
Conversion Process at Temple Beth Shalom

Welcome to Temple Beth Shalom's Introduction to Judaism and Conversion Course! We are thrilled that you have decided to explore Judaism within our Reform community and we know you will find our members eager to welcome you at Shabbat services and holiday celebrations throughout the year. Choosing a Jewish life is a huge step and we believe you will find deep meaning and a sense of purpose within Jewish rituals, traditions and our shared history.

Our conversion process is unique and we welcome students who are interested in learning more about Judaism, but who may not be ready to declare their intention for conversion. That is why we also call this class our Introduction to Judaism series. We strive to create a cohesive and supportive community of learners, and therefore we offer various points of entry throughout the year while encouraging all our students to remain in each series for the duration of that topic.

Please read the information and FAQ's below and feel free to contact the clergy assistant, Marissa Wright at the Temple Beth Shalom office or Rabbi Cohen with any questions at 512-735-8900

2018-2019 Dates

Sunday mornings from 10:00-11:15am* at Temple Beth Shalom

Dates are subject to change; please confirm the dates with the Temple office before beginning a new series.

Holidays: August 5, 12, 19, 26, September 2, 30

History: October 7, November 4, 11, 18, December 2, 9, 16

Book Shelf: January 6, 13, 20, 27, February 3* (Special 2pm-3:25pm time)

Jewish Communal Life: February 10, 24, March 3, 10

Liturgy: March 31, April 7, 14, 28, May 5, 12

Life Cycle: June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, July 7, 14

Class tuition: \$36 per series or \$180 for the year of 6 series

Please pay through our online form at

<https://bethshalomaustin.wufoo.com/forms/z1g0ehuv01rge96/>

Required class topics explored in 4-8 week series offered throughout the year:

These classes are taught by our Rabbis and by distinguished scholars and lay leaders within our community.

Jewish Holiday Year and our Collective Stories taught by Dana Baruch

In this series you will walk through the Jewish year and the various rituals that accompany every holiday. You will be encouraged to attend holiday observances throughout the year. Special attention will be paid to Shabbat observance and any holidays that occur during the time this class meets.

Jewish History taught by Rabbi Freedman

This crash course in Jewish history will take you from forty years of wandering in the desert to modern day Israel in less than 6 weeks! This course will help put into context your understanding of how and why our core text and our liturgy have evolved over time. Students will be encouraged to study a particular time period in Jewish history more deeply based on your own interest.

The Jewish Bookshelf, Our Core Text taught by Sandy Kress

"Rabbi Meir said, anyone who engages in Torah study for its own sake, *Torah Lishma*, merits many things...He becomes like an increasingly powerful river...It makes him great and exalted above all of creation." - Pirkei Avot, Ch.6. The Jewish people are considered the "people of the book" and our core texts inform every aspect of our lives. In this course you will be provided with a taste of various Jewish texts including the Torah, Prophets, Writing, Talmud and modern day Response.

Jewish Communal Life, Denominations and the Organizational World taught by Dana Baruch

The alphabet soup of Jewish denominations and organizations is often overwhelming to anyone who is new to the community. This course will begin with the various denominations in Judaism, exploring their similarities and differences and it will end with an introduction to Jewish organizations today.

Liturgy and Creating Your Own Prayer Practice taught by Rabbi Cohen

Jewish liturgy will be explored through the Reform Movement's prayer book *Mishkan T'fillah*. Students will gain an understanding of how liturgy has evolved over time, how it is continuing to evolve today and what liturgy can teach us about Jewish communal life throughout history.

The Jewish Life Cycle taught by Lori Freedman

This class will introduce you to the rituals and celebrations that accompany the Jewish life cycle. Modern life cycle rituals will also be explored and you will have the chance to attend a life cycle celebration or participate in a mock celebration during the final class session.

Hebrew Learning

Temple Beth Shalom, in partnership with the greater Austin Jewish Community, offers Hebrew at various levels throughout the year. This year, a Liturgical Hebrew class is being offered immediately before our Conversion class to help facilitate a more comprehensive learning experience. More information about this class is below, as well as a link to all the Shalom Austin Hebrew offerings.

Do you want to be able to follow Jewish religious services more easily? Help your child with Hebrew homework? Register today and join us for our new **Introduction to Hebrew** class!

<https://www.bethshalomaustin.org/learning/adults/hebrew-intro>

Shalom Austin Opportunities: <https://shalomaustin.org/page.aspx?pid=417>

Other requirements:

- **Individual Meetings with Our Rabbis:** *At the end of your conversion process our Rabbis will recommend you to a committee of learned Jews for your Beit Din (translated as house of judgment). In order to feel comfortable recommending you for this final step, our Rabbis meet with students throughout their conversion process(at least 3 times) to explore topics including; your unique religious journey and why you have chosen Judaism, Jewish theology and the role that God plays in your life, your family's role in your Jewish life and any questions you have about creating a Jewish home.*
- We encourage all our conversion students to **become immersed in communal life** at Temple Beth Shalom and in the greater Austin Jewish community. This may include but is not limited to; regular service attendance, volunteer for a community initiative or Temple committee, participate in a social justice project or learning program, become involved in a community -wide holiday celebration or event. Our professional staff is eager to help you find your niche in our community; please do not hesitate to contact them for guidance and recommendations.
- **Journaling:** We recommend that all our students write in a Journal at the end of each series that you attend. Think about how the class informed your conversion process. How did it affect your evolving Jewish life and your Jewish identity? Rabbi Cohen, Rabbi Freedman and your teachers are eager to hear from conversion students and will read and respond to your journal entries if you choose to share them. Your entries will provide you with materials for your final essay that we ask all our conversion students to write before your *Beit Din*.

Frequently Asked Questions:

How long does it take to convert to Judaism?

The conversion process is unique for every individual. Rabbi Cohen and Rabbi Freedman believe that it typically takes 18 months to complete this process, which includes at least one full year of living a Jewish life. Our students meet with Rabbi Cohen and Rabbi Freedman before you begin taking the class and throughout your process. Together we decide when you are ready to convert.

What happens when I am ready to convert?

Rabbi Freedman and Rabbi Cohen will invite 2-3 educated Jews or local clergy to sit on your *Beit Din* where you will be asked several questions about your decision to convert. This ritual is often a highlight of the process for everyone involved, as you have gone through a personal transformation and we are honored to witness this exciting time in your life. You will not be asked specific questions about Jewish law; rather we will ask you about your conversion experience, the topics you explored in class, your beliefs about God and what brought you to the Jewish community. After the *Beit Din* our rabbis, along with any family members or significant individuals who participated in your conversion process, will witness your official conversion at a local *Mikveh*. The requirement for *Mikveh* is that the water is flowing and “alive.” Barton Springs, Deep Eddy and Bull Creek all fulfill these requirements.

For male students, what is required for conversion concerning circumcision?

Jewish law prescribes several rites for conversion. Circumcision is the eternal sign of the covenant (*b'rit*) between God and the descendants of Abraham. However, circumcision does not create Jewish identity. If the male was already circumcised before his conversion, our Rabbis encourage the process of *hatafat dam b'rit*, where a drop of blood is taken from the spot that was once covered by his foreskin. If a male has not already been circumcised our Rabbis will discuss your options, but we do not require a complete circumcision.

Recommended Book List

Torah and Commentary:

The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation, by Adele Berlin (Editor), Marc Zvi Brettler (Editor), Michael Fishbane (Editor)

The Torah: A Modern Commentary, by W. Gunther Plaut (Author) or The Torah: A Women's Commentary, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi (Editor), Andrea L. Weiss (Editor) or Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary, David L. Lieber (Author), Jules Harlow (Author)

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH* features the oldest-known complete Hebrew version of the Holy Scriptures, side by side with JPS's renowned English translation.

Jewish Daily Life:

Living a Jewish Life, Updated and Revised Edition: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families, by Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper (Authors)

Jewish Living: A guide to Contemporary Reform Practice Revised Edition by Mark Washofsky (Author)

On the Doorposts of Your House: Prayers and Ceremonies for the Jewish Home, by Chaim Stern (Author)

Calendar and Holidays:

The Jewish Holidays, by Michael Strassfeld (Author) or

The Tapestry of Jewish Time: A Spiritual Guide to Holidays and Life-Cycle Events, by Nina Beth Cardin (Author)

Jewish History:

A History of the Jews, by Paul Johnson

Jewish Literacy, Revised Ed: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History, by Joseph Telushkin (Author)

The Jewish Bookshelf:

Back To The Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts, by Barry W. Holtz (Editor)

Prayer:

Mishkan T'fillah, The Reform Movement's Prayer book, published by the CCAR press

Making Prayer Real, Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What to Do about It, by Rabbi Mike Comins

Entering Jewish Prayer, A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service, by Reuven Hammer

To Pray as a Jew, A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service, by Hayim H. Donin

The Way into Jewish Prayer, Lawrence Hoffman (Hoffman has written extensively on Jewish prayer, specifically within the Reform movement. He wrote an anthology entitled, My People's Prayer Book that is a wonderful resource if you find it in your local library or on the book shelves in our synagogue.)

*Many if not all of these books can be found used on Amazon, or at local used book stores at a reduced price.

Articles/Websites:

"10 Things to Know Before/During the Conversion Process"

<http://www.reformjudaism.org/10-things-know-before-during-conversion-process>

Supporting Interfaith families exploring Jewish Life

www.interfaithfamily.org

Website for Reform Judaism

<http://reformjudaism.org/>