

## ***Transformative Figures in Jewish History***

### ***Meir Balofsky***

#### **The courses objectives:**

*Participants will become familiar with the people and institutions that make up the contemporary North American Jewish world.*

#### **Course Description:**

- *First semester will focus on the post-temple era through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Figures will include Rabbi Judah the Prince, Maimonides, Rashi, Baal Shem Tov, Moses Mendelssohn and Herzl. Themes will include the origins of the siddur and prayer, the evolution of the oral law and various renaissances in learning, including Kabbalah and Chassidism. The birth of the modern Reform movement will be discussed.*
- *Second semester will focus on themes specific to the North American experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Themes will include the legacy of the Holocaust, Jewish education, social justice, religious and social diversity and music*

#### **The Process of the Course: Semester 1**

Lesson	Topic of the Lesson	Primary Focus
1	<i>Introduction.</i> What are the institutions and experiences that make up the Jewish World today? What is the value in understanding where these came from and who were the people behind them?	
2	The survival of Torah and scholarship. The Oral Law & Rabbi Judah the Prince.	<i>The “new” challenges of the Diaspora</i>
3	Siddur. How do we pray? Why the siddur is the way it is.	<i>Amram Gaon / Saadia Gaon</i>
4	Commentary and Accessibility. The influence of the commentators and expanding the Horizons of Learning. Maimonides.	<i>Rashi and Rambam</i>
5	Maimonides - the impact and significance of the 13 principles of faith	<i>13 Principles of Faith Part I</i>
6	Maimonides - the impact and significance of the 13 principles of faith	<i>13 Principles of Faith Part II</i>
7	Practical Judaism. Bringing scholarship to the masses. Rabbis Karo and Isserles.	<i>The Shulchan Aruch</i>
8	Emergence of Safed. Kabbalah	<i>The Arizal and Safed</i>
9	Chassidic Movement and the <i>Mitnagdim</i> . Baal Shem Tov, Vilna Gaon and the legacy of Shabbtai Tzvi.	<i>Origins of modern Kiruv</i>
10	Emancipation & Enlightenment. The Reform movement.	<i>Moses Mendelssohn, Isaac Mayer Wise</i>
11	Modern Zionism and the Orthodox Jewish community.	<i>Vilna Gaon, Herzl, Rav Kook, The Agudah</i>

12	Review	
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## Semester 2

Lesson	Topic of the Lesson	Comment
1	Jewish diversity in Ashkenazi North America	<i>Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist; New Hybrids</i>
2	The Post-Holocaust Culture	<i>Elie Wiesel. Holocaust identity Judaism over the 4 generations since the war.</i>
3	The Jewish Day School (primary/secondary)	<i>Rav Soloveitchik. Assessing the success and challenges as alumni</i>
4	The Jewish Education (post-secondary)	<i>YU and similar / Brandeis / Hillel / Aish HaTorah / Moishe House</i>
5	Jewish Summer Camp	<i>Foundation for Jewish Camp. Experiential education</i>
6	The North American Jewish community & Israel	<i>Netuei Karta – Mizachi – INN – Birthright – Nefesh B’Nefesh</i>
7	Jewish Music. What makes music Jewish?	<i>Shlomo Carlebach, Debbie Freidman Modern Artists – Israeli and Hassidic</i>
8	Sephardic Halachic World	<i>Influence of Rav Ovadiah.</i>
9	Women Learning & Leadership in Orthodoxy	<i>Sarah Schenirer, Nechama Leibowitz, Maharat / Rabbah Programs</i>
10	Middot & Tikkun Olam / Jewish Social Justice	<i>Heschel: Learning social justice form Torah, not Torah from social justice</i>
11	Intermarriage and Assimilation	<i>Where do we draw the lines? Where did we draw the lines? Where should we draw the lines?</i>
12	Review	

## Course requirements

### Requirements/ Assignment/Tasks

*Semester 1: Final exam. 50%*

*Assignment 25% Choose a figure from Jewish history whose work influenced the world we live in. Prepare a presentation (written, oral, visual, digital) that would suggest, based on their “foundations”, what they may think of the Jewish world today.*

*Participation/ Attendance: 25%*

*Semester 2: Final Exam 50%*

*Assignment 25% Choose a theme from this semester. Research a deeper dive into the theme and its current state in the Jewish world. Project two possible and realistic futures of this subject for the next two generations.*

*Participation / Attendance 25%*

### Grade Components Number Grade

**Required textbooks, other textbooks** - all content will be provided