

Proposed Theme for Teaching:

‘Set Me as a Seal upon Your Heart’: Spiritual Friendship in Jewish Mystical Tradition

Spiritual Friendship among the Kabbalists of Safed and Jerusalem in the 16th-17th Centuries

Safed was the site of a great renaissance of kabbalistic life in the sixteenth century. One of the central features of this renaissance was mystical community organized around various intentional fellowships. What notions and practices of interpersonal relations were at the heart of these fellowships, especially the Lurianic fellowship? How did these practices reverberate in Bet El, the kabbalistic community of 17th century Jerusalem?

Love and Friendship in Classical Hasidism

Fellowship and intimate interpersonal relations were central to Eastern European Hasidism. According to one Hasidic teacher, Reb Arele Roth, for example, individuals are encouraged to associate with others who can help “wake” them up spiritually. R. Abraham Kaslisker espoused the practice of *dibbuk haverim* when we are in need of personal inspiration. We’ll study these and other practices in order to understand the importance of the interpersonal to the Hasidim, and to ask how these might speak to us today.

Bio:

Lawrence Fine is the Irene Kaplan Leiwant Professor of Jewish Studies, and professor of Religion at Mount Holyoke College. He is a well-published scholar of Kabbalah and Hasidism with special interests in mystical experience and practice, and mystical communities. He is the author or editor of five books, including *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period* (Princeton University Press, 2001), and *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford University Press, 2003). The latter book was a finalist for the Koret National Book Award, and winner of the Choice Outstanding Book Award in Religion for 2004. He is active in the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and teaches widely in the Jewish community. He lives in Amherst, Massachusetts.