Theology of the Jewish Year
RB-JTHT-230

Fall 2013-2014

Shanah Bet
The Rabbinical School of Hebrew College

Monday, 2:30-4:00 pm, Room 101

Instructor:

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Course Description:

This course is designed to provide students with a context for in-depth reflection on the theological motifs imbedded in, and emerging from, the various rituals and customs of the annual liturgical calendar. We will situate this discussion within a broader exploration of the nature of time in various Jewish theological sources. Our studies will be dedicated to the examination of three major topics: (1) Day & Night, (2) Shabbat, and (3) the Shalosh Regalim. We will analyze a variety of classical and modern Jewish texts and other cultural creations as well as relevant materials from other religious and secular traditions.

Required Books:

- Irving Greenberg, The Jewish Way
- Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy

Please also bring a Hebrew/English Tanakh and a siddur to all class meetings.

*All other sources will be posted on Schoology and distributed in class.

Class Requirements:

- Regular class preparation, attendance, and discussion
- Weekly online havruta exchanges
- D’var Torah (midterm assignment; instructions below)
- Lesson plan (final assignment; instructions below)

Class Meetings (13 total):

- September – 16, 30
- October – 7, 14, 21, 28
- November – 4, 11, 18
- December – 2, 9, 16
* Closing Dinner – Thursday, December 19

-Class Schedule & Assignments-

**Introductory Readings, September 16-30**

- Michael Fishbane, “Introducing Jewish Theology,” *Sacred Attunement*, pp. 43-45

**Questions:**

- What are the key elements of Jewish theology as Fishbane outlines them in this brief excerpt from *Sacred Attunement*?
- How do you understand the classical arc of Jewish time—creation, revelation, and redemption? What is the place of teleology in your thinking?
- How do Greenberg and Waskow each understand the rhythms of the calendar year? What are some points of convergence and divergence in their readings?

**UNIT I: Night & Day, October 7-14**

- Arthur Green, “*Shacharit,*” *These Are the Words*, p. 101
- “Prayer Before Dawn,” *Tzava’at Ha’Rivash* #16, translated by Or N. Rose & Ebn Leader in *God in All Moments*, p. 22-23
- Arthur Green, “*Minhah,“ and *Arvit, Ma’ariv,”* *These are the Words*, pp. 97, 77
• “Why is the Afternoon Prayer Called Minhah?” Kedushat Levi, Hayei Sarah, translated by Or N. Rose
• Hashkiveinu (My People’s Prayer Book)

• Nehemia Polen, “Jacob’s Remedy: A Prayer for the Dislocated [A teaching from the Sefat Emet, Va Yetzei],” Jewish Mysticism & the Spiritual Life, pp. 201-208

Questions:
-What is one kavannah you might carry with you into each of the three daily prayer services from these readings?

-How do the three daily tefilot figure in your prayer life?

UNIT II: SHABBAT, October 21-28

• Abraham Joshua Heschel, selections from The Sabbath included in Between Man and God, pp. 214-229 (+ notes)

• Irving Greenberg, “Toward a Pluralist Shabbat Experience,” The Jewish Way, pp. 175-181

• Arthur Green, “Shabbat” (including the brief guide to Shabbat observance), These are the Words, p. 255

• “The Secret of the Sabbath,” Zohar II 135a-b, translated by Daniel Matt, The Essential Kabbalah, p. 80 (+ notes)

• “A Well in the Field,” Va-Yetzei, Sefat Emet, translated by Arthur Green, The Language of Truth, p. 44

• Traditional Friday Night Kiddush (My People’s Prayer Book)

• Marcia Falk, Friday Night Kiddush and Related Blessings, The Book of Blessings

• Traditional & Alternative Versions of Havdalah (My People’s Prayer Book and Siddur Kol Ha’Neshamah [Reconstructionist])

Questions:
-How do you go about fashioning the “architecture” of Shabbat? What are some of the things you do and do not do to make this day sacred?
-What is one symbol or image from the rituals of 
 kiddush or havdalah that you find
 particularly meaningful? Why?

UNIT III: SHALOSH REGALIM

(Pesach, Nov. 4-11; Shavuot, Nov. 18-Dec.2; Shavuot, Dec. 9-16)

- Arthur Green, “Pesah,” “Shavuot,” “Sukkot,” These Are the Words, p. 246, 259, 6
- Pesach:
  - Parker Palmer, “Spring,” The Fetzer Institute
  - Selections from the “Maggid” section of the Haggadah (My People’s Prayer Book)
  - Selections from The Women’s Seder Sourcebook, edited by Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Tara Mohr, and Catherine Spector
- Shavuot:
  - Arthur Waskow, “Trek through Anxiety & Hope—Counting the Omer” and “Peak Experience—Shavuot,” Seasons of Our Joy, pp. 165-183, 185-203
  - “Black Fire on White Fire,” Kedushat Levi, Shavuot, translated by Or N. Rose in Speaking Torah: Spiritual Teachings from Around the Maggid’s Table, Volume II, pp. 219-220
- Sukkot:
  - Irving Greenberg, “Journey to Liberation: Sukkot,” The Jewish Way, pp. 94-118
  - Jonathan Wittenberg, “From Yom Kippur to Sukkot,” The Eternal Journey, pp. 81-83
“Houses & Booths,” Mei Ha’Shiloah, Section II, Va’Yishlah

- Contemporary Ushpizin customs (Ritual Well, My Jewish Learning, AJWS, Hazon, etc.)

-Parker Palmer, “Autumn,” The Fetzer Institute

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**D’var Torah—Guidelines**

Please write a *d’var Torah* (1,000-1,250 words) relating to any of the issues we have discussed in class to date. Please submit a written draft to me electronically the day before class (Sunday, 6pm). You will then present a version of your work orally to the class at the beginning of the session the following day—8-10 minutes. We will create a roster of presenters during our first session.

Your presentation should include the following elements:

- One biblical source
- One pre-modern Jewish source (Rabbinics through Hasidism)
- One modern or contemporary source (Jewish or non-Jewish)

Questions to consider as you write your *d’var Torah*:

- Whom are you addressing?
- Why do you care about this issue?
- Why should your reader care about this issue?
- What is one major idea or question you want the reader to recall after reading or hearing your piece?

**Final Assignment—Guidelines**

Please prepare a lesson plan for adult learners in a synagogue or other communal setting on one Jewish holiday or observance that we did not explore in this course. The session you are designing is 90-minutes and has 20 participants from different walks of Jewish and interfaith life.

In preparing your lesson plan, please include the following elements:

- Title
- Goals (2-4)
- Introduction
- Session Elements (examples: havruta study-30 minutes; film clips-10 minutes; group discussion-20 minutes; journaling-15 minutes; etc.)
- Textual and other sources
- Guiding Questions (3-5)
- Conclusion
- For Further Exploration (resources for your students)