

The Essential Judaism

Jewish Year 5777 – Fall 2016 / Spring 2017

Rabbi Barry Leff

Temple Beth-El

Birmingham, Alabama

Course Description

What do Jews believe about God, Heaven & Hell, the Messiah?

What's with all the rules?

What's Jewish prayer about? How can I feel connected to God in prayer?

How do I find meaning in Shabbat (the Sabbath) and holidays?

What does Judaism have to say about contemporary issues such as alternative sexualities, medical ethics, the environment?

Why is Israel so important to the Jewish people? What about the Palestinians?

Join Rav Barry for a series of 30 classes exploring these and other questions. The course is aimed at both Jews and Gentiles interested in learning more about Judaism. Whether your Jewish education stopped with your bar or bat mitzvah and you want to develop an adult relationship with Judaism, or if you have done some learning and just want to continue the discussion and deepen your knowledge, or are just curious about Judaism, there's something for you here.

The course is free and open to the public.

Anyone not Jewish who completes the course will have completed Rav Barry's educational requirements for conversion if they are interested.

A complete schedule will be posted on the Temple Beth-El website. You need not commit to the entire course; people are welcome to drop-in for any class session of interest.

It will also be possible to participate in the class via Skype.

Classes will meet at Temple Beth-El, Tuesday evenings at 6pm, starting September 20, 2017.

The Essential Judaism

Jewish Year 5777 – Fall 2016 / Spring 2017

Rabbi Barry Leff

Temple Beth-El

Birmingham, Alabama

	Class	Reading	Date
	Introduction and Overview		
1	Judaism While Standing on One Foot – the Overview		9/20
2	Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur	JW	9/27
	No class – Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur		10/4 & 10/11
3	Sukkot/Simchat Torah	JW	10/18
4	The Jewish Prayer Service and Synagogue Rituals / Bimah Basics	TL pp. 1-86, 197-214.	10/25
5	The Jewish Calendar and holiday cycle	TL pp. 87-142; JW pp. 1-33; JL chapter 290	11/1
	What Jews Believe		
6	Jewish views of God	KG pp. 1-90, 209-248; JL chap. 264	11/8
7	Theodicy – the problem of evil	KG pp. 129-148; JL chapter 288	11/15
	No Class - Thanksgiving		11/22
8	Revelation – the Written and Oral Torahs	KG pp. 91-128; JL chaps. 1-4, 82-84, 245-246	11/29
9	Kiddush, Kaddish, and Kedusha – Holiness, Chosen-ness and The Role of the Jews	JL chap. 261, 263, 268, 315, 328	12/6
10	Chanukah, Tu b'Shevat, Purim,	JW	12/13
11	Teleology: Jewish Views of the Afterlife and the Messiah in Judaism	JL chap. 283, 284; readings	12/20
	No Class – winter break		12/27 & 1/3
	Jewish Prayer		
12	The Shema	TPJ	1/10
13	The Amidah	TPJ	1/17
14	How to Pray	Readings	1/24

	Living as Jew – The Mitzvot	Reading	Date
15	Halakha and commandedness	JL chap. 253	1/31
16	Shabbat	HTR; JL chaps. 314-317	2/7
17	Kashrut	HTR; JL chap. 330	2/14
18	Judaism and Human Sexuality, Taharat Mishpacha	JL chap. 279, 322; CR pp. 115-122	2/21
19	Medical Ethics – Fertility, Abortion, Euthanasia	JL chap. 262, 270, 274	2/28
20	Tzedaka – Charity and Justice and Gemilut Chesed – Lovingkindness	JL chap. 265, 269, 275-8, 280, 281	3/7
21	Honesty and Business Ethics	JL chap. 254-260	3/14
22	Lashon Hara	JL chap. 271	3/21
23	The Environment – plants and animals	JL chap. 272	3/28
24	Passover/Omer/Shavuot	JW	4/4
	No class - Passover		4/11
	Jewish History		
25	History – Biblical Period and Rabbinic Periods	JL chap. 2-86	4/18
26	History – Medieval – Modern Period	JL chap. 85-132, 181-236, 247-250	4/25
27	History – Zionism and the History of Israel, Israel in the Heart of the Jew (Diaspora vs. Exile)	JL chap. 133-180	5/2
	Lifecycle Events		
28	Lifecycle Part I – Birth, Bris/Simchat Bat, Bar Mitzvah	CR pp. 1-70	5/9
29	Lifecycle Part II – Conversion, Wedding, Mezuzah, Divorce	CR pp. 71-166; JL chap. 329	5/16
30	Lifecycle Part III – Sickness, aging, death; Honor Your Father and Mother	CR pp. 167-251; JL chap. 273	5/23

Legend:

CR = Celebration and Renewal

HTR = How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household

JL = Jewish Literacy

JW = The Jewish Way

KG = Knowing God

TL = To Life

TPJ = To Pray as a Jew

Introduction to Judaism 101 –annotated bibliography

Needed as soon as possible:

Kushner, Harold. *To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking*. New York: Warner Books, 1993. Read all of “To Life!” as an overview of Judaism; other books will take us into greater detail in specific areas

Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy*. New York: William Morrow, 1991. In many ways, *Jewish Literacy* is the central textbook for the course.

Additional required books, need to have before we start the relevant topic:

Donin, Hayim Halevy. *To Pray as a Jew*. Basic Books, 1980.

Geffen, Rela M. *Celebration and Renewal: Rites of Passage in Judaism*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1993

Greenberg, Blu. *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*. Fireside, 1985.

Greenberg, Irving. *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. Touchstone, 1993.

Simon, Ethelyn, and Anderson, Joseph. *Teach Yourself to Read Hebrew*. Albany, CA: EKS Publishing, 1985.

Basic Home Jewish Library (not course texts per se, but things every Jewish home should have)

A Siddur—either Siddur Sim Shalom or the Artscroll Interlinear Siddur.

Harlow, Jules, ed. *Siddur Sim Shalom*. New York: Rabbinical Assembly (United Synagogue of America), 1985

The Schottenstein Ed. *Siddur: Sabbath & Festivals Prayers With an Interlinear Translation – Ashkenaz*. Artscroll, 2002.

The Schottenstein Ed. *Siddur: Weekday Prayers With an Interlinear Translation – Ashkenaz*. Artscroll, 2002.

A Chumash—preferably Etz Hayim, although any Chumash is acceptable.

An English Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), preferably Jewish Publications Society.

Recommended, but not required

Dorff, Elliot. *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1991.

Lew, Alan. *This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared*. New York: Little, Brown & Company

Introduction to Judaism – Recommended Readings, Videos on Jewish Culture/History

Books:

Historical Novels

As a Driven Leaf, by Milton Steinberg
O Jerusalem!, by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre
Mila 18 by Leon Uris
Exodus by Leon Uris
The Source by James Michener

Contemporary (relatively) fiction

The Chosen, by Chaim Potok
Sotah, by Naomi Ragen
Kaatterskill Falls by Allegra Goodman
All of a Kind Family (series, children's books) by Sydney Taylor

Videos:

The Long Way Home (Moriah Films, the Wiesenthal Center)
Schindler's List
Yentl
Fiddler on the Roof
Masada (the six hour TV miniseries with Peter O'Toole)