



## JS 300: METHODS IN JEWISH STUDIES

Emory University

Spring 2004

Time: T, Th 10:00 &ndash; 11:15

Place: Candler 120

Instructor:

Professor David R. Blumenthal (7-7545; 404-634-3833; <[reldrb@emory.edu](mailto:reldrb@emory.edu)>)

<<http://www.emory.edu/UDR/BLUMENTHAL>>

Content:

Jewish Studies is a data field; it is not a discipline. Hence, Jewish Studies can be, and is, studied in many disciplines. This course is intended to display various methods for studying the data of Jewish studies: historical, philological, exegetical, literary, theological, feminist, artistic, legal, and social scientific. We will, therefore, begin by examining several texts through which to demonstrate these methods, with special attention to the Akeda (Genesis 22). This will be followed by an orientation in library sources. The main part of the course will be devoted to reading in each of the methods and applying the basic tools of that discipline to various texts. At the end, we will reconsider what we have done and, then, apply our learning to a topic for a final paper. Students completing this course will have a good idea of the range of methods in Jewish studies and those wishing to go on to doctoral work will be able to choose intelligently one of these disciplines.

Possible projects:

Use the Emory Israeli Stamp Collection as an illustration of the course.

Expand the Jewish Studies website as an illustration of the course.

Texts:

The *Tanakh* and translation.

D. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*.

S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial*.

M. Peskowitz and L. Levitt, *Judaism Since Gender*.

Recommended:

P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*.

J. Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*.

Reserve, books:

D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (midrash).

H. Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose* (literary).

D. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, vol. 2. (theology).

J. Plaskow, *Standing at Sinai* (feminist).  
R. Adler, *Engendering Judaism* (feminist).  
P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror* (feminist).  
C. Newsome, *The Women's Bible Commentary* (feminist).  
J. Woocher, *Sacred Survival* (social scientific).  
C. Liebman and E. Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (social scientific).  
L. Levitt and M. Peskin, *Judaism Since Gender* (feminist).

Reserve, articles:

N. Sarna, "The Binding of Isaac" (historical).  
D. Levenson, "Child Sacrifice: Deviation or Norm" (historical).  
review of D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (exegesis).  
D. Blumenthal, review of H. Fisch, *Poetry With a Purpose* (literary).  
E. Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, 69-97 (theology).  
L. Eron, "'Abraham said, 'No'" (theology)  
N. Graetz, "The Haftarah Tradition" (feminist).  
B. Scolnic, "Bible Battering" (feminist).  
D. Blumenthal, "Who is Battering Whom" (feminist).  
D. Blumenthal, review of Peskowitz and Levitt, *Judaism Since Gender* (feminist).  
D. Blumenthal, review of Levitt and Adler, (feminist).  
E. Umansky, "Re-Visioning Sarah" (feminist).  
C. Thompson, "Imagining Sarah"(feminist).  
B. Rosenblit, "David, Bat Sheva, ..." (feminist).  
D. Lopez, "Psalm 22..." (feminist).  
M. Broyde, materials on abortion in Jewish law (law).  
J. Woocher, "Civil Judaism" (social scientific).  
"Population Survey: 1990" (social scientific).  
J. Leavy, *Creating Community* (social scientific).  
Association for Jewish Studies Program, 1999 (social scientific).  
D. Blumenthal, *Judaic Studies: An Exercise in the Humanities* (summary).  
D. Blumenthal, "Where Does Jewish Studies Belong?" (summary)

## SYLLABUS

### ORIENTING OURSELVES

Introduction & 1/15

Read the Akeda in Hebrew and English; list possible questions and group them.

Look at Rembrandt's Akeda; list possible questions.

Consider the shoah; list possible questions.

Discuss:

How are all these "texts"?

What is the difference between "texts / data" and "method / discipline"?

How is xxx a "method" or "discipline"?

How does an xxx "read" a "text"?

What does an xxx look for in interpreting a "text"?

Library Resources & 1/20, 22

NOTE: We will meet at the Library as follows: 1/20 &dash; Room 310; 1/22 &dash; Special Coll.  
Find and identify: the two indexes of articles on Jewish subjects; four Hebrew dictionaries;  
concordances; the LC numbers for Judaica  
Find and identify Jewish sources on the Web  
Bring topics and keywords to research  
Print, electronic, and web sources

## NINE "METHODS / DISCIPLINES" FOR STUDYING "TEXTS / DATA"

History as Method &dash; 1/27, 29

Find and browse through Graetz, Dubnow, and Baron.  
What is the LC number for Jewish history?  
What are the differences in purpose between these three historians?

### **Discuss:**

What are "periodization" and "hegemonic centers"?  
What is the difference between a "typology" and a "chronology"?  
Topics: What makes the Golden Age of Spain "Golden"?  
How does Jewish history replace religion as source of identity?  
What is "secularization"?

### **Application:**

Contrast Sarna and Levenson on child sacrifice in the Bible  
What is the historical dimension of the Akeda? )

Philology and Linguistics as Method &dash; 2/3, 5 (guest lecturer)

Find and use Brown, Driver, Briggs; Ben Yehuda; Gesenius, Grammar; various concordances, esp.,  
Mandelkern's Concordance.

### **Application:**

Prepare the first four sentences of the Hebrew text of the Akeda thoroughly.  
Compare Ex. 20: 2-14 and Dt. 5: 6-18. How would you create "the" text?

Rabbinic Exegesis as Method &dash; 2/10, 12

Find M. Kasher, Torah Shelemah / Biblical Encyclopedia, esp. the Akeda.  
Find two midrashim on the Akeda in the original.  
Read Spiegel

### **Discuss:**

What is "rabbinization"?  
What is "midrash," "peshat," "ideological codes"?  
What are "gapped texts," "cotexts / cocitation," the "third text"?  
What is the "rabbinization" of biblical theology.  
How is rabbinic exegesis a "method" or "discipline"?  
How does a rabbinic exegete "read" a "text"?  
What does a rabbinic exegete look for in interpreting a "text"?

### **Application:**

Go over Akeda midrashim looking for literary structure.  
What does midrash "do" to the Akeda?

Literature / Literary Criticism as Method &dash; 2/17, 19 -- guest discussant (2/19)

Define: "structuralism, post-modernism, deconstructionism, lit. crit.," etc.  
(try Princeton Encyclopendia of Poetics )  
Read H. Fisch, Poetry with a Purpose, with review.  
Find modern Jewish stories that embody the Akeda theme  
(Find and use the Fiction Catalogue and Short Story Index ).

**Discuss:**

What is "literature / literary criticism"? How is it a method and discipline?  
How is literature / literary criticism a "method" and a "discipline"?  
How does an author / literary critic "read" a "text"?  
What does an author / literary critic look for in interpreting a "text"?

**Application:**

Reread the Akeda looking for literary structure and fault lines.  
Do a literary critical analysis of the Akeda.  
Review modern renderings of the Akeda.

Theology as Method &endash; 2/24, 26

Read Facing, 3-54, 235-9 on theological method; (Heschel).

Read Understanding Jewish Mysticism, vol. 2, 89-110; "Creating Zohar"  
Read Wiesel

**Discuss:**

What is "theology"? How is it a method or discipline?  
How is theology a "method" or "discipline"?  
How does a theologian "read" a "text"?  
What does a theologian look for in interpreting a "text"?

**Application:**

Reread the Akeda. What is the theology of the Akeda?  
Reread Spiegel. What is the rabbinic theology of the Akeda?  
Read Wiesel. What does he add theologically?

Feminism as Method &endash;3/2, 4 -- guest discussant (3/4)

Read Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler, Levitt and Peskowitz.  
Read P. Tribble, Texts of Terror with a Bible in hand.  
Read the articles by Graetz, Scolnic, and Blumenthal.  
Rosenblit's interpretation of Psalm 51 and Lopez on Psalm 22.  
Find Jewish feminist websites.

**Discuss:**

What is the nature and purpose of the feminist perspective?  
List three disputes within feminist studies on the method and purpose of the method.

**Application:**

Read Umansky and Thompson on the Akeda.  
Find other feminist midrashim on this.

(3/ 9, 11 &endash; no classes; spring break)

Art as a Method &endash; 3/16 -- guest discussant

Read prepared materials on art and religion as a method.

**Discuss:**

How is art a "method" or "discipline"?  
How does an artist "read" a "text"?  
What does an artist look for in interpreting a "text"?

**Application:**

Read on art and music and the Akeda.

Law as Method -- 3/18, 23 -- guest discussant (3/23)

Read the essay on law and religion by John Witte.  
Read the legal materials on abortion.

**Application:**

Go over the legal materials on abortion.

**Discuss:**

What is law? Why is it a category of study and being?  
How is law a "method" or "discipline"?  
How does a lawyer "read" a "text"?  
What does a lawyer look for in interpreting a "text"?

Social Science as Method &endash; 3/25, 30

Read J. Woocher, Sacred Survival (esp. ch. 3,5).  
Read C. Liebman, Civil Religion in Israel (esp. ch. 2, 4-6).  
Read Creating Community, Conservative Synagogues, and Affiliation Study.  
Read Atlanta Jewish Times and Federation Annual Report.

**Discuss:**

What do you see not using any of our previous methods?  
What are the "texts" here?  
What kinds of questions are being asked here?  
What is "civil religion"?  
How is social science a "method" or "discipline"?  
How does a social scientist "read" a "text"?  
What does a social scientist look for in interpreting a "text"?

**Application:**

What is the canon of American Jewish civil religion?  
What is marginal? excluded (taboo)?

(4/6, 13 -- no classes; Passover)

**TRYING OUR HAND**

Student presentations (by hevruta) &endash; 4/1, 8, 15, 20

D. Blumenthal, three articles on the role and place of Judaic /Jewish Studies  
Analyze the Akeda according to the methods we have studied, in hevruta.  
Follow guidelines on the study sheet.  
Prepare materials for class presentation.  
Observe the time limits; it is a matter of derekh erez.

**Conclusion** &endash; 4/22

Discuss the overlap of the methods studied.  
How would the multidisciplinary of this book apply to other works?

**Final paper due** -- as soon as you can

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