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Translating Jewish Theology into Educational Settings: My Personal and Professional Journey with Neil Gillman at JTS

STEVEN M. BROWN

This special issue of *Conservative Judaism* enables me to honor Professor Neil Gillman and allows us both an opportunity to publicly share the work we have been doing together for the last eleven years at JTS. In 1987 The Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism (JTS, RA, and USCJ) requested that I write material making *Emet Ve-Emunah* understandable to teenagers in the movement.¹ As part of my preparation for writing those materials, which were published by the Commission, I contacted Neil Gillman, a prominent member of the committee that wrote *Emet Ve-Emunah*, who graciously agreed to give me a “guided tour” through the booklet.² He recorded many hours of tapes, and for each chapter pointed out the most salient principles and ideas, including what he termed the “blockbuster idea” in each section. From those core concepts, or big ideas, I crafted an approach to making the material accessible to teens, teachers, and later, as it turns out, to many adults who found it helpful. That’s when my personal love affair with my friend, teacher, and colleague really began.

When I came to JTS in 1996 as Director of the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education, and Assistant Dean of the newly opened William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education, Neil made me an offer I

could not refuse. He bemoaned the fact that few in our movement were doing any serious theological inquiry, teaching, or learning in any of our educational institutions. JTS focused on academics only, not on applied theology needed by our students in the field. Few were seriously engaged in God talk or in understanding how we know what God wants of us, let alone grappling with more difficult issues such as theodicy and eschatology:

I had been teaching theology in the Rabbinical School and List College for thirty-five years, convinced, as a private citizen, that the brand of theology was teachable to students of all ages. Others said no, that it could only be taught to adults. I was not an educator. I was a professor. I did not know anything about education. Professor Lukinsky observed me one day and asked me why I did what I did. He said he spends twenty-five years trying to teach teachers what [I] did instinctually.

I have a sense that there will be an afterlife to the theology that I teach. For any intelligent Jew today, theology is indispensable. Many think it is not necessary, they don't need it. They don't need to teach God or talk to congregants about God. Rather, they say, teach me about how to put on *tefillin*. I couldn't put on *tefillin* if God was not a part of it. If you work in a classroom and are shaky about theology, how will you be able to teach it?

Neil suggested we create a new team taught course (team teaching was almost unheard of at JTS in 1996) that would expose our students to the core theological issues they would need to confront for themselves and as future leaders and educators. We would combine the theology material with pedagogical skills or content knowledge, to be able to teach sophisticated concepts to learners of all ages. I readily accepted Neil's offer and challenge and together we created EDU/PHI 5525 Translating Jewish Theology into Educational Settings. (See Appendix A for abbreviated syllabus.) Neil set the theological agenda, starting with revelation, moving to God, theodicy, and finally eschatology. I morphed the exercises previously created in the WLS manual and added many more to create this new course. After teaching it for one semester on campus, we agreed to try it as the second-ever online course at JTS. Over eleven years we have taught it, on campus and online, to hundreds of JTS students. It was a most popular course,

always filled to the rafters with anywhere from thirty to fifty students each semester. The journey I took with Neil Gillman in developing, tweaking, and fine tuning the approach and materials was one of the most exciting and meaningful professional and personal experiences of my life.

Neil taught me that first and foremost, JTS students must begin to grapple with and understand their own theological views and confusions if they are to eventually deal with these issues with others through their work in the Jewish community. We were committed to creating a safe space for students, allowing them to articulate their own views, doubts, challenges, and faith assumptions, something that was difficult in other academic classes. There were few places in the JTS structure where students could process their views, particularly in light of the faith crisis many endured upon entering the JTS Bible Department classes and learning, perhaps for the first time in their lives, that *Torah mi-sinai* was not everything they had imagined. As a Jewish educator, I felt strongly that Davidson students need to be able to talk about God, a figure often absent in Jewish education since educators were so uncertain of the right things to say and teach. We soon discovered some key centers of concern for students: is Exodus 19 true? For most it was the default position to be taught and learned even if they, the parents, and the rabbi in the shul in which they were teaching did not believe it. Is that the only way to understand revelation? Do faith, belief, and theology matter as much as doing and practicing mitzvot in Judaism? Is it okay to allow more than one theological view in our classrooms, or to move among them ourselves?

The fact of the matter was that Neil had been teaching much of the material (which I will outline later) in his courses over the years, but only to small groups of students. The educational journey we took together involved not only the “what” to teach, but “how” to teach it. I have been profoundly moved and energized by Neil’s grasp of philosophical and theological issues and writers, and I believe it’s fair to say that his whole teaching style and approach changed as he gained exposure to my “Davidson School ideas,” as he calls them. Neil began to ask, for example, the unthinkable question for an academic, “So, let me ask you a Davidson question: how did you feel about what we just did [or read]?” He began to see that the use of small cooperative learning groups, where students were guided to interact with one another and delve into problem areas, or

uncover underlying ideas in texts or secondary readings was a powerful way to engage students, create active learning environments, help them make personal meaning, and shape intimate spaces where students felt free to express deeply felt doubts, frustrations, or points of view that might be too risky to share with a whole class.

When we first began to work together, Neil retained most of his traditional, professorial bluster, getting agitated and grumpy when a student did not have the correct text with her or did something else to annoy him. He could be quite the curmudgeon, and was anything but non-threatening. The educator in me cringed, but I persevered by example. Neil gradually became better than I at creating an open, accepting atmosphere of academia. I have no doubt that while I could still not hold my own teaching the theological materials, Neil could easily do without me in teaching the pedagogical material and how to use it in schools, camps, and adult learning groups. Neil, in the end, was my best student ever.

The Course

Each semester we begin with a screening of an episode entitled “Midterms,” from the second season of *The West Wing*, written by Aaron Sorkin.³ The president confronts a popular radio talk-show host on the issue of her fundamentalist approach to scripture, in which she justifies her opposition to homosexuality based on Leviticus 18:22. His challenge invites her to consider the meaning of other verses that she ought to take seriously.

President Bartlet

Chapter and verse. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions while I had you here. I’m interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. (*small chuckles from the guests*) She’s a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, and always clears the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be? While thinking about that, can I ask another? My Chief of Staff, Leo McGarry, insists on working on the Sabbath, Exodus 35:2, clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it okay to call the police? Here’s one that’s really

important, ‘cause we’ve got a lot of sports fans in this town. Touching the skin of a dead pig makes us unclean, Leviticus 11:7. If they promise to wear gloves, can the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point? Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother, John, for planting different crops side by side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads?

Neil always chuckles as this scene unfolds, as do I, and no matter how many times we have shown it a student will always find a new nuance we have not heard before. This scene is a way for us to set a conversational tone, allowing students to make use of the media with which they are familiar, to enter the more unfamiliar ground of theological readings and discussion, and become more conversant with documentary hypothesis theory. We invite students to tease out the underlying theological issues raised in this scene regarding fundamentalism, the nature of Biblical text, and the privileging of some verses over others.

Near the end of our first session, Neil always explains the first course assignment. Students are asked to write a one-page personal theology addressing certain questions:

1. What is your conception of God?
2. How do we know what God wants of us or what is our understanding of Revelation?
3. Why is there evil in the world?
4. What happens after we die or in the end of days?

Neil admonishes the students to answer in their own words, using no quotes, citations, or references. He wants students to begin to search their souls for ideas and approaches. They are asked to provide us three copies: one for each instructor, which we read and comment upon, and the third copy is placed in an envelope we give them to be taped in the back of their notebooks. During the last session of the semester we invite students to open and review their original theology statements, and discuss any changes that might have occurred in their thinking or, if there were no changes, why they feel even more convinced that they are satisfied with their original writing.

Revelation

Early on in developing the course, Neil set the parameters of the theological issues we would cover, beginning with revelation, moving to God, then to theodicy, and concluding with eschatology. Our methodology was to alternate between Neil's presentations of theological material, highlighting certain sections of the assigned readings, and my focus on the translation into educational practice. Sometimes I begin a unit with a film clip or cooperative learning exercise to give students a common starting point, and at other times I follow on Neil's explication of theological material. Neil begins with Revelation because, "Revelation sets up the role of authority. Issues of authority pervade everything we do as Jews. How active or passive can we be and must we be?"

Once Neil is finished working through the positions of Lamm, Heschel, Rosenzweig, and Kaplan as emblematic of various possible theological stances, the fun begins. Over the years it has been interesting for me to see how Neil's position has evolved. Early on he presented these as four legitimate positions on a continuum from traditionalist to liberal. In the last years, he basically takes the position that there are only two possible views of revelation, the traditionalist and the liberal. It all comes down to the human-divine components. The liberals (Heschel, Rosenzweig and Kaplan) simply differ on the ratio of human-divine authorship and partnership. Lamm, representing the traditionalist point of view sees it as all divine revelation. Neil opines that if he were to write *Sacred Fragments* again, he would do it differently this time.⁴ In our most recent iteration of the course, Spring 2008, Neil again evidences his ability to learn from his students. Speaking about the Lamm text he reconsiders:

I have been teaching this text [Lamm] for 150 years and at an adult education session at the Skirball Institute, a student taught me to see that it means something entirely different. The student suggested that the first 'will' is God's commanding Moses and giving him the Torah and the second 'will' is Moses' transmission of the Torah to the Jewish people which means that there is a human component even in Lamm's theology. The student made me doubt a significant focus of my teaching, differentiating God's will with Moses's writing it down.⁵

Once we conclude the overview of the theological positions, we engage students in a forced-choice cooperative learning activity. Signs with names of the four theologians are placed around the room and students are asked to go to the one that most clearly represents their own personal point of view. They assemble in groups and begin discussions about why they chose that approach. They are allowed to move to another group if they feel misplaced. They may not stand between two groups. Neil and I fondly remember the semester when one rabbinical student walked around in circles in the middle of the room, since he could not make a choice. Once they are “comfortable” in their groups, we ask them to prepare a lesson for a target audience of their choosing, to teach Exodus 19 through the lens of the theological position they have chosen. As Neil says, “We ask you to develop a lesson plan on how to teach Shavuot, based on the theology you have chosen for this exercise.” Once again, students are reminded of what we call the “default position,” in which most of them have been raised and taught: Lamm. This exercise has resulted in exciting new ways of teaching the notion of revelation and how we know what God wants of us, based on the theologies of the four thinkers. In closing the unit I usually remind students that we often vacillate among all the positions as we move through life, or in different moments of life. Standing at the Torah for an aliyah, being read by a highly competent reader from a beautifully calligraphied scroll is a Lamm moment for me—the words are true. Feeling a sense of awe and wonder as I pray, or experience God’s presence in a holy moment is Heschel. Blessing my children on Friday night is a Rosenzweigian moment of revelation. Studying text at JTS is pure Kaplan.

Since the default position regarding the revelation at Sinai assumes the historicity of the Biblical narrative, I was amazed when Neil first pointed out in class the glaring omission of a reference to Sinai in Psalm 136 which we recite on Shabbat and *yom tov*. Did the author of this history of the Jewish journey from creation to residence in the land of Israel not know of the Sinai tradition? Was it left out deliberately? Could it indeed be, as Heschel would say, a Biblical midrash? How many times had I read this Psalm without ever noticing that lacuna? This triggered in me the desire to have our JTS students think more deeply about the relationship of history and historiography. So we created an exercise in which the morning of the class

I downloaded the front page website of such online newspapers as the *New York Times*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Gulf* (as in Persian) *News*, *Al Ahram* (from Egypt), the *Palestinian Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, etc.

We divide students into groups of four or five and give each group multiple copies of just one paper's download, asking them to create a one-minute news brief on the world today as they know it from the text in front of them. Each group then delivers its broadcast, and we analyze what occurred. What emerge are five or six very different stories of what happened on earth in the last twenty-four hours or so. Using the latest and speediest technology in the history of the world, students see the multiplicity of historiographies. Which is true? What is truth? How is our perception of events shaped by our culture, politics, personal and collective memories? Thus we try to open our students' understanding of the historiography innate within our Biblical traditions and help them begin to find ways of distinguishing between history and historiography, not assuming any history is ever devoid of selective perception and memory. How would the Egyptians have recorded the Exodus? How would the Canaanites have memorialized *kibbush haaretz*, assuming those events really happened? Such an empathetic reading of our texts may help students understand the "other" a bit more sensitively. All this of course makes many students uncomfortable, and Neil acknowledges that discomfort, though never apologizes for having helped cause it.

God

God is the next unit in the course. We begin with a screening of three scenes from *O God*, written by Carl Reiner and starring John Denver and George Burns in the title role.⁶ Three pivotal scenes in which Jerry meets God are screened, and students in three groups are tasked to take notes on one of the three scenes, highlighting the theological issues contained in each. This classic film, humorous and very "Jewish" in its take on God theology, opens up the entire spectrum of faith and doubt that we consider. After I give an overview of a theory of practice for thinking and teaching about God (as religious educators, we believe in God, God talk needs to permeate all aspects of Jewish life, practice and civilization; doubt and

questioning are very Jewish emotions; there is a wide range of views as to the nature of God in Judaism; and all God talk is metaphorical) we move into some exercises I have developed to get students more comfortable with God talk. We use my Faith Interview and Names of God exercises.⁷

Neil then assigns one of the following texts to students in small groups: *Adon Olam*; Psalms 13, 23, 44, 91; Job 1–2; Jonah 4; Exodus 34; *U'netaneh Tokef* or *Avinu Malkenu*; Hosea 2. He asks students to extrapolate the image of God portrayed in these texts and then leads a discussion going from group to group on the issues, many of which were raised in the *O God* film but are now seen in the light of our sacred texts. This leads us to the assignment, given by Neil, for students to write their own metaphors for God. Neil wants them to see how difficult they are to write, while at the same time giving them permission to invent their own and add to our traditional stockpile of metaphors. He generally sites two powerful examples of what he's looking for as a way of guiding students in how they should go about this assignment. The first is a metaphor for God written by a student who said that for her God was Fred Astaire to her Ginger Rogers. She explained:

When we miss a step, it's always my fault. He dances in flats; I have to dance in heels; he's on the ceiling, I'm on the floor; he can be late, I can't. He pinches me in the clinches; I mustn't. And Cyd Charisse is waiting for me to fail. But when we get together, it's sheer ecstasy.

Another example is from an eleven-year-old boy attending an adult study group held in someone's home. Neil asked participants to write their own metaphors for God. The boy came back and offered his own: "God, after the Holocaust, is a rat in a maze." Thinking further aloud about what he had written, he edited it and said, "No, God is the maze!" This from an eleven-year-old! Neil's ability to get people of many ages to think deeply and personally about their relationship with God has inspired me to create many of the exercises for the course, and in my own writings try to do the same for educational practitioners in varied settings. As a result, our students at JTS develop and submit incredibly sophisticated, creative, and most personal metaphors ranging from God as the ink for the pen of life,

to God as an HVAC system, to the best of all, when last semester Jeremy Stein, a cantorial student, wrote:

God is Neil Gillman. He is a teacher, an authority figure and a source of inspiration. His classes offer us an opportunity to build community. The syllabus he has given us provides a guideline for his expectations for us and for our behavior. Some people believe that we are obligated to live up to these expectations and are rewarded for doing so. Others feel that they represent an ideal, but that we are not required to follow every last detail. Some of these requirements we must complete in a group. Others must be completed by the individual. Some insist that the syllabus is the direct word of Neil Gillman while others suspect that it is actually a composite document with more than one author . . .

Need anyone say more?

Theodicy

We begin the unit on the problem of evil in the world with another clip from *The West Wing* entitled “Two Cathedrals.”⁸ President Bartlett has just suffered the loss of his long time assistant, who was killed in a car crash upon returning from a car dealer with her first car ever. She was in her sixties and lost her two twin sons in the Vietnam War. The president is the subject of national scorn since it was revealed that he was elected to office while suffering from a mild form of MS, which his physician wife had been treating in secret. One of his closest aides, Josh, was severely wounded by an assassination attempt meant for another aide, Charlie, a black man working for the President. After his assistant’s funeral the President, alone in the great national cathedral, walks up to the main altar chastising God for punishing him even though he has done much good for the country and the world. He ends by cursing God in Latin, lights a cigarette, and drops it on the floor, crushing its flame with the sole of his shoe.

Following a discussion with students on the theodicy issues raised in the scene, I present a theory of practice on how to deal with suffering and evil in educational settings.⁹ Based on *Emet Ve-Emunah*, I highlight the follow-

ing points: I eschew any notion that those killed in the Holocaust were being punished, or as one leading Chief Rabbi of Israel observed, because they did not do enough mitzvot. I reject that as theological obscenity. I admit that the world is mysterious and we don't know it all, that there are forces at work which we as yet to not comprehend (eg. Were there radio waves before we had radios?) Next I speak about Chaos Theory or complexity theory i.e. that in all complex systems there is randomness and chance. The universe is a complex system, which by definition has a certain amount of randomness, so why one person gets cancer and another does not is not an act of God but a random occurrence. Then I remind students of the verse in *Avot* 3:19 translating it as "Everything can be anticipated, but free will is given." I gloss it to mean that we can often anticipate the results of our actions, and so human free will is often a cause of evil in the world. I then give students the following set of metaphors, explaining that we can believe any two of them, but not all three:

- A. God is omnipotent.
- B. God is just and fair.
- C. Job was a good person.

I suggest that the one we can give up on, indeed the one that isn't particularly Jewish and is more Greek is "A." Either God is not omnipotent or God seeks to limit God's self to allow for free will and permit the natural order that requires randomness.

Finally, I suggest that Jewish tradition does not seek to codify, dogmatize, or otherwise predetermine what we should believe about theodicy. Rather, it comes down solidly on the issue that we need to cope with suffering, and therefore developed complex mechanisms for coping with evil in the world. I solicit students' suggestions and they come up with many, such as the *mitzvot* of *aveilut*, *bikkur ḥolim*, *tzedakah*, *tikkun olam*, *kashrut*, etc.

Neil then introduces them to the work of Clifford Geertz and his notion that when evil occurs we seek three understandings: intellectual (Why did it happen?), moral (How can a good God permit it to happen?), and emotional (How do I handle it?).¹⁰ Following a study of some selected passages from the Geertz material, Neil then invites the class to participate in one of

the most powerful and difficult exercises of the semester. He states four scenarios and asks students to write God's answer:

1. You are on the 98th floor of the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001, and are sure death is imminent. You look up and say, "God, why me?" Write God's answer.
2. You are in line to enter the "showers" at Auschwitz, and you look up and you say, "God, why?" Write God's answer.
3. You are an eleven-year-old diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer. You lie in bed and ask, "God, why?" Write God's answer.
4. You are present in Tel Aviv for the dancing and singing that follows Ben Gurion's declaration of the State of Israel. You rest for a moment and ask, "God, why now?" Write God's answer.

As you might imagine, students are often emotionally moved and drained after this exercise.

Eschatology

Neil and I begin the unit on the end of days with a values line cooperative learning exercise. Half the class at a time is invited to come forward and stand in front of the chalkboard. On the wall behind them, spaced about a foot apart, is a Likert-like scale with "zero" in the middle. To the right numbers, ascend +1, +2, +3, +4, +5 (agree) and to the left they descend -1, -2, -3, -4, -5 (disagree). We then present the following statements to each group and ask them to stand at the point on the continuum which best represents their position on the matter. We first elicit comments from the students on the extremes, then from those in the middle. Students may move to another position upon hearing the views of others.

The statements are:

1. Human life, though brief and passing, has lasting significance and death does not mark the absolute end of a person's identity.
2. Some day, all who have died will be physically resurrected, reborn, and live again.
3. Though we die physically, we have a soul which lives eternally.
4. When you die, that's the end. There is nothing else.

5. There is life after death in that we live on genetically, through the traits our descendants inherit from us.
6. After we die we continue to live in the memory of those who survive us.
7. We never really die if our example impels the living to do righteous deeds (acts of *tzedakah*) in our memory.
8. After death we are judged by God and put in heaven or hell.
9. Our eternal soul will come back again in another body.
10. Since we don't know what happens when we die, the best thing to do is follow the principle: Repent one day before you die.
11. Individually we die, but our collective efforts as a people will lead to a better world for our descendants.¹¹

This exercise is a very non-threatening way to involve students in the issues, allow them to own their own positions while seeing the range of others' positions, and gives the instructors a very quick picture of which issues trouble or matter to the class. Its kinesthetic nature is also a good way to deal with tough issues. The exercise is democratizing in that students immediately see and value their classmate's views and struggles, allowing for openness and dialogue. This particular exercise highlights one other important aspect of the course—we seek to demonstrate a wide range of instructional techniques that can lead to learner centered, collaborative, personal meaning making, active learning experiences for students studying complex theological issues.

Neil then begins a review and discussion on an outline he has prepared, which summarizes the major issues in Jewish views on eschatology from the personal, national, and universal points of view. He then summarizes and illuminates the views expressed in his book *The Death of Death*.¹²

To deepen our students' understanding of eschatological issues, we involve them in several exercises which tend to cause no small measure of discomfort. We ask them to write an epitaph for themselves, one by which they would like to be remembered, or which might appear on their tombstones, and also to consider what they are doing in life now to merit that epitaph later. We ask them to create a timeline of their lives, listing important life-changing and affirming events up until now, and projecting it into the future until their death. Then we look at an ethical will written by Ibn

Tibon, born in Grenada c.1120.¹³ We discuss the nature of ethical wills, and how they can be used by parents for children, or as educational vehicles, such as inviting the graduating students of a given school to prepare an ethical will for the rising seniors, or how a board of directors of a Jewish non-profit might prepare such a will for its successors.

Over the last eleven years, hundreds of JTS students have had an energizing experience with theology, helping them clarify their own positions and giving them tools to help them in their future work as clergy and educators. Their appreciation and positive responses evidenced in end-of-semester course evaluations and personal reflections to us once they are in the field, have been most gratifying. They have more than justified Neil's hopes and visions as to how we could make theological and philosophical study at JTS more meaningful and important in the personal and professional lives of our students. So it is with no small measure of thankfulness to Neil and to the Almighty that I shall carry with me the honor, privilege, and life-long memory of working with one of the finest scholars, teachers, and *menschen* to have crossed my life's path. May Neil Gillman continue to go from strength to strength.

NOTES

1. Commission, O. T. P. O. C. J. *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, Women's League for Conservative Judaism, Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, 1988).

2. Steven M. Brown, *Willing, Learning and Striving: A Course Guide For Teaching Jewish Youth Based on Emet Ve-Emunah* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America, from The Commission On The Philosophy of Conservative Judaism, 1988).

3. A. Graves, "The Midterms," *The West Wing* (2000).

4. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992).

5. N. Lamm, "Condition of Jewish Belief: a symposium compiled by the editors of Commentary Magazine" *Commentary Magazine*, (1989), pp.124–125.

6. Carl Reiner, *O God*, Warner Bros. (1977).

7. Steven M. Brown, *L'ela L'ela—Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer*

Part of Us. (New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Department of Youth Activities, 1980).

8. T. Schlamme, "Two Cathedrals," (2000).

9. Steven M. Brown, "The Problem of Evil," *Shema Magazine* (April 2006).

10. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York, Basic Books, 1973).

11. Steven M. Brown, (1988).

12. Neil Gillman, *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish thought* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997).

13. I. Abrahams, *Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006).

Rabbi Steven M. Brown, Ed.D. is Head of School at The Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, a pluralistic day school serving grades 6–12 in Bryn Mawr, PA.

Appendix A

Abbreviated Syllabus EDU/PHI 5525 Translating Jewish Theology Into Educational Settings

Required Texts:

1. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990). This book should be read in its entirety beginning now!
2. Steven M. Brown, *Willing, Learning and Striving: A Course Guide for Teaching Jewish Youth Based on Emet Ve-Emunah*. (New York: United Synagogue, 1988). Available from faculty secretary or USCJ Book Service.
3. Course Packets (available online via JTS library)
4. Siddur Shalem and TaNaKH must be brought to every class.

Note: “Theology” and “Practice” readings are mostly contained in the course packet available in JTS Library online reserves. **You will be provided with a short compendium of readings we want to work on in class. These must be brought to every class session.** All books are on reserve in the library. Assigned books may also be purchased at West Side Judaica. In addition to the assigned readings, a number of hand-outs will be distributed in class as appropriate for each session. Please make sure that you have these hand-outs as you will be responsible for using them.

Readings and Assignments

Week 1 (1/17)

Introduction—Why Take This Course?

Writing theology statements and critical incident report

Week 2 (1/24)

Theory and Practice—Why Both are Necessary READINGS:

THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE: Fowler, James. (1991) “Stages in Faith Consciousness” in *Religious Development in Childhood and Adoles-*

cence. Oser and Scarlett (ed.), Summer 1991, San Francisco. Jossey-Bass Inc; Craig Dykstra. "Faith Development and Religious Education" in *Faith Development and Fowler*. C. Dykstra and S. Parks (ed.). Birmingham, Al. Religious Education Press, 1986; Exercises

Assignment Due: (Always make one copy for each instructor): One page personal theological statement.

Week 3 (1/31)

Revelation—Theology and Practice

READINGS:

THEOLOGY: (WEEKS 3–5)

Condition of Jewish Belief, pp. 37–38, 45–47, 124–126, 223–225;

A.J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp. 167–200; and 257–278;

F. Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning* (ed. N.N. Glatzer), pp. 109–124;

SF Chs. 1 and 2;

Exodus 19–20;

Practice: W.L.S. Module III—Revelation; Exercises.

Week 4 (2/7)

Revelation—Theology and Practice

READINGS:

THEOLOGY: SEE WEEK 3

PRACTICE: EXERCISES; Kaunfer, Alvan. "Synectics: An Approach to Teaching Midrash" in *Melton Research Newsletter* No. 11, Fall 1990; Kelman, V. "How is a Torah Like an Overcoat?" in *Melton Journal* No. 16, Spring/Summer 1983; Netter, Esther. "What Does a Praying Jew Look Like?: The Synectics Approach to a Question of Prayer" in *Melton Journal* No. 14, Spring 1982.

Week 5 (2/14)

Revelation—Putting the Views Together

READINGS:

THEOLOGY: SEE WEEK 3

PRACTICE: EXERCISES; Gevirtz, Gila. *Partners With God and Partners With God: Teachers Edition*; Behrman House, West Orange, N.J. 1995. Exercises.

Assignments Due: Group lesson plan on Exodus 1.

Week 6 (2/21)

God—Part 1: Theology and Practice

READINGS:

THEOLOGY: How Can We Talk About God? A *Maimonides Reader*, ed. I. Twersky, pp.42–47; N. Gillman. (2000). *The Way Into Encountering God in Judaism*. Introduction and Ch. 4–6. Psalms 13, 23, 44, 78, 104, 105; Job 1 & 2; Hosea 2.

Modecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, Pt. II; A.J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, Chs. 2–11;

PRACTICE: SEE WEEKS 4 AND 5.

Assignments Due: 1 page personal theology of revelation. (Please submit two copies of each!)

Weeks 7 & 8

(2/28, 3/7, 3/8)

God—Part 2: Theology and Practice

READINGS:

THEOLOGY: WEEK 6 READINGS.

PRACTICE: Continue Ciardi, John. *How Does A Poem Mean?*, Intro and Ch.. 1; Boston. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1975, Introduction and Ch. 1; W.L.S.—Module II—God Talk; Exercises; Schulweis, Harold. “From God to Godliness: Proposal for a Predicate Theology” in *God in the Teachings of Conservative Judaism*. S. Siegel and E. Gertel (eds.); The Rabbinical Assembly, NY. 1985; Exercises.

- Week 9 (3/14) **Suffering and the Holocaust—Part 1: The Problem of Evil**
READINGS:
THEOLOGY: JOB 1, 38–42;
 Moshe Greenberg, “Reflections on Job’s Theology” (in JPS one-volume edition of *The Book of Job*);
 H. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*; SF, Ch. 8.
PRACTICE: M.S. Strom & W.S. Parsons (1982) *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. Overview and Ch. 1.
 Grollman, Earl. *Talking About Death*. Boston, Beacon Press; W.L.S.—Module V—The problem of Evil; exercises
Assignment Due: 1 page personal metaphor for God (Please submit two copies!)
- Week 10 (3/21) **Suffering and the Holocaust-Part 2**
READINGS:
THEOLOGY: ELIE WIESEL, *NIGHT*.
PRACTICE: Exercises; W.L.S.—Module V cont., Exercises
Assignment Due: 1 page project proposal (Please submit 2 copies!)
- Week 11 (3/28) **Eschatology-Part 1**
READINGS:
THEOLOGY: *A Maimonides Reader* (ed. Twer-sky), Introduction to *Helek*; SF, Ch. 11; N. Gillman, *The Death of Death*, Chs.1,10; Daniel chs. 10–12;
PRACTICE: Emet Ve-Emunah, pp. 28–32; W.L.S.—Module VI—Our Vision of the Future; Exercises.
- Week 12 (4/18) **Eschatology-Part 2**
READINGS:

— Steven M. Brown —

THEOLOGY: See week 9

PRACTICE: *W.L.S.* Module VI, cont.

Week 13 (4/25)

Creating Ethical Wills and Review of Personal Theology Statements

May 4 (Friday)

Graduating senior term projects due. (One copy each to Drs. Gillman and Brown!)

May 11 (Friday)

Term projects due. (One copy each to Drs. Gillman and Brown!)

(Don't even think of handing this in late!!!)