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JWST 419E  
WMST 498E  
Tues., Thrs. 12:30-1:45  
Office hours: Mon. 10-11:00  
Thrs. 1:50-2:30

**Jewish Women's Spirituality: An Historical Perspective**  
The University of Maryland  
Spring 2003

And Miryam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

-Exodus 15:20

And say how in spirited hours  
she struggled hard with God,  
and how her blood sang deep  
and small men ruined her.

-Anna Margolin  
"Epitaph"

A woman and a Jew, sometimes more  
of a contradiction than I can sweat out  
yet finally the intersection that is both  
collision and fusion, stone and seed.

-Marge Piercy  
"The ram's horn sounding"

The starting point for this course is a question: did so-called "normative Judaism" of any period necessarily include the experiences of Jewish women? As students of Jewish history we learn the broad outlines of the history of the religion as well as of the people. The course of Judaism is fascinating and worthy of further research in itself. However, what may be an alternate field of research is the history of women's Judaism. If it is true that women had different religious experiences, what were these and how and why did they change over time?

This course is exploratory. It will not answer all of these questions but it will offer the students a window into women's Judaism in different eras and areas. Students will be provided with primary documentation and skills and methodologies to understand it. The main goal of the class is to understand what women were doing in different time periods. If this leads us to a more complete picture of Judaism as a whole, we will have been truly successful.

### Course Expectations:

-This course relies on active student participation. All students will be expected to complete the assigned readings and attend class regularly. Missing more than one class meeting or showing up unprepared will affect the student's grade.

-The writing assignments for this course will include a final examination, one 3-5 page explication of a primary document and one 5-7 page book review. Each of these will be explained fully in advance.

-The format of the written assignments for this course is intended to help create a cooperative learning environment. Students will be presenting their findings both formally and informally. For this reason, as well as overall fairness, all work must be turned in on time.

### Grades:

Class participation-10%

Document Review-20%

Book Review-35%

Final exam-35%

### Highly recommended for purchase:

Baskin, Judith. Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, second edition. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998.

Umansky, Ellen M., and Dianne Ashton, eds. Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality- A Sourcebook. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

### Topics of discussion:

**Tues. 1/28:** Introduction to the goals of the course

Examination of the syllabus

Clarification of expectations

Definitions of spirituality

**Thrs. 1/30:** Narrowing in on Jewish women's spirituality

History of the Jewish people

Historiographic issues

Reading: "What is Spirituality" (to be handed out in class)

\*"Jews" in Encyclopedia Americana

**Tues. 2/4:** Rereading the Bible (bring Bible to class)  
Women and song: ecstasy and despair

Reading: \* Carol Meyers, Discovering Eve, chapter 7  
1 Chronicles 25:1-6 (please read these in order)  
Exodus 15: 20-21  
Judges 5:1-28  
Jeremiah 31:1-5  
Judges 11:32-40  
Jeremiah 9:16-18  
Ezekiel 32:16, 8:14  
Lamentations 2:17-19

**Thrs. 2/6:** Jewish women and the goddess(es) (bring Bible to class)

Reading: 1 Kings 15:11-14  
2 Kings 23:4-7  
Jeremiah 7:17-18  
Jeremiah 44:15  
\*Bird, Phyllis, "The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus" in  
Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Cross Moore  
\*Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, chapter 13.

**Tues. 2/11:** Jewish women's spirituality in the time of the Mishna

Reading: \*Kraemer, Ross S., Her Share of the Blessings, chapter 8.

**Thrs. 2/13:** Alternative sources for Jewish women's spirituality in the time of the Mishna

Reading: "Jewish Women in the Diaspora World of Late Antiquity," in  
Baskin, Jewish Women in Historical Perspective.  
\*Brooten, Bernadette J., Women Leaders in the Ancient  
Synagogue, introduction and chapter 7.  
\*Philo, On the Contemplative Life, (volume IX of Loeb Classical  
Library) 12-13, 30-33, 68-69, 80, 83-90.

**Tues. 2/18:** Jewish women in the time of the Talmuds  
Discuss first paper

Reading: \*Henry, Sondra and Emily Taitz, Written Out of History: Our  
Jewish Foremothers, chapter 5.

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\* All books and articles marked with an asterisk will be in the course-pack.

\*Rosmarin, Trude Weiss, Jewish Women Through the Ages, chapter 3.

\*Adler, Rachel, "The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah." Tikkun 3:6 (Nov./Dec. 1988).

**Thrs. 2/20:** The special women's holiday

Reading: \*Holtz, Barry W., Back to the Sources, pp. 129-143, 158-163  
\*Agus, Arlene, "This Month is for You: Observing Rosh Hodesh as a Woman's Holiday," in Elizabeth Koltun, The Jewish Woman.

**Tues. 2/25:** Jewish women in the Early Middle Ages

Reading: Baskin, Judith, "Jewish Women in the Middle Ages," in Baskin.  
\*Zolty, Shoshana Pantel, And All Your Children Shall be Learned, pp. 131-146.

**Thrs. 2/27:** Sephardi Women before and after the expulsion

Reading: Melammed, Renee Levine, "Sephardi Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," in Baskin.  
\*Melammed, Renee Levine, Heretics or Daughters of Israel? chp. 4.

**Tues. 3/4:** Piety among Jewish women of the early Modern Period

Reading: Umansky and Ashton, eds., Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality, pp. 33-50.  
\*Reguer, Sara, "Women and the Synagogue in Medieval Cairo," Women and the Synagogue.

**Thrs. 3/6:** Women in the multi-cultural Italian states

Reading: Adelman, Howard, "Italian Jewish Women," in Baskin.

**Tues. 3/11:** Women's supplication in Ashkenaz

Reading: Weissler, Chava, "Prayers in Yiddish and the Religious World of Ashkenazic Women," in Baskin.  
\*Weissler, Chava, Voices of the Matriarchs, chp. 8.

**Thrs. 3/13:** Physical expressions: modern and pre-modern  
**Document Review due**

Reading: \*Grossman, Cissy, "Womanly Arts: A Study of Italian Torah Binders in the New York Jewish Museum Collection," Journal of Jewish Art, volume 7, 1980.  
Reserve readings/viewings to be announced.

**Tues. 3/18:** Reading Jewish women's lives in East European memoirs

Reading: Hyman, Paula, "East European Jewish Women in an Age of Transition, 1880-1930," in Baskin.  
\*Chagall, Bella, Burning Lights, pp. 25-62.  
\* Wengeroff, Pauline, Rememberings, pp. 34-45.

**Thrs. 3/20:** Zionist ethos  
Discuss book review

Reading: \*Raider, Mark and Miriam Raider-Roth, The Plough Woman, pp. 172-180, 183-186, 231-234.  
Umansky and Ashton, pp. 164-176.

[Spring Break]

**Tues. 4/1:** Spiritual resistance to the Holocaust

Reading: \*Eliach, Yaffa, Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust, foreword and pp. 25-27, 28-29, 29-33, 36-37, 37-39, 45-47, 70-72, 74-75, 92-94, 123-125, 134-140, 151-153, 160-161.  
\*Oshry, Ephraim, Responsa from the Holocaust, 25-27, 71-3, 81-85, 146-7, 156, 183, 187, 193-4.

**Thrs. 4/3:** Elderly Middle Eastern Jewish women

Reading: \*Sered, Susan Starr, Women as Ritual Experts, introduction and chapter 3.

**Tues. 4/8:** Immigrant women and mothering

Reading: \*Rubin, Ruth, Voices of a People, chapter one.  
\*Myerhoff, Barbara, Number Our Days, chapter 7.

**Thrs. 4/10:** American Jewish women finding their place

Reading: Umansky, Ellen, "Spiritual Expressions: Jewish Women's Religious Lives in the Twentieth-Century United States," in Baskin. Umansky and Ashton, pp. 127-8, 129-130, 136-147, 160-164.

**Tues. 4/15:** Women in the Rabbinate

Reading: \*Priesand, Rabbi Sally, Judaism and the New Woman, chapter 2. Umansky and Ashton, pp. 228-229, 242-246, 265-273, 279-282, 282-285.

**Tues. 4/22:** Poetry and art as expressions of spirituality

Reading: \*Umansky and Ashton, pp.213-215, 216-218, 221-223, 226-227, 240-241, 274-276, 285-286, 304-306, 310-321.

Preparation: Bring copies for the whole class of a poem of your choice. The poem can be from the assigned reading or any other source, including yourself.

**Tues. 4/29:** Ultra-Orthodox women of today

**Book Reviews due**

Reading: \*The Modern Jewish Woman, Groner, Schapiro, Langer.  
\*Aiken, Lisa, To be a Jewish Woman, chapter 11.

[Thursday 17 April cancelled due to Passover. We will make up the time by scheduling some extra hours for the book review presentations at the end of the semester.]

**Thrs. 5/1:** New prayers and rituals by Jewish women

Reading: \*Fishman, Sylvia, A Breath of Life, chapter six. Umansky and Ashton, pp. 218-220, 235-239, 241-242, 247-265.

[Thursday 24 April cancelled due to Passover holiday. See above.]

**Tues. 5/6 and Thrs. 5/8:** Presentations of book reviews (we will schedule more time as needed.)

**Tues. 5/13:** Conclusions: what we can know and the challenges of subjectivity  
answer questions for final

Reading: \*Umansky and Ashton, introduction.

**Final Examination Wednesday 21 May, 1:30-3:30**