



## Dr Gitit Holzman

### Abstract

The curriculum of Israeli colleges of education includes a compulsory course devoted to Jewish religion. The Ministry of Education's policy is that every intended teacher in Israel should study a basic course on Judaism, whether they are Jewish, Muslim or Christian, and whether they are studying to become a teacher of mathematics, science, arts or the humanities. As Israel is a dynamic multicultural society, and since every school teacher is supposed to be an erudite educator, this demand is quite reasonable. However, teaching such a course seems to present multifarious challenges. The main complications encountered in these courses revolve around the following aspects:

1. Engaging in the academic teaching of religion to students who often hold strong yet conflicting religious sentiments.
2. Discussing religion as a humanly-originated concept rather than being necessarily of divine origin. Thus the nature of Judaism, as that of every other religion, is presented as the product of the influence of other religions, as well as geographical, historical, and political circumstances.
3. Arousing interest in Judaism among Arab students.
4. Introducing basic concepts of Christianity and Islam to Jewish students.

In order to address these challenges, I conducted the course using different forms of dialogues. In fact, dialogue is an essential characteristic and category of Jewish tradition. The opening chapters of the Bible include dialogues between God and Adam, Adam and Eve, and Eve and the snake. The biblical text continues with numerous dialogues between God and his prophets, the prophets and the people, and the prophets and the kings. None of these dialogues are smooth and happy. They all reflect bitter arguments, differences of opinions, and ongoing disputes. However, despite this biblical polyphony, profound study of the scriptures can provide meaningful values and moral lessons that remain relevant in all times. The Jewish sages who interpreted the Bible and further developed Jewish heritage created a massive body of work amounting to dozens of volumes. Their heritage is also a dialogic one, as these volumes record numerous disputes over principles of Jewish faith and tradition. There is very rarely a clear bottom line, as if the lesson they wanted to teach was that the ancient tradition is kept alive only as long as it is questioned, discussed, and never taken for granted. Jewish scriptures also record numerous dialogues between Jews and Pagans, Christians, and Muslims. The most prominent Medieval Jewish scholar was Moses Maimonides. His Muslim counterpart was Ibn Rushd (known in Latin Europe as Averroes). They both lived in the 12th century in neighboring countries and shared similar ideas regarding religion and philosophy. Numerous studies have discussed the unique

affinity between these two individuals, yet no evidence was found testifying they were actually familiar with each other. In 2002 an Israeli scholar published a book entitled: The Latent Secret Maimonides and his Friend Ibn Rushd. The book is a record of an imaginary dialogue between these great intellectuals. This dialogue never actually took place, though it could have done had the circumstances been slightly different. Reading that book I was struck by the ability of fantasy to touch real life and solve actual problems. This, along with other elements concerning teaching Jewish tradition at an Israeli College to Jewish, Muslim and Christian students, will be discussed in this presentation

## **Bio**

Dr Gitit Holzman is a scholar of Jewish Philosophy, currently teaching at Levinsky College of Education, Tel Aviv, Israel. Dr Holzman has earned her Ph.D. at the Department of Jewish Thought of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her field of expertise is Medieval Muslim Philosophy and its impact on Jewish Philosophy. Her Doctoral Dissertation as well as Masters Thesis explored unpublished manuscripts of prominent Jewish philosophers, thus shedding light on significant parts of Jewish philosophical tradition hitherto unknown. After completing her Ph.D Dr Holzman conducted a post-doctoral research at Harvard University. She has been teaching at Israel leading academic institutions: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Ben-Gurion University of the Negev; the Technion, Israel institute of technology; Haifa University. To date she has published 25 articles in leading academic journals, presenting original research in Medieval and Modern Jewish History and Philosophy.