

INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM –Fall 2012

REL 6 / JWST 6

MWF 11:15 - 12:20 [Tu 12:00-12:50]

Professor Benor

Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3 & by appointment (304 Thornton)

The course offers an introduction to Judaism by examining three spiritual manifestations that were dominant from Late Antiquity through Early Modernity: (1) Torah Study and Ritualization; (2) Philosophical–Political Theology; and (3) Mystical Practices and Kabbalist Theosophy. Against this background we shall consider the impact of modern challenges to the tradition and outline several modes of adaptation.

Requirements

Exegetical Essay (2 pages) [Due TBD / by 5 PM] 30%

Analytical Essay (3 pages) [Due TBD / by 5PM] 30%

Final exam – “take-home” [Due 11. 20 / by noon] 40%

Required Texts (available at Wheelock Books):

Scheindlin. *A Short History of the Jewish People*

Halbertal. *People of the Book*

Seeskin. *Maimonides*

Green, Arthur. *A Guide to the Zohar*

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard

Policies

Whenever possible, audio recordings of lectures will be made available on blackboard. Lectures are recorded to ease the pressure on note-taking in class, to allow students to think, participate in discussions, ask questions, and study for the final exam.

In-class thinking and discussion are the most important part of the course. It is through them that we learn how to think about religion, in general, and gain deeper understanding of Judaism. Questioning and discussion, anytime, are your responsibility. X-hours will be used only when needed to keep us on schedule.

The burden of reading and writing has been minimized, as much as possible, to allow students the leisure to reflect about the issues that come up in class and in the readings. Reflection is a major part of the class work-load and it is completely up to you. Study questions will be provided as needed and upon request.

The “take-home” open-books nature of the assignments makes information readily available. This allows the assignment to focus on students’ understanding of the significance of the information and their learning what questions to ask about it.

Students with special needs that will not be resolved by access to recorded lectures must discuss their needs with the instructor by the end of the 2nd week of classes.

Instructor and students are bound by the honor code.

Schedule of Class Meetings and Readings

9. 10	M	1	Introduction to the Course	
			<i>Cosmos & Polis</i> —“ Religion” & Judaism	
9. 12	W	2	Historical Geopolitical Observations	Scheindlin. 1-69
			Antiquity—the Fertile Crescent	
9. 14	F		Medieval & Modern—between Christendom and Islam	Scheindlin. 71-260
9. 17	*		No class—Jewish New Year	
9. 18	*		No class—Jewish New Year	
9. 19	W	3	Jewish Cosmopolis	Levenson: “Chosenness and its Enemies”
			Election • “The Chosen People”	
9. 21	F		Monotheism—God of Creation	Strauss. “Interpretation of Genesis” Midrash Rabbah, “Adam has been created”
9. 24	M		Cosmological Ritual—Cosmos & Chaos •Solomon’s Temple •Right and wrong animals	Douglas. “The Abominations of Leviticus” Levenson. “The Mastery of God and the Vulnerability of Order”
9. 25	T		Class	
9. 26	*		No class—Jewish Day of Atonement	
9. 28	F		Cosmological Change •Torah of Creation • Linguistic Cosmology • God’s Calendar	Dan. “The Language of Creation and its Grammar” Elior. “From Temple to Merkava”
10. 1	M	4	Divine Power and Human Autonomy • From Adam to Job • It is not in heaven! • “Will the Judge of the whole earth not do justice?”	Genesis 18:16-33; Benor. “Abraham, God, and Justice” & “From Adam to Job”
10. 3	W		Moral Psychology • Good Impulse • Evil Impulse	Boyarin. “Dialectics of Desire: ‘The Evil Instinct Is Very Good’” Benor. “Rabbinic moral psychology”.
10. 5	F	5	The Kingdom of God	Urbach. “The Shekhina—the Presence of God in the World” Patai. “The Shekhina”
			God’s Presence in the World—Shekhina • Sociology of religious experience • Purpose of Torah study	
10. 8	M		Ritualization • Liminality • Chaos, cosmos and law • Structure of Jewish Ritual: Sabbath, Bar-Mitzvah, Marriage, Purim	Fishbane. “Judaism As Ritual System”

10. 10	W		Obedience and Communion • Legalistic intellectualism—Spirituality	Guttmann. “The Basic Ideas of Biblical Religion”
10. 12	F	6	The Legal System	Halbertal. 1-89
			Scripture—Constitution of Sacred Text • Prophets • Priests • Judges • Scribes • Rabbis	
10. 15	M		Midrash — How to Read a Sacred Text • Reading or Interpretation? • Scriptural Reasoning: Extrapolation, Interpolation, & Divination	Stern, “Midrash and Hermeneutics”
10. 17	W		Religion of Law • Mishna • Talmud • Legal Codes	Halbertal. 90-134
10. 19	F	7	Philosophical-Political Theology	Halbertal. “What is the Mishne Torah?”
			Maimonides’ Code of Law • Legalism and Anti Legalism	
10. 22	M		Philosophical Idea of God • God, unknowable and unthinkable	Seeskin, 1-40 Benor. “Meaning and Reference in Maimonides’ Negative Theology”
10. 24	W		Religious Doctrine I — Creation & Prophecy • Religious naturalism	Seeskin. 41-80
10. 26	F		Religious Doctrine II — Providence & the Problem of Evil • Messianic realism	Funkenstein. “Political Theory and Realistic Messianism” Maimonides. <i>Guide of the Perplexed</i> III: 12
10. 29	M	8	Mysticism & Theosophy	Green. <i>A Guide to the Zohar</i> . Part 1
			The Mystical Image of God • Primordial Adam	
10. 31	W		Mystical Anthropology • Demonic aspects of the universe	Green. <i>A Guide to the Zohar</i> , Part 2
11. 2	F		Theosophic Messianism • History must end!	Green. <i>A Guide to the Zohar</i> , Part 3
11. 5	M	9	Modern Challenges	Magid. “Through the Void. . .” Peperzak. “Judaism and philosophy in Levinas” (excerpt)
			Absence of God • Presence through Absence • Radical Monotheism • Holocaust?	
11. 7	W		Orthodoxy & Fundamentalism • Anti Modern Modernism	Soloveitchick. “New Role of Texts in the Haredi World” Friedman. “The Lost Kiddush Cup” Batnitzky. “Religious Reform and Invention of Modern Orthodoxy” [ch. 2]
11. 9	F		The 3 rd Jewish Commonwealth • Anti-religious Zionism • A “Jewish state	Hartman. “The Third Jewish Commonwealth” Batnitzky. “Rejection of Jewish Religion and birth of Jewish Nationalism” [ch. 8]
11. 12	M		Feminism and the Future	Levinas. “And God created Woman” Hauptman “Feminist Perspectives on Rabbinic Texts”