Spirituality & Social Justice:
Abraham Joshua Heschel & Martin Luther King, Jr.
CG-INTD-560
Hebrew College

Fall 2013-2014
Online/In-Person Course

Instructor:
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Course Description:
In this semester-length course, the lives and writings of two of the most celebrated religious figures in twentieth-century American culture—Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel—are critically examined, exploring areas of commonality and difference. How did these men read the sacred texts of their traditions? Who were their teachers and spiritual guides? How did they enter public life? What was their understanding of the relationship between religion and American democracy? How did they view the interreligious dimensions of their work? In addition to our examination of the biographies and writings of these two individuals, we will also spend time exploring the cultural and political contexts in which they met and worked together. This will include a sustained examination of the movement for African American civil rights and various forms of Jewish engagement with it. By studying Heschel and King together, we will have the opportunity to learn by way of comparison and contrast—including the impact of each man on the other—thus offering us two intriguing models of “spirituality and social justice” from a vital period in modern American history.

Course Structure:

*The Schoology platform will be the location for much of the activity of the course.

- Weekly Introduction and Closing Reflection – Each Sunday and Thursday evening I will record a brief video (10-15 minutes) introducing and reflecting on the materials with which we engage that week.

- Guiding Questions – On Monday mornings I will post 3-5 questions in discussion threads to help orient your explorations and discussion.

- Midweek Meeting – Every Thursday afternoon from 4:45-5:45 pm EST, I will hold an open session at Hebrew College (room TBD) for discussion. You can join us in person or by Google Hangout (I will provide separate instructions on how to join).
Assignments:

- Weekly Posts

Students are expected to participate actively in the discussion forum, responding directly to my questions and to the comments of your classmates. Your responses need not be long—50-150 words each. Please respond to 2 of my threads to 2 responses from your peers.

- Mid-Course Reflection (1,000 words): Due Date: **November 1**

Choose one primary source discussed in class and comment on its relevance for contemporary American life – religious, political, social, etc. – using at least two secondary sources from the syllabus to support your argument. Your essay should include an analysis of the text and the context in which it was offered, including respectful critique.

- Final Assignment: Due Date: **December 16**

Option 1: Prepare a 90-minute, introductory session for adult education students on one dimension of the life and thought of Heschel, King, or both (including pedagogic goals, session outline, materials, and guiding questions).

Option 2: Prepare an essay (2,000 words) on a subject of your choosing, based on the materials explored in the course. All topics must be pre-approved by the instructor.

Required Texts:


2. Taylor Branch, *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement* (Simon & Schuster, 2013) [King Years]

*Many of the sermons and speeches (text and A/V) by Dr. King that we will examine are available online. In particular, we will make extensive use of resources of the Martin Luther King Research & Education Institute at Stanford University, [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/). Other sources ill be scanned and placed on our Schoology site.*

Recommended Texts:


Course Schedule:

*Pre-Course Assignment

Please watch the following two interviews before our first class meeting:

-NBC, Meet the Press, “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” (1965, 25:00)  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAtsAwGreyE

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=1789 (10:00)

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I. Heschel, Hasidism, and Modern Life – Sep. 16-20

-Susannah Heschel, Introduction, EW

-AJH, selections, *The Ineffable Name of God: Man* (Yiddish poetry), translated by Morton Leifman


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II. MLK: Early Life, Cultural Roots, and Intellectual Growth – Sep. 23-27

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_501122_00

-Lewis Baldwin, selections, *There is a Balm in Gilead* (1991), pp. 15-29; 160-174; 275-310

-Rufus Burrow, Chapter 4, “King’s Conception of God,” *God and Human Dignity* (Notre Dame, 2007), pp. 89-123

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III. *God in Search of Man*: Heschel’s Theological Worldview – Sep. 30-Oct. 4


-AJH, *EW*, Sections 1 and 3

-Shai Held, Chapters 1 and 3, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence* (2013)

- Chapter 1 – “Wonder, Intuition, and the Path to God,” pp. 28-46, 52-71
IV. Thrust into Leadership: MLK, The Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the SCLC – October 7-11

-Taylor Branch, *King Years*, Chapter 1

-Jo Ann Robinson, Chapter 2, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*


-MLK, Address at First Mass Meeting of the MIA at Holt Street Baptist Church (Dec. 3, 1955)

  - Text & Audio (5:00):
    http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/the_addres_to_the_first_montgomery_imp
    rovement_association_mia_mass_meeting/


-NPR, “Civil Rights Icon Rosa Parks Dies” (October 25, 2005, Cheryl Corley, 6:00)


-Shai Held, Chapter 4, “The Pathos of the Self-Transcendent God,”


-Edward K. Kaplan, “Prophetic Radicalism: Sacred Humanism & Social Action,” *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Poetics of Piety*, pp. 100-113

-AJH, Section 2, *EW*

-Susannah Heschel, “Theological Affinities in the Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King, Jr.” *Conservative Judaism* L: 2-3 (1998), 126-143

http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-ideas/cj/classics/heschel/theological-
affinities-in-the-writings-o.pdf

VI. King’s Pilgrimage to Non-Violence: Jesus, Gandhi, and African American Experience – Oct. 21-25

-MLK, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi” (July 1959)


- PBS, *Freedom Riders* (documentary film, Stanley Nelson, 2011, 1:53:00)  
  [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanaexper/freedomriders/watch](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanaexper/freedomriders/watch)

- Mississippi History Now, “Fannie Lou Hamer: Civil Rights Activist”  
  [http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/51/fannie-lou-hamer-civil-rights-activist](http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/51/fannie-lou-hamer-civil-rights-activist)

- Fannie Lou Hamer’s Testimony at the 1964 Democratic Convention (6:30)
  - Video & Transcript:  


- Taylor Branch, *King Years*, Chapters 6, 7, 8

VIII. Birmingham and the March on Washington, DC – Nov. 4-8

- MLK, “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963)  
  [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf)

- PBS, The Tavis Smiley Show, “Interview with Jonathan Rieder,” author of *Gospel of Freedom* (April 4, 2013, 26:00)  
  [http://video.pbs.org/video/2364991116/?starttime=1200000](http://video.pbs.org/video/2364991116/?starttime=1200000)

- MLK, “I Have a Dream” (August 28, 1963)
  - Text:  
    [http://mlkkpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/publications/speeches/address_at_march_on_washington.pdf](http://mlkkpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/publications/speeches/address_at_march_on_washington.pdf)

  - Video:  

- Time Magazine, 50th Anniversary Retrospective on “I Have a Dream” (August 2013—Please explore this multi-media exhibit, including “3,000 Miles to History” and “Tell Em about the Dream”)  

- MLK, “Eulogy for the Martyred Children” (September 18, 1963)  

- Taylor Branch, *King Years*, Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12
VIII. Faith & Interfaith: Heschel’s Vision of Interreligious Engagement – Nov. 11-15

- AJH, “No Religion is an Island,” EW, p. 116-136


- Eva Fleischner, “Heschel’s Significance for Jewish-Christian Relations,” Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring His Life and Thought, pp. 142-164

- Arnold Eisen, “Heschel and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism,” Modern Judaism, Volume 29, Number 1, February 2009, pp. 4-15

IX. Malcolm X, Black Power, and Black-Jewish Tensions – Nov. 18-22


X. Valleys & Mountaintops: Economic Justice & The Vietnam War – Nov. 25-29


-MLK, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” (April 3, 1968)
  - Text: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/publications/speeches/I've_been_to_the_montaintop.pdf
  - Audio: http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm

-Taylor Branch, *King Years*, Chapters 13-18


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**XI. Prayer, Preaching, and Religious Praxis the Works of Heschel & King**

-AJH, *EW*, Section 5, pp. 137-168

-Shai Held, Chapters 6 and 7, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence* (Dec. 2013)
  - 6 – “The Self that Transcends Itself,” pp. 198-205


-NPR, “King’s Speeches Still Influencing World Rhetoric: An Interview with Jonathan Reider” (Cheryl Corley: Host, April 4, 2008, 18:00)

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**XII. The Legacies of Heschel & King Today—Dec. 9-13**


-Taylor Branch, *King Years*, Epilogue

-The Ikeda Center, Interview with Vincent Harding, “The Inconvenient Hero—MLK” (8:30)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzaqVxVp3B4