B’ruchim Habaim L’kulam! (Welcome everyone) to Congregation Beth Israel’s Living a Jewish Life class. This introductory course is intended to convey information about the major facets of Judaism. Students in this class typically come from a variety of backgrounds: Born-Jews as a refresher, Interfaith couples, curious folks, or as a path to conversion. Whatever the case may be, Rabbi Folberg and Rabbi Levy look forward to teaching you along the way.

Conversion Requirements

Rabbi Mentors: If you are considering conversion, please let us know which Rabbi you would like to have as your mentor. You must meet with your mentor at least 2 times each semester. Please reach out to Trish Ivey to schedule these.

Journals: Journaling is an excellent way for you to keep track of what you have learned. We encourage all students to take advantage of the provided questions/prompts for journal entries throughout the year. For students considering conversion, we require 3 journal entries per semester. Please e-mail your journal entries to Trish Ivey at: clergyoffice@bethisrael.org. If you wish, you may turn in hard copies of your journal entries before class instead of emailing. Please note: all journal entries are kept strictly confidential between the student and their Rabbi mentor.

Spring Semester Writing Assignment: For those who are considering conversion, write a reflection on 6 Shabbat or holiday services. You may attend services at Congregation Beth Israel or another Austin Synagogue. This assignment is due June 4, 2021.

Spring Semester Exam: For those who are considering conversion, please complete the Spring Semester Exam by June 4, 2021. You can find the exam on our website at the end of the semester. Here is the link to the LJL page: https://www.bethisrael.org/ljl.html

NOTE: The exam is open book & open notes

Books for Class


  *NOTE: This book and your notebook are all you need for class each week.*


If you are struggling to purchase these books, please contact Trish Ivey: clergyoffice@bethisrael.org
Dates and Assignments

January 12th: Life Cycle I – Birth

Readings for this session:
- Introduction to Judaism, 6-23
- A History, 429-436
- Jewish Living, 132-151; 239-242

Journal Options:
- What do you think it means for Jews to receive a given Hebrew name in addition to their English name?
- Many boys when they are born today are routinely circumcised in hospitals. However, for Jewish parents, the act of circumcision is a commandment, an act that brings a baby boy into the covenant which often takes place ritually on the 8th day of the child’s life. What are your thoughts on ritual circumcision?

January 26th: Life Cycle II – Marriage

Readings for this session:
- Introduction to Judaism, 97-137
- A History, 436-444
- Jewish Living, 151-182

Journal Options:
- Kiddushin is one of the Hebrew words that means marriage. It comes from the same root word as Kadosh which means sacred or holy. What are your thoughts on the sacredness of marriage? What makes a marriage holy?
- If you are married, or are getting married and have a Ketubah, a Jewish marriage contract, what does this document mean to you? Reflect on the text and its symbolism. If you don’t have a Ketubah, describe your ideal Ketubah.
- In Jewish tradition, there have been divorces for as long as there have been weddings. A traditional Jewish divorce involved a short ceremony and signing a Get. What are your thoughts on this kind of ceremony marking a divorce?
February 9\textsuperscript{th}: Life Cycle III – Death

Readings for this session:
- *Introduction to Judaism*, 75-90
- *A History*, 444-451
- *Jewish Living*, 182-202

Journal Options:
- In the 1800s Alfred Nobel, read his own obituary and saw all the terrible things people wrote about him in the paper. This caused Alfred to change the course of his life and eventually led him to create the Nobel Prizes, to encourage people to strive for the betterment of society. What would your obituary say? What would you like for it to say?
- Having studied the Jewish understanding behind the rituals of death and dying, in what ways do you imagine the Jewish path through burial and grieving help a surviving individual or family move through this time of healing? Are there ways in which these practices fall short?

February 23\textsuperscript{rd}: Life Cycle IV – Conversion

Readings for this session:
- *A History*, 52-54
- *Jewish Living*, 203-216
- *Introduction to Judaism*, 54-74

Journal Options:
- If you are considering conversions, what are your thoughts about the process up to this point? What are the barriers left in your life preventing you from feeling authentically Jewish?
- What do you think about a person changing their religious identity? Is it the same as changing your spirituality? Is there an inner essence in people that makes them Jewish, Christian, Muslim, etc.?
- What did your religious upbringing look like? How has your religiosity evolved through your life?

March 9\textsuperscript{th}: Torah and Beyond

Readings for this session:
- *Introduction to Judaism*, 91-96
- *Jewish Living*, 1-35, 58-64
- *A History*, 317-345, 203-260
- *Jewish Holidays*, 47-56
- *The Book of Ruth*, Preferably a Jewish translation

Journal Options:
- Which Jewish texts interest you the most? How have different texts shaped the way you think about Judaism?
- Do you see Judaism as a system of laws? As an ideology? As a process of interpreting texts? Of moral guidelines?
- Read the book of Ruth, preferably a Jewish translation and write your response.
- What next steps would you like to take in your Jewish education?
March 23rd: Purim

Readings for this session:
- Introduction to Judaism, 152-161
- Jewish Living, 124-126
- Jewish Holidays, 187-198
- The Book of Esther, Preferably from a Jewish translation of the Bible

Journal Options:
- If you are planning on raising children, considering the realities of history, what would be your reasoning for raising Jewish children?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt threatened because of your identity? Had to hide who you really are? Is there anything that you would be willing to risk your life to protect?
- Read the Book of Esther in the Bible, write your reactions to the story.

April 6th: Passover Part I

Readings for this session:
- Introduction to Judaism, 138-151
- Jewish Living, 97-109
- Jewish Holidays, 5-55
- A History, 385-395

Journal Options:
- Describe any memories you have from attending Passover Seders in the past.
- One of the most important ideas in the Torah says: “because we were slaves in Egypt.” On Passover, we are instructed to not simply say these words but to believe them. What experiences have you had in your life where you struggled for freedom? What does “being a slave in Egypt” mean to you?
- For many Jews, varying degrees of attention are paid to traditional dietary restrictions, yet for most Jews not eating leavened bread on Passover is still high on their list of priorities. Why do you think that is? What are your thoughts on Kashrut in general vs. specifically for Passover?

April 20th: Passover II – Model Seder

During this class, we will participate in a model seder. This will look different than in the past, but it will still be fun!

Journal Options:
- If you have never hosted a Seder, do you feel like this is something you could do? In what ways would you try to make this ritual your own?
- As you read through the Haggadah, was there a reading or a text that spoke to you. Reflect on some of the themes of the Seder and describe what they mean to you.
May 4th: Antisemitism and the Holocaust

Readings for this session:
- *Introduction to Judaism*, 350-363
- *Jewish Living*, 131
- *A History*, 95-97, 261-283, 517-541
- *Jewish Holidays*, 56-62 (to Yom Ha-Atzma’ut)

Journal Options:
- At the moment of conversion, one promises to cast one’s lot with that of the Jewish people. What are the implications of “casting one’s lot with the Jewish people?” Given what you know of the Holocaust and the history of Antisemitism, why would a Jew choose to remain Jewish?
- Attend a Community Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, service. Write a reflection on the experience.
- You may hear some people say: “You didn’t experience the Holocaust or Anti-Semitism. How can you understand it? How can you possibly know how it feels?” How might you feel hearing that question? How might you respond?

May 11th: God

Readings for this session: TBD

Journal Options: TBD

May 18th: Shavuot & Conclusion

Readings for this session:
- *Introduction to Judaism*, 232-265
- *Jewish Living*, 110-112
- *A History*, 395-397
- *Jewish Holidays*, 69-83

Journal Options:

Reminders:
- Writing assignment due June 4, 2021
- Journal entries are due June 4, 2021 (We recommend doing these as we go along)
- LJL Spring Exam will be due June 4, 2021