



Tel Aviv University International
CONTEMPORARY JEWISH ISSUES
Spring 2020

Instructor: Dr. Moshe Gresser - telavivmoshe@gmail.com

Course Description:

This course will explore in an inter-personal and dialogical way a series of issues that engage and concern contemporary Jews, through readings and class discussions. Issues will be set in the context of relevant Jewish laws, traditions and selected texts, to provide necessary Jewish substance and background. The tension between tradition and modernity, as well as that between Israel and the Diaspora, especially America, will serve as the backdrop for many of these issues, so vital to the Jewish future. Class discussion will attempt to develop the skill of *listening* in order to articulate the intelligence of opposing views, while struggling to discern the truth - the classic Jewish procedure in an "argument for the sake of Heaven."

Required Reading: Articles and texts in the **Readings for Contemporary Jewish Issues**, available online on the course Moodle site. Occasional handouts in class.

Grading System:

1) Preparation, Attendance and Class Participation, as measured by 4 Class Discussion Reports done in class over the course of the semester: 20%

Please Note: In order to facilitate a non-distracting and intellectually productive learning environment, cell phones, texting, Ipods, laptops, PDAs, and their accompanying earpieces are NOT allowed during class. **Ignoring this rule will lower your participation grade.**

2) Midterm Exam [based on both readings and class discussion]: 40%

3) Cumulative Individual Final Paper (8-10 pages): 40% Email submission NOT accepted. 10 point penalty for email submission.

Students are responsible for assigned readings whether they are reviewed in class or not.

Please Note: In accordance with TAU International policy, **class attendance is required.**

*More than 3 unexcused absences will lower your grade by at least 10%.

*Any request to take the exam on a date other than the one scheduled must be submitted to the TAU INTERNATIONAL Office. The professor is not authorized to make separate arrangements for a make-up exam.

***Cell phone use or Laptop Internet surfing during class will not be allowed.**

Ignoring this rule will lower your participation grade.

Weekly Schedule and Reading Assignments:

First Week:

Class 1 – Tues. Feb 25 - Introductions and overview: Issues bind, issues divide. What is a Jewish Issue? What are the most important issues that engage Jews today, and Why? Judaism as a generative culture of debate. Jewish literacy as an issue of Jewish survival. Is Judaism a religion, a nation, a family or a civilization (or all four)? What do you think are the most important Jewish issues today? For next class, read Handout from Encyclopedia Judaica: "Who is a Jew?"

Class 2 – Thurs. Feb 27 - The "Who is a Jew?" Debate in Israel and in Judaism: A defining issue. What is at stake? Who cares? Brother Daniel, the Shalit case and the State of Israel: What is a Jewish State? How do religion and ethnicity intertwine in Jewish identity? What is the role of law in Judaism? What's the difference between a law and a religious requirement or obligation?

Second Week:

Class 3 – Tues. Mar 3 – Context and Historical Background: Jewish Modernity and the Emancipation. Matrilineal vs. Patrilineal descent: What's the issue? What are the values reflected in each position? Reform versus Orthodox positions. Is it all a matter of taste?

Class 4 – Thurs. Mar 5 - Zionism and Israel-Diaspora relations: What does Israel mean to you? How do Israelis and Diaspora Jews view each other? Is "exile" a part of modern Jewish identity? Is Judaism without a national dimension fully Jewish?

Third Week:

Class 5 – Tues Mar. 10 - The Chosen versus the Choosing People: the role of autonomy. What is the Jewish Role in the World? Is "The Chosen People" necessarily chauvinistic? Does a Jew have an obligation to anything other than individual self-interest?

Class 6 – Thurs Mar. 12 - Conversion: Why are circumcision (Brit Milah) and ritual immersion in a mikveh necessary to conversion? (Are they?) If circumcision is the sign of the Covenant, how are women included? How does conversion help us understand Jewish identity?

Fourth Week:

Class 7 – Tues. Mar. 17 - Antisemitism, Anti-Judaism, Anti-Zionism: Why hate Jews? Five stages in the development of Jew-Hatred.

Class 8 – Thurs. Mar 19 - Christianity, Jew-Hatred and Antisemitism.

Fifth Week

Class 9 - Tues. Mar. 24 – Anti-Zionism and Contemporary anti-Semitism. Israel and the Media. The BDS Movement. Does antisemitism affect American Jews? How do you understand contemporary antisemitism like the slaughter of Jews in a synagogue in Philadelphia? What role does the Holocaust play in contemporary Jewish identity? What role should it play?

Class 10 – **Thursday, March 26th** - **MIDTERM EXAM** (40%)**

Sixth Week

Class 11 - Tuesday, March 31 - Judaism and Gender. Jewish women, Jewish men, Feminism and Patriarchy; Men's and Women's roles. How do Judaism and feminism challenge each other? What can they learn from a dialogue?

Class 12 - Thursday, April 2 - Feminist Judaism: Women's Torah, women's rituals, women's leadership. What do women want? What do men want? What does God want? Can we be friends?

Passover Vacation: April 5th - April 18th

Seventh Week:

Class 13 – Tues. April 21 - The Abortion Debate Pro and Con: Can feminism include an opposition to abortion? How do both rights and moral obligations play a role in this issue?

Class 14 – Thurs. April 23 - Issues in Jewish Dating 1: Modesty (tsniut) and Jewish dress. Gender Display and Power. What do our clothes say about how we see ourselves and how we see others? What do we want them to say? What does self-restraint say? Covering one's hair and sexiness as different ways of feeling good about oneself (social conditioning and self-esteem); the naked body as artistic expression of the innocence of the body (Steven Tunick) .

Eighth Week:

Tuesday, April 28th – **Yom HaZikaron** – **NO CLASS**

Class 15 – Thurs. April 30 – Issues in Jewish Dating 2: Hooking up, non-marital sex and Judaism: Touching (negi'ah) and not touching: What do they mean? Does virginity have any value to Jews today? What role does self-restraint play in Jewish dating?

Ninth Week:

Class 16 – Tues. May 5 – What is Jewish marriage? Why marry Jewish? The Jewish Wedding ceremony ("Kiddushin") as an expression of values. Does the tradition have a right to define my marriage?

Class 17 – Thurs. May 7 - Intermarriage and Assimilation: What's the Issue? Why marry a Jew? Isn't love all that matters? Should Jews not date non-Jews? What is at stake? What are the benefits of intermarriage? Should Rabbis agree to officiate at mixed marriage ceremonies?

Tenth Week:

Class 18 – Tues. May 12 - Sex and Judaism. What's love got to do with it? Jewish Marital Sexuality and Family Purity Laws. Should a Jewish marriage include the Jewish way in love and sex? Can a Jewish marriage include consensual extra-marital sex? Sex as partnership.

Class 19 – Thurs. May 14 – Judaism and Adultery. Is it any of Judaism's business? Homosexuality, Gay marriage. A modern argument for the sake of heaven, or simple prejudice and fear? What do we do if we believe the halakha is wrong?
- Summing Up and Looking Back. What's this all about? Why does it matter?

****Cumulative Final Paper (40%) – Due Thursday, May 14th (in paper copy)**

Suggested Supplementary Reading:

S.N. Eisenstadt, Jewish Civilization. The Jewish Historical Experience in a Comparative Perspective, 1992.

Jacob Neusner, Judaism in Modern Times. An Introduction and Reader, 1995.

Jack Wertheimer, A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America

Shaye Cohen, Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism, 2005.

Mendes-Flohr & Reinhartz, The Jew in the Modern World. A Documentary History

Prager and Telushkin, Nine Questions People Ask about Judaism

Eliezer Berkovits, Crisis and Faith. New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1976.

Marc Kelner, Contemporary Jewish Ethics

Maurice Lamm, The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage

David Feldman, Marital Relations, Birth Control and Abortion in Jewish Law

Shmuley Boteach, Kosher Sex. A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy, 1999.

Gila Manolson, The Magic Touch. A Jewish Approach to Relationships, 1992.

Gila Manolson, Outside Inside. A Fresh Look at Tzniut, 1997.

Kathleen Bogle, Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus, 2008.

Robert Wistrich, Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred

Rachel Biale, Women and Jewish Law

Susannah Heschel, On Being A Jewish Feminist

S. Grossman, R. Haut, Daughters of the King

Tamar Ross, Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism 2004.

Irving Greenberg, The Jewish Way. Living the Holidays

Mordicai Waxman, ed., Tradition and Change. The Development of Conservative Judaism.

Bruce A. Philips, Re-Examining Intermarriage: Trends, Textures, Strategies, 1995.

Egon Mayer, Love and Tradition. Marriage between Jews and Christians, 1985.

Sacks, Jonathan. Crisis and Covenant (1992)

David Hartman, A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism (1999)

David Hartman, Israelis and the Jewish Tradition

TAU International Course Guidelines

Rules and Respectful Behavior

- No cell phones or laptops permitted in class unless approved by instructor for use
- Tardiness to class is not permitted
- As our courses bring together students from many different styles of learning and from a wide variety of home institutions, we ask that students remain respectful to and patient with fellow classmates at all time as some students may be more familiar with certain course material or procedures than others.

Learning Accommodations

In accordance to University guidelines, students with learning disabilities or accommodation requests must submit official documentation from their home country / university (translated into English by notary if not already in English) to TAU International (tauiacademic@tautex.tau.ac.il) in advance of arrival describing in detail any specific needs they have. Students must also bring a copy of this documentation with them on-site and give it to their faculty on the first day of class while introducing themselves so that the faculty know who they are and what sorts of needs they may have. TAU International and its faculty cannot guarantee that all accommodations received at the home school can be similarly met at TAU but certainly does the best it can to make any suitable accommodations possible that are needed.

In-class Exams

TAU does not permit, under any circumstances, taking any in-class (including mid or final) exams early or later than the scheduled exam day. When selecting courses, it is thus very important to note below if there is an in-class midterm or final exam as this date/exam cannot be changed. Early departures from the program are not approved, nor are early or exception in-class exams.

TAU International Absence Policy

Attendance is **mandatory** in all of the courses. Missing classes will be reflected in the final grade of the course. Up to three justified absences from classes will be accepted (for example: emergency matter or illness, both of which will require an official doctor's note sent to the faculty **on the day of the absence**). Such cases of absence should be reported to your lecturer immediately and again, a doctor's note is required. Students are required to arrive on time for classes. Teachers are entitled to treat any single case of lateness and/or repeated lateness as an unjustified absence. Please note that according to TAU Academic Policy, if a student's behavior or attendance during the semester is disagreeable his/her course participation may be cancelled at the discretion of TAU.

Students are responsible for reading and adhering to the policies and procedures in the TAU International Academic Handbook [posted here](#) at all times.