

HIST/JUS/RELI 435/535

IN PERSON, 7 weeks, Oct. 12 - Dec. 6

Tue/Thu, 12:30-1:45 p.m., Fall 2023

Kabbalah & Jewish Mysticism



According to the Hebrew Bible, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of a heavenly chariot, a fearsome structure that emitted fire, was surrounded by wonderful beasts, and served as God's throne (see above). Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein depicts a monster made from various corpses, a monster who comes to life at the whim of a scientist. "Gollum," a grotesque and manipulative cave dweller, holds a powerful secret and both helps and threatens the protagonist of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit (part of The Lord of the Rings saga). You may have heard of folklore concerning young Jewish women who are possessed by demons known as dybbuks.

HIST/JUS/RELI 435/535 is an introduction to the Jewish mystical tradition (called Kabbalah from the 12th century onward) in the context of Jewish history. We will survey major texts and concepts of that tradition in chronological order, and interpret them by considering:

1. The different times, places, and other historical conditions in which these texts and concepts were produced
2. The internal dynamics and momentum of Jewish mysticism itself
3. The social and psychological functions that mysticism fulfilled and fulfills for its practitioners



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Learn about such mystical figures as Rabbi Yehuda Loeb of Prague, who created a soul-less being of clay, the Golem, to protect his community! Learn about the adventurer, Rabbi Yosef Della Reina, who undertook a legendary quest to conquer cosmic evil! Learn about Shabbatai Zvi, a flamboyant mystic who "married the Holy Scriptures" and became the most successful self-styled "Messiah" in the lands of Jewish dispersion! Learn how Hasidic masters even today seek to "mend" the universe by way of acts of loving-kindness!

In short, come and learn how, over the centuries, the members of a beleaguered civilization created the means of that civilization's resilience by elaborating a complex mystical narratives, as well as an elaborate canon of theology, folk tales and practices, all of which shed light on how human beings use their minds to overcome obstacles, find meaning, and nurture hope for their future. See you in class!

For more questions contact Jackie Schmidt, Outreach Coordinator at jan1@arizona.edu, or visit our website at www.judaic.arizona.edu



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