

Introduction to Judaism Syllabus/ Reading List 5784 - 2023-4

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Class will be held on Monday evenings in the synagogue meeting room from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. Due to the occasionally unpredictable nature of the rabbi's schedule, it may be necessary to cancel some scheduled dates. Every effort will be made to cover the missed material during the semester.

Suggested reading list:

The books can be purchased online or ordered through local bookstores. If you have trouble finding any of them, the synagogue will place an order from the publisher and sell them to you at cost. The prices listed are approximate, based on previous years' prices.

The Book of Jewish Practice, Rabbi Louis Jacobs; Behrman House, \$13.50

The Book of Jewish Belief, Rabbi Louis Jacobs; Behrman House, \$13.50

Reading list - for further enrichment:

Jewish Thought

Sacred Fragments, Rabbi Neil Gillman
Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Neil Gillman; Behrman House
The Death of Death, Rabbi Neil Gillman
A Jewish Theology, Rabbi Louis Jacobs
Healer of Shattered Hearts, Rabbi David Wolpe
Judaism as a Civilization, Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan
God and the Big Bang, by Rabbi Daniel Matt

Jewish History

Understanding Jewish History (two volumes), Sol Scharfstein
Jewish People, Jewish Thought, Robert Seltzer
Wanderings, Chaim Potok
A History of the Jewish People, Solomon Grayzel
History of the Jewish People, Max Margolis and Alexander Marx
A History of the Jewish People, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson
Jews, God, and History, Max Dimont
Jewish Literacy, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin
A History of the Jewish Experience, Leo Trepp
A History of Zionism, Walter Laqueur

Prayer/Liturgy

To Pray as a Jew, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin
Service of the Heart, Evelyn Garfiel
Entering Jewish Prayer, Reuven Hammer

General Judaica, Jewish calendar, life cycle, mitzvot

It's a Mitzvah, Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson; Behrman House
The Jewish Holidays, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld; Harper and Row
This is My Beloved, This is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations, Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff, Rabbinical Assembly
The Passover Seder, The Art of Jewish Living series, Dr. Ron Wolfson
A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort, Dr. Ron Wolfson
The Jewish Dietary Laws, James M. Lebeau
Jewish Dietary Laws, by Samuel Dresner and Seymour Siegel
Shabbat: The Family Guide to Preparing for and Celebrating the Sabbath, 2nd edition, Dr. Ron Wolfson; Jewish Lights
The Sabbath, Abraham Joshua Heschel
Jewish Literacy, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin
Jewish Wisdom, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin
The First Jewish Book of Why, Alfred Kolatch
The Second Jewish Book of Why, Alfred Kolatch
The First Jewish Catalog, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld
The Second Jewish Catalog, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld
The Complete Book of Jewish Observance, Leo Trepp

Bible

Tanakh, Jewish Publication Society

The Jewish Study Bible, Oxford University Press

The Five Books of Moses, translated by Everett Fox, Schocken

Etz Hayim, Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of *Conservative Judaism*

The JPS Bible Commentary series (includes all five books of Torah, Jonah, and Esther)

About the Course and the Syllabus

The course and syllabus have been designed with multiple audiences in mind. Some students might be serious Jews, involved with Temple or Synagogue, who would like to fill in a few gaps in their basic Jewish education. Some might be totally unfamiliar with Judaism, may or may not be Jewish, but have heard or read something about Judaism and want to learn more. Others might be committed Christians, interested in learning the Jewish background against which Christianity developed. Still others might be working on conversion to Judaism. All are welcome.

Because of our limited time and the vastness of the material that I would like to cover, we need to begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. I will set aside a few minutes to address questions that have come up in the course of the week, whether from past lessons or from current events. My lectures are designed to be responsive to questions, keeping in mind the Rabbinic admonition, “One who is embarrassed [to ask questions], does not learn.”

Occasionally, I have included “special assignments,” involving areas of Jewish practice and home rituals. These assignments are primarily for those students looking to deepen their own Jewish commitment or for those seeking conversion. All students, however, should feel free to engage in the special assignments.

By the way, all services and programs of the synagogue are open to guests. You may wish to subscribe to the synagogue monthly newsletter, the Voice (\$25/year), to keep track of everything that is happening. Also, feel free to visit our Shabbat services, 9:30 - 11:45 a.m. (approximately) each Saturday.

Now, in the immortal words of the 1st century Rabbinic sage Hillel, Tzei u’lmad, “Go and learn!”

An overview of the class dates and topics:

| | |
|---|----|
| Session 1 - Introduction/Ideas in Jewish Theology | 5 |
| December 11, 2023 | 5 |
| Session 2 - Biblical Civilization/How Jews Read the Bible | 6 |
| December 18, 2023 | 6 |
| Session 3 - Shabbat - Sacred Rest | 7 |
| January 8, 2024 | 7 |
| Session 4 - Kashrut | 8 |
| January 15, 2024 | 8 |
| Session 5 - Post-Biblical and Pre-Rabbinic Civilization | 9 |
| January 22, 2024 | 9 |
| Session 6 - Introduction to the Jewish Calendar and the Three Pilgrimage Festivals | 10 |
| January 29, 2024 | 10 |
| Session 7 - The Rabbinic Period - Talmud Midrash, and Argument for the Sake of Heaven | 11 |
| February 5, 2024 | 11 |
| Session 8 - Life cycle I - Birth/B'nai Mitzvah | 12 |
| February 12, 2024 | 12 |
| Session 9 - Pesah - The story that Brought Forth Torah | 13 |
| February 19, 2024 | 13 |
| Session 10 - Life cycle II - Marriage/Sexuality/Divorce | 14 |
| February 26, 2024 | 14 |
| Session 11 - The Days of Awe | 15 |
| March 4, 2024 | 15 |
| Session 12 - Life cycle III - Illness and Death | 16 |
| March 11, 2024 | 16 |
| Session 13 - Medieval Jewish Civilization - Philosophy and Mysticism/Purim | 17 |
| March 18, 2024 | 17 |
| Session 14 - The Holocaust/Fast Days | 18 |
| March 25, 2024 | 18 |
| Session 15 - Zionism and the Modern State of Israel | 19 |
| April 1, 2024 | 19 |

Session 1 - Introduction/Ideas in Jewish Theology

December 11, 2023

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice

Belief in Action

pp. 1-3

Study of the Torah

pp. 4-11

The Book of Jewish Belief

What is Judaism

pp. 1-9

Belief in God

pp. 10-18

Torah

pp. 19-28

The Mitzvot

pp. 29-37

The Chosen People

pp. 38-45

The Messianic Idea

pp. 221-229

The Hereafter

pp. 230-238

Topics to be covered:

- What is Judaism?
- Torah and mitzvot
- Chosen people
- Encountering God
- Proving God's existence
- The End of Days: What will be?
- What is a Jewish life?
- Religious Authority
- Revelation
- Sensing God's presence
- Suffering: Why does God allow it?

Note: For the next class, write two or three short paragraphs on your own personal theology of God and revelation. If you did not receive the syllabus in advance and prepare the reading, please review this reading before the second class session.

Session 2 - Biblical Civilization/How Jews Read the Bible December 18, 2023

Hand in Personal Theology Papers.

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief
The Bible

pp. 46-55

Topics to be covered:

- Torah/*Tanakh*
- The Patriarchs and Matriarchs
- Prophecy
- Biblical scholarship and criticism
- Slavery, exodus, and conquest
- Destruction and exile

Note: No class next week, December 12 - Rabbi out of town.

Session 3 - Shabbat - Sacred Rest

January 8, 2024

Reading assignment:

Handout from *The Sabbath*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Book of Jewish Practice
The Sabbath, pp. 74-80

The Book of Jewish Belief
The Sabbath, pp. 96-104

Topics to be covered:

- The Meaning of Shabbat
- Friday night Shabbat celebration
- How to observe Shabbat

Note: No class for the next two weeks, December 25 and January 1.

Session 4 - Kashrut

January 15, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice
The Dietary Laws

pp. 66-73

The Book of Jewish Belief
The Dietary Laws

pp. 132-139

Topics to be covered:

- What is kashrut?
- Kashrut in the home and outside
- Why keep kosher?
- Purim: Celebrating powerlessness

Special assignment: Using the steps in *It's a Mitzvah*, advance your observance of the mitzvah of kashrut by at least one step. If you do not keep kosher at all, begin with steps 1-3. If you keep kosher only partly, begin keeping kosher more fully using the more advanced steps.

Session 5 - Post-Biblical and Pre-Rabbinic Civilization

January 22, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice
Hanukkah and Purim

pp. 118-122

Topics to be covered:

- Post Biblical History
- The Rabbinic Hanukkah
- The Historical Hanukkah

Session 6 - Introduction to the Jewish Calendar and the Three Pilgrimage Festivals

January 29, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice

Sukkot

pp. 98-106

Shavuot and Sefirat Ha-Omer

pp. 92-95

Topics to be covered:

- The lunar-solar calendar
- Sukkot and the Sukkah
- Simhat Torah
- Tikkun Leil Shavuot
- Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot
- Shemini Atzeret
- Reenacting the giving of the Torah
- The Book of Ruth

Session 7 - The Rabbinic Period - Talmud Midrash, and Argument for the Sake of Heaven February 5, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief

Talmud and Midrash

Rabbinic Literature

pp. 56-66

pp. 67-76

Topics to be covered:

- Post Biblical History
- Halakha and Aggadah

- Who were the Rabbis?
- Oral Torah: Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash

Session 8 - Life cycle I - Birth/B'nai Mitzvah

February 12, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice

Birth and Education

pp. 47-53

Honoring Parents

pp. 54-59

The Book of Jewish Belief

Marriage and the Family

pp. 215-220

Booklets from Congregation Ahavas Israel

“Pregnancy and Birth Rituals in Jewish Tradition”

“Brit Milah Ceremony”

Topics to be covered:

- Pregnancy traditions and rituals
- Birth ceremonies: Brit Milah and Simhat Bat
- Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Session 9 - Pesah - The story that Brought Forth Torah **February 19, 2024**

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice
Passover

pp. 81-85

Topics to be covered:

- The meaning of Pesah
- Kashrut on Pesah

- The Song of Songs

Session 10 - Life cycle II - Marriage/Sexuality/Divorce

February 26, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice
Marriage

pp. 41-46

The Book of Jewish Belief
Marriage and the Family

pp. 212-215

Topics to be covered:

- The marriage ceremony
- The get - a Jewish divorce

- Mikvah and sexuality

Session 11 - The Days of Awe

March 4, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice

Rosh Hashanah

Yom Kippur

pp. 107-112

pp. 113-117

Topics to be covered:

- Sin and Teshuvah - the month of Elul and Selihot
- Rosh Hashanah
- The Mahzor
- Yom Kippur
- Shofar

Session 12 - Life cycle III - Illness and Death

March 11, 2024

Reading assignment:

Handout: Ahavas Israel guide to mourners

The Book of Jewish Practice

Death and Mourning

pp. 60-65

Topics to be covered:

•Visiting the Sick

•Jewish laws on death and mourning

Session 13 - Medieval Jewish Civilization - Philosophy and Mysticism/Purim March 18, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief

| | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Jewish Philosophy | pp. 77-82 |
| Jewish Mysticism | pp. 86-95 |
| Jewish Movements | pp. 140-148 |
| The Holocaust | pp. 149-156 |

The Book of Jewish Practice

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Hanukkah and Purim | pp. 122-125 |
|--------------------|-------------|

Topics to be covered:

- Exiles and wanderings
- Pogroms
- Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewry
- Jewish philosophers - Sa'adia Gaon, Maimonides
- Rashi
- False Messianism
- Jewish movements
- The pleasures and pitfalls of entering modernity
- Inquisitions and expulsions
- Expulsions and wandering
- Hasidism
- Mysticism

Note: I will pass out 100 Basic Judaism review questions at the end of class today. At the end of the final two class sessions there will be time to go over some of the answers.

Session 14 - The Holocaust/Fast Days

March 25, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief
The Holocaust

pp. 149-156

The Book of Jewish Practice
Fast Days

pp. 126-129

Topics to be covered:

- Fasts of mourning
- Exiles and wanderings
- Pogroms
- Asarah b'Tevet, Shiva Asar b'Tammuz, and Tisha B'av
- Destruction of the Temple
- Inquisitions and expulsions
- The meaning of the Holocaust

Note: There will be time to ask questions about the 100 Basic Judaism review questions.

Session 15 - Zionism and the Modern State of Israel

April 1, 2024

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief
The State of Israel

pp. 157-165

Topics to be covered:

- Emancipation
- Theodor Herzl
- History of Zionism and the foundation of the State of Israel
- Israel as a haven - Yemenite, Soviet, and Ethiopian immigration
- Contemporary history and culture of the State of Israel

Note: There will be time to ask questions about the 100 Basic Judaism review questions.