

Introduction to Judaism

Congregation Shaarei Shamayim
Taught by Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman
January 25-March 15

Reading Materials:

- *Essential Judaism: Updated Edition: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs & Rituals*, by George Robinson

Optional:

- *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*, by Alan Lew
- *A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice*, by Michael Strassfeld

A Note on the Reading: We all have different amounts of time and interest in reading. Use the assigned reading as a guide – If you do the reading in advance, you'll have a richer understanding of the material. But if you cannot complete it, or your eyes are glazing over, don't worry about it. Come to class, and you'll still be able to learn a great deal and participate in our discussions. You can always come back to the reading later.

January 25: Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness + Jewish Time

- Introductions
- Jews as a cultural, ethnic, national, and religious group
- Jewish Time:
 - Understanding the Jewish calendar
 - Shabbat

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 79-94
- ["We Asked 23 Rabbis: What Are Jews, Exactly?"](#) The Forward, December 12, 2017
- Optional: [Why Does the Jewish Calendar Change Every Year?](#) – BimBam (scroll down to the bottom)

February 1: Jewish Year Cycle

- Jewish holidays part 1: Tisha B'Av, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah
- Jewish holidays part 2: Chanukkah, Tu B'shevat, Purim
- Jewish holidays part 3: Passover, Shavuot

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 94-139
- Optional: *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*
- Optional: [Jewish Holidays](#) – BimBam

February 8: Sacred Texts

- Timeline of Jewish texts: Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval, Modern, Contemporary
- Evolution of Jewish thought

- Sampling Jewish texts

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 263-364
- Optional: *Essential Judaism*, pp. 365-460
- Optional: *A Book of Life*, pp. 139-175

February 15: God, Spirituality, and Prayer

- Jewish beliefs about God and spirituality
- Jewish ideas about prayer
- Overview of a Shabbat service

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 9-54
- [Overview of a Shabbat Morning Service](#) by Deborah Eisenbach-Budner, Havurah Shalom
- Optional: *A Book of Life*, pp. 176-205

February 22: Jewish Life Cycle

- Sanctifying significant moments in the life cycle
 - Birth: Brit milah and baby naming ceremonies
 - Coming of Age: Bnei Mitzvah
 - Marriage: Jewish weddings
 - Divorce: Get
 - Illness: Prayers for healing
 - Death: Jewish funerals
- Reconstructing ritual
- Creating ritual for other life cycle events: conversion, coming out, miscarriage, etc.

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 140-197
- Optional: Peruse [Ritual Well](#) – a huge resource of contemporary ritual from the Reconstructionist movement
- Optional: [Lifecycle Videos](#) – BimBam

March 1: Jewish History

- History 1: Ancient, Rabbinic, Medieval
- History 2: Modern, Contemporary
- Special focus on: Antisemitism through the ages, power and powerlessness, Jews as the “ever-dying people”

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 461-506
- [“A Crash Course in Early Jewish History”](#) – My Jewish Learning
- [“Antisemitism in Europe and America in the Modern Period: Historical Perspectives,”](#) Reena Sigman Friedman, Evolve (Reconstructing Judaism)

- Optional: "[The Whole Jewish History in One Hour](#)" David Solomon
- Optional: [History Videos](#) – BimBam

March 8: Contemporary American Judaism

- Different branches and movements of Judaism
- Post-ethnic Judaism
- Jewish trends in 21st century America
- Conflicts among Jews: Israel, Chabad, race and racism, post-denominationalism,...

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 56-76
- "[Non-Denominational and Post-Denominational](#)" – My Jewish Learning
- Peruse [Evolve](#) – a Reconstructionist website with short articles about contemporary issues

March 15: Living a Jewish Life

- Integrating Judaism into one's life
- Creating a Jewish practice
- Navigating challenges of Jewish life: antisemitism, interfaith issues, tzedakah,...

Reading:

- *Essential Judaism*, pp. 507-523
- Read a few articles on [Evolve](#) about issues of interest to you
- Optional: *A Book of Life*, pp. 3-134, pp. 206-223
- Optional: [What is a Mitzvah?](#) – BimBam