

## **Contemporary Jewish Thought in Historical Context**

RB-JTHT-518

Spring 2019

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This course has two components:

1. An exploration of American Jewish history focusing on themes of particular importance to rabbinical students like the emergence of the denominations. We will also spend time contextualizing American Jewish history and thought within the broader currents of American religious history.
2. An exploration of seminal contemporary Jewish thinkers who wrote in an American context such as Mordecai Kaplan, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, Judith Plaskow and others.

We will ultimately be aiming to place our own historical moment and our own theologies within broader historical/theological frameworks.

### **Assignments**

1. Thorough reading of weekly material. All material [including recommended reading] unless otherwise marked will be on schoology. If the reading is available on-line, I have given the link in this syllabus.
2. Class presentation on one of the thinkers/topics. Students will be responsible for presenting and leading one class discussion of 20-30 minutes. More details to be discussed in class.
3. Final paper which will integrate your own theological ideas within the thinkers we discuss. [10-12 pages]

### **Books**

Please acquire:

1. Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) – [“AJ” in syllabus]
2. Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought* (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1995) [“Choices” in syllabus]

### **Class 1, February 6**

#### ***Setting the Context: The Jewish Encounter with America***

##### Required Readings:

1. *AJ*, introduction – chapter 2
2. Wikipedia entry on Emma Lazarus

##### Recommended Reading for Further Study

1. Morton Borden, *Jews, Turks and Infidels*, (1984) pp. 1-22
2. Lou Silberman, *American Impact: Judaism in the United States in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (1964)
3. Esther Schorr, *Emma Lazarus*, (2006) – [not on schoology]

### **Class 2, February 13**

#### ***Emergence of Reform Judaism***

##### Required Readings:

1. *AJ*, 62-102
2. Karla Goldman, “Chapter 5: Women in the Reforming Synagogue: Resistance and Transformation,” *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism*. Book is on-line through Hebrew college library.

##### Recommended Reading For Further Study:

1. Michael Meyer, *Response To Modernity*, pp. 225-295
2. Leon Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue*, pp. 79-97
3. Jonathan Sarna, “The Debate Over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue,” in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer
4. Jacob Rader Marcus, “The Americanization of Isaac Mayer Wise” available on-line at:  
[http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/wise/attachment/5280/marcus\\_theAmericanizationOfIMW.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/wise/attachment/5280/marcus_theAmericanizationOfIMW.pdf)

**(Note: no Class on February 20)**

### **Class 3, February 27**

#### ***Early 20<sup>th</sup> century: American Zionism***

##### Required Readings:

1. *AJ*, 151-207
2. Jonathan Sarna, “‘The Greatest Jew in the World Since Jesus Christ’: The Jewish Legacy of Louis Brandeis,” *American Jewish History*, 81 (1984)
3. Joyce Antler, “Zion in Our Hearts: Henrietta Szold and the American Jewish Women’s Movement” in *American Jewish Women’s History*, ed. Nadell

##### Recommended Reading:

1. Michael Meyer, “American Reform Judaism and Zionism: Early Efforts at Ideological Rapprochement,” *Studies in Zionism* 7 (spring 1982)
2. Ben Halpern, “The Americanization of Zionism, 1880–1930,” *American Jewish History* 69 (September 1979)
3. Melvin Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (1995) [not on schoology]

(Note – no class on March 6, yom iyyun)

#### **Class 4, March 13**

##### ***Immigrant Experience***

###### **Required Reading:**

1. Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*, (2009) pp. 1-25
2. Arthur Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experience*, pp. 1-24; (25-42 if you get a chance).
3. Paula Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902" in *American Jewish Women's History*, ed. Nadell

###### **Recommended Reading:**

1. Abraham Karp, "New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi," *Publications of the AJHS*, 44 (1955), available at: <http://www.ajhs.org/reference/adaje.cfm>

#### **Class 5, March 20**

##### ***Emergence of Conservative Judaism***

###### **Required Readings:**

1. Jonathan Sarna, "The Parting of the Ways: How Conservative and Orthodox Judaism in the United States Became Two Separate Movements" (Unpublished)
2. *AJ*, 208-255
3. Mel Scult, "Schechter's Seminary" in *Tradition Renewed: A History of JTS*, ed. Jack Wertheim

###### **Recommended Reading**

1. Jack Wertheim, "The Conservative Synagogue" in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheim
2. Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America*, (1963) [not on schoology]
3. Michael Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement*, (2012) [not on schoology]

#### **Class 6, March 27**

##### ***Mordecai Kaplan***

###### **Required Reading:**

1. *Choices*, "Mordecai Kaplan"
2. Mordecai Kaplan, "The Power that Makes for Salvation" in *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, pp. 40-61
4. Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, Introduction, "The Present Crisis in Judaism."
5. Noam Pinko, "Peoplehood: Kaplan's Forgotten Act of Disloyalty," *Sh'ma*, April, 2010, pp. 10-11. available on-line at: <http://www.shmadigital.com/shma/201004/?folio=1#pg10>

Recommended Reading:

[Books are all available in library]

1. Mel Scult, Robert Seltzer eds., *The American Judaism of Mordecai Kaplan*, (NY: NYU Press, 1992)
2. Mel Scult, *American Judaism Faces the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: A Biography of Mordecai Kaplan*. (Detroit, MI: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1993)

**Class 7, April 3**

***Abraham Joshua Heschel***

Required Reading

1. *Choices*, "Abraham Joshua Heschel"
2. A.J. Heschel, "Toward an Understanding of Halakha," in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susanah Heschel
3. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp. 3-23, 167-191, 257-265

Recommended Reading

- 1 Ed Kaplan, *Prophetic Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel*, vol. 1 (2007) [not on schoology]
- 2 Ed Kaplan, *Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America*, vol. 2. (2009) [not on schoology]
- 3 Art Green, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: Recasting Hasidism for Moderns," *Modern Judaism*, (2009), 29, (1) available on-line at:  
<http://mj.oxfordjournals.org/content/29/1/62.full>

**Class 8, April 10**

***Joseph Soloveitchik***

Required Readings:

1. *Choices*, "Joseph Soloveitchik"
2. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, pp. 17-29
3. Soloveitchik, *Lonely Man of Faith*, pp. 1-27
4. David Hartman, "The Halakhic Hero," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Oct., 1989), pp. 249-273

Recommended Reading

1. Elliot Dorff, "Halakhic Man: A Review Essay," *Modern Judaism* 6, (1), 1986: pp. 91-98
2. David Singer and Moshe Sokol, "Joseph Soloveitchik: Lonely Man of Faith," *Modern Judaism* 2, (3), 1982: pp. 227-272.

**Class 9, April 17**

**Heschel, Soloveitchik and Meeting the Other**

Required Reading:

1. Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," available on-line at:  
<http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/~alan/chaplain/Heschel.html>
2. Revuen Kimmelman, "Rabbis Joseph Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations," *The Edah Journal*, available on-line at:  
[http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/4\\_2\\_Kimelman.pdf](http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/4_2_Kimelman.pdf)

4. Joseph Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition*, available on-line at: <http://www.traditiononline.org/news/originals/Volume%206/No.%202/Confrontation.pdf> [just section "II"]
5. David Hartman, "Confrontation," *Love and Terror in The God Encounter: The Theological Legacy of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik*, (2004) pp. 131-166

Recommended Reading:

1. See essays by Eugene Korn, David Berger, Aryeh Klapper and Phil Cunningham on "Confrontation" as part of Boston College Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding 2003 Conference on "Confrontation: 40 Years Later." Available on-line at: [http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/](http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/)
2. ed. Harold Kasimov and Byron Sherwin, *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interfaith Dialogue*, (2009) [not on schoology]
3. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "No Religion is an Island: Following the Trailblazer," available on-line at: <http://www.elijah-interfaith.org/uploads/media/NoReligionIsAnIsland.pdf>

**Class 10, May 1**

***Responses to the Shoah: Richard Rubinstein, Emil Fackenheim, Yitz Greenberg***

Required Reading

1. *Choices*, "Confronting the Holocaust"
2. Richard Rubenstein, "Symposium on Jewish Belief" & "The Symbols of Judaism and the Death of God" in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, ed. Steven Katz, (2007) pp. 415-418
3. Emil Fackenheim, various essays, in *Wrestling with God*, pp. 419-449
4. Yitz Greenberg, "Voluntary Covenant" in *Wrestling with God*, pp. 543-555.

Recommended Reading:

[all books in library, not on schoology]

1. David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, (1993)
2. Steven Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*, (1985)
3. Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, (1982)

**Class 11, May 8**

***Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler and Jewish Feminism***

**Guest Teacher: TBD**

Required Reading:

1. *Choices*, "Jewish Feminist Theology" (by Ellen Umansky)
2. Rachel Adler, "The Female Rapist and Other Inversions" in *Engendering Judaism* (1999) pp. 1-19
3. Judith Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological" in *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 223-233

Recommended Reading:

1. Falk, Marcia, "Notes on Composing New Blessings: Toward a Feminist-Jewish Reconstruction of Prayer." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3 (Spring 1987): 39–53
2. Gross, Rita. "Steps Toward Feminine Imagery of Deity in Jewish Theology," In *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, 243–247
3. Umansky, Ellen "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology: Possibilities and Problems," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, edited by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, 187–198
4. Rachel Adler, "Here Comes Skotsl: Renewing Halakha," in *Engendering Judaism* (1999): 20-51.

**Class 12, May 15**

**Forward: Queer Jewish Thought & Post-Modern Jewish Thought**

Required Reading:

1. Jay Michaelson, "Toward a Queer Jewish Theology," Sh'ma, (2005) available on-line at: <http://shma.com/2005/12/toward-a-queer-jewish-theology/>
2. *Choices*, "Postmodern Judaism"

Recommended Reading:

1. Eugene Borowitz, "The Jewish Self" in *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (1991)
2. Art Green, *Radical Judaism*, (2010) [introduction and chapter 1]