

The Seminar in Sacred Texts (**RLG 6935**) introduces students to the concerns and methodologies surrounding the study of religious texts and reading practices. The theme for the Spring 2015 semester is “War and Peace across Traditions.” Each instructor will lead a three-week unit on one or more texts that express the relationship between a given religious tradition and issues of war and peace and their social and theological implications for the study of those traditions and for religion in general. Students will choose a text or texts of their own to work on for the final project in consultation with the appropriate instructor(s).

### **Course Objectives:**

1. To introduce students to some key concepts, theories, and methodologies concerning the study of sacred texts.
2. To introduce students to the concerns and problems of the comparative study of religion by analyzing a theme thought to be relevant to many religious traditions.
3. To facilitate informed cross-cultural and inter-tradition comparison and evaluation of ways of expressing religious ideas by focused study of selected texts.
4. To engage students in in-depth studies of an individual text or texts covering one or more reading communities, leading to a research paper.

### **Course Requirements and Grading:**

1. **Attendance & Participation** (50% of the final grade)

A seminar is only as good as the members who contribute to it. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to participate in class discussions and activities, and to come to class having completed all assigned readings with questions for discussion. There are FOUR outside lectures which are a compulsory element of the course:

**God is a man of war. The Lord is His name.**

**Lecture by Stuart Cohen (Bar Ilan University)**

February 8, 2015 2:00 pm

Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU, 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33140

February 16, 2015

Florida International University, Modesto A. Madique Campus

**Generals Wearing Yarmulkes: Does the Israel Defense Force Face a Threat of Dual Authority? Lecture by Stuart Cohen (Bar Ilan University)**

February 17, 2015 12:30 pm

Florida International University, Modesto A. Madique Campus SIPA 125

**1948 as a Jewish World War**

**Lecture by Derek Penslar (University of Oxford)**

March 29, 2015 2:00 pm

Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU, 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33140

**Dreyfus Was Not Alone: Jewish Military Officers in the Modern World**

**Lecture by Derek Penslar (University of Oxford)**

March 30, 2015

Florida International University, Modesto A. Madique Campus hall to be announced.

Absences will only be excused in cases of illness or emergency with appropriate documentation.

The schedule is:

REL 6935-U01	Seminar in Sacred Texts
Schedule:	
1/14/2015	Introductions/Syllabus
1/21/2015	Dr. Vose-
1/28/2015	Dr. Vose
2/4/2015	Dr. Vose
2/11/2015	Dr. Parfitt
2/18/2015	Dr. Parfitt
2/25/2015	Dr. Parfitt
3/4/2015	Dr. Atkhar
3/18/2015	Dr. Atkhar
3/25/2015	Dr. Atkhar
4/1/2015	Dr. Bidegain
4/8/2015	Dr. Bidegain
4/15/2015	Dr. Bidegain
4/22/2014	

### **Research Paper** (50% of the final grade)

Each student will select one or two texts to form the subject of a research paper of 5,000- 6,000 words in consultation with the appropriate faculty member(s). Deadlines for a Topic Proposal (**Feb. 5**), Annotated Bibliography (**Mar. 5**), and Title & Abstract (**Apr. 2**) are set throughout the semester to keep you on pace. The paper may be a comparative analysis of texts across traditions or may be an analysis of one or more texts within a specific tradition that addresses the theme of the course. The **Final Draft** is due, posted to the Turnitin folder on the course Blackboard page, by **Wednesday, April 23 at 11:59 PM**. NO EXTENSIONS will be granted beyond this date.

2.

Class Hours: W 5:00-7:40 Classroom: GC 271-A

RLG 6935: Seminar on Sacred Texts – Spring 2015 2

### **Policies:**

1. Late papers will lose a full letter grade per day and will not be accepted after four days beyond the due date.
2. All student work must conform to University policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course as well as disciplinary measures.

### **Grading scale:**

A 93-100 A- 90-92 B+ 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82 C+ 77-79 C 73-76 C- 70-72 D+ 67-69  
D 63-66 D- 60-62 F 0-59

### JUDAISM

This is the briefest overview (taken from the BBC website)

#### **Judaism and war**

Judaism does not regard violence and war to promote justice as always wrong. It accepts that certain kinds of war will be ethically justified, and that it is sometimes morally acceptable to kill people.

Before declaring war or starting a battle there must be a genuine attempt to make peace and avoid the conflict.

Jewish law only permits combatants to be deliberately killed in war. Innocent civilians must be given every opportunity to leave the field of combat before a battle starts.

#### **Old Testament**

In much of the Old Testament God gives his clear approval to war. He is identified as a warrior, and is shown as leading the Jews in conflict, bringing them victory, protecting them from enemy forces.

But at the same time the Old Testament is filled with Jewish longing for peace.

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

## **Isaiah 2**

### **Peace**

Peace is seen as something that comes from God and that will only be fully realised when there is justice and harmony not just between peoples, but within individual communities.

Some of the present day arguments put forwards in the context of terrorism take up this idea that there can be no real peace without justice for all. The importance of peace to the Jewish people is emphasised by 'Shalom', the conventional greeting between Jews from the earliest times, which means 'peace'.

### **Self-defence**

The Talmud states that a person (a Jew or a non-Jew) is permitted to kill "a pursuer" to save his own life. This ruling applies to both individuals and groups of people (including states).

### **The Rabbis**

The ancient rabbis thought that there were three types of war that a Jewish state should consider:

- **Obligatory wars:** these are wars that God commanded Jews to fight. They include the biblical wars against the Canaanites and against the Amalekites.
- **Defensive wars:** (These are also obligatory.) If the Jewish people are attacked, they are obliged to defend themselves. This doctrine covers pre-emptive strikes (which is when a country attacks an enemy who is about to attack it).
  - Some writers think that a war of self-defence doesn't count as a war, but is merely the normal action that can be taken under the Jewish law dealing with attackers and based on Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed."
- **Optional wars:** These are wars undertaken for a good reason, and where no other form of "negotiation" remains possible.

### **The rules of war**

The Jewish tradition is clear that before declaring war, or starting a battle, there must be an attempt to make peace - any military action without doing this is probably unlawful (Deuteronomy 20:10).

Only combatants are allowed to be killed intentionally in war. Military commanders should give non-combatants a good chance to leave the combat area before the battle starts. (This is usually impractical in modern warfare.)

However some authorities say that if a non-combatant knowingly stays in a place where a battle is about to take place, they lose their protection..

This is a somewhat longer survey by Norman Solomon

## Judaism and the ethics of war

**Norman Solomon\***

Norman Solomon served as rabbi to Orthodox congregations in Britain, and since 1983 has been engaged in interfaith relations and in academic work, most recently at the University of Oxford. He has published several books on Judaism.

### **Abstract**

*The article surveys Jewish sources relating to the justification and conduct of war, from the Bible and rabbinic interpretation to recent times, including special problems of the State of Israel. It concludes with the suggestion that there is convergence between contemporary Jewish teaching, modern human rights doctrine and international law.*

: : : : : :

### **The sources and how to read them**

Judaism, like Christianity, has deep roots in the Hebrew scriptures (“Old Testament”), but it interprets those scriptures along lines classically formulated by the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud, completed shortly before the rise of Islam.

The Talmud is a reference point rather than a definitive statement; Judaism has continued to develop right up to the present day. To get some idea of how Judaism handles the ethics of war, we will review a selection of sources from the earliest scriptures to rabbinic discussion in contemporary Israel, thus over a period of three thousand years.

The starting point for rabbinic thinking about war is the biblical legislation set out in Deuteronomy 20. In form this is a military oration, concerned with *jus in bello* rather than *jus ad bellum*; it regulates conduct in war, but does not specify conditions under which it is appropriate to engage in war. It distinguishes between (a) the war directly mandated by God against the Canaanites

\* For a fuller examination of this subject with bibliography see Norman Solomon, “The ethics of war in the Jewish tradition”, in *The Ethics of War*, Rochard Sorabji, David Robin *et al.* (eds.), Ashgate, Aldershot 2005.

## Course texts

R.K. Narayan, trans. *The Mahabharata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (University of Chicago Press, 2013). ISBN: 9780226051659

Laurie L. Patton, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita* (Penguin, 2008). ISBN: 9780140447903