

Great Jewish Books
JUDS0681-S01
CRN: 15105

Fall, 2014

Judaism is sometimes defined as an extended conversation between writers in different places and times, writing in different languages. This course will give you access into this conversation. Who are the major thinkers and their works? What are the topics and ideas that engage them, and how do they engage each other? We will wrestle with their ideas, both as universal answers to perennial questions of human concern (e.g., why is there evil in the world) and as expressions of their own Jewishness.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able:

1. To identify several major works of the Jewish canon, their historical context and importance;
2. To identify, critique, evaluate, and apply to one's own life some of the major themes and important ideas that run through this literature, such as: the nature of human beings; how to live a good and moral life; obedience and freedom; home and exile; and personal identity;
3. To evaluate and critique the category of "Jewish literature";
4. To compare and contrast the works examined in this class in order to identify the relationships between them;
5. To write better;
6. To constructively critique both other people's writing and your own;
7. To speak in public with more confidence.

Instructor

Professor Michael Satlow, Religious Studies and Judaic Studies. My office is on the second floor of the Judaic Studies office at 163 George St. (corner of George and Brook). My office phone is 863-3911 and email is Michael_Satlow@brown.edu. You are always welcome to contact me for an appointment. I will make myself accessible in a variety of ways (from lunches to virtual hangouts) and I strongly encourage you to drop by!

Texts, Resources, and Communication

You will be doing a lot of reading for this course and you should own the texts listed below, all available at the Brown Bookstore. You will want to make notes in these books as you read and bring the book under discussion to class.

The Jewish Study Bible (ed. Berlin, Brettler, Fishbane)

The Talmud: A Selection (ed. Solomon)

A Maimonides Reader (ed. Twersky)

The Essential Kabbalah (ed. Matt)

The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln (ed. Lowenthal)

Tales of the Hasidim (ed. Buber)
In My Father's Court (Singer)
Call it Sleep (Roth)
Old New Land (Herzl)
Mr. Mani (Yehoshua)

For each work you will also have access to a study guide, available on Canvas. It is important that you consult this guide while doing your reading. On those guides I will also include additional recommended readings, should you be interested. These will usually include a chapter of my book *Creating Judaism*. Additional readings on OCRA may be available; our OCRA password is "greatjewishbooks". You are not required, however, to do any of these readings.

Canvas will also be used for submission of work. Additionally, we will maintain a Facebook group. Participation in this group is optional but will earn extra credit.

Expectations

This is a seminar and much of our time together will be spent in discussion. It is thus vital – to your own learning as well as to the others in the class – that you attend every class having done the assigned reading. If for some excellent reason you cannot attend the class, please let me know in advance. More than one absence (unless all are excused with a dean's note) can result in failure from the class.

Writing. This course emphasizes writing. Every week you will have to do some writing, although much of it is informal. Developing one's writing is a process of which critique and rewriting are a vital part, and I have tried to give you opportunities for both. In addition to regular journal writing, you will also write three papers, each of which requires a different kind of analysis.

- **Journal Writing (200 points):** For most classes you will write no more than two to three paragraphs responding to the reading. I will often give prompts for these responses, but I will also encourage you (especially later in the course) to depart from them. These will be made in Canvas and will be accessible to the entire class. Journal entries must be made by 8:00 AM of the day of class.
- **First paper: Analysis of a single work (500 points).** This 5-page paper will analyze one of the works that we have read to date, responding to a choice of prompts. The first draft (100 points) is due by the end of the day on October 8. You will peer review each other's papers by October 15 (100 points). You must then meet with me privately to discuss your papers before October 22. The final paper is due October 27 (300 points).
- **Second paper: Comparison of two works (600 points).** This 5-page paper will compare and contrast two works that we have read, responding to a choice of prompts. The first draft (200 points) is due by the end of the day on November 5. You will peer review each other's papers by November 12 (100 points). You must then meet with me privately to discuss your papers before November 19. The final paper is due December 3 (300 points).
- **Final paper: Trace a theme or idea through three or four works (600 points).** This is a 10-12 page paper that gives you an opportunity to delve more deeply into a single theme or idea that interests you. You must meet with me to discuss the topic; this can be done in our

last paper conference or at some other time prior to December 10. You are not required to submit any drafts, but if you would like to then I would be happy to read them, as long as you give me sufficient time. It is due December 18, at 9 AM (our scheduled exam time).

Note that in order for the process of the first two papers to work, the schedules must be followed strictly. Late, unexcused work will be heavily penalized. Should you desire more time to complete the final paper, please talk to me in advance. If not completed by the deadline, however, you will receive an INC in the course.

Presentations. You will have an opportunity to make two short presentations (200 points for the first presentation; 300 for the second) to the class, either individually or as part of a group. The purpose of these presentations is to develop your ability to express yourself clearly in public.

Grading. You can earn a maximum of 2400 points. Extra credit will be given for active participation in the Facebook group, as well as for other activities that may be assigned throughout the semester. A: 2400-2160; B: 2159-1920; C: 1919-1680. If taking S/NC, an A grade will result in an S with distinction and less than a 1680 will be a NC.

Schedule

Please note that we are canceling one class for a Jewish holiday and will make it up during Reading Week.

September 3	Introduction <i>Reading:</i> None
September 10	Bible (I): The Torah <i>Reading:</i> Genesis; Exodus 1-24; Leviticus 1; Deuteronomy <i>Assignment:</i> Journal entry
September 17	Bible (II): Prophets and Writings <i>Reading:</i> Joshua 1-11; 2 Samuel; Isaiah 1-2, 42-54; Psalms 23, 24, 103; Job 1-3, 38-42; Ecclesiastes <i>Assignment:</i> Journal entry
September 24	Class Canceled: Erev Rosh HaShanah
October 1	Talmud <i>Reading:</i> <i>The Talmud: A Selection</i> , pp. xv-lxiii, 4-37, 94-126, 246-261, 442-445, 510-517 <i>Assignment:</i> Journal entry
October 8	Maimonides <i>Reading:</i> <i>A Maimonides Reader</i> , 1-119; 231-358 <i>Assignments:</i> Journal entry; draft of first paper

October 15	<p>Kabbalah <i>Reading: The Essential Kabbalah</i> <i>Assignments:</i> Journal entry; peer reviews</p>
October 22	<p>Gluckel of Hameln <i>Reading: The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln</i> <i>Assignments:</i> Journal entry; writing conference this week; final draft due October 27</p>
October 29	<p>Hasidim <i>Reading: Tales of the Hasidim</i> <i>Assignment:</i> Journal entry</p>
November 5	<p>Literature of the Shtetl <i>Reading: In My Father's Court</i> <i>Assignment:</i> Draft of second paper</p>
November 12	<p>The Immigrant Experience <i>Reading: Call it Sleep</i> <i>Assignment:</i> Journal entry; peer review</p>
November 19	<p>Israel <i>Reading: Mr. Mani</i> <i>Assignment:</i> Journal entry; writing conference</p>
December 3	<p>TBA <i>Assignment:</i> Final draft due</p>
December 10	<p>Conclusions Final presentations</p>