

University of Manitoba
Faculty of Arts
Department of Religion
Rabbinic Judaism RLG N 2760 (A01)
crn 14818

Fall 2010, Regular Session, 3 credits (one semester)
Tuesday & Thursday 1-2:15 pm, September 14 – December 7
Room 114 St. John's College

Instructor: Justin Jaron Lewis
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11 am, or by appointment

Course Description

There have never been many Jews in the world, but their tradition has fascinated and influenced much of the world and has survived through extreme challenges. This course is an introduction to Rabbinic Judaism, the basis of Jewish tradition as we know it today.

In this course, “Rabbinic Judaism” means the kind of Judaism which emphasizes the study of sacred texts and life according to their laws, as interpreted by learned men known as rabbis. It spans the centuries from the days of the Roman Empire to the American Revolution. “Mainstream Judaism” would be a non-academic but fairly accurate synonym during most of this time period.

A distinctive feature of Rabbinic Judaism is its emphasis on text study. Our course will focus on a number of books composed by rabbis between the third and eighteenth centuries of the Common Era. Each of these texts has its own “personality” which we will get to know.

We will read and discuss selections from the Mishnah, Midrash, the Talmud, the traditional prayer book, commentaries on the Torah, codes of Jewish law, rabbis’ answers to learned questions, and mystical and devotional literature. Each selection will relate to the revered scriptural/ liturgical passage(s) known as “the *Shema*” (“Hear, O Israel”, based on Deuteronomy 6:4), which is recited twice or more daily by Rabbinic Jews and is said to sum up core Jewish beliefs and values.

We will also read scholarly articles relating to these texts and to Rabbinic Judaism generally, including literary, historical, feminist and other scholarly perspectives.

The format of the course will be a combination of lecture/discussion and seminar / text study. Lectures will put the texts we are looking at in historical context and fill in aspects of Rabbinic Judaism not dealt with in course readings. Text study will focus on understanding each of the Rabbinic texts we’ll look at, and how they relate to each other, to the *Shema* and to broader issues in Jewish life.

Required Textbooks – available at U of M bookstore

1) *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH: Student Edition*. Philadelphia: JPS (Jewish Publication Society). This is the best modern, scholarly Jewish edition of the Jewish Bible, with the traditional Hebrew text alongside a clear English translation. Other editions of the Bible may be used for reference, but this one is required. Bring it to each class, from the beginning of the course.

2) Solomon, Norman. *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2000. Please read this short book early in the semester for general background on Judaism; as of Tuesday Sept. 28th, I will assume you are familiar with it and I will not spend time presenting information which is in this book.

Other readings

There will be a required reading for each Tuesday and Thursday of the course, beginning September 21. Any readings not in the textbooks will be provided by the instructor as handouts or posted on the course Angel site. A full schedule of readings and class topics will be provided at the beginning of classes and all readings will be available early in the course.

Evaluation and Assignments

1) Attendance: Required to pass

As per University policy, regular attendance is expected; in the case of absence, however, students remain responsible for all instruction, notes and announcements they may have missed. Students should consult the university's policy on attendance in the General Calendar.

Beginning September 28, I will take attendance at each class. Attending 16 of the remaining 19 classes will count as full attendance for purposes of passing the course. Any further absences would have to be for a sound reason approved by the instructor. For the sake of your class participation grade, and your learning, you should attend every class if at all possible.

2) Participation: 15%

In general, this will be based my assessment of your participation through asking and responding to questions in each class. (Verbal participation at each class beginning Sept. 28th counts for 1% per class; there are actually 19 classes but the maximum for this portion of your grade is 15%. I reserve the right to adjust this portion of your grade based on my assessment of the *quality* of your participation, and will alert you if I am thinking of doing so.)

3) Written Assignments

All written assignments are to be submitted by e-mail to Justin.Lewis@umanitoba.ca, as attachments in .doc, .docx, .odf, or .rtf file format.

Use margins set at or about 1 inch / 2.5 cm; Times New Roman 12-point type; double-spaced; pages numbered. Include your name in the attachment. You may follow any style guide, as long as source references include enough information to allow me to look them up readily—so source references must include page numbers, though not all style guides require this.

My expectations for each of these assignments will be discussed further in class. Please note the different “late submission policies” for the different assignments.

I) Very brief reports on the readings from Jewish texts: 9% total (1% each), due weekly (most weeks) through the semester

“The *Shema*,” a Scriptural reading / prayer recited regularly by Rabbinic Jews, is understood somewhat differently in each of the different texts we will be looking at. *After* we study each Rabbinic text, e-mail me brief (one or two sentences) answers to the following two questions:

1) What is this text referring to when it discusses the *Shema*, or what parts of the *Shema* does it refer to? (The definition of “the *Shema*” varies from “Deuteronomy 6:4” to “reciting three specific selections from Scripture plus three prayers composed by the Rabbis plus later additions, with specified gestures”. Some texts we will look at focus on the words of Deuteronomy 6:4, others on other words or on aspects of the ritual of reciting the words.)

2) In this text, what does the *Shema* mean, or why is it important? (According to different texts, the *Shema* may be about theology, or rules, or ritual behaviour. One text we will study sees the *Shema* as teaching the absolute oneness of God, while another says that it is about God’s masculine and feminine aspects embracing each other.)

We will discuss these points about each text as we read it in class, so this is an easy assignment. Your report on each week’s Rabbinic text is due before class the following Tuesday, beginning September 28th. You’ll get 0.5% if one of your two answers is more or less right in my estimation, and 1% if both are. There are 9 of these assignments, for a total of 9%.

Late submission policy: In general, these reflections will not be accepted late, because the point is to make sure you are keeping up with our text study.

II) Reflections on the scholarly readings: 16% total (2% each), also due throughout the semester, almost weekly

It is essential to read and think about the scholarly readings *before* we talk about them in class.

Therefore, each week, starting at the beginning of October – preferably on the Wednesday, but at the latest before the Thursday class – send me a reflection on the assigned reading from academic scholarship which is going to be discussed at the Thursday class. Suggested length: 250 words / one page; longer is fine.

Your reflection should briefly summarize the contents, or what you consider the main theme and highlights, of the reading, and tell me something about what you find interesting, aggravating, incomprehensible, or whatever, and what thoughts or questions the reading brings up for you. As the course goes on, your reflections should include some thoughts on how new readings relate to earlier ones and how your own thinking about Judaism (or any other relevant topic – Bible, prayer, tradition) is developing.

I will mark each reflection as a mini-essay, out of 2, based primarily on how much it shows me that you have read and thought the week’s reading, and secondarily on clarity and readability. (Informal style is fine for these reflections, but egregiously sloppy thinking or writing needs to be avoided.) There are 8 of these assignments for a total of 16%.

Late submission policy: In general, these reflections will not be accepted late, because the whole point is to write something about the week’s assigned readings before the week’s classes begin. It may be worth asking for an extension in dire circumstances, but don’t push it. Take advantage of the fact that there are some weeks without this assignment to do these readings and reflections in advance!

III) Book Review: 30%, due Friday October 29th

Find a book which is an introduction to Judaism (or to Jewish culture or Jewish history, etc.) Your choice must be confirmed with me. Write a report on the book which briefly sums up its contents and gives me an idea of what you have learned from it and how it relates to material we are covering in this course.

The purpose of this assignment is to broaden your learning about Jewish tradition beyond what you'll hear and read in this course; therefore, be particularly alert to any differences in perspective or outright contradictions between this book and our course, and mention them in your review. Suggested length: 1250 words / 5 pages.

Early submission bonus: Submissions will be accepted as early as September 29th, with an early submission bonus of 0.1 out of 30 per day.

Late submission policy: There is a one-day grace period followed by a late submission penalty of 3 points out of 30 per day.

IV) Creative project OR Research paper: 30%, due Wednesday December 1st

As the course nears its conclusion, you have a choice of a creative project which gives you a chance to respond to the material in a non-linear way, grounded in imagination, *or* a more conventional research paper. Either project should focus on a particular text we have studied or a theme arising from the course, and either option should involve the same commitment of your time and energy.

Creative Project:

Choose a text we have studied, or a theme that arises from the course (*some possible examples:* changes in Jewish understandings of the Shema; the survival of a tradition under difficult circumstances; Jewish women in the world of the Rabbis...) and create a story, or a dialogue, or a painting, or a video, or a song, or an installation, etc... which arises from your in-depth engagement with this theme or text.

We will discuss expectations and possibilities for this assignment further in class. It will be essential to check in with me as you develop your idea, and, if possible, submit drafts, sketches, etc. for my comments as you work on it.

Whatever project you do should be accompanied by a brief (1-2 page) "artist's statement" telling me about your idea and how it relates to something from the course. If you do additional research, provide a bibliography.

Research Paper:

As in any other Arts course, choose a topic arising from the course, in consultation with me, do substantial additional reading, work out a thesis statement, and write a paper working through an idea about Rabbinic Judaism, grounded in your reading. Here too, we will discuss expectations and possibilities further in class, and submitting drafts of your work for my comments is highly recommended.

Early submission bonus for Creative Project or Research Paper: Submissions will be accepted as early as October 31st, with an early submission bonus of 0.1 out of 30 per day.

Late submission policy for Creative Project or Research Paper: If needed and asked for, an extension without penalty will be granted till any time on Tuesday December 7th (the day of our last class) but that's it; I cannot accept this assignment at all after December 7th, because of my winter research commitments.

There are no exams in this course.

Technology-related policies for this course

No computers in class; bring pens/pencils and paper/notebooks. No earphones. No use of cell phones or other personal electronic devices in class; please turn them off. Exception: If anyone wishes to record classes, talk it over with me.

Outside class, internet access is required. The course Angel site will be used extensively, and all written assignments are to be submitted electronically as e-mail attachments in .doc, .docx, .odf or .rtf format

Important Dates / Tentative Class Schedule

NB: because of the Jewish holy day Rosh Hashanah, this course begins later than others. Beginning early in the semester, we will study a Rabbinic text each Tuesday and a scholarly academic article each Thursday. A detailed schedule of readings will be distributed on the first day of class, at the latest, and the readings themselves will be distributed or posted on the course Angel site early in the semester. Students expecting to do a research paper as the final project are advised to skim through all the assigned readings as soon as possible as an aid to choosing a research topic.

Thursday September 9 – NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

Week 1: Hear *what*, O Israel? “The *Shema*” in the Bible

Tuesday September 14 – Course introduction

Thursday September 16 – Text study from JPS *Tanakh*: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Week 2: From the Bible to the Mishnah

Tuesday September 21 – Lecture / discussion on history, legend, and texts

Wednesday September 22 – end of registration revision period

Thursday September 23 – NO CLASS (1st day of Sukkot).

Required Reading: *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*. As of next Tuesday's class I will assume that everyone has read this book.

Week 3: Mishnah: Timing of Ritual

Tuesday September 28 – taking attendance begins

– Text study, selection from Mishnah Berakhot; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday's class

Thursday September 30 – NO CLASS (Shemini Atzeret) – time to read the academic article assigned for next Thursday

Week 4: Siddur – Order of Prayers

Tuesday October 5 – brief report on the Mishnah due before class (answers to 2 questions)
– Text Study: Siddur (traditional prayerbook); submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday’s class

Thursday October 7 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Week 5: Midrash: The *Shema* as Dialogue

Tuesday October 12 – brief report on Siddur reading due before class

– Text Study: Midrash; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday’s class

Thursday October 14 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Week 6: Talmud: Aggadah: The *Shema* in Legend

Tuesday October 19 – brief report on Midrash reading due before class

– Text Study: Talmud; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday’s class

Thursday October 21 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Week 7: Torah commentators: The meaning of the words of Scripture

Tuesday October 26 – brief report on Talmud reading due before class

– Text Study: Torah commentaries; submit the required brief report on these selections before next Tuesday’s class

Thursday October 28 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Friday October 29 – Due Date for Book Review

Week 8: Maimonides: Law and Intellectual Understanding

Tuesday November 2 – brief report on Torah commentaries reading due before class

– Text Study: Maimonides; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday’s class

Thursday November 4 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Week 9: The *Shema* in bed and on the deathbed

Tuesday November 9 – brief report on Maimonides selection due before class

– Text Study: traditional prayers and rules; submit the required brief report on these selections before next Tuesday’s class

Thursday November 11 – NO CLASS – Remembrance Day, and no academic article assigned – work on your Creative Project or Research Paper

Week 10: Zohar: Mystical Theology

Tuesday November 16 – brief report on “the *Shema* in bed and on the deathbed” due before class

– Text Study: Zohar; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday’s class

Wednesday November 17 – last date for Voluntary Withdrawal without academic penalty
– recommended date to submit a draft of your final project

Thursday November 18 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Week 11: Responsa: Questions of Law and Practice

Tuesday November 23 – brief report on Zohar selection due before class

– Text Study: Responsa; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday's class

Thursday November 25 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Week 12: Devotional Literature: Worship

Tuesday November 30 – brief report on Responsa selection due before class

– Text Study: *Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah*; submit the required brief report on this selection before next Tuesday's class

Wednesday December 1 – Due Date for Creative Project or Research Paper

Thursday December 2 – Reflection on the academic article assigned for today due before class

Conclusion

Tuesday December 7 – last class

– brief report on *Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah* due before class

Accommodations for Student Needs

I will do my best to accommodate any particular student needs relating to health, differences in ability, religious holidays, etc. Please speak to me early in the course to make arrangements.

Student Resources

The Learning Assistance Centre is located in 201 Tier Building. Advisors provide a wide range of services focused on improvement of academic learning skills. In addition to individual consultations, the Centre offers workshops on test-taking, note-taking, essay and term paper writing, and listening skills.

Writing Tutors operate from both the Elizabeth Dafoe Library and the Learning Assistance Centre and can be accessed either by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Check scheduled hours of availability on-line through the Learning Assistance Centre site, <http://umanitoba.ca/student/u1/lac/> or the Elizabeth Dafoe Library site, <http://umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/dafoe/>.

The Virtual Learning Commons is a unique learning and social networking site at the University of Manitoba. Students can access Writing Tutors and a variety of Learning Assistance Centre resources on-line at www.umanitoba.ca/virtualllearningcommons. There are several links to excellent, brief on-line tutorials on integrity in academic work (e.g., what is plagiarism? How do you paraphrase? What are appropriate citation formats?) and a useful Assignment Manager wherein entering the due date for a term paper automatically creates a timetable for completion of each step in its preparation and execution.

Academic Integrity / Academic Dishonesty

Please be aware of core principles (the wording here is suggested by the Center for Academic Integrity):

Honesty

An academic community of integrity advances the quest for truth and knowledge by requiring intellectual and personal honesty in learning, teaching, research, and service.

Trust

An academic community of integrity fosters a climate of mutual trust, encourages the free exchange of ideas, and enables all to reach their highest potential.

Fairness

An academic community of integrity establishes clear standards, practices, and procedures and expects fairness in the interactions of students, faculty, and administrators.

Respect

An academic community of integrity recognizes the participatory nature of the learning process and honours and respects a wide range of opinions and ideas.

Responsibility

An academic community of integrity upholds personal accountability and depends upon action in the face of wrongdoing.

In this context, please familiarize yourself with the following University regulations covering plagiarism and cheating (from *University of Manitoba 2010-2011 Undergraduate Course Calendar*, General Academic Regulations and Requirements, Section 8.1):

Plagiarism or any other form of cheating in examinations, term tests or academic work is subject to serious academic penalty (e.g. suspension or expulsion from the faculty or university). Cheating in examinations or tests may take the form of copying from another student or bringing unauthorized materials into the exam room (e.g., crib notes, pagers or cell phones). Exam cheating can also include exam impersonation. (Please see Section 4.2.8 on Exam Personation).

A student found guilty of contributing to cheating in examinations or term assignments is also subject to serious academic penalty.

To plagiarize is to take ideas or words of another person and pass them off as one's own. In short, it is stealing something intangible rather than an object. Plagiarism applies to any written work, in traditional or electronic format, as well as orally or verbally presented work. Obviously it is not necessary to state the source of well known or easily verifiable facts, but students are expected to appropriately acknowledge the sources of ideas and expressions they use in their written work, whether quoted directly or paraphrased. This applies to diagrams, statistical tables and the like, as well as to written material, and materials or information from Internet sources.

To provide adequate and correct documentation is not only an indication of academic honesty but is also a courtesy which enables the reader to consult these sources with ease. Failure

to provide appropriate citations constitutes plagiarism. It will also be considered plagiarism and/or cheating if a student submits a term paper written in whole or in part by someone other than him/herself, or copies the answer or answers of another student in any test, examination, or take-home assignment.

Working with other students on assignments, laboratory work, take-home tests, or on-line tests, when this is not permitted by the instructor, can constitute Inappropriate Collaboration and may be subject to penalty under the Student Discipline By-Law.

An assignment which is prepared and submitted for one course should not be used for a different course. This is called “duplicate submission” and represents a form of cheating because course requirements are expected to be fulfilled through original work for each course.

When in doubt about any practice, ask your professor or instructor.

The Student Advocacy Office, 519 University Centre, 474-7423, is a resource available to students dealing with Academic Integrity matters.

Additional note: The Faculty reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designated to detect plagiarism. The common penalty in Arts for plagiarism in a written assignment, test or examination is F on the paper and F for the course. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as the purchase of an essay or cheating on a test or examination, the penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department in Arts or from all courses taught in this Faculty.

Grade Distribution

Although marks are worked out in percentages, what will appear on your transcript is a letter grade. Here is a chart of how percentages translate into letter grades (as established by the Department of Religion) and GPA (grade point averages):

Percentage	Description (from University calendar)	Letter Grade	GPA
0-49%	failure	F	0
50-55%	marginal	D	1
56-64%	adequate	C	2
65-70%	Satisfactory	C+	2.5
71-79%	Good	B	3
80-85%	Very good	B+	3.5
86-94%	Excellent	A	4
95-100%	Exceptional	A+	4.5