

Stanford University
Feminist Studies/Jewish Studies
FS 139/JS 139 Seminar: Rereading Judaism in Light of Feminism

Spring Quarter, 2007
4-5 Units
Tuesdays/ Thursdays
10-11:15 a.m.
Building 260, Room 001

Instructor: Patricia Karlin-Neumann
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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 our readings, 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.

1. Rachel Adler, **Engendering Judaism: Toward an Inclusive Theology and Ethics**, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1998 (hardback) or Beacon Press, 1999 (paper)
2. Merle Feld, **A Spiritual Life: A Jewish Feminist Journey**, SUNY Albany, Albany, 1999

3. Haviva Ner-David, **Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Toward Traditional Rabbinic Ordination**, Jfl Books, Needham, MA, 2000
 4. **Course Reader, FS 139** is required and can be purchased through University Readers at 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.
- Readings will include excerpts from the following texts, which 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.)
 6. Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1990

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.

In addition to the morning classes, there will be an occasional film screened outside the class, either individually or on an evening convenient for the seminar participants.

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 on the evening prior to each class (Monday night and Wednesday night). 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	60%
Leadership--20%; participation--20%; response papers --20%	
Final class presentation	10%
Final research paper	30%

Tuesday, April 3: Class will not be held due to Passover

**Thursday, April 5: Gender and Creation: Where it all Began
Genesis Creation and Naming Stories**

Syllabus and class expectations
 Discussion of Rachel Adler, "I've Had Nothing Yet, So I Can't Take More," Moment Magazine (Handout)
 Text Study on the creation and naming stories

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*

Tuesday, April 10: 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:

1. Susannah Heschel, On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, Schocken Books, New York, 1983

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

Thursday, April 12: 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 "isogesis"(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

Handout:

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:

2. Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, "Gluckel of Hamelin", Written Out of History, Bloch Publishing, New York, 1978, pp. 169-177, 276-

3. Shulamit Magnus, "Pauline Wengeroff and the Voice of Jewish Modernity", in Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition, (New York University Press, 1995)

Discretionary Reading:

- Paula Hyman, Gender and Jewish History, Tikkun Magazine, Vol. 3, No 1*
Marvin Lowenthal, (translation) The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln, Schocken Books, New York, 1977
Miriam Peskowitz, "Engendering Jewish Religious History", Judaism Since Gender, ed. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, pp. 17-39
Malka Shapiro, The Rebbe's Daughter: Memoir of a Hasidic Childhood, ed. Nehemia Polen, (Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia), 2002
Shulamit Magnus, "Out of the Ghetto": Integrating the Study of Jewish Women into the Study of "The Jews", Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought, Vol. 39. No. 1, Winter, 1990
Helpful Resources: Jewish Women's Archives, <www.jwa.org>, Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, by Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore

Tuesday, April 17: Women Writing Texts

Leaders: _____

Readings:

Merle Feld, A Spiritual Life: A Jewish Feminist Journey, pp. 1-138

Course Reader:

4. Judith Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer, Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, Ballantine Press, New York, 1994
 "Introduction"--Judith Kates and Gail Reimer, pp.xvii-xxv
 "The Book of Ruth"--pp. 5-13
 "Her Mother's House"--Gail Twersky Reimer, pp. 97-105
 "The Concealed Alternative"--Aviva Zornberg, pp.65-81

Discretionary Readings:

- Ellen Frankel, The Five Books of Miriam, (Jewish Publication Society, 1996)*
Goldstein, Elyse, Seek Her Out: a textual approach to the study of women and Judaism (2003)

Thursday, April 19: 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.

Leaders: _____

Readings:

Course Reader:

5. Susannah Heschel, On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, Schocken Books, New York, 1983
"Notes Toward Finding the Right Question"--Cynthia Ozick, pp. 120-151
"The Right Question is Theological"--Judith Plaskow, pp. 223-233
6. Ellen Umansky, "Jewish Feminist Theology" in Eugene Borowitz, Choices In Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide, 2nd edition (Behrman House, West Orange, New Jersey) 1995, pp. 313-340.

Discretionary Readings:

- Martha Ackelsberg, "Spirituality, Community and Politics: B'not Esh and the Feminist Reconstruction of Judaism", Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Spring, 1986 pp.109-120*
- Judith Plaskow, "Spirituality and Politics: Lessons from B'not Esh", Tikkun Magazine, Vol. 10. No 3. pp 31-32, 85*

Tuesday, April 24: Jewish Feminist Theology (continued)

Leaders: _____

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
- 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

Thursday, April 26: 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:

7. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, Westview Press), 1998

"Introduction" pp.1-14

"Sotah" pp. 15-29

"Conclusion" pp. 244-249

8. Rachel Adler's retraction of her earlier "Tumah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings" (see Koltun, pp. 63-71) in "In Your Blood, Live: Revisions of a Theology of Purity" in *Tikkun Magazine* 8:1 (January/February 1993), pp. 38-41

Discretionary Reading:

Rachel Biale, *Jewish Women and Jewish Law*

Millen, Rochelle L. *Women, birth, and death in Jewish law and practice*

Tuesday, May 1: 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!)

Course Reader:

9. Moshe Meiselman, Jewish Women in Jewish Law,
"Women's Obligation in Mitzvot", pp. 43-46,
"Women as Witnesses", pp. 73-80
"The Marriage Contract", pp. 96-102

Discretionary Readings:

- Miriam Peskowitz, Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender and History,
"Daily Labors", pp. 49-76
- Tova Hartman Halbertal, Appropriately Subversive: Modern Mothers and
Traditional Religions, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge) 2002
- 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
- Sylvia Barack Fishman, Changing Minds: Feminism in Contemporary Orthodox
Jewish Life (American Jewish Committee, New York) 2000
- Stephanie Wellen Levine, Mystics, Mavericks and Merrymakers: An Intimate
Journey Among Hasidic Girls (NYU Press, New York) 2004

Thursday, May 3: Women and Halacha (continued)

Leaders: _____

Readings:

Haviva Ner-David, Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Toward Traditional
Rabbinic Ordination, pp. 1-130

Discretionary Reading:

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

Tuesday, May 8: Women and Halacha (continued)

Leaders: _____

Film: "Yentl" (ZVC 14090)

Readings:

Haviva Ner-David, Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Toward Traditional Rabbinic Ordination, pp. 131-243

Thursday, May 10: 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 through these readings.

Leaders: _____

Readings:

Handout:

Rachel Adler, "Innovation and Authority: A Feminist Reading of the 'Women's Minyan' Responsum" in Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, Studies in Progressive Halacha, (forthcoming)

Course Reader:

10. Samuel Freedman, Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry, (August, 2000, Simon and Schuster), "Los Angeles, California, 1987-89, Judaism and Gender: Revolution toward Tradition" pp. 125-161

Discretionary Readings:

Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai, "God: Reimagining the Unimaginable" pp. 121-169

Tracy Guren Klirs, The Merit of Our Mothers, (HUC Press)

Nina Beth Cardin, Out of the Depths I Call to You

Naomi Janowitz and Maggie Moers Winig, Siddur Nashim: A Sabbath

Prayer Book for Women, privately published, Providence, 1975

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

Tuesday, May 15: Women's Voices in Prayer (Continued)

Leaders: _____

Readings:

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

Course Reader:

11. Marcia Falk, The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival, HarperSan Francisco, 1996
"Author's Preface" pp. xv-xxii
" Commentary: Introduction" pp. 417-423
Selected Prayers and Commentary, pp. 24-27,
431-436; 158-9, 461-2; 322-323, 493

Discretionary Reading:

Marcia Falk, "Notes on Composing New Blessings" in Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality, pp. 128-138

Thursday, May 17: 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 intransigent problems.

Leaders: _____

Readings:

Merle Feld, A Spiritual Life: A Jewish Feminist Journey, pp. 139-255

Handout:

Phyllis Chesler and Rivka Haut, eds. Women at the Wall: Claiming Sacred Ground at Judaism's Holy Site, (Jewish Lights, Woodstock) 2002,
"A Wall that Matters and Others that Don't: A Meta-Denominational View", Shulamit Magnus, 224-235
"Epilogue", 355, 359-361

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
Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman, "An Ethics of Encounter: Public Choices and Private Acts", in Elliot Dorff and Louis Newman, Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader, pp. 219-245
Aviad Hacoen, Tears of the Oppressed : An Examination of the Agunah Problem : Background and Halakhic sources (Ktav, Jersey City) 2004

Tuesday, May 22: Tikkun (continued)

Leaders: _____

Readings:

Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism: Toward an Inclusive Theology and Ethics
 "Justice and Peace Shall Kiss: An Ethics of Sexuality and Relationship"
 pp. 105-168
 "Epilogue: Seeds and Ruins" pp. 209-212

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

Course Reader:

12. Adena Berkowitz, "The Prisoners of Divorce", Lillith Magazine, No. 18, Winter 1987, pp. 18-23

Thursday, May 24: 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:

13. 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

Lynn Gottlieb, *She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Vision of a Renewed Judaism* (San Francisco, HarperSan Francisco, 1995)

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 29: 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:

14. Penina Adelman, "A Drink from Miriam's Cup: Invention of Tradition Among Jewish Women", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Fall 1994, Vol. 10. No. 2, pp. 151-167

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 31: 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:

15. Jody Elizabeth Myers "The Myth of Matriarchy in Recent Writings on Jewish Women's Spirituality" in *Jewish Social Studies*, Fall 1997 (4:1)
16. Chava Weissler, Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women, "American Transformations of the Tkhines", pp. 149-171

Discretionary Readings:

Mary Belenky, et al. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind, Basic Books, 1986

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

Diane Tickton Schuster, Jewish lives, Jewish learning : Adult Jewish learning in Theory and Practice (UAHC Press, New York) 2003

Tuesday, June 5: Class Presentations

Thursday, June 7: Reading Week--discretionary session to discuss papers,

Tuesday, June 12: Final Papers due Papers should be delivered to the Round Room behind Stanford Memorial Church and placed in the instructor's box by noon on Tuesday, June 12th.