

## **Environmental Ethics and Judaism**

Summer 2003

Sociology 099/410/510, CRN 82194/82195/82196, 2 Credits

Tues/Thurs 7-9:20 PM, Cramer 221

Instructor: Shamu Fenyvesi  
Office Hours: By Arrangement  
Phone & email: (503) 231-4160 shamuf@aol.com

### Course Description

Environmental issues raise fundamental moral and religious questions about human purpose and responsibility in the world. Using Bible, Jewish religious texts, and contemporary writings, we will explore Jewish perspectives on environmental ethics in the context of consumption and waste, food, global climate change and extinction, sense of place/bioregionalism, and bioengineering. Readings and discussions offer diverse perspectives on the role of humans in relation to God and nature, responsibility toward other species, and balancing human needs with ecological health.

Instructional/Learning Needs: Students needing accommodation should immediately inform the instructor. Students can contact Disability Services 725-5664 for support where appropriate.

### Learning Objectives

- ② To perceive the diverse value systems underlying current environmental issues.
- ② To explore Jewish ethical texts, concepts and practices such as: Genesis I and II and Creation, tzar baalei hayyim (prevention of suffering in animals), bal taschit (do not destroy), blessings, awe, the Book of Job.
- ② To demonstrate an understanding of the power of interpretation and the complexity of human expressions of the relationship with the natural world.
- ② To apply understanding of Jewish ethical concepts to current environmental dilemmas.
- ② To become more self-reflective of our personal environmental religious credos.

### Methods

Each class we will engage with a particular concept or text through a brief introduction by the instructor followed by small-group and large-group conversations. Rather than simply judge the Jewish texts and concepts for their commitment to an ecological ethic, we will explore them to understand Jewish perspectives on the relationship with the natural world and to examine our own dynamic ethical stances.

### Course Reading

The readings will be a combination of primary texts (biblical and rabbinic commentary) and scholarly and creative interpretations of Jewish tradition.

### Course Expectations and Approach

- ② Student Participation: I expect a high degree of student responsibility. This includes: prompt attendance, asking for help when you need it, reading and reflection on the readings, and active participation in discussions.
- ② Late Assignments: It is expected that all assignments will be turned in on time. Late assignments will have 10% deducted for each day they are late.
- ② Controversy with Civility: It is expected that even in heated disagreements, members of the class (including the instructor) will treat each other with respect. Listen to understand, rather than to contradict.
- ② I welcome diverse and dissenting opinions. Students will not be evaluated for their views.

### Assignments

1. Discussion Questions: Pairs of students will be assigned a date on which they need to bring 2 questions on each reading for that week. The pair will read the questions to the class to initiate the conversation. Questions should: relate to the text, provoke discussion, make connections between texts and/or course concepts, or reflect students' application of the text to environmental ethical dilemmas. Dates will be assigned to pairs on the first class.
2. Ecological Autobiography, Due July 1. In 2-3 typed (double-spaced) pages reflect on how you have come to the ecological beliefs you hold today. Answer these two questions in your paper. 1. What people, what traditions (religious, family, ethnic), what experiences have shaped your beliefs about the human relationship with the natural world? 2. How does religion affect your ecological beliefs?
3. Critical Reflection, Due July 17. Outline Due, July 10. In 4-5 typed pages (double-spaced) (1) discuss 3 of the ideas which most appealed to you from the course readings and (2) apply those ideas to your personal environmental credo: What do these ideas, stories, texts relate to your environmental ethic? How have these concepts changed (or not) your way of thinking about human-nature relations, spirituality and the way you live your life? An outline of this paper is due July 10<sup>th</sup>. This does not have to be a formal outline, but rather a initial sketch of what you would like to do in your critical reflection. On July 15<sup>th</sup> students are expected to share some of their ideas for the paper in order to cultivate new ideas.

### Evaluation

Participation: 20%  
 Ecological Autobiography: 30%  
 Discussion Questions: 10%  
 Critical Reflection: 40%

### Grading

97-100	A+	93-96	A	90-92	A-
87-89	B+	84-86	B	80-83	B-
77-79	C+	74-76	C	70-73	C-
67-69	D+	64-66	D+	60-63	D-
0-59	F				

## DRAFT Course Schedule

Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments Due
June 24	Introductions, Syllabus, Why religion and ecology, Definitions What is a Jewish text? What do they matter?	Genesis I & II Quinn, <i>Ishmael</i> Jonas, <i>Contemporary problems in ethics</i> . Rockefeller & Elder, <i>Intro</i> Holtz, <i>On Reading Jewish Texts</i>	
June 26	② Interpreting texts ② Creation myths ② Genesis I & II <u>AGGADAH</u>	Ehrenfeld & Bentley, <i>Judaism and Stewardship</i> Fink, <i>Shabbat and the Sabbatical Year</i> Mishnah, <i>Shabbat</i> Waskow, <i>From Compassion to Jubilee</i>	
July 1	② Genesis I & II ② Shabbat, Shmittah, Yovel HALAKHAH	Schwartz, <i>Bal Tashchit</i> Bal Tashchit texts and Responsa	DUE: Ecological Biography
July 3	② Bal Tashchit	Kook, <i>Essays</i> Weintraub, <i>The Spiritual Ecology of Kashrut</i> Waskow, <i>What is Eco-Kosher?</i>	
July 8	② Food: Kosher Laws	Fenyvesi, <i>Blessing the Wine</i> Heschel, <i>God in Search of Man</i> Troster, <i>Created in the Image of God</i> Blessings, Prayer texts	
July 10	② Blessings, Prayer, Psalms TEFILLOT	McKibben, <i>The Comforting Whirlwind</i> Mitchell, <i>Job</i>	DUE: Outline of Critical Reflection
July 15	② The Book Of Job ② Share ideas for final paper <u>AGGADAH</u>	Berry, <i>The Gift of Good Land</i> Cronon, <i>Getting Back to the Wrong Nature</i> Charles et al, <i>Where you at?</i>	
July 17	② Applications, Synthesis ② Conclusions		DUE: Critical Reflection

### Full References for Course Reader

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- Waskow, A. (1980). From compassion to Jubilee. *Tikkun*, 5(2), 78-81.
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