

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- analyze central Jewish traditions about the environment
- recognize the diversity of the thought and practice of the Jewish people
- refrain from making statements that take the form, “Judaism says X about environmental issue Y”
- analyze how contemporary Jews use pre-modern Jewish texts in constructing their identities and their responses to modern environmental concerns
- critically consider your own approach to environmental ethics and respond to what you learn in this course to help you be—in the words of Elon’s mission statement—“global citizens and informed leaders motivated by concern for the common good.”

VIRTUES TO BRING TO CLASS

Some important qualities for the study of a religious/moral/cultural/political tradition like Judaism include:

- being careful in your reading, observing and listening
- being open-minded and honest about your own prejudices
- being tolerant of difference while also being critically-minded

Throughout this course, we will often think critically about the attitudes of other people and the decisions that they make about how to interact with the broader environment. At the same time, we will also think critically about how we live our own lives. Whatever your background, this course may challenge not only some of your assumptions about the Jewish tradition but also some of your assumptions about how to live in the world, and I hope that you will be enriched by the serious reflection that the course will encourage.

As in all other Elon classes, you are also required to adhere to the following values, which stand at the center of Elon’s honor code:

- **HONESTY:** Be truthful in your academic work and in your relationships.
- **INTEGRITY:** Be trustworthy, fair and ethical.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Be accountable for your actions and your learning.
- **RESPECT:** Be civil. Value the dignity of each person. Honor the physical and intellectual property of others.

READINGS FOR THE COURSE

Required books (available at the Elon Bookstore, also on reserve at the library):

1. Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 2006). →

2. Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, ed., *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2002).
3. Martin D. Yaffe, ed., *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001).
4. An edition of the Hebrew Bible with the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation: either *TANAKH: The Holy Scriptures* (which is just the translation), *The Jewish Study Bible* (which includes helpful commentary), or the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (if you can read Hebrew). You can, alternatively, rely on the online version of this translation, at <http://taggedtanakh.org>, though only if you feel comfortable navigating the text of the Tanakh using that interface.

Other items on the syllabus, marked with an ^(M) symbol, are available on Moodle. Please make sure that you bring a copy of the assigned readings to class on the day on which they are due.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

15% Attendance and Engagement. You are required to attend every class, to arrive on time with your reading completed (and printed out), to listen attentively to your instructor and fellow classmates, to take notes during class sessions, to contribute thoughtfully to class discussions, and to make a good effort on in-class activities. Your presence in the room during the entire class session is essential, and so you should not get up and leave our classroom in the middle of our discussion. (We'll take breaks as needed!) Please also keep computers, cell phones, and other devices off and stored away during class.

If you do need to miss a class for whatever reason, please let me know ahead of time, and please submit official documentation. After class, then, you'll need to (1) download any in-class materials (slides, handouts) which will be posted on Moodle after the class, (2) get notes from a classmate, (3) type up your own notes based on the in-class materials and your classmate's notes, and (4) submit those notes on Moodle.

Missing more than one class without official documentation will cause your final course grade to fall by a full letter grade.

20% Participation on our Class Blog: by **12:00 pm** each day that reading is due, you should post a minimum-175-word reflection in response to some aspect of the reading due that day. A separate handout will be distributed with details about this assignment.

15% Quizzes: generally open-book quizzes to complete online before class; if there's no open-book quiz online, you should expect a closed-book reading quiz at the start of class. (On this course schedule below, I've only noted quizzes during the first half of the term, but you should expect them in the second half as well.)

5% Site visit report

20% Mid-term paper

25% Final Exam

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in order to fully participate in this course, please contact Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

COMMUNICATION BEYOND CLASS TIME

Please know that I am happy to meet with you privately to discuss your work in the course, as well as any other issues that the course may raise for you—or just to chat. I am available to meet both after class and during the mornings before class. I am also happy to be in touch by email, and I will respond to emails as promptly as I can.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(readings and assignments are due on the day for which they are listed)

1/6 (Tues.), class #1: The Beginning of the Course, and the Beginning of the World

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 1–9

1/7 (Wed.), class #2: Opening Accusations and Opening Responses

- TANAKH: Genesis 1:1–3:24
- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 11–31
- Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”^(M)
- Jeremy Cohen, “On Classical Judaism and Environmental Crisis,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 73–79
- Jeanne Kay, “Concepts of Nature in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, 86–102
- *Skim* Steven Schwarzschild, “The Unnatural Jew,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 267–277 (just to get a basic sense of his argument)
- *Skim* Jeanne Kay, “Comments on the Unnatural Jew,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 286–288

First blog post due by 12:00 pm

Take-home quiz due by 1:30 pm

1/8 (Thurs.), class #3: Ancient Visions of Creation

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 33–69
- *Skim* Evan Eisenberg, “The Ecology of Eden,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 27–51
- David Kraemer, “Jewish Death Practices: A Commentary on the Relationship of Humans to the Natural World,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 81–91
- TANAKH: Genesis 4:1–17, 6:1–9:21, 10:6–10, 11:1–9
- Classical Midrash on the Story of Noah ^(M)

In-class Quiz

1/9 (Fri.), class #4: Ancient Visions of Creation II (*class discussion will be online*)

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 71–84
- “Perek Shirah: The Chapter of Song” ^(M) (read chapters 1-6; you can skip the introductory text on p. 2 and the concluding text on p. 15)
- Eilon Schwartz, “Mastery and Stewardship, Wonder and Connectedness: A Typology of Relations to Nature in Jewish Text and Tradition,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 93–104
- TANAKH: The Book of Job, 38:1–42:6
- *Skim* Stephen Geller, “Nature’s Answer: The Meaning of the Book of Job in its Intellectual Context,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 109–130, focusing just on understanding his thesis on pp. 126-129.

 Video lecture to watch: *The People of Israel and the Formation of Ancient Judaism* ^(M)

Take-home quiz; notes on video lecture; and 3 comments on blog, due by 4:30 pm

1/12 (Mon.), class #5: Laws, Virtues, and the Heritage of Medieval Jewish Philosophy

- Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, part 3, chapters 32 ^(M)
- Lenn Goodman, “Respect for Nature in the Jewish Tradition,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 227–258
- Geoffrey Claussen, “Jewish Virtue Ethics and Compassion for Animals: A Model from the Musar Movement” ^(M)

Take-home quiz due by the start of class time

1/13 (Tues.), class #6: The Heritage of Medieval Kabbalah

- Geoffrey Claussen, “An Introduction to Kabbalistic Symbolism and Ideas of Creation” ^(M)
- Elliot Wolfson, “Mirror of Nature Reflected in the Symbolism of Medieval Kabbalah,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 305–324
- Arthur Green, “A Kabbalah for the Environmental Age,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 3–15

Take-home quiz due by the start of class time

1/14 (Wed.), class #7: The Wilderness, I-Thou Relationships and the Repair of the World

- Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 53–59 ^(M)
- Jerome Gellman, “Early Hasidism and the Natural World,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, **just** pp. 370–371 regarding Buber
- Mike Comins, *A Wild Faith*, pp. 35–42 ^(M)
- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 139–149
- Lawrence Troster, “The Promise of Creation: A Jewish Environmental Theology of Redemption” ^(M)

Mid-term Paper Due Today

1/15 (Thurs.), class #8: Environmental Justice

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 127–138
- Eliezer Diamond, “How Much is Too Much? Conventional versus Personal Definitions of Pollution in Rabbinic Sources,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, pp. 61–77
- Jill Jacobs, “The City and the Garden,” from *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice through Jewish Law and Tradition*, pp. 179–191 ^(M)
- Sharon Wachsler, “Composting Judaism” ^(M)

1/16 (Fri.), class #9: Unnecessary Waste, Unnecessary Pain: Bal Tashchit and Tza’ar Baalei Hayyim

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 88–127
- Eilon Schwartz, “Bal Tashchit: A Jewish Environmental Precept,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 230–247
- J. David Bleich, “Judaism and Animal Experimentation,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 333–353

1/19 (Mon.): NO CLASS – Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

1/20 (Tues.), class #10: The Ethics of Eating

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 149–162
- Simchah Roth, “‘And You Shall Be Holy People Unto Me’: Why an Observant Jew Should Follow a Plant-Based (Vegan) Diet” ^(M)
- J. David Bleich, “Vegetarianism and Judaism,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 371–380 (and note that the rabbi whose last name is spelled “Kook” by Bleich is the same person as the rabbi whose last name is spelled “Kuk” by Roth)
- Joel Mosbacher, “Fish: A Complex Issue,” from *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, pp. 189–195 ^(M)

1/21 (Wed.), class #11: Sabbaths and Festivals

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 165–192
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, pp. 3–10, 13, 27–32 ^(M)
- Edward Kaplan, “Reverence and Responsibility: Abraham Joshua Heschel on Nature and the Self,” in *Judaism and Ecology*, **just** pp. 416–417 (regarding Shabbat)
- Lawrence Troster, “An Environmental Confession for the High Holidays” ^(M)
- Irving Greenberg, “Journey to Liberation: Sukkot,” from *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays* ^(M)
- Jonathan Wittenberg, “Tu B’Shevat: The Speech of Trees” and “On the Life and Death of Trees,” from *The Eternal Journey: Meditations on the Jewish Year* ^(M)
- Judy Maltz (*Ha’aretz*), “The Hippest Commandment for Progressive Jews” ^(M)

1/22 (Thurs.), class #12: Judaism and the Environment in the United States (with a focus on North Carolina) **Field Trip today to the American Hebrew Academy and Temple Emanuel in Greensboro; we will meet at 1:30 in Greensboro, location TBA; class will last until 6:30, and will include a free dinner!**

- Laurie Zoloth, “Interrupting Your Life: An Ethics for the Coming Storm” (a proposal to Religious Studies professors across America) ^(M)
- Bradley Artson, “Our Covenant with Stones: A Jewish Ecology of Earth,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, pp. 161–169

1/23 (Fri.), class #13: Prayers and Blessings

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 84–88, 192–199
- The Shema and its Blessings, from the traditional Ashkenazi Evening Service, *Koren Siddur* ^(M)
- Judith Plaskow, “Commentary on the Shema” ^(M)
- Mike Comins, *A Wild Faith*, pp. 85–93, 101–109, 197–199 ^(M)
- Moshe Benovitz, “A Monthly Encounter with the Shekhinah” ^(M)
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp. 46–49 ^(M)

1/25: Site visit report due by SUNDAY, 1/25, 4:30 pm

1/26 (Mon.), class #14: Judaism and the Environment in Contemporary Israel (and a conversation with Jeremy Benstein)

- Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, pp. 201–230
- Alon Tal, *Pollution in a Promised Land*, chapters 1 and 12 ^(M)

1/27 (Tues.): Final Exam