

Religious Literacy Speaker Series

Religious Literacy is understanding how religion works in contemporary society in both visible and invisible ways. It helps explore the idea that being a good citizen requires both knowledge about religions, as well as an understanding of how religion (and “religion”) shapes even secular contexts.

This inaugural Speaker Series has been arranged in cooperation with the UVM Jewish Studies Program and focuses on a few of the many ways Judaism influences and interacts with contemporary society. Each lecture examines an intersection between modern life and Jewish identity.

Here are the upcoming lectures in the series:

Wed, March 6th, 4:30-6pm in the John Dewey Lounge, Old Mill
Rachel Z. Feldman
Messianic Zionism in the Digital Age

Judaism in the twenty-first century has seen the rise of the messianic Third Temple movement, as religious activists based in Israel have worked to realize biblical prophecies, including the restoration of a Jewish theocracy and the construction of the third and final Temple on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount. The role of technology in this movement’s globalization has been critical.

Rachel Feldman will discuss her forthcoming book, *Messianic Zionism in the Digital Age*, which highlights the ways in which the internet and social media have contributed to the movement's growth beyond the streets of Jerusalem into communities of former Christians in the Philippines, the US, and elsewhere, who now identify as the Children of Noah (Bnei Noah) and ally themselves with Jews in Israel and the diaspora who wish to rebuild the Temple.

Presented by the UVM Department of Religion, and the Jewish Studies Program at UVM in cooperation with the University of Vermont Humanities Center. With support from the Lattie F. Coor Endowment, The Harry H. Khan Fund, and the program in German, Russian, and Hebrew.

Wed. March 27th, 4:30-6pm in the John Dewey Lounge, Old Mill
Oren Kroll-Zeldin and Ariella Werden-Greenfield
This Is Your Song Too: Phish and Contemporary Jewish Identity

The band Phish was born right here at UVM in 1983, playing their first show at the Harris-Millis cafeteria. They went on to become an international phenomenon with a dedicated fanbase, many of whom are Jewish. Two members of the band —bassist Mike Gordon and drummer Jonathan Fishman—were raised in Jewish households and Phish has been known

to play Hebrew songs in concert. At live shows, many attendees, some wearing T-shirts emblazoned with “Phish” written in Hebrew letters, express feeling something special—even distinctly Jewish—during their performances. Editors of the new book *This is Your Song, Too: Phish and Contemporary Jewish Identity*, Oren Kroll-Zeldin and Ariella Werden-Greenfield will discuss how Phish is one avenue through which many Jews find cultural and spiritual fulfillment outside the confines of traditional and institutional Jewish life. The collected essays in their book show that Phish fandom and the live Phish experience act as a microcosm through which we see American Jewish religious and cultural life manifest in unique and unexpected spaces.

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Wednesday April 17th, 4:30-6pm in the John Dewey Lounge, Old Mill

Rebecca J Epstein-Levi

Torah Edgeplay: Risk, Community, and Ethics from the Beit Midrash to BDSM

Much mainstream discourse on sexual ethics—religious and secular alike—treats “deviant” sexual activities as the height of individualism, pitting them against “traditional” communities in which chaotic, risky individual desires and appetites are subordinate to the collective good. But what if “deviant” sexualities offer models for communal ethics that account for collective wellbeing and identity as well as individual variation, risk-taking, and pleasure? What if it is precisely those communities’ engagement with risk that helps them develop social and moral virtue? And what if classical rabbinic text has within it narratives and resources that not only mirror and elucidate those communities’ virtues, but also mirror, illuminate, and help to mend their vices?

Rebecca J. Epstein-Levi is Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Gender & Sexuality Studies at Vanderbilt University. An expert on sexual ethics, she uses unconventional readings of classical rabbinic text to study the ethics of sex and sexuality, disability, and neurodiversity. She will discuss her forthcoming book, *Torah Edgeplay: Risk, Community, and Ethics from the Beit Midrash to BDSM*.

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