

Concordia University
 Department of Religion
 Reli 381/4: Women and Religion: Judaism
 Tuesday - Thursday: 11:45-1
 Hall 539-3
 Instructor: Norma Baumel Joseph
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 Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3 preferably by appointment

This course will focus on women's practice of and inclusion in the religious system of Judaism. This is not a course on women in Jewish history but, rather, an examination of the "tradition" - the legal codes and rulings as they regulated and continue to affect women's religious lives and participation in the life of the community. The differences between law, custom and practice will underlie our study as we examine life cycle rituals, calendrical celebrations, and daily rituals. From biblical texts to talmudic reasoning, medieval codes to contemporary responsa, we will investigate the principal sources, the interpretations and contemporary applications that surround women's lives as Jews. The diversity of contemporary practice and feminist innovation will inform and challenge our investigation.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance and participation is required.
2. Short critical essay 20% Due January 27, 2005.
3. Research topic and bibliography 5%, due February 17, 2005.
4. Research Paper 35% Due March 29, 2005.
5. Final take home exam 40% Due April 14, 2005.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at bookstore)

Rachel Biale, WOMEN AND JEWISH LAW

Reli 381 Course pack. All the Required Readings are found in this course pack.

Additional sources-useful for research projects:

Rachel Adler, ENGENDERING JUDAISM, 1999.

Getsel Ellinson, WOMEN AND THE MITZVOT, 3 vols. (English translation of primary sources).

Sylvia Barack Fishman, A BREATH OF LIFE: FEMINISM IN THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, 1993.

Blu Greenberg, ON WOMEN AND JUDAISM: A VIEW FROM TRADITION, 1981.

Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, DAUGHTERS OF THE KING, 1992.

Judith Hauptman, REREADING THE RABBIS, 1998.

Susanna Heschel, ed. ON BEING A JEWISH FEMINIST: A READER, 1983.

- Mendell Lewittes, THE NATURE AND HISTORY OF JEWISH LAW, 1966.
 N. Hecht et al. Editors, AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY AND SOURCES OF JEWISH LAW. 1996.
 Elizabeth Koltun, ed. THE JEWISH WOMAN: NEW PERSPECTIVES, 1976.
 Judith Plaskow, STANDING AGAIN AT SINAI: JUDAISM FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE, 1990.
 Maurie Sacks, ed. ACTIVE VOICES: WOMEN IN JEWISH CULTURE.
 Rachel Wasserfall, WOMEN AND WATER, 1999.
 A. Weiss, WOMEN AT PRAYER.
 J. Wolowelsky, WOMEN, JEWISH LAW AND MODERNITY, 1997.
 M. Kaufman, THE WOMAN IN JEWISH LAW AND TRADITION.
 S. Zolty, AND ALL YOUR CHILDREN SHALL BE LEARNED.

Grading System

- A : Superior grasp of material, excellent analysis and thought provoking presentation.
 B : Good understanding, clear and orderly presentation.
 C : Adequate grasp of material, reasonably clear.
 D : Evidence of reading, inadequate comprehension.
 F : Absence of evidence that required work was done.

Code of conduct

Please familiarize yourselves with university regulations contained in the Concordia Undergraduate Calendar concerning academic misconduct (i.e. plagiarism and multiple submissions) and other offences of conduct (i.e. discrimination, harassment, violent or threatening behaviour). **You must always give proper citation of any work used from any source. Any improper use of another's work will be reported to the Dean's office as a plagiarism offence to the code of conduct.**

Student Services

Please see Concordia's web site under Student Learning Services for extra help and for more information and examples on appropriate citing practices

COURSE OUTLINE

All required readings are either in the textbook or the course pack.

Week 1: January 4, 6.

Introduction

- a) Judaism, Jewish History, Jewish Law
- b) Women in the picture: Gender Analysis
- c) A biblical example

READ:

Introduction to textbook.

J. Plaskow: "Introduction: It's Feminist, But is it Jewish," vii-xix
"Torah as Law in a Feminist Judaism" 60-74

both in Standing Again At Sinai: Judith Plaskow 1990 (San Francisco: Harper & Row)

Week 2: January 11, 13.

Beginnings: Life Cycle Rituals and Gender Patterns

- a) Welcoming Children
- b) Puberty: Bat Mitzvah

READ:

R. Alpert: "Our Lives are the Text," 66-80 Bridges 1991 (Spring)

J. Davis: "The Bar Mitzvah Balabusta," 125-139 in Active Voices ed. M. Sacks, 1995
(University of Illinois Press)

Week 3: January 18, 20.

Obligation and Exclusion: Law and Ritual

- a) Rabbinic Texts and Social Consequences

READ:

Biale, Chapter 1

S. Berman: "The Status of Women in Halakhic Judaism," 114-128 in E. Koltun ed. The Jewish Woman 1976 (NY: Schocken)

J. Hauptman: "Ritual," 221-243 in J. Hauptman, ReReading the Rabbis 1998 (Westview Press).

*A. Kirschenbaum: "Appendix I: A Historical Sketch of the Sources of Jewish Law," 289-304 in A. Kirschenbaum Equity in Jewish Law (NY: KTAV)
or any good introduction to Jewish law (Lewittes, Hecht, Feldman).

Week 4: January 25, 27

Short critical essay 20% Due January 27, 2005.

The Arguments over Educating Women

- a) The Historical transformation

READ:

D. Weissman: "Education of Jewish Women," 29-36 in Encyclopaedia Judaica Yearbook 1986-87 (Jerusalem: Keter)

Recommended:

D. Weisman, "Bais Yaacov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists" in Koltun.

- b) The Legal Debates

READ:

Biale pp. 29-41.

R.G. Ellinson: "Talmud Torah," 240-267

"Educating the Young Girl," 273-9

in G. Ellinson Serving the Creator 1986 (Israel: Elnor Library)

Week 5: February 1,3

Women as Prayers and Prayers of Women

a) Legal Obligations and Patterns

READ:

I. Haut: "Are Women Obligated to Pray," 89-101 in S. Grossman & R. Haut, eds.

Daughters of the King 1992 (NY: Jewish Publication Society)

A. Blumenthal: "An Aliyah for Women," 266-280

P. Sigal "Women in a Prayer Quorum," 282-291

D. Feldman "Woman's Role and Jewish Law," 294-305

All in Conservative Judaism and Jewish Law ed. S. Siegel 1977 (NY: The Rabbinical Assembly)

b) Women's Prayers

READ:

C. Weissler: "Four Tkhinnes," 51-55 in Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality edited by E. Umansky and D. Ashton (Boston: Beacon Press)

C. Weissler: "The Construction of Gender in Yiddish Devotional Literature," in Weissler Voices of the Matriarchs 1998 (Boston: Beacon)

Week 6: February 8,10.

1. Synagogue Presence

a) Innovative Rituals and Prayer

READ:

S. Fishman: "Praying with Women's Voices," 143-180 in Fishman A Breath of Life 1993 (NY: The Free Press).

S. Levi Elwell: "Reclaiming Jewish Women's Oral Tradition: An Analysis of Rosh Hodesh," 111-126 in M. Procter-Smith and J. Walton eds. Women at Worship (Westminster John Knox).

A. Cohen Nusbacher: "Efforts at Change in a Traditional Denomination" 95-113 in NASHIM 1999 vol. 2.

2. Synagogue and Communal Roles

a) Rabbinic Leadership

READ:

P. Nadell: "The Women Who Would Be Rabbis," 123-134 and

L. Geller: "From Equality to Transformation?" 243-253 both in T. Rudavsky ed. Gender and Judaism 1995 (NYU Press)

Week 7: February 15, 17

Research topic and bibliography 5%, due February 17, 2005.

Film: Half the Kingdom

Discussion

Mid-term break: February 21-25**Week 8: March 1,3**

Sexuality: Marital and otherwise

READ:

Biale, Chapters 5,7,10

Week 9: March 8,10.

a) Marriage

READ:

Biale, Chapters 2

b) Procreation, Contraception and Abortion

READ:

Biale, Chapters 8 and 9

Week 10: March 15, 17

Menstrual Restrictions and Reclamations

READ:

Biale, Chapter 6

R. Adler: "TUM'AH and TOHARAH," 117-127, 1976 (NY: Schocken)

C. Weissler: "Mitzvot Built into the Body," 101-115, H. Eilberg-Schwartz People of the Body, 1992 (SUNY Press).

L. Anteby: "There's Blood in the House," 166-185

N. Marmon: "Reflections on Contemporary Miqveh Practice"

Both in Women and Water ed. R. Wasserfall, 1999 (Brandeis University Press).**Week 11: March 22, 24**

Divorce: film and discussion

READ:

Biale, Chapters 3 and 4

FILM: Untying the Bonds... Jewish Divorce

Week 12: March 29, 31

Research Paper 35% Due March 29, 2005.

Death and Inheritance

READ:

R. Millen: "The Female Voice of Kaddish," 179-201 in M. Halpern and C. Safrai, eds. Jewish Legal Writings by Women 1998 (URIM Publications).

E. Klein: "Medieval Sourcebook"

Week 13: April 5, 7.

What about God

L. Savlov: "The Shekhinah," 63-79 in A. Sharma Gender in World Religions 1992 vol. 3.C. Christ: "Women's Liberation and the Liberation of God," 11-17 in E. Koltun ed. The Jewish Woman 1976.

Conclusions : Innovation, Tradition and Identity

Jewish women practicing at home and everywhere.

Final take home exam 40% Due April 14, 2005.