

*On these pages you will find an outline of the course, with synopses of each chapter and the main points that are covered in the discussion questions for each session.*

# More than Chemistry: The Romantic Choices of American Jews

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This course offers an opportunity to examine the ideals we may hold about romantic love and about our partners – actual or potential – and the implications of such romantic choices for our lives as Jews.

The overall questions the course addresses include:

- What are we looking for (or did we look for) in a partner?
- How realistic are our wishes? What are their implications?
- What are our views of Jewish partners? non-Jewish?
- What kind of family life do we want? Where does Judaism come into this picture?
- How may the issues in a relationship change over time?
- Are our personal goals similar to or different from those of our parents? How do our own wishes coincide or conflict with those of the community?

The chapters of “More than Chemistry” explore these and related questions. For each session you will find a brief description of the film followed by “In Depth” background on a related aspect of Jewish life.

**THE INTRODUCTION** sets out the idea that romantic love, often presented as “pure chemistry,” is frequently much more than that. Instead, romantic choices are often invested with larger social, economic, or psychological goals and may be tied to generational conflict, social movements, or the task of acculturation to the larger society. The films in this course help demonstrate that “falling in love” can involve much “more than chemistry.”

**SESSION ONE****A (Re)arranged Match: *The Imported Bridegroom***

This 1989 film is based on an 1898 story by Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Forward*. In the film, a brilliant Talmud scholar is brought back from the Old Country as the intended husband of an American-born young woman who has very different ideas about her ideal mate.

“In Depth” provides background on the traditional Jewish family, the role of romance and marriage, and changes wrought in family structure and romantic ideals in the New World of America.

Topics explored in the questions include:

- Differences between Old World Jewish values and the values encountered and adopted in America.
- Ways that our “romantic” ideals may incorporate other goals, such as financial security and social status.
- How we may think about people who appear “different” from members of our own social group.
- The notion of fulfilling our own ambitions through others (our children, our romantic choices).
- Views of Jewish religious tradition that may be held by secular American Jews.

**SESSION TWO****“A Very Precious Love”: *Marjorie Morningstar***

This 1958 film is based on the 1955 novel by Herman Wouk. Its heroine strikes out from her comfortable family to search for adventure, experiences an intense and stormy romance, and finally chooses a stable, conventional life.

“In Depth” traces images of Jewish women from the immigrant generation forward, especially as depicted by male writers and filmmakers.

Key issues addressed:

- Images of Jewish women, as seen by Jewish men.
- The role of parents in defining values and guiding their children’s decisions.
- The nature of rebellion.
- The options for women in earlier decades and today.
- The difference between “falling in love” and choosing a life partner.

**SESSION THREE****A Farewell to Innocence: *Goodbye, Columbus***

A 1969 film based on Philip Roth's novella, published in 1959. It portrays the summer romance of a poor but intellectual librarian and a beautiful, spoiled Radcliffe student.

"In Depth" discusses Jewish economic success, including the images of materialism depicted in novel and film, the concurrent strand of Jewish liberal social commitment, and the conflict that sometimes plays out between generations around these issues.

Key issues include:

- How some characteristics may simultaneously (or sequentially) attract and repel two people.
- The impact of negative images and stereotypes on our own views.
- The hidden agendas that may drive a relationship.
- The role of values in defining our lives as Jews.

**SESSION FOUR****Facing Facts: *Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition***

This documentary presents a group of interfaith couples as they discuss the challenges of intermarriage and, especially, raising children.

"In Depth" examines the changing profile of American Jewry, characterized by increasing rates of intermarriage, and the responses of individuals, families, and denominations to this new reality.

Key issues include:

- Means of passing on Jewish traditions in a mixed marriage.
- The decisions about raising children faced by the Jewish partner in a mixed marriage.
- The impact of intermarriage on the extended family.
- Responses of the Jewish community to intermarriage.

**SESSION FIVE****When Opposites Attract: *The Way We Were***

This 1973 film depicts the attraction, marriage, and separation of a passionate, activist Jewish woman and a cool, privileged gentile man.

"In Depth" explores the tradition of Jewish activism in America and the image of committed, politically involved Jewish women depicted in literature and in the film.

Key topics include:

- The power of difference in romantic attraction.
- The implications of significant differences, religious and otherwise, in a long-term relationship.
- The role of parental approval or disapproval.
- The disparity between an imagined future (or past) and the reality.

#### **SESSION SIX**

##### **Opposites Attract, Again: *Annie Hall***

This 1978 Woody Allen film is in some respects the previous movie in reverse, with intellectual, Jewish Alvy Singer and his elusive love – breezy, Wisconsin-bred Annie Hall.

“In Depth” examines the American Jewish community in the 1970s, when the success of economic and social integration into American society began to raise questions about what constitutes Jewish identity in America.

Key issues addressed:

- The importance of family in selecting a mate.
- Images we may hold of Jews and non-Jews as prospective partners.
- The issues that define us as Jews in America.
- The challenges of making a relationship work.

#### **SESSION SEVEN**

##### **Matchmaker, Matchmaker: *Crossing Delancey***

This 1988 film explores the encounters of a serious, modern Jewish woman with, first, a narcissistic writer and then, a quiet, traditional Jewish man.

“In Depth” looks at the lifestyle choices of Jews today, especially the challenges for singles in our modern, impersonal society who wish to find a mate.

Key issues include:

- The difficulties of finding appropriate partners today.
- Means for bringing together single Jewish men and women.
- The role of matchmakers, yesterday and today.
- What we may seek in selecting a Jewish partner.
- What difference, if any, we think it makes to marry a Jew.