COURSE SYLLABUS for DI-665

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
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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.

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

Afternoon: 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 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