Suffering, Theodicy, and Repentance: Interreligious Readings of JOB and JONAH

Winter/Spring 2015 – D. Min. Schedule
Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Jan. 27, Feb. 24, Mar. 17, Apr. 14, and May 12

Professor: Dr. Yehezkel Landau, Associate Professor of Interfaith Relations
Office: 60 Lorraine Street, Room 3; Office Hours: Mondays, 2 to 4:30 p.m.; Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. to noon (except for days when this course meets); or by appointment
Phone: (860) 509-9538
Fax: (860) 509-9539
Cell: (860) 944-4504
E-mail: ylandau@hartsem.edu

COURSE RATIONALE AND GOALS:

Job and Jonah are probably the two most “unorthodox” books in the Hebrew Bible. Their principal characters try to make sense of experiences that do not fit the images of God presented in the other books. Moreover, these challenging portrayals evoke the existential questions we all must face, for there are a “Job” and a “Jonah” in each of us: Is there any meaning in suffering, and can the pain or trauma be redeemed? How do we repent, and how might we invite others, including our leaders, to repent? How can we transform ourselves and our communities to be more in keeping with God’s promises and moral imperatives? Aiming at an inclusive method of “practical exegesis,” the course will juxtapose Jewish interpretations of these two books with teachings in the Christian and Muslim traditions.

Goals include:

- to help students appreciate how Jews read their own Scriptures, and how Christian and Muslim approaches to these sacred stories offer complementary insights; hopefully this will foster a non-doctrinaire approach to texts and an openness to multiple readings

- to cultivate an awareness of how contemporary the so-called “Old Testament” is

- to relate the stories in Job and Jonah to our own faith struggles of discernment, fidelity, and transformation

- to encourage a multi-faith conversation around the challenges posed by the texts, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and enrichment
ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- appreciating how any translation is already a distortion of the original text
- developing a basic understanding of the four-level typology of rabbinic exegesis, with special appreciation for the power of midrash (allegorical parable)
- being able to approach Scripture as a source of practical wisdom, rather than a collection of myths or fables
- appreciating Scripture as an underpinning for collective self-understanding throughout history, and relating this awareness to our own life journeys within faith communities
- cultivating a “dialogue” between ancient texts and their wisdom, on the one hand, and contemporary thinkers and their own insights, on the other, and discerning how that cross-generational conversation can enrich our own faith journeys

METHODS OF TEACHING AND DISCUSSION:

An introductory morning session on Jewish exegesis of Scripture, with examples of midrash. Subsequent class sessions will focus on the Biblical texts, as well as theological and philosophical issues raised by these ancient stories. Particular attention will be paid to our own faith responses to suffering, ethical misconduct, guilt feelings, and yearnings for transformation. Instruction will weave together various approaches and interpretations, including the literary, the psychological, and the practical application of insights gleaned from our readings of these texts, as well as Qur’anic references to Job (Ayoub) and Jonah (Yunus). Class discussion will aim at forging an interfaith learning community, wrestling with the challenges within the texts and juxtaposing those “objective” challenges with our own “subjective” faith struggles.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND METHODS OF ASSESSMENT:

Course participants will be expected to have read the assigned readings for each class. They will also be asked to prepare a one-to-two-page reflection statement (typed, double-spaced) for each session, responding to the assigned readings. These will be read by the instructor and returned to the students with comments. The written reflections are meant to help students formulate their insights and questions to offer as part of the class discussion.

A final paper of approximately 15 double-spaced pages is required of students taking the course for credit. The paper should make reference to at least one book listed under “Recommended Readings” at the end of this syllabus. This paper is due the last day of the course (May 12).
Criteria for grades will be as follows: participation in class discussions (20%); grasp of the reading material and creative, critical thinking exhibited in the short reflection statements (30%); and seriousness of engagement with the larger issues raised by Job and/or Jonah, as demonstrated in the final paper (50%). Note: the Seminary’s plagiarism policy will be strictly enforced; all written work must be original unless properly cited.

Attendance: Students are expected to be present and prepared for each class. If you know you will have to miss any class, please inform the professor in advance. Missing two class sessions will adversely affect the final course grade. Missing three or more sessions will result in automatic failure of the course.

Email Communications: Emails to matriculated students (including reading assignments) will be sent to their Hartford Seminary student accounts. Auditors should let the instructor know their preferred email addresses to ensure transmission of messages.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSIONS, TOPICS, AND READINGS**

Books recommended for purchase are bolded with an asterisk: JPS translations, with commentaries, of Job and Jonah; plus books by Kushner; Gutierrez; Perry; and Paulus.

**January 27:** Morning: *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Exegesis*

**READING:** Chapter One, A. “Biblical Narrative” by Joel Rosenberg in *BACK TO THE SOURCES: READING THE CLASSIC JEWISH TEXTS*, edited by Barry Holtz, pp. 31-81 (on reserve)

“Acquire Wisdom”: Reading Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and “Being But Dust and Ashes”: Reading Job in *HOW TO READ THE BIBLE* by Marc Zvi Brettler, pp. 231-255 (on reserve)

Afternoon: *Prophecy, Prayer, and Protest*

**READING:** JOB AND JONAH: QUESTIONING THE HIDDEN GOD by Bruce Vawter, C.M. (Foreward and chs. 1-8, on reserve)


**February 24:** Morning: *The Book of Job: Textual Analysis*

**READING:** *THE BOOK OF JOB* (JPS translation) with introductions by Moshe Greenberg, Jonas C. Greenfield, and Nahum M. Sarna

Afternoon: The Theodicy Challenge: Is There Redemptive Meaning in Suffering?

March 17: Morning: Christian Perspectives on Job, Suffering, and Theodicy

Afternoon: Suffering and Redemption in Islam
READING: “Islam” (chapter 3) in PROBLEMS OF SUFFERING IN RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD by John Bowker, pp. 99-136 (on reserve)

April 14: Morning: The Book of Jonah: Textual Analysis

Afternoon: Teshuvah—Repentance and Return
READING: Selected chapters from ON REPENTANCE IN THE THOUGHT AND ORAL DISCOURSES OF RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK by Pinchas H. Peli and from THEY MADE THEIR SOULS ANEW by Andre Neher (on reserve)

May 12: Morning: Theological and Literary Dimensions of the Jonah Story

Afternoon: Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Jonah
READING: JOB AND JONAH: QUESTIONING THE HIDDEN GOD by Bruce Vawter, C.M. (Chs. 9-12, on reserve)
   Essays from THE JOURNAL OF SCRIPTURAL REASONING, Volume 3, No. 1—June 2003, on the theme “Extending the Signs: Jonah in Scriptural Reasoning” (on reserve)

The Process and Promise of Spiritual Transformation
**Recommended Readings**—the final course paper should make reference to at least one of the following:

- **JUDAISM AND TRAGIC THEOLOGY** by Frederick S. Plotkin
- **MESSENGERS OF GOD: BIBLICAL PORTRAITS AND LEGENDS** by Elie Wiesel
- **THE EXILE OF THE WORD: FROM THE SILENCE OF THE BIBLE TO THE SILENCE OF AUSCHWITZ** by Andre Neher
- **THE DIMENSIONS OF JOB** edited by Nahum M. Glatzer (note, especially, “Job and Jonah” by Leon Roth)
- **STUDIES IN JEWISH THOUGHT (Vol. 1)** by David S. Shapiro—chapters on Job and Jonah
- **THE BOOK OF JOB: A BIOGRAPHY** by Mark Larrimore
- **THE BOOK OF JOB: A CONTEST OF MORAL IMAGINATIONS** by Carol A. Newsom
- **DECONSTRUCTING THEODICY: WHY JOB HAS NOTHING TO SAY TO THE PUZZLE OF SUFFERING** by David B. Burrell
- **JOB AND DEATH NO DOMINION** by Daniel Berrigan
- **IN TURNS OF TEMPEST: A READING OF JOB WITH A TRANSLATION** by Edwin M. Good
- **PROVIDENCE IN THE BOOK OF JOB: THE SEARCH FOR GOD’S MIND** by Jeremy I. Pfeffer
- **J.B.** by Archibald MacLeish
- **ANSWER TO JOB** by C. G. Jung
- **CREATION AND THE PERSISTENCE OF EVIL** by Jon. D. Levenson
- **GOD AND EVIL: A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE** by David Birnbaum
- **EVIL AND SUFFERING** edited by Jacob Neusner
- **JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF SUFFERING** edited by Shalom Carmy
- **WHY DO WE SUFFER?** by Daniel Harrington, S.J.
- **REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING** by William J. O’Malley
- **GOD, EVIL, AND INNOCENT SUFFERING: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION** by John E. Thiel
- **WHEN SUFFERING PERSISTS** by Frederick W. Schmidt, Jr.
- **SUFFERING RELIGION** edited by Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson
- **PROVERBS AND ASHES: VIOLENCE, REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING, AND THE SEARCH FOR WHAT SAVES US** by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker
- **IF GOD IS GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD?** By Benjamin Blech
- **FACING THE ABUSING GOD: A THEOLOGY OF PROTEST** by David R. Blumenthal
- **ARGUING WITH GOD: A JEWISH TRADITION** by Anson Laytner
- **THE HEALER OF SHATTERED HEARTS: A JEWISH VIEW OF GOD** by David J. Wolpe
- **MAKING LOSS MATTER: CREATING MEANING IN DIFFICULT TIMES** by Rabbi David Wolpe
- **NECESSARY LOSSES** by Judith Viorst
- **AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT: A FATHER’S JOURNEY THROUGH**
LOSS by Leonard Fein
FOUND THROUGH LOSS: HEALING STORIES FROM SCRIPTURE AND EVERYDAY SACREDNESS by Nancy Reeves
BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON: ONE FAMILY’S FAITH-JOURNEY THROUGH ILLNESS by Thomas J. Davis
LIVING WITH LOSS, HEALING WITH HOPE: A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE by Rabbi Earl A. Grollman
“Hilkhot Teshuvah” (Laws of Teshuvah/Repentance) by Moses Maimonides, in THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE (Mishneh Torah, Vol. 1)
THE GATES OF REPENTANCE by Rabbeinu Yonah ben Avraham of Gerona
LIGHTS OF RETURN by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook
DAYS OF AWE by S. Y. Agnon
THE YOM KIPPUR ANTHOLOGY by Philip Goodman
YOM KIPPUR READINGS edited by Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins