



# Yeshiva University

## THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

### 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](mailto: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 materials 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](mailto: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.mymvonline.com](http://yu2.mymvonline.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 25<sup>th</sup>**: Welcome and Overview

### **Week 2: Introduction I**

Readings: *Alienation and Faith* (for Next time)

**August 30<sup>th</sup>**: Meeting Rabbi Sacks

Readings: *Alienation and Faith* (as above)

**September 1<sup>st</sup>**: Setting the Stage

### **Week 3: Rosh Hashana**

### **Week 4: Introduction II**

Readings: *Torah and Wisdom: Judaism and the World*

**September 13<sup>th</sup>**: [REMOTE] Source and Method

Readings:

**September 15<sup>th</sup>**: *Erev Yom Kippur*

### **Weeks 5-6: Sukkot**

### **Week 7: Theology I—The Great Partnership**

Readings: *In Two Minds*

**October 4<sup>th</sup>**: Religion and Science

Readings: *Finding God; Why God?*

**October 6<sup>th</sup>**: Proof and Faith

### **Week 8: Theology II—Not in God's Name**

Readings: *Dualism*

**October 11<sup>th</sup>**: Religion and Violence

Readings: *The Universality of Justice, The Particularity of Love*

**October 13<sup>th</sup>**: Election and Rejection

### **Week 9: Ethics I—To Heal a Fractured World Part 1**

Readings: *Faith as Protest*

**October 18<sup>th</sup>**: Religious Ethics

Readings: *Charity as Justice*

**October 20<sup>th</sup>**: Economic Ethics

### **Week 10: Ethics II—To Heal a Fractured World Part 2**

Readings: *Love as Deed*

**October 25<sup>th</sup>**: Familial Ethics

Readings: *Mending the World*

**October 27<sup>th</sup>**: Environmental Ethics

### **Week 11: Ethics III—To Heal a Fractured World Part 3**

Readings: *The Kindness of Strangers*

**November 1<sup>st</sup>**: Social Ethics

Readings: *Responsibility for Society*

**November 3<sup>rd</sup>**: Political Ethics

**Week 12:**

Readings: **\*\*\*MIDTERM\*\*\***

**November 8<sup>th</sup>:** **\*\*\*MIDTERM\*\*\***

Readings: n/a

**November 10<sup>th</sup>:** Guest Lecture

**Week 13: Politics I—Reith Lectures Part 1 & 2**

Readings: *The Environment of Faith; Numbers: Then and Now*

**November 15<sup>th</sup>:** The Walk to Freedom

Readings: *The Demoralization of Discourse; The Social Animal (Exodus)*

**November 17<sup>th</sup>:** 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 22<sup>nd</sup>:** The Nuclear Option

Readings: *Paradoxes of Pluralism; The Home We Build Together*

**November 24<sup>th</sup>:** The Common Good

**Week 15: Politics III—Reith Lectures Part 5 & 6**

Readings: *Fundamentalism; The Dignity of Difference: Exorcising Plato's Ghost*

**November 29<sup>th</sup>:** When Faith Goes Too Far

Readings: *Community of Communities; A Religious Defense of Liberal Democracy*

**December 1<sup>st</sup>:** The Current Crisis

**Week 16: Jewish Politics**

Readings: *A People that Dwells Alone?*

**December 6<sup>th</sup>:** The Blessing of the Present

Readings: n/a

**December 8<sup>th</sup>:** Presentations

**Week 17: Parsha Presentations**

Readings: n/a

**December 13<sup>th</sup>:** Presentations

Readings: n/a

**December 15<sup>th</sup>:** Presentations

**Weeks 18: Liturgy, Life, and Looking Back**

Readings: *Koren-Sacks Siddur—Introduction*

**December 20<sup>th</sup>:** Praying Faith

Readings: TBD

**December 22<sup>nd</sup>:** Overview

**January 7<sup>th</sup> @ Midday:** *Final Assessment Due*