

Judaism 2011 Syllabus

JUDAISM: JWST/RLST 20300-01 and 02

MWF 10:00-10:50 / 11:00-11:50

Friends 207

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Course Goals and Objectives

Judaism introduces the most important aspects of Judaism as a religious civilization. The modern term “Judaism” encompasses much more than just faith and belief, the features that many people think of as the essence of religion. It refers to a worldview (or worldviews), a daily way of life, a system of ethics, and a communal memory of the Jewish past that links Jews living in under very different conditions across the world. Contemporary Judaism is based in a long textual tradition that begins with the Bible and the Talmud and continues to the present day. This tradition is usually called “rabbinic” Judaism because the rabbis (scholars and teachers) of the first centuries of the common era are those who shaped it. It is also based in Jewish folk practices that may not be written down but that can be equally powerful in shaping the Jewish way of life (for example, the groom’s smashing a glass with his foot at the end of the Jewish marriage ceremony).

Judaism is not a monolithic tradition – there are significant differences between Jews stemming from central and northern Europe (Ashkenazi Jews), Jews whose roots are found in the Iberian peninsula (Sephardic Jews) and those coming from the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahi Jews). Historically, law (as interpreted by the rabbis) has been a very important mode of Jewish creativity and an important factor in the creation of a Jewish way of life. In the modern world, Jewish law has become less important for many Jews, but attachment to Jewish practice and the cycle of Jewish life has remained important even for those who do not identify themselves as religious Jews.

The goal of the course is to gain an understanding of the lived tradition of Judaism – both the textual and the folk traditions – as they have developed over time. It does so by focusing on several aspects of Judaism:

1) Foundations of Judaism. A close study of selected texts that range from the Bible to contemporary texts that introduce Jewish theology and legal thinking. This part of the course is designed both to begin to learn how to read and interpret Jewish texts and to learn about specific topics, which include the ethos of rabbinic culture (rabbinic self-conceptions and sources of authority), Jewish monotheistic theology, and the process of legal decision-making.

2) Modern Varieties of Jewishness. This segment of the course introduces the changes in Judaism and Jewish life wrought by the advent of modernity, starting in the early 19th century. We discuss the growth of different Jewish religious movements (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Havurah and Renewal Judaism) and the different ways in which they have altered the classical Jewish tradition. This history is discussed in order for students to understand the variety of Jewish practice among Jews in the United States. As part of this unit of the course, we also learn about the internal diversity of the Jewish people, especially in the United States, which is a product of modernity, mass migrations of Jews around the world, and globalization.

3) Jewish ethics. Through an examination of selected topics in Jewish ethics, students learn further about Jewish legal reasoning and how it has been applied to particular issues. Topics include love of neighbor – community and social responsibility; care for the poor and disadvantaged in society; business ethics; and the ethics of war. The focus here is both on examination of the classical texts and their contemporary application.

4) Jewish daily life. How the ideals of Judaism are lived on a daily basis. This is where the philosophical/religious/ethical goals of Judaism come down to earth in what people actually do, creating the Jewish way of life. The focus is on how the practice of Judaism structures human life, on a daily, weekly, and yearly basis, and throughout the life cycle.

a) The life of worship and prayer covers daily and weekly prayer, the Sabbath, and the Jewish holidays throughout the year.

b) The Jewish life cycle from birth to death, discussing how experiences that are common to many cultures – birth rituals like circumcision or baby-naming, coming of age rituals, marriage and rules about sexuality, death and mourning – are made Jewish through specific rituals. Students are introduced to Arnold van Gennep's anthropological theory of rites of passage and how to apply it to the stages of the Jewish life cycle.

5) Methods of analysis. In this course, students will learn how to analyze the phenomena of Jewish life in various ways. This means using theories of ritual (derived from anthropology or the study of religion) to understand the meaning of daily or life-cycle rituals. It means learning methods of moral reasoning to understand Jewish modes of deciding ethical issues. It means employing sociological theories of identity-formation to understand how Jews in the modern world come to construct their own Jewish identities. Such an approach will ensure that students understand and know how to apply theories derived from several disciplines to the study of Judaism.

Books Required for Purchase:

Eliezer Segal, *Introducing Judaism* (Routledge, 2009)

Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, eds., *Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford, 2003)

Elliot Dorff and Danya Ruttenberg, eds., *Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: War and National Security* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 2010)

Elliot Dorff and Danya Ruttenberg, eds., *Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: Social*

Justice (Jewish Publication Society of America, 2010)

Course Reader costs \$6.00 and is available from Kenesha Vick in Muller 309.

Additional required readings are available on the course wiki site:

<http://sites.google.com/a/ithaca.edu/judaism-2011/Home>

Requirements

1. Attendance and participation (10%): Class attendance is required, unless you have a good excuse, which must be documented. Two unexcused absences are allowed, but above that, your absence will be noted (and will lower your grade).

Participation includes asking questions and speaking up during class discussions, participating in small group work (chevruta), active listening to lectures and to classmates, and taking notes. I expect you to come to class having done each day's reading and prepared to say something about it.

Chevruta. In class I will sometimes ask you to read a particular text together with another person, so that you can discuss your own questions about the text and spark each other's ideas. This method is taken from the rabbinic way of studying a text, a method that they called chevruta (fellowship). It stems from the idea that learning is acquired best through the active interaction between self, fellow, and text. Your chevruta partner may have different questions than you do, or different answers.

Active Listening. Listening to another person speak is not a passive enterprise. Really to understand another person requires paying attention to his or her words, taking notes on what the other person says, making associations with what you already know, asking questions when you don't understand. This is true when you listen to your classmates in small or large group discussions or to my lectures. I expect you to pay attention in class and learn both from your classmates and from my lectures.

Take notes. Do not expect simply to remember everything said in class. If you are unfamiliar with taking notes for a class, please speak to me.

2. Chevruta group meetings (25%)

To discuss primary texts (10%): During the semester you will be asked to join a chevruta group to discuss the primary source texts of the course. This will entail meeting together outside of class and having a discussion, guided by the questions that I will hand out in class or post on the course wiki site. You will take notes on the discussion and hand them in to me in class. Topics that you'll be asked to discuss this way are Foundations of Judaism and Jewish Ethics.

Chevruta class discussion kick-off (15%): Twice during the semester your chevruta group will be asked to kick off class discussion, for the Modern Jewish Identities section of the course and for the Daily Life Cycle section. In order to prepare for your topic, you will need to read the selections for the day carefully and devise interesting ways to bring the whole class into the discussion.

3. First Exam (10%). On "Foundations of Judaism," on February 18, in class.

4. Five page reflection paper on modern Jewish identity, due Friday, March 11 (15%): What does/do modern Jewish identity/ies consist of?

5. Participation in model Seder, April 11 (5%) – together with a partner, each

student will be required to research and lead one part of the in-class Seder.

6. Jewish ethics paper (15%), due May 2. This paper will focus on one of the issues discussed in the two Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices books.

7. Final Exam (20%) – This will be a cumulative test.

Section 1 exam: Wednesday, May 11, 7:30-10:00 am.

Section 2 exam: Monday, May 9, 7:30-10:00 a.m.

Policies

1. No plagiarism on papers or cheating on examinations. ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST BE YOUR OWN. Please consult the Student Handbook for a complete statement of the Ithaca College policy on plagiarism, including definitions of plagiarism and proper citation of sources. Plagiarism includes using another student's paper to write your own, or lending your paper to another student (do not do this!). I refer proven cases of plagiarism or cheating to the Judicial Affairs office.

2. Attendance Policy. Students are expected to attend all classes, and they are responsible for work missed during any absence from class. In accordance with New York State law, students who miss class due to their religious beliefs shall be excused from class or examinations on that day. Any student who misses class due to a verifiable family or individual health emergency, or to a required appearance in a court of law, shall be excused.

Two unexcused absences are permitted. In order not to be penalized for missing additional classes – because of illness, family emergency, or other obligations such as job interviews, team travel, or participation in the Theatre Department's spring week in New York for seniors, you must notify me and provide a written excuse from the appropriate authority.

3. Respect for others in the class is required. This includes:

Arrive to class on time.

Turn off your cell-phone before class starts. Do not send text messages or play games on your phone during class.

Do not use your laptop in class unless you are given specific permission to do so.

Don't eat noisy food in class (e.g., potato chips). If you must eat in class, please throw away your trash after class.

Please do not leave the room during class except in case of dire physical need.

Respect the instructor and your classmates – listen when they speak and avoid whispering or passing notes in class.

4. All written work must be done to pass the class. This includes exams and papers.

5. Students with learning disabilities: please approach me early in the semester and let me know your needs in terms of papers or exams. Also, please have the Office for Support Services send me a letter with your specific needs. In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Students must register with the Office of Academic Support Services and provide appropriate documentation to

the College before any academic adjustment will be provided.

6. If you are having personal or family problems, and find it difficult to complete your assignments – please speak to me to set up special arrangements. Please, do not simply stop coming to class!

Diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance. The source of symptoms might be strictly related to your course work; if so, please speak with me. However, problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also contribute to decreased academic performance.

Ithaca College provides a Counseling Center to support the academic success of students. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides cost-free services to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your academic success and/or well-being.

In the event I suspect you need additional support, expect that I will express my concerns (and the reasons for them) to you and remind you of resources (e.g., CAPS, Health Center, Chaplains, etc.) that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.

Schedule of Classes and Readings: Notice – subject to change!

Readings on the wiki site are introduced with the word “Wiki.” To access them, go to the online syllabus (<http://sites.google.com/a/ithaca.edu/judaism-2011/Home/syllabus-for-spring-2011>), find the proper day, and click on the link.

Monday, January 24 Introduction

Handout: syllabus.

Read: Segal, 1-8.

Topic 1: Foundations of Judaism: history and texts

Weds., Jan. 26 The biblical legacy

Read: Segal, 11-20.

Evening program, 7:00pm, Textor 102 (suggested, not required)

Wednesday, January 26 MLK Week program: Faith and Social Justice Panel Discussion

For class on Friday, Jan. 28: Meet together with your chevruta group to discuss the biblical readings.

Fri., Jan. 28 Biblical texts I

Basic biblical concepts: creation, revelation, covenant between God and the people of Israel, the oneness of God, the love of God and the love of other people.

Read: Segal, 137-140; Genesis 1-3, 12, 22, Exodus 19-20, Leviticus 19, Deuteronomy 5-6. Make sure to read the commentary on each passage in the Bible as well, and bring your Bible to class.

Monday, Jan. 31 Biblical Texts II

Continued discussion of biblical passages in class. Bring your Bible to class.

Weds., February 2 Second Temple era: Who were the Maccabees? The

Pharisees? The first Christians?

Read: Segal, 21-39.

Wiki: [Josephus on the Jewish sects](#); [Gospel of Matthew \(selections\)](#).

For class on Friday, Feb. 4: meet together with your chevruta group to discuss the rabbinic passages. What is the rabbinic ideal of the sage? Why is Hillel held up as a model sage, in contrast to Shammai? How do the rabbis deal with the rules of the Sabbath – compare what they say about Sabbath observance with how Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew deals with the Sabbath laws.

Fri., Feb. 4 Judaism of the Talmud and Midrash: Who were the rabbis? How did they develop Judaism from the Bible? How did they interpret the Bible?

Read: Segal 40-46

Wiki: [Mishnah Avot 1-5 \(selections\)](#), [Rabbinic Passages](#) (on Hillel and Shammai and the Golden Rule), and [The Sabbath in rabbinic sources](#) (compare with what Jesus says about the Sabbath in the Gospel of Matthew).

Mon., Feb. 7 Mishnah, Midrash, and Talmud

Read: Segal, 47-57, 197-199, 201-202; 212-216.

Wiki: [page of Talmud](#).

Weds., Feb. 9 Medieval Sephardic and Ashkenazic Judaism

Read: Segal 60-69, 203-209; 218-220.

For class on Friday, February 11: meet together with your chevruta group to discuss rabbinic and medieval commentaries on the Sh'ma.

Fri., Feb. 11 Sh'ma in rabbinic and medieval commentaries

Read: Wiki: [Sh'ma as Text and Practice I](#).

Mon., Feb. 14 Sh'ma in Jewish law and philosophy

Read: Wiki: [Sh'ma as Text and Practice II](#).

Weds., Feb. 16 Sh'ma in Jewish practice

Read: “Mezuzah,” “Tallit,” and “Tefillin” in the Course Reader, pages 1-14, and the commentary of the Zohar on the mezuzah at Wiki: [Meaning of Mezuzah – Zohar](#).

Fri., Feb. 18 Exam #1, on the first unit

Topic 2: Judaism in the modern world: tradition reworked

Mon., Feb. 21 Enlightenment, Emancipation, and Religious Reform

Read: Segal 106-121.

Weds., Feb. 23 Judaism in the New World: Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Jewish Renewal

Read: Segal 122-130.

Fri., Feb. 25 Jews of the Middle East: Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews

Rachel Wahba’s family comes from Egypt and Iraq, Roya Hakakian’s family is from Iran, and Ruth Knafo Sutton’s family is from Morocco. What do their stories tell us about Jewish life and culture in those countries and among those who have subsequently settled in the United States and Israel?

Read: Segal, p. 128; Rachel Wahba, “Benign Ignorance or Persistent Resistance” in Course Reader, pages 15-24.

Wiki: Roya Hakakian, “[In Khomeini’s Shadow.](#)”

Recommended Reading: Wiki: Ruth Knafo Setton, [Articles.](#)

Fri., Feb. 25 evening – 6:00 p.m.

Shabbat service at Muller Chapel, led by Galeet Dardashti – attendance is required

Sun., Feb. 27 “The Naming,” performance by Galeet Dardashti and her ensemble. 7:00-8:00 p.m. in the Emerson Suites. Attendance is required.

Mon., February 28 Jews in Israel: Homeland and Exile

Read: Segal 173-178 (discusses the Zionist movement, the relationship of religious Judaism to Zionism, and the creation of Gush Emunim, the religious settler movement). See the online syllabus for links to maps of Israel and the Israeli-Arab conflict and for a timeline of history from the late 19th century to the present.

Weds., March 2 Jews of India – in India, Israel, and America

Presentation and discussion with Dr. Barbara Johnson

Read: TBA

Topic 3: Modern Jewish American Identities

For each of these topics, one or more chevruta groups will be asked to kick off discussion in class that day.

Fri., March 4 On being an African-American Jew

Read: Four articles by and about African American Jews, describing their own experiences. All of these articles are available on the Wiki site (see next page): “Black Jews: A Minority within a Minority,” by Donna Halper; “The Dream,” by Carlton Watson; “Waiting Outside the Promised Land,” by Lesley Williams; and two articles about Rabbi Capers Funnye, who is a first cousin of Michelle Obama. At African American Jews, you can view a video of Rabbi Funnye speaking to his congregation in Chicago.

Mon., March 7 Hasidic Jews

Read: Lis Harris, Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family, chapter on “The Neighborhood and the Family,” in Course Reader, pp. 34-45.

Weds., March 9 Feminist and Orthodox

Read: Blu Greenberg, “Can a Mild-Mannered Yeshiva Girl Find Happiness Among the Feminists?” in Course Reader, pp. 25-33.

Fri., March. 11 Gay and Jewish

Read: Lev Raphael, “To Be a Jew,” in Journeys and Arrivals: On Being Gay and

Jewish, in Course Reader, pp. 46-60.

In class: viewing of selections from the movie, Trembling Before G-d.

Due March 11: five-page paper on modern Jewish identity

Spring Break – March 14-18

Topic 4: Jewish Daily Life

Mon., March 21 The Study of Ritual: How do we study rituals of the lifecycle and the year?

Read: Fiona Bowie, “Ritual Theory, Rites of Passage, and Ritual Violence,” in The Anthropology of Religion in the Course Reader, pp. 61-74.

Today is “Shushan Purim” – the day when the holiday of Purim is celebrated in ancient walled cities (like Jerusalem)

Weds., March 23 The Jewish Life Cycle: Introduction

For the Jewish Life Cycle topics, one or more chevruta groups will be asked to kick off discussion in class that day. The assignment is available on the Wiki site:

<https://sites.google.com/a/ithaca.edu/judaism-2011/Home/jewish-daily-life/chevruta-assignment-on-jewish-lifecycle>.

Read: Segal, pp. 295-305.

Friday, March 25 Beginning of Life: Circumcision & Baby-naming

Read:

On circumcision: Genesis 17 (the commandment to Abraham to circumcise)

Against circumcision: on the Wiki site: Michael Kimmel, “The Kindest Un-Cut.”

For circumcision: on the Wiki site: David Zaslow, “Circumcision and Brit.”

On baby-naming ceremonies:

An overview on women and ritual, see Wiki: Jewish Women's Archive: Ritual in United States.

An overview and selected rituals, see: Wiki: Ritual Well: Baby-Naming and Simchat Bat.

Wiki: “Planning and Implementing Your Daughter's Brit Bat,” by Debra Nussbaum Cohen.

Monday, March 28 Marriage, wedding and family, niddah and mikveh

Read:

On marriage: A brief description of marriage and the wedding ceremony – Wiki: Marriage.

“Marriage,” in Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/marriage>.

On the Mikveh – Wiki: Mikveh.

“Mikveh” in Jewish Women: An Historical Encyclopedia:

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/mikveh>

Two articles on a Reform Jewish perspective on niddah and mikveh:
<http://www.reformjudaismmag.net/396js.html> (article by Jane Solomon, “Entering the Mikveh”)
<http://www.reformjudaismmag.net/396mb.html> (“Reform Jews Discover the Mikveh”)

Weds., March 30 Death, mourning, and life after death

Read:

1. Segal 182-187; 301-303; for an outline see Death, mourning, and the afterlife
2. Four short articles on various aspects of Jewish beliefs and practices on death, mourning, and the afterlife.
 - a. Amitai Etzioni, “Good Grief,” in Course Reader, pages 108-109
 - b. Anthony Ramirez, “A Medical Dimension to a Religious Debate,” in Course Reader, pages 110-112.
 - c. Peter Steinfelds, “The Case for What ‘Comes as a Shock to Most Jews and Christians Alike,’” in Course Reader, pages 113-115.
 - d. On the Wiki site: Mel Glazer, “Hevra Kadisha: The Final Mitzvah.”

Fri., April 1 Regular class will not be held because of the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, but students will be required to attend a relevant session and to write about it.

Mon., April 4 The Sacred Calendar

Read: Segal, 277-294; see Wiki: Cycle of the Jewish Year for an outline of the calendar and the schedule of holidays for 5771 (the current Jewish year). Our discussion of the calendar will focus on the festival of Passover, which is the preeminent home ritual. One of the most important aspects of Passover (from a ritual standpoint) is what one is allowed to eat on the holiday – all leavened foods are forbidden (bread, bagels, pizza, etc.). We will start with a discussion of the normal rules of kashrut, discuss the home preparations for Passover, and then examine the ritual of the Passover seder itself.

Weds., April 6 Kashrut

What are the basic rules of Kashrut and why should they be followed? A hint: not because they are a healthier way to eat!

Read:

1. Segal, 269-272.
2. Leviticus 11, 17, and Deuteronomy 14.
3. Mary Douglas, “The Abominations of Leviticus,” in the Course Reader, pages 75-83.

Fri., April 8 Introduction to Passover

Read: Wiki: Passover (a brief account of the story of the Exodus) and Irene Awret, “Preparing for Passover in North Africa,” in the Course Reader, pp. 84-89.

Mon., April 11 A Model Seder

We will be putting on our own seder in class. Small groups will prepare each section of the seder and will have to lead it.

Read: Scott-Martin Kosofsky, “The Month of Nisan” in the Course Reader, pp. 90-107. This article explains the whole observance of Passover and the course of the seder.

Topic 5. Jewish Ethics

Weds., April 13 Love your neighbor as yourself: the biblical basis of Jewish ethics and morality

Read: Wiki: [Leviticus 19 and its commentaries](#).

Fri., April 15 Social Justice – The Environment: Case Study and Sources

Read: Elliot Dorff and Danya Ruttenberg, eds., Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: Social Justice, pp. ix-xi, 71-80.

For class on Monday, April 18, get together with your chevruta group to discuss the three responses to the Case Study questions.

Mon., April 18 The Environment II

Read: Dorff and Ruttenberg, Social Justice, pp. 81-101 (three responses to the Case Study questions)

This evening is the first seder of Passover

Weds., April 20 No class – second day of Passover

Fri., April 22 War and National Security – Justifications for War: Case Study and Sources

Read: Elliot Dorff and Danya Ruttenberg, eds., Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: War and National Security, pp. xi-xiv, 49-58.

Mon., April 25 No class – seventh day of Passover

Wed., April 27 Justifications for War II (responses to the Case Study questions)

Read: Dorff and Ruttenberg, War and National Security, pp. 59-80

Fri., April 29 The Conduct of War: Case Study and Sources

Read: Dorff and Ruttenberg, War and National Security, pp. 81-90

Mon., May 2 The Conduct of War II (responses to the Case Study questions)

Read: Dorff and Ruttenberg, War and National Security, pp. 91-109

Due today: Ethics paper.

Weds., May 4 The Conduct of War III (responses to the Case Study questions)
Read: Dorff and Ruttenberg, War and National Security, pp. 110-128

Friday, May 6 Review session for Final Exam.

Final Exam dates

Section 1 exam: Wednesday, May 11, 7:30-10:00 am.

Section 2 exam: Monday, May 9, 7:30-10:00 a.m.