

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Religion REL 118.80 CRN: 93016
Women's Studies 150.80 CRN: 93017
WOMEN AND JUDAISM
Dr. Leila Gal Berner
Spring 2007

Mon. and Wed. 12:45 - 2:00 p.m.

Phillips 414-A

Phone: (301) 946-1411

(As I observe the Jewish Sabbath, please do not call between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday)

Email: lgberner@earthlink.net

Office hours: By appointment — I can often meet with you immediately before or after class. If you need to talk with me at other times, please do not hesitate to call.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Beginning with an exploration of Jewish women's history and legal status, we will focus on feminist theological perspectives and Jewish women's spirituality as reflected in personal writings, ritual, liturgy and *midrash* (biblical interpretation and commentary). In this regard, the dialectic between tradition and innovation will be examined. We will together explore underlying meta-issues such as how the female and the feminine find their place within Judaism, and how Jewish women engage with, challenge and embrace Judaism.

REQUIRED TEXTS: These books are on sale in the university bookstore and are required for the class. **Please bring the book(s) with you to class on the date they are assigned.**

- Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism
- Judith Baskin, ed., Jewish Women in Historical Perspective
- Elyse Goldstein, ReVisions: Seeing Torah Through a Feminist Lens
- Blu Greenberg, On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition
- Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai
- Riv-Ellen Prell, I Did It My Way: Women Remaking American Judaism
- Danya Ruttenberg, ed., Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism

There will also be some photocopied readings distributed. These are marked with an X in the class assignments. **Please bring these photocopies to class on the date they are assigned.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **(10%) Regular attendance, careful and critical reading** of assigned materials, and **active participation** in class discussions. Each student is expected to **complete the assigned readings before the class session in which they will be discussed**. It is also expected that each student **participate actively in class discussion**. **This is essential if the class is to facilitate expression of gained knowledge and a vibrant sharing of views and opinions**. Though I am aware that some students are more talkative than others, it is difficult for me to gauge your preparedness for class if you do not engage in our class discussions. Please make every effort to involve yourself in our discussions, and do not be afraid to express your opinion, even if it differs from your classmates' or mine.
2. **(25%) A take-home midterm exam**. The midterm questions and instructions will be distributed on **MARCH 5** and will be due on **MARCH 24**. This will give you nineteen days to consider your responses and write your essays. There will be twelve days to write the exam for those who wish complete it before the Spring Break, and several days

during the break for those who wish to use that time to write the exam. You are welcome to review your notes, reread assigned materials and make outlines before you begin to write. However, **once you begin to write, this is a closed-book exam. You may use only your outline. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

3. **(25%) Two** three-page double-spaced **reflection papers** due at the beginning of each (chosen) week's readings. A very brief summary of an author's main point(s) and your thoughts on the reading — Do you agree or disagree with the author? Why? What do find particularly interesting about the author's perspective or thesis? What alternative approach might you offer?

Important: the reflection papers for a chosen week should cover **all** the readings for a particular theme or topic. (If a new topic begins in the same week, you need not write about these readings). **NOTE: It is not advisable to submit these papers late in the semester, a particularly pressured time, when you will be preparing for exams and writing other papers. NO FURTHER REFLECTION PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER MARCH 31.**

3. **(40%) A ten-fifteen page paper**, which may be either a synthesis paper or research paper on a topic or issue related to the course. While a list of suggested topics will be distributed, students are encouraged to suggest their own topics (and clear them with Dr. Berner). Suggested paper topics will be distributed on **March 10. Final decisions for paper topics must be made no later than March 24, if you are choosing a subject not on the suggested list.** All topics that are not on the suggested topic list must be cleared with Dr. Berner

The paper will be due **no later than 1:00 p.m. on MAY 7. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

There will be no final exam in this course.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS ASSIGNMENTS

<p>IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU ALWAYS BRING THE ASSIGNED READINGS WITH YOU TO CLASS.</p>
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X = Photocopied readings (will be distributed at least a week prior to the class for which it is assigned).

1. **Jan. 14:** Introduction and an Historical Overview of Issues Concerning Jewish Women
- No reading assignment
2. **Jan. 16:** History: Biblical Women I
- Baskin, pp. 25—45 (Susan Niditch)
 - Goldstein, pp. 35-44

NO CLASS ON JANUARY 21 – MARTIN LUTHER KING Jr. HOILIDAY

3. **Jan. 23:** History: Biblical Women II

- X Carol Meyers, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," in The Women's Bible Commentary, ed. C. Newsom and S. Ringe, pp. 251 — 259
 - X Susan Ackerman, "And the Women Knead Dough: The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah," in Women and the Hebrew Bible, ed., A. Bach, pp. 21 — 32.
 - Goldstein, p. 149-169
- 4. Jan. 28 : History: Women in the Rabbinic Era**
- Baskin, pp. 73—100 (Judith Romney Wegner)
 - X Hauptman, Rereading the Rabbis, pp. 1 — 14
 - X Judith Baskin, "Rabbinic Judaism and the Creation of Woman," in M. Peskowitz and L. Levitt, eds., Judaism Since Gender, pp. 125 — 130.
- 5. Jan. 30 : Women and Halakha (Religious Law) I**
- Greenberg, pp. 39—55 and pp. 75—104
 - Goldstein, pp. 89-132
 - X Rachel Adler. "The Jew Who Wasn't There," in Susannah Heschel, ed., On Being a Jewish Feminist, pp. 12—18
 - X Judith Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological," in Susannah Heschel, ed., On Being a Jewish Feminist, pp. 223—233
- 6. Feb. 4: Women and Halakha (Religious Law) II**
- X Rachel Adler, "*Tumah and Taharah: Mikveh*" in R. Siegel, M. Strassfeld, S. Strassfeld, eds., The Jewish Catalog, pp. 167—171
 - X Rachel Adler, "In Your Blood, Live: Revisions of a Theology of Purity," Tikkun, 8/1 (1993)
 - Goldstein, p. 94-132
- 7. Feb, 6: Jewish Women and Abortion**
- X Basil Herring, "Abortion," pp. 25-45, in Jewish Ethics and Halakhah for Our Time
 - X "Abortion Ritual" by Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael from Ritualwell website (www.ritualwell.org)
 - X Religious Tolerance: Jewish Beliefs: Abortion (website)
 - X Immanuel Jacobovits, "Jewish Views on Abortion"
- 8. Feb. 11: Engendering Judaism: The Work of Rachel Adler**
- Adler, pp. 169 — 215
- 9. Feb. 13: Reclaiming the Divine: Women and Theology I**
- Plaskow, pp. 121—143
 - Goldstein, pp. 133-140, 149-175

- X Rita Gross, "Steps Towards Feminine Imagery of Deity in Jewish Theology," in Susannah Heschel, On Being a Jewish Feminist, pp. 234—247
- Prell, pp. 27-49 (Millen)

NO CLASS ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18: PRESIDENTS' DAY HOLIDAY

10. Feb. 20: Reclaiming the Divine: Women and Theology II

- Plaskow, pp. 143—169
- X Laura Geller, "Encountering the Divine Presence," in Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds., Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality, pp. 242—247

11. Feb. 25: FILM: "Half the Kingdom"

- Goldstein, pp. 177-180 (note her comments as a participant in the film)

12. Feb. 27: FILM: "The Return of Sarah's Daughters"

- No reading assignment

13. March 3: Women Rabbis

- Ruttenberg, pp. 112-118 (Karen (Chai) Levy)
- X Joy Levitt: "Women Rabbis: A Pyrrhic Victory?"
- X Selections from *Raayonot*
- Prell, pp. 211-228 (Nadell)

14. March 5: Women in the American Denominations

- Prell, 109-133 (Goldman/Reform), pp. 135-152 (Dash Moore and Bush/Reconstructionist), pp. 153-179 (Schwartz/Conservative)

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM WILL BE DISTRIBUTED

15. March 10: Women and Contemporary Orthodoxy

- Prell, pp. 181-209 (Joseph/Orthodoxy)

GUEST SPEAKER – An Orthodox feminist speaks about her life and beliefs

SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED

16. March 12: Reclaiming Sacred Text: Women & Midrash I

IMPORTANT: BRING ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF HEBREW BIBLE TO CLASS

- X Linda Kuzmack, "Aggadic Approaches to Biblical Women," in The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives, ed. E. Koltun, pp. 248 — 256
- Prell, pp. 83-106 (Leveen)
- Aviva Cantor, "The Lilith Question," in Susannah Heschel, On Being a Jewish Feminist, pp. 40—50 (LILITH)

- Goldstein, pp. 45-58 (EVE AND LILITH)
- X Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith," in Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds., Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality, pp. 215—216 (EVE AND LILITH)
- Ruttenberg, pp. 131—153 (Yiskah Rosenfeld) (LILITH)

NO CLASS ON MARCH 17 OR MARCH 19 – GWU SPRING BREAK

17. March 24: Reclaiming Sacred Text: Women & Midrash II

**MIDTERM EXAMS DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS
NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED**

IMPORTANT: BRING ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF HEBREW BIBLE TO CLASS

- GENESIS 16: 1—18:15 and 21:1—22 (SARAH AND HAGAR)
- GENESIS 22: 1 — 19 (THE BINDING OF ISAAC)
- X Midrashic sources on Sarah and Hagar

Paper topic decisions are due today, if the topic is not on the suggested topics list

18. Wed., March 28: Reclaiming Sacred Text: Women & Midrash III

IMPORTANT: BRING ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF HEBREW BIBLE TO CLASS

- EXODUS 2:1 — 10 (Miriam saves Moses)
- EXODUS 13:5 —15:21 (At the Reed Sea)
- NUMBERS 12:1—15 (Miriam's protest)
- NUMBERS 20:1—29 (Miriam's death/Aaron's death)
- Goldstein, p. 69-80
- X Midrashic sources on Miriam (including Miriam's well)

19. March 31: Reclaiming Spiritual Experience: Women in Worship and Ritual I

- Prell, pp. 231-256 (Myers), pp. 257-277 (Ochs)
- X Leila Gal Berner, "Our Silent Seasons," in Debra Orenstein, ed., Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones, vol. 1, pp. 121-136.

NO REFLECTION PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER TODAY

20. April 2: Reclaiming Spiritual Experience: Women in Worship and Ritual II

- Prell, pp. 279-302 (Grant)
- X Savina Teubal, "Simchat Hochmah", in Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, eds., Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality, pp. 257—265
- **FILM:** "Timbrels and Torahs"

21. April 7: Jewish Lesbians

- X Selections from Christie Balka and Andy Rose, eds., Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay and Jewish
- X Selections from Rebecca T. Alpert, Sue Levi Elwell and Shirley Idelson, eds., Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation

22. April 9: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism: A Variety of Perspectives I

- Ruttenberg, pp. xv-xxiv (Intros. by Heschel & Ruttenberg) and pp. 14—23 (Jennifer Blyer), pp. 67—76 (Sarah Coleman), pp. 161—167 (Emily Wages),

23. April 14: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism I: A Variety of Perspectives II

- Ruttenberg, pp. 52—66 (Sharon Wachslar), pp. 102-111 (Ryiah Lilith), pp. 119—130 (Ellen Friedrichs),)

NO CLASS ON APRIL 16 & 21 – Dr. Berner away during part of Passover week

24. April 23: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism I: A Variety of Perspectives III

- Ruttenberg, pp. 154—160 (Ursula Katan), pp. 189—193 (Billie Michele Mandel), pp. 194—205 (Hanne Blank)

25. April 28: Women’s Voices in Song: Jewish Feminist Music I

- No reading assignment

26. April 30: Women’s Voices in Song: Jewish Feminist Music II

- No reading assignment

**FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN 1:00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 7
NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

Please deliver your papers to THE RELIGION DEPT., located at 2106 “G” Street. It is a small row house building. Go up the stairs and find the Religion Dept. Please put the papers in my mailbox OR deliver them to the department administrative assistant.