

Intro to Judaism Class Summaries

Adat Shalom Synagogue



Miller Introduction to Judaism Program

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

This course is taught through a collaborative educational partnership with the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program of American Jewish University.

Questions:

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Class One:***Torah: Our People's Story***

Overview of the *Torah*: its basic narratives, personalities, and themes. Exploration of the concept of *brit* (covenant) as a primary motif of the *Torah*. Building classroom community and reviewing administrative and learning requirements.

Class Two:***Ancient Israel: Kings, Priests, Prophets***

Overview of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient history (Conquest of Canaan to Babylonian Exile) of the Jewish People. Discussion of the ways that the Bible is used in Jewish liturgical life. Examination of selected texts and concepts from *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*.

Class Three:***Two Jews... Three Opinions***

Understanding the varieties of Jewish-ness — including exploration of geographic, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Development and ideology of the modern Jewish denominations. Introduction of the concept of *mitzvah* and *halakha* as a lens to examine the philosophical underpinnings of Jewish religious diversity.

Class Four:***Sacred Days: The Festivals of the Year***

Overview of the major Jewish holidays' narratives, rituals, and themes, including the *Shalosh Regalim*, the High Holy Days, Hanukkah, Purim, and *Tisha b'Av*. Emphasis on the ways that the Jewish calendar conveys Judaism's core teachings and values.

Class Five:***Shabbat: A Cathedral in Time***

Exploration of the practice of Shabbat, from its origins in the Ten Commandments to its contemporary observance. Overview of the principles of *shmirat* Shabbat, emphasizing helping students determine how to begin incorporating elements of Shabbat observance into their lives. Examination of the meaning and practice of Shabbat rituals in the home.

Class Six:***Prayer: Keva and Kavanna***

Exploration of the mechanics and meaning behind Jewish prayer. Focus on the general rubrics of the prayer service, keva/kavanna, ritual garb and symbols, and comfort in the synagogue environment. Building familiarity with basic prayers and blessings—including *Sh'ma*, *Amidah*, *Kaddish*, and the basic blessing formula.

Class Seven:***Passover: Exodus and Us***

Study of the Passover narrative, emphasizing its importance to shaping Jewish identity and values. Examination of the Passover dietary laws. Experiential study of the rituals of the Passover Seder.

Class Eight:***God Wrestling***

Jewish approaches to theology, emphasizing the concept of "wrestling with God" and a variety of ways of understanding God. Exploration of selected Jewish texts about God from the Bible, rabbinic literature, and the prayer book. Opportunity for developing and articulating a personal theology.

Class Nine:***The Rabbinic Revolution***

Overview of the development of Rabbinic Judaism and how it is distinct from earlier Biblical Israelite religious practice. The historical context of the late-Second Temple Period and the existential challenge posed by the destruction of the Temple. Examination of illustrative examples of rabbinic literature, particularly how rabbinic texts adapt, expand, and update Biblical concepts.

Class Ten:***Days of Awe***

Exploring themes and observances of the High Holy Day period—from *Rosh Hodesh Elul* through *Yom Kippur*, emphasizing the practice of *teshuvah*. Study of key symbols, prayers, and what to expect from *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* services.

Class Eleven:

Jews and Food

Exploration of the practice of *kashrut*—its basic rules and concepts and how to practically apply them to daily life. Emphasis on a developmental approach to taking on Jewish eating practices. Also, study the practice of *brakhot* before and after eating.

Class Twelve:

Under Crescent and Cross

Overview of Jewish history from the end of the Talmud Period until the dawn of the Modern Period. Focus on the contributions of Rashi, Rambam, and Joseph Karo. Overview of the development of *Kabbalah*, including an introductory discussion of the *Zohar* and the *Tsfat/Lurianic* tradition. Emphasis on the question: What role does the contributions of the Middle Ages—literary, *halakhic*, and mystical play in contemporary Judaism?

Class Thirteen:

The Greatest Blessing

Study of Jewish rituals for sanctifying relationships, with an in-depth focus on marriage rituals. Discussion of *mikvah*— for conversion, lifecycle rituals, and *taharat ha-mishpacha*. Exploration of Jewish ethics around intimate relationships and sexuality. Discussion of inclusion of LGBTQ Jews in contemporary Jewish life.

Class Fourteen:

From Generation to Generation

Exploration of the rituals and meaning behind Brit Milah and Simchat Bat, with a discussion of the significance of circumcision both for infants and for converts. Choosing a Jewish name, again focusing on both infants and conversion. Jewish parenting and different modes of Jewish education (both formal and informal). The significance of the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony.

Class Fifteen:

Life's Hard Times

Understanding Jewish practices toward illness and healing, particularly the mitzvah of *bikkur holim*. Exploration of Jewish ethics regarding end-of-life, including questions about life support, autopsy, organ donation, etc. Overview of funeral and burial practices and mourning practices, including shiva, shloshim, and yahrzeit. Jewish views on the afterlife.

Class Sixteen:

Hatred and Heroism

History of anti-Semitism, from Biblical stories (Purim & Hanukkah) to Jews under Christian and Muslim rule, to the advent of racial anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Holocaust survivor testimony and discussion of Jewish responses to the Holocaust.

Class Seventeen:

Israel: A Great Dream

The significance of Israel in Jewish life and thought. Historical survey from Herzl through the founding of the State of Israel, emphasizing understanding the meaning and varieties of Zionism. Overview of Israeli geography and key sites. Focus on understanding the connection between American Jews and Israel, including how we are to understand and respond to Israel's domestic and international struggles.

Class Eighteen:

The Jewish Mission to Heal the World

Closing the class with an exploration of three big concepts-- *Tzelem Elohim*, *Tzedaka*, and *Tikkun Olam* — which serve as foundational principles of Judaism. Closing celebration for the class and discussion of next steps for continuing learning.