



Temple Israel

An Engaging, Diverse Jewish Community
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

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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 count-up to our second pilgrimage festival and the traditional observance of the revelation at Sinai. This week we will again discuss God 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, Bensach, 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

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

Class 9: Prayer What are the origins and structures of Jewish prayer? How are prayers organized? While Jewish prayer is canonized and the services are pre-determined, does that mean that we cannot make our own petitions or requests? What if I don't read Hebrew yet, how can I pray? What is a blessing and how is it different from a prayer?

Vocabulary: *Avodah, Davven, Tefilah, Shul, Minyan, Siddur, Shacharit, Mincha, Ma'ariv, Kippah, Tallit, Tefillin, Aliyah*

Required Reading: Strassfeld 176-205, Telushkin 717-722

Journal Entry due by our next class: What is the purpose of prayer? Does prayer play a role in my life? What do I believe about prayer? What do the terms "prayer," "worship," "tefilah" and "service of the heart" mean to me? Does God hear my prayers? Why are the majority of Jewish prayers offered in the first person plural (we/our) form?

Class 10: Gemilut Hasadim: Explore the third category of our quote, the pillar of "Loving kindness". How does Judaism understand living ethically? This week we will look at examples of ethical commandments. How do acts of gemilut hasadim differ from giving Tzedakah? What is the connection between tzedakah/charity and justice and its implications for Jewish life.

Vocabulary: *Gemilut Hasadim, Pushka, Tzedakah box, Ma'aser, Torah, Pirkei Avot, Mentsch,*

Required Reading: Jacobs 180-186, 203-211, Telushkin 553-564, 573-576, Strassfeld 206 –223, 353-356

Class 11: Teshuvah and Mitzvah What is a mitzvah and how is it different from a good deed? How does the concept of Teshuvah (repentance or more literally, 'return') ground ethical living in the yearly holiday cycle? Become familiar with two categories of commandments, theological and interpersonal.

Vocabulary: *Teshuvah, Bein Adam L'Makom, Bein Adam L'chavero*

Required Reading: Jacobs, 29-37, 187-195

Journal Entry due by our next class: The concept of *mitzvot* is central to Judaism. What actions do I consider *mitzvot* as compared with actions that are "good deeds"? How might the idea of commandment affect my actions at home, work or in the community? Do I feel there is a relationship between ethical and ritual *mitzvot*? How might performing one (type) inform or affect the other?

Class 12: High Holy Days – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur This week we will continue learning about the fundamentals of the High Holidays including the concepts of Teshuvah (repentance), Tefilah (prayer) and Tzedakah (charity). Vocabulary: *Teshuvah, Shana Tova, G'mar chatima Tova, Tzom Kal, Gut Yontiff, Makhzor, Kol Nidrei, Ne'ilah,*

Required Reading: Telushkin 634-641, Greenberg 182-215, Strassfeld 260-273, Waskow 1-46.

Journal Entry due by our next class: What does the concept of God as Sovereign mean to me? What do I believe about sin? Is ultimate teshuvah/atonement possible? Is forgiving the same as forgetting? Is there someone in my life I still need to forgive?

Class 13: Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret, Agriculture and faith in Judaism The first of the three pilgrimage festivals in the calendar, Succot (with Simchat Torah and Shemini Artzeret that come at the end of it) is a joyful week in Jewish life, and connect us to our agricultural roots as well as to the temple centered culture of ancient Israel.

Vocabulary: *Succot, Ushpizin, Chag Sameach*

Required Reading: Telushkin 641-646, Greenberg 94-118, Strassfeld 274-283, Waskow 47-76

Class 14: Chanukah

How Chanukah's proximity to Christmas has impacted the way the holiday is perceived. History and practice of Chanukah, candle-lighting laws. Discussion

and questions about issues that come up at this time of the year. Explore what it means to give up Christmas traditions.

Vocabulary: *Menorah, Khanukiya, Hillel, Shammai, Latkes, Gelt, Dreidle*

Required Reading: Greenberg 258-282, Telushkin 109-114, 646-648, Strassfeld, 284-9.

Class 15: The Jewish Home, Kashrut

Part 1: The Jewish Home

Vocabulary: *Mezuzah, Kiddush cup, Tzedakah box, Tallit, Tefillin, Siddur, Nerot*

Required Reading: Jacobs, 124-131, 196-202

Part 2- Kashrut: The Jewish relationship with food goes back to biblical times as a complicated part of Jewish identity. We will examine the origin, laws and customs surrounding Jewish food and the commandments related to Kashrut.

Vocabulary: *Kosher, Eco-Kashrut, Hekhshe, Milkhik, Fleishik, Pareve, Treif, Kasher l'Pesach*

Required Reading: Strassfeld 66-75 (top) and 81-93, Jacobs 132-139

Class 16- End of Life and Mourning: Vocabulary: *Shiva, Sheloshim, Sh'nat Avelut, Kaddish, Khevera Kadisha, Kri'a, Yahrtzeit, Yizkor, Zikhrone/a Livrakha, Alav/Aleha L'Shalom*

Required Reading: Strassfeld, 440-463, Greenberg 290-296

Class 17-18 - The Shoah (Holocaust): Antisemitism, Modern Zionism, The Meaning of the State of Israel, Israel and Her Holidays,

Vocabulary: *Hatikvah* (song in IJ, pg 348), *Magen David, Kibbutz, Aliyah, Shoah*, antisemitism, 'never again'

Required Reading: Jacobs 149-165, Telushkin 521-526, Greenberg 307-326, 373-404,

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saeky9l5T9c&feature=player_embedded

Journal Entry due by our next class: Why do you think that Jews have been the focus of discrimination throughout history? Do you think anti-Semitism still exists? Have you ever experienced or witnessed anti-Semitism?

OR

How might the Zionist movement be an outgrowth of anti-Semitism? What is your reaction to the longing for Jerusalem, which is reflected in much of Jewish history? What are my feelings about the modern State of Israel? What role should Israel play in the lives of Jewish Americans?

Class 19 : Conversion

Vocabulary: *Ger Tzedek*

Required Reading: Strassfeld 324-336, Rambam's Letter to Ovadiah

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.