**Great Jewish Books**

**JUDS0681-S01**

**CRN: 15078**

**Fall, 2015**

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.

**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: Second Edition* (ed. Berlin, Brettler, Fishbane)

*Rabbinic Stories* (ed. J. Rubenstein)

*A Maimonides Reader* (ed. I. Twersky)

*The Zohar* (ed. D. Matt)

*Koren/Sacks Siddur*

*Call it Sleep* (H. Roth)

*God in Search of Man* (A. J. Heschel)

*Mr. Mani* (A. B. Yehoshua)

Some weeks you will also have access to a study guide as an aid.

**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.

*Writing*. This course emphasizes writing. Most weeks 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 two papers.

* Journal Writing: For most classes you will write about three paragraphs responding to the reading. I will sometimes 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 9:00 AM of the day of class. I encourage you all to respond to each other. (25% of grade)
* Short paper: Comparison of two works. This 5-page paper will compare and contrast two works that we have read, responding to a choice of prompts. The first draft is due by the end of the day on Monday, October 26. You will peer review each other’s papers by Monday, November 2. You must then meet with me privately to discuss your papers by the end of the day on November 6, and submit the paper by the end of the day on November 12. (20% of grade)
* Final paper: Comparison of two works. This 10-12 page paper compares one work from the list at the end of this syllabus with one work that we have already read. 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 17, at 9 AM (our scheduled exam time). (30% of grade)

*Presentations*. You will have an opportunity to make two short presentations 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. The first presentation will be during the course of the semester (10% of grade), the second will be a presentation based on your final paper, given on the last day of class (15% of grade).

**Schedule**

We will meet during Reading Week. I will also on occasion assign short secondary readings to supplement the assigned reading.

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| September 9 | **Introduction** |
| September 16 | **Bible (I): The Torah**  *Reading*: Genesis; Exodus 1-24; Leviticus 1; Deuteronomy  *Assignment*: Journal entry |
| September 23 | **Cancelled: Yom Kippur** |
| September 30 | **Bible (II): Prophets and Writings**  *Reading*: Joshua 1-11; 2 Samuel; Isaiah 1-2, 42-54; Psalms 23, 24, 103; Job 1-3, 38-42; Ecclesiastes  *Assignment*: Journal entry |
| October 7 | **Talmud**  *Reading*: *Rabbinic Stories*  *Assignment*: Journal entry |
| October 14 | **Maimonides**  *Reading*: *A Maimonides Reader*, 1-119; 231-358  *Assignments*: Journal entry |
| October 21 | **Kabbalah**  *Reading*: *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*  *Assignments*: Journal entry; short paper (***Monday, October 26***) |
| October 28 | **Cancelled** |
| November 4 | **Siddur**  *Reading:* Excerpts from Koren/Sacks Siddur  *Assignments*: Journal entry; peer review **(*Monday, November 2*)**; writing conference ***(by Friday, November 6)*** |
| November 11 | **The Immigrant Experience**  *Reading*: *Call it Sleep*  *Assignment*: Journal entry; final of short paper **(*Thursday, November 12*)** |
| November 18 | **Jewish Thought**  *Reading:* *God in Search of Man*  *Assignment*: Journal entry |
| December 2 | **Israel**  *Reading*: *Mr. Mani*  *Assignment*: Journal entry |
| December 9 | **Conclusion**  Final Presentations |

**Final Paper: List of Possible Texts**

Dov Baer ben Samuel, *In Praise of Baal Shem Tov: The Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism* (ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome Mintz, 1970)

Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, *The Path of the Just* (ed. Yaakov Feldman, 1996)

Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (1983)

Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (1886-1929, 2005)

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism* (1729-1786, 1983)

Glückel of Hameln, *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln* (1646-1724, 1977)

Singer, Isaac B., *In My Father’s Court* (1966)

Abraham Isaac Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems* (ed. Ben Zion Bokser, 1978)

Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (trans. Peter Cole, 2001)

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz; and, The Reawakening* (1986)

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1965)

Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*

Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of America-Jewish Life* (2010)

Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *The Bridal Canopy* (1967)

Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (2004)

Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism* (1998)