

Crafting a Personal Theology: A Post-Confirmation Exploration of Jewish Thought

Curriculum Guide written by
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Rationale

As young adults finish high school and go off to college or start work, many are grappling with deep existential questions. Does God exist? What do I believe? As young adults separate from their parents, many begin questioning the assumptions they were raised with. The same thing happens with Jewish young adults, who may question whether they believe everything they were taught in religious school when they were younger. This especially applies to theology.

Jewish theology is an important component to Judaism. The Jewish religion is based off the belief of one singular God, the God of Israel. But what exactly is that God like, and how does that God act in the world? What do Jews think of God? Faith in God is central to our religion, and yet at the same time, it is often an underdeveloped subject. Jewish education tends to focus on stories, holidays, and rituals. While theology is a complex subject, it often is not approached even in young adulthood. By the time many young Jews become adults, they have not had a chance to compare and contrast different Jewish conceptions of God, and figure out what their personal theology is. They end up asking those deep existential questions about God and the universe on their own, with their friends, or in their college classes. Learning about these deep existential topics outside of Jewish spaces reinforces the belief that they are altogether separate from Judaism and Jewish identity.

Jewish theology not only impacts the Jewish religion, but it also has a profound impact on Jewishness and Jewry, the cultural and sociological aspects of Judaism. Jewish theology has impacted Jewish rituals, customs, collective memories, and even how Jews see

themselves. Jewish texts and traditions say a lot about God. And yet, there is no singular Jewish theology. All at once, God is master, teacher, parent, lover, and friend. So which is it?

These seemingly contradictory viewpoints can be confusing to any Jew, but especially to young Jewish adults who are solidifying their Jewish identity. Additionally, many of these traditional terms and viewpoints of God do not resonate with young people, and they feel disconnected and turned off from God language or even belief in God. Without learning about different Jewish conceptions of God, religion, and tradition, young Jewish adults may distance themselves from Judaism as a result of their feelings of disconnect from God and traditional theology.

This curriculum guide is specifically designed for 11th and 12th graders as they prepare to “enter the real world” and encounter these topics and conversations outside of Jewish spaces. This guide aims to create a space to explore deep questions about God and religion from a Jewish perspective to show that different approaches to theology are not necessarily discordant with Judaism. Before students may be exposed to suggestions that religion goes against science, feminism, or LGBTQ+ people, students can learn about ways Jewish theologians have incorporated those elements into their Judaism in a harmonious, authentic way.

This course will be an in-depth dive into Jewish theology. By exposing learners to multiple different theologies, this course will illustrate how there is no singular way to approach Jewish belief. Through Judaism’s interpretive process of studying and responding to text, individuals can make the case for their own personal theology.

This course will ask the questions Jewish theologians have grappled with over the centuries: Why do bad things happen to good people? How does God manifest in the

universe, and how do we connect with God? How do women fit into Judaism? How does Judaism respond to LGBTQIA+ people?

This course will offer answers to these questions. While the possibilities of Jewish theology are endless, this course will focus on rejections of supernatural belief, post-holocaust theology, feminist theology, and queer/trans theology. Starting with the radical theological shifts of Beyond Supernaturalism, students will reconceptualize the possibility of Jewish belief as they then learn about post-Holocaust theologies. Students will then learn how Judaism is evolving to become more inclusive, first with feminist theology and then continuing into queer/trans theology. Students will learn tools to dealing with problematic or exclusionary texts and traditions. Such tools include: modern midrash, finding alternative interpretations, and reinterpreting text oneself.

Learners will be given the opportunity to engage with existential theological questions. As learners encounter new theologies and respond to them in the course, they will begin to develop their own personal theologies. In the closing unit, learners will evaluate the theologies they have learned, and craft their own personal theologies. This course will not only expose learners to different ways of thinking about the Jewish God, but it will give learners the ability to articulate their own conception of God and Judaism.

Allowing young Jewish adults the space to explore their own beliefs will help students craft their own Jewish identity separate from their parents or community. With their own Jewish identity, students will be better equipped to seek out or even create new Jewish spaces when they leave home. Since so many Jewish spaces are centered around the religious aspects of Judaism, helping students develop their own personal theology will also encourage more connection with Jewish spaces after they leave home.

Letter to the Teacher

This course is a deep dive into alternative theologies that students do not often get a chance to learn about in religious school. The teacher should be familiar with traditional theology of theism (a supernatural, transcendent God). Additionally, the teacher must be willing and eager to move past the traditional theist belief into each alternative theology that will be studied in the course. It would be helpful for the teacher to have considered their own theology, and how it connects to and branches off from tradition.

For the Beyond Supernaturalism unit, it would be helpful for the teacher to be familiar with the life and theology of Baruch Spinoza. It would also be helpful for the teacher to read “Ba-Derekh: On the Way—A Presentation of Process Theology” by Bradley Shavit Artson. Much of the content from the post-Holocaust unit comes from the book *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* by Steven T. Katz. Other helpful resources include *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* by Zachary Braiterman, and *Faith After the Holocaust* by Eliezer Berkovits.

Outside of the content in this curriculum guide, the teacher should have some outside knowledge of Jewish feminism and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Judaism. The teacher should have a baseline understanding of Judith Plaskow’s “Standing Again at Sinai” and Rachel Adler’s “Here Comes Skotsl: Renewing Halakha” in *Engendering Judaism*, and a comprehension of how the two feminist theologians differ from one another. Additionally, there is an important distinction made between equality and equity within these units. Equality is when everyone is treated the same, while equity is when everyone is treated according to their needs. Justice is the ultimate goal, where the root cause of inequality has been eliminated.

The teacher should also be willing and able to bring in outside examples of how Judaism has been innovated to become more inclusive of women and LGBTQIA+ people. Some resources for this include the Keshet website (keshetonline.org), *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells* published by the CCAR Press and edited by Rabbi Denise Eger, and Reconstructing Judaism's ritualwell.org.

There are a number of informal assessments throughout the curriculum. While there are a couple of small formal assessments in the form of worksheets turned in, there are two main formal assessments in the final unit. The first main formal assessment is participation in the Socratic circle. The Socratic circle is a way to employ the Socratic method of discussion with students. More information on the Socratic method of discussion can be found here: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/socratic-seminar/>. In the Socratic circle, students will prepare to defend one of the theologies they learned in class. The goals of this assessment are to deepen understanding of one of the theologies, provide an engaging way to review the rest of the theologies, and to increase students' confidence in discussing theology.

The second main formal assessment is the final project. Students will create a representation of their personal theology, and present it to the class. Their representation can be in any format, so long as they can use the representation to explain and present their theology to other students. This final project is meant to be an authentic assessment: after completing the project, they should be able to articulate their own personal theology to anyone who asks. As this course is dedicated to building up students' own personal theologies, this assessment enables students to cultivate and craft that theology, as well as practice articulating it in front of others.

These last two formal assessments are also Memorable Moments. These moments are distinct from the rest of the course. The Socratic circle is meant to be fun and light-hearted, with students taking on personas and characters to defend their theology. The presentations of personal theologies will most likely be the only time students will ever be in a situation where a group of people are presenting something so vulnerable and meaningful as their personal theologies. It should be set up as something students should be very proud of, and respectful of others.

Timeline of informal assessments, formal assessments, and Memorable Moments:

Beyond Supernaturalism

Unit 1 Lesson 2: Informal assessment

Feminist theology

Unit 3 Lesson 2: Informal assessment

Unit 3 Lesson 4: Informal assessment; **Formal assessment** (Equity/Equality worksheet)

Queer/Trans theology

Unit 4 Lesson 1: **Formal assessment** (Origins of Queerphobia worksheet)

Unit 4 Lesson 3: Informal assessment

Review + Final Project

Unit 5 Lesson 2: **Formal assessment** (Prepared responses for Socratic circle)

Unit 5 Lesson 3: **Memorable Moment** and **Formal assessment** (Socratic circle)

Unit 5 Lesson 4: Informal assessment

Unit 5 Lesson 5: Informal assessment

Unit 5 Lesson 6: **Memorable Moment** and **Formal authentic assessment** (Presentations of personal theology)

Scope and Sequence

Beyond Supernaturalism

This unit explores theologies that move beyond a supernatural concept of God. These radical reconfigurations of God include pantheism, panentheism, transnaturalism, and process theology.

Post-Holocaust theology*

This unit asks the question how to continue to believe in God after the Holocaust. It includes the theologies that came out of that question, including Rubenstein's "God is dead" theology, Berkovits's "hidden God" theology, and Fackenheim's "epoch-making" theology.

Feminist theology

This unit surveys how women entered the theological conversation, with Rachel Adler and Judith Plaskow. It asks how women are included or excluded from Judaism, and what can be done to allow women to be full Jews.

Has one formal assessment.

Queer/trans theology

Using feminist ideology, the conversation expands to include LGBTQI+ people. It asks the question, how do we understand God, Torah, and Israel through a queer or trans perspective?

Has one formal assessment.

Review + Final Project

This unit first reviews all the theologies learned, and then allows for students to compare and contrast the different theologies they learned over the course in a Socratic circle discussion. Students then are able to create their own theology, which they present to each other in the last class.

Has three formal assessments and two Memorable Moments.

***scripted unit**

CG Overview

Goals:

- Introduce the interpretive tradition in Judaism.
- Introduce several theologies that go beyond traditional beliefs of theism.
- Establish modern midrash as a possible way to make Judaism more inclusive.
- Illustrate how ancient and modern interpretations could be used to reinterpret potentially problematic Jewish texts.
- Establish that there is no singular Jewish theology.
- Guide students in cultivating their own personal theology.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to give an example of one Jewish theology that rejected supernaturalism.
- Students should be able to explain the need for Jewish feminism.
- Students should be able to contextualize how the Holocaust changed Jewish theology.
- Students should be able to offer a reinterpretation of the Biblical prohibition on homosexuality.

Essential questions:

- How does God manifest in the universe, and how do we interact with that God?
- How do we continue to believe in God after the Holocaust?
- How does Judaism include women?
- How can we reshape Judaism to be more inclusive of marginalized identities?
- How can Judaism be queer/trans inclusive?

Unit 1

Beyond Supernaturalism

Unit overview:

The Beyond Supernaturalism unit introduces different ways to believe in God without believing in anything supernatural. The first lesson explores what supernatural means, specifically anything that goes against the laws of nature. Supernatural elements from a non-religious standpoint could include luck, ghosts, or willing something to happen. Supernatural elements from a religious standpoint could include miracles and the efficacy of prayer. Non-supernatural belief systems believe in a God that is within nature, as opposed to separate from it. The non-supernatural belief systems explored in this unit are pantheism, panentheism, transnaturalism, and process theology.

Enduring understandings:

- Supernaturalism encompasses anything that goes against the laws of nature.
- Some Jewish conceptions of God do not include a supernatural entity.
- Some Jewish theologians have combined religion with science instead of trying to separate them.
- Some scientists have a connection to the universe that could describe a similar connection that many people feel to God.

Essential questions:

- Is God limited to the laws of nature?
- Is God a part of nature, or separate from nature?
- Is God sentient?
- What if God were a scientific force of nature, like gravity or entropy?

Learning outcomes:

- Students should be able to explain the concept of supernaturalism.
- Students should be able to differentiate between theism, pantheism, and panentheism.
- Students should be able to explain how process theology connects religion and science.

Key terms:

- Supernaturalism
- Pantheism
- Panentheism
- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Transnaturalism
- Process Theology

Unit 1 Lesson 1: Intro to Course + Unit

Materials:

- Whiteboard
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce the belief that there are many different ways for Jews to conceptualize God.
- Explain the Jewish tradition of the interpretive process and its connection to Jewish thought.
- Introduce the scope of the course by giving a brief overview of each unit, and the goal of the course to create one's own personal theology.
- Explain how the students will use their journals throughout the course.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain how the interpretive process allows for contradictory beliefs within Judaism.
- Students should be able to name two beliefs about God that are contradictory.
- Students should be able to articulate the goal of the course, which is to create one's own personal theology.

Set Induction:

- **I believe God is...**
 - Teacher shares their name, pronouns, and completes the concept "I believe God is...", and asks students to do the same. If students do not know what they believe, ask them to answer with what they've been taught.

Main Lesson:

- **Activity:** God is...
 - Draw a table on the board, with "God is" on one axis, and these on the other: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How.
 - Ask students to respond to the prompt "God is" with attributes or conceptions of God. Write answers on the board organized in the category that corresponds. Prompt students to try to fill in columns that have fewer answers.
 - After the board has been filled, ask, "Are any of these answers contradictory?" Circle the answers that students say are contradictory.
- **Lecture:** Intro to Course
 - **Basis of Jewish belief**
 - Most religions are based off a set of beliefs

- These beliefs are enforced through religious authority
 - Judaism’s central text, the Torah, does include set beliefs, but mostly it is laws and stories. Judaism’s beliefs come from **interpretation** of the Torah.
 - Modern Judaism is mostly based off ancient rabbinic interpretation of the Torah.
 - Without religious authority in Judaism, anyone is free to interpret Torah just like the ancient rabbis.
 - There can be as many ways to believe in Judaism as there are Jews!
- **Big questions**
 - “In this course, we will ask the big questions that your religious school teachers might have said you didn’t have time for, such as: why do bad things happen to good people? Why is there suffering in the world? Are women equal in Judaism? How does Judaism feel about LGBTQ+ people? Is God a being in the sky, or is God within nature? Does God care about us, and how do we connect to God? The course will be split into different units, and each unit will explore different questions about God.”
- **Overview of units**
 - Give a brief overview of each unit: beyond supernaturalism, post-Holocaust theology, feminist theology, and queer/trans theology.
- **Journals**
 - Hand out the journals and tell students to put their names on them.
 - Introduce the journals as something the students will write in each week in order to keep notes about what they’re learning and thinking about.
 - Explain that you will collect the journals each week to look through to make sure that everyone is participating and understanding, but that they will not be judged on the content of their journals.
- **Final Project**
 - Explain the final project: students will create their own personal theology, and present it to the class. Let the students know they will have plenty of time to work on this in class, and they will have many different theologies to help draw inspiration from.
- **Chavruta**
 - **Introduce chavruta:**
 - “The traditional way to study Jewish text is in pairs, a technique called *chavruta*. When studying by yourself, you only get one perspective, and you might not get as much from a text. When studying with a bunch of people, it might be easy to sit back and listen and not contribute your own ideas. With only two people, it strikes that balance of needing to participate in discussion, but also being able to listen and learn from others as well. While we won’t dive into text just yet, we’ll get together in pairs to practice the *chavruta* style of discussion.”

- Group students in pairs.
- Questions for pair discussion:
 - 1. What were you taught about God?
 - 2. What do you think you're supposed to believe?
 - 3. What do you think you actually believe?

Closure

- **Journals**

- **Summarize:** How is Judaism's system of belief different from other religions? What is the interpretive process?
- **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** What would you like to see in Jewish belief? Give a description of how you would add to/change Jewish belief.
 - **Option 2:** Draw what you think is the traditional belief of God.

Unit 1 Lesson 2: What is Supernatural?

Materials:

- Way to show Superhero Set Induction (in Appendix) -print out or projection
- Journals

Goals:

- Discuss the concept of supernaturalism – what makes something supernatural?
- Apply the concept of supernaturalism to Judaism.
- Introduce the “problem” of supernaturalism – that it is not believable.
- Question what Judaism without supernaturalism might look like.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to define supernatural as any thing or event that does not follow the rules of nature.
- Students should be able to give their own examples of supernaturalism.
- Students should be able to connect supernaturalism to Judaism through the traditional Jewish belief in God and miracles.
- Students should be able to come up with one potential problem with supernaturalism.

Note to teacher:

- Informal assessment in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Show students the pictures of superheroes in the Appendix.
 - **Question:** “What is different between the two sets of heroes and villains?”
 - **Connection:** figures on left have supernatural powers, figures on right have normal abilities but are talented and dedicated to their cause.
 - **Question:** When creating heroes or villains, what is the benefit to giving them super powers? What is the benefit to not giving them superpowers?
 - **Question:** Some superheroes/supervillains got their superpowers through natural, scientifically-explainable means, such as Spider-Man or the Hulk. Are their superpowers more believable when they can be explained by science?

Main Lesson:

- **Small group study**
 - Divide students into groups. Ask them to brainstorm aspects of Judaism that fall into the “supernatural” category. “Supernatural” can apply to God as well as to people and events in the Bible. After they’ve come up with a list of

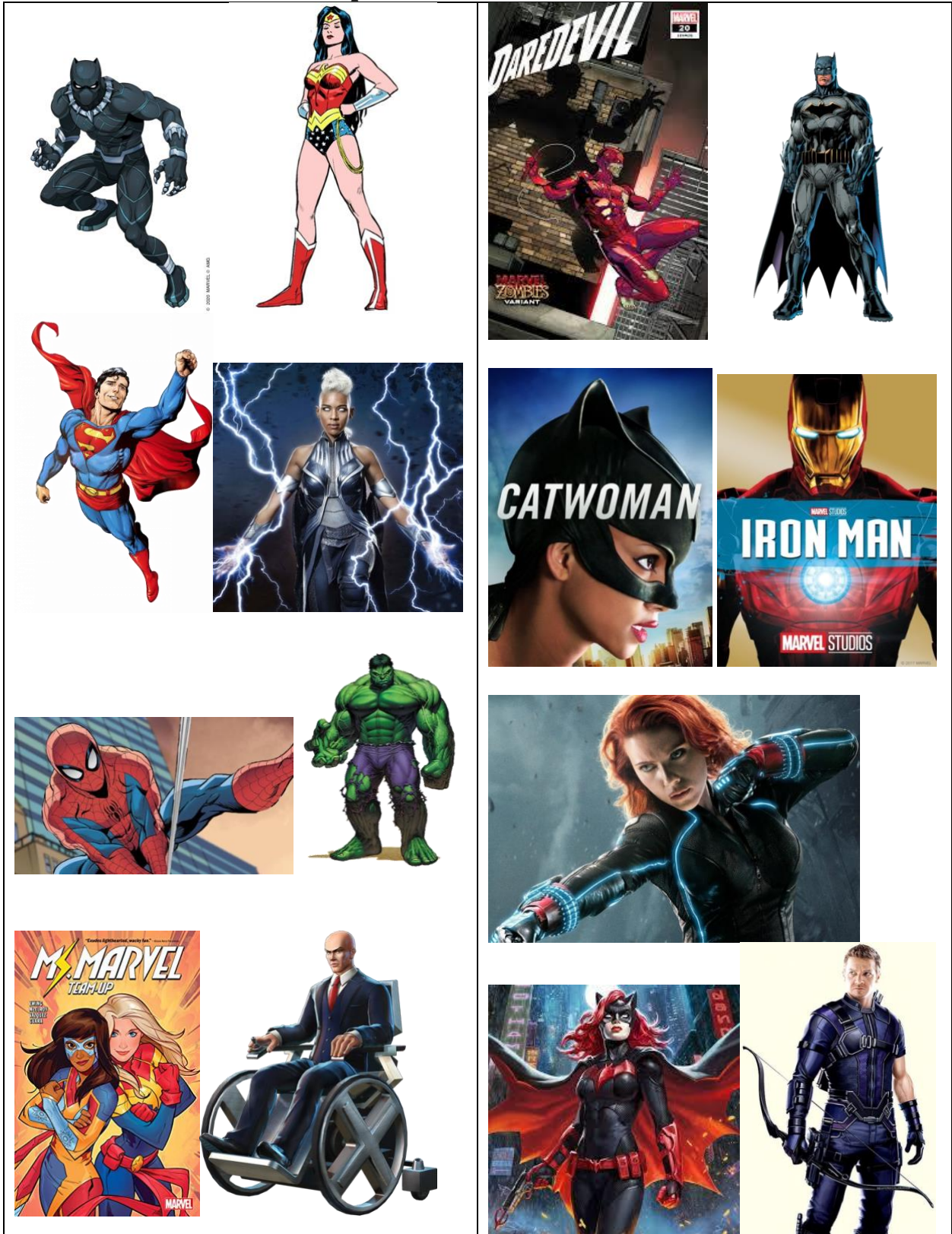
supernatural aspects of Judaism, ask them to come up with a list of what falls into “naturalism” – what is not supernatural in the Bible.

- **Informal assessment:** Walk around the groups and ask how students are doing. See if they are understanding supernaturalism, and if they are able to apply the concept to Judaism.
- Ask students to look over their lists of supernatural and not supernatural aspects of Judaism.
 - **Questions:** What is appealing about supernaturalism? What is appealing about naturalism?

Closure

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** What are some appeals of supernaturalism, and what are some appeals of naturalism? Does religion need supernaturalism?
 - **Explore:** Create a Jewish superhero. Do they have powers?

Appendix Superhero Set Induction



Unit 1 Lesson 3: Introduction to Pantheism & Panentheism

Materials:

- Spinoza's God print out (in Appendix)
- Access to youtube / way to share videos
- Journals

Goals:

- Define panentheism.
- Explore the universalist origins of pantheism and panentheism through Baruch Spinoza's theology.
- Discuss how religion and science could be compatible.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to define pantheism as the belief that God is nature/nature is God.
- Students should be able to define panentheism as the belief that God is within nature but not limited to it.
- Students should be able to explain how pantheism and panentheism go beyond supernaturalism.

Set induction:

- Have one side of the room represent "strongly agree" and one side represent "strongly disagree," and ask students to position themselves somewhere in the room based on their answers.
- Read statements that describe pantheist or panentheist beliefs, such as:
 - I feel connected to something bigger than myself when I'm in nature.
 - I do not believe God is a super powerful man in the sky.
 - I believe in a higher power within the universe.
 - Nature has a will.
 - Things only happen in this world if the universe wants them to.
 - There is something greater than us that connects everything.
 - I connect to the spirit of the universe.
 - I connect to the spirit of nature.

Main Lesson:

- **Videos**
 - Watch the Neil DeGrasse Tyson video on interconnectedness:
<https://youtu.be/BZW6w1B48TY>
 - **Questions:**
 - NGT says he was called by the Universe. What does this mean?

- NGT compares the way he feels about the Universe to the way people feel about God. Could belief in the universe be a spirituality?
 - Watch the first part of the Baruch Spinoza video on God: <https://youtu.be/xpAmJZmnAaA> (0:15-3:30)
 - **Questions:**
 - How does Spinoza describe God?
 - *(answers: the totality of existence; God is the indestructible particles that make up the substance of everything that exists)*
 - How does Spinoza's belief connect to science?
 - Watch the first part of the video on Baruch Spinoza: <https://youtu.be/pVEeXjPiw54> (0:00-3:30)
 - **Questions:**
 - What was Spinoza's upbringing?
 - What were Spinoza's beliefs?
 - *(answers: God is not a person; God is all that has existed and all that will exist; prayer does not work)*
- **Chavruta**
 - Pair the students up and have them read and discuss Spinoza's God handout (in Appendix).

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** What is the difference between pantheism and panentheism?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** What does the meaning, "God is everything, everything is God" mean to you? Explain why you agree or disagree.
 - **Option 2:** If someone radically changes what "God" means, can they still say they believe in God? Why or why not?

Appendix Spinoza's God

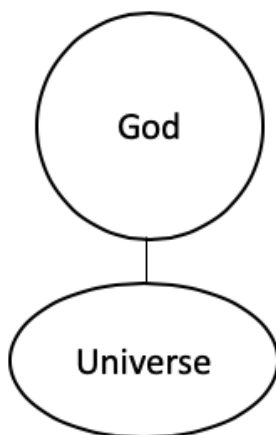
"I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists, not who concerns himself with the fate and doings of mankind."

-Albert Einstein

Spinoza denied that God had any human attributes. When he said that God could not see, or hear, or think, or want, people were very angry with him, and said that they could not imagine what kind of God Spinoza believed in, if his God couldn't do those things. Spinoza replied:

"I believe that, if a triangle could speak, it would say that God is eminently triangular, while a circle would say that the divine nature is eminently circular. Thus each would ascribe to God its own attributes, would assume itself to be like God, and look on everything else as ill-shaped."

Traditional theology (theism) believes that God is transcendent, or far away and removed from our world. Spinoza believed that God is imminent, or close by and within our world. Theism believes in a transcendent God, pantheism believes in an imminent God, and panentheism believes in a God who is both transcendent and imminent. While some label Spinoza as a pantheist, since he believed God and the universe were one in the same, others say Spinoza was a panentheist, since Spinoza also believed God was the origin of reason and love.



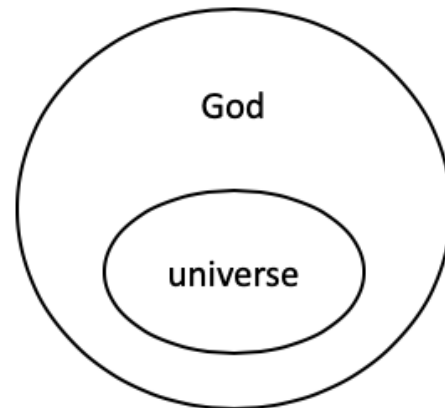
Theism

God is separate from the universe



Pantheism

God is everything



Panentheism

Everything is within God

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think Albert Einstein meant when he said he believes in "Spinoza's God"?
2. What does Spinoza's quote tell us about how he viewed the traditional belief in God?
3. What is the difference between theism, pantheism, and panentheism?
4. How do you feel about these three theologies presented?

Unit 1 Lesson 4: Panentheism Explored

Materials:

- Access to youtube / way to share videos
- Panentheism in Judaism and Panentheism in Other Religions print outs (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Explore panentheism in traditional Jewish texts.
- Explore panentheism in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to give an example of panentheism in Judaism.
- Students should be able to compare and contrast panentheism in Judaism with panentheism in another religion.
- Students should be able to differentiate between theism, pantheism, and panentheism.

Set induction:

- Video on panentheism: <https://youtu.be/5bPXdfysPo8>
 - **Questions on video:**
 - What is panentheism?
 - How is it different from theism?
 - How is it different from pantheism?
 - If panentheism believes God is the universe plus something else, what is that something else?
- Review theism, pantheism, and panentheism:
 - Theism is traditional theology which places God and the universe as separate. God is transcendent and cannot be reached in this world.
 - Pantheism is a rejection of traditional theology. It says that God and the universe is one and the same, and God is within everything and always close by.
 - Pantheism is not polytheistic – there is still only one God, but that God can be found in nature.
 - Panentheism believes that God is within the universe and outside the universe – that everything is God, including something beyond the universe that is unfathomable to us.

Main Lesson:

- **Chavruta**
 - Split students into pairs.

- Pass out print-outs of Panentheism in Judaism and Panentheism in Other Religions.
- Instruct the students to read the texts out loud together and answer the discussion questions
- **Class discussion**
 - Bring everyone back together as a class
 - Open discussion of the texts:
 - What did they think about what they read?
 - What can we learn from studying other religions?
 - Do you think God is universal? Why or why not?

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** Where might you find panentheism in Judaism? Where might you find it in other religions?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Write an argument for whether or not we as Jews can use other religion's ideologies to shape our own beliefs.
 - **Option 2:** Compare/contrast the different examples of panentheism.
 - **Option 3:** Draw a comic of the Kabbalistic creation story with *Ein Sof* and *tzimtzum*.

Appendix

Panentheism in Judaism

In Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), God is called *Ein Sof*, without end. Something without end is at once very close and also very far away. Therefore, God is both imminent and transcendent. It also means that there is nothing that is not God. If God is without end, God spans across all time and space. The Kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum* says that when God was creating the world, there was nothing but God. In order to create something new, God had to withdraw Godself in order to create space for the universe. This withdrawal created chaos, and the world that was created contained some brokenness as a result of God's withdrawal. Once the world was created, God stopped the process of withdrawal, and returned to being *Ein Sof*, and once again is without end.

Discussion question:

1. Does this description of *Ein Sof/tzimtzum* fit within panentheism? Why or why not?

Panentheism in Other Religions

Buddhism

"...Buddhism is not atheistic... It has certainly a God, the highest reality and truth, through which and in which this universe exists. However, the followers of Buddhism usually avoid the term God, for it savors so much of Christianity, whose spirit is not always exactly in accord with the Buddhist interpretation of religious experience. Again, Buddhism is not pantheistic in the sense that it identifies the universe with God. On the other hand, the Buddhist God is absolute and transcendent; this world, being merely its manifestation, is necessarily fragmental and imperfect. To define more exactly the Buddhist notion of the highest being, it may be convenient to borrow the term very happily coined by a modern German scholar, "panentheism," according to which God is all and one and more than the totality of existence."

-Reverend Zen Master Soyen Shaku, from "The God Conception of Buddhism"

Hinduism

By Me all this universe is pervaded through My unmanifested form.
All beings abide in Me but I do not abide in them.

-From the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient holy Hindu text

Christianity

Ephesians 4:6: "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Romans 11:36: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever.

-Ephesians and Romans are both letters written by Paul the Apostle, which are in the Christian Bible. King James Version is the translation used.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Buddhism avoid the term God? Have you ever felt that way?
2. Would you interpret the Hindu or Christian texts to be panentheist? Why or why not?

Unit 1 Lesson 5: Transnaturalism

Materials:

- Access to youtube / way to share videos
- Transnaturalism handout (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce Kaplan's theory of transnaturalism.
- Compare/contrast transnaturalism with pantheism and panentheism.
- Integrate transnaturalism with modern science.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to define transnaturalism as the belief that God is within nature.
- Students should be able to explain how transnaturalism combines science and religion.
- Students should be able to compare and contrast pantheism, panentheism, and transnaturalism.
- Students should be able to explain universalism and particularism as they apply to Judaism.
- Students should be able to argue whether or not they agree with a universalist approach to Judaism.

Set induction:

- Watch this video from Nas Daily on Religion: <https://youtu.be/yaFiD6IOrNQ>
 - Discussion questions:
 - What does it mean when they say religion is like a bunch of fingers pointing at the same moon?
 - Do you agree with this video? Why/why not?

Main Lesson:

- **Review**
 - Theism is a type of supernaturalism – God is beyond nature
 - Pantheism is a type of naturalism – God is within nature
 - Panentheism is a combination – God is both within nature and beyond it.
- **Introduce transnaturalism**
 - “Our next theology is transnaturalism. Like panentheism, transnaturalism rejects the binary of natural or supernatural. Developed by Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, transnaturalism represents Kaplan's belief

that God is not within this world or detached from it. To describe God's presence in this world, Kaplan came up with the concept of transnaturalism."

- **Chavruta**
 - Pair students.
 - Hand out Transnaturalism text (in Appendix).
 - Ask them to read the text out loud to each other, and then answer the discussion questions.

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** What was Kaplan's theory of transnaturalism? How did he try and combine science and religion? How do universalism or particularism apply to Judaism?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** What might universalist / transnaturalist prayer look like? Try writing out a couple of universalist and/or transnaturalist prayers.
 - **Option 2:** Write a short story where someone experiences a transnaturalist God – the "Power" of the universe that drives people toward goodness. How does one experience that God?
 - **Option 3:** If God is a Power, the effects of God's power could be observed even if the power itself is invisible – like how gravity's effects can be observed even though gravity is invisible. Draw some ways God as Power could be observed in nature.

Appendix

Transnaturalism

Text 1

“In brief, God is the Power in the cosmos that gives human life the direction that enables the human being to reflect the image of God.” -Mordecai Kaplan

Discussion questions:

1. What does Kaplan mean by the phrase “reflect the image of God”? How can one be “enabled” to reflect the image of God?
2. Kaplan describes God as a power in the universe, as opposed to a being. How does this combine spirituality and science?

Text 2

“In this view, there is more to the universe than the sum of its parts. ... A transnaturalist believes that God works *through* us rather than *upon* us. Thus, our sense of responsibility to bring divinity into the world is sustained by the faith that there is a power at the source of human endeavors.” (Rebecca Alpert, *Exploring Judaism*, p. 29)

Discussion questions:

1. How is the transnaturalist’s view of God different than the traditional view of God (theism)?
2. How is the transnaturalist’s view of God different from a non-religious or atheist view of God?
3. What do you think of this perspective of God, and why?

Text 3

“All Reconstructionists would agree... that though we refer to God as the Healer of the sick, we should not accept our ancestors’ conception of God as supernaturally intervening to perform miraculous cures.” (Alpert, *EJ*, p. 35)

Discussion questions:

1. How is a Reconstructionist belief of God as healer different from a traditional belief of God as healer?
2. Why might Jews continue to say prayers of healing if they don’t believe that God will intervene to heal people?

Text 4

Transnaturalism is also at its heart a universalist belief system. Universalism is the belief that something should apply to all people/things. In this case, it means that God is the God of all people, not just the God of the Jews. If God is one as the Shema says, then there is only one God for everyone. We may have different names for God and different ways of thinking about God, but God is universal. If God is a Force in the world, like other scientific phenomena, then all the more reason why this Force would apply to everyone.

Because of his universalist views, Kaplan and Reconstructionist Judaism reject particularism, the idea that one group is separate and distinct from another group. This includes the belief that Jews are God's chosen people. Many Reconstructionist prayers rewrite the language to make it universal instead of particular.

For example: in the *Aliyah* blessings that one recites before a Torah reading, it generally says "*asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*" – who chose us from among all the people.

Reconstructionist prayers write instead, "*asher kervanu la'avodato*" – who has called us to do God's work.

Discussion questions:

1. What do you think about the idea of a universalist Jewish belief?
2. Would you agree that our God is the same as other religions' God? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel about changing prayers to make them more universal?

Unit 1 Lesson 6: Process Theology

Materials:

- White board
- What is a Process? and Process Theology handouts (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Discuss natural “forces” that are unseen truths of the universe, such as gravity, entropy, or the laws of thermodynamics.
- Introduce Artson’s process theology, the belief that God is a natural process in the universe, rather than a sentient being.
- Integrate process theology with modern science.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to compare and contrast panentheism, transnaturalism, and process theology.
- Students should be able to explain process theology as being the belief that God is a process in nature, as opposed to a being outside of nature.
- Students should be able to argue for or against a belief in process theology.

Set induction:

- Write on the board: God is the source of good in the universe.
 - Ask students: “Do you agree or disagree, and why?”
 - Write answers on the board.

Main Lesson:

- **Review**
 - Theism
 - The belief that God is separate and removed from the universe
 - Pantheism
 - The belief that God and the Universe are the same thing
 - Panentheism
 - The belief that God is within the universe and beyond it
 - Transnaturalism
 - The belief that God is neither within the universe nor separate from it, but a process of it
- **Introduction to Process**
 - “Today we will be learning another theology similar to transnaturalism called process theology. While process theology has existed for over a hundred years in Christian theology, it has only recently been developed in

Jewish theology. Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson has applied the concept of process theology to Jewish belief and practice.”

- **Group discussion**
 - Pass out print-out of What is a Process? handout.
 - Ask for volunteers to read paragraphs out loud.
 - Ask if there are any questions about the text.
 - Ask if a student can summarize the passage.
 - Answer discussion questions together as a class.
- **Chavruta**
 - Pass out print-out of Process Theology handout.
 - Put students in pairs.
 - Instruct students to read out loud in their chavruta pairs, and then answer the discussion questions together.

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** What is process theology? How is it different and similar to transnaturalism?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Create a drawing that represents process theology.
 - **Option 2:** Is process theology comforting because it means God is not punishing you, or is it upsetting because it means God will not intervene on your behalf? Explain your answer.
 - **Option 3:** Artson studied advanced physics to write his theory of process theology. How would you use science to explore spirituality?

Appendix

What Is A Process?

Written by Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler

A **process** is a continuous action, operation, or series of changes that take place step by step. A process is active and fluid, as opposed to static and unchanging. Processes may refer to series of biological or chemical transformations. Examples of such processes include the carbon cycle, cell differentiation, photosynthesis, the process of decay. We can also talk about much larger ongoing processes like the evolutionary process. There are mathematical processes such as the Fibonacci sequence, which appears in natural structures as varied as the daisy's petals, the sunflower's seed head, the pine cone, the chambered nautilus' shell, the branches and root systems of trees, spiral galaxies such as the Milky Way galaxy, and hurricanes.

Discussion questions:

1. What are the scientific or mathematical examples given? Can anyone explain any of them?
2. Kaplan saw God as a force, like gravity. Bradley Artson sees God as a process, like evolution. What might be the difference between a force and a process?

Process Theology

Written by Ariel Zitny, summarized from "Ba-Darekh: On the Way – A Presentation of Process Theology" by Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, and from hearing Rabbi Artson lecture.

Rabbi Artson in his doctoral thesis rewrote what it means for a Jew to follow Process theology. Rather than being inspired by Kaplan and following in his footsteps, Artson decided to study Process theology in the Christian tradition, and to also study advanced physics to try and make sense of it from a modern scientific standpoint. Artson also approached process theology from the viewpoint of someone who very much believes in God, and someone who believes God is an active force and being. But how can God be an active force and being, while also being a process? This is kind of like the wave-particle duality of light: light is both a particle and a wave at the same time, despite those being contradictory to each other. Artson uses this view of God: God is both a process (something we think of as a non-sentient non-entity) and a being (a sentient entity) at the same time.

To prove process theology, Artson must first disprove traditional theology. He first disproves that God is all-powerful with a medieval paradox: If God is all-powerful, then God should be able to create a weight so heavy that God cannot lift it; but if God could not lift the weight, then God would not be all-powerful. But if God could not create a weight unable to be lifted, that would also make God not all-powerful. Artson then disproves that God is all-knowing. "For God to be all-knowing makes real, substantive human freedom impossible. And if God knows the future absolutely, then God also knows God's future choices absolutely. Such perfect foretelling strips God of any freedom as well, a contradiction lurking within the dominant theological scheme" (Artson). Artson argues that the idea of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God was never a part of Judaism, and it has been a theology that Jews have absorbed from other religions and faiths. "Rather than cling to this outmoded (and unbiblical/unrabbinic) philosophical notion of God and power, Process thinking offers a way to recover a biblically and rabbinically resonant, dynamic articulation of God, world, and covenant, integrating that portrayal with contemporary scientific knowledge of the cosmos and of life into a speculative philosophy worthy of our engagement" (Artson).

Artson says Process theology is first and foremost **relational**. What he means by this, is that everything is in constant relation with everything else. The idea that anything is separate is only an illusion due to size and scale. We see our bodies as singular separate entities, but if we were to zoom in, we would see that within our singular bodies are separations of parts, with those parts having separations of cells and atoms. Even within an atom, most of the atom is empty space, and yet we see ourselves as solid substances, because we do not have the capacity to see how much separation we have within ourselves. We also don't realize how much interaction we actually have with our outside worlds. We see ourselves as distinct, but we are completely permeable – atoms "float in and out of what we think of as 'us' all the time" (Artson). What we think of as separate and distinct is really permeable and fluid. This also works on a global scale. Rabbi Artson once remarked how humans have such limited capacity to see. We look at the ocean and see a fluid, dynamic state, but when we look at mountain ranges we see rigid, unmoving structures. But, if we were to look at a mountain range over hundreds of thousands of years, it would look

just as fluid as the waves in the ocean. Everything is fluid, everything is in motion, we just need the right perspective to see it.

The world, and all its inhabitants, is partially self-created and self-creating. The entire universe is in partnership with God in its own becoming. God is the ultimate process of becoming. God's name is formed from the root 'to be,' and often theorized to be the present tense form of the word 'to be' that we don't actually use in Hebrew. God as creator is a God who has *created the ability to choose*. Our partnership with God is that "God holds out a choice to you that you are free to take or free to reject – and then God meets you in the next choice, with the next possibility" (Artson). God is not coercive – God is suggestive. God *invites* us to make choices, and we always have the possibility to make the best choice. But even if we do not make the best choice, God will be there with us for the next choice, offering us another opportunity to better ourselves and the world around us.

Artson therefore describes God as a "lure." God is a persuasive force for goodness. God is not impartial. God cares about the wellbeing of the world, and the wellbeing of all its inhabitants, and God feels real sadness when people suffer. However, God is not able to be coercive. It is possible God could have given Godself that capability, but in doing so, God would have created a very different world, with very different creatures. In the world that God created, God specifically created choice, which gives us all free will. Because of that, God does not have the power to stop evil from happening. But God is not hidden or absent: God is there, encouraging all of us to make the best decisions.

This has been especially meaningful for people who have trouble believing in God while bad things happen in this world. Many people think, "I believe in goodness, but I don't believe in God, because how could horrible things happen if God exists?" This theory might speak to those people. Just as your conscience doesn't actually have the power to control your decisions for you, but it does play a deciding factor in what decisions you make, God cannot control your thoughts or actions, but God can be very persuasive in trying to encourage you to make the decisions God thinks you should make. This can describe those nagging feelings we all sometimes get where we feel like we ought to do something, and sometimes we can't figure out where those feelings are coming from.

This also changes the way we can think about religion, and organized religion. Artson uses process theology to show that *belief in goodness is more important than belief in God*. He quotes from the Talmud, where the rabbis imagine God to say, "It would be better for the people to forsake me but maintain my Torah, for the great light emanating from the Torah would have led them back to me." If we believe in goodness, and we practice that goodness, that will bring us to God – whether we realize it or not. Some people who may even label themselves atheists are truer believers than others under this principle: *those who follow the "lure" to do good are the true followers of God*.

Artson calls this an "open-ended Torah." The Torah is our relationship and conversation with God as this ultimate lure to do goodness. Rather than worrying about kosher laws or proper observance, we should quiet ourselves to try and listen if we can hear what it is God wants from us. This is where prayer comes into process theology:

whatever process brings you to a state of mind where you can listen to that lure of goodness, that becomes a spiritual practice. Whether it's traditional prayer, meditation, or yoga, most people need a way to enter that place where they can listen to the lure.

Discussion questions:

- What is Artson's view of God?
- How does Artson support process theology from a Jewish standpoint?
- How is Artson's process theology similar to Kaplan's transnaturalism? How is it different?
- What do you think about Artson's process theology?

Unit 2

Post-Holocaust Theology

Unit 2: Post-Holocaust Theology

- Lesson One: Introduction to Course + Unit
- Lesson Two: God Is Dead
- Lesson Three: Hidden God
- Lesson Four: Vengeance
- Lesson Five: Justice/Redemption

Unit Goals:

- Contextualize the existence of multiple theologies within Judaism's interpretive tradition.
- Contextualize the Holocaust as an event that challenged traditional Jewish theology.
- Introduce five different Holocaust theologies: God is dead, hidden God, vengeance, divine justice, and redemption.
- Make connections between Holocaust theologies and Jewish texts.
- Make the theologies personal by asking how we respond to them.

Unit Objectives:

- Students should be able to summarize each of the five post-Holocaust theologies.
- Students should be able to evaluate whether or not they agree with each post-Holocaust theology.
- Students should be able to synthesize elements from some of the five theologies to create their own post-Holocaust theology.

Essential Questions:

- How do Jews continue to have faith after the Holocaust?
- How can an all good, all powerful God allow the Holocaust to happen?
- What does it mean to be a Jew in a post-Holocaust world?

Unit 2 Lesson 1: Introduction to Unit

Materials:

- Whiteboard
- Index cards
- Tape
- Journals

Goals:

- Contextualize the horrors of the Holocaust.
- Connect the horrors of the Holocaust with Jews' inability to continue believing in God in the same way.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain why the Holocaust was theologically problematic.
- Students should be able to give one answer of how to have faith after the Holocaust.

00:00-00:10 – Set Induction – What do you know about the Holocaust?

Teacher gives each student a couple of index cards.

“On these cards, I want you to write down anything and everything you know about the Holocaust. Things you learned in school, personal accounts you heard from survivors, or stories you saw in movies or tv. Write down as many things as you can think of that relates to the Holocaust, using as many index cards as you need. When you’re done, we’ll tape them to the whiteboard.”

Once students have taped their responses to the whiteboard, as a class read through the answers. Ask students these questions:

- “What do you notice about the answers given?”
- “What are the answers that are repeated?”
- “Are there any positives written?”
- “How does God fit into these answers?”

00:10-00:20 – Connecting Unit 1 & 2

“We started our course by learning about supernaturalism, which is considered to be the traditional Jewish theology.”

Ask for a student to summarize supernaturalism.

(answer: Supernaturalism is the belief in things, beings, or events that defy the laws of nature.)

Question: If the traditional Jewish belief in God is the belief in a supernatural God, what do the “beyond supernatural” theologies believe?

(answer: a God who exists within nature, rather than solely removed and separate from nature. This God is within our world and not separate from it. This God could be a part of what we understand to be science and the laws of nature.)

“For the theologians who rejected supernaturalism, science and reason were the main catalysts which caused them to question traditional belief. After learning more about science and logic, these theologians needed to find a new way to believe in God that did not go against what science and reason have proven to be true.”

“Each of the theologies we study in this course will be responding to a problem or a question they see within Jewish belief and tradition. Last unit that question was science and reason. This unit the question is the Holocaust. Namely, how to continue to believe in God after something as horrible as the Holocaust happens.”

00:25-00:45 – Introduction to Holocaust Unit

“The Holocaust shook the whole world to its core. It wasn’t until after the war ended that the world realized the extent to Hitler’s Final Solution plans. It was not only hard for the people who survived the Holocaust to continue to believe in God, but it was also hard for people who heard about the horrors and listened to survivors’ stories.”

Question for discussion: Who has heard a first-person account about the Holocaust from someone who has lived through it? (ask for volunteers to share what they’ve heard)

“Now that we’ve discussed a little about what the Holocaust was like, we can better situate ourselves within that context. Even though we did not live through this horrible time, we can try and imagine what it would have been like. With all this in mind, let’s return to our original question: How can Jews continue to believe in God after the Holocaust? This question suggests that after the Holocaust, there is a tension between the belief in God and the fact that the Holocaust happened. This tension led a bunch of people to no longer believe in God. Let’s think a little more about why believing in God after the Holocaust might be so difficult.

Question for discussion: Why do you think it was hard for people to continue to believe in God after the Holocaust?

(possible answers: God is good and the Holocaust was bad, God is all-powerful so God could have stopped the Holocaust, the Jews are God’s chosen people and God should have liberated the Jews from Germany in a modern day Exodus, God said Jews would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and there are even fewer Jews today than there were before the Holocaust)

Teacher writes answers on the board in bullet-points.

Questions for discussion: Thinking back to our Beyond Supernaturalism unit, how do you think a pantheist or a panentheist would respond to this question of how to have faith after the Holocaust? What about a transnaturalist, or someone who believes in process theology?

(possible answers: A pantheist or panentheist might say that since God is within the universe, God was still present during the Holocaust, but not able to interfere in a supernatural way. This God does not listen to prayers and was unaffected by the human suffering. A transnaturalist or a person who believes in process theology might say that God was present but unable to interfere, but this God does care and wishes for goodness.)

00:45-1:00 – Closure Journaling Activity

“Prompt: Pretend you are someone who survived the horrors of the Holocaust, and you are writing a letter to a friend who is also a Holocaust survivor. It isn’t too long after the war ended and you were freed. Your friend wrote to you asking if you still believe in God, saying that they are not sure how they can still have faith after everything that has happened. Using a pen and paper, write your friend a letter explaining to them whether or not you still believe in God, and why.

Teacher gives students 10 minutes to write their letter.

Ask if any students want to share their letters.

“These letters are a great example of how many different ways Jews can respond to questions of Jewish theology. Next time we will start to learn about ways Jewish rabbis responded to the question of how to have faith after the Holocaust. We will look at a different answer each class, for a total of four different answers. Next time our answer will be: God is dead. So if any of you responded in your letter to your friend that God is dead, this theology will match your letter! And if you have any questions about how a Jewish theology can believe that God is dead, just wait till next time!”

Unit 2 Lesson 2: God Is Dead

Materials:

- Whiteboard
- Rubenstein's God is Dead text (in Appendix)
- Journals and pen

Goals:

- Introduce Rabbi Rubenstein's God is Dead Theology
- Explain how theodicy influenced the God is Dead theology
- Connect the God is Dead theology with the real feelings and beliefs of everyday Jews

Objectives:

- Students should be able to describe Rubenstein's God is Dead theology.
- Students should be able to explain how Rubenstein's theology answers the question of theodicy.
- Students should be able to compare and contrast Rubenstein's theology and atheism.
- Students should be able to evaluate whether they agree or disagree with Rubenstein's theology.

00:00-00:05 – Set Induction

Teacher writes question on the board: "If God is all-knowing and all-powerful (omniscient and omnipotent), then did God create the Holocaust?"

"Today we begin with the question: "If God is all-knowing and all-powerful (omniscient and omnipotent), then did God create the Holocaust?" Take a moment and think of an answer, and we will go around the room and respond. Please answer yes or no, and why. If you have conflicting thoughts, let us know what they are."

(possible answers: no, because God is not all-powerful; no, because God gives us free will; no, just because God could have stopped it doesn't mean God started it; yes, because God enacts God's will in the world)

00:05-00:10 – Introduction to Rubenstein

"We asked the question if God is all-knowing and all-powerful, then did God create the Holocaust? Many theologians after the Holocaust struggled with their faith in God, mostly because they believed in a God that was all good, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Even if we take away all-good, since we know God has acted in anger before, by suggesting that God is all-knowing and all-powerful means God knew about the Holocaust, could have

stopped it, and didn't. Or even worse, it means God caused the Holocaust. As we've seen Divine punishment in the Torah before, where God has killed people because of their sins, people could then interpret the Holocaust as Divine punishment on a huge scale. Not surprisingly, this was not a belief many people could continue to believe in. For many people, they simply stopped believing in God. For our next theologian, however, he stopped believing in the God of our ancestors, but he did not necessarily reject God completely."

00:10-00:35 Text Study

Pair students in Chavruta.

Ask students to begin their chavruta study by answering the question at the top of Rubenstein's God is Dead handout. Then, they should read the text and answer the discussion questions in their pairs.

00:35-00:45 – Class Discussion

Bring students back together as a class. Engage students in class discussion by prompting them with the following questions.

Discussion questions: "What did you think of Rubenstein's theology? What did you find compelling? Did you agree or disagree, and why?"

00:45-1:00 – Closure

"This was our first response to how to have faith after the Holocaust. The God is dead theology answers why God did nothing to stop the Holocaust: because God was unable to do anything to stop the Holocaust.

"In our last couple of minutes, we will write our responses to Rubenstein's God is Dead theology. Take out your journals, and write a response to Rubenstein. Do you agree with him? Do you disagree? Are there parts you agree with, and parts you disagree with? What do you have questions about, and want to know more about?"

Teacher instructs students to write in their journals. In the last 5 minutes, ask students if any want to share what they've written.

"Thank you all for an amazing lesson and discussion about the God is Dead theology. Next time we will continue with questioning how to have faith after the Holocaust, and next time our answer will be the Hidden God theology."

Appendix

Summarized by Ariel Zitny from Steven T. Katz's book Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and Zachary Braiterman's book (God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought.

Rubenstein's "God is Dead"

Perhaps the first Jewish theological response to the Holocaust came out in 1966, called *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, written by Rabbi Richard L. Rubenstein. It took many years for anyone to write about the Holocaust, both survivors and non-survivors alike. Katz writes that the radio silence could be explained because "the cry of the living demanded precedence over the sacred duty of remembering the dead" (Katz 143). However, Rubenstein's response was not one of remembrance, but rather a response trying to make sense of what happened. Not a survivor himself, he was actually in rabbinical school at the Reform seminary Hebrew Union College while the Holocaust was happening. Struggling with how to keep his faith in God after the Holocaust, he wrote *After Auschwitz*, which was seen by many to be a blasphemous and disrespectful reaction to this atrocity, but to others it was an invitation to be Jewish in a different way.

Rubenstein had had a conversation with a Christian colleague of his who suggested that if God was all-good and all-powerful, then it was God who created the Holocaust. Rubenstein responded by saying, "If I believed in God as the omnipotent author of the historical drama and Israel as His Chosen People, I had to accept [my friend's] conclusion that it was God's will that Hitler committed six million Jews to slaughter. I could not possibly believe in such a God nor could I believe in Israel as the chosen people of God after Auschwitz." Essentially Rubenstein was saying, "I cannot continue to believe in an all-powerful God who would choose the people Israel, and yet allow them to suffer in the Holocaust." This belief, while not previously published by a religious Jewish theologian, was not a unique response to the Holocaust: As a character in one of Elie Wiesel's books declares, a Messiah who does not arrive while Auschwitz is operating, will never have a reason to come.

This is the question of theodicy. Theodicy is the question of how does evil exist if God is all-powerful and all-good. Rubenstein understands the logic that says, "God is all-good, God is all-powerful, and the Holocaust happened" as concluding that God created the Holocaust. Therefore, he rejects the belief in a living God. Many Jews responded to his 'God is dead' theology with the accusation that this was blasphemous, but Rubenstein responds to them by saying that it is more blasphemous to suggest that God would have considered Auschwitz a just punishment than to say there is no God.

"Surprisingly, his 'God is dead' theology does not make him leave Judaism. Rubenstein actually doubles down on his commitment to the Jewish religion, writing that without God, the existence of peoplehood is even more important. Rubenstein writes, "It is precisely because human existence is tragic, ultimately hopeless, and without meaning that we treasure our religious community." To Rubenstein, after the Holocaust Judaism could

not be a religion in the same way, but that made it all the more important for it to remain a people. Even though Rubenstein could not continue to believe in a living God after the Holocaust, he continues to believe in the Jewish people, and suggests we focus our attention on ritual instead of belief.”

There were many responses to Rubenstein’s assertion in the death of God, one of them being from another prominent Reform Jewish theologian, Rabbi Eugene Borowitz. In a sermon entitled “Death of God,” Borowitz writes, “No Jew until quite recent times ever so changed his father’s belief as to deny God altogether, yet that is the fearful possibility of our situation. It is as if people are standing up to God and saying, ‘Unless you meet our standards you cannot exist!’” While perhaps audacious to many people of faith, this is a realistic thought process that many people had post-Enlightenment. Borne out of the Enlightenment was the ideology that religion, and by extension faith in God, was a choice, and that people were not obligated to opt-in. Because of this new ideology of voluntary religion, combined with the horrors of the Holocaust and the belief that faith in God did not ultimately serve the Jewish people, many Jews decided to opt-out of faith, and adopted Rubenstein’s theology, whether consciously or not.

Discussion questions:

- How did Rubenstein’s theology come about?
- Why does Rubenstein reject the belief of a living God?
- What is theodicy? How does Rubenstein address it?
- How did Rubenstein respond to people who called his theology blasphemous?
- Is this a type of atheism? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Rubenstein believed that the religious community was still important even after the “Death of God”?
- What are your thoughts about Rubenstein’s theology? Do you agree, why or why not?

Unit 2 Lesson 3: Hidden God

Materials:

- White board
- Don't Hide Your Face and Hidden God (in Appendix) print-outs
- Debbie Friedman's "Don't Hide Your Face" / way to play it
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce Hidden God theology.
- Connect Berkovits' Hidden God theology to Psalm 27 and Isaiah 45.
- Explain how according to Berkovits, free will leads to both salvation and suffering.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain the Hidden God theology.
- Students should be able to compare and contrast the Hidden God theology with the God is Dead theology.
- Students should be able to evaluate whether they agree with Berkovits' connection between divine love and suffering and why.

00:00-00:05 – Set Induction

Teacher plays the Debbie Friedman song "Don't Hide Your Face (Al Tasteir)." (Lyrics in Appendix)

Discussion questions: *What did you hear in the song? What do you think the song is about, and why?*

(possible answers: *asking God for help, asking God not to turn away or hide, looking for a response from God when you pray)*

00:05-00:15 – Introduction to Hidden God Theology

Teacher writes on board: How to have faith after the Holocaust? 1. God is dead. 2. God is hidden.

"Today we will be learning about the hidden God theology. Similar to the God is dead theology, the hidden God theology is also attempting to answer this question of how to have faith after the Holocaust. The hidden God theology is also based off the belief that God does not intervene in worldly affairs. But rather than coming to the conclusion that a non-intervening God means God is dead, this theology concludes that God is hiding, and God's actions are not easily seen or recognizable. Instead of performing unbelievable miracles, God hides God's power and chooses not to interfere. With a hidden God, God can

still be all good and all powerful, but since God chooses not to interfere on Earth, bad things will still happen.

“The Hidden God theology was created by Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, an Orthodox rabbi who was able to escape from Germany in 1939. In his book *Faith After the Holocaust*, Berkovits addressed how to make sense of the seemingly opposing beliefs that God is all-good, God is all-powerful, and the Holocaust was a manifestation of incomprehensible evil that could not be understood as legitimate/deserved punitive justice from God. Berkovits comes up with the theory of a “hiding God” – a God who *could* intervene in affairs on Earth, but does not.

“Berkovits uses Jewish texts to support his theory. In a moment we will use some of the texts he uses. But first, I want to explain how Berkovits connects God’s hiddenness with God’s goodness. Berkovits notices that in the texts about God’s hiddenness, God’s hiding seems to be directly connected to God’s salvation. Picking up on this connection and using the interpretive tradition, Berkovits explains this connection by arguing that God’s concealment is *necessary* for salvation. For Berkovits, salvation is directly connected to the performing of mitzvot, which is directly connected to the free will of humanity. Doing good deeds means nothing if we did not do them willingly. If God wants people to have free will, God needs to let them exercise that will, even if it means bad things will happen. Free will cannot have conditions – we can’t *sometimes* have free will, or else it isn’t really free will.

“This offers humanity free will, as well as an opportunity to be able to do repentance, but it also means that God must allow that bad things can happen. However, Berkovits does not go so far as to say that God is completely removed from the world, as Rubenstein did. Rather, Berkovits asserts that God does show Godself, but not through direct actions. According to Berkovits, God reveals God’s presence through the survival of the Jewish people. To Berkovits, the glimmer of good brought about by the actions of people is what divine redemption looks like. The fact that there were Righteous Gentiles who helped Jews escape, the fact that the world responded to end the war, the fact that the Jews were not wiped out like Hitler had planned, to Berkovits these are all examples of God’s divine will being enacted in the world.”

00:15-00:35 – Text Study

Teacher splits students into small groups or pairs. Teacher gives them Don’t Hide Your Face and Hidden God texts. Teacher instructs students to read each text and answer the discussion questions in their pairs/small groups.

00:35-00:45 – Class Discussion

Teacher brings students back together as a group. Teacher asks students to share what they discussed in their small groups/pairs. Teacher asks students whether or not they agreed with Berkovits and Greenberg about the Hidden God theology.

Teacher offers space for student questions.

00:45-01:00 – Reflection / Closure

Teacher asks students to bring out their journals.

Journal prompt: Argue whether or not it is possible for God to give people free will and also prevent suffering in the world. Either: yes, it is possible for God to give people free will and also prevent suffering, and here is how _____; or no, it is not possible for God to give people free will, and here is why _____.

In last 5 minutes of class, ask students if anyone wants to share their argument and rationale.

“This week we learned a bit about the Hidden God theology, and how is similar to but also different from the God is Dead theology. Next time we will go in a completely different direction, and learn a bit about a vengeance theology. You might be wondering how vengeance could be a theology, so hang onto that, and we’ll discuss next time!”

Appendix

Don't Hide Your Face

Don't Hide Your Face (Al Tasteir)

By Debbie Friedman

Based off Psalm 27

Don't hide your face from me
I'm asking for your help
I call to you, please hear my prayers, Oh God
If you would answer me
As I have called to you
Please hear me now, don't hide your face from me

Psalm 27:9-12

9. Do not hide your face from me; do not thrust aside your servant in anger; you have ever been my help. Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, Oh God, my savior.

10. Though my father and mother abandoned me, Adonai will take me in.

11. Show me your way, oh Adonai, and lead me on a level path because of my watchful foes.

12. Do not subject me to the will of my foes, for false witnesses and unjust accusers have appeared against me.

Discussion questions:

1. How are these texts connected to the hidden God theology?
2. How does Psalm 27 support the belief that suffering on earth is not God enacting God's will?
3. The song is based on verse 9. How is verse 9 different by itself? How does it change with the other 3 verses added?
4. Verse 11 asks God to lead the psalmist on a level path because of their watchful foes. What does this mean? How is asking to be "led" different from asking to be "saved"?

Hidden God

(texts edited for gender-neutrality)

Isaiah 45:15

“You are indeed a God who conceals themselves; oh God of Israel who brings salvation!”

Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, pg. 106

“This is the inescapable paradox of divine providence. While God tolerates the sinner, God must abandon the victim; while God] shows forbearance with the wicked, God must turn a deaf ear to the anguished cries of the violated. This is the ultimate tragedy of existence: God's very mercy and forbearance, God's very love for humanity, necessitates the abandonment of some people to a fate that they may well experience as divine indifference to injustice and human suffering. It is the tragic paradox of faith that God's direct concern for the wrongdoer should be directly responsible for so much pain and sorrow on earth. We conclude then: the one who demands justice of God must give up humanity; the one who asks for God's love and mercy beyond justice must accept suffering.”

Discussion questions:

1. Why does Berkovits use Isaiah 45:15 to base his “Hidden God” theology on? How does he use the interpretive tradition?
2. What does Berkovits mean by “the inescapable paradox of divine providence”?
3. Berkovits says the one “who asks for God's love and mercy beyond justice must accept suffering.” What does this mean? Why, according to Berkovits, is suffering connected to God's love and mercy?

Rabbi Irving Greenberg's response to Berkovits' Hidden God theology:

“The lesson of Purim is that in an age of ‘eclipse of God,’ look for divine redemption in the triumph of the good, even if that victory does not meet present notions of purity and perfection...God is the Divine Redeeming Presence encountered in the partial, flawed actions of humans.”

“The rebirth of Israel... is comparable to the Exodus itself.”

Discussion questions:

1. Rabbi Greenberg uses Purim as an analogy, because God is not mentioned once in the entire story of Esther. Even without any mention of God, the book of Esther is still considered a holy scroll, and we still celebrate the holiday of Purim. How do you think this analogy connects to Berkovits' Hidden God theology?
2. According to Greenberg, where do we find God when God is hidden?
3. According to Greenberg, what is a modern day example of God's miracles? How is this connected to the Hidden God theology?
4. Do you agree with Berkovits' and Greenberg's conception of God's actions in current day? Why or why not?

Unit 2 Lesson 4: Vengeance

Materials:

- White board
- Vengeance Theology handout (in Appendix)
- Journal

Goals:

- Introduce Fackenheim's vengeance theology: To stop being Jewish after the Holocaust was to let Hitler win.
- Place Fackenheim' theology within the context of another response to the main question of how to have faith after the Holocaust
- Introduce Fackenheim's ideas of "root experiences" and "epochmaking events"
- Make Fackenheim's vengeance theology personal by directing it to ourselves

Objectives:

- Students should be able to define vengeance theology as "not being Jewish after the Holocaust is to let Hitler win."
- Students should be able to explain the difference between root experiences and epochmaking events.
- Students should be able to give one example of a root experience and one example of an epochmaking event.
- Students should be able to evaluate what they think and how they feel about Fackenheim's vengeance theology.

00:00-00:05 – Set Induction

"Raise your hand if you've seen someone be bullied."

"Raise your hand if you've seen someone be bullied for something they can't change about themselves."

"Raise your hand if you've seen someone be bullied because of something they love."

"Raise your hand if you've ever heard 'changing yourself would let the bullies win.'"

Question for discussion: "Does anyone have any thoughts about the idea that changing yourself would let the bullies win? Do you agree or disagree, and why?"

00:05-00:15 – Introduction to Vengeance Theology

“Much like the idea that when someone changes themselves because they’re bullied they’re letting the bullies win, one theologian believed that to not be Jewish anymore after the Holocaust was letting the Nazis win.

“In this unit we’ve been asking the question, ‘How to have faith after the Holocaust.’

Teacher writes “How to have faith after the Holocaust” on the board.

“The God is dead theology was the first response to that question. Because of that, each additional response was both responding to the original question, as well as to that first answer of God is dead. Last time we learned about the hidden God theology, which both answered the original question as well as refuted the idea that God is dead. This week we’ll learn about vengeance theology, which does the same.

Teacher writes on the board under “How to have faith after the Holocaust”: 1. Divine Justice
2. God is dead 3. God is Hiding

“Fackenheim believed that first response, that the Holocaust was divine justice, was blaspheming against the victims of the Holocaust, and that the second response, that God was dead, blasphemed against the God of those victims.

“However, Fackenheim doesn’t try to figure out why God did not intervene in the Holocaust. Instead, he takes an entirely different approach.”

Teacher crosses out question “How to have faith after the Holocaust” and writes, “How to continue to be Jewish after the Holocaust.”

00:15-00:35 – Text Study

Teacher passes out Text 1 and divides students into pairs or small groups. Students should read through the text, and then answer the discussion questions together.

00:35-00:40 – Class discussion

Teacher brings the class back together as a group.

“Let’s return to our new question that we asked at the beginning of this class: How to be Jewish after the Holocaust? What do you think Fackenheim says to that question?”

Teacher returns to the new question on the board: How to be Jewish after the Holocaust?

Teacher writes students’ answer on the board.
(answer: “If you don’t, you’re letting Hitler win.”)

Discussion Question: How do you feel about Fackenheim's position? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

00:40-01:00 – Reflection / Closure

Teacher asks students to take out their journals.

“Just like the response that changing who you are because you're bullied lets the bullies win, Fackenheim's vengeance theology is empowering to some people, and upsetting to others.

“How might his theology be empowering?

(possible answers: because all you have to do to fight Hitler is stay Jewish, because it gives people reason to stay true to who they are)

“How might his theology be upsetting?

(possible answers: because if someone doesn't want to be Jewish they shouldn't be coerced into staying Jewish, people don't have to believe in God just to be anti-Nazi)

“We will now write our own thoughts in our journals. Prompt: Fackenheim says to you, “If you stop being Jewish, you're letting Hitler win.” How do you respond to him?

In last 5 minutes of class, ask students if any of them would like to share what they wrote.

“This week we learned our third way to have faith after the Holocaust, vengeance theology, the idea that we need to stay Jewish as vengeance against Hitler. Next time we will learn the last two Holocaust theologies, which I have grouped together. They are both more traditional theologies, and we've already talked about the first one a little bit. They are divine justice, and divine redemption.”

Appendix

Summarized by Ariel Zitny from Steven T. Katz's book Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought

Vengeance Theology

Rabbi Emil Fackenheim, a Holocaust survivor, wrote what was both his response to the Holocaust and his response to the previous responses to the Holocaust in his book *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* in 1970. In his writings he addressed the two previously mentioned ideologies: one, the Holocaust was nothing special and was attribution of divine justice, and two, a valid response to the Holocaust was to believe that God is dead. He tried to find a way to avoid both the absolute faith of the pious who do not see any special problem in the *Shoah* and those like Rubenstein who argue that the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from Auschwitz is the 'Death of God'. Fackenheim believed that the first blasphemed against the victims of the Holocaust, and the second blasphemed against the God of those victims.

Fackenheim sees the question of "How to have faith after the Holocaust" to be the wrong question entirely. Not every Jewish person even believed in God to begin with. Throughout history Jews have questioned if they believe in God, and yet they continued to belong to the Jewish people, and therefore they prayed to the God of Israel, because that's what Jews do.

Fackenheim sees the real question as, 'How to continue to be Jewish after the Holocaust. Fackenheim acknowledges that keeping faith is hard, but not necessary to remaining Jewish. However, Fackenheim insists that "Above all, Jews are forbidden 'to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish'" – and to do so would be giving Hitler a posthumous victory.

Fackenheim says that Hitler tried to eliminate all Jews from the earth. The easiest way to do this was to murder all of them. But, if every Jewish person decided to not be Jewish anymore, and converted to another religion and raised their kids as another religion, eventually Judaism would be entirely forgotten, and there would be no more Jews. Although Hitler's antisemitic Final Solution was more racially-based than religiously-based, Fackenheim still argues that letting the Jewish religion die out would be letting Hitler win. Because of this, Fackenheim argues that we have an obligation to be Jewish, regardless of how we might feel about faith or God.

However, he understood that it was hard to find meaning in something as horrific as the Holocaust. And without meaning, it is hard to have faith.

Instead of thinking of it as divine punishment as many traditional Jews did, and instead of thinking of it as the death of God as many other Reform Jews did, Fackenheim thought back to texts in the Torah that also showed the Jews going through extreme hardship. He specifically thinks about the hundreds of years of slavery that the Jews lived

through in Egypt before they were liberated and saved. Fackenheim argues that Jews have had “root experiences” and “epochmaking events” that define who we are as a people.

Root experiences are “historical events of such a formative character that they continue to influence all future ‘presents’ of the people and they are of such a power that these past moments legislate to every future era.” An example of a root experience would be the Exodus from Egypt. Epochmaking events on the other hand are “crises that challenge the ‘root experiences’ through new situations, which test the resiliency and generality of ‘root experiences’ to answer to new and unprecedented conditions and realities.” For example, the destruction of the First and Second Temple, which eliminated temple sacrifices and the priestly duties.

Because Jews had the shared experience of hundreds of years of slavery followed by a divine redemption, that root experience shaped the Jewish people for all time. We don’t look back on our slavery in Egypt and think of that as divine punishment, or proof that God didn’t love us. We look back on it as a powerful experience that shaped who we are.

Because Jews had the tragedy of the destruction of the First and Second Temple, we were challenged to adapt to a Judaism without the Temple. While the destruction of the Temples was a tragedy, it shaped the Jewish people. However, unlike the Exodus from Egypt, it did not come to define who we are as a people. First, not all Jews shared the experience of the destruction of the Temples – there were already Jews living in Diaspora, living Jewish lives without the Temple. Second, while it changed Jewish practice, it did not change Jewish identity or belief.

Epochmaking events influence Jewish collective memory and ideology, but root experiences influence the very identity of Judaism itself. For Fackenheim, the Holocaust was an immensely powerful epochmaking event, from which the Jewish people were challenged; however, it was not a root experience, and therefore does not necessitate a change of Judaism itself. Because of this, he disagrees with Rubenstein’s theory that Judaism and/or Jewish belief must change in order to adapt to a post-Holocaust reality.

Discussion questions:

- What does Fackenheim say would be letting Hitler win? Do you agree, why or why not?
- What is a root experience? What is an epochmaking event? How are they similar? How are they different?
- Why do you think Fackenheim classifies the Holocaust as an epochmaking event instead of a root experience?
- What is Fackenheim’s conclusion? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Unit 2 Lesson 5: Justice/Redemption

Materials:

- Divine Justice and Redemption (in Appendix) print-outs
- Journals

Goals:

- Explain divine justice theology
- Explain redemption theology
- Differentiate between the way Kook, Greenberg, and Berkovits believe in redemption theology
- Review post-Holocaust theology unit

Objectives:

- Students should be able to define redemption theology
- Students should be able to define divine justice theology
- Students should be able to compare divine justice to parenthood
- Students should be able to argue for or against divine justice theology and redemption theology.

00:00-00:05 – Set Induction

“Raise your hand if you’ve ever done something you weren’t supposed to do, and a parent or caretaker punished you and said they were punishing you because they loved you?”

Teacher asks students how they felt about those experiences, and whether or not they believed it.

(possible answers: it felt bad because I didn’t feel loved in that moment and so I didn’t believe it; I was confused because if they loved me why weren’t they more understanding; I was angry because it’s a cop-out answer; I listened because they’re my parents and maybe they know better)

“Raise your hand if you’ve ever experienced something really difficult, but were rewarded for having gone through that difficult experience?”

Teacher asks students to give examples of difficult experiences that they were rewarded for having experienced.

(possible answers: studying really hard for a test and then getting a good grade, training a lot for a meet and performing well, getting a shot at the doctor and getting a lollipop, working really hard to get good grades and your parents bought you something as a reward)

00:05-00:10 – Introduction to Justice/Redemption

“While not exactly the same idea, our last two Holocaust theologies can be represented in those questions I began class with. The first question, where a parent or caretaker punishes you because they love you, represents the divine justice theology. Divine justice theology says that everything that happens on earth is an enactment of divine justice, and was therefore deserved. The second question, where you experienced something difficult but were rewarded as a result, represents the redemption theology. Redemption theology acknowledges that good people go through difficult experiences, but claims that hardship is necessary in order to receive rewards.”

00:10-00:30 – Text Study

Teacher hands out Divine Justice and Redemption texts. Teacher splits students into pairs. Students are instructed to read each text and answer the discussion questions.

00:30-00:45 – Reflection / Lesson Closure

Teacher asks students to share what they discussed in their small groups.

“This will be our last journal entry for our unit on post-Holocaust theology. We have two questions for our prompt today. Choose one to start with, and if you have enough time, move on to the other one. You will take a stance, either for or against the theologies we have learned today.

Prompt:

- Write a persuasive argument that punishment is / is not an expression of love.
- Write a persuasive argument that hardship is / is not necessary for reward.

Teacher gives students 10 minutes to write in their journals. Teacher asks if any students would like to share what they've written.

00:45-01:00 – Reflection / Unit Closure

“As this is the last class of our post-Holocaust theology unit, let’s take our last remaining time to reflect on what we’ve learned this unit. Take a couple minutes to flip through your journals and remind yourself what you wrote about. As you flip through, notice what you agreed with and what you disagreed with. Take notes and write down your thoughts, because we will share them when we come back. Go ahead and flip through your journals now, and we will come back in five minutes.”

Teacher gives students 5 minutes to skim through their journals. Teacher writes on the board: How to have faith after the Holocaust

“Now that we’ve reminded ourselves of our past lessons, we’ll start to synthesize what we’ve learned to create our own beliefs. Each of these thinkers had their own answer to the question of how to have faith after the Holocaust. Share with us either what you agreed with or what you didn’t agree with.”

Teacher invites students to share what they agreed and disagreed with from this unit.

(possible answers: I agreed with the hidden God theology, and I very much do not believe in divine justice; I agreed with the God is dead theology and also that people enact goodness on earth, and I disagreed with divine justice and redemption theology; I’m not sure if I believe in God or not, but I do feel like I want to still be Jewish so Hitler doesn’t win)

“We have now concluded our post-Holocaust theology unit! Next time we will begin our new unit, which is called Feminist Theology. This unit will explore how Judaism and feminism can combine, and how Jewish feminists have shaped the future of Judaism. So next time we will put the Holocaust behind us and dive into Feminist theology.”

Appendix

Summarized by Ariel Zitny from Steven T. Katz's book Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought, Michael Oppenheim's book Irving Greenberg: A Jewish Dialectic of Hope, and Eliezer Berkovits' Faith After the Holocaust.

Divine Justice

In past tragedies, Jews have viewed the existence of such horror and devastation to be the attribution of divine justice. According to biblical texts, the children of Israel are punished by God for their sins. For example, this is the reasoning given for the destruction of the First and Second Temple, which were said to be destroyed because Jews treated each other poorly. Many traditional religious Jews continue to have this belief for the explanation of why bad things that happen in the world today. In his lecture entitled "Faith after the Holocaust: Divine Providence and Free Choice", Rabbi Tamir Granot writes, "Variations of this approach view the Holocaust as a punishment for different sins, such as the Enlightenment (Rabbi Wasserman and his disciples), or Zionism (the Rebbe of Satmar)." Basically, while different groups of Jews disagree on what the sin was that God was punishing the Jews for, they all believed that the Holocaust must have been divine punishment for some wrongdoing committed by Jews.

Despite the fact that this seems to go against the idea that God is all good, it actually does fit into this belief: the believers in divine attribution of justice believe that God is acting justly for the good of humanity, and that ultimately what seems like anger and suffering is enactment of punishment out of love. As a parent might punish an unruly child in the hopes of improving their child and/or teaching them a valuable lesson, so too does God punish the children of Israel out of love and compassion. They argue that the punishment is not undeserved, and it is given to better the one who receives the punishment. Therefore, the Jews who believe in the divine justice theology do not question their belief in God, because to them, the question, "How can a God that is all good and all powerful allow this to happen?" does not make sense, since they believe the punishment is directly tied to the goodness of God. They believe a parent or caretaker who punishes their child is more loving than a parent or caretaker who ignores their children and lets them do whatever they want. To Jews who believe in the divine justice theology, the Holocaust as punishment is better proof of a loving God than the Holocaust as a result of God's absence in the world.

Discussion questions:

1. According to divine justice theology, why did the Holocaust happen?
2. How do the believers of divine justice compare God to a parent? How do they connect punishment with love?
3. How does divine justice theology answer the question of how to have faith after the Holocaust?
4. What are your thoughts about divine justice theology? Do you agree/disagree? Why?

Redemption

Redemption theology is the belief that good people have to go through horrible hardship in order to receive rewards. There were a couple of different theologians who wrote about redemption theology, but it was begun by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook.

Rabbi Kook believed that the Holocaust was a necessary evil in order to bring about the redemption of the Jewish people. Like in divine justice theology, Kook argues that God was directly related to the horrors of the Holocaust. Kook explains how God could be all good, all powerful, and a *direct contributor* to the events of the Holocaust, writing, "...Out of His goodness, God has an 'interest' in allowing such evil to take place. ... Hitlerian evil serves the purposes of God's guidance of the world, which requires the painful amputation of the attachment to exile in order to redeem *Am Yisrael* in its land." To Kook, the Holocaust was both a punishment from God for the children of Israel for getting too attached to the diaspora, and an unfortunate requirement in the process of the creation of the State of Israel, which God needed to enact in order for the greater good of the children of Israel. Therefore, as bad as the Holocaust was, it was a necessary pain in order for the betterment of all Jews.

Discussion questions:

1. What does Rabbi Kook mean when he compares the Holocaust to a "painful amputation"?
2. Why might Rabbi Kook have felt that the Holocaust was necessary in order for the State of Israel to be created?

Although Greenberg agreed that the creation of the State of Israel was proof of divine redemption, Greenberg strongly opposed Kook's ideology that the Holocaust was a requirement for redemption. Greenberg writes, "It is blasphemous to think that God could be directly acting to realize a messianic plan for Israel, because that would imply that God could have intervened to save the six million innocents, and did not!" Therefore, Greenberg's theory of redemption was one of *indirect* redemption through the good deeds of humanity, rather than a *direct* form of redemption through acts of divine providence. Because of this refusal of the belief of direct divine redemption, he disagreed with many of his Orthodox contemporaries. Instead, Greenberg believed that God's goodness could be seen in the good actions of humans.

Discussion questions:

1. How did Greenberg disagree with Kook?
2. What is the difference between Kook's idea of a direct redemption, and Greenberg's idea of an indirect redemption?
3. According to Greenberg, how does God act in this world?

Berkovits, like Greenberg and Kook, also saw a connection between the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. However, like Greenberg, he disagreed with the ideology of Kook's amputation metaphor. While he saw a connection, he did not see the connection as one of purpose or causality – he did not believe the Holocaust needed to happen in order for the State of Israel to exist, nor did he think of the Holocaust as the punishment and the creation of the State of Israel as the reward. Berkovits agrees with Greenberg that God's goodness can be seen in the small good deeds of people.

But Berkovits goes farther – back to his usage of Isaiah 45:15 and the idea of a hidden God: the God who is hidden and who saves. Berkovits interprets this line to mean that God's hiddenness is directly connected to God's ability to save. According to Berkovits, the hiddenness can be seen in the events of the Holocaust, and the saving can be seen in the creation of the State of Israel. While Berkovits does not say how God was involved in the creation of the State of Israel, he believes it to be too big of a miracle to not have God's involvement. Therefore, the Holocaust was a result of God's hiddenness, but the creation of the State of Israel was a result of God's ability to save.

Discussion questions:

1. How does Berkovits connect the Holocaust to the creation of the State of Israel?
2. How are these 3 redemption theologies similar?
3. How are these 3 redemption theologies different?
4. Which ones do you agree with? Which ones do you disagree with? Why?

Unit 3

Feminist Theology

Description of unit:

This unit introduces Jewish feminism, addressing the inclusion of women within Judaism. This unit introduces Judith Plaskow's "Standing Again at Sinai" which illustrates a huge feminist problem within Judaism: the lack of inclusion of women in Biblical texts. Plaskow suggests people write new Jewish stories to fill in the gaps of our past. The unit then covers the concepts of equality and equity, and discusses the differences between them. It ends with Rachel Adler's *Engendering Judaism* which suggests gender equity is better than gender equality. Because equality treats everyone the same it can erase people's differences, but equity addresses people's differences.

Enduring understandings:

- Jewish women have always been included in Judaism, even if their stories have not always been shared.
- Feminism and Judaism are not at odds with each other.
- Modern Jewish feminists engage with Jewish tradition to reshape a more inclusive Jewish future.
- Modern Midrash enables marginalized Jews to tell their stories to be included in Jewish collective memory.

Essential questions:

- Can Judaism be feminist?
- Has Judaism always included women?
- How can Modern Jews reshape Judaism to be more inclusive of women?
- How can Jews use Modern Midrash to help tell the stories of marginalized Jews?

Learning outcomes:

- Students should be able to explain why the phrase "Do not go near a woman" was disturbing to Plaskow.
- Students should be able to define modern midrash.
- Students should be able to explain how modern midrash can be used for social justice.
- Students should be able to explain the differences between equality, equity, and justice.
- Students should be able to explain why Adler was not satisfied with gender equality.

Key terms:

- Midrash
- Modern Midrash
- Feminism
- Inequality
- Equality
- Equity
- Justice

Unit 3 Lesson 1: Introduction to Jewish Feminism

Materials:

- Judith Plaskow text print-outs (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce students to Jewish feminism
- Generate thought about representation of women in Judaism

Objectives:

- Students should be able to give a reason for the need for Jewish feminism.
- Students should be able to explain why the line “do not go near a woman” is disturbing to Plaskow.
- Students should be able to articulate whether they agree with Plaskow’s need for Jewish feminism and why.
- Students should be able to give an example of how we can reshape Jewish memory to include women.

Set induction:

- Step in/ standing in line of agree or disagree
 - Ask students to stand in the middle of the room. Have one side of the room represent “agree,” one side represent “disagree,” with the spectrum in the middle. Ask students to position themselves along the line of “agree” and “disagree” for each statement as it relates to their experiences.
 - Say various statements that students may agree or disagree with. The questions can be about physical appearance, ability, identity, hobbies, interests, or experiences.
 - **(Examples:** *I’m Jewish, I like sports, I have long hair, I’m shy, I’m good at math, I have good vision, I’ve never been out of the country*)
 - After making 10-15 statements, each with varying levels of agreement/disagreement, process the exercise together as a class.
 - **Questions:** What did it feel like to either be included with or excluded from other members of the group? Were there times students were by themselves in an area? Were there times students did not want to respond honestly, because they would rather stay where they were with friends?

Main Lesson:

- **Introduce Jewish feminism**
 - “Feminism is the fight for gender equity. Because we live in a patriarchal society, feminism generally focuses on equity for women. By looking at ways

patriarchy has disadvantaged and discriminated against women, we can figure out ways to create a society that is more equitable for people of all genders.”

- “We just talked about ways we’ve been excluded from groups. Many women have had similar experiences with religion, including within Judaism. Throughout history, women in Judaism have been prevented from participating in certain religious rituals or practices, and from holding certain leadership positions. Women have also not seen themselves as represented in Biblical texts as men. As a result, Jewish feminism attempts to address the ways we can create gender equity in Judaism.”
- **Chavruta**
 - Group students in pairs.
 - Read Judith Plaskow text with a partner and answer the discussion questions
- **Class discussion**
 - **Questions for discussion:**
 - Why was the phrase “do not go near a woman” disturbing to Plaskow?
 - Did the text or your conversation bring up any other questions about women in Judaism?
 - Do you agree with Plaskow’s need for Jewish feminism? Why or why not?
 - How can Jewish memory be reshaped to include women?
- **Exclusion activity**
 - Have everyone write a statement written as if it applies to everyone, but in reality it only applies to some people in the room.
 - *(Examples: We hate the rain because it makes our glasses wet and hard to see through; we don’t eat meat so only order cheese pizzas; we don’t want to go to the cat café, we’re dog lovers!)*
 - Ask students to share their statements with everyone.
 - **Discussion question:** “What did it feel like to be a part of a group and have a statement said about the group that excluded you?”

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** Why was the line “do not go near a woman” disturbing to Plaskow?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** What is a solution you can think of to help with the problem Plaskow has identified?
 - **Option 2:** Draw the scene at Sinai where all of Israel is gathered at the mountain and they hear the words, “Do not go near a woman.”
 - **Option 3:** Why do you think the Torah focuses more on men’s perspectives? Do you think it reflects Jewish belief? Why or why not?

Appendix

Judith Plaskow texts

Quotes from Judith Plaskow, "Standing Again at Sinai"

"Entry into the covenant at Sinai is the root experience of Judaism, the central event that established the Jewish people. Given the importance of this event, there can be no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses' warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, 'Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.' For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stands at Sinai ready to receive the covenant – not now the covenant with individual patriarchs but with the people as a whole – at the very moment when Israel stands trembling waiting for God's presence to descend upon the mountain, Moses addresses the community only as men. The specific issue at stake is ritual impurity: An emission of semen renders both a man and his female partner temporarily unfit to approach the sacred (Lev. 15:16-18). But Moses does not say, 'Men and women do not go near each other.' At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible. Whether they too stood there trembling in fear and expectation, what they heard when the men heard these words of Moses, we do not know. It was not their experience that interested the chronicler or that informed and shaped the Torah."

Discussion questions:

- What is the difference between the lines "Do not go near a woman," and "Men and women do not go near each other"? Why does this difference matter?
- Why are women not mentioned as being present, either at Sinai or in other Torah stories?
- Do you believe only men were present at Mount Sinai? Why or why not?

"To accept our absence from Sinai would be to allow the male text to define us and our connection to Judaism. To stand on the ground of our experience, on the other hand, to start with the certainty of our membership in our own people is to be forced to re-member and recreate its history, to reshape Torah. It is to move from anger at the tradition, through anger to empowerment. It is to begin the journey toward the creation of a feminist Judaism."

Jewish feminists, in other words, must reclaim Torah as our own. We must render visible the presence, experience, and deeds of women erased in traditional sources. We must tell the stories of women's encounters with God and capture the texture of their religious experience. We must expand the notion of Torah to encompass not just the five books of Moses and traditional Jewish learning, but women's words, teachings, and actions hitherto unseen. To expand Torah, we must reconstruct Jewish history to include the history of women, and in doing so alter the shape of Jewish memory."

Discussion questions:

- What does it mean to "reclaim Torah as our own"? What does it mean to "render visible the presence, experience, and deeds of women erased in traditional sources"?
- What does it mean to "reconstruct Jewish history to include the history of women"?
- How can we reshape Jewish memory to include women?

Unit 3 Lesson 2: Plaskow Returns

Materials:

- White board
- Journals
- Print-outs of text (Mad-Lib, and Plaskow texts, in Appendix)

Goals:

- Introduce students to Plaskow's concept of modern midrash
- Facilitate discussion of possibilities for new modern midrash today

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain the concept of modern midrash.
- Students should be able to connect modern midrash to Jewish feminism.
- Students should be able to generate their own ideas for modern midrash.

Note to teacher:

- Informal assessment in this lesson.

Set induction:

- **Mad-lib Activity**
 - Introduce Mad-Lib
 - Most Mad-Libs are filled in without looking at the surrounding words, which can make it really funny when you fill in the blanks and read it altogether.
 - For this mad-lib, we will look at the surrounding words and try and fill in the blanks to make our answers fit in context.
 - **Fill in the Mad-Lib** (in Appendix) together as a class.
 - **Connection:** The blanks allow us to fill in the gaps and create our own stories in the spaces.
 - **How is midrash like Mad-libs?**
 - Midrash is the process of filling in the blanks in the Torah.
 - Classical midrash vs. modern midrash
 - Classical midrash was written by rabbis hundreds of years ago. It attempted to provide more information about Biblical stories. Modern midrash is contemporary, and it can be written by anyone.

Main Lesson:

- **Chavruta**
 - Group students in pairs.

- Read Judith Plaskow texts with a partner and answer the discussion questions.
- **Class discussion**
 - Come back together as a class.
 - **Informal assessment:** Check for understanding with modern midrash.
 - **Questions:**
 - What is modern midrash?
 - How would someone use modern midrash to fix the problem Judith Plaskow found in the text “do not go near a woman”?
 - As a class, create ideas for modern midrash for today. Write answers on the board.
 - Judith Plaskow noticed stories about women were missing from the Torah. Modern midrash can be stories about women.
 - **Questions for discussion:**
 - Are there other stories that are missing from the Torah?
 - What else could be made into modern midrash?
 - How can we reshape Jewish memory to include women?
 - How can we create modern midrash?

Closure:

- **Journal**
 - **Summarize:** What is modern midrash? How can it be used to include women in Judaism? What other stories are missing that could be filled in using modern midrash?
 - **Explore:** Create your own modern midrash. It could be:
 - **Option 1:** Draw a depiction of a scene from Jewish history (could be in the Bible or not).
 - **Option 2:** Create a song or a poem about a Jewish person whose story might not have been told.
 - **Option 3:** Write a short story that tells about the experience of a marginalized Jewish person, either from the Bible or not.

Appendix

Mad-Lib

Noah's Ark

God chose Noah as the most righteous among all people because Noah was *(adjective)*.

God saw when Noah *(action)*, and God knew that Noah was special.

When God first told Noah about the flood, Noah *(action)*.

Noah told his wife, who responded by *(action)*.

Some of the problems Noah encountered when trying to round up the animals: the elephants *(problem)*, the lions *(problem)*, and the parrots *(problem)*.

Everyone was so happy when they finally found land again because *(problem)*.

Years later, Noah and his family would look back on their memory of those 40 days and nights and *(action)*.

Judith Plaskow Text

Quotes from Judith Plaskow's "Standing Again at Sinai"

"Jewish feminists, in other words, must reclaim Torah as our own. We must render visible the presence, experience, and deeds of women erased in traditional sources. We must tell the stories of women's encounters with God and capture the texture of their religious experience. We must expand the notion of Torah to encompass not just the five books of Moses and traditional Jewish learning, but women's words, teachings, and actions hitherto unseen. To expand Torah, we must reconstruct Jewish history to include the history of women, and in doing so alter the shape of Jewish memory."

"A feminist approach widens our historical and religious vision by bringing to the fore material concerning women's religious history and experience that previously had gone unnoted. More important, it introduces another standard of value by which we might judge and appreciate what we see. Feminism forces us to look at who defines certain developments as normative, to what end and with what implications."

"It is not just Torah as traditionally understood, moreover, that can be sifted and mined for information about women. Feminist work expands the concept of Torah further by finding material on Jewish women's lives far outside the traditional canon."

Discussion questions:

- According to Plaskow, what is the benefit of a feminist approach?
- How can a feminist approach be applied to Judaism outside of Torah?

Following passages are based on Plaskow's Standing Again at Sinai, written by Ariel Zitny

Plaskow continues to write that Jewish feminists could use the tradition of midrash to further feminist scholarship. Our ancient and medieval rabbis wrote midrash, interpretations on Biblical texts and stories. Midrash often takes the form of a story, and many times is accepted as Torah itself. There is a midrash about Abraham smashing idols that is not in the Torah. There is a midrash about Nachshon being the first person to walk into the Sea of Reeds before it splits. Midrash fills in gaps in the original Torah stories.

Plaskow suggests feminists create modern midrash to fill in some of these gaps in our Jewish history. As much of our texts and our collective stories have been written by men, the only way to equalize the playing field is to add women and people of other genders into the conversation. Within a more equal society where women and trans and nonbinary people have more of a voice, by creating modern midrash marginalized people can help share their stories as being part of the collective Jewish memory.

Discussion questions:

- What is modern midrash?
- How does Plaskow suggest feminists use modern midrash to make Judaism more representative?
- How do you think someone would go about creating a modern midrash? What research would they need to do?

Unit 3 Lesson 3: Feminist Midrash Explored

Materials:

- Ability to play “I’m Done Dressing Up” by Girls in Trouble (Spotify, YouTube)
- 3 JPS TaNaKhs for reference
- 3 Posters with written quotes from Torah (Quotes in Appendix)
- Post-It notes

Goals:

- Introduce Girls in Trouble.
- Listen to “I’m Done Dressing Up” by Girls in Trouble.
- Discuss how art can be used as a modern midrash.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain how Girls in Trouble is modern midrash.
- Students should be able to create their own modern midrash.
- Students should be able to explain how modern midrash can be feminist.

Note to teacher:

- No Journal closure this week.

Set induction:

- **Play “I’m Done Dressing Up” by Girls in Trouble** for the students on YouTube or Spotify.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What is the song about?
 - Who is the song about?
 - Do you think this is modern midrash? Why or why not?
- Give brief overview of Girls in Trouble
 - “Alicia Jo Rabins writes music about women in the Torah. She takes what we know about these women from our stories, and asks questions about how they were feeling or how they experienced the situation. She then writes songs based on how she thinks those women might have felt. “I’m Done Dressing Up” is how she imagined Vashti responded when asked to present herself to the king in the Book of Esther.”
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - How is this modern midrash?
 - How is this feminist?

Main Lesson:

- **Review**

- **Midrash** is Jewish interpretations of the Torah, including stories filling in the gaps in the Torah.
- **Modern Midrash** is Jewish interpretations of any Jewish collective memory, including but not limited to the Torah.
- Purpose is to fill gaps in Torah / Jewish history
- Can take many forms: writing, music, visual arts
 - A painting is an interpretation because we did not actually know what things looked like, so the painting offers an interpretation of the scene
 - Music, poetry, and writing can also offer interpretations
- **Modern Midrash activity**
 - Put up posters around the room that give different lines from the Torah, which students can use to create their own modern midrash.
 - **Poster 1:** “Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment with my husband so old?” Then Adonai said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I really bear a child, old as I am?’ Is anything too wondrous for Adonai? I will return the same time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” Sarah lied saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was frightened. But God replied, “You did laugh.”” (Gen. 18:11-15)
 - **Poster 2:** “Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?” The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees in the garden. It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.’” And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die, but God knows as soon as you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.” (Gen. 3:1-6)
 - **Poster 3:** [As Isaac’s servant was looking for a wife for Isaac and found Rebecca] “He said to them, “Do not delay me, now that Adonai has made my errand successful [ie, I have found Rebecca as Isaac’s wife]. Give me leave that I may go to my master.” And they said, “Let us call the girl and ask for her reply.” They called Rebecca and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” and she said, “I will.” And they blessed Rebecca and said to her, “O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads; may your offspring seize the gates of their foes.” (Gen 24:57-60)
 - **Making notes**
 - Give students some Post-It notes, and ask students to walk around the room and read the passages on the posters. Ask them to write questions they have about information missing from the passage. For example, “What is the main character feeling?”

- **Pick a poster**
 - Once students have added notes to each poster, ask students to stand next to the poster that interested them the most, or that they would be most interested in writing modern midrash for.
- **Creating modern midrash**
 - Group students together based on which poster they chose. Ask them to work together as a group to read the questions their classmates had about the text. Using those questions, the text itself, and a JPS TaNaKh, ask students to create their own modern midrash for the text. They can create one modern midrash together as a group, or work individually within the group on creating their own.

Closure:

- **Class discussion**
 - Bring students back together as a group
 - **Share**
 - Ask students to share the modern midrash they created.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What was the experience like?
 - What were some of the questions you asked about your text?
 - How did it feel to create modern midrash?
 - What did you think about your classmates' creations?

Appendix

Poster 1: Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment with my husband so old?" Then Adonai said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I really bear a child, old as I am?' Is anything too wondrous for Adonai? I will return the same time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah lied saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. But God replied, "You did laugh." (Gen. 18:11-15)

Poster 2: Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees in the garden. It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows as soon as you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. (Gen. 3:1-6)

Poster 3: [As Isaac's servant was looking for a wife for Isaac and found Rebecca] He said to them, "Do not delay me, now that Adonai has made my errand successful [ie, I have found Rebecca as Isaac's wife]. Give me leave that I may go to my master." And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." They called Rebecca and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" and she said, "I will." And they blessed Rebecca and said to her, "O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads; may your offspring seize the gates of their foes. (Gen. 24:57-60)

Unit 3 Lesson 4: All Genders Wrap

Materials:

- White board
- Ability to share Equity/Equality image (in Appendix) – either projection or print-out
- Print-outs of Equity/Equality worksheet and Justice worksheet (in Appendix)
- Access to youtube / way to share videos
- Journals

Goals:

- Watch All Genders Wrap video.
- Generate discussion about “equal” meaning “same,” and whether that erases our differences.
- Discuss how equality and equity might be different – equality is everyone being treated the same, while equity is everyone being treated according to their needs.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to differentiate between equality and equity.
- Students should be able to give an example of gender equality that might not be equitable.
- Students should be able to apply gender equality and gender equity to Judaism.
- Students should be able to analyze whether or not a specific Jewish text, ritual, or belief is equal or equitable.
- Students should be able to design a suggestion for how to make Judaism more equitable.

Note to teacher:

- Informal assessment in this lesson.
- Formal assessment in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Write “Equity” and “Equality” on the board in a table.
- Share Equity Image (in Appendix)
- Ask students to explain the image and what it means
 - **Connection:** “equal” treatment is being treated the same, but being treated the same is not always fair when people have different needs. Being treated the same may ignore or erase differences.
- Ask students to help fill in the table for equity and equality by listing words or examples that could connect with either one.
- Together as a class, come up with definitions for equity and equality that explain the difference.

- Equality is being treated the same, regardless of needs.
- Equity is being treated according to needs, even if it means people get treated differently.

Main Lesson:

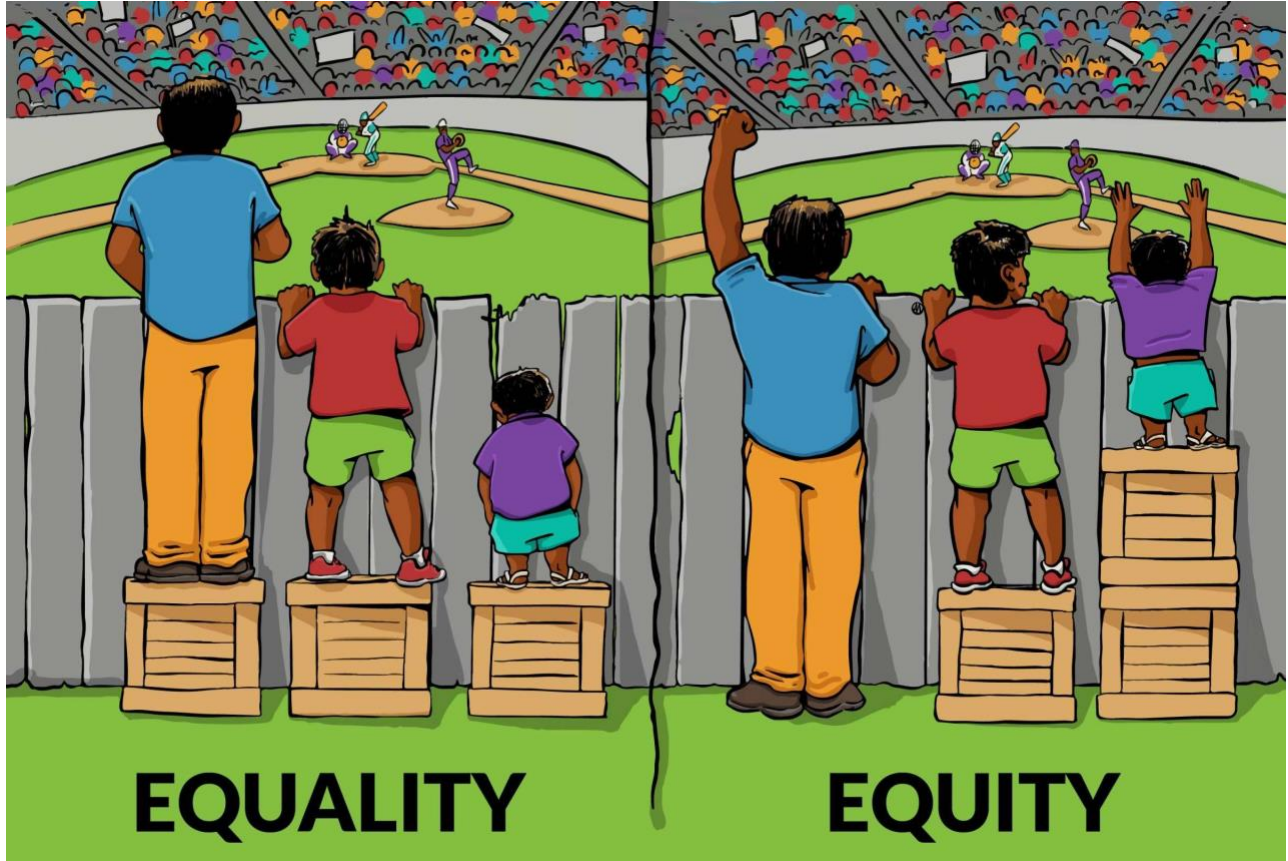
- Watch All Genders Wrap youtube video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUsDP1PqVZw>
- **Class discussion:**
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - Is “All Genders Wrap” an example of equality or equity? Why?
 - What are other examples you can think of where Jewish rituals that were traditionally for boys and men have been extended to all genders?
 - How might this type of gender equality be problematic?
- **Chavruta**
 - Group students in pairs.
 - **Equity/Equality worksheet** (in Appendix).
 - Pass out worksheet.
 - Ask students to read through the list of examples of Jewish practices and rituals at the bottom of the page. Instruct students to sort the examples into whether they are a form of equity, equality, or neither, and to bring their worksheet to you with their names on it once they have finished.
 - **Informal assessment:** Walk around each group and ask students where they’ve sorted some examples. Ask them to explain their answers.
 - **Formal assessment:** Look through their Equity/Equality worksheets. Check for completion and understanding in their sorting. *Hold onto worksheets, as the students will revisit them next class.*
 - **Justice worksheet** (in Appendix).
 - As students turn in their Equity/Equality worksheets, give them the Justice worksheet.
 - Instruct students to get started on their journals when they finish their Justice worksheets.

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** What is the difference between equality and equity? How is justice different from either one?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** What is your vision for justice in Judaism? How do we get there? Write out your vision of an ideal Judaism with justice for all and a plan for how to achieve it.
 - **Option 2:** Draw your own graphic of equality, equity, and justice.
 - **Option 3:** Give an example of inequality in Judaism. Now think of a way to transform that inequality to: 1. Equality, 2. Equity, and 3. Justice

Appendix

Equality/Equity (Set Induction)



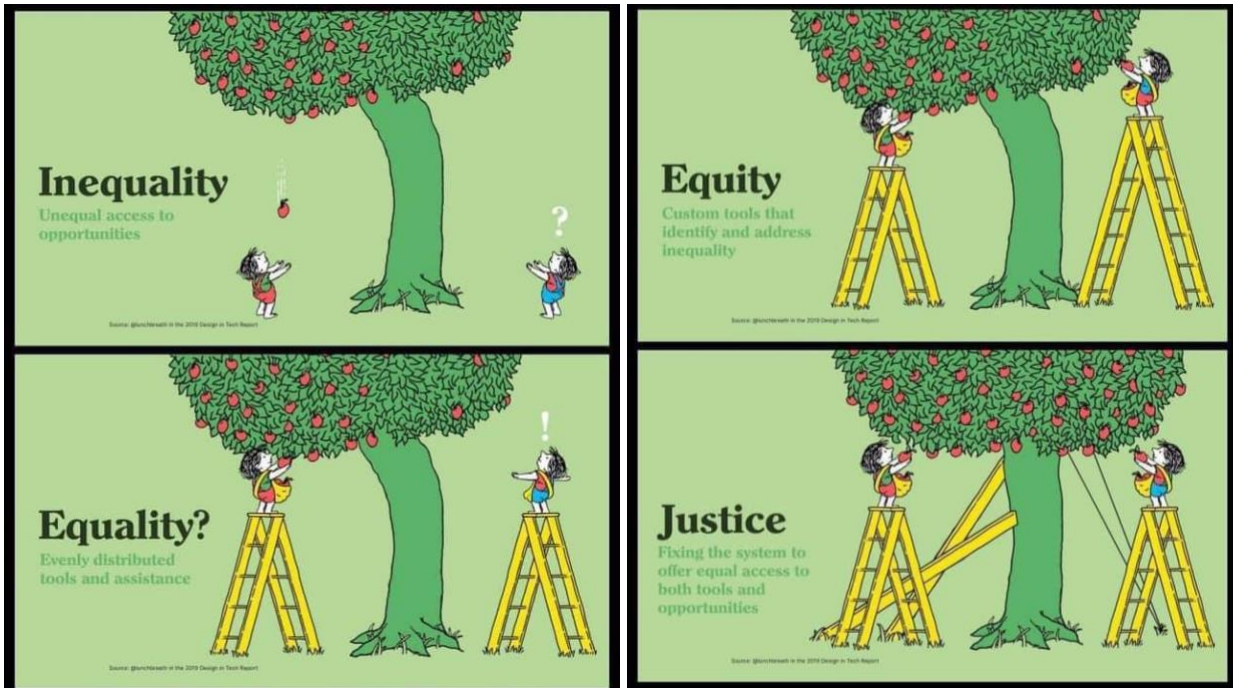
Equity/Equality Worksheet

Group members: _____

Equity Changes made to address people according to their needs	Equality Changes made to make sure everyone is treated the same	Neither No changes made / does not address people's needs or treat everyone the same

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------|------------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Bat mitzvah | Bris | Baby naming | Wedding | Tallit for women |
| Passover seder | | Kohenet/Hebrew Priestess | | Shabbat services |
| B'mitzvah / Bet mitzvah | | transliteration | | Bima with a ramp |
| Miriam's cup at the seder | | open/free services | | co-ed religious school |
| Big box of kippot for everyone | | Open sukkah | | children's kippot |
| Microphones on the bima | | Funeral | | Conversion classes |
| Non-male clergy | | new liturgy for trans people | | Bar mitzvah |

Justice Worksheet



Inequality: unequal access to opportunity

Equality: evenly distributed tools and assistance

Equity: custom tools that identify and address inequality

Justice: Fixing the system to offer equal access to both tools and opportunities

Discussion questions:

- What is the difference between equity and justice?
- What are some examples in your everyday life of equality, equity, and justice?
- What are some examples in Jewish feminism of equality, equity, and justice?

Unit 3 Lesson 5: Engendering Judaism with Rachel Adler

Materials:

- Journals
- Index Cards
- Poster with “Because of my gender, people assume I’m...” written on it
- Print-outs of Rachel Adler text (in Appendix)

Goals:

- Introduce students to Adler’s perspective of Jewish feminism
- Discuss what Adler meant by the term “honorary men.”
- Explore how Adler’s approach is better described as gender equity rather than gender equality.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain why Adler was not satisfied with other attempts at gender equality.
- Students should be able to categorize whether Jewish reforms are attempts at equality or attempts at equity.
- Students should be able to apply the concepts of equality and equity to other marginalized identities.

Set induction:

- **Gender Assumptions**
 - Give each student one index card
 - Ask them to finish the sentence: “Because of my gender, people assume I’m...”
 - When they’re finished, collect all the cards and shuffle them so they are anonymous.
 - Ask students to help tape the cards onto the poster. As a class, read each card out loud.
- **Debrief** Gender Assumptions activity
 - **Questions for discussion:**
 - Did any of the answers surprise you?
 - Did they relate to any of the answers?
 - What can we learn from hearing about how other people experience gendered assumptions?

Main Lesson:

- **Review**
 - **Equality:** treating people the same
 - **Equity:** treating people according to their needs
 - **Justice:** removing systemic barriers that create inequality

- **Introduce Adler**
 - Plaskow was concerned with the stories of women, and how women could be included in Jewish collective memory. Plaskow encourages people to write women into our tradition, either by filling in gaps of Biblical stories, or by sharing our own voices.
 - However, Plaskow’s work does not address the practical aspect of Judaism: ritual, prayer, and observance. Jewish law is very gendered: many commandments are for all genders, many commandments are for men only, and some commandments are for women only.
 - Rachel Adler was an observant Orthodox Jew who wanted to be able to be as involved in her Jewish practice as the men around her. She wanted to be able to wear tefillin and tallitot, and to pray three times a day. However, she also did not want to be a man, and she appreciated the way Judaism acknowledged a difference between genders. She wanted the ability to observe more mitzvot, but she did not want her gender erased in the process.
- **Chavruta**
 - Pair students in same group as last class (according to their worksheets) .
 - **Text study**
 - Pass out print-outs of Adler text (in Appendix). Instruct them to read the Adler text and answer the discussion questions.
 - **Equity/Equality worksheet**
 - Pass out their Equity/Equality worksheets from last class. Ask them to go over their answers and see if they would make any changes based on what they’ve learned about equality and equity since then.
- **Class discussion**
 - Bring students back together
 - **Questions for discussion:**
 - Did anyone change their answers on their Equity/Equality sheet? If so, why?
 - What are some other marginalized identities that should be viewed as “variations” rather than “deviations”? How can Judaism be more inclusive of these groups of people?

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** Why was Rachel Adler not satisfied with gender equality?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Gender equality has addressed inequality in many positive ways, and has also fallen short of equity or justice in other ways. Make a list of pros and cons for gender equality.
 - **Option 2:** What is a way Judaism can honor people’s differences and see them as variations rather than deviations? Create new ideas for practices, rituals, or liturgy to celebrate variation in Judaism.
 - **Option 3:** What does variation in Judaism look like? Draw a picture of a diverse Jewish community.

Appendix

Rachel Adler Texts

Quotes from *Engendering Judaism* by Rachel Adler

“Because ‘all men are created equal,’ Reform Judaism included women by categorizing them as ‘honorary men.’ But making women honorary men made them deviant men. It required viewing their differences from men as defects in their masculinity. As Prell demonstrates, this definition of equality not only hid discrimination that blocked women’s full participation: it barred women from articulating experiences and concerns that men did not share. To enforce equality, it abolished the few women’s mitzvot prescribed by Orthodoxy, making women even less visible than before. The experience of classical Reform illustrates a defect that feminist legal critiques have identified in the universalist understanding of equality. An equality predicated on ignoring the differences that constitute distinctive selves both conceals and legitimates injustice. An institution or enterprise is fully inclusive only if it includes people as the kind of people they really are.

Legal and philosophical critiques, not only by feminists, but by communitarians, both progressive and conservative, civil libertarians, and poststructuralists of every sort, ask us to reevaluate the Enlightenment universalist values of equality, autonomy, rights, and justice, values in which progressive Judaism have invested heavily.”

“However, the conceptions of human nature that predominate in Jewish thought, as in Western philosophy and law, are unitary. Feminist legal theorists and philosophers have shown how this conception of a single human nature is inadequate and distortive. It sets up as a norm one particular variant of male human nature from whom all others are regarded as deviant. Instead, human nature needs to be understood as a spectrum of meaningful human differences.

In addition, difference itself needs to be redefined as *variation*, rather than *deviation*.”

Discussion questions:

- What does Adler mean when she says Reform Judaism included women by categorizing them as ‘honorary men’?
- According to Adler, how can equality conceal and legitimate injustice?
- What is Adler’s idea of a fully inclusive society?
- How does Adler view human differences? How does she suggest we reframe our thinking of differences?
- What are other marginalized identities that should be seen as “variation” rather than “deviation”? How might Judaism be more inclusive of them?

Unit 4

Queer/Trans Theology

Description of unit:

This unit introduces queer/trans theology. It first explores queer theory, building off of the feminist unit to expand the critical lens to transgressions of societal norms of gender and sexuality. It connects gender and sexuality within the queer/LGBTQIA+ umbrella by highlighting shared experiences and overlap, while maintaining the distinction between gender and sexuality by also studying them separately. This unit shows the origins of Biblical queerphobia, and then challenges those traditional viewpoints with reinterpretations of text that applies a queer-positive lens.

Enduring understandings:

- Judaism traditionally has included more than two genders.
- The interpretive process in Judaism allows for Jews to interpret potentially problematic texts with a more inclusive read.
- Queer/trans theology makes space for LGBTQIA+ people in Judaism

Essential questions:

- How are people influenced by their own cultural understandings when they read a text?
- Which traditional viewpoints are preserved, and which get forgotten?
- How have LGBTQIA+ people been erased throughout history?
- How can modern Jews reshape Judaism to be a place of belonging for queer Jews?

Learning objectives:

- Students should be able to reference a Biblical origin of queerphobia, and provide one way to refute or reinterpret that reference.
- Students should be able to explain how gender and sexuality are connected.
- Students should be able to define androgynos as a person who has both male and female characteristics.
- Students should be able to give one example of how Judaism can be more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people.

Key terms:

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| • Queer | • Transgender | • Gender |
| • Queerphobia | • Intersex | • Sexuality |
| • Lesbian | • Asexual | • Queer theory |
| • Gay | • Nonbinary | |
| • Bisexual | • Androgynos | |

Unit 4 Lesson 1: Introduction to Queer Theory

Materials:

- White board
- 6 posters, each labeled with an identity: lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, intersex, asexual
- Large Post-its
- Print-outs of Origins of Queerphobia (in Appendix)
- JPS TaNaKh
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce students to queer theory.
- Discuss the Biblical origins of queerphobia.
- Explore other examples of abominations in the Torah.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to give a reason for the need for queer theory.
- Students should be able to define queer theory as applying a LGBTQIA+ lens to text.
- Students should be able to reference a Biblical origin for queerphobia.
- Students should be able to reference one other instance of an abomination in Torah, other than Lev 18:22, Lev. 20:13, and Deut: 22:5.

Note to teacher:

- Formal assessment in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Write on the board: "I have seen discrimination against this community when..."
- Put the posters with the 6 identities (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, intersex, asexual) up around the room.
- Give each student several large post-its.
- Instruct students to try and write at least one example of discrimination against each group that they have either seen personally, or heard about someone else experiencing (either from a friend, on tv, or in the news).
- Once students have put their post-its on the posters, go around as a class and read the notes out loud.

Main Lesson:

- **Debrief** the discrimination activity
 - What did that activity bring up for you?

- How did you feel writing the answers?
- How did you feel hearing other answers read?
- How does this relate to Judaism?
- How does this relate to equality, equity, and justice?
- **Introduce queer theory**
 - Draw an umbrella on the Whiteboard. Write “Queer” inside the umbrella. Underneath the umbrella write “LGBTQIA+”
 - **Gender and sexuality**
 - **LGBTQIA+** includes some identities that are based in **sexuality**, and some identities that are based in **gender**.
 - Gender and sexuality are more separated in modern society, but they used to be much more linked. People who did not conform to gender roles were seen as gay, and people who were gay were seen as not conforming to gender roles.
 - Now we know there are some gender nonconforming people who are not gay, and some gay people who are not gender nonconforming. We also know there is much more than gay and straight, or gender conforming and gender nonconforming.
 - **Queer theory** is a lens through which to see texts and experiences from a queer perspective. Just as feminist critique looks at the Bible from a woman’s perspective, queer theory looks at the Bible from a queer perspective. “Queer” encompasses any way that an individual might exist outside of societal expectations of their gender or sexuality. While some people identify their sexuality or gender as queer, here we are using queer to be an umbrella term.
 - **LGBTQIA+**
 - Write “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and more” on the board under the umbrella.
 - Explain that each of these identities is unique and distinct and deserves to be seen as separate. However, they all share similar experiences of the ways they are disadvantaged in society, so by grouping them together they are able to increase their power in community.
- **Chavruta**
 - Pair up students
 - **Origins of Queerphobia** worksheet.
 - Pass out worksheet.
 - Instruct students to read the worksheet and answer the questions on the second page.
 - Ask students to turn in the question section of the worksheet when they have finished.
 - **Formal assessment:** Read through students’ answers to the questions on the Origins of Queerphobia workshett.

Closure:

- **Journals**

- **Summarize:** What are the biblical origins of queerphobia? What is queer theory?
- **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Design a poster advertising the importance of Queer Theory.
 - **Option 2:** Why are there so many more “abominations” that do not get talked about as much as the queer abominations? What is your take-away from this?
 - **Option 3:** Gender and sexuality are linked in Queer theory and within the LGBTQIA+ umbrella. How do you think gender and sexuality are linked? Why?

Appendix

Origins of Queerphobia

Biblical passages addressing queer prohibitions:

1. Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an *abomination*. (Leviticus 18:22)
2. If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an *abomination*; they shall be put to death—their bloodguilt is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)
3. A woman must not put on man's apparel, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing; it is an *abomination* to Adonai your God, all that do this. (Deuteronomy 22:5)

Other abominations:

- All Jews are instructed to destroy idols of other gods when they come across them. But if they save any of the silver or gold from the idols, this is an *abomination*. (Deut 7:26)
- A man divorces his wife, and she remarries; her second husband divorces her. If the first husband remarries her, this is an *abomination*. (Deut. 24:4)
- Anyone who worships another god, this is an *abomination*. (Deut. 17:4)
- Unkosher food, including pork, shellfish, and milk with meat, are all *abominations*. (Deut. 14:3)

Full list of “abominations”:

In Leviticus: 18:22, 18:26, 20:13.

In Deuteronomy: 7:25-26, 13:14-15, 14:2-4, 17:1, 17:4, 18:9, 22:5, 23:19, 24:4, 27:15, 32:16

Turn the page to answer the questions.

Student names: _____

Complete the following questions:

1. Using the full list of abominations on the first page, look up and read through **every** instance of an abomination in the Torah. What do you notice about all of these examples? Does anything surprise you about this list?

2. Pick **one** of the examples to write about. How is the line you chose similar to the first three examples of “abominations”? How is the line you chose different from the first three examples?

3. With all the abominations listed, only the three at the top are queerphobic. And yet, these are the most often-cited abominations from the Torah. Why do you think that even though only 3/14 of the examples of abominations are queerphobic, they are given more weight or value than the other listed abominations?

Unit 4 Lesson 2: Sexuality

Materials:

- White board
- Index Cards
- Print-outs of text (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Discuss the Biblical origins of queerphobia
- Explore sexuality in Judaism as it relates to women and queer people.
- Question whether the original prohibitions in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 are more focused on homophobia or sexism/transphobia.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain the traditional perspective of sexuality in Judaism.
- Students should be able to differentiate between Jewish prohibitions on homosexuality for men and Jewish prohibitions on homosexuality for women.
- Students should be able to describe how sexism may be at play in the Lev 18:22 and 20:13.

Set induction:

- **Introduce Gender/Sexuality activity**
 - “Sometimes it can be hard to separate gender and sexuality. For a lot of queer people, their first memories of knowing they are queer are often attached to *gender* as opposed to *sexuality*. Many young boys remember playing with Barbies or wanting to wear their mother’s make-up, and that being an indicator to adults that they were gay. Many young girls remember not wanting to wear dresses or wanting to play sports with the boys, and that being an indicator to adults that they were gay.”
 - “Many people who transgress gender norms are seen to be gay. And many gay people are seen to transgress gender norms. So when we encounter queerphobia, we have to ask: is this against homosexuality, or against the transgression of gender norms?”
- **Gender/Sexuality activity**
 - Put three sections on the whiteboard: Sexuality, Gender, and Both.
 - Give students index cards and tape.
 - “Think of some examples of queerphobia you’ve seen, either personally or on TV. Write as many examples down as you can, with one example per Index Card.”

- Once students have written down some examples, ask them to come to the board and to tape them in which section they belong, based on what the queerphobia was targeting: Sexuality, Gender, or Both.
- Once students have taped answers to the board, go over the answers with the class.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - Do you think any of these answers should be moved to a different section?
 - What do you notice about the groups of examples listed?
 - What does this show us about how gender and sexuality are linked?

Main Lesson:

- **Introduce main lesson**
 - “Today we will be looking more closely at the origins of queerphobia in the Bible that we explored last class. Today we will look more closely at if these prohibitions say more about gender or sexuality, and what our rabbis said in response.”
- **Chavruta**
 - Pair students.
 - Hand out the Homosexuality in Traditional Judaism worksheet.
 - Instruct students to read through all the texts and answer the discussion questions with their partner.
- **Class discussion**
 - Bring students back as a group.
 - Ask students to share what their groups talked about.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - Do you think the Leviticus text is addressing just sexuality, just gender, or bot sexuality and gender? Why?
 - Why do you think women were excluded from this prohibition?

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** How are sexuality and gender linked? How does this impact the Biblical prohibition in Leviticus 20:13?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Explain how Lev. 20:13 shows an example of how men can be negatively impacted by misogyny. What are some other examples of how men can be negatively impacted by misogyny?
 - **Option 2:** There is no Biblical prohibition on same-gender relations for women. Is this an example of inclusion or exclusion? Why?
 - **Option 3:** Leviticus 20:13 paints a picture of a man taking on a woman’s role as a bad thing. Draw an image of a man taking on a woman’s role, but make it a positive thing.

Appendix

Homosexuality in Traditional Judaism

Text 1

Leviticus 20:13: If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death—their bloodguilt is upon them.

Discussion questions:

1. What does it mean to lie with a male the way “one lies with a woman”? Is this any intimate act, or a specific one?
2. Is the issue presented in the text the fact that a man is lying with a man (ie, homophobia), or the fact that one of the men is assuming the position of a woman (ie, misogyny and/or transphobia)? Could it be possible for a man to lie with a man but in a way that’s not similar to how he would lie with a woman? Defend your answer.

Text 2

Commentary on Lev. 20:13:

1. Intercourse in the full sense of the word, not fondling or premature withdrawal of either party’s male organ. Both parties are guilty of an abomination, unless one party has been raped. (Chizkuni)
2. Both of them have committed an abomination – only if the one penetrated was not raped. (Ibn Ezra)
3. As one lies with a woman – this means he inserts as a brush into a tube. (Rashi)
 - a. Inserts – this means the man inserts. Because if not so, why write “in the same manner as with a woman?” Is there another way to lie with a male that the verse has to say “in the same manner as with a woman” in order to exclude this other way of lying? (Siftei Chakhamim)

Discussion questions:

1. How do the commentaries interpret the phrase “as one lies with a woman”? What does it include? What does it not include?
2. In 3a, there is a question of whether there are other possible ways men can lie together that would not qualify as being like the way one lies with a woman. What do you think, and why?

Text 3

In accepting homosexuality in 2006, the Conservative Movement wrote:

“The explicit biblical ban on anal sex between men remains in effect. Gay men are instructed to refrain from anal sex.”

Discussion questions:

1. Even after accepting homosexuality, the Conservative Movement maintains a ban on anal sex – but not other forms of intimacy between two men. What does this tell you about how the Conservative Movement interprets Leviticus 20:13?
2. Why do you think the Conservative Movement voted to include gay men, but ban anal sex?
 - a. Does their ruling suggest the original prohibition was a prohibition on gay sex, rather than a prohibition on gay love or attraction?
 - b. Do you think the prohibition on anal sex is related to the idea that the penetrated person is “taking the role of a woman”? Is this sexist? Why or why not?

Text 4

There are **no** Biblical prohibitions for lesbianism. Going off of a line from Talmud which says women should not rub against each other for sexual purposes, Maimonides writes:

It is forbidden for women to rub against each other; it is among the “ways of the Egyptians,” about which we were warned in Leviticus 18:3 (“You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt”) and about which our sages expounded, “What would they (the Egyptians) do? A man would marry a man, a woman would marry a woman, and one woman would marry two men. While the behavior is prohibited, one does not punish it with lashes because no specific biblical prohibition has been violated and no sexual intercourse took place at all. ... A man ought to be exacting with his wife on this matter and should prevent her from associating with women known for this, not to permit those women to visit her nor her to visit them.

Discussion questions:

1. Why do you think the Biblical prohibition on same-gender relationships does not apply to women?
 - a. Does this support the belief that the prohibition is actually not about homosexuality, but about men taking on women’s roles?
2. What does Maimonides’ statement say about the prevalence of women who engaged in same-gender love? Are you surprised by this? Why or why not?
3. Many people have read the original Biblical prohibitions as being against homosexuality in general. But as we see with this Maimonides quote, there is no explicit prohibition against women. Why do you think the original prohibition only applies to men?

Unit 4 Lesson 3: Variations on Sexuality in Judaism

Materials:

- White board
- Print-outs of text (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce students to Jewish queer theory through Torah Queeries
- Explore different readings of Leviticus 18:22 that offer alternative explanations of the verse.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to give one example of an alternative reading of Leviticus 18:22.
- Students should be able to name one way queer theory could deal with problematic texts, and give an example.
- Students should be able to make connections between queer theory and what they learned in the feminist section.

Note to teacher:

- Informal assessment in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Feminism/Queer Theory comparison
 - Write on the white board a table with two headings: Feminism, and Queer theory
 - “We learned in our unit on Feminism about how feminist theory introduced a number of ways to help combat the problem of sexism in our tradition. What are some of the ways feminist scholars have fought against traditional sexism?”
 - *(Examples: uplifting stories of women that our tradition does include; creating our own stories of women by filling in the gaps in Biblical stories; reinterpreting the stories we have to be more inclusive of women; allowing women equal access to text and ritual; recognizing ways in which women are distinct from men and honoring those differences.)*
 - Write down students’ answers on the board. Prompt more answers with reminding students of Plaskow, Girls in Trouble, and Adler.

- After collecting answers in the feminism column, ask students to fill in suggestions under queer theory. How can queer theory fight against traditional queerphobia?

Main Lesson:

- **Jigsaw**

- Introduce the concept of a jigsaw lesson. Students will be put into groups. Each group will study one text in depth, answer the discussion questions, and prepare a summary to present to the class. Each group will come together to explain their text to the rest of the class.
- Break students into 4 groups.
- Assign each group one text.
 - **Group 1:** Text 1 (First part of “Deconstructing Leviticus: Finding a Queer Spiritual Path Back from the Exile of Sacred Text” By Avi Rose)
 - **Group 2:** Text 2 (Second part of “Deconstructing Leviticus: Finding a Queer Spiritual Path Back from the Exile of Sacred Text” By Avi Rose)
 - **Group 3:** Text 3 (“The Queering of Leviticus, or how a Rabbi Permits Gay Sex” by Greg Tepper)
 - **Group 4:** Text 4 (“Parashat Emor” by Ariel Zitny)
- Instruct students to read the text, answer the discussion questions, and prepare a short summary of the text.
- Give the assigned text to each group.
- When groups have finished, bring everyone back together, and ask each group to present their material.
 - **Informal assessment:** make note of how well groups seem to understand their text.
 - If necessary, prompt groups for more information with probing questions.
- Allow space for other students to ask each group questions about their text.
- Once every group has presented, open up for class discussion.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What text was most interesting to you, and why?
 - Did anything you heard/read surprise you? Why?
 - How are these texts similar to or different from the ways feminists have approached Jewish tradition?
 - How can we use these texts to foster more inclusion in the future?
- **Feminism/Queer Theory activity revisited**
 - Return to the board with different ideas for how to use feminist and queer theory within Judaism.
 - Ask students to add to the list with what they’ve learned from the texts they studied today.

Closure:

- **Journals**

- **Summarize:** What are some ways queer theory has reinterpreted the line from Leviticus? Which was your favorite that you learned today, and why?
- **Explore:** One way queer theory deals with problematic texts is to write new ones.
 - **Option 1:** Write a new version of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Explain why you made the changes you did.
 - **Option 2:** Imagine there was a queer love story in the Torah. Write that story here.
 - **Option 3:** Draw a picture of a Jewish queer couple/family.

Appendix

Text 1

From: "Deconstructing Leviticus: Finding a Queer Spiritual Path Back from the Exile of Sacred Text" By Avi Rose

The Biological Argument

Looking back at the needs of the newly liberated tribe of Israel, it is easy to see why exclusive man to man sexual contact might have been threatening. After all, the greatest weapon at the disposal of the patriarchal tribes, was their sheer force of number. In fact, the whole story of Exodus starts with Pharaoh's assumption that the Jews had become too numerous and therefore threatened the safety of the Egyptian nation.

As such, the most common understanding of the Leviticus text is purely biological- for men to ignore their responsibility as progenitors would be disastrous. The fact that men spent a great deal of time segregated from women and that there was a tradition of homosexuality in the surrounding cultures, is cited as proof of this view of the text. By extension, this argument is used even in modern times. In a post-Holocaust reality, it is argued, when the depleted ranks of the Jewish community face biological obliteration, could there be any other understanding of the law?

The answer is both a strong yes and no. While such a rationale has merit, it does not go far enough to fully explain the prohibition. This is because it is simply impossible that a man would have even considered an exclusively homosexual life, even if that were their primary orientation. Given the societal imperative for procreation, a man's reproductive role was likely never questioned. Multiple sexual partnering for men, was, therefore, not only acceptable, but regarded as a symbol of wealth and prestige.

Homosexuality, if it were to occur, could only have existed as an accompaniment to marriage. If they were inclined to engage sexually with another man, it could occur only in such a way that would not threaten the biological survival of the tribe. As such, it must be concluded that though a partial rationale, the purely biological explanation falls short of clearing up the core nature of the Leviticus text. Obviously, there are other factors at work.

Keeping the Civil Order

If biology was not the main reason for the prohibition, it seems logical to look at the socio-cultural factors which might be useful in understanding the Leviticus text. Something about certain aspects of homosexuality seemed threatening to the social order of the community. Two explanations for this, can be found by examining the linguistic structure of the text. Torah text is usually very economical and specific, such that scholars look for clues in the words chosen, the context in which they are placed and the patterns which are common with other occurrences in the text. Rabbi Dr. Michael Samuel, an orthodox scholar, offers an understanding of the Leviticus text in his internet discussion of the subject. He claims that the use of the Hebrew word for male "Zachar", is used elsewhere in the text with great precision. In fact, he argues that it specifically refers to male children and not mankind in general. As such, it is possible that what the Torah is really stating, is

that an adult cannot have sexual contact with the younger male members of his clan. This would make sense, given the placement of the statement. The law pertaining to male/male sex, is part of a string of prohibitions outlawing incest and sexual activity with members of extended family and community.

A related understanding of the text's civil order intentions is offered by Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Reb Zalman is of the opinion that the text warns men not to substitute other men as sexual partners, when in fact, it is a woman that is desired. His proof for this is the fact that the text goes to the trouble of stating that what is prohibited is sexual contact like that with a woman. If the Torah had wanted to ban all sexual contact between men, it might have sufficed with a statement such as "do not lie with a man". Since it does, however, take the time to be specific and since it is well known that men spent a great deal of time together in isolation, it is possible to conclude that the Torah warned men not to forcefully use each other as substitutes for what they really needed. Issues of bisexuality aside, this argument makes a great deal of sense. Telling men that they could not have sexual contact with other males under certain circumstances-rather than not at all-would fit in well with the vision of civil order implied in the text.

Separating Judaism from Other Religious Practices

Judaism was a revolution in its time. The prevailing custom dictated belief in multiple gods, the sacrifice of humans and the use of sexuality as a form of worship. All of this was rejected by the Torah, which called for a radical shift in religious paradigms. Several commentators, including Rebecca Alpert in the classic work on queerness and Judaism entitled "Twice Blessed", note that it was common for men in cultures surrounding the Israelites to engage in ritual sex with temple prostitutes of both genders. In fact, vestiges of these pan sexual ritual humans still exist in parts of the world. These authors point once again to the language of the Torah in order to buttress their contention that what is prohibited in the Leviticus text is not a personal relationship between men, but rather a religious one. Noting that the word used to connote the negative image of homosexuality is "Toevah", the commentators state that this word is otherwise reserved for acts of ritual practice deemed outside the acceptable norms of Jewish convention.

Strength for this argument, comes from re-examining the placement of the prohibitive law in the general text. The anti-homosex statute, comes right after other forms of inter- family and community sex and right before a statement which forbids sex acts with members of the Molechite tribe. The Molechite tribe, was known to use sexual rituals as part of its idolatrous worship ceremonies. As such, it can easily be stated that what the text intended, was for Jews to refrain from sexual activity known to be primarily for ritual purposes. Loving sex between two men did not likely enter the equation- either because it was not considered enough of a phenomenon to warrant mention, or because it was accepted as part of human nature. The fact that sex between women (which was not a common ritual practice) is not mentioned in a document which otherwise severely limits the sexual practices of females, adds validity to this view. If the Torah really wanted to ban homosexuality rather than ritual sex, it would have clearly told both genders to refrain from doing so.

Text 2

From: "Deconstructing Leviticus: Finding a Queer Spiritual Path Back from the Exile of Sacred Text" By Avi Rose

The Feminist Understanding

For me, the strongest and most visceral reading of the Leviticus text comes from a feminist interpretation of the law. Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, in her upcoming book of Torah commentary, claims that male/male sexuality was threatening to the patriarchal framers of the bible, since it was, in many ways, a direct rejection of the patriarchy and the sharp distinctions between male and female necessary for its survival.

Rabbi Goldstein's argument is, that once a man allows himself to play the passive role in a sexual contact, he violates the very essence of patriarchal thinking. To be receptive as a sexual partner is to be female – to be lesser than and subordinate to the dominance of others. The fact that a man might choose such a role part or all of the time, threatens the order of a society which believes that divisions of power necessarily fall along gender lines.

As such, the Torah might well have seen homosex as an act of subversion, something which it could not accept. It challenged the idea that at a basic genetic level, all men were aggressive and all women passive. It opened the door to women demanding more rights and primacy within the community. This, it feared, might loosen the bonds of tribal power which otherwise flowed in an orderly fashion from one generation of males to another, using women as conduits rather than participants in the process.

In the eyes of the patriarchs who framed the Torah, homosexuality's dirty little secret was that variation in roles fell along a continuum of humanity and not gender. Sexuality, as the great symbol of power, created the illusion that men would always be on top and women forever on the bottom. Men having sex with other men, sharing their power rather than "lording" it over women, threatened to pull down the whole house of cards which was the patriarchal system. In order to prevent this from happening, it was deemed necessary to place homosex in the cesspool of human sexual urges-with ritual blasphemy and incest-lest it be let out of its cage and reveal its deep, dark truth.

I can see the validity of this argument in the ways and means which we are still grappling with the residue of patriarchy in modern society. Women are still being forced into passive, second class status- raped, beaten, threatened, starved and impoverished into submission. Men who dare to desire each other, or to act in effeminate ways, face ridicule, censure, isolation and similar consequences to those of women.

Even within the community of gay men, there are attempts to modify the patriarchy and unwittingly preserve its hold on society. The devaluing of effeminacy, the glorification of the macho, the myth of men's natural promiscuity and inability to maintain "feminine" style monogamy and the strict separation of men into ranks of "top" or "bottom" are but a few examples.

So What Now?

The Leviticus verses seen in the light of these explanations, lose much of their authoritarian power and absolutism. Behind the smoke and mirrors of their magic, they seem suddenly less monstrous, even puny. Yet, for all that we see it as mere bark, we have allowed it to have great bite. We are still, as both Jews and Christians, controlled and dominated by the text. For many, even the most rational and reasonable explanation of the verses is mere apologetics, a means by which to cloud the truth that God hates homos.

So, it seems to me that all the scholarship in the world is useless, unless and until we are willing to both give and receive of its wisdom. Without a chorus of voices from within the queer community and from our straight brothers and sisters, the message is lost in the apparent negative clarity of Leviticus. We cannot expect the rational mind to take in information which the emotional and experiential self deems as inauthentic. We need to believe and act upon the truth of these more enlightened views of the Torah, if we are to make it possible for a wider audience of religious followers to listen and treat queer members of society with respect and acceptance.

As such, I remain committed to my tradition and to my people, even when they try to criticize and isolate me. Simple, or not, I choose to sew together my queer and Jewish identities, even if the pieces do not seem to fit, or even match in fundamental ways. I will do my best to create an environment of healing and reconciliation between the Jewish community and the community of queer Jews. Painful as it often is, I see myself and others like me, committed to restoring our Torah to its true nature and Godly intention. It is my prayer that we can clean the lens of our collective eyes and allow the Torah's light to bring humans closer together. As a Jew, I see it as my responsibility to repair the world and engage in an attempt to make of humanity the clearest reflection of the Divine that we can possibly be.

Text 3

“The Queering of Leviticus, or How a Rabbi Permits Gay Sex” By Greg Tepper

That whole thing about Leviticus clearly forbidding sexual relations between two men? Open to interpretation. At least that’s what Oregon-based Rabbi Debra Kolodny, Executive Director of Nehirim, the national LGBTQI group, says, based on the idea of “queering the text.” “Queering the text,” Kolodny says, “looks for the *chidush* [a new idea or way of understanding a text], the innovation, the insight that’s never been imagined before because the lens we’re looking for today never existed before.”

Kolodny says contemporary liberal Judaism is at an historical moment in which it can combine its knowledge of history, sociology and sexuality to thousands of years of Jewish tradition to reveal “something that couldn’t be revealed even 20 years ago because we didn’t have the experience under our belt.” “Queering the text” refers to any number of paths for looking at scripture and is “the lens through which we look at our text,” says Kolodny. She cites Leviticus: “A man should not lie with a man.” “How are we to be in relationships with these texts that are difficult?” asks Kolodny. “In that way queer theology is no different than any other way of looking at the text. That’s what Jews do.” An example of “queering” is in how Leviticus, the text authoritatively cited when discussing traditional Judaism’s prohibition against homosexual relations between men, can be reexamined.

Kolodny describes one way in which the text can be seen through a *chidush* in which the text would not forbid homosexual relations or unions. First, she explains, the Hebrew word “*toevah*,” used in Leviticus, has been mistranslated as “abomination.” Rather than abomination, she says, “It’s a ritual practice prohibited to a people. It comes up when Joseph’s brothers come up and the Egyptians won’t eat because the food is *toevah* to the Egyptians.”

Leviticus, she says, is merely describing a pagan ritual practice prohibited to Jews. “In those days there were pagan cults who did fertility rite that were prohibited: a fertility rite that involves two men having sex with each other.” So today, she explains, if someone asks if it’s ok for two men to engage in homosexual relations, as a rabbi she responds, “Are you engaging with pagan ritual? If not, it’s not prohibited — the Torah doesn’t speak to it.”

The first Nehirim LGBTQI Jewish clergy retreat

On December 7-10, queer Jewish history, tradition and ritual will be extensively explored as over 60 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer rabbis, cantors and students gather in San Francisco for the first Nehirim LGBTQI Jewish clergy retreat. (the “I” is a recent addition to the “LGBTQ” acronym, and stands for intersex, the term used to describe those formerly referred to as hermaphroditic).

The three-day event will be the largest gathering of its kind to date. Participants will study queer theology, celebrate LGBTQI Jewish life and create new rituals for the Jewish LGBTQI community. The retreat, Kolodny says, is “not a moment when people are meekly

coming out of the closet. We have come to a point where people are accepting of sexual orientation and diversity and we have become part of the mainstream of the Jewish world.”

The group’s San Francisco conference will focus on historical, theological and traditional aspects of queer Jewish life and explore how “queer theology” can be used to assist LGBTQI Jews in their ritualistic and traditional lives. Participants will examine from a historical perspective “where we’ve come, where are we going,” she says, noting that once-hidden communities are now creating new and unique rituals for marriages, bar mitzvahs and other Jewish occasions. Attendees will also explore theology, including Midrash, Talmud, scripture and Kabbalah. “That is one portion of the conference where queer theology will be front and center,” she adds.

Nehirim stated goals include providing “vibrant, pluralistic, egalitarian and accessible programming that cultivates and empowers LGBTQI Jewish souls.” It also aims to create a supportive network and hopes to “impassion” participants. “Queer is contextual,” she says. “It’s an umbrella term that means pretty much everybody that isn’t heterosexual or anyone that isn’t cisgender – born into a gender that feels right as opposed to feeling some disconnection.” Creating new rituals and traditions and understanding Jewish texts in a way that allows the queer community to live full Jewish lives is a primary goal of the conference.

The conference will explore topics including: What rituals have people created for same-sex marriage or a bar/bat mitzvah where both parents are of the same gender, or how do you sensitively and appropriately handle the mikveh (ritual bath) for the conversion for a transgender person. There will be panels on topics such as theology, ritual and liturgy and pastoral care, followed by cooperative learning workshops. “It will be a mix of sharing and creating new forms, so we can learn from one another and explore the ways we are all taking leadership to the Jewish world,” says Kolodny.

Cantor Jalda Rebling, spiritual leader of Berlin’s Ohel HaChidush congregation, has assisted in creating and overseeing rituals for LGBTQI services. “I helped the different families and people create (the rituals). What we do is have a deep conversation about why people want a Jewish ritual, what do they expect from it and then the ritual creates itself. What I do is open spaces people never before knew are there. The first LGBTQI ritual I created in 2007 was during Sukkot so we created a Sukkah as the first house for a married LGBTQI couple.”

As more LGBTQI Jews are married, “queering the text” also requires the creation of texts for divorce. Kolodny provides the example of a get (Jewish divorce) for a lesbian couple and a Passover “Supreme Court Seder” that celebrates the emancipation of American slaves, gay rights and Jewish freedom, both created by Rabbi Margaret Moes Wenig of Hebrew Union College, as new rituals that are consistent with Jewish thought.

The international fight for LGBTQI rights

In Germany, as in the United States, LGBTQI clergy not only create rituals and work within queer theology, but fight for LGBTQI rights as well. Nehirim has partnered with

organizations in pursuit of equal marriage legislation in the United States. German LGBTQI clergy fight for the legalization of same-sex marriage as well.

“Here in Germany,” Rebling said, “we have had a long fight for equal rights behind us and we are still not where we want to be. It was my generation that has had to be very creative with the help of creative lawyers to make daily life as normal as possible. It was a long way. Legally a same-sex marriage is still not totally equal. But step-by-step we are getting there.”

Regarding Nehirim’s upcoming conference, Rebling had praise and enthusiasm. “I am excited. To be here in Europe as a renewal Jewish clergy is a very lonely place. Thanks to the ALEPH network [the Alliance for Jewish Renewal] we have become more in numbers. I could never do the pioneering work I do here without the strong ALEPH and OHALAH [The Association of Rabbis for Jewish Renewal] network in this world,” says Rebling.

“And thanks to modern electronic media I am closely connected to my *chevre* [Hebrew for friends] with questions and all the little steps we do here to make our world a better place for every single Jew in all our diversity,” says Rebling. And that’s exactly what Nehirim is hoping for. “Our goal is to support the total integration and empowerment of LGBTQI Jews, enriching klal Yisrael and all of our lives in the process,” says Kolodny.

Text 4

“Parashat Emor” By Ariel Zitny

As Reform Jews, we can get pretty uncomfortable with Leviticus. I know I can get pretty uncomfortable with Leviticus. I have a tenuous at best relationship with *halakha* as it is, and that is without the stonings and animal sacrifices.

Sometimes when faced with difficult text, it can be tempting to just reject the text and pretend it doesn't exist. Leviticus is full of texts I'm sure most of us wish we could ignore. We even end this portion with a blasphemer literally getting stoned to death.

But we have something else in this week's torah portion. This portion includes the laws concerning the celebration of Jewish holidays: when and how to observe Passover, Counting the Omer, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. After we are told about the observation of holidays, we see this verse:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִצְוֵי יְהוָה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

So Moses declared to the Children of Israel the appointed times of Adonai.

In the Babylonian Talmud, at the very end of tractate Megillah, this text is interpreted as meaning that we learn about the appointed times of God *during* its appointed time:

שיהו שואלין ודורשין בענינו של יום

sh'yihu sho'alin v'dorshin b'inyano shel yom

We ask and demand to study *b'inyano shel yom*, in the context of the day. Generally this verse is taken to mean that every year is a repeating cycle, and repeated times have repeated readings: we read about Pesach on Pesach, Shavuot on Shavuot, etc. But what if we don't think about the “appointed times” as being fixed in a singular cyclical year, with fixed learnings that were decided in the past? What if, instead of having one repeating cycle, we think of these cycles of time as occurring in a spiral, hitting those same appointed times along the circle while still progressing forward? Each time we cycle around, we are adding to it the wisdom of those who came before us. Maybe we are meant to take each previous cycle into account every time the year comes back around to the appointed times of years past. So that means next year, when we are reading this portion again, we will do so not just with the original knowledge, but all the additional knowledge gained. We will do so in the context of the day.

This gives us the invitation to read old texts in a new way. It also forces us to confront our texts regularly. We have a calendar of textual cycles, and every year we return to the texts at the appointed times. But we are not returning to the time itself, and we are not returning to past versions of ourselves. Neither do we need to return to a past interpretation.

In this week's reading, in Leviticus 24:20, we have the line containing the oft-cited phrase, “an eye for an eye,” ending with, *כְּאֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִיָּם בְּאָדָם כֵּן יִתֵּן לוֹ* “that which he gives to another shall be given to him.” Rashi tells us not to take this literally: he interprets the text to be about a monetary compensation, citing that the verb “to give,” *לתת* generally refers to something passed between hands, like money.

We like this interpretation. It makes sense, and it makes the text more palatable. What I don't like is how many other texts lack this type of re-reading. In last weeks' reading we have Lev. 20:13, discussing what seems to be a prohibition of gay male sex.

וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־זָכָר מִשְׁכָּבֵי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה עָשׂוּ

A man who lies with a male like one lies with a woman did an abominable thing

In the interpretation of this text, the rabbis focus on the use of the word זָכָר, male, instead of a repetition of the first gendered word, אִישׁ. Indeed the translation is such: "man shall not lie with male". This is indisputable; the words used are different. The sages argue this suggests the prohibition extends to underage male people, that is, boys who had not yet reached maturity. They further argue that in cases of pedophilia and rape, it is only the perpetrator who has committed the abomination, and the victim is not to be punished for the crime. I agree with the focus on the use of זָכָר, but I see another interpretation: to differentiate between זָכָר and אִשָּׁה. אִשָּׁה is translated as "woman" – but it can also mean "wife." If זָכָר is being used to emphasize the physical aspect of biological sex, as opposed to the social construct of gender, then it would make sense for it to also say מִשְׁכָּבֵי נְקֵבָה – "as one lies with a female," keeping with the emphasis on the physical aspect of biological sex. However, we see the gendered word instead – full with the social constructs including the association of marriage: not just an adult female, but an adult female who has fulfilled her societal role of gender by getting married. Reading this passage as "like one lies with a wife" instead of "like one lies with a woman," we can fill in another interpretation: cheating on your wife is still adultery, even if done with a man.

It could be that I am coming to this conclusion because I have been influenced by the modern times in which I live. Or, I have been influenced by the *mo'adim*, by the *inyanim shel yom*, by every cycle of appointed times in years past, each happening in their own contexts, repeating along the yearly cycle, while still progressing forward in time. This verse tells me that when I read Leviticus with a modern lens, I can still be reading about an appointed time, the *parashat hashavua*, during its appointed time, in its own context: now, in 2018.

Unit 4 Lesson 4: Gender

Materials:

- Print-outs of text (Gender Studies worksheet in Appendix)
- 5 posters
- Large Post-Its
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce students to gender studies
- Explore the way gender is portrayed in the Bible
- Read the creation story with an eye for gender

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain the purpose of gender studies.
- Students should be able to reference Deuteronomy 22:5 as a Biblical origin for the prohibition on transgressing gender norms.
- Students should be able to make connections between sexism and rigid gender roles.

Set induction:

- **Gender Is activity**
 - Create 5 posters, each with a different prompt for students to add their thoughts:
 - Gender is...
 - Gender is not...
 - Men are...
 - Women are...
 - People who are not men/women are...
 - Put the posters around the room.
 - Give students several large Post-Its.
 - Instruct students to walk around the room and complete the sentences for each poster. Students should write their answers on a Post-It.
 - Once students have added a Post-It on each poster, read through all the answers of each poster.
 - Discussion questions for each poster:
 - Which statements do you agree with, and why?
 - Which statements do you disagree with, and why?
 - Are there any contradictions?
 - After going through all the posters, come back together as a class.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What did you notice about the responses?

- What does this teach you about gender?
- How are these responses influenced by culture?

Main Lesson:

- **Introduction to Gender studies – small lecture**
 - Gender studies has come out of the feminist movement.
 - It takes the feminist ideology of reading texts with an eye for gender, and it applies it beyond just looking for women’s stories.
 - Gender theory asks about gender in general – how does the text understand gender? How does it enforce gender? How does it limit gender?
 - Gender studies in Judaism
 - Looking expansively at gender in the Torah and other Jewish texts
- **Chavruta**
 - Pair students.
 - **Gender Studies worksheet.**
 - Hand out worksheet.
 - Ask students to read the texts and answer the discussion questions.
- **Class discussion**
 - Bring students back together.
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What were you surprised by? Why?
 - Was anything confusing or unclear? (invite other students to respond to questions)
 - What are some questions you have about the creation story and gender in Judaism?

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** How is gender studies similar to and different from feminism? What are the Biblical origins of gender and gender roles?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Write an interpretation of Deuteronomy 22:5 that allows for more freedom of gender expression.
 - **Option 2:** What was the first human like? What gender was the first human? Explain your answer with quotes from the text.
 - **Option 3:** Before Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, they did not wear clothing or have separate societal roles. It could be said that their lives in Eden were free from gender roles. Write or draw a picture of what life in Eden might have been like without gender expectations.

Appendix

Gender Studies Worksheet

Biblical origins against cross-dressing/transgressing gender norms:

A woman must not put on man's apparel, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing; it is an *abomination* to Adonai your God, all that do this. (Deuteronomy 22:5)

Biblical origins of gender:

Genesis Chapters 1 & 2

(Note about translation: edited for gender-neutrality of God and human.)

Genesis 1

"When God began to create heaven and earth—"

Before creation, the earth was *tohu vavohu*, unformed and void

1st day: Light (day), darkness (night)

2nd day: Separation between water and sky

3rd day: Separation between land and sea, creation of vegetation

4th day: Sun, moon, and stars

5th day: Animals from the water, birds in the sky, creeping things

6th day: Cattle, more creeping things, wild beasts (and humans)

"And God said, "Let us make human in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created human in God's image, in the image of God God created the human; male and female God created them."

Discussion questions:

1. Where are humans in the order of creation?
2. Where is gender mentioned in this story?

Genesis 2

"The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that God had been doing, and God ceased on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that God had done."

"Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. **When Adonai made earth and heaven—** when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because Adonai had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no human to till the soil, but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole

surface of the earth— Adonai formed human from the dust of the earth. God blew into the human’s nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.”

God made the Garden of Eden and instructed the human not to eat from the center tree.

“Adonai said, “It is not good for human to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for the human.” And Adonai formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the human to see what the human would call them; and whatever the human called each living creature, that would be its name. And the human gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for the human no fitting helper was found. So Adonai cast a deep sleep upon the human; and, while the human slept, God took one of the human’s ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And Adonai fashioned the rib that Adonai had taken from the human into a woman; and God brought her to the human.”

“Then the human said, “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman, for from man was she taken.” Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.”

Discussion questions:

1. Where does human come in the order of creation in Genesis 2?
2. How does Genesis 2 contradict Genesis 1?
3. Where does gender come into Genesis 2?
 - a. Where do gender roles come into Genesis 2?
 - b. What do we know about men and women from this passage?
4. What are your thoughts about Genesis 1 & 2? What surprises you? What confuses you?

Unit 4 Lesson 5: Variations on Gender in Judaism

Materials:

- Access to youtube / way to share videos
- Print-outs of text (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce students to the rabbinic conception of the androgynos.
- Explore the midrash that suggest that the first human was an androgynos.
- Re-examine the creation story with an eye for gender expansiveness.
- Apply the concept of the androgynos to intersex and nonbinary people.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain how the first human could have been androgynos.
- Students should be able to compare and contrast the traditional conception of creation with the rabbis' alternative conception of creation.
- Students should be able to define androgynos as a being that contains both masculine and feminine characteristics.
- Students should be able to apply the concept of androgynos to modern day acceptance of intersex and nonbinary people.

Set induction:

- **Play "Origins of Love"** from Hedwig and the Angry Inch:
<https://youtu.be/zU3U7E1Odc>
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - The song says there originally were 3 genders. What were they?
 - What happens to the 3 genders?
 - What do you think about the idea of one person with two faces, four arms, and four legs?
 - What do you think happened when each person was split in two? What do you think it was like for them to be separated?

Main Lesson:

- **Introduction to the androgynos**
 - While the video we just watched from Hedwig and the Angry Inch tells a story that comes from Greek mythology, we actually have something very similar in Jewish tradition.
 - **Midrash**
 - Ask a student to review what midrash is (interpretations on Biblical texts that provide more detail)

- Put students in pairs.
- **Variations on Gender in Torah** worksheet.
 - Pass out worksheet.
 - Ask students to read the text and answer the discussion questions.
- **Class discussion**
 - **Discussion questions:**
 - What were some of your reactions reading the text?
 - How did you feel about this alternative interpretation?
 - What is the symbolism behind having all of humanity come from the same multi-gendered being?
 - How is this story of the first human similar to the Origins of Love that we watched at the beginning of class? How is it different?
 - How might we apply the concept of the androgynos to gender in our culture today?
 - How might we use this text to promote Jewish inclusion of intersex and trans/nonbinary people?

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Summarize:** What is an androgynos? How does the androgynos fit into the story of creation? How does the androgynos relate to modern day intersex and nonbinary people?
 - **Explore:**
 - **Option 1:** Draw what the first human could have looked like according to Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman.
 - **Option 2:** Explain how the first human being an androgynos can both be a feminist text as well as a queer text.
 - **Option 3:** Write or draw the story of the first human being split in two to become male and female.

Appendix

Variations on Gender in Torah

Deuteronomy 22:5

A woman must not put on man's apparel, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing; it is an *abomination* to Adonai your God, all who do this.

From a midrash on Deuteronomy from 200 CE:

"A man's garment shall not be upon a woman": What does Scripture come to teach us? If that she should not wear white clothing, and he should not wear colored clothing, is it not written (*Ibid.*) "for the *abomination*, etc."? And this [white or colored clothing] is not an abomination. It means, rather, that a woman should not wear what a man wears and go among the men (for licentious* purposes), and a man should not wear what a woman wears and go among the women.

*licentious- illegal, immoral, or promiscuous

Discussion questions:

1. How does the midrash on Deuteronomy interpret this verse in Torah? Is this still a prohibition on crossdressing? Why or why not?

From the Talmud (Nazir 59a):

"What is the meaning of this verse [Deut 22:5]? If it teaches only that a man may not put on a woman's garment, and a woman may not wear a man's garment, it is already stated in explanation of this prohibition that "it is an abomination to the Lord your God," and there is no abomination here in the mere act of wearing a garment. Rather, it means that a man may not wear a woman's garment and thereby go and sit among the women; and a woman may not wear a man's garment and sit among the men."

Discussion questions:

1. What do the rabbis in the Talmud think the "abomination" is referring to in Deut. 22:5?
2. Do the rabbis think cross-dressing is an abomination? Why or why not?
3. How do these interpretations of this verse change your reading of it?

Genesis 1:27

And God created the human in God's image, in the image of God God created it; male and female God created them.

Note on translation: "it" was used to represent a gender-neutral singular, and "them" was used to represent a gender-neutral plural, which reflects the original context of the Hebrew

Midrash on Genesis (Genesis Rabbah)

(A rabbinic commentary written on Genesis in the 4-6th centuries CE)

***androgynos:** a person with both masculine and feminine characteristics, who cannot be classified as either male or female.

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar (RYBE) said, “At the time when The Holy One Blessed be God created the first human, God created it as an androgynos*; as is it written: ‘male and female God created them.’”

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman (RSBN) said, “At the time when The Holy One Blessed be God created the first human, God created it with a double face one on each side, and split the human along the middle and created two backs, one back here and one back there.”

Discussion questions:

1. How does RYBE interpret the verse “male and female God created them”?
2. How does RSBN expand on RYBE’s interpretation of the line from Genesis?
 - a. What does the first human look like according to RSBN?
 - b. How did God create two humans from one according to RSBN?
 - c. What problems do you see with this interpretation? Why?

(text continued from above)

They [his peers] challenged him: doesn’t it say, “and God took a *tzelah* [rib] from the human”? Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman replied to them, “In this case, *tzelah* does not mean rib. It means one of its sides, just as we see in Exodus 26:20: ‘and for the *tzelah* of the tabernacle,’ which they translate as *side* of the tabernacle.”

Discussion questions:

1. What argument do RSBN’s peers provide to try and disprove his interpretation?
 - a. What is RSBN’s response? Do you find it compelling? Why or why not?
2. How do you feel about the possibility of the first human being a multi-gendered being?
 - a. What are some feminist take-aways from this text?
 - b. What are some queer theory take-aways from this text?
 - c. What do you think about this text being written 1500 years ago?

Unit 5

Review + Final Project

Description of unit:

This unit will serve as a review of the first four units, as well as giving space for the students to work on their final projects and presenting them. For review, first the teacher will review Beyond Supernaturalism and the Post-Holocaust unit, and then review Feminism and Queer/Trans theory. Then there will be a debate where students will pick a theology to defend and debate with one another about their beliefs or approaches to Judaism. The unit will conclude with time for students to work on creating their own personal theologies, and then they will present their theologies to the class on the final day.

Enduring understandings:

- Judaism contains countless different approaches and lenses through which to view and interpret traditional text.
- Every Jew has the ability to create their own personal theology.
- Variation in Jewish belief makes Judaism stronger and more multi-faceted.

Essential questions:

- Why do people have the spiritual beliefs that they have?
- What is the purpose of religion or spirituality?
- How can tradition be used to promote progress and inclusion?
- In what ways can tradition be innovated or personalized?
- What do I believe, and why?
- How do I approach Jewish tradition, and why?

Learning objectives:

- Students should be able to articulate their own personal theology.
- Students should be able to describe their connection to Jewish text and tradition.
- Students should be able to find creative solutions to responding to problematic Jewish texts.

Unit 5 Lesson 1: Review Units 1-4

Materials:

- 6 Posters
- Journals

Goals:

- Review Beyond Supernaturalism unit.
- Review Post-Holocaust unit.
- Review Feminist Theology unit.
- Review Queer/Trans Theology unit.
- Begin generating thought about creating a personal theology.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain the differences between theism, pantheism, and panentheism.
- Students should be able to give an example of how to combine science and religion.
- Students should be able to name one way Jewish theology changed after the Holocaust.
- Students should be able to give an example of Jewish feminism.
- Students should be able to give an example of a queer/trans reinterpretation of a text from Torah.

Set induction:

- **What do you remember?**
 - Go around the room and name one thing you remember from anything we've learned so far.

Main Lesson:

- **Jigsaw Review Activity**
 - **Split class into 6 groups:**
 - God is Dead & Hidden God
 - Vengeance & Justice/Redemption
 - Pantheism & Panentheism
 - Transnaturalism & Process Theology
 - Feminist Theology
 - Queer/Trans Theology
 - **Preparation**
 - Instruct students to review their hand-outs and what they have written in their journals on their subject. As they review, they should write notes on their poster to present to the class.
 - **Presentations**

- Students present their posters with their notes about their theologies.
- Let other students ask the presenters questions about their theologies.
- **Class discussion**
 - Is there a theology we went over today that you still don't quite understand, or have questions about?
 - Is there a theology we went over today that particularly speaks to you, and why?
 - What similarities do you see between theologies we went over today?
 - What differences?

Closure:

- **Journals**
 - **Explore:** Which of the theologies that we discussed today would you like to learn more about? How might you adapt that theology to your own belief system? Begin thinking about how the theologies from the past four units could factor into your own thinking about God.

Unit 5 Lesson 2: Prepare for Socratic Circle

Materials:

- Way to share Images of Perspective (in Appendix) – either print-outs or projection
- Large Post-Its
- Journals

Goals:

- Introduce Socratic Circle.
- Assign students subjects for Socratic Circle.
- Guide students in preparing for Socratic Circle.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to explain what a Socratic circle is.
- Students should be able to say in their own words why their assigned theology is important.
- Students should be able to give an example of one way their theology can reinterpret Jewish texts or beliefs.

Note to teacher:

- Formal assessment in this lesson.
- No journal activity this lesson.
- Variations for Socratic circle offered based on class size.

Set induction:

- **Show Images of Perspective** (in Appendix)
 - **Questions for discussion:**
 - What do these images show?
 - What can we learn about perspective from these images?
 - How does the Jewish tradition of interpretation relate to these images?
 - How are these images connected to the content we've learned in this class?

Main Lesson:

- **Introduction to Socratic Circles**
 - Ask if any students know who Socrates was, and if they could tell any information they know about him.
 - Ask if any students know what the **Socratic method** is.
 - *(answer: the Socratic method is a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions*

to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions)

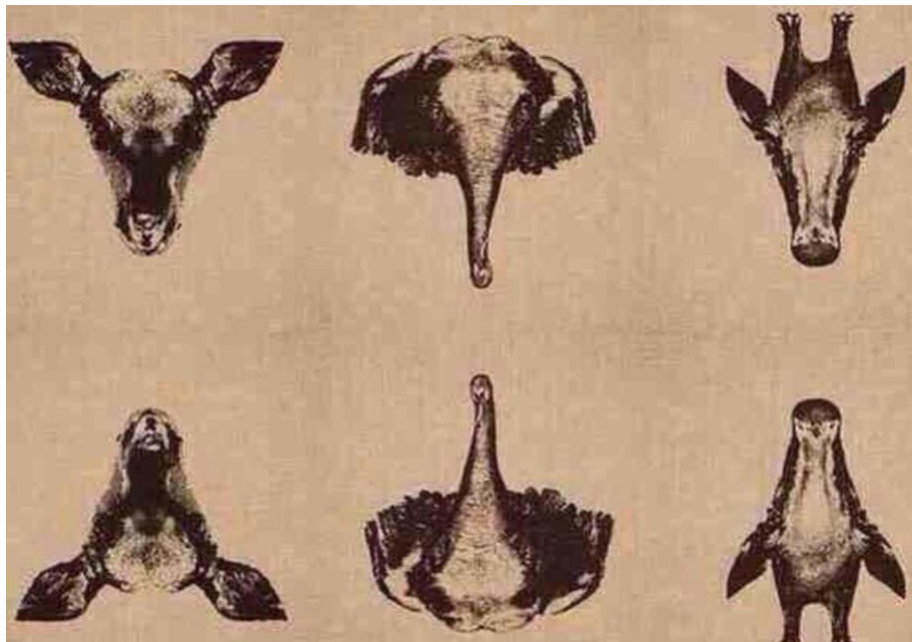
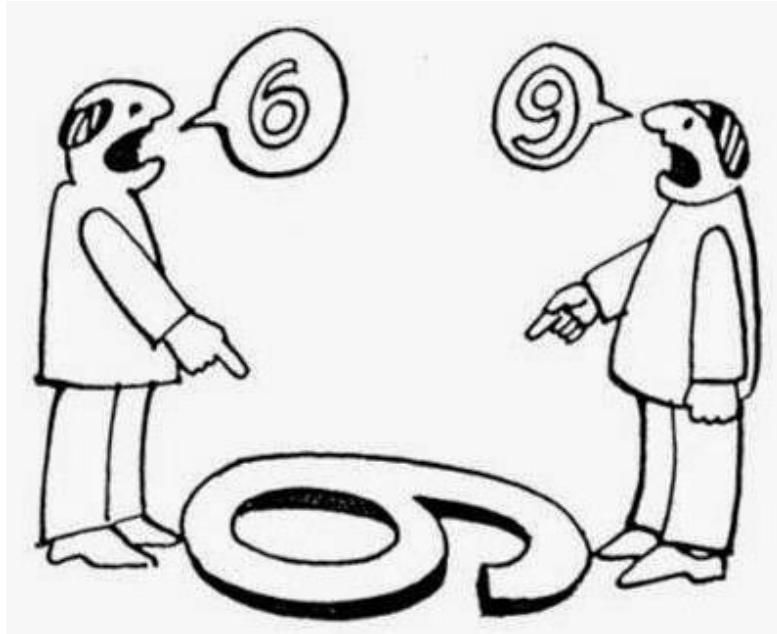
- “How is the Socratic method different from a debate?”
- **Socratic Circles**
 - Pass out Socratic Circles handout.
 - Read through the handout as a class.
 - Ask if students have any questions about the assignment/activity.
 - **Note:** the Socratic circle should have two circles of students, an inner circle and an outer circle. The teacher should be in the outer circle. The inner circle engages in the discussion, while the outer circle observes and takes notes. Then, the students switch places, and the students from the outer circle move to the inner circle and get a chance to engage in discussion. The size of the circles will depend on class size. If there are at least 12 students, put at least one student to represent each subject in the inner circle, and the subjects will repeat when students switch. If fewer than 12 students, put the same number of students in the inner and outer circles, and switch the subjects when students switch.
- **Assign students subjects** (either pick for the students – could be based on jigsaws from previous session; or let students choose)
 - **Subjects:**
 - God is Dead & Hidden God
 - Vengeance & Justice/Redemption
 - Pantheism & Panentheism
 - Transnaturalism & Process Theology
 - Feminist Theology
 - Queer/Trans Theology
 - **Note:** Subjects that have combined theologies can be broken up if there is a large class (more than 12 students). Students only need to represent one of the theologies in their subject if their subject has combined theologies.
- **Preparation**
 - Students prepare for the Socratic circles by picking a theology within their subjects if it has more than one, reviewing their subjects, writing answers to the prompt, and preparing possible questions to ask about the other subjects.
 - **Teacher Check-in:** Teacher walks around to check in with students. Ask how their preparations are coming, and see if they need any help with preparing. Make sure students are on task writing their 1-2 page answer to the prompt.
 - **Formal assessment:** Before the end of the activity, read through students’ 1-2 page answer to the prompt. Offer any suggestions you have for improvement. Give students time to edit their responses based on your feedback.

Closure:

- Go around the room and have each student say one sentence about the persona they are crafting for the Socratic circle activity next class. Who is their character that believes in the theology they were assigned?
- Remind students they can bring costumes to get into character next class.

Appendix

Images of Perspective



Socratic Circles

What are Socratic Circles?

Socratic circles are a way to foster discussion in a collaborative way. Students listen to each other's defenses of their subject, and respond to each other's defenses with probing questions to challenge each other and dig for deeper understanding.

Rules for Socratic circles:

- Talk to each other, not to the teacher
- Use evidence to support your statements
- Ask clarifying questions first if you don't understand what someone has said
- Do not interrupt each other
- You do not need to raise your hand to speak, but be aware of how much space you take up. If you are talking often, give space for others to respond – if you are not talking very much, jump in with a question.
- This discussion will center on challenges and disagreements:
 - When you disagree with another student, do not be judgmental or mean. State your disagreement with your alternate interpretation, or in the form of a probing question.
 - When someone disagrees with you, remember that it is for the sake of discussion and deeper understanding.
- Overall, be respectful!

What the Socratic circle will look like:

In our Socratic circle, each student will represent a different theology we have learned in class. It will be the student's job to argue why their theology is the best theology to follow. After each student has had time to defend their theology, the circle will open up for discussion. Students will ask each other probing questions, and respond to each other's answers. Since everyone will be defending a theology they may or may not agree with, think of this also as an acting challenge. Take on a persona of someone who truly believes in your theology. Use voices or costumes to fully take on this character.

Directions: All students must first answer the prompt. While other students are sharing their answers to the prompt, take notes about their answers. Use these notes to guide your questions for them. After everyone has spoken, the discussion begins. Contribute to the discussion by asking your classmates probing questions.

Prompt: What does your theology add to Jewish tradition or belief? **Write in your Journal a prepared response of 1-2 pages to read during the Socratic circle.**

Bring your prepared response to me to look over before the Socratic circle.

Possible questions to ask in the Socratic circle:

- Where does that idea come from?
- What does that word or phrase mean?
- Who is the intended audience for this theology? How does the intended audience impact the theology?
- What are the implications of that belief?
- What evidence or support do you have for that?
- Why do you believe that?

Unit 5 Lesson 3: Socratic Circle

Materials:

- Journals

Goals:

- Facilitate two Socratic circles.
- Generate discussion about God and Judaism from the perspectives of the different theologies studied.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to defend the belief system of their theology in their own words.
- Students should be able to differentiate between post-supernatural theologies, post-holocaust theologies, feminist theologies, and queer/trans theologies.

Note to teacher:

- Formal assessment in this lesson.
- Memorable Moment in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Go around the room and have each student introduce their character for the Socratic circle, and which theology they're an expert on.

Main Lesson:

- **Socratic Circle**
 - **Set up**
 - Arrange the chairs in two concentric circles. The students participating in the discussion will sit in the inner circle, while those observing will sit in the outer circle.
 - **Two circles**
 - Explain that the inner circle will engage in the discussion, and the outer circle will observe. This is to help keep the discussion group small, so it is easier for everyone to participate. After everyone in the inner circle has spoken and participated in discussion by asking and answering questions, the circles will switch, and the students from the outer circle will move to the inner circle and participate in the discussion.
 - **Review** Socratic circles handout
 - **Rules for Socratic circles:**
 - Talk to each other, not to the teacher

- Use evidence to support your statements
- Ask clarifying questions first if you don't understand what someone has said
- Do not interrupt each other
- You do not need to raise your hand to speak, but be aware of how much space you take up. If you are talking often, give space for others to respond – if you are not talking very much, jump in with a question.
- This discussion will center on challenges and disagreements:
 - When you disagree with another student, do not be judgmental or mean. State your disagreement with your alternate interpretation, or in the form of a probing question.
 - When someone disagrees with you, remember that it is for the sake of discussion and deeper understanding.
- Overall, be respectful!
- **Directions:**
 - All students must first answer the prompt. While other students are sharing their answers to the prompt, take notes about their answers. Use these notes to guide your questions for them. After everyone has spoken, the discussion begins. Contribute to the discussion by asking your classmates probing questions.
- **Possible questions to ask:**
 - Where does that idea come from?
 - What does that word or phrase mean?
 - Who is the intended audience for this theology? How does the intended audience impact the theology?
 - What are the implications of that belief?
 - What evidence or support do you have for that?
 - Why do you believe that?
- **Memorable moment:**
 - **Set up the moment as different:** “We have gathered here today, some of the foremost scholars of different Jewish theologies! We are so honored and privileged to be able to listen to each of them speak about why their theology is the best way to approach Judaism. Can we first get a round of applause for our speakers today?”
- **Formal assessment:** take notes as students present their prepared responses, and engage with each other in discussion prompted by questions and answers.
- **Answering prompt**
 - **Ask each student:** What does your theology add to Jewish tradition or belief?
 - Each student responds to the prompt with the write-up they prepared.
 - Once all students have answered, move to discussion.

- **Discussion**
 - “Thank you again to our speakers! What wonderful answers you’ve all prepared! We now open the floor for discussion. Speakers, what questions do you have for one another?”
 - **Note:** Try and let students guide their discussion. If they need prompting, you can call on students to ask a question.
 - After students have all asked each other questions and responded to one another, thank “speakers” again.
- **Repeat**
 - **Switch** the inner and outer circle.
 - **Set up the moment:** “We have gathered here today, some of the foremost scholars of different Jewish theologies! We are so honored and privileged to be able to listen to each of them speak about why their theology is the best way to approach Judaism. Can we first get a round of applause for our speakers today?”
 - **Answering prompt**
 - **Ask each student:** What does your theology add to Jewish tradition or belief?
 - **Questions**
 - “Thank you again to our speakers! What wonderful answers you’ve all prepared! We now open the floor for discussion. Speakers, what questions do you have for one another?”
- **Debrief**
 - How did it feel to participate in a Socratic circle?
 - What weren’t you sure of?
 - What did you learn or what were you reminded of?
 - What other thoughts did it bring up?

Closure:

- **Journal**
 - **Explore:** Crafting a personal belief system involves taking bits and pieces from everything that you agreed with to create a belief system that is uniquely yours. Out of everything that we’ve learned in this class, what has resonated with you? What bits and pieces do you want to use to create your personal theology?

Unit 5 Lesson 4: Begin Crafting Personal Theology

Materials:

- Print-outs of text (in Appendix)
- Journals

Goals:

- Aid in students creating their own personal theology.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to begin to articulate their own personal theology.

Note to teacher:

- Informal assessment in this lesson.
- No journal activity for this lesson.

Set induction:

- **Purpose of theology**
 - Go around the room and answer the question, “What is the purpose of belief?”

Main Lesson:

- **Importance of developing personal beliefs**
 - As students graduate high school and many start college, and as they move from being regarded as minors to being regarded as full adults, they will be expected to have their own opinions and beliefs.
 - They will encounter many different belief systems in their lives, and they may not know what they agree or disagree with. They also may not know what beliefs exist within Judaism or not.
 - By exploring and developing your own personal theology, it can be easier to understand and relate to other belief systems that you encounter in your life.
 - Personal theologies are constantly evolving: our beliefs change and grow as we change and grow. The more we learn, the more robust and developed our personal belief systems can be.
- **Time to work on their projects**
 - Pass out hand-out for Personal Theology Project (in Appendix).
 - Instruct students to work independently on their final projects.
 - **Informal assessment:** Walk around and check in with students as they’re working. See what their plans are for their final projects, and if they’re getting stuck at all in the process.

Closure:

- Ask students to answer the following question:
 - Personal theology is as much about what we don't believe as it is about what we do believe. What is something that during this course you've realized you don't believe?

Appendix

Personal Theology Project

The final project for this class is to craft your own personal theology. Using theologies, ideologies, and methodologies learned in class, answer these questions: What is my belief in God? What is God like, and how does God interact in the world? How do I interact with God? How do I interact with Jewish tradition and text? How do I connect with the Jewish people?

You will share your answers to these questions in a presentation in class on our last class. Presentations should be 5-7 minutes long. You can be creative on what it is you present. You can create a visual representation, you can write a poem or a song, you can create your own midrash, you can write a persuasive argument or a journal entry, you can create a poster, you can make a powerpoint. If you have any thoughts not listed, come speak to me.

Whatever you come up with, you need to be able to present it to the class and use it to help explain your personal theology.

Unit 5 Lesson 5: Continue Crafting Personal Theology

Materials:

- Journals

Goals:

- Aid students in developing their personal theologies.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to articulate their personal theology.

Note to teacher:

- Informal assessment in this lesson.
- No Journal activity in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Ask students to finish the sentence: “I don’t think people like to talk about religion because...”

Main Lesson:

- **Religion and belief are not taboo**
 - Many people say you should not discuss money, politics, or religion
 - But talking about religion and belief systems is one way to learn about it and expand your own beliefs and ideas
 - By talking about our own beliefs here, among people we know well and have something in common with, we can practice feeling comfortable owning our beliefs and thinking more deeply about them.
- **Time to work on their projects**
 - Instruct students to work independently on their final projects.
 - **Informal assessment:** Walk around and check in with students as they’re working. Make sure they are creating a component to present to the class.

Closure:

- Ask students to provide a small “sampling” of their personal theology presentations – a couple words or a sentence about what they will present.

Unit 5 Lesson 6: Presentations

Goals:

- Give space for student to present their personal theologies.

Objectives:

- Students should be able to create a personal theology and present it to the class.
- Students should be able to explain what they believe about God and why.
- Students should be able to evaluate how they feel about Jewish tradition and text.

Note to teacher:

- Formal assessment in this lesson.
- Memorable moment in this lesson.
- No Journal activity in this lesson.

Set induction:

- Ask students to each share a statement of support or encouragement for their classmates sharing their personal theologies.

Main Lesson:

- **Formal Authentic Assessment: Presentations**
 - **Memorable Moment:** Students share their Personal Theology Projects and presentations
 - After each presentation:
 - Congratulate the presenter
 - Ask students to share any positive feedback they might have
 - Allow space for students to ask the presenter questions

Closure:

- What are you taking away from this course?