During the past three decades, the feminist movement in North America has generated a wide range of questions in many disciplines about how we study and value women's lives and experience. As both a lived and historical religious tradition and culture, Judaism has been subject to these questions. Jewish feminists have turned a searchlight on traditional rabbinic texts, Jewish law, history and religious life and thought, evaluating the place of women within the tradition.

In this survey course, we will examine the feminist critique of Judaism with respect to traditional gender roles, Jewish texts, Jewish law (*halacha*) and ethics, prayers and rituals as well as conceptions of Jewish communal leadership. We will also explore the ways in which this critique has spawned new understandings and practices in shaping a more just and inclusive Judaism.

**Course Readings:**

The following texts are required and are available for purchase at the Stanford Bookstore. The books are also on reserve in Green Library.


3. Haviva Ner-David, *Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Toward Traditional*
4. **Course Reader, FS 139** is required and can be purchased through University Readers at [www.universityreaders.com/students](http://www.universityreaders.com/students). They promise to deliver within 1-4 days and the first section of the reader is available electronically as a PDF.

The course pack price is **$49.10**, and includes materials that we will use in class daily, so you should purchase your own copy. **To purchase the course pack, please follow the instructions below:**

**Step 1:** Log on to [www.universityreaders.com](http://www.universityreaders.com).
**Step 2:** Click on the white "STUDENTS BUY HERE" button located in the "Student Store" section (upper right-hand corner of the page).
**Step 3:** Create an account or log in if you have an existing account to purchase.
**Step 4:** Easy-to-follow instructions will guide you through the rest of the ordering process.

Payment can be made by all major credit cards or with an electronic check.

Readings will include excerpts from the following texts, which may be borrowed from the instructor or can be found on reserve at Green Library and at the Hillel Library at the Ziff Center for Jewish Life.

5. Elizabeth Koltun, *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, Schocken Books, New York, 1976 (This book is out of print, but I have a few copies that can be borrowed.)


7. Additional readings will be available on CourseWork throughout the quarter.

**Requirements:**

A. Regular class participation and leadership

This class will be conducted as a seminar. Everyone must read critically and carefully. All students are expected to have completed assigned readings before each meeting, to take an active part in discussion, and to discuss readings thoughtfully. Most sessions will be led by students. In preparation for leading the class discussion, leaders should read through all the assigned material, check some of the sources cited by the authors, show connections or disparities between the readings, raise questions about methodology and bias, focus on key passages, try to respond to questions raised by classmates and involve the instructor as a resource. The purpose of these sessions is not to summarize the readings but to discover the connections between them. You can miss up to two sessions without penalty.

B. Written Assignments
1) Response papers. For each session, you are responsible for writing a one-two page response paper discussing and raising questions about the week's reading. These papers are informal. They will not be graded, but they will be counted. You can use these papers to give personal reactions to the readings, synthesize and compare sources or to raise questions to discuss in class. These response papers are due via email prior to each class session. If you must miss a class session, you are still responsible for turning in a response paper. You may miss three response papers without penalty.

2) A research presentation and paper on a topic of your choice due at the end of the quarter. (For those taking the class for 4 units, the paper should be 10-15 pages. For those taking the class for 5 units, the paper should be 20 pages.) This research can be an elaboration of ideas we have surveyed in class or an exploration of material that we were unable to cover (Jewish women's leadership; the role of women in particular movements, a particular historical period or culture, a specific theological, ritual or legal issue). Some bibliographic material is included in the syllabus. Additionally, you may want to make use of the Jewish Women's Archives (www.jwa.org), Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, by Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore, or the Index of Articles in Jewish Studies (http://libnet1.ac.il/~libnet/rmb/) The final presentation and paper should offer creative thinking on research related to the themes of the course. The preparation should involve reading beyond the syllabus itself; it may include interviews or use of other media such as film. The presentation to the class will take place on Tuesday, June 5th. The final paper is due Tuesday, June 12th.

Grading: Seminar participation 70%
Leadership--25%; participation--25%; response papers --20%
Final class presentation 10%
Final research paper 20%

Tuesday, March 31: Gender and Creation: Where it all Began

Genesis Creation and Naming Stories

I. Syllabus and class expectations
II. Text Study on the creation and naming stories
III. Distribution and, if time, discussion of Rachel Adler, “I’ve Had Nothing Yet, So I Can’t Take More,” Moment Magazine (Handout)
IV. See CourseWork for “Timeline of Jewish and US Feminism” from Riv-Ellen Prell’s Women Remaking American Judaism

Discretionary Follow up Reading:
Koltun, The Jewish Women: New Perspectives
"Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation"--Phyllis Trible, pp 217-240
Ilana Pardes, Countertraditions in the Bible, pp 13-38
Bible, Chapters 1-3
Readings in preparation for each session will be found following the date of that session.

Thursday, April 2: Why A Feminist Reading of Judaism: The Dawning Critique

These readings, from the two earliest anthologies of Jewish feminist writings, are meant to provide an overview of the issues raised by early Jewish feminists. We will be screening excerpts from “Half the Kingdom”, a film on Jewish feminism. The themes presented will be elaborated and deepened throughout the course.

In Class Film: “Half the Kingdom” (ZVC 3791)

Readings:

Koltun, The Jewish Women: New Perspectives
"The Jewish Feminist: Conflict in Identities"--Judith Plaskow, pp.3-10
"Tumah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings"--Rachel Adler, pp. 63-71
"The Other Half: Women in the Jewish Tradition"--Paula Hyman, pp.105-113
"Judaism and Feminism"--Blu Greenberg, pp. 179-192

Course Reader:

   "Introduction"--Susannah Heschel, pp. xiii-xxxvi

For students unfamiliar with Judaism, you may want to look at CourseWork at the overview presented in:


Tuesday, April 7: Our Lives As Text: Women's Voices in Jewish History

Through history and rereading of traditional narrative texts, women have raised new questions about what was and what might have been. Methodological problems in recovering women's experience with scant sources and understanding those sources, as well as the "inventions" and "eisegesis" (reading in) which women have done will be examined.

Leaders: _________________________________

Readings:
Koltun, The Jewish Women: New Perspectives
Models From Our Past, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists" -- Deborah Weissman, pp. 139-148
"Bertha Pappenheim: Founder of German-Jewish Feminism" -- Marion Kaplan, pp. 149-163

CourseWork:

B. Ellen Umansky and Diane Ashton, "Gluckel of Hameln: From her memoirs", Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook, pp. 47-51

Course Reader:


Discretionary Reading:
Paula Hyman, Gender and Jewish History, Tikkun Magazine, Vol. 3, No 1
Helpful Resources: Jewish Women's Archives, <www.jwa.org>, Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, by Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore

Thursday, April 9: No class due to Passover

Try to attend a women’s or feminist Seder and reflect on how it either builds on or changes the experience of a traditional Seder.

(It is a good idea to get a jump on the reading for next week—this is the longest assignment of the class—although much of it is poetry.)

Tuesday, April 14: Women Writing Texts
Readings:


Course Reader:

   "Introduction"--Judith Kates and Gail Reimer, pp.xvii-xxv
   "The Book of Ruth" (Biblical text)--pp. 5-13
   "Her Mother's House"--Gail Twersky Reimer, pp. 97-105
   "The Concealed Alternative"--Aviva Zornberg, pp.65-81

Discretionary Readings:


*Goldstein, Elyse, Seek Her Out: a textual approach to the study of women and Judaism* (2003)

Thursday, April 16: No Class Due to Passover

Tuesday, April 21: Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology

As a textually based tradition, Judaism is more concerned with practice than theology. Unlike Christianity, which has a systematic theological enterprise, Judaism struggles with a definition of theology that encompasses text, life and social reality. We will see how Jewish feminists have both appropriated and altered the categories of Christian feminist theologians.

Readings:

Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*,
"Introduction" pp. vii-xix
"Setting the Problem, Laying the Ground", pp. 1-24

Course Reader:
Thursday, April 23: Jewish Feminist Theology (continued)

Leaders: _________________________________

Readings:

Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism: Toward an Inclusive Theology and Ethics
"Preface" (David Ellenson) pp. viii-xii
"Introduction" pp. xiv-xxvii
"Prelude: The Female Rapist and Other Inventions" pp. 1-20

Discretionary Reading:
Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective.
"Torah: Reshaping Jewish Memory", pp. 25-74
"Israel: Toward a New Concept of Community" pp. 76-120

Tuesday, April 28: Women and Halacha

Halacha or Jewish law is the organizing principle of traditional Jewish life. Understanding the traditional categories of Jewish life, critiquing and challenging them has been a central component of Jewish feminism.

Leaders: _________________________________

Readings:
Koltun, *The Jewish Women: New Perspectives*
"The Status of Women in Halachic Judaism" Saul Berman pp. 114-128

Course Reader:
"Women's Obligation in Mitzvot, “pp. 43-46,
"Women as Witnesses", pp. 73-80
"The Marriage Contract", pp. 96-102
"Introduction" pp.1-14
"Sotah" pp. 15-29
"Conclusion" pp. 244-249

CourseWork:

“Abortion” pp. 219-238

*Discretionary Reading:*
Rachel Biale, *Jewish Women and Jewish Law*
Millen, Rochelle L. *Women, birth, and death in Jewish law and practice*

**Thursday, May 30: Women and Halacha (continued)**

Leaders: _____________________________

Readings:

Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: Toward an Inclusive Theology and Ethics*
"Here Comes Skotsl: Renewing Halacha" pp. 21-60

(warning: earlier generations of students have thrown the book against a wall over this chapter!)

*Discretionary Readings:*
Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender and History*,
"Daily Labors", pp. 49-76
Tamar El-Or, *Next Year I Will Know More: Literacy and Identity Among Young Orthodox Women in Israel*, (Wayne State University Press, Detroit) 2002
Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Brandeis University Press) 2004

**Tuesday, May 5: Women and Halacha (continued)**

Leaders: _________________________________

Readings:


Discretionary Reading:  
*Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender*, *Stanford University Press, 2000*)

**Thursday, May 7: Women and Halacha (continued)**

Leaders: _________________________________

Film: “Yentl” (ZVC 14090)

Readings:


**Tuesday, May 12: Our Words as Text: Women's Voices in Prayer**

From accepting the prayers of the tradition to searching for women's words to creating new prayers, Jewish feminists have struggled with how to speak to God. Issues of authority, God language and authenticity will be explored though these readings.

Leaders: _________________________________

Readings:

Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: Toward an Inclusive Theology and Ethics*
"And Not Be Silent: Toward Inclusive Worship" pp. 61-104

CourseWork:


E. Selections from contemporary women’s prayerbooks
   "Author's Preface" pp. xv-xxii
   Selected Prayers and Commentary, pp. 24-27, 431-436; 158-9, 461-2; 322-323, 493
   Naomi Janowitz and Maggie Moers Winig, Siddur Nashim: A Sabbath Prayer Book for Women, privately published, Providence, 1975
   pp. i-11, 96

Discretionary Readings:

Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai, "God: Reimagining the Unimaginable" pp. 121-169
Nina Beth Cardin, Out of the Depths I Call to You

Avraham Weiss, Women at Prayer: a Halakic Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups
Chava Weissler, "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazi Women" in Arthur Green, Jewish Spirituality 2: 245-275
Chava Weissler, "Tears for the Shechinah" in Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women, pp. 104-125

Thursday, May 14: Tikkun: Women Healing a Broken World

A commitment to gender equality brings with it philosophical underpinnings as well as activism. Both inside the Jewish world and beyond it, Jewish feminists have applied new ways of thinking to intransient problems.

Leaders: ___________________________
Readings:

"Epilogue: Seeds and Ruins" pp. 209-212

Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai, "Feminist Judaism and Repair of the World"*, pp. 211-238

CourseWork:


**Tuesday, May 19: Tikkun (continued)**

Leaders: __________________________

Readings:

Merle Feld, *A Spiritual Life: A Jewish Feminist Journey*, pp. 139-202


CourseWork:

G. Phyllis Chesler and Rivka Haut, eds. *Women of the Wall: Claiming Sacred Ground at Judaism’s Holy Site*, (Jewish Lights, Woodstock) 2002,
“A Wall that Matters and Others that Don’t: A Metadenominational View”, Shulamit Magnus, 224-235
“Epilogue”, 355, 359-36

Film: “Women of the Wall” New Day Films 31 minutes (ZVC 18811)

*Discretionary Reading:*

*Jewish Law Watch: The Agunah Dilemma, Case Study Number 2, The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, pp. 1-16*

*Phyllis Chesler and Rivka Haut, eds. Women at the Wall: Claiming Sacred Ground at Judaism’s Holy Site, (Jewish Lights, Woodstock) 2002,*

“Drama in Jerusalem”, Bonna Haberman p. 3-35
Thursday, May 21: Women as Ritual Experts and Ritual Innovators

Jewish feminists have been hungry for participation in the rhythms and cycles of Jewish life. Both by appropriating little known rituals and creating new ones, the landscape of Jewish moments has been irrevocably altered by women claiming the domain of ritual.

Leaders: ___________________________________

Readings:

Course Reader:
10. Susan Starr Sered, Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem,
   "Introduction" pp. 3-17, notes pp. 145-147
   "Sacralizing the Feminine: Food Preparation as a Religious Activity" pp. 87-102, notes pp. 153-154
   "Conclusion: The Making of a Ritual Expert" pp. 138-141, notes p. 159

In Class Film: “In Her Own Time” (ZVC 4632)

Discretionary Readings:
Penina Adelman, Miriam’s Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year
Barbara Myerhoff, Number Our Days.
Barbara Myerhoff, "Illuminating the Unwritten Scroll" Conference tape, 1984
Stephanie Wolfe, "Crisis and Celebration: Creating and Adapting Jewish Rituals to Mark Our Lives" Unpublished rabbinic thesis
Frida Kerner Furman, Facing the Mirror: Older Women Beauty Shop Culture
E.M. Broner, Bringing Home the Light: A Jewish Woman’s Handbook of Rituals
Mary Antin, “Malinke’s Atonement”, in Joyce Antler’s America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Writers, Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 27-71.
Tuesday, May 26: Women As Ritual Experts (continued)

Leaders: __________________________

Readings:

Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism: Toward an Inclusive Theology and Ethics
"Brit Ahuvim” A Marriage Between Subjects” pp. 169-208

Course Reader:


Discretionary Reading:
Deborah Orenstein:  Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones, Volume 1 Jewish Lights, “Afterward: How to Create a Ritual”

Thursday, May 28: Women's Spirituality and Jewish Tradition

"Spirituality", while hard to define, has a power and impetus that has captured contemporary Jewish women. Several of the readings for this course--Merle Feld and Haviva Ner-David’s books among them, are the beginnings of a literature on Jewish women’s spirituality. Additionally, the following readings will help us to understand the broad outlines of Jewish women's spirituality as it has been expressed in the last decade.

Leaders: __________________________

Readings:

Course Reader:

12. Jody Elizabeth Myers "The Myth of Matriarchy in Recent Writings on Jewish Women's Spirituality" in Jewish Social Studies, Fall 1997 (4:1)

Discretionary Readings:
Sue Levi Elwell, "Text and Transformation: Toward a Theology of Integrity", Unpublished rabbinic thesis
Carol Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*


**Tuesday, June 2: Final Class and Class Presentations**

**Tuesday, June 9: Final Papers due** Papers should be delivered to the Old Union, room 318 (third floor) by noon on Tuesday, June 9th.