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.


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.

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.)


**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:

   "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:


**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

**Tuesday, April 17: Women Writing Texts**

**Leaders:** ____________________________

**Readings:**


**Course Reader:**

   - "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:**
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:

   "Notes Toward Finding the Right Question"--Cynthia Ozick, pp. 120-151
   "The Right Question is Theological"--Judith Plaskow, pp. 223-233

Discretionary Readings:

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
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:
   "Introduction" pp.1-14
   "Sotah" pp. 15-29
   "Conclusion" pp. 244-249

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
Course Reader:

**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

**Thursday, May 3: Women and Halacha (continued)**

Leaders: _________________________________

Readings:


**Discretionary Reading:**

**Tuesday, May 8: Women and Halacha (continued)**

Leaders: _________________________________

Film: “Yentl” (ZVC 14090)

Readings:
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:


Course Reader:


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

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)
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.

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
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:

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:
"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
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:


Course Reader:


Discretionary Reading:


**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)

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 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.