

JUD 125/REL 225: Text and Tradition: Jewish Civilization Through the Ages
Spring 2012, Smith College

Instructor: Joel S. Kaminsky
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Course Description

This course explores major Jewish texts, ideas and practices over a period of more than 3,000 years. By working our way through the library of Jewish civilization and engaging with some of the most dramatic moments in Jewish history (God's call to Abraham, the rise and fall of an ancient Jewish state, the development of a portable homeland in the Rabbinic literature, exploration of various medieval developments including Jewish philosophy and mysticism, the influence of the Enlightenment and secularism, the impact of the Holocaust and the founding of modern Israel on contemporary Jewish life) we explore how Jews have constantly adapted themselves to new circumstances and influences, while also maintaining a distinct religion and national identity. Our readings include selections from Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), Talmud (the major rabbinic collection of Jewish law and lore), midrash, Jewish liturgical texts, legal codes, mystical literature, Hasidic tales, philosophy, historical narratives, modern Jewish Literature, and essays by contemporary thinkers and scholars. The course is appropriate for students from the widest variety of backgrounds, and is particularly suitable for those students interested in a broad course combining religious, historical, and textual inquiry.

Required Books

1. The Jewish Study Bible (ed. A. Berlin and M. Brettler; Oxford, 2004) Abbreviated **JSB** below. It is best to buy a copy of this Bible because it is the one I will use in class. Furthermore it is an excellent Bible and has many study tools within it. However, any good modern translation of the Bible (NRSV, NEB, NAB) is acceptable.
2. A Short History of the Jewish People, by Raymond Scheindlin (Oxford, 1998). Abbreviated **HJP** below.
3. Back to the Sources edited by Barry Holtz (New York: Touchstone, 1984). Abbreviated **BTS** below.
4. The Peace and Violence of Judaism by Robert Eisen, (Oxford U Press, 2011). Abbreviated below as **PVJ**.
5. **Course Packet** available from Paradise Copies.

Grading

- 1 Midterm 20% of your total course grade
- 3 reaction papers for 5% each, total 15% of your final grade
- 1 short paper putting Eisen's Bible chapter in dialogue with the Collins talk for 7.5%
- 1 short paper engaging Eisen's chapter on Zionism for 7.5%
- 1 5-6 page Interpretive paper for 15%
- 1 Final for 25% of your total course grade
- Class attendance and participation 10% of your final course grade

Course Requirements

1) There will be a **Midterm Exam** worth 20% of your course grade. Tentatively scheduled for Friday March 9th.

2 a.b.c.) You will be asked to write 3 reaction papers that will be graded check, check+, check-. These are 1-2 pages double-spaced and will each be worth approximately 5% of your course grade for a total of 15% of your grade. **A.)** Write a reaction paper on the talk by Peter Cole and Adina Hoffman entitled, "Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Genizah," Thursday, March 8, 7pm due by Monday March 12th. **B.)** Write a reaction on Nathaniel Deutsch's public lecture entitled: "Travels Through the Jewish Dark Continent: Folklore and the Quest for Jewish Ethnography," on Monday April 2nd at 4:15 PM in Neilson Browsing Room, due by Thursday April 5th. For assignment **C** you can attend one of the three following events and turn in a reaction paper within 3 days of the event:

On Tuesday, March 13, 3pm Seelye Hall 310 students and faculty are invited to an open class for REL 223 Jews and Modernity at which Magda Teter (Wesleyan University) will talk on: "Ritual Murder and the Complex Relations between Jews and the Catholic Church in the Early Modern Period"

See one of the following two Jewish Film festival movies:

Wednesday March 28, 7pm Stoddard Auditorium

Grace Paley Collected Shorts

Thursday, March 29, 7pm Stoddard Auditorium

Matchmaker

Or, attend a Jewish ritual or cultural event that is something you have NOT previously experienced.

3 a. b.) We will be reading through The Peace and Violence of Judaism by Robert Eisen over the course of the semester. He presents arguments on both sides of the question of whether Judaism in its various historical manifestations promotes or ameliorates violence against non-Jews. **A.)** On the biblical material I will ask you to write a 3 page essay putting Eisen's book into conversation with the talk by Professor Collins and to thoughtfully draw out some of your own reactions in relation to what you learned about this topic. This paper is due Monday February 27th and will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. **B.)** In relation to the Zionism material, I will ask you to write a 2-3 page paper talking about the Eisen material on Zionism and our class discussion of this material. I would like you to discuss which side of Eisen's arguments you find more convincing and why. I am also curious to hear if you found this book useful on the whole. This will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. This paper is due on Monday April 30th. .

4) Interpretive Paper: Write a paper approximately 5-6 double-spaced pages in length (about 1250-1500 words). This paper will count for 15% of your grade. You will take a short passage from the Tanakh (perhaps as little as 4-5 verses or as much as a whole chapter). You will hone in on some of the key problems or issues raised by the passage in question and you will research how at least 3 later post-biblical Jewish sources or commentators wrestle with the issue(s) upon which you focus. **This paper is due on Monday April 16th in class.**

5) There will be a **Final Examination** worth approximately 25% of your course grade.

6) **Class Attendance** and **Thoughtful Participation** will be worth approximately 10% of your course grade. **If you skip more than 3 classes I will drop your grade.**

7) In order to do well at any of the above requirements it is imperative that you do all of the readings required for each class. If you are pressed for time before a particular session make sure to do at least the primary

readings. (I mean those that are selected from the Bible and other classical sources). But you must eventually complete all the secondary readings in order to do decently on the exams.

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Course Outline

January 27th--Introduction to the Study of Judaism

Begin to ask yourself what is Judaism? Is Judaism simply a religion, or perhaps is it closer to a culture? Can one legitimately speak of a Jewish civilization; what about a Jewish race? Can Judaism be considered a type of nationalism because of its deep attachment to the land of Israel? What makes a person Jewish? Is there an authoritative body that creates the norms that rule life for all Jews? If not, was there ever such a body in the past? What is the essence of Judaism? How does Judaism relate to Christianity and Islam? What do they share and where do they differ? When and where did Judaism begin? How has it changed over time? Only by asking these types of questions can we hope to grasp the tradition. Therefore, I hope you will continue to ask such questions as we learn more about Judaism.

Assignments:

- 1) Look through your Bible and take note of the major divisions within it. How does the Jewish Bible differ from Christian the Old Testament? How old is the Jewish Bible and what was its original language(s)? What are the 3 major divisions within it? Who wrote these various books and when? Who decided which books became part of the Jewish Bible and which were excluded?
- 2) Look through the time-line appended to this syllabus. You should begin to familiarize yourself with the dates and the historical events that are listed on it.
- 3) I want you to keep track of any confusing terms or concepts that comes up in the readings or in the classroom. Periodically, we will work through these lists in an attempt to clarify their contents. Questions are the key to learning. ASK!!!

January 30th--Creation, Corruption, and Abraham

Assignments:

- 1) Read Genesis 1-12, 15, 17, 22.
- 2) Read Genesis Intro and material introducing biblical background in **JSB** 8-11 and 2048-2057. Also read the notes on the side of the pages of all biblical readings.
- 3) **BTS** 31-62

February 1st --The Patriarchal and Matriarchal Stories

Assignments:

- 1) Read Genesis 25, 27-34, 37-45.
- 2) Read Joel Kaminsky's article "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," Perspectives in Religious Studies 31.2 (Summer 2004): 135-152. **Packet.**

Friday February 3rd --Exodus

Assignments:

- 1) Read Exodus 1-15.
- 2) Read Jon D. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," in The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), pp. 127-159; 180-183. Packet.
- 3) Read Exodus Intro in **JSB** 102-106.

February 6th --Sinai

Assignments:

- 1) Read Exodus 19-24, Leviticus 11-15, 17, 19, 25, Deuteronomy 4-9, 12-15, 17-18, 21-24.
- 2) Read **BTS** 83-101.
- 3) Read **JSB** 203-06 and 356-63.

February 8th--Theo-Politics: Judges, Kings and Early Prophets

Assignments:

- 1) Read Judges 2-12, 19-21, 1 Samuel 8-15, 2 Samuel 11-12.
- 2) 3) Read **HJP** 1-23.
- 3) Read **JSB** 508-510 and 558-561.

February 10th --Literary Prophecy

Assignments:

- 1) Read Amos 1-7; Hosea 1-3, 9-11; Isaiah 1-2, 6-9, Jeremiah 1-4, 7, 23, 26-28; Ezekiel 3-4, 18.
- 2) Read A.J. Heschel, The Prophets, Volume 2, (Harper & Row, 1962) pp. 1-11. **Packet**
- 3) Read **JSB** 455-461.

February 13th --Wisdom Literature and Psalms

Assignments:

- 1) Read Proverbs 1-8, 13-21, 26, 30 Job 1-11, 38-42, Ecclesiastes 1-5, 11-12, Psalms 1-2, 8, 44, 78, 93-97, 103-104, 109, 121-126, 137, 139.
- 2) Read **JSB** 175-79.

February 15th –Exile and Restoration

Assignments:

- 1) Read Lamentations, Esther, Isaiah 40-66, Jeremiah 30-34, Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 13, Daniel 1-6.
- 2) Read **HJP** 25-33.

February 20th –Violence and the treatment of the Other in the Jewish Bible

Assignments:

- 1) In preparation for this talk and the 3 page paper you write on the Collins talk and the readings from **PVJ**, please read **PVJ** pages 15-64 and be prepared to speak intelligently about the material in class on Monday February 20th.

FEBRUARY 22-Collins Talk at 4:30 PM **In place of Class you will attend this talk**

Assignments:

- 1) Come up with at least 1 intelligent question you might ask Professor Collins after his talk. Ideally, I would like several students to ask an intelligent question.

Friday February 24th --Biblical Interpretation in the Bible and in para-biblical sources

Assignments:

- 1) Inner Biblical exegesis. Compare the following passages: Lev 17:15 to Deut 14:21; Lev 19:19 to Deut 22:9-11; Exod 17:8-16 to Deut 25:17-19; I Samuel 9 and 15 to Esther 1-3; Exodus 20:5-6 and Deuteronomy 24:16 to Ezekiel 18 and Jonah 4; Read Jeremiah 29 and compare it to Daniel 7-9, 12.
- 2) Read Joseph and Asenath in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol 2 (ed. James Charlesworth; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 187-88, 202-231.
- 4) Read excerpt from the Qumran Peshar on Habakkuk in The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (trans. G. Vermes; Penguin Books, 1975), 235-43. **Packet**
- 5) Read **HJP** 33-49.
- 6) Read **JSB** pages 1829-35.

February 27th, 29th, Friday March 2nd and March 5th --The Rabbinic Period

Assignments:

- 1) Read excerpts from Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, trans. Philip Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co, 1949), 2-9, 24. **Packet**

2) Read Excerpts from Mishnayoth, volume IV Order Nezikin (Gateshead: Judaica Press, 1990), 96-99 and The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, vol 1, Baba Mezia (London: Soncino, 1933), 131-33, 352-53 and The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Kodashim, vol 1, Menahot (London: Soncino, 1948), 190; The Treatise Ta'anit of the Babylonian Talmud (trans, Henry Malter; Philadelphia, Jewish pub. Society, 1967), 334, 336, 338, 372, 374; Packet

3) Read Midrashic excerpts from Mekilta de-Rabbis Ishmael, Volume 2, trans Jacob Lauterbach (Philadelphia, JPS, 1976), 252-256, 260-261; Midrash Rabbah, Genesis, vol 1 (trans H. Freedman; London: Soncino, 1983), 1. 56-60, 66, 155-56, 187; Midrash Rabbah, Exodus, (trans S. Lehrman; London: Soncino, 1983), 47-49, 53-55; Lamentations Rabbah in The Midrash Compilations of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries (trans. Jacob Neusner; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 120-27. Packet

4) Read pages 41-48 of The Schocken Passover Haggadah, ed. Nahum Glatzer (Random House, 1996).
Packet

5) Read **BTS** 129-43 and 163-167, 177-204.

6) Read **HJP** 51-69.

7) Read **PVJ** 65-110 and be prepared to discuss this material in class.

FRIDAY MARCH 9th –Tentative date of Midterm Exam

March 12th–Visit by Prof. Justin Cammy lecturing on Yehudah Halevi

Assignments: TBA

March 14th and 26th –Medieval Jewish Philosophy

Assignments:

1) Read excerpts from Moses Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed (trans. Shlomo Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), vol 1, pp. 5-26, vol 2, pp. 525-31 and his commentary on Helek (chapter 10 of Sanhedrin) in A Maimonides Reader (trans. Isadore Twersky; New York: Behrman House, 1972), 402-23. Packet

2) Read **BTS** 261-85.

3) Read **HJP** 71-95.

4) Read **PVJ**, 111-128.

March 28th – Library Research Day

Show up in the Neilson Classroom for a meeting with Bruce Sajdak on your two mid-sized papers.

March 30th –Jewish Mystical texts

Assignments:

- 1) Skim the excerpts and the notes from Daniel Matt, The Essential Kabbalah (Harper San Francisco, 1994), 102-104, 135-37, 154-55, 198-199, 208-209, 214 and skim over the excerpts from The Zohar, Pritzker Edition, vol. 1 (trans. Daniel Matt; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 222-227, 229-30. **Packet**
- 2) Read **BTS** 305-329.
- 3) Read **HJP** 97-121.
- 4) Read PVJ, 129-39.

April 2nd –Lunch Talk and afternoon lecture by Nathaniel Deutsch

April 4th –Peshat: text centered Jewish medieval biblical interpretation

Assignments:

- 1) Read excerpts from The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Genesis (trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman; Brooklyn: S. S. & R. Publishing, 1976), 1-3, 27. Ramban (Nahmanides) Commentary on the Torah, Genesis (trans. Charles Chavel; New York: Shilo, 1971), 17-25, and Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch, Volume 1 Genesis (trans. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur Silver; New York: Menorah Publishing, 1988), 21-29, 65-69. **Packet**
- 2) Read **BTS** 213-31 and 242-57.

April 9th – Chasidism

Assignments:

- 1) Read “The Tale of the Jerusalemite” from Rabbinic Fantasies (ed. David Stern and M. Mirsky; Philadelphia: Jewish Pub. Society, 1990), 121-42 and “The Clever Man and the Simpleton” and “The King and the Emperor” from Nahman of Bratzlav: The Tales (trans. Arnold Band; New York: Paulist, 1978), 67-78 and 143-61. **Packet**
- 2) Read **BTS** 361-399.
- 3) Read **HJP** 173-87

April 11th—The Jewish Liturgical Calendar

Assignments:

- 1) Genesis 17, Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16.

2) Read Judaism: Revelation and Traditions by Michael Fishbane (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987), 83-101. **Packet**

3) Read Susan Starr Sered, Women as Ritual Experts: the Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem (New York: Oxford, 1992), 65-85. **Packet**

4) **JSB**, pages 1929-1933.

April 16th — Yiddish Literature

Assignments:

1) Read stories by Sholom Aleichem, Y. L. Peretz, and I. B. Singer from A Treasury of Yiddish Stories (ed. By Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg; New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 111-48 and 182-87, 231-233, 553-574. **Packet**

2) Read I. B. Singer “Joy,” pages 29-37 in The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer (New York: Noonday Press--Farrar, Straus. Giroux, 7th printing, 1988), 29-37. **Packet**

3) Read **HJP** 173-87.

April 18th— Visit by Cynthia Gensheimer to speak on 19th century Jewish Women’s Lives

Assignments: TBA

April 23rd — View the Quarrel

Assignments:

1) View “The Quarrel” which we will discuss over lunch. **Class will run from 11-12:55** and will include free lunch.

2) Read **HJP** 199-216.

3) Read Chaim Grade, “My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseynner,” from A Treasury of Yiddish Stories (ed. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg; New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 624-51. Found with the other readings from this book in the section of the PACKET dedicated to Yiddish Literature.

April 25th— Modern Zionism and the question of Violence toward the Other

Assignments:

1) Read **PVJ** pages 141-203 and come prepared to discuss this material in class.

2) 2) Read **HJP** 217-248.

April 30th — Jewish Life Cycle Rituals

Assignments:

- 1) View L.A. Mohel in class.
- 2) Read Judaism: Revelation and Traditions by Michael Fishbane (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987), 101-106.

May 2nd-- Final class wrap up and review

Timeline of important dates in Jewish (and regular) history

1800 B.C.E. = Abraham

1280 B.C.E. = The Exodus from Egypt

1000 B.C.E. = King David

960 B.C.E. = King Solomon builder of the 1st Temple

922 B.C.E. = The Empire that David and Solomon ruled over split into two smaller nations. These are Israel or Ephraim in the north and Judah in the south.

722 B.C.E. = The Northern Kingdom (Israel) was conquered by Assyria.

587 B.C.E. = The Southern Kingdom (Judah) was conquered by Babylonia.

538 B.C.E. = The Edict of Cyrus allowed the first exiles to return and rebuild the temple. This was the beginning of the 2nd temple period.

333 B.C.E. = Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire including what was once the territory of biblical Israel. In 323 Alexander the Great died and war broke out between his generals. Two major victors: Ptolemy ruled over Egypt, North Africa, and sometimes Israel; Seleucus ruled over Persia, Syria, Asia Minor, and sometimes Israel.

165 B.C.E. = The Maccabees

63 B.C.E. = Pompey, a Roman general, took Jerusalem.

70 C.E. = The Second Temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was ransacked.

200 C.E. = The Mishnah was compiled by Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Prince)

312 C.E. = Constantine won the battle at the Milvian bridge and gave Christianity the status of a legal religion.

500 C.E. = The Talmud was compiled

632 C.E. = Mohammed's death

1040 C.E. = Rashi's birth

1096 C.E. = The 1st Crusade

1135 C.E. = Maimonides' birth

1286 C.E. = Completion of the Zohar by Moses de Leon

1348 C.E. = The Black Death

1492 C.E. = The Expulsion of all Jews out of Spain

1550 C.E. = Joseph Caro and Isaac Luria

1665 C.E. = Shabbatai Tzvi

1720 C.E. = The Vilna Gaon, Jacob Frank, the Baal Shem Tov, and Moses Mendelssohn

1791 C.E. = The Emancipation of all Jews of France

1897 C.E. = First Zionist Congress in Basle

1941 C.E. = WW II and the Holocaust

1948 C.E. = The Founding of the State of Israel