

Date: Sep. 2025

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

**Transitional Figures in Jewish History**

**Meir Balofsky**

07-939-02

07-949-03

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| **Course Type:** | Lecture |
| **Scope of credits:** | 1 |
| **Year of study:** | 2025-2026 |
| **Semester:** | Fall & Spring |
| **Day & Time:** | Wed. 10:00-12:00 |
| **Reception Time:** | Upon appointment |
| **Lecturer Email:** | balofsky@israelxp.com |
| **Moodle Site:** | \_\_\_ |

**Course description and learning goals.**

**Course Abstract**

*Participants will become familiar with the people and institutions that make up the contemporary North American Jewish world. Topics include earlier themes which impacted the entire Jewish world as well as more contemporary themes that have more micro impacts on specific communities.*

**Learning objectives**

Students will be familiar with the names and history of significant influences in Judaism. They will learn to independently research themes for further study.

**Knowledge**

Students will explore their own questions and areas of interest in Judaism through the lens of the individuals who laid the groundwork.

**Skills**

Learners will gain the confidence to embrace their Jewish identity through analysis, writing and research.

Learners will engage with healthy debate on an array of controversial topics and will notice how the nature of certain controversies are reimagined with the passage of time.

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

**Semester 1**

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| Lesson No. | Topic | Active learning | Required reading | Assessment |
| 1 | *Introduction.* What are the institutions and experiences that make up the Jewish World today? | Debate and discussion |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 2 | The Kotel. The Walls of Jerusalem  Hero’s Expansion of the Temple | Debate and discussion  Visual depictions |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 3 | The survival of Torah and scholarship. The Oral Law & Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi | Debate and discussion  Small and large group collaboration |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 4 | R’ Yehuda HaNasi - The Talmud story continued. | Debate and discussion |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 5 | The Establishment of the Jewish  Calendar as we know it  Hillel the Younger | Debate and discussion  Visual depictions |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 6 | Siddur. How do we pray? Why the siddur is the way it is.  The Hebrew Language. Amram Gaon | Debate and discussion | Selections from the Amram Gaon Siddur | *Content quiz submission* |
| 7 | Torah and Talmudic commentary  Rashi | Debate and discussion | Samples of Rashi commentary | *Content quiz submission* |
| 8 | Maimonides - the impact and significance of the 13 principles of faith Part I | Debate and discussion | 13 principles of faith  Biographical information Maimonides | *Content quiz submission* |
| 9 | Maimonides - the impact and significance of the 13 principles of faith Part II | Debate and discussion | 13 principles of faith | *Content quiz submission* |
| 10 | Practical Judaism. Bringing scholarship to the masses. Rabbis Karo and Isserles. | Debate and discussion | Excerpts from the Shulhan Arukh | *Content quiz submission* |
| 11 | Emergence of Safed. Kabbalah | Debate and discussion  The Sefirot visuals |  | *Content quiz submission* |
| 12 | The messianic idea and cult followings | Debate and discussion | Film on cults  Biographical information  Shabtai Tziv | *Content quiz submission* |

**Semester 1 Bibliography**

* **Grayzel, Solomon. *A History of the Jewish People.* Plume. 1968**
* **Spiro, Ken. *Crash Course in Jewish History.* Menucha. 2010**
* **Talmud Rosh Hashana 2a**
* **Kalluach calendar**
* **Aronow, Sam. *The Hebrew Calendar. 2021. YouTube***
* **Amram Gaon Siddur -*****hebrewbooks.org/14439***
* **Bonchek, Avigdor *-What's Bothering Rashi? Devarim****,* **Feldheim, 2003**
* **Kaplan, Aryeh - *Maimonides' principles: The fundamentals of Jewish faith.* Olivestone, 1985**
* **Shulchan Arukh, 581**
* **Cults Explained. 2020. YouTube/Netflix**

**Semester 2**

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| 13 | Chassidic Movement and the *Mitnagdim*. Baal Shem Tov, | Debate and discussion | Stories of the Baal Shem Tov | *Content quiz submission* |
| 14 | Emancipation & Enlightenment. The Reform movement. Part I | Debate and discussion  Small and large group | Napolean and the Jews | *Content quiz submission* |
| 15 | Emancipation & Enlightenment. Conservative and Modern Orthodox.  Part II *Solomon Schechter*  *Rav S. R. Hirsch* | Debate and discussion | Selections from Rav Hirch  Biographical content  R Hirch  Solomon Shechter | *Content quiz submission* |
| 16 | Jewish diversity in Ashkenazi North  America  *Reconstructionist; New Hybrids* | Debate and discussion | Video interview with  Adam Allenberg  Ariella Rosen | *Content quiz submission* |
| 17 | Israel Alliance Spectrum  *How different sects of Jews connect and relate to Israel ideologically and practically* | Debate and discussion  Sharing of personal experiences. | Video and biographic content on the Neturei Karta | *Content quiz submission* |
| 18 | The Post-Holocaust Culture  *Elie Wiesel. Holocaust identity Judaism over the 4 generations since the war.* | Debate and discussion | Film  Eichman trial  Spielberg  Tarantino | *Content quiz submission* |
| 19 | The Jewish Day School (primary/secondary)  *Rav Soloveitchik. Assessing the success and challenges as alumni* | Debate and discussion | Biographical content Rav Soloveitchik | *Content quiz submission* |
| 20 | Jewish Summer Camp  *Foundation for Jewish Camp*  *Experiential education* | Debate and discussion | Video interview Rabbi Avi Orlow | *Content quiz submission* |
| 21 | Jewish Music. What makes music Jewish?  *Shlomo Carlebach, Debbie Freidman*  *Modern Artists – Israeli and Hassidic* | Debate and discussion | Music samples | *Content quiz submission* |
| 22 | Sephardic Halachic World  *Influence of Rav Ovadiah Yosef* | Debate and discussion | Guest lecture  Rabbi Eli Menaged | *Content quiz submission* |
| 23 | Women Learning & Leadership in Orthodoxy  *Sarah Schenirer, Nechama Leibowitz, Maharat / Rabbah Programs* | Debate and discussion | Video interview with Rabbah  Aliza Baranofsky | *Content quiz submission* |
| 24 | Middot & Tikkun Olam / Jewish Social Justice  *Heschel: Learning social justice form Torah, not Torah from social justice* | Debate and discussion | Biographical content Heschel  Midot table – Foundation for Jewish camp | *Content quiz submission* |
| 25 | Intermarriage and Assimilation | Debate and discussion |  | *Content quiz submission* |

**Semester 2 Bibliography**

* **Grayzel, Solomon. *A History of the Jewish People.* Plume. 1968**
* **Spiro, Ken. *Crash Course in Jewish History.* Menucha. 2010**
* **chabad.org/library/article\_cdo/aid/421867/jewish/Stories-of-the-Baal-Shem-Tov.htm**
* **YouTube – Eichman Trials, Scenes from Inglorious Bastards**
* **Weisel, Eli. *Night.* 1956**
* **Podcast: *Jacob J Schacter on Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik***
* **Making Menches, a periodic Table.** **Foundation for Jewish camp**

**Final grade**

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| Description of the learning product | Weight in the final score |
| Writing a research paper | 33% |
| Final Exam | 33% |
| Attendance with participation | 34% |