehunia Ben HaKana, Master of the First Century Esoteric School*. York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 1979.

Rambam (Moshe b. Maimon) and (Moshe b. Naḥman). *Sefer ha-Miẓvot with Hassagot ha-Ramban*. Edited by Chaim Chavel. Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1981.

Ramban (Moshe b. Naḥman). Commentary on the Torah. In Breuer, Mordechai, ed. *Torat Hayyim*. 7 vols. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987. (Text is standard in any edition in Miqra'ot Gedolot.)

Tishby, Isaiah, and Fishel Lachover. *Mishnat ha-Zohar*. 3rd ed. 2 vols. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1971.

Verman, Mark. *The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Resources to have on hand:

- A Tanakh: I recommend using a Hebrew-only text (such as Koren) so that you are not distracted by the English translation; but any version of the JPS Tanakh (1999 revised text, the most recent) is a good study tool.
- A Hebrew dictionary that you are knowledgeable about and that works for you. For Hebrew/Aramaic-English, I recommend Jastrow for working with medieval Hebrew, but you may like to use or supplement with Even Shoshan (Heb-Heb), Alcalay (Heb-Eng), or others.
- A dictionary of rashei teivot (Hebrew abbreviations): most commonly, *Otzar Rashei Tevot* by Shmuel Ashkenazi and Dov Jarden, which is widely available at Judaica bookstores.
- Encyclopedia Judaica: Updated in 2007, this encyclopedia (not to be confused with the *Jewish Encyclopedia* in the public domain) should be your go-to for looking up accurate contextual information (e.g., the basic biographical outline of an unfamiliar figure).

Assignments & Assessment

Following is an overview of the assignments that students will receive as a way to practice skills, demonstrate mastery of the material—and, importantly, try out and contribute their own ideas. Assignment sheets with greater detail will be distributed well in advance of due dates, but for your reference, here is a brief description:

1. Attendance, class preparation, and active participation (60%)

Please refer to the bullet points in the “Course Expectations” section directly above for a detailed description of what class preparation means for our course. Active participation means ably reading, translating, and explaining the texts when called to do so; being prepared to knowledgeably add to others’ remarks; and being engaged in class discussions. Of course, for this you’ll need to be in attendance.

2. Prospectus (15%) – A 1-page synopsis of your final project, along with an annotated bibliography. ****DUE Mar. 26 by the end of the day****

3. Final Project (25%) – The final paper is designed as a structured exploration of a core, framing question. First, define your question. Next, you’ll do a close reading of a medieval text of your choice that pertains to your framing question. Contextualize the source, describe its approach, and explain its responses to the question. In the third section of the paper, you will suggest in what ways the text speaks to the question in our time—or not! A list of possible questions and texts will be provided to you before the prospectus due date. ****Due May 14 by the end of the day****

Please refer to the percentages as a reflection of the relative weight given to each area. This means that the effort that you put into weekly preparation and in-class discussion is really important!—With room for exploration, mistakes, and learning, of course.

Policies & Attendance Requirements

- **Attendance:** Missing more than two class meetings will result in a lowered grade, illness and emergencies excepted. If you will be absent from class, let me know as soon as possible.
- **Assignment Submission:** Written assignments are due in hard copy at the beginning of class on the day marked on the schedule.
- **Late Assignments:** Late assignments will be accepted only if arrangements are made beforehand, emergencies excepted. If you require an accommodation for an assignment or test date, the more time we have to work out an equitable solution, the more flexibility you can receive.
- **Office Hours:** By appointment, and I will generally be in the classroom before each meeting should you wish to drop in or go over any questions before class (but it’s always a good idea to confirm).
- **Email:** I’m available to you to answer any questions or concerns you may have via email and am usually able to respond quickly.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment
Jan. 29	Introduction: Crisis, Creativity & “Jewish Thought” Before Modernity	Source sheet
Philosophical Approaches		
Feb. 5	Theology (Kalām): Se’adyah Gaon	<i>Sefer Emunot ve-De’ot</i> , Qafih ed., IV, 5-6, pp. 207-210
Feb. 12	Pietistic & Particularistic Views: Yehudah ha-Levi, Bahye Ibn Paquda	Yehudah ha-Levi, <i>Sefer ha-Kuzari</i> , Qafih ed., I, 1, pp. 1-4, V, 22-28, pp. 231-234; Bahye Ibn Paquda, <i>Hovot ha-Levavot</i> , Qafih ed., Introduction, pp. 13-19.
Feb. 19	Ta’amei ha-mizvot Rambam, Semag, Ramban	Rambam, <i>Sefer ha-Mitzvot</i> , Chavel ed., introduction, pp. 20-24, first positive commandments, pp. 1-4; Ramban, <i>Hassagot</i> to Rambam (above), <i>Sefer Mizvot</i> , in Chavel, ed., Introduction, pp. 25-27, On Rambam’s first positive commandment, pp. 1-3; <i>Sefer Mizvot Gadol</i> , first positive commandment, p. 1a.
Feb. 26	Codification & Creed I: Rambam	<i>Commentary on the Mishnah: Pereq Heleq</i> , Qafih ed., pp. 140-146; <i>Mishneh Torah</i> , Steinsaltz ed., Introduction, ¶1-12, pp. 1-3, ¶38-43, pp. 8-10; <i>Sefer ha-Madda’</i> , Introduction, pp. 75, ch. 1, 1-3, pp. 78-90; <i>Sefer Ahavah</i> , ch. 4, 15-18, 378-380.
Mar. 5	Codification & Creed II: Rambam	<i>Moreh ha-Nevukhim</i> , Qafih ed., Dedication, pp. 3-4; Intro., pp. 5-10; Part I, ch. 59, pp. 94-98.
Mar. 12	Maimonideanism: Ra’avad, Crescas, Abravanel	Ra’avad, <i>Hassagot to Mishneh Torah</i> , Hasdai Crescas, <i>Or Hashem</i> , Part III, Introduction, pp. 272-273 & III, Principle 2, pp. 318-322; Abravanel, <i>Rosh Amana</i> , ch. 1.
Mystical Approaches		
Mar. 19	Re-Emergence of Mystical Gnosis: Sefer Yezirah & The Bahir	<i>Sefer Yezirah</i> , Kaplan ed., <u>Hebrew texts only</u> (beginning of each ch., pp. 3-229); <i>The Bahir</i> , Kaplan ed., Hebrew text, §1-22, pp. 206-208.
Mar. 26	Mystical Masters & Disciples: The ‘Iyyun Circle, Ramban	<i>Sefer ha-‘Iyyun</i> , Verman ed., Contemplation/Short Version, pp. 34-36; Ramban, Introduction to the Torah Commentary (selections), Comment on Gen. 1:1, <i>Torat Hayyim</i> , ed. Breuer. **Prospectus due**
Apr. 2	Varieties of Mystical Praxis: Hasidai Ashkenaz; Abulafian Ecstasism	<i>Sefer Hasidim</i> Parma rec., ¶102, 171, 444, 639, 770 (handout from Princeton Sefer Hasidim database); Abraham Abulafia, <i>Sefer ha-Ge’ulah</i> (Commentary on <i>Moreh ha-Nevukhim</i>), R. Cohen ed., pp. 1-5, <i>Or ha-Sekhel</i> , <i>Haqdamah</i> ¶1 (handout).

Apr. 9	Mystical Midrash: Moshe de Leon & the Emergence of the Zohar	The <i>Zohar</i> , <i>Haqdamah</i> , §1-2, Sulam ed., pp. 1-4; <i>Mishnat ha-Zohar</i> , ed. Tishby and Lachover, vol. 1, pp. 119, 121-123, 166-168, 326-327, 391-392
Apr. 16	Zohar II	(con't.)
<i>April 18-28 – Spring Break</i>		
Apr. 30	Mystical Halakhah: The Qabbalah in Safed— Cordovero, Karo, Luria	Yosef Karo, <i>Shulḥan Arukh</i> , Fraenkel ed., O.H. § , <i>Beit Yosef</i> O.H. §141. Moshe Cordovero, <i>Tomer Devorah</i> , ch. 1 (alef), ch. 10, ¶1-4 (handout); Ḥayyim Vital, <i>Shemonah She'arim (Etz Ḥayyim)</i> , vol. 1, Itzhak Luria (Arizal), Poem (<i>Mah lekha yitzri</i>), Carmi ed., 471; Yisrael Najara, Poem (<i>Tidar shenat 'eini</i>), Carmi ed., 477.
May 7	Conclusion	
Final Project		
May 13 – 17: Finals Week		* <u>Final Paper</u> : due Tuesday, May 14, <u>via email</u> by 11:59 p.m.