



INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM - Course Syllabus

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UNION for Reform Judaism, West District
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Save this Syllabus! You will need the information, topics and Journal assignments until the end of course.

Location: Temple Gan Elohim
12861 N 8th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85029

Time: Sundays, 4:30 – 6:30 PM

Instructor: Rabbi Tracee Rosen

Date **Class Topic**

1. Oct 21 **BEGINNINGS**
Orientation
The Jewish Calendar and Shabbat I
The Jewish sense of time and the role of Shabbat
The concept of holiness in Judaism
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 2 (3-13); *Sourcebook*, 1-5; 179-96
Journal: Write a personal statement about where you are in your religious life now.

2. Oct 28 **Shabbat II: Prayer**
Prayer as experienced particularly during Shabbat
Synagogue worship and home blessings; the prayers in the service
Tzedakah
Parashat haShavua (the weekly Torah portion).
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 2; *Sourcebook*, 197-231; *Gates of Shabbat* (peruse)
Journal: How might you observe Shabbat in a meaningful way? (Take a look at Resource Sheet 86 and pick two items you might do.) Do you pray? What motivates you? What setting works for you? What words emerge?

3. Nov 4 **LIFECYCLE I:**
Birth, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation and Lifelong Learning
God's covenant with the Jewish people.
Entering into the covenant at birth: berit milah and baby naming
The concept of *mitzvot* - obligations, commandments or commitments?
Jewish Texts: Torah, Mishnah, Talmud
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 13, 14, 15 (90-120); *Sourcebook*, 6-23; 91-96, 271-89
Journal: A child born to Jewish parents enters the covenant with a ceremony of welcome. What kinds of welcome do you want or need to begin/continue your journey in Judaism?

Homework: Please read the assigned chapter(s) in the *Jewish Home* (Syme) and the *Sourcebook* (Einstein and Kukoff) and other assigned readings each week prior to attending class.

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4. Nov 18 **LIFE CYCLE II: Marriage**
The Jewish Wedding Ritual
Keeping a Jewish Home and Basics of Kashrut
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 16, 17; *Sourcebook*, 97-137;
Handout on kashrut
Journal: *Kiddushin is the Hebrew term for wedding. What makes a relationship "sacred?" In what ways can you enhance the holiness of your relationship?*

Please start reading *A Short History of the Jewish People*

5. Dec 2 **Chanukah**
Jewish identity and assimilation
The December Dilemma
Hellenism and its Role in the Chanukah Story
The Enlightenment and Reform Judaism
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 6 (38-44); *Sourcebook*, 24-52
Journal: *What is the message of Chanukah for you and how can you communicate it in a non-Jewish world?*
6. Dec 9 **Jerusalem in the Jewish Imagination (From the Bible to the Roman Empire)**
Reading: *Short History of the Jewish People*, 1-69.
Journal: *Discuss three ideas/facts from this week's reading that you found most interesting/surprising/disturbing.*
7. Dec 16 **Rosh HaShanah**
Creation, Sin, Repentance (*teshuvah*)
Jewish New Year and creation of the world
Different concepts of sin and salvation in Judaism and Christianity
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 3; *Sourcebook*, 162-78.
Journal: *In looking over the past year, what are aspects of your life you would like to change? What are the obstacles? How can Judaism help you achieve your goals?*

Winter Break

8. Jan 13 **Yom Kippur**
Forgiveness and communal responsibility for transgressions
Yizkor (memorial service for the dead)
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 4; *Sourcebook*, 364-74; TANAKH: Jonah
Journal: *What does it take to really let go of a hurt and forgive someone? Do you need to forgive yourself? Are there people from whom you need to ask forgiveness? How can Judaism help you work toward making changes in your life?*

Homework: Please read the assigned chapter(s) in the *Jewish Home* (Syme) and the *Sourcebook* (Einstein and Kukoff) and other assigned readings each week prior to attending class.

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9. Jan 27 **Sukkot and Simchat Torah**
Permanence and fragility
Simchat Torah and the centrality of Torah
Ushpizin (Guests) - Notable Jews from Abraham to Wiesel
Ecclesiastes/Kohelet
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 5; *Sourcebook*, p. 266-99; TANAKH: Ecclesiastes
Journal: *Make a list of Jewish guests (past and/or present) you would invite to your sukkah. Explain your list.*
10. Feb 3 **Purim and Tu b'Shevat**
Reversals, Subversion and Celebration
Antisemitism through the lens of Purim
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, 45-56; *Sourcebook*, 152-61
Journal: *For what would you be willing to risk your life? Considering the realities of history, what would be your reasons for wanting your children to be Jewish?*
11. Feb 10 **Expulsion from Spain to the Holocaust, Yom Ha-Shoa (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and Tisha B'Av**
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 12; *Sourcebook*, 350-63; *Short History of the Jewish People*, 71-215 (esp. ch. 4, 9).
Journal: *"The Holocaust did not affect your family. How can you possibly relate?" How might you feel hearing that question? How might you respond?*
12. Mar 3 **Israel and Zionism, Yom Ha-Atzma'ut (Israel Independence Day)**
Reading: *Sourcebook*, 305-49; *Short History of the Jewish People*, 217-63.
Journal: *What does Israel mean to you? How would you like to live or visit there?*
13. Mar 10 **Passover and MODEL SEDER**
Please bring your Haggadah and seder supplies!
Exodus – Redemption – Memory
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, 57-74; *Sourcebook*, 138-51.
Journal: *What is Pesach about? How do you understand liberation? Why do Jews emphasize the Seder ritual?*
14. Mar 17 **Conversion (Gerut)**
Reading: Lydia Kukoff. *Choosing Judaism*
Journal: *What does it mean to be part of a (religious) community? What seem to be the important reasons for converting to Judaism? What Hebrew name might you choose, and why?*

EXAM REVIEW: EXAM QUESTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED DURING THIS CLASS FOR STUDENTS TO COMPLETE AT HOME.

The completed answers should be returned to the instructor at the last class session of the course, unless you make an alternative arrangement.

Homework: Please read the assigned chapter(s) in the *Jewish Home* (Syme) and the *Sourcebook* (Einstein and Kukoff) and other assigned readings each week prior to attending class.

Please start reading *Finding God*.

15. Apr 7 **Peoplehood and Conversion Panel**
Reading: Lydia Kukoff. *Choosing Judaism*.
Journal: *Judaism is not just a religion. In what activities might you involve yourself that would enable you to feel more a part of the Jewish people?*
16. Apr 21 **Jewish Theology: Different Views of God**
The role of faith in Judaism
The Messiah
Reading: *Sourcebook*, 187-96; 377-91; Sonsino and Syme. *Finding God*
Journal: *Which idea of God resonates most with you? Why? How does it compare with the view of God with which you grew up?*
17. Apr 21 **LIFE CYCLE III: Death and Mourning, the Afterlife**
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 18; *Sourcebook*, 75-90.
Journal: *What would you like people to say about you at the end of your life? What would you have liked to accomplish in your life?*
18. May 5 **Shavuot- Revelation and Reform Judaism in America**
The Ten Commandments
The Reform Platforms of 1885 and 1999
Reading: *The Jewish Home*, ch. 11 (80-84); *Sourcebook*, 232-65; *TANAKH: The Book of Ruth*; Principles of Reform Judaism from 1885 (Pittsburgh Platform) and 1999 (Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism) at <http://ccarnet.org/documentsandpositions/platforms>
Journal: *How do you respond to these principles? Which resonate most with you?*

FINAL EXAMS DUE!

Notices to all Students of URJ Introduction to Judaism

- 1) A required *Shabbaton* is arranged for this class, date TBD. It lasts approximately four hours and consists of Torah study, a learners' service, a potluck lunch and a Q&A session. Attendance at this Shabbaton is a course requirement. Many students say that it is the best part of the course. Email announcements will be made well in advance.
- 2) Attendance at three Shabbat services (at different synagogues) is also required. Please write up a paragraph for your Instructor for each service attended.
- 3) An official *Certificate of Completion* will be issued by the URJ Introduction to Judaism program to every student who completes all the course requirements. This certificate is worth having and saving. A Bet Din for conversion generally requires the certificate.
- 4) To make up a missed class at another course location, check the URJ website at <http://urj.org/learning/classes/intro/socal-az/registration/>. Download the syllabus for the class location you wish to attend. Make sure you sign in on the attendance sheet to get proper credit.

Homework: Please read the assigned chapter(s) in the *Jewish Home* (Syme) and the *Sourcebook* (Einstein and Kukoff) and other assigned readings each week prior to attending class.