



**SEMINAR**

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

11:30–13:00 & 15:00–16:30

**METALOGIC OF THE TRACE**

*The Disclosure of the World (ha-'olam) in the  
Concealment (he'lem) of Infinity*

with

**Prof. Elliot Wolfson**

Marsha and Jay Glazer Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies  
at the University of California, Santa Barbara

# PROGRAM

*Wednesday, November 15, 2023*

11:15 – 11:30            **Introduction**

11:30 – 13:00           **Session I**

13:00 – 15:00           **Lunch Break**

15:00 – 16:30           **Session II**

## *Venue*

Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion  
University of Hamburg  
Jungiusstrasse 11C, room C 319 (3 rd floor)

The first part of the seminar will explore the question of the viability of positing alterity in kabbalistic symbolism by examining carefully the dyad of light and vessel in Lurianic sources as it pertains to the notion of the trace of light that is left behind in the vacuum from which the light was withdrawn. Special attention will be paid to the paradoxical assertion that this place is both empty and not empty of the light. The derivation of the vessel from the light challenges the viability of eliciting a dual ontology from the kabbalistic theosophy, which has significant repercussions in the discussion of the construction of gender. The second part of the seminar will examine the ramifications of the discernment regarding the sameness of the light and the vessel drawn explicitly by the

masters of the Ḥabad-Lubavitch dynasty in their insistence that the world itself is naught but the trace of the hiddenness of this light, a monistic orientation epitomized in their exploitation of the wordplay between ha-olam and he'lem, that is, the world is the concealment of infinity. We can elicit from Ḥabad sources that the concurrent omniabsence of the infinite and its omnipresence yields the paradox that God is manifest in the world in which God is unmanifest, which is not to say that God is manifest after being unmanifest but rather that God is manifest and unmanifest at the same time, that is, manifest because unmanifest and unmanifest because manifest.

Messianic consciousness revolves around unveiling the veil of nature as veil as opposed to discarding the veil, that is, beholding the disclosure of the essence of the infinite being in the finite beings wherein it is hidden to the point that infinite and finite are juxtaposed as the same owing to their difference. To be awakened messianically is to perceive the world in such a way that the hidden will be revealed and the revealed will be hidden, to comprehend that the body is the aspect of boundary that enclothes the boundless light, that the vessel of materiality is the mantle concealing and thereby revealing the radiance of immateriality. Expressed in a different terminological register, Ḥabad messianism does not entail the acosmic repudiation of the world but rather the semiotic transubstantiation of the gross physicality into the more subtle materiality of the linguistic body, an idea that is based on the longstanding kabbalistic idea that the true nature of bodiliness is not the corruptible flesh but the matter that is made of the Hebrew letters.

Elliot Wolfson is the Marsha and Jay Glazer Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He received bachelor and master of Arts degrees from Queens College of the City University of New York, where he pursued the study of philosophy, focusing especially on phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism. He received master of arts and doctor of philosophy degrees from Brandeis University, where he specialized in the study of the Kabbalistic texts and traditions that have remained central to his scholarly work. He was the Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, where he taught between 1987 and early 2014.



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