

The University of Tel-Aviv Overseas Student Program

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH ISSUES - Spring 2019

Instructor: Dr. Moshe Gresser

Course Description:

This course will explore in a personal 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 articulating 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.

Grading System:

1) **Attendance, class preparation and participation: 10%**

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]: **30%** (if you do the paper with a partner), or **40%** (if you choose not to do a paper)

3) **Optional Jewish Issue paper with a partner (4-5 pages): 20%** - Email submission not accepted. You must turn in a paper copy to receive credit. 10 point penalty for email submission.

4) **Cumulative Individual Final Paper (8-10 pages): 40%** (with the issue paper) or **50%** (without a paper). 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 OSP 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 OSP 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. Mar 5 - 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. Mar 7 - 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 12 – 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 14 - 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?

Third Week:

Class 5 – Tues Mar. 19 - 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. 21- PURIM! No Class.

Fourth Week:

Class 7 – Tues. Mar. 26 - - 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?

Class 8 – Thurs. Mar. 28 – Antisemitism, Anti-Judaism, Anti-Zionism: Why hate Jews? Five stages in the development of Jew-Hatred.

Fifth Week

Class 9 - Tues. Apr 2 - Christianity, Jew-Hatred and Antisemitism.

Class 11 – Thursday, April 4th - Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Israel and the Media. Does antisemitism affect American Jews? Jewish views of non-Jews. What role does the Holocaust play in contemporary Jewish identity? What role should it play? - Midterm Review.

Sixth Week

Tuesday, April 9th – Yom HaAtzmaut – NO CLASS

Thursday, April 11 - MIDTERM EXAM (30% or 40%)**

Passover Vacation: April 15th - April 27th

Seventh Week:

Class 12 – Tues. April 30 - Jewish women, Jewish men, Feminism and Halakha (Jewish law); Men's and Women's roles. How do Judaism and feminism challenge each other?

Class 13 – Thurs. May 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?

Eighth Week:

Class 14 – Tues. May 7 - The Abortion Debate Pro and Con: Can feminism include an opposition to abortion?

Class 15 – Thurs. May 9 – 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 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) .

Ninth Week:

Class 16 – Tues. May 14 – 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?

****Optional Jewish Issue paper with a partner due (20%)**

Class 17 – Thurs. May 16 - 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?

Tenth Week:

Class 18 – Tues. May 21 – 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?

Class 19 – Thurs. May 23 - 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.

Eleventh Week:

Class 20 – Tues. May 28 - Judaism and Adultery. Is it any of Judaism's business?

Class 21 -Thurs. May 30 - 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% or 50%) – Due Thursday, May 30th**

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

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State (1992)