

INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM  
**January – December 2021**  
S Y L L A B U S

**Key:** BJ = Becoming Jewish; EJP = Entering Jewish Prayer; ADA = A Day Apart; GJRP = Guide to Jewish Religious Practice; SH = A Short History of the Jewish People; MCJ = Modern Conservative Judaism

\* = Thursday

- January 5:     **Registration**  
                   **Introductions**  
                   **What Is Judaism?**  
                   BJ, pp. 1 - 39  
                   Topics and Questions:  
                   1. The Biblical origins of the word “Jew”  
                   2. Why is a definition of Judaism elusive?  
                   3. How is Judaism different from other religions?  
                   4. Does Judaism have a creed?  
                   5. What makes Judaism distinctive?  
                   6. The Problem with “Jews for Jesus”  
                   7. “Israel, God, and Torah are One”  
                   8. When does Judaism begin?
- January 12:    **God: The Core of Jewish Belief**  
                   Topics and Questions:  
                   1. What is the difference between theism and atheism?  
                   2. What are the different kinds of theism?  
                   3. Why is the existence of evil a particular problem to theists?  
                   4. What is the cosmological proof for the existence of God?  
                   5. What is the teleological proof for the existence of God?  
                   6. What is the ontological proof for the existence of God?  
                   7. What is the argument from tradition?  
                   8. The four attributes of God  
                   9. The additional attributes that Judaism associates with God  
                   10. The seven Holy Names and two rabbinic names for God and the implications  
                   Vocabulary: Tetragrammaton, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence
- January 19:    **Torah: A Gift and a Guide**  
                   SH, 1-23  
                   MCJ, Part 2, pp. 83-116  
                   Questions and Topics:  
                   1. What is the root meaning of the word ‘Torah’?  
                   2. What are the names of the five books that compose the Torah?  
                   3. What has the word ‘Torah’ come to mean in its narrowest and broadest senses?  
                   4. What is the dilemma attached to the giving of the Torah?  
                   5. What are the various ways the Torah is conceived and divided?  
                   6. What is a commandment? What does a commandment imply?  
                   Vocabulary: mitzvah, mitzvot, oral law, written law
- January 26:    **Torah (Continued)**  
                   Genesis: Chapters 1-4, 12-18, 21-22, 26-30:24, 37-50

Exodus, entire  
 Leviticus: Chapters 18-20, 23  
 Numbers: Chapters 13-15, 20:1-13  
 Deuteronomy: Chapters 7, 10:12-12:28, 29:9-19, 30:11-20  
 Handouts: Genealogy, “Notable and Quotable”

Topics and Questions:

1. Who are the Patriarchs?
2. Who are the Matriarchs?
3. The three central events of early Israelite history
4. What are some the essential teachings of the Torah?

February 2: **The Bible and How It Came To Be**

SH 24-50

Handout: “Old Testament Canon”

Topics and Questions:

1. What are the three components of Hebrew Scriptures?
2. What is a prophet?
3. How do Jews refer to the Bible?
4. What is the Masoretic text?
5. Who determined the content of the Bible and when?
6. What is lower Biblical criticism?
7. What is higher Biblical criticism?

Vocabulary: apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, TaNaKh,

February 7: **Hebrew Reading Marathon 9:30 – 2:00 via Zoom**

February 9: **Talmud and Midrash**

SH 51-70

Handout: “Orders and Tractates”

Topics and Questions:

1. The real beginning of Judaism
2. What three characteristics separate Israelite religion from Judaism?
3. What separated Judaism from Christianity?
4. Why was interpretation necessary?
5. The Babylonian vs. Jerusalem Talmud

Vocabulary: mishnah, gemara, Talmud, order, tractate

February 16: **Rabbinic Literature Expands**

Handout: “Sources of Jewish Law”

**Jewish Philosophy and Philosophers**

SH 71-95

Questions and Topics:

1. The inverted pyramid of the evolution of Rabbinic literature
2. Why were commentaries necessary?
3. Why were codes necessary?
4. How did Jewish philosophy begin?
5. Who are the major Jewish philosophers?

Vocabulary: midrash, tosefta, geonim, rishonim aharonim. Responsa

February 23: **Purim**

The Book of Esther (in the Bible)

BJ 58-60

GJRP 232-240

Topics and Questions:

1. What is the essential message of Purim?

2. What book of the Bible is associated with the holiday?
3. What are the three unique features of that book?
4. What problems have scholars raised with the story?
5. What four mitzvot are performed on Purim?

Vocabulary: Shabbat Zakhor, Ta'anit Esther, Vashti, Mordekhai, Hadassah, Ahashverosh (Artixerxes), Haman, groggers, "ad lo yasda," mattanot, l'evyonim, mishlo'ah manot, hamantaschen, purim spiel, shushan purim

March 2: **Demystifying Jewish Mysticism**

SH 116-117

Topics and questions:

1. What is mysticism?
2. Why is mysticism universal?
3. When does Jewish mysticism begin?
4. Why was mysticism secretive?
5. What is Lurianic Kabbalah or practical mysticism?
6. What is the state of Jewish mysticism today?

Vocabulary: Ein Sof, sefirot, Zohar, tzimtzum, shevirat ha-kelim, tikkun

March 9: **Israel: The Chosen People and the Promised Land**

Questions and Topics:

1. What are three ways that the concept of chosen-ness is explained?
2. How does each reflect the outlook of the major modern movements?
3. What is the Jewish population of the world today?
4. Why do Jews have a deep affinity with the State of Israel?

March 16: **Pesah: Festival of Freedom**

BJ 60-63

GJRP 103- 147

*Haggadah Shel Pesah*

Song of Songs (in the Bible)

Topics and Questions:

1. Why is Passover the foundational holiday of Judaism?
2. When does preparation for Passover begin and why?
3. What is hametz?
4. What are the three means of preparing for Passover?
5. What is the seder? What are its objectives?
6. What text is essential to the seder?
7. What symbolic foods are eaten at the seder?
8. What symbolic foods are not eaten at the seder?
9. What foods are required to be eaten?
10. What is the afikoman?
11. Why do we set out a Cup of Elijah?
12. How long is Passover celebrated in Israel? Outside of Israel?
13. What are the intermediate days of the festival and how are they observed?
14. What special prayers are incorporated into the synagogue service?

Vocabulary: Pesah, z'man heruteinu, hag ha-matzot, hag ha-aviv, nisan, "hametz b'ma-shehu," koshering, mekhirat hametz, bedikat hametz, seder, haggadah, karpas, haroset, matzah, maror, afikoman, l'shanah ha-ba'ah, tal, yizkor

March 23: **Understanding the Jewish Calendar**

BJ 41-2; 75-6

GJRP 255-268

Handouts: “Principles of the Jewish Calendar”

“The Important Dates of the Jewish Year”

Topics and Questions:

1. Why is a calendar so important?
2. What are the principles of the Jewish calendar?
3. What Biblical requirements make such precision necessary?
4. What are the dates of the Jewish holidays and fast days?
5. Which Jewish month has no holidays or fast days?
6. What is a leap year? When does it occur?

Vocabulary: intercalation, solar year, lunar year, nineteen-year cycle, adar sheni

March 30: **Shabbat: An Island In Time**

BJ 79-92

EJP, Chapter 11

GJRP 54-94

Topics and Questions:

1. What is the purpose of Shabbat?
2. How is Shabbat a ‘day on’ rather than a ‘day off’?
3. Prohibitions vs. Opportunities
4. When does Shabbat begin and end? How is each marked?

Vocabulary: melakhah, muktzeh, shevut, hadlakat nerot, kabbalat Shabbat, Kiddush, hallah, lehem mishneh, zemirot, birkat ha-mazon, pesukei d’zimra, shaharit, musaf, se’udah shlishit, havdalah, neshamah yeterah

April 6: **Shabbat Continued**

ADA (Entire)

MCJ 373-376

April 13: **EXAM**

April 20: **The Synagogue**

Topics and Questions:

1. When were synagogues invented and why?
2. What are the three names/purposes of synagogues?
3. How are synagogues oriented?
4. How are synagogues named today?
5. What features in common do all synagogues share?

Vocabulary: bet kenesset, bet midrash, bet tefillah, bimah, amud, mizrah, aron kodesh, ner tamid, mehitzah, hazzan, shaliah tzibbur or ba’al tefillah, ba’al koreh, nusah, minhah, ma’ariv, gabbai, petiḥah, hagbah, gelilah, aliyah/aliyot

April 27: **Tallit, Tefillin, Mezuzah**

EJP Chapter 12

GJRP 49-52; 1-9

Questions and Topics:

1. What are the purposes of wearing a tallit and tefillin?
2. What is the purpose of affixing a mezuzah?
3. To which doorposts is a mezuzah attached?
4. How is the construction of the tallit designed to convey its meaning?
5. How are tefillin worn?

Vocabulary: tallit, tzitzit, tefillin, tefillah shel yad, tefillah shel rosh, peshutim, peshutim mehudarim, gassot, tefillin shel rabbenu tam

May 4: **Kashrut**

GJRP 302-378

Questions and Topics:

1. What does the word kosher mean? What is its origin?
2. What are the six purposes for keeping kosher?
3. What five types of dietary laws are specifically mentioned in the Torah?
4. What are the signs for kosher animals?
5. Why must milk and meat be separated?
6. What happens when milk and meat are accidentally mixed?
7. How long must a Jew wait to eat dairy after eating meat?
8. How long must a Jew wait to eat meat after eating dairy?
9. How does transference occur? What are the remedies?

May 11:

**Shavu'ot: Festival of the Giving of the Torah**

BJ 63-65

GJRP 147-153

The Book of Ruth (in the Bible)

Questions and Topics:

1. What are the five names for the holiday?
2. Why is there no tractate in the Talmud devoted to this holiday?
3. What book of the Bible is associated with Shavu'ot and why?
4. What are the central themes of Shavu'ot?
5. Why are dairy foods eaten?

Vocabulary: Hag Ha-Shavu'ot, Hag ha-katzir, Atzeret, z'man mattan toratenu, Hag ha-Bikkurim, Ruth, Naomi, Bo'az, tikkun leil Shavu'ot, akdamut

**Tish'a B'Av**

BJ 67-73

GJRP 241-253

Handout: "Remembrance is the Secret of Redemption"

Topics and Questions:

1. What are the "Three Weeks?"
2. What events are commemorated during this period?
3. What is the saddest day of the Jewish year?
4. Why is Tish'a B'Av still observed today?

Vocabulary: Shiv'ah Assar B'Tammuz, Bein Ha-Metzarim. T'lata d'puranuta, Shabbat Hazon, Tish'a B'Av, Shabbat Naḥamu, Shav d'Neḥamta

May 20\*:

**Shopping Kosher Field Trip (if possible)**

Questions and Topics:

1. What is COR?
2. Are there other kashrut supervisory agencies?
3. How can we tell what product is kosher?
4. What is "Glatt Kosher?"
5. Are all fruits and vegetables kosher?
6. Why does water have a hekhsher? Canned fruits and vegetables?

May 25:

**Prayer**

EJP Chapters 5 -10

GJRP 41-49; 11-39

MCJ 53-79

Topics and Questions:

1. What are the two reasons for prayer?
2. What are reification and catharsis?

3. What are the four kinds of prayer?  
 4. How often do Jews pray?  
 5. In what language may Jews pray?  
 6. What tools are used in prayer?  
 7. Community and Quorum  
 Vocabulary: tefillah, kavanah, nusach, tzibbur, minyan, kippah (yarmulka)
- June 1: **Prayer Continued**  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What is the building block of Jewish prayer?  
 2. Which prayer is recited during every prayer service?  
 3. What is the “kaddish” and what purpose does it serve in prayer?  
 4. How are the various prayer services organized?  
 Vocabulary: berakhah, Shema, Amidah, Shemoneh Esreh, k’negged avot tiknum, k’negged korbanot tiknum
- June 8: **The Pursuit of Holiness**  
 BJ Chapters 4, 5, and 6  
 MCJ 252-271  
 Allen, *Prescription for an Ailing World*  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. Is it possible to follow the Torah and still be ethically deficient?  
 2. Why do Jews place holiness ahead of happiness?  
 Vocabulary: naval birshut ha-torah, lifnim mishurat ha-din, shvil ha-zahav, Kiddush hashem, hillul hashem, gemilut hesed, tzedakah, derekh erez, tzni’ut, anavah, lashon ha-ra, kavod ha-beriyot, bal tash-hit, tza’ar ba’alei hayyim, “ha-ba l’hargekha hashkem l’hargo,” pikuah nefesh
- June 15: **Rosh HaShanah**  
 GJRP 176 – 202  
 BJ 43-56; 99-106  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. The month of E.L.U.L.  
 2. What are the four names of the holiday?  
 3. How many days is Rosh Hashanah celebrated?  
 4. How is the eve of Rosh Hashanah distinct?  
 5. What is the proper greeting for the first night of Rosh Hashanah?  
 6. What specific mitzvah is associated with the holiday?  
 7. How is the Jewish New Year different from the secular new year?  
 Vocabulary: teshuvah, mahzor, shofar, teki’ah, shevarim, teru’ah, kittel, malkhuyot, zikhronot, shofarot, tashlikh, l’shanah tovah, g’mar hatimah tovah
- June 22: **Exam**
- September 9\*: **Yom Kippur**  
 EJP 121-155  
 GJRP 204 –224  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What are the ten days of repentance?  
 2. What is Shabbat Shuvah and when does it occur?  
 3. What controversial ceremony is performed on the eve of Yom Kippur?  
 4. What are the five prohibitions of Yom Kippur?  
 5. What is atonement?  
 6. What are the four steps that must precede atonement?  
 7. With what special prayer does Yom Kippur begin?  
 8. What two long additions are added to the musaf service?

9. What book of the Bible is read in its entirety on Yom Kippur and why?  
 10. How does Yom Kippur end?  
 Vocabulary: asseret y'mai teshuvah, shbbat shuvah, kapparot, al het, kol nidrei, avodah, Jonah, Ne'ilah
- September 14: **Sukkot: Festival of Booths**  
 GJRP 156-166  
 EJP Chapter 11  
 Book of Kohelet (in the Bible)  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What are the four names for the holiday?  
 2. What makes a sukkah kosher?  
 3. What makes Sukkot historically unique?  
 4. How many days is Sukkot celebrated?  
 5. What is the name of the last day of the holiday?  
 6. What four items are bundled together and what do they symbolize?  
 Vocabulary: Hag, hag ha-sukkot, hag ha-assif, z'man simhatenu, noi, hiddur mitzvah, ushpizin, lulav etrog, hadassim, aravot, hakkafot,
- September 23\*: **Shemini Atzeret and Simhat Torah**  
 EJP, Chapter 11  
 GJRP 166-173  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. How many days is Shemini Atzeret celebrated?  
 2. What does the name of this holiday mean?  
 3. What two special prayers are added to the musaf service?  
 4. What does Simhat Torah celebrate?  
 Vocabulary: "hag bifnei atzmo hu," geshem, yizkor, hatan torah, hatan bereshit, kol ha'n'arim, hakkafot
- September 30: **One Torah, Many Movements**  
 SH 97-121; 173-197; 249-263  
 MCJ 1-12; 15-16; 13-14  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What is Hasidism?  
 2. What is Musar?  
 3. What are the three major modern movements in Judaism? To what phenomenon did each react?  
 4. What is the only modern movement in Judaism to originate in North America?  
 5. What are the differences in outlook among the major movements
- October 5: **Zionism**  
 SH 123-147; 217-233; 235-248  
 MCJ 335-359, 361-372  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. When and why did Zionism arise?  
 2. What is the definition of Zionism?  
 3. Who were the founder/ thinkers of Zionism and what were their ideas?  
 4. How is Zionism still relevant today?
- October 12: **Marriage and Divorce**  
 GJRP 379-414; 450- 456; 466 – 473; 476-488  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What are the two purposes of marriage?

2. What are the terms used to describe marriage and what do they imply?  
 3. What are the implications of these purposes?  
 4. What are grounds for divorce?  
 Vocabulary: kiddushin erusin, nissu'in, hatan, kallah, ketubah, mikveh, bedekken, niddah, fasting, get
- October 19: **Family**  
 GJRP 414-418; 420-438  
 MCJ 274-307  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What ceremonies are associated with the birth of boys? Girls?  
 2. What obligations do parents have towards their children?  
 3. What concept ought to inform married life?  
 4. What obligations to children have toward parents?  
 5. Jewish Education: Costs and Challenges  
 Vocabulary: shalom zakhar, shalom bat, brit milah, mohel, sandek, kvatter/kvatterin, pidyon haben, Talmud torah/hinukh, bar/bat mitzvah, se'udat mitzvah, tza'ar giddel banim, shalom bayyit, kibbud av v'em
- October 26: **The Conversion Process I**  
 Review BJ 1-39; EJP 3-39  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. Who is the paradigm for conversion to Judaism?  
 2. What acts are required for conversion?  
 Vocabulary: hatafat dam brit, tevilah, mikveh, kabbalat ha-mitzvot, bet din
- November 2: **The Conversion Process II: Visit to the Mikveh**  
 GJRP 509-522  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. What makes a mikveh kosher?  
 2. What are the three configurations of a kosher mikveh?  
 3. What matters to the Bet Din?
- November 9: **The Holocaust**  
 SH 199-215  
 Elie Wiesel, *Night*  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. Why is the term Sho'ah preferred?  
 2. What are the two major theological issues associated with the Sho'ah?  
 3. What are the traditional and modern approaches to resolving those issues?
- November 16: **Death and Mourning**  
 EJP, Chapters 14  
 GJRP 269-300  
 Topics and Questions:  
 1. Preservation of Life and End of life  
 2. Leading towards death  
 3. Attitudes to the dead  
 4. From grief to recovery  
 5. The Mourning Syndrome  
 Vocabulary: bikkur holim, kavod ha-met, nivul ha-met, hevra kaddisha, taharah, takhrikhim, shemirah, somer, keria'ah, levayah, nihum avelim, shivah, shelsohim, kaddish, yahrzeit, unveiling
- November 23: **Hanukkah**  
 BJ 56-8



SH 25-49  
GJRP 226-232

Topics and Questions:

1. What is the difference between a major and minor Jewish holiday?
2. What accounts for the popularity of Hanukkah in North America? In Israel?
3. What is the popular story of Hanukkah?
4. What is the real story of Hanukkah?
5. Who were the Maccabees? The Hasmoneans?
6. How is the hanukkiyah lit?
7. Why are fried foods eaten?
8. Is gift-giving on Hanukkah justified?
9. The December Dilemma
10. Syncretism and Assimilation

Vocabulary: menorah, hanukkiyah, shammash, dreidl, latkes, sufganiyot

November 30: **Messiah**

Topics and Questions:

1. What is the origin of the concept of messiah?
2. What does messiah mean literally? Figuratively?

Vocabulary: mashiah

December 7: **Afterlife**

1. What is the connection/order among the End of Days, the messianic idea, the Last Judgment, and Resurrection of the Dead?
2. What is the concept of the soul?
3. What is gilgul?
4. Do Jews believe in re-incarnation?

Vocabulary: tehiyyat ha-metim. Neshamah, metempsychosis

December 14: **EXAM**

If you have questions or concerns about this course or related issues, please feel free to speak with your instructor or sponsoring rabbi. You may also contact the leadership of the Ontario Rabbinical Assembly, the sponsoring organization for this course:

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