

## **REL V3570y Women and Judaism: Folklore or Religion?**

Mon/Wed 2:40 - 3:55

703 Hamilton

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Office Hours: Tues., Wed. 2:00 - 4:30

In this course we will examine a variety of issues pertaining to women and Judaism. This will not be a history of Jewish women *per se*, but an exploration of (1) one of the major world religions from an atypical yet illuminating perspective; (2) the relationship between women and a religion that is both theirs and not theirs. We will look at, among others, matters of law, ritual practice, communal status, (re)reading of ancient texts, lived experience.

This will be a lecture course. However, each class will start off with 20 min. of *hevruta* study (i.e., one-on-one with a partner) or discussion on the readings (Instructor and TAs will be present, circulating among the students to supervise, to help). This will spur the collective discussion that will follow when we regather as a single group. Though this will be a lecture course, the goal is to achieve a seminar-like atmosphere for open discussion of readings and issues.

Course will include three papers (1) 3 pp. min. autobiography situating ones own trajectory within the framework of the issues dealt with in the course; (2) 5 pp. min. on Jewish women's religion and the web or contemporary Jewish women's art, fiction or poetry; (3) a final research paper of min. 10 pp.

Books will be available at Labyrinth Books (112th btwn Broadway and Amsterdam). All essays will be available via electronic reserve and in a course reader (available at Broadway Copy @ 121 St.)

### **Required Texts**

Adler, Rachel, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). ISBN: 0807036196

Biale, Rachel, *Women and Jewish Law: The Essential Texts, Their History, and Their Relevance for Today*, Reprint ed. (Schocken Books, 1995). ISBN: 0805210490

Deutsch, Nathaniel, *The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). ISBN: 0520231910

Sered, Susan Starr, *Women As Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (Oxford University Press, 1996). ISBN: 019511146X

Wasserfall, Rahel (ed.). *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England [for] Brandeis University Press, 1999. ISBN: 0874519608

Weissler, Chava, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999). ISBN: 080703617X

## **Syllabus**

### **Mon. 1/17, Wed. 1/29 - Introduction: Women and Judaism**

Biale, Intro, ch. 1 (“Women and the Mitzvot”), 3-43

Essays and responses by Miriam Peskowitz and Carol P. Christ, in *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, eds. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 29-48.

Peskowitz, Miriam, “Engendering Jewish Religious History,” in *Judaism Since Gender*, ed. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (Routledge, 1996), 17-39.

Tal, Ilan, “Jewish Women’s Studies,” *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 770-96.

Sacks, Maurie, “Problems in the Study of Jewish Women’s Folk Culture,” *Contemporary Jewry* 10,1 (1989): 95-104.

Adler, *Engendering Judaism*, ch. 2 (“Here Comes Skotsl: Renewing Halakhah”), 21-59.

### **Mon. 1/24, Wed. 1/26 - Marriage 1: Social Structure and Economics**

Biale, chs. 2-4 (“Marriage,” “Divorce,” and “The *Agunah*” and The *Yavamah*”), 44-120

Levitt, Laura, *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home* (Routledge, 1997), 29-62, 75-106.

Adler, *Engendering Judaism*, ch. 5 (“*B’rit Ahuvim*: A Marriage Between Subjects”), 169-207.

### **Tues. 2/1, Thurs. 2/3 - Marriage 2: Sex and Sexuality**

Biale, chs. 5-7 (“Sexuality and Marital Relations,” “*Niddah*: The Laws of the Menstruant,” and “Sexuality Outside of Marriage: Incest, Adultery, Promiscuity, and Lesbianism”), 121-97.

Bal, Mieke, “Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character,” in Castelli and Rodman, *Women, Gender, Religion*, 149-73.

Levitt, *Jews and Feminism*, ch. 4 (“The Sexual Contract”), 63-74.

Adler, *Engendering Judaism*, ch. 4 (“Justice and Peace Shall Kiss: An Ethics of Sexuality and Relationship”), 105-167.

### **Tues. 2/8, Thurs. 2/10 - Ritual 1: Mikveh**

Wasserfall, *Women and Water*.

**Tues. 2/15, Tues. 2/17 - Birth and Giving Birth**

**2/17 - FIRST PAPER DUE**

Biale, chs. 8-9 ("Procreation and Contraception," "Abortion"), 198-238

Ben-Ami, Issachar, "Customs of Pregnancy and Childbirth among Sephardic and Oriental Jews," *New Horizons in Sephardic Studies* (1993), 253-67.

Schely-Newman, Esther, "Sweeter than Honey: Discourse of Reproduction among North African Women," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 15:3 (1995): 175-188.

Sered, Susan Starr, "Childbirth as a Religious Experience: Voices from an Israeli Hospital," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7,2 (1991): 7-18.

Steinberg, Avraham, "Natural Childbirth: May the Husband Attend?" *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 1,2 (1981): 107-22.

Muchawsky-Schnapper, Ester, "Symbolic Decorations for a Woman after Childbirth in San`a," *Israel Museum Journal* 7 (1988): 61-74.

**Tues. 2/22, Thurs. 2/24 - Rabbinic Women**

Boyarin, Daniel, "Studying Women: Resistance from Within the Male Discourse," *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (University of California Press, 1995), 167-96.

Hasan-Rokem, Galit, "Erecting the Fence: Texts, Contexts, Theories, and Strategies," and "Peeping through a Hole: Comparing and Borrowing," *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-54.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Social Context of Folk Narratives in the Aggadic Midrash: The Feminine Power of Laments, Tales, and Love," *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 108-29.

Fonrobert, Charlotte Elisheva, "When the Rabbi Weeps: On Reading Gender in Talmudic Aggadah," *Nashim* 4 (2001): 56-83.

Kosman, Admiel, "A Woman's Voice is 'Erva': the Female's Voice and Silence -- Between the Talmudic Sages and Psychoanalysis," *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 357-75.

**Tues. 3/1, Thurs. 3/3 - Folklore/Ritual? 1**

Morgenstern Leissner, Omi, "Jewish Women's Naming Rites and the Rights of Jewish Women," *Nashim* 4 (2001): 140-77.

Davis, Judith, "The Bar Mitzvah *Balabusta*: Mother's Role in the Family's Rite of Passage," in Maurie Sacks (ed.), *Active Voices: Women in Jewish Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 125-41.

Sered, Susan Starr, "Food and Holiness: Cooking as a Sacred Act among Middle-Eastern Jewish Women," *Anthropological Quarterly* 61,3 (1988): 129-39.

Bilu, Yoram, "Cinderella and the Saint: The Life Story of a Jewish Moroccan Female Healer in Israel," *Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 14 (1989): 227-60.

Spiegel, Marcia Cohn, "Spirituality for Survival: Jewish Women Healing Themselves," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12,2 (1996): 121-37.

**Tues. 3/8, Thurs. 3/10 - Ritual 2**

Sered, *Women As Ritual Experts*.

**Week of March 14 - SPRING BREAK; NO CLASSES**

**Tues. 3/22, Thurs. 3/24 - Ritual 3: Prayer**

Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*.

**Tues. 3/29, Thurs. 3/31 - Ritual/Folklore? 2**

**3/31 - SECOND PAPER DUE**

Adelman, Penina, "A Drink from Miriam's Cup: Invention of Tradition among Jewish Women," in Maurie Sacks (ed.), *Active Voices: Women in Jewish Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 109-24.

\_\_\_\_. "The Golden Calf Jumps over the New Moon: Mythmaking among Jewish Women," *Anima* 16,1 (Fall 1989): 31-39.

Dubin, Lois Carol, "Who's Blessing Whom? Transcendence, Agency, and Gender in Jewish Prayer," *Cross Currents* 52,2 (2002): 165-77.

Joseph, Norma Baumel, "Ritual, Law, and Praxis: An American Response/a to Bat Mitsva Celebrations," *Modern Judaism* 22,3 (2002): 234-60.

Marienberg, Evyater, "A Mystery on the Tombstones: Women's Commandments in Early-Modern Askenazi Culture," *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* (Winter 2003).  
Online?

**Tues. 4/5, Thurs. 4/7 - Women and "Official" Judaism**

Deutsch, *The Maiden of Ludmir*.

## **Tues. 4/12, Thurs. 4/14 - Rereading the Symbolic Landscape**

Pardes, Ilana, "Rachel's Dream: The Female Subplot," ch. 4 of *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 60-78.

Wiskind-Elper, Ora, "Exodus and the Feminine in the Teachings of Rabbi Yaakov of Izbica," in *Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts*, ed. Ora Wiskind Elper and Susan Handelman (New York: Urim, 2000), 447-70.

Scheering, Linda S., "Double Time... Double Trouble? Gender, Sin, and Leviticus 12," *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 429-50.

Brenner, Athalya, "Some Reflections on Violence against Women and the Image of the Hebrew God: the Prophetic Books Revisited," in *On the Cutting Edge: the Study of Women in Biblical Worlds: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach and Esther Fuchs (New York: Continuum, 2004), 69-81.

Ostriker, Alicia Suskin, "A Holy of Holies: the Song of Songs as Countertext," in *The Song of Songs: a Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Second Series), ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 36-54.

## **Tues. 4/19, Thurs. 4/21 - (Re)Writing Identities in the Symbolic Landscape**

### **4/21 - THIRD PAPER DUE**

Bilu, Yoram, "The Woman Who Wanted to Be Her Father: A Case Analysis of *Dybbuk*-Possession in a Hasidic Community," in Castelli and Rodman, *Women, Gender, Religion*, 331-45.

Jacobowitz, Susan, "'Hardly There Even When She Wasn't Lost': Orthodox Daughters and the 'Mind-Body Problem' in Contemporary Jewish American Fiction," *Shofar* 22,3 (2004): 72-94.

Graetz, Naomi, "Women and Religion in Israel," *Jewish Feminism in Israel: Some Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Kalpana Misra and Melanie S. Rich (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, [for] Brandeis University Press, 2003), 17-56.

Ratner, Tsila Abramovitz, "Discourses of Negotiation: the Writings of Orthodox Women in Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 21,1-2 (2002): 139-68.

Sands, Roberta G., "'Ba'alot Teshuvah' Daughters and Their Mothers: A View from South Africa," *Contemporary Jewry* 21 (2001): 55-77.

## **Tues. 4/26, Thurs. 4/28 - Toward a Summation**