



FACULTY OF ARTS
CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



PRAGUE JEWISH STUDIES

THE JEWS AND THE “OTHERS” 2012

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Prerequisites: basic knowledge of Judaism
courage to deal with difficult questions
desire to learn

Course Description & Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

The course explores a variety of attitudes towards inner and outer “Others” within Judaism from the perspective of Judaic religious law (Halakhah). It will focus mainly on three groups, which have been subject to various legal limitations: Women, Heretics and Apostates, and Non-Jews. We will analyze both inclusivist and exclusivist approaches in traditional Jewish sources and we will present them in their historical, social, and cultural contexts. We will try to identify fears, conflicting emotions and conditions of Jewish life which gave rise to some traditional ideas pertaining especially to women and Non-Jews. In this regard, a special attention will be paid to the arguments about halakhic status of Islam and Christianity, however, the halakhic response to Eastern religions will be dealt with as well. The three aforementioned themes provoke a serious discussion among contemporary Jewish thinkers. It relates to issues such as gender in Judaism, boundaries of the Jewish community, Jewish denominations, Jewish relation to other religions, religious authority, and many others. As all of the three major themes of this course are reflected in the contemporary discussions on Judaism and Human Rights, the respective issues will be addressed in the closing lecture of every main section showing both constructive and disruptive role that religion can play in the democratic society.

The three major themes will be divided into thirteen lectures. Each lecture will be followed by a seminar where students will work with traditional and contemporary textual sources which relate to particular issues. Students will be expected to participate in critical, sensitive, and informed discussions.



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Required Readings

Walzer, Michael, Menachem Lorberbaum, No'am Zohar, Ari Ackerman. The Jewish political tradition. Vol. 2, Membership. New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2006.

Recommended Readings

Blidstein, Gerald J. The "Other" in Maimonidean Law. *Jewish History*, Vol. 18, No. 2/3, Commemorating the Eight Hundredth Anniversary of Maimonides' Death (2004), pp. 173-195.

Brill, Alan. *Judaism and other religions: models of understanding*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Broyde, Michael J, John Witte. *Human rights in Judaism: cultural, religious, and political perspectives*. Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1998.

Fisher, Shlomo. "Intolerance and tolerance in the Jewish tradition and contemporary Israel". *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol 2, No. 1 (March 2003), 65–80.

Freehof, Solomon Bennett. *The Responsa Literature*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955.

Grossman, Avraham. *Pious and Rebellious, Jewish Woman in the Middle Ages*. Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2004.

Halbertal, Moshe. „*Ones Possessed of Religion*“: *Religious Tolerance in the Teachings of Meiri*. *The Edah Journal* 1:1/ Marhesvan 5761 (2000).

Heifetz, Harold (ed.). *Zen and Hasidism : The Similarities Between Two Spiritual Disciplines*. Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Pub. House, 1996.

Katz, Jacob. *Exclusiveness and tolerance: studies in Jewish-Gentile relations in medieval and modern times*. New York, N.Y. : Behrman House, c1961.

Katz, Nathan. "Buddhist-Jewish Relations". In P. Schmidt-Leukel (ed.). *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*. St. Ottilien, EOS: 2008.

Lewis, Bernard. *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.



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Maimonides, Moses, H M Russell, J Weinberg. *The book of knowledge: from the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides*. New York: Ktav, 1983.

Mintz, Adam. *The relationship of Orthodox Jews with believing Jews of other religious ideologies and non-believing Jews*. New York: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University press, 2010.

Porton, Gary. *Goyim: Gentiles and Israelites in Mishnah and Tosefta*, Brown Press, 1988.

Septimus, Bernard. "Petrus Alfonsi on the Cult at Mecca". *Speculum*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Jul., 1981), pp. 517-533.

Shapiro, Mark B. *Islam and the halakhah*. *Judaism*, 00225762, Summer93, Vol. 42, Issue 3.

Wegner, Judith Romney. *Chattel or person?: the status of women in the Mishnah*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

**A course reader will be distributed to students at the beginning of the course.
All texts will be available both in English and Hebrew.**

Student Responsibility and Code of Conduct

Students are subject to the general standards and requirements of Charles University in regard to attendance, examinations, and conduct, as well as to the specific requirements of the program. The student is expected to assume the initiative in completing all requirements at the time specified.

Assessment and Final Grade

The course grade will be calculated as follows:

Attendance	30%
Participation in class discussions	30%
Final Paper	40%



Schedule

Each lecture will correlate with a seminar held in the same week

1. Introductory lecture

The Oral Tradition and its authority; traditional perspectives on Jewish community – boundaries and margins

2. Women in rabbinic Judaism – a historical perspective

The rabbinic construction of “woman”; halakhic limitations and the struggle for autonomy

3. Women and halakha – contemporary issues

Modern day “agunot”; “mamzerim”; women in public roles; women as religious authorities

4. Heresy – traditional attitudes towards religious deviations

Sects in Judaism; the construction of “Min” in rabbinic literature; rabbinic attitudes towards Karaites

5. Leaving Judaism?

Apostates and secular Jews: exclusivist and inclusivist approaches; secular Jews in the halakhic discussion in the State of Israel

6. Denominational split in Judaism

Major denominations in historical perspective; the orthodox views of other denominations; points of conflict and concord



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7. Converts – choosing Judaism

Conversion in halakhic perspectives; “extended family” versus “community of faith”; conversions and the State of Israel

8. Jews and Non-Jews in the Mishna, Tosefta and Talmuds

Introductory notes on religion and culture; the concept of “idolworship” in biblical and rabbinic texts; defining terms: “Goy”, “Ben Noah”, “Ger Toshav”, “Righteous Gentiles”

9. Islam in the halakhic perspective

Jews under the rule of Muslims; halakhic analysis of Islam from Ge'onim to contemporary opinions

10. Christianity in the halakhic perspective I.

Jews under the rule of Christians; Christianity in the early rabbinic texts; rabbinic construction of Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud; polemical literature

11. Christianity in the halakhic perspective II.

Halakhic analysis of Christianity from Ge'onim to contemporary opinions

12. Buddhism and Hinduism in the halakhic perspective

Judaism in contact with Hinduism and Buddhism: historical account; views on halakhic status of Buddhism and Hinduism; Jewish response to “Jewish Buddhists”

13. Non-Jews in the Jewish state - halakha and morality

Status of non-Jews in the Jewish society: from traditional to modern opinions; inclusivist and exclusivist approaches in their social and historical contexts