

**Great Jewish Books**  
**JUDS0681/RELS0322**  
**CRN: 16104**

**Fall, 2021**

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.

This class can be used to fulfill a WRIT requirement.

**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 evaluate and critique the category of “Jewish literature”;
3. To compare and contrast the works examined in this class in order to identify the relationships between them;
4. To write better;
5. To better constructively critique both other people’s writing and your own;

**Instructor**

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Please note that my goal is to run a classroom accessible to all. Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

**Resources**

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 and online. 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)  
*Job: A New Translation* (Greenstein)  
*Elements of Style, 4<sup>th</sup> edition* (Strunk and White)  
*A Maimonides Reader* (ed. I. Twersky)  
*Memoirs* (Glückl of Hameln)

*Altneuland* (T. Herzl)  
*A Guide for the Perplexed* (D. Horn)

Some weeks you will also have access to a study guide, available on Canvas. It is important that you consult this guide while doing your reading.

Canvas will also be used for submission of work.

### **Device Free**

No electronic devices are to be used during class time. This is not a decision that I have taken arbitrarily or lightly, given how intertwined these devices are with much of what we all do. Yet in my experience seminars such as this one have a better and more productive atmosphere when they are kept out of the classroom. Reasonable accommodations, of course, can be made for those who need them.

### **Expectations**

1. Attendance. Much of your learning will occur in discussion during class. Be prepared to attend, be fully present at, and engage in every class. I want you to see the class as a space in which we are all focused on the same goal of mutual understanding and learning.
2. Reading. You must complete all of the assigned readings prior to class. You will often be provided in advance with focus questions. Much of our time in class will be spent examining primary source material together.
3. Journaling. Most weeks you will complete a written “journal” assignment prior to class. I will often provide a prompt. These assignments are based on the readings you will do for that week. They will be open for the entire class to read and will be made by Monday at noon (for the upcoming class). You can miss one without penalty (but not the assignment on October 25). I am looking primarily for thought and effort in these; they should be well-written but the ideas need not be polished. Taken together, they are worth 10% of your grade.
4. Peer reviews. You will have two opportunities to review and comment on the writings of your peers. You will receive more instructions about how to do this effectively. This is worth 10% of your grade.
5. Paper. This paper (about 3000 words) will analyze an approved book. A list of suggested books can be found at the end of the syllabus; you are expected to consult with me in advance about your choice. A draft is due November 29, with the peer reviews due the week after. The final version is due by December 21, 2 PM. The draft is worth 10% of your grade and the final version is worth 30%.
6. Portfolio. You will submit a selection of your revised journal entries with a couple of reflective essays. This is also due by December 21, 2 PM, and will be worth 40% of your grade.

### **Time Expectations**

The following “good faith” estimate of time expectations is required on all Brown syllabi by the Dean of the College:

Our accrediting agency requires an expectation of at least 180 hours of coursework in order to receive four credit hours. This figure will be reached in this class through the following expectations:

- (1) Class meeting (36 hours);
- (2) Reading for class (6 hours/week \* 12 weeks = 72 hours)
- (3) Weekly writing assignments (2 hour each\*11=22 hours)
- (4) Paper (20 hours)
- (5) Revisions (10 hours)
- (6) Portfolio preparation (20 hours)

Extensions and incompletes will be given only for extraordinary reasons. Any violations of Brown's Academic Code will result in failure from the class and automatic referral to the Dean's office.

### **Covid Statement**

I strongly believe that the most effective learning occurs when you have multiple opportunities to articulate your ideas. Discussion is thus a critical part of this course and most of our time in class will be spent engaging each other about the readings. I am thus committed to making your educational experience as close as possible to what it would have been pre-Covid. I very much want to sit together, in-person, around a table (or at least in a circle), talking without masks.

As much as I would like to ignore Covid, as I write this it is clear that I cannot. We will make some accommodations as we proceed, most immediately whether or how often we should meet outside in order to safely ditch the masks. *Most importantly, you must put health first – do not come to class if you are sick.* We may or may not find a way to patch you into the discussion, but if we cannot then I will give alternative assignments to help you further your learning. You will not be penalized for such absences.

### **Tentative Schedule**

Note that we will also be reading sections of *The Elements of Style* throughout the semester. Exact pages will be provided on Canvas.

<b>September 13</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>September 20</b>	<b>What is Jewish Literature?</b> <i>Reading:</i> Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, "Jewish Literature/World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational," <i>PMLA</i> 130:1 (January 2015), 92-109 (available on Canvas); David Stern, <i>The Anthology in Jewish Literature</i> , Introduction, pp. 3-11 (online book in our library) <i>Writing:</i> Journal entry
<b>September 27</b>	<b>Bible (1): Origins</b>

	<p><i>Reading:</i> Genesis 1:1 – Exodus 20; James Kugel, <i>How to Read the Bible</i>, 2-46</p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Journal entry</p>
<b>October 4</b>	<p><b>Bible (2): Novellas</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Ruth and Esther</p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Journal entry</p>
<b>October 18</b>	<p><b>Bible (3): Job</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Greenstein, <i>Job: A New Translation</i></p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Journal entry</p> <p>Critique two previous responses. Your critiques should be both gentle and constructive, meant to help the authors improve their response.</p>
<b>October 25</b>	<p><b>Talmud</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Assignment to be distributed</p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Rewrite one of your own previous responses, based on your new thinking and the responses you received.</p>
<b>November 1</b>	<p><b>Maimonides</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> <i>A Maimonides Reader</i>, 1-119</p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Journal entry</p>
<b>November 8</b>	<p><b>Kabbalah</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Assignment to be distributed</p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Journal entry</p>
<b>November 15</b>	<p><b>Glückl of Hameln</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Glückl (pages to be announced)</p> <p><i>Writing:</i> Journal entry</p>
<b>November 22 (Remote)</b>	<p><b>Siddur</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> The Sabbath Morning Service; Tabory, “The Prayerbook (Siddur) as an Anthology of Judaism,” chapter 7 in D. Stern, <i>The Anthology in Jewish Literature</i> (online book in our library)</p> <p>No writing assignment (to allow you to work on your paper)</p>
<b>November 29</b>	<p><b>Theodor Herzl</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Herzl, <i>Altneuland</i>; Avineri, “Rereading Herzl’s Old-New Land”</p> <p>Paper due</p>
<b>December 6</b>	<p><b>Jewish-American Fiction</b></p> <p><i>Reading:</i> Dara Horn, <i>A Guide for the Perplexed</i></p> <p>Peer reviews due</p>

### List of Possible Books for Paper

Deuteronomy

Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*

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)

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

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

Isaac B. Singer, *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)

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

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

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

Henry Roth, *Call it Sleep*

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*

Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism*

Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Man*