Judaism and Feminism

Tanhum Yoreh

In this course we will explore the key issues that arise in Judaism with the advent of feminism. In particular, we will examine ritualistic, social and legal issues that pertain to women in Judaism. We will look at the various ways feminism has influenced central lifecycle events in Judaism (birth, coming of age, marriage and divorce). We will discuss each topic from multiple perspectives. No prior knowledge is assumed. The essay topic must be approved. Weeks with a due date are marked with an asterix.

Evaluation: Participation 10% Oral Presentation 10% Test 30% Essay Proposal 10% Final Essay 40%

Week 1 – Introduction (History, Development and Key Issues)

Reading: Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There,"
http://jwa.org/feminism/_html/JWA001c.pdf

Week 2 – Marriage and Divorce:

http://jwa.org/encyclopedia

Week 3 – The Chained Woman (Agunah)


Film: selections from Anat Zuria’s Sentenced to Marriage

Week 4 – Commandments – Positive Time Bound Commandments


Week 5 – Attitudes Towards the Body – Issues of Purity


Week 6 – Sex and Sexuality

Reading: Rachel Sara Rosenthal “Of Pearls and Fish: An Analysis of Jewish Legal Texts on
Sexuality.” http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/167233

*Week 7 – In class test.

*Week 8 – Women of the Wall and other Jewish Feminist Organizations (*essay proposals due)


Film: Yael Katziv’s Praying in Her Own Voice

Week 9 – Women Rabbis – This section will explore the history of the ordination (semikhah) of women across the various Jewish denominations including Maharat, yoetzet halakhah and private ordination.


*Week 10 – Feminism in Prayer and the Synagogue – This section will delineate the key differences in the role and status of women between the various Jewish denominations as they are reflected in prayer (tefillah), the prayer quorum (minyan), segregation in the synagogue (meḥitzah), and being called to the Torah (aliyah). (*oral presentations)


*Week 11 – Reclaiming Judaism – Feminist Approaches to Tradition (*oral presentations)


*Week 12 – Conclusion (*final essays due)

Bibliography


Alpert, Rebecca. Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of


Greenberg, Simon (ed.). *The Ordination of Women as Rabbis: Studies and Responsa*. NY: JTS,


