

**Women in Judaism: Traditions and Change**  
**JST 130**  
**American Jewish University College Initiatives**  
**Young Judea Year Course**

Jewish women are often seen as silent throughout history and peripheral to or excluded from Jewish law and public ritual. This course sets out to find women's voices. The course will survey the development of the role of woman from the introduction of the first female archetype in the Bible until modern day. We will visit major issues and trends in Judaism and examine them from different religious and feminist perspectives. We will look at challenges women have faced throughout Jewish history and contributions they have made.

Students will be graded on a midterm research paper (35% of the final grade) and a final class presentation (35%). Additionally, students are expected to complete the readings and attend and participate in classroom discussions (15%). In-class assignments and quizzes make up the final 15% of the grade.

**Class Sessions:**

Classes 1-2

- I. Introduction
  - A. Class Overview and Expectations
  - B. A Woman's Role in Judaism

Readings:

- De Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. New York: Vintage Books; Reissue edition, 1989.
- Psalms 31. Tanach Koren. Feldheim Publishers: Jerusalem, 2002.
- Syfers, Judy. "I Want a Wife". Ms. Magazine. 1971.

Classes 3-5

- II. Women in the Bible
  - A. Eve's role as seen in Midrash and Feminist Literature
  - B. Text Study: A Woman of Valor (Psalms 31)
  - C. Reactions to Chana's Prayer as paradigmatic to "man's" view of the "woman's" traditional role in Judaism

Readings:

- Schwartz, Howard. Lilith's Cave. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991.
- Judges 4. Tanach Koren. Feldheim Publishers: Jerusalem, 2002.
- Steinsaltz, Adin. Biblical Images. Basic Books: New York, 1984.
- Samuel 1:1. Tanach Koren Feldheim Publishers: Jerusalem, 2002.

Classes 6-7

- III. Women in the Talmud
  - A. Beruriah as the archetype of the empowered woman in Talmud
- IV. The Politics of Geography
  - A. Ashkenazi and Sepharadi Women in the Middle Ages

Readings:

- Wegner, Judith Romney. "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism." Baskin, Judith, ed. Jewish Women in Historical Perspective. Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1991.
- Slater, Elinor and Slater, Robert. Great Jewish Women. Jonathan David Publishing: New York, 1998.
- "Source Material: Hearing the Voice of Beruriah." Heritage & History. WUJS.
- Baskin, Judith "Jewish Women in the Middle Ages" in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective. Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1991.
- Melammed, Renee Levine. "Medieval & Early Modern Sephardi Women in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective. Wayne State University Press: Detroit, 1991.

## Classes 8-12

- V. Women and the Jewish Lifecycle
  - A. Simchat Bat and Zeved Bat

### Readings:

- Breger, Jennifer. "Historical Precedents of Welcoming Ceremonies for Girls". in The Orthodox Woman and Ritual: Options and Opportunities. JOFA Publications.
- Farber, Seth. "It's a Girl: Traditions, Customs and Ceremonies." Jerusalem: ITIM Publications, 2003.

- B. Bat Mitzvah

### Readings:

- Salkin, Jeffrey. For Kids--Putting God on Your Guest List: How to Claim the Spiritual Meaning of Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Jewish Lights Publications: New York, 1998.
- Breger, Jennifer. "The Halachot of Bat Mitzvah".

- C. Marriage

### Readings:

- Lamm, Maurice. Jewish Way in Love and Marriage. David, Jonathan Publishers, Inc.: New York, 1991.
- Greenberg, Blu. On Women and Judaism. The Jewish Publication Society of America: Philadelphia, 1981.
- Kaufman, Michael. The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition. New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.: New York, 1993.
- Goldstein, Rabbi Elyse. "Take Back the Waters" in Lilith, Summer 1986.

- D. Jewish Divorce and the Plight of the Agunah

### Readings:

- Schneider, Susan Weldman. "Divorce." Jewish and Female. Simon and Schuster: New York, 1984.
- Shenhav, Sharon. "The Agunah – An Ancient Problem in Modern Dress" in Outlook. Summer 1994.
- Goldson, Ruth Berger. "Separating – A Havdalah Ritual for When a Marriage Comes Apart" in Lilith. Spring, 2003.
- Hollander, Vicki. "The New, Improved Jewish Divorce: Hers/His" in Lilith. Spring, 2003.
- Hammer, C. Devora. "Confessions of an Aguna Activist". In Lilith. Winter, 2003.

## Classes 13-14

## VI. The History of Women's Education

- A. The Bais Yaakov Movement
- B. Leaders in the World of Women's Education

### :Readings

- Weissman, Deborah. "Education of Jewish Women." Encyclopedia Judaica Yearbook. 1986-1987.
- Weissman, Deborah. "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists" in Koltrun, Elizabeth, The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives. Schocken Books: New York, 1976.
- Sokolow, Moshe. "Nechama Leibowitz: She Taught Torah out of Love." The Jerusalem Report. May 15, 1997.
- Krasner-Davidson, Haviva. "Why I'm Applying to YU." Moment. December 1993.

### Classes 15-16

## VII. Women and Halacha

- A. Moving from the periphery to taking a central role
- B. The evolution of Halacha

### Readings:

- Kaufman, Michael. The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition. Op. Cit.
- Adler, Rachel. "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halakhah and the Jewish Woman." Heschel, Susannah, ed. On Being a Jewish Feminist. Schocken Books: New York, 1983.
- Heschel, Susannah. "Introduction." In Heschel, Susannah, ed. On Being a Jewish Feminist. Op. Cit.

### Classes 17-20

## VIII. Women in Prayer and in Synagogue

- A. The historical role of women in the synagogue
- B. The evolution of women's prayer groups
- C. The creation of a place for women within the world of prayer

### Readings:

- Grossman, Susan and Haut, Rivka. "From Persia to New York: An Interview with Three Generations of Iranian Women." Daughters of the King. The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1992.
- Weissler, Chava. "Women's Studies and Women's Prayers: Reconstructing the Religious History of Ashkenazic Women." Jewish Social Studies. Vol. 1. No. 2. 1995.
- Hauptman, Judith. "Women and Prayer: An Attempt to Dispel some Fallacies." Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought Vol. 42. No. 1. Winter 1993.
- Scherr, Robert. "Voices from the Balcony." Conservative Judaism. Vol. 54. No. 3. 2002.
- Geffen, Rela. "The Impact of the Jewish Women's Movement on the American Synagogue: 1972-1985." Daughters of the King. Op. Cit.
- Reguer, Sara. "Kaddish from the 'Wrong' Side of the Mehitzah." In Daughters of the King. Op. Cit.

### Classes 21-23

## IX. Ordination of Women Rabbis

- A. The history of Women Rabbis
- B. Religious Movements and their Approach to Female Ordination.

Readings:

- Gordis, Robert. "The Ordination of Women – a History of the Question." Judaism. Vol. 33. No. 1. 1984.
- Feldman, David. "Some Problems Ahead." Judaism. Vol. 33. No. 1. 1984.
- Greenberg, Blu. "Will there be Orthodox Women Rabbis?" Judaism. Vol. 33. No. 1. 1984.
- King, Lisa Alcalay. "Can Orthodoxy Change?" in Hadassah Magazine. May 2004.
- Henkin, Chanah. "Women and the Issuing of Halakhic Rulings." Halpern, Micah and Safrai, Chana, ed. Jewish Legal Writings by Women. Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 1998.

Classes 24-27

- X. Women Taking Charge
  - A. Women's roles in volunteer movements
  - B. Women finding a unified voice
  - C. Women creating feminine rituals and finding spirituality

Readings:

- Hyman, Paula. "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The NYC Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902." American Jewish History. Vol. 70, No. 1, September 1980.
- Hyman, Paula. "The Volunteer Organizations: Vanguard or Rear Guard?" in Lilith. 1978.
- Schneider, Susan Weidman. "From Pushke to Power Suit". in Lilith. Spring, 2002.
- Cardin, Rabbi Nina Beth. "Women's Spirituality." Outlook. Spring 1997.
- Musleah, Rahel. "Our Judaism Ourselves: A Women's Place on the Calendar." Hadassah Magazine. June/July 2002.
- Ner- David, Haviva. "Whose Wall is this, Anyway?" The Jerusalem Report. December 12, 1996.
- Haut, Rivka. "The Presence of Women".

Classes 28-30

- XI. Where do we go from here? A summary and a look forward.