

Religion 230
Introduction to Judaism
Skidmore College

Professor: Marla Segol

Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:10-12:30, LADD 307

Office Hours: Mondays, **1-2**; Wednesdays 4:40-5:40, or by appointment.
215 Ladd Hall

Course Description

Is there such a thing as Jewish Yoga? What is the significance of sex, gender, and the body in Jewish thought? What is the nature of the divine? How are humans to act effectively in the world?

How do we answer these questions? As always, we'll do it by looking at the texts, chronologically and in cultural and historical context. These will include rabbinic, medieval, Hasidic, and contemporary materials, such as Talmud and Midrash, philosophical and mystical texts, poetry and codes of ritual behavior. In so doing, we'll become acquainted with Jewish thought on the human-divine relation, the body, sexuality, gender, social order, and the meaning of human action.

Getting in touch:

I can be reached by e-mail at msegol@skidmore.edu My office phone is x5405, but e-mail is usually better.

1. **Short History** of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood by Raymond P. Scheindlin Oxford Univ Pr,
2. Back to the Sources **Back To The Sources** by Barry W. Holtz. ... Date: January 1986
3. **Dream of the Poem** by Peter Cole, Princeton University Press

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance. Attendance is required.

2. Reading. You are required to do ALL of the reading for this course. You will be accountable for it in a variety of ways throughout the term, including informed class participation, reading exercises, and contribution to panels.

3. Class participation: (10 points) Class participation is a must. I will lecture for about half of each class, while the remainder of most meetings will consist of structured class discussion. You will be graded on your informed participation.

4. Notebook: Reading questions and step-by-step exercises: (50 points) I've assigned a reading question and/or a step-by-step exercise for each class. You are to answer these questions in your

class notebook dedicated especially to this purpose. And, you are to bring your notebook to class every time it meets so that you can refer to your answers for class discussion. I'll collect and grade the notebooks four times during the term. These dates are: **2/17; 3/4; 4/2; and 4/28**

5. Final Paper Proposal (10 points)

6. Final Paper 7-8 Pages (30 points)

EXPECTATIONS & COURSE POLICIES:

General Expectations: I expect you to read, write, think, and learn. Then, I expect you to talk about it.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Only two absences (excused or unexcused) are allowed. Students who miss three (3) or more class sessions will have their final course grade lowered by two (2) points per excessive absence. Any student who misses seven or more class sessions will receive an "F" for their course grade. Regular and consistent attendance is necessary for success in this course. In short, if you're not in class, you can't participate and learn.

Participation: Active participation is necessary for success in this course. Students are expected to arrive to class on time and to consistently contribute to class discussions. Arriving late is both disruptive and disrespectful to classmates who are attempting to participate in the learning process and affects your own ability to participate in the entire class session. Points will be deducted from your final course grade for habitual lateness.

Participation is not simply about quantity or "how much you participate," but about the quality of your involvement in class. Excellent participation is arriving on time; actively listening to and being involved in the discussion at hand; asking questions about things you do not understand; synthesizing course and other materials to arrive at new understandings; and being eager to make informed, thoughtful, and respectful comments on the ideas of others.

Course Policies

All course assignments must be handed in on time. All written assignments must be submitted in class in hard-copy form. Students must retain a hard copy of all class assignments.

Students are expected to complete readings and assignments before class. When preparing writing assignments for this course, please refer to the Skidmore College Expository Writing Network (available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/writingbrd/INDEX.html>) and/or the Writing Center for additional help.

Expected Style: All written papers are expected to be well-written (e.g., well-organized, correct spelling, appropriate grammar), double-spaced, using 1" margins and 12 point font, stapled, and accompanied by a cover sheet. In addition, students must adhere to either MLA or Chicago style when citing sources in text and when generating reference lists for assignments of any kind.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to adhere to the college's honor code. Academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, failure to cite, cheating) will not be tolerated, and the Integrity Board will be notified of suspected violations. Skidmore's Expository Writing Network (available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/writingbrd/INDEX.html>) has helpful information on the ethics of writing. Please make use of this campus resource.

Disability Accommodations: Any student with special needs requiring accommodations should give me his/her memo of accommodations in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow up with me regarding all accommodations that require my participation. The student is advised to ensure full use of testing accommodations by coming to talk to me at least seven days before any test on the syllabus. The Coordinator for Students with Disabilities is located in the Office of Student Academic Services. You can make an appointment by calling extension 5180.

Syllabus: While every attempt is made to include all course information on this syllabus, some changes may be necessary. Any changes will be announced in class. Students are responsible for adhering to the information contained in the syllabus and any announcements in class pertaining to course information.

Readings:

1/20

1. Intro

Rabbinics

1/22

2. Intro Judaism, from Neusner

1/27

3. Intro Judaism 2, from Neusner

1/29

4. Fine pp 39-51: Communal Prayer and Liturgical Poetry
5. Other Piyyutim: Yose ben Yose, Yannai: and Eleazar Ben Kallir pp 209-11; 215-27

In our discussion we will focus on Yose ben Yose's "Avodah," Yannai's "Prayer for Love" and "Abraham's Complaint" and Eleazar ben Kallir's "The Celestial Fire" and "The Dialogue of Zion and God"

What can we learn about Jewish prayer from this reading? How is it generated, and how does it change? How important a part of Jewish life is it, and why? Describe the poems you have read. What are their purposes? How might they have been used in a synagogue service, and what sort of worldview do they express?

2/3

6. Talmud 1: Back to the Sources, chapter 2, pp129-75. Refer to the full text of Berakhot, for clarification purposes. It may be found at this link: http://www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth_2.html read all of folio 2, and click the link to continue to 3a. Do not read 3b, since we will not be covering it in class.

Explain the purposes of the Talmud as you understand them from reading Chapter 2 in Holtz, and try to contextualize them historically according to what you have read in Chapter 3 of Scheindlin.

2/5

7. Talmud 2: Baba Metzia 59b http://www.come-and-hear.com/babamezia/babamezia_59.html Begin with folio A as the rabbis start to discuss the oven. Read down to the bottom of the page of folio B

What is the main goal of this text? Who won the argument and why? What can this tell us about the role of Torah in the human relation to the divine?

2/10

8. Issues surrounding the study of Talmud today- from Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*
 - A. Marriage and Divorce, pp129-44
 - B. The Talmud's Importance for the People, and The Talmud has Never Been Completed, pp266-75

What is the status of women in the texts reviewed by Steinsaltz? How might the laws of marriage and divorce pose problems in contemporary usage? Given the way in which the Talmud is constructed, how might contemporary Jews approach these issues? Please generate some discussion questions on this material.

2/12

9. Midrash: Holtz chapter 4

Explain the function of the midrash according to Holtz and write your own midrash treating the problems that arise from Genesis 4.10, Cain's murder of Abel. Or, choose any other of the Biblical passages discussed in this chapter.

Notebooks due 2/17

2/17

10. Midrashim on Adam and Eve, selection from Kvam

What is the range of opinions on gender roles in these texts? What is the most common? Is it possible to say that these midrashim share a purpose, and if so, what is it?

Medieval Judaism

2/19

History Moment:

11. Scheindlin: Chapters 3 and 4: Roman Palestine and Sassanid Babylonia and Jews in Muslim Spain
What changed and why does it matter?

2/24

12. Bahya ibn Pakuda:

A. Book 1

What are the different ways to understand the unity of God, which is the correct one according to Bahya, and what are the consequences of getting it wrong?

2/26

13. Books 2 and 10

According to Bahya, what is God, how do we talk about God, what is the proper way to love the divine, and why?

3/2

14. Joel Kramer: The Life of Moses ben Maimon. From Fine.

3/4

15. Maimonides' Guide Coursepack: Maimonides: *Guide for the Perplexed*: 1:1-5; 1: 49-59;

Compare Maimonides' *Guide* to the Mishneh Torah. Also, compare the Mishneh Torah to the material you read from Talmud. Does Maimonides share the same goals of the writers of the talmudic passages you read? Specifically, how do they relate to the Bible? Also, compare their narrative voices. Maimonides Continued: The Mishneh Torah (course packet)

Notebooks due 3/4

SPRING BREAK 3/7-15

3 classes on poems

3/17

16. The New Hebrew Poetry: the wine poem- **NOTE:** *we may continue Maimonides here instead.*

A. Dunash ibn Labrat

B. Solomon ibn Gabirol, poems

Compare these poems to the Piyyutim we read earlier. What can they tell us about the context in which they were written, and about their function? What can they tell us about how human beings related to the created world?

17. The thirteenth century and the rise of kabbalah: Holtz Chapter 6

What kind of writing is kabbalistic writing? To what other genres is it related and how does this matter?

3/19

18. Kabbalah: Selections from the *Zohar*

Explain the goals of these texts and compare them to others that seem to be related.

3/24

19. The Expulsion from Spain:

A. Scheindlin Chapter 6

B. Description, internet sourcebook

C. Film: The last Marranos

No question.

Modern Judaism

3/26

3/31: Pesach: Class Cancelled

4/2

20. After Spain

A. Pietistic customs from Safed 375-398

What is the goal of the mystics of Safed? How does ritual address history?

Notebooks due 4/2

4/7 Baal Shem tov 1

A. Scheindlin Chapter 8

B. From “In Praise of the Ba’al Shem tov” coursepack

How does the Ba’al Shem Tov respond to earlier theologies, particularly that of the Safed School mystics? And How does he respond to history?

4/9 No Class: Passover

4/14

Ba’al Shem Tov 2

21. The Jews of Eastern Europe:

A. *In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov*: Introduction plus pp 7-31; 34-38; 255-61

Continue exploring the above question.

4/16

22. Tales of Nahman, The Seven Beggars

Explain how these tales work and what they are trying to convey.

4/21

23. Film: A Life Apart

After watching this film, ask yourself how these narratives of the Ba'al Shem Tov and of Nahman of Bratslav shape the daily life of Hasidim.

4/23

4/28

Notebooks due 4/28

Notebook Guidelines:

Notebook: Reading questions: (50 points) I've assigned a reading question or a group of questions for each class. You are to answer these questions in your class binder dedicated especially to this purpose. And, you are to bring your notebook to class every time it meets so that you can refer to your answers for class discussion. I'll collect and grade the notebooks four times during the term

Proposal Guidelines

Paper Guidelines:

1. Papers should be 7-8 pages long. They should be double-spaced, and in 12-point font with one-inch margins all around.
2. They should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
 - a. The introduction should introduce and present your thesis, and explain how you intend to prove it.
 - b. The body should support your thesis with quotes from the work, and from whatever secondary sources you intend to use. Quotes must be interpreted as well as presented in order to be effective.
 - c. The conclusion should explain your progress. That is, it should not only restate your thesis, but it should acknowledge some of what you have learned about it through writing your paper. You should not introduce any new ideas in your conclusion, but instead, you should show a more nuanced understanding of your original thesis, with the benefit of the experience of your paper.
3. It is very important to focus on the question by supporting your ideas about it with quotations from the text. This means that if you believe something to be true about a text you must include or refer to those parts of the work from which you deduced this idea.
4. Citations: The following items must be cited:
 - a. pieces you have taken from the work in question
 - b. all secondary sources- criticism, facts, figures, etc.
 - c. ideas: if you got an idea about the work from a book, you should cite it even if you do not quote it directly.
5. Using sources productively: You must include quotations from the textual sources you discuss in your paper. The proper way to use a quote includes three steps:
 - A. You introduce and contextualize the quote.
 - B. You cite it properly according to MLA or Chicago style guidelines
 - C. You conclude by analyzing the quote and showing how it supports your point.
 - D. Here is a very simple example: (A) In Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, the main character justifies his desire to practice three religions by espousing a universalist understanding of religion, asserting that "the God of the Hebrews and the Christians is the same as the God of the Muslims!" (B) (Martel, p 72) (C) In this, Piscine expresses his belief that because these three religions work toward the same goal, serving the same God, he is justified in practicing both Christianity and Islam.
6. Papers must include and **USE** full text printed academic sources. No web sites are permitted except those I have designated on the syllabus. You may use campus databases of full text articles such as JSTOR. Otherwise, you must use books to prove your points.
7. Your paper must explicitly treat course material.
8. For your information: for our purposes a primary source is a sacred or literary text. A secondary source is one that analyzes and theorizes the primary source. For example: The biblical book of *Exodus* is a primary source, and Nahum Sarna's *Exploring Exodus* is a secondary source. Your textbook is a secondary source because it theorizes primary religious sources. However, when I ask

you to use a secondary source I do not mean your textbook because it is the starting point of our inquiry, and I am asking you to go further.

9. Failure to cite your sources properly is **plagiarism** and will be treated as such.