

Introduction To Hasidism

Instructor: Avi Blitz

Syllabus Outline for Young Judea Year Course in Israel

Hasidism is a religious revivalist movement which began in Eastern Europe during the eighteenth century. At its outset it captured the imagination of both the masses and the scholarly. Based on both deep kabalistic principles and simple ideas of piety Hasidism became one of the most influential forces in Eastern European Jewry throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the onset of World War Two and the Holocaust, although the movement was in decline, large communities of Hasidim still occupied the major cities and shtetlach (villages) of Eastern Europe. The destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust completely decimated the Hasidic movement. It seemed as if the great influence of Hasidism had come to a tragic end. However, this revivalist movement refused to die and transplanted itself to the shores of America and the new fledgling State of Israel.

In this course we will study the *history* and *theology* of the Hasidic movement and how it developed from a small grass-roots movement to one of the basic institutional forces of Orthodox Judaism. We will examine how it was effected by and reacted with other ideological movements of the time, such as the established Yeshiva/Rabbinic world, the Enlightenment and Zionism. We will probe the modern world of Hasidism to see how, after losing as much as 70% of its members to the Holocaust, it has become once again a major force in the Jewish world. We will learn about modern neo-Hassidic movements and other Jewish spiritual movements which have been influenced by Hassidic thought.

In our analysis we will use first hand sources such as the writings of the leaders of the movement ('Torahs'), various tales of the Hasidim, scholarly works analyzing Hasidic thought and society, media presentation of the Hasidim and visits and meetings with members of today's Hasidic communities in Israel. Students will be assessed by a mid-term assignment (30%), a research project (40%) and class participation and attendance (30%). Internet sources must be cleared with the instructor in advance prior to their inclusion in any submitted work.

Course Outline:

Historical Context: Jewish Life in the 17th and 18th Centuries .1

Khmelnitski Massacres .1

Shabbtai Tzvi .2
Rabbinic Elite .3
Readings: Ben-Sasson, pp. 691-723

An Overview of Jewish Mysticism .2

The Tannaim: Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai .1
The Middle Ages: Ramban .2
16th Century Tzfat: Rabbi Yitchak Luria, Rabbi Yosef Caro .3
Readings: Kaplan, pp. *Inner Space* 3-20
Dan, pp. 1-19

The Ba'al Shem Tov .3

The Tradition of Ba'alei Shem .1
The Life of the Besht (Ba'al Shem Tov) in Legend .2
Joy and Prayer in the teachings of the Besht .3
Readings: Tzava'at HaRivash, p.13
Wiesel, pp.3-39
Dan, pp. 19-34

4/5. The Students of the Besht

The Maggid of Mezeritch: The Crystallization of a Movement .1
Toldot Yaakov Yosef: The First Hasidic Author .2
Readings: Maimon, Solomon 49-55
Buber, *Tales I*, pp.98-117
Wiesel, pp. 40-42

6/7. The Creation of the Hasidic Schools/Dynasties

Poland- R.Elimelech of Lizensk, Hozeh from Lublin and the Yid HaKodesh .1
Lithuania- R. Schnuer Zalman and R. Aharon of Karlin .2
Ukraine- Rav Mordechai Nahum of Chernobyl .3
Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev Stands Alone .4
Readings: Buber, *Tales I* pp. 253-285
Wiesel, pp. 89-112
Dan, pp. 73-75

8. Challenges to Traditional Jewish Life

Changes in Prayer Form (Nusach Tefillah) .1
Ecstatic Prayer .2
The Ritual Slaughter (Shehita) Knife .3
Readings: Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* pp. 17-35, 93-103, 121-125

9. The Opposition- Misnagdim

Rabbi Eliyahu - The Vilna Gaon .1
Excommunications .2

Rabbi Schnuer Zalman is Imprisoned .3
Readings: Ettinger (in Ben-Sasson), 768-776
Rabinowicz, pp. 42-50

10. Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav

Meditation and Prayer .1

Speaking with G-d .2

Joy and Ecstasy .3

The Rebbe's Tales .4

Readings: Mintz, pp. 1-21

Opatoshu pp. 99-104

Kaplan, *Rabbi Nachman's Stories*, pp. 1-9, 31-54

11/12. From Kotzk To Isbicz

Absolute Truth and the Kotzker Rebbe .1

The Kotzker Secludes Himself in a Room .2

Radical Thought of Rabbi Mordecai Yosef Leiner .3

Readings: Wiesel, pp. 228-254

Rabinowicz, pp.71-88

Gellman, pp. 23-39

13. Hasidic Thought

Devekut - Clinging to G-d .1

"His Glory Fills the World" .2

"For the Sake of the Unification of the Holy One" L'shem Yichud... .3

Readings: Steinsaltz *The Long Shorter Way*, pp. 248-256, 317-323

Jacobs, pp. 140-153

14. Zionism and Hassidut

Hassidim and Misnagdim Reconcile .1

Decline of the Hasidic Movement in the Early 20th Century .2

Creation of Agudat Yisrael .3

Readings: Mintz, pp. 28-36

Bacon pp. 71-91

15. Hassidut and the Holocaust

Rebbe's Advise Staying in Europe .1

Admurim That Stayed in Europe- Rabbi Kolonimus Kalman Shapiro of Piazecz, Rabbi Israel Spira of Bluzhov .2

Admurim That Escaped - Rabbi Yoel Teitlebaum of Satmar, Rabbi Mordecai Alter of Gur, Rabbi Aaron Rokeach of Belz .3

Readings: Landau, pp.130-149

Eliach, pp. xv-xxxii, 3-4, 33-36, 39-41, 48-50, 79-84, 88-91, 155-159

16. The Growth of Hasidism in America

Bobov- ReGrouping .1

Bostoner Chasidim- A Distinct American Court .2

Hasidic Towns: Kiriyat Joel, Monsey .3

Readings: Mintz pp. 37-63

17. Traditional Hasidic Courts in Israel

Relationship to the Modern State of Israel .1

Agudat Yisrael and Politics .2

Distinctive World of the Hasidim .3

Readings: Landau, pp. 32-40, 62-67

18. Ba'al Tshuva Movement

The 60's and Jewish Identity .1

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach - Dancing, Singing Rabbi and his Holy 'Hipplach' .2

Readings: Aviad, pp. 13-53

Green, Itzik Lodzer: Psychedelics and Kabbalah, pp. 176-192

Green, After Itzik: Toward a Theology of Jewish Spirituality, pp. 193-204

19. Chabad and the Messiah

The Routes of Messianism in Jewish Belief .1

Hassidut and the Messianic Idea .2

The Rebbe as Messiah - Has Chabad Crossed the Line? .3

Readings: Wiener, pp. 155-196

Landau, 68-84

20. The Role of the Rebbe in Streams of Orthodoxy

The Rosh Yeshiva: Rav Shach, Rav Eliyashiv .1

The Rishon Letzion: Rav Ovadia Yosef .2

The Kabbalist: Rav Kaduri .3

Readings: Landau, pp. 43-54, 85-106

Melman pp. 97-106

21. Neo-Hasidic Movements and Radical Israeli Politics

Habbakukniks .1
Hevron and Bat Ayin- Hasidism and Yesha .2
Nah, Nah, Nahman Me'uman .3
Readings: Sprinzak, pp. 30-32, 43-51

22. Hasidism Meets the New Age

Kabbalah and the Rich and Famous .1
Renewal Judaism and Hassidic Spiritualism .2
Crystals, Meditation and Gurus .3
Readings: Green, *Seek My Face, Speak My Name*, pp. xiii-xxv, 82-89

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