The Thought of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2021
Course Number: 15412 (JPHI)
Sessions Meet: M (3:10-4:25pm) and W (3:35-4:50pm)
Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Overview

The aim of this class is to explore the thought of perhaps the most renowned and influential teachers of Judaism at the start of the twenty-first century: the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. With such a wide-ranging and voluminous oeuvre, we will divide his thought into three distinct but intersecting fields—Theology, Ethics, and Politics—and read selections of his writing in those areas. We will cover parts of his Reith Lectures, Covenant & Conversation, The Home We Build Together, To Heal a Fractured World, The Great Partnership, Not in God’s Name, and Future Tense, along with a number of smaller stand-alone essays—with an eye toward considering his sources and examining his central theses, while assessing his unique contribution toward the history of Jewish thought.

Required Texts

For this course there are no material’s that you will 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 is a collaborative endeavor and depends for its success on your steady attendance and informed participation, so your final grade may well be swayed by the quality—in addition to the reality—of your participation in class. Poor attendance (i.e., more than three absences during the term and/or frequently arriving late to class) will lower your final course grade considerably.
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 – 10%
Midterm – 30%
Class Presentation – 20%
Final – 40%
Week 1: Welcome
Readings: n/a
  August 25th: Welcome and Overview

Week 2: Introduction I
Readings: Alienation and Faith (for Next time)
  August 30th: Meeting Rabbi Sacks
Readings: Alienation and Faith (as above)
  September 1st: Setting the Stage

Week 3: Rosh Hashana

Week 4: Introduction II
Readings: Torah and Wisdom: Judaism and the World
  September 13th: [REMOTE] Source and Method
Readings:
  September 15th: Erev Yom Kippur

Weeks 5-6: Sukkot

Week 7: Theology I—The Great Partnership
Readings: In Two Minds
  October 4th: Religion and Science
Readings: Finding God; Why God?
  October 6th: Proof and Faith

Week 8: Theology II—Not in God’s Name
Readings: Dualism
  October 11th: Religion and Violence
Readings: The Universality of Justice, The Particularity of Love
  October 13th: Election and Rejection

Week 9: Ethics I—To Heal a Fractured World Part 1
Readings: Faith as Protest
  October 18th: Religious Ethics
Readings: Charity as Justice
  October 20th: Economic Ethics

Week 10: Ethics II—To Heal a Fractured World Part 2
Readings: Love as Deed
  October 25th: Familial Ethics
Readings: Mending the World
  October 27th: Environmental Ethics

Week 11: Ethics III—To Heal a Fractured World Part 3
Readings: The Kindness of Strangers
  November 1st: Social Ethics
Readings: Responsibility for Society
  November 3rd: Political Ethics
Week 12:
Readings: ***MIDTERM***
    November 8th: ***MIDTERM***
Readings: n/a
    November 10th: Guest Lecture

Week 13: Politics I—Reith Lectures Part 1 & 2
Readings: The Environment of Faith; Numbers: Then and Now
    November 15th: The Walk to Freedom
Readings: The Demoralization of Discourse; The Social Animal (Exodus)
    November 17th: Between State and Self

Week 14: Politics II—Reith Lectures Part 3 & 4
Readings: The Family; Family, Faith, Freedom (Genesis); [The Love That Brings New Life into the World]
    November 22nd: The Nuclear Option
Readings: Paradoxes of Pluralism; The Home We Build Together
    November 24th: The Common Good

Week 15: Politics III—Reith Lectures Part 5 & 6
Readings: Fundamentalism; The Dignity of Difference: Exorcising Plato’s Ghost
    November 29th: When Faith Goes Too Far
Readings: Community of Communities; A Religious Defense of Liberal Democracy
    December 1st: The Current Crisis

Week 16: Jewish Politics
Readings: A People that Dwells Alone?
    December 6th: The Blessing of the Present
Readings: n/a
    December 8th: Presentations

Week 17: Parsha Presentations
Readings: n/a
    December 13th: Presentations
Readings: n/a
    December 15th: Presentations

Weeks 18: Liturgy, Life, and Looking Back
Readings: Koren-Sacks Siddur—Introduction
    December 20th: Praying Faith
Readings: TBD
    December 22nd: Overview

January 7th @ Midday: Final Assessment Due