

## Religious Studies 130 Judaism

Fall, 2011  
T and Th 11:00-12:15  
HSSB 1174

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### Course Description:

This course is intended to accomplish two purposes – an introduction to the Jewish Studies minor and an introduction to the religious traditions of the Jews. It is not an introduction to the history of Jewish ideas nor is it an introduction to the study of Jewish history, although both are important to our course of study. Our central concerns will be how the Jewish tradition can and is studied, the variety of symbols used by Jews, and the multiplicity of their meanings. We will examine in some detail four central symbolic structures of Judaism: land, people, time and law. We will explore the mythological and ritual dimensions of each of these structures and the different scholarly approaches that are used to study each. These symbolic structures have been and continue to be used by Jews to understand themselves and their worlds. We will be concerned with the ways in which these symbols relate to one another, how these symbols structure Jewish reflection on the fundamental issues of human life and thus provide Jews with orientation to their worlds. Indeed, we will argue that Jewish identity in history and in the contemporary world in which Jews live in pluralistic and open societies is directly related to the power or force of these symbols. In 2005, Jews marked 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American Jewry. In 1654, 23 Dutch Jews who were themselves refugees from Curacao settled in New Amsterdam, beginning the history of our Jewish community. Hence, woven throughout our discussion of land, people, time and law will be an on-going conversation in the class about how these symbolic structures are experienced by Jews in their lived experience here in the United States, as well as in other places in Europe, Latin America and in Israel. What dilemmas do Jews face in an open and pluralistic society such as ours? How do these symbols contribute to ways in which Jews negotiate the boundaries of their identities and relationships with other ethnic, religious, and racial communities? And, finally, how are the symbolic structures of Jewish life deployed, interpreted and re-interpreted, and re-invested with meaning in vastly different societies?

### Required Texts:

All students should purchase all these texts:

1. S.Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe: A Treasury of Jewish Wisdom for Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal on the High Holy Days*.
2. Jonathan Sacks, *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah: Hebrew and English Text With New Essays and Commentary*.

3. Arthur Hertzberg, *Judaism: The Key Spiritual Writings of the Jewish Tradition*.
4. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*.
5. Danya Ruttenberg and Elliot N. Dorf, eds., *Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: Social Justice*.

All students should select one of the following novels:

1. Dara Horn, *In the Image: A Novel*.
2. Anita Diamant, *Day after Night*.
3. Ilana Stanger Ross, *Sima's Undergarments for Women: A Novel*.
4. Tova Mirvis, *The Outside World*.

Course Requirements:

1. Careful preparation of all reading assignments.
2. A mid-term examination on Tuesday, 25 October. The mid-term will be an essay examination and will be worth 20% of the course grade.
3. The completion of a writing project based on the novel you have selected. Dara Horn, Anita Diamant, Ilana Stanger Ross, and Tova Mirvis are among the best contemporary American Jewish writers. The complete assignment will be distributed in class on Tuesday, 27 September. Your essay should be 10 to 12 pages in length. This is not a research paper nor a book report or review. The assignment asks you to consider how each of these very different novels reflect material or issues that we will discuss in lecture and you will read about in the other books assigned for this course. You may of course read reviews of the books, but nothing else is necessary to complete this paper. Your essay must be turned in at the beginning of lecture Tuesday, 29 November, immediately after the Thanksgiving recess. **I will not accept papers turned in later or outside of this class meeting.** Your essay must be technically perfect with no typographical errors or misspellings. You should use a manual of style for all matters relating to the essay. Your essay will be evaluated on the basis of both how well you respond to the specific questions issues and questions of the assignment as well as the quality of your writing in completing this essay. This assignment will be worth 35% of the final course grade. Your essay will be returned at the course final.

4. You must attend two of the three outside class events listed below. At the class session immediately following the presentations, each student will turn in a single page comment on three important ideas, elements, or things you learned from each event. The comments must be word-processed. No late assignments will be accepted and both assignments must be completed to meet this course requirement. There are no substitutes for the three events listed below. This element of the course will constitute 10% of the final course grade. Those students who attend all three events and complete three comments will be given 5% extra-credit on the final course grade. All three events are sponsored by the Herman P. and Sophia Taubman Endowed Jewish Studies Symposia and are free.

5. A comprehensive final examination on Wednesday, 7 December 12:00-3:00. The final exam will be worth 35% of the final course grade. The exam will ask you to write on a number of questions which comprehensively test your control of all the course materials.

Required Outside Class Presentations:

Sunday, 16 October at 3:00 p.m. – Helmi Kittani and Eytan Biderman, “Peace through Prosperity: Jewish-Arab Economic Development in Israel.” Campbell Hall.

Thursday, 3 November at 8:00 p.m. – Simon Sebag Montefiore, “Jerusalem.” Campbell Hall.

Wednesday, 16 November at 7:30 p.m. – Screening of Roselyn Bosch’s *La Rafle* (2010). Campbell Hall.

**Two Important Notes.**

**Note on use of e-mail:** Electronic messages to me should be restricted to the following areas. First, if you have an emergency which requires you to miss a class, you should send me an e-mail message. Second, you may contact me through e-mail with regard to questions from your reading or lecture materials, but my answers in this context will necessarily be relatively short and schematic. Third, I do not accept written work via the e-mail. You must be in class on the days when you are required to turn in your written work. Fourth, and most importantly, I will not respond to questions about grades on the mid-term, the writing assignment, or the final examination through e-mail. Your work is far too important to be reduced to the brief nature of electronic communications. These questions should be discussed in my office hours or in scheduled appointments.

**Note on plagiarism:** The faculty in Religious Studies believes plagiarism to be one of the most serious infractions of student conduct within the learning community. All faculty members of the department have agreed that we will pursue disciplinary actions in all cases of plagiarism and that we will ask the Dean of

Students and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies not only to suspend the offending student from the university but also prohibit the student from taking any further courses in Religious Studies. Make certain in your paper and in the examinations that you attribute all materials cited directly or indirectly, verbatim or paraphrased in your essays.

Lecture Topics and Reading Assignments:

**September 22 -- October 4** – Introduction: From Abraham to the *Goldeneh Medineh*.

1. The contexts of the study of Judaism and the disciplines of Jewish Studies.
2. Outsiders and Insiders.
3. A brief overview of Jewish history.

**\* Please note that there will not be a class meeting on Thursday, 29 September which is the First Day of Rosh Ha-Shanah.**

**October 6 - 11** – Who is a Jew?

1. Jewish identity determined by Jewish law or *halakhah*.
2. The problematics of Jewish identity

Reading Assignment: Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 1-28.

**October 13-18** -- The Structure of Space in Judaism.

1. The cosmology of ancient Israel.
2. Holy Land: *eretz-yisrael* as sacred space.
3. *Galut*: Sacred space reversed.
4. Temple, synagogue and home.

Reading assignment: Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 203-234 and 294-320.

\* Sunday, 16 October at 3:00 p.m. – Helmi Kittani and Eytan Biderman, “Peace through Prosperity: Jewish-Arab Economic Development in Israel.” Campbell Hall.

**October 20-27** -- Sacred Time Part I – The Shabbat

1. Shabbat as paradigm for sacred time in Judaism.
2. Labor and rest.

3. The feminization of time.
4. "The days of the Messiah" and "the world to come."

Reading assignment: Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* and Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 170-178, 271-286.

\* Mid-term examination, Tuesday, 25 October.

**November 1 - 3** – Sacred Time Part II – *Yamim Nora'im*.

1. Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur: The world created and the judged.
2. The festival of Sukkot.

Reading assignment: S.Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe* and Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 178-202.

\* Thursday, 3 November at 8:00 p.m. – Simon Sebag Montefiore, "Jerusalem." Campbell Hall.

**November 8-10** -- Sacred Time Part III – Pesach.

1. The ritual recreation of people.
2. The structure of the Passover Seder.
3. *Yetzirat mitzrayim* and the organization of history.

Reading assignment: Sacks, *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' Haggadah*. Glatzer, ed., *The Passover Haggadah*. Please bring this volume to class during this section of the course.

**November 15** -- The Structure of Peoplehood in Judaism.

1. *Avraham avinu*: Covenant and election.
2. The social metaphors of Judaism.
3. *Moshe rabbenu*: Moses as paradigm for human life.
4. Religious leadership.

Reading assignment: Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 29-84.

\* Wednesday, 16 November at 7:30 p.m. – Screening of Roselyn Bosch's *La Rafle* (2010). Campbell Hall.

**November 17** -- The Cycle of Life.

1. Rites of passage in Judaism.
2. Conception and birth.
3. *Bar mitzvah*.
4. The symbolism of marriage.
5. The symbolism of conversion.
6. Death.

Reading Assignment: Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 99-140.

**November 21 – 29** -- The Structure of Law in Judaism.

1. Holy Law and Holy Book: The Cosmic Law.
2. The Rabbis' Torah.
3. Torah and interpretation.
4. *Halakhah* in contemporary situations.

\* Thanksgiving Holiday recess, 23-24 November

\* Writing assignment is due in class.

Reading assignment: Hertzberg, *Judaism*, pp. 85-98, 141-169, and 235-271; Ruttenberg and Dorf, *Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: Social Justice*.

**December 3** -- Summary and Conclusion.