



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Jewish Thought and the World to Come: Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2020

Course Number: JPHI 1919 – PQT

Sessions Meet: Tuesday, 4.40pm—6.20pm

Instructors: Rabbi Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Overview

The aim of this class is to explore the ways in which Jewish texts and thinkers have understood the experience of the soul after death across the ages. We will begin with a range of approaches taken to the afterlife in civilizations around the Ancient Near East, and then turn to Jewish thought as it evolved over time starting with the Biblical text and ending in the modern world. We will cover debates concerning truths about which the stakes could not be higher and survey some of the most compelling and imaginative pieces of Jewish literature ever produced, correcting popular misconceptions and shedding light on areas rarely discussed.

Required Texts

For this course there are no materials that you'll be required to purchase—all readings will be made available on canvas or are available online and will be linked or indicated on the canvas page.

Attendance and Participation

This class will be heavily focused on our in-class sessions and it is vital that you both attend and participate. Poor attendance (or frequently arriving late to class) will lower your final course grade noticeably.

Due Dates

Assignments must be turned in on the date and hour they are due unless an extension has been arranged in advance. If you anticipate needing an extension, please let me know well before the due date. Readings listed above a particular date are to be read for that date.

Please be aware of the University's *Academic Integrity Statement* as all students are expected to abide by it, and note the following two announcements:

- *Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu during the first weeks of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.*
- *Academic support is available to you if you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. She is available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am - 6pm. To make an appointment, go to yu2.mywconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support".*

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation – 20%

Midterm – 35%

Final Exam/Project – 45%

Week 1: Introduction

Readings: N/A

September 1st: “Why we don’t talk about the World to Come?”

Week 2: The Ancient World—Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia

Readings: Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell* (1-18); Plato, *The Republic* (Selections).

September 8th: Neutral and Moral Immortality

Week 3: The Biblical Text I—*Prohibitions*

Readings: Hebrew Bible (*Selections*)

September 15th: Prohibitive Implications

Week 4: The Biblical Text II—*Intimations*

Readings: Hebrew Bible (*Selections*)

September 22nd: Hints of Heaven and Hell

Weeks 5-6: Sukkot

Week 7: The Apocryphal Imagination—*A Break from the Hebrew Bible*

Readings: Maccabees 2 & 4 (*Selections*); Enoch 1 (*Selections*)

October 13th: The Journeys Begin

Week 8: The Rabbinic Sages I—*The Ins and Outs*

Readings: Mishnah (*Selections*)

October 20th: Holding the Line

Week 9: *MIDTERM*****

Readings: N/A

October 27th: In-class Midterm

Week 10: The Rabbinic Sages II—*Death’s Door & More*

Readings: Talmud (*Selections*)

November 3rd: Facing New Fears

Week 11: The Middle Ages I—*Visionary Midrash*

Readings: *Gedulat Moshe* (*Selections*)

November 10th: An Explosion of Images

Week 12: The Middle Ages II—*Philosophers and Poets*

Readings: Judah HaLevi, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Immanuel of Rome (*Selections*)

November 17th: A New Language

Week 13: N/A

Readings: N/A

November 24th: Friday Schedule

Week 14: The Middle Ages III—*Pietists and Mystics*

Readings: Judah the Pious (*Selections*); Zohar (*Selections*)

December 1st: Ghosts and the Anatomy of Eternity

Week 15: Bridge to Modernity—*The Popular Imagination*

Readings: Chasidic Tales (*Selections*)

December 8th: Scenes of Feeling

Weeks 16: Where We Stand Today

Readings: Samson Raphael Hirsch, Joseph Soloveitchik, Jonathan Sacks (*Selections*)

December 15th: Back to the Beginning