Date: Sep. 2020 

Course Name:

Jewish Literacy

**Type of course:** Lecture

2 Credits

**Year of Studies:** 2020-2021 **Semester:** Fall& Spring **hours/credits:** 2

**The courses objectives: (Overall Objectives/ Specific Objectives)**

1. To equip students with answers to the most fundamental questions concerning life as a Jew - drawing from classic and contemporary Torah sources
2. To engage students in an interactive dialogue surrounding these questions, enabling them to explore the different facets of these issues as well as their own personal orientation towards them
3. To activate students’ creative energies, empowering them to independently explore solutions to core religious and spiritual challenges

**Course Description:**

Each class will be centered around one core question related to God, existence, religious faith and practice, and others. Several classic sources will be presented offering several opinions on the matter, which will guide a classroom discussion. Several creative projects will be assigned, where students will have to explore challenging topics of their own choosing and present the class with creative solutions to them.

**Detailed Lesson plan:**

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| **Lesson #** | **Topic** | **Sources** |
| 1 | Introduction:  Goals of the course  Class rules and & assignments What Jewish Literacy is and why it matters |  |
| 2 | Why did God create the world?  The creation contradiction: for His honor vs. out of love | **Ha’Emek Davar**; *Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin*; Introduction to Sefer Shemot  **Da’at Tevunot**, *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato*, Chapter 58 |
| 3 | What’s our purpose in this world?  For the next world  For self-perfection | **Mesilat Yesharim**; *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato*; Chapter 1  **Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsh**; Genesis 1:3  **Rambam**; Commentary to the Mishna; Sanhedrin 10 |
| 4 | Is there really an afterlife?  Olam Haba’ah of the body vs. Olam Haba’ah of the soul  Techiyat Hameitim  Understanding the timeline  Heaven and hell? | **Rambam**; Hilchot Teshuva 8:2  **Ramban**; Sha’ar Hagmul; 97,98  **Rav Saadya Gaon**; Amunot V’Deot; ch. 7  **Rabbeinu Bachya**; Shulchan Shel Arbah; Sha’ar 4 |
| 5 | When is Moshiach coming?  Is he really coming? (Belief in Moshiach)  What needs to happen for moshiach to come?  What will the times of moshiach look like? | **Rambam**; Hil. Melachim; 11:1  **Talmud Bavli**; Trac. Sanhedrin 97b-98a  **Rav Saadya Gaon**; Amunot V’Deot; ch. 8  **Rambam;** Hil. Melachim 12:2 |
| 6 | Can you prove that God exists?  Design implies a creator  Order implies a creator | **Chovot HaLevavot**; *Rabbeinu Bachya*; 1:6  **Otzar Midrashim**, Temurah 7  **Charles Darwin**, The Origin of Species, J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1971, p. 167 |
| 7 | Why is there so much suffering?  Suffering as a test  Suffering as purification and clarity  Suffering as atonement / preparation for eternal reward | **Ramban**, Bereishit 22:1  **Derech Hashem**; *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato;* pp. 97,111,125  **Talmud Bavli**; Trac. Menachot 53b  **Talmud Bavli**;Trac. Brachot 5a |
| 8 | Why did God choose us?  A light unto the nations  A different species of humanity  The eternal “nature” of the Jewish people | **Talmud Bavli**; Trac. Yoma 69b  **Ha’Emek Davar**; *Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin*; Bereishis 17:5  **Derech Hashem**; *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato*, 2:4:1  **Sefer HaKuzari**: *Rav Yehudah Halevi*: Ma’amar 5, #20  **Leo Tolstoy**, What is the Jew? The Final Resolution p. 189  **Mark Twain**, Concerning the Jews, Harper’s Magazine, March 1898 |
| 9 | Why do we need to pray?  Prayer as the goal of creation  Prayer as a continuous divine dialogue | **Birth of the Spoken Word**; Rav Dovid’l Weinberg  **Kovetz Igros**; Chazon Ish, Vol 1, Letter 23 **Kovetz Igros**; Chazon Ish, Vol 4, Letter 23 **Talmud Bavli**; Trac. Brachot 31a |
| 10 | Does prayer really work?  Prayer as self evaluation  Prayer as spiritual transcendence  Prayer as an act of mindfulness | **Emunah Ubitachon;** *Ramban*; Ch. 1  **Tosafot**; Tractate Shabbat; 118b  **Talmud Bavli**; Trac. Bava Batra 164b  **Talmud Bavli**; Trac. Rosh Hashana 16b  **Ritva**; Ibid  **Or Yechezkel**; Rav Yechezkel Levestein |
| 11 | Why so many rules?  Understanding the role of Mitzvot | **Horev**; *Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch; introduction*  **Guide to the Perplexed**; *Rambam*; 1:34 |
| 12 | Why are we supposed to be different?  Judaism’s relationship with secular culture  The concept of Kedusha | **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein**; Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict  **Dr. Chaim Waxman**; Dilemmas of Modern Orthodoxy - Sociological and Philosophical  **Ramban**; Levitikus 19:2 |

**Course requirements/assignments:** Attendance, participation in class discussions and homework assignments, 1 Midterm project, 1 Final Project

**Grade Components (Number grade or pass/fail):** Number grade