

Date: Sep. 2025

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

**Introduction to the Jewish Experience**

**Meir Balofsky**07-940-02

07-950-02

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| **Course Type:** | Lecture |
| **Scope of credits:** | 1 |
| **Year of study:** | 2025-2026 |
| **Semester:** | Fall & Spring |
| **Day & Time:** | Wed. 9-10:30 |
| **Reception Time:** | Upon Appointment |
| **Lecturer Email:** | Balofsky@gmail.com |
| **Moodle Site:** | \_\_\_ |

**Course description and learning goals.**

**Course Abstract**

*Participants will gain a strong familiarity and understanding of major figures, texts and aspects of ritual observance.*

**Learning objectives**

*Participants will understand the stories in Genesis and Exodus, and the narratives associated with the major holidays and the time in which they took place.*

*They will be familiar with themes including Jewish life cycle and kashrut.*

**Knowledge**

Learners will have a working knowledge of practical Jewish observance and be familiar with not only what we do but why it is done.

**Skills**

Leaners will analyze and research themes and become familiar with Jewish primary and secondary texts.

**Active learning –** **lessons plan**

**SEMESTER 1**

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| Lesson No. | Topic | Active learning | Required reading | Assessment |
| 1 | *Age of the Universe – Creation. The Jewish Year and timeline.* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 2 | *The first humans, the first mistake, the first response*  *The Garden of Eden narrative* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 3 | *A conversation about relative morality*  *The flood of Noah* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 4 | *Understanding the “Tent” of Avraham*  *The Patriarchs and Matriarchs* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 5 | *Relationships*  *Patriarchs and Matriarchs II* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 6 | *A conversation about consent, abuse and harassment*  *The Dina and Shechem episode* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 7 | *The Kippa conversation*  *Joseph Narrative* | Group discussion | *Selections from Genesis* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 8 | *The Nazi Playbook*  *Slavery of Egypt* | Group discussion | *Selections from Exodus* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 9 | *A physical and theological assault. Question of how to celebrate / commemorate.*  *The 10 Plagues* | Group discussion | *Selections from Exodus* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 10 | *Purpose of Mass Revelation*  *What are the 5 books of the Torah?*  *Revelation at Sinai – 10 commandments* | Group discussion | *Selections from Exodus* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 11 | *National transgression and National consequences*  *The Golden Calf* | Group discussion | *Selections from Exodus* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 12 | *A war and celebration of physicality and spirituality.*  *\*Chanukah – To be taught the week ahead of Chanukah* | Group discussion | *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*  *Chanukah* | *Content quiz submission* |

**Semester 1 Bibliography:**

* **Genesis**
* **Selections - audio classes. Rabbi Ari Kahn**
* **Selections - Echoes of Eden. Rabbi Ari Kahn.**
* **Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 139**

**SEMESTER 2**

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| 1 | *Birth / Brit / Pidyon, Bar- Bat Mitzvah*  *Jewish Life Cycle 1* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 2 | *Weddings*  *Jewish Life Cycle 2* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 3 | *Death and Mourning*  *Jewish Life Cycle 3* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 4 | *What does it mean that the holidays are “late this year”*  *Rosh Chodesh – Lunar Calendar* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 5 | *Who were the Jews? The Purim Story*  *Purim – Part 1* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 6 | *Purim Story continued –*  *How we celebrate today*  *Purim – Part 2* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 7 | *The Haggadah – content and structure. Seder Experience*  *Passover 1* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 8 | *Seder Experience continued. Ritual & Kashrut*  *Passover 2* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 9 | *Why is Shavuot the least popular of the major holidays?*  *The Omer and Shavuot* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 10 | *Cooking / Timers / Eruv*  *Shabbat in practice* | Group discussion |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 11 | *How do we mourn for something we didn’t experience?*  *Fast days and Tisha’ B’Av* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |
| 12 | *The spiritual and the practical*  *Kashrut* | Group discussion | *Selections from Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* | *Content quiz submission* |

**Semester 2 Bibliography:**

* **Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 120, 122-125 145-149, 163-164, 194-215,**
* **Esther**
* **Passover Haggadah**

**Final grade**

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| Description of the learning product | Weight in the final score |
| Final exam | 33% |
| Research paper | 33% |
| Attendance and active participation | 34% |