

Date:Sep. 2025

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

**The Jewish Bookshelf**

**Rabbi Akiva Dovid Weiss**Course No**:**

**07-1889-01/07-1890-02**

**05-6020-80/05-6022-80**

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| **Course Type:** | Lecture |
| **Scope of credits:** | 1 |
| **Year of study:** | 2025-2026 |
| **Semester:** | Fall and Spring |
| **Day & Time:** | Tuesdays 9:00-10:30; 10:30-12:00 |
| **Reception Time:** | Tuesdays 12:00-13:00 |
| **Lecturer Email:** | ravakivaw@gmail.com |
| **Moodle Site:** | \_\_\_ |

**Course description and learning goals**

**Course Abstract**

Students will gain a familiarization of central Jewish texts, books, and published works along with their authors, and their historical, cultural, and religious significance and impact on Jewish learning and identity. Throughout the course students will be challenged to think about which sorts of books would they choose to line their own “Jewish Bookshelf” – and why. Texts and works range from religious/historical (Tanakh, Mishna, Josephus) Halakhic (Jewish Law, Shulchan Aruch, Maimonides), Kabbalistic, as well as Aggadic (philosophical, Midrash).

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**Learning objectives**

Recognizing major Jewish works and understanding the historical framework from whence they arose as well as the authors who wrote them and the subject material which is their focus. The significance of each of the works will be discussed as well as additional works, often contemporary, of each of the major sources. Primary sources as well as secondary sources will be classified, utilized and analyzed with an eye towards discerning the underlying theme and values being discussed by the texts.

**Knowledge**

1. Learners will understand primary texts and their authors, their historical placement and context.
2. Learners will analyze primary texts and secondary literature to gain context and perspective on the subject material
3. Learners will write summaries of the texts and main arguments and submit written practical summaries from each lesson.

**Skills**

1. Learners will appreciate key primary and secondary historical texts
2. Learners will evaluate authors and works and compare them to modern socio-religious narratives and practice

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

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Semester 1 | Topic | Active learning | Required reading | Assessment |
| 1 | “The People of the Book” – What books should go on a “Jewish” Bookshelf? | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 2 | THE TANAKH: Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim: A Historical timeline | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 3 | Mishna and Midrash: The Oral Torah | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 4 | The Oral Torah II: The Tamud | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 5 | Jewish Liturgy: The Siddur of R. Amram Gaon | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 6 | Jewish Codes: The Rambam and his Guide | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 7 | Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s Kuzari: Jewish Philosophy 101 | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 8 | Defending Judaism against the Church: Ramban’s Debate | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 9 | SEFER HACHINUCH, Sefer HaMitzvot: Taamei HaMitzvot and Tarya”g | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 10 | Tur and Shulchan Aruch: A New Horizon |  |  |  |
| 11 | Final Examination |  |  |  |
| Semester 2 |  |  |  |  |
| 1 | What do The Printing Press, Incunabula, The Tosafists, and the Jewish Review of Books all have in common? | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 2 | Sifrei Kabbalah: The Zohar, the Book of Creation, and other Magical Texts | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 3 | Is there anybody out there? Responsa Literature | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 4 | Practical Guidance and Self-Help I: Halachic Works | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 5 | “Soul-Ride”: Chassidut (Practical Guidance and Self-Help II) | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 6 | Mussar and Jewish Ethics (Practical Guidance and Self-Help III) | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 7 | Kol Bo – The Books of Everything | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 8 | History, Jewish History, and Biogrpahies | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 9 | Jewish Fiction | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 10 | Zionism | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 11 | Philosophy and Modernity | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 12 | What’s on Your Jewish Bookshelf? (Class Presentations) | Collaborative learning |  |  |
| 13 | Final Examination |  |  |  |

(In a course that lasts a whole year, the additional sessions should be added)

\* There may be changes in the syllabus depending on learning progress and effectiveness

**Final grade**

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| --- | --- |
| Description of the learning product | Weight in the final score |
| Writing a literary blog | Will account for 20% of the final grade |
| Group Presentation of a Solution to a Complex Case | 60% of final grade |
| Analysis of symptomatic description for possible diagnoses |  |
| Coding a component for a specific function in the system |  |

**Course** requirements

Weekly assignments will be given in the form of written analysis, summaries, and application of lessons through reflective writing and will constitute 30% of the course grade.

A course final representing 50% of the final grade will be administered at the end of the semester. Classroom participation and in-class discussions will account for 20% of the semester grade. In the second semester, a final project presentation accounting for 50% of the grade and will be in lieu of a final.

Attendance is mandatory, with 80% attendance as a minimum before negatively affecting final grade. Attendance below 50% will result in an incomplete or fail of the course.

 **Prerequisites**

Ability to read texts or translation of texts

**Bibliography:**

**Suggested Readings**

Semester 1

Black, Jeremy; Green, Anthony (1992). *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press

Thompson, R. (1930) *The Epic of Gilgamesh.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Freud, Sigmund. "The Interpretation of Dreams". *Classics in the History of Psychology*

Jacobi, J. (1973) *The Psychology of C. G. Jung.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

Telushkin, Joseph (1991). *Jewish Literacy*. New York: William Morrow and Co.

Semester 2

*War of the Jews* Book V, sect. 99

Ben-Ami, Doron; Tchekhanovets, Yana (2011). "The Lower City of Jerusalem on the Eve of Its Destruction, 70 CE: A View From Hanyon Givati". *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*. **364**: 61–85.

Katz, Steven T., ed. (2006). *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*. Vol. 4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldenberg, Robert (1977). "The Broken Axis: Rabbinic Judaism and the Fall of Jerusalem". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

Locke, J. (1689). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1998, ed). Book II, Chap. XXI, Sec. 17. Penguin Classics, Toronto

Nichols, Shaun; Joshua Knobe (2007-12-01). "Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions".

Kane, Robert; John Martin Fischer; Derk Pereboom; Manuel Vargas (2007). *Four Views on Free Will (Libertarianism)*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing

Fischer, R.M. (1994). *The Metaphysics of Free Will*. Oxford: Blackwell

Boyarin, Daniel (1995) *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture.* University of California Press