



## Temple Israel

An Engaging, Diverse Jewish Community  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Rabba Kaya Stern-Kaufman, Rabbi  
Amy Hyett, President

January 2021

Syllabus for Conversion- Created by Rabbi Leanna Morrit  
**With additions by Rabba Kaya Stern-Kaufman**

**Class 1: Jewish time – Overview of Jewish Holidays, Cyclical Time** The Jewish calendar allows us to concretize the abstract ideas and values in a cyclical pattern. We will learn about the rhythm and major themes of the Jewish year and how the holidays (large and small) fit into the yearly cycle of Jewish time.

Vocabulary: *Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, Chag, Yontiff, Tu Bi-Shvat*

**Required reading** Strassfeld 227-230, 290-292, Telushkin 631-633, 648-649, Jacobs, 105-114, Waskow Preface, and 105-113

**Journal Entry due by our next class:** What is my current level of religious commitment? Why am I taking this class? What do I hope to learn? What are my questions, doubts or concerns? What are the things about Judaism that most appeal to me? What gives me pause?

**Class 2: Purim:** Traditions and the 4 mitzvot of Purim

Vocabulary: Megilla, Grogger, Hamantashen, Mishlo-ach Manot, Matanot L'evyonim, Ta'anit Esther

**Required Readings:** Book of Esther (found in your JPS Bible), Strassfeld 293-297, Waskow 115-131

**Class 3: Passover - From slavery to freedom-** Passover, the second of the three pilgrimage festivals, commemorates the exodus from Egypt and is a holiday most celebrated by American Jews. This moment in our calendar is pivotal in a number of ways. We will see how the festival of Passover, especially the Seder nights, illustrates the Jewish values of freedom and justice and represents the birth of the Jewish nation.

Vocabulary: *Mah Nishtanah, Chametz, Matzah, Charoset, Maror, Kasher L'Pesach/Peysadik, Kitniyot*

**Required Reading:** Tanakh: Exodus chapters 11-13, Strassfeld, 231-243, Telushkin 653-659, Waskow 133-164

**Class 4: From Passover to Shavuot: From Liberation to Revelation** The second day of Passover through the first day of Shavuot is the 49-day, 7-week countdown to our second pilgrimage festival and the traditional observance of the revelation at Sinai. This week we will again discuss God



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in Jewish thinking. Why is God revealed? What does this mean? How is revelation a part of Jewish theology?

Choosing and Chosen-ness – Megillat Ruth

Vocabulary: *Omer, Sefirah, ger (tzedek), mikveh, "Jew by choice," beit din*

**Required Reading:** Strassfeld 244-255, Waskow 165-206

**Journal Entry:** At the time of conversion one promises to "cast one's lot" with the Jewish people. What are the implications of casting one's lot with the Jewish people? How do I understand chosenness and choosing.

### **Class 5: A Sanctuary in Time - Shabbat**

How do we sanctify time on a weekly basis? Shabbat is the time-keeper of Jewish life. We will begin to learn the conceptual and ritual keystones that enables us to enter into, what Heschel refers to as, "a sanctuary in time."

Vocabulary: *Shabbes, Gut Shabbes, Shabbat Shalom, Brakha, Kiddush, Motzie, Bensch, Havdalah*

**Required Reading:** Telushkin 673-680, Strassfeld 103-134, Jacobs, 96-104

Optional Reading: Heschel, *The Sabbath*, Greenberg 127-181

**Journal Entry due by our next class:** What does the concept of Shabbat mean to me? What am I doing/can I do to observe Shabbat? What aspects of Shabbat are meaningful/relevant to me? What might I add or take away to create a time of rest, sanctity and delight?

**A central principle found in Pirkei Avot (the Ethics of our Ancestors) is that the world rests on three pillars, "Torah, Avodah (worship) and Gemilut Hasadim (acts of loving kindness)." (Pirke Avot 1:2). Over the next sessions we will explore these three ideas separately and understand how they offer a foundational approach to Judaism.**

**Class 6: Written Torah** How is Torah central in Jewish life? What is the written Torah more specifically? Learn about the structure of the written Torah, the centrality of Torah study and the nature of its commanding voice.

Vocabulary: *Chumash, Tanakh, Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim, Haftarah, Aseret Hadibrot, 613 Commandments*

**Required Reading:** Telushkin 3 -54, Strassfeld 139 – 145, Jacobs 19-28



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**Class 7: Oral Torah, Halakhah, Aggadah-Midrash** Where did the tradition of interpretation in Jewish life come from? Learn about the idea of Rabbinic Judaism, categories of mitzvot and the evolution of Jewish law as a guideline for Jewish practice.

Vocabulary: *Mitzvah, mitzvot, Mishna, Gemara, Talmud, Shulkhan Arukh, Halakhah, Aggadah, Midrash*

**Required reading:** Telushkin 146-157, Strassfeld, 146-170, Jacobs 56-76, Greenberg 286-290

**Class 8:** We will explore the range of Jewish conceptions of God in Jewish liturgy and text. We'll have time to think about our personal connection to the concept of God and how that might inform our understanding of Jewish practice.

Vocabulary: *Shekhinah, Adonai, Elohim*

**Required Reading:** Jacobs 10-18, Strassfeld 487-504

## Reading List for Conversion Class

- **A Jewish Bible (Tanakh).** I recommend **The Jewish Study Bible** published by Oxford Press.
- **A Chumash with Commentary- 5 Books of Moses**  
Etz Hayim (Conservative movement)
- **A Siddur** (Jewish Prayer book) **Siddur Eit Ratzon** or **Mishkan T'filah & Siddur Lev Shalem (Conservative)**
- **A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice**, Michael Strassfeld, Schocken, 2002
- **Living Judaism**, Rabbi Wayne Dosick, Harper San Francisco, 1995.
- **Jewish With Feeling**, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi w/ J Segal, Riverhead, 2005

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- **The Book of Jewish Belief**, Louis Jacobs, Behrman House 1984 (*A Google Book/readable online for free*)
- **Jewish Literacy**, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Morrow, 2008
- **What do Jews Believe?**, David S. Ariel, Schocken, 1995
- **The Sabbath**, Abraham Joshua Heschel
- **The Jewish Way**, Rabbi Irving Greenberg
- **Seasons of our Joy**, Arthur Waskow

**A Jewish calendar.** you can buy one or download your own at [www.hebcal.com/hebcal](http://www.hebcal.com/hebcal)