

Living Judaism: An Introduction to Jewish Belief and Practice

Rabbi Adam Rubin, Ph.D. – Beth Tikvah Congregation

Syllabus 5779 (2018-19)

“I am a Jew because...”

Edmund Fleg (France, 1874-1963)

I am a Jew because

Judaism demands no abdication of the mind.

I am a Jew because

Judaism asks every possible sacrifice of my life.

I am a Jew because

Wherever there are tears and suffering the Jew weeps.

I am a Jew because

Whenever the cry of despair is heard the Jew hopes.

I am a Jew because

The message of Judaism is the oldest and the newest.

I am a Jew because

The promise of Judaism is a universal promise.

I am a Jew because

For the Jew, the world is not finished; human beings will complete it. I am a Jew because

For the Jew, humanity is not finished; we are still creating humanity.

I am a Jew because

Judaism places human dignity above all things, even Judaism itself.

I am a Jew because

Judaism places human dignity within the oneness of God.

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B'ruchim haba'im! Welcome to a year of “Living Judaism.” As a community of learners and as individuals we are setting out on a journey of discovery that will involve two important characteristics of Judaism, joy and wrestling. During this journey we will explore the depth and richness of the Jewish

way of life, open our minds and spirits to the traditions that have been passed down, and honour those traditions with our hard questions and creative responses to them.

Texts:

- *Emet v'Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism (EE)* (copy given in class)
- Martin S. Cohen, Editor, *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews (OL)*
- Michael Strassfeld, *A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice (BL)*
- Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy (JL)*
- United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism website: <http://www.uscj.org/default.aspx>
- Conversion to Judaism website Summary of Marc D. Angel, *Choosing to Be Jewish: The Orthodox Road to Conversion* (overview of history and different approaches to conversion): http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Conversion_to_Judaism/1

Actions (for conversion candidates):

- Visit at least two synagogues.
- Visit at least one other Jewish agency: Jewish Family Services, JCC (*Jewish Community Centre*), a Jewish day school, Louis Brier Home & Hospital, the mikveh.
- Wear a kippah and tzitzit (*a tallit katan – undergarment with fringes on the corners*) for a week and reflect on your experiences.
- Select a book from the bibliography, read it, and present a 5-minute report on it to the class. If there is a particular book you would like to read and report on that is not on the list, please let me know.
- Keep a journal about your experience of practicing Judaism. (See the beginner's checklist.)
- Attend Shabbat services regularly at Beth Tikvah.

Year Schedule: *Unless otherwise noted, all Living Judaism classes meet in the Bet Midrash/Library at the synagogue. Instructor available in classroom for questions and conversation after each class; class session from 8:00 to 9:00.*

Date	Day	Class or Event
10/16	Tue	Introductions and Jewish Calendar
10/23	Tue	What is Judaism? Who is a Jew? Unity and Diversity in Judaism READ: EE 45-46 ("The Ideal Conservative Jew") Practice: Morning blessings: Who has made me in Your image, Who has made me Yisrael, Who has made me free.
11/13	Tue	The Synagogue: Origin, Architecture, Gestures, Objects, Prayer READ: JL 705-735 [Temple/Synagogue, Minyan, Mekhitzta, Rabbinic Ordination, Common Terms, Siddur et al., Torah Scroll, Torah Portion, Aliyah, Priestly Blessing, Tzitzit, Tefillin, Kippah, Some Famous Prayers] Practice: Aliyah blessings
11/20	Tue	Navigating the Jewish Community, Local to National to Global; Israel, from People to State; Conversion

Date	Day	Class or Event
		READ: BL 467-74; JL 650 [Israeli Independence]; EE 27-36 (whole section on "The Jewish People")
11/27	Tue	Hanukkah and Purim (and other minor festivals: Rosh Chodesh, Tu B'Shevat) READ: BL 284-297; JL 111-16, 634-35, 637-38 [Antiochus, Maccabees, Hannah; Hanukkah; Purim]; JH 161-198 Practice: Hanukkah blessings
12/11	Sat	Jewish Home: "Mikdash Me'at": BL, 3-21, 94-102; EE, 39-40; JL 588-591
12/18	Tue	Shabbat: First among Festivals READ: BL 103-34 For further reading: Abraham Joshua Heschel, <i>The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man</i> ; Noam Zion and Shawn Fields-Meyer, <i>A Day Apart</i> Practice: Shabbat blessings
12/25	Tue	No Class – Winter Break
1/1	Tue	No Class – Winter Break
1/15	Tue	Introduction to the Three Paths of Torah, Avodah, and G'milut Hasidim READ: BL 206-23; EE, 36-39 ("Social Justice; On Women"); Practice: Aliyah blessings
1/22	Tue	Jewish Prayer READ: BL 176-205; JL 731-36 [Some Famous Prayers, Sh'ma Yisrael]; EE 40-43 ("Tefillah: Prayer")
1/29	Tue	Jewish Life Cycle: Illness: Visiting the Sick, Death READ: BL 396-404, 415-422
2/12	Tue	Jewish Life Cycle: Childhood and Teenage Years READ: BL 304-23; 337-352
2/19	Tue	Jewish Life Cycle: Mourning, Afterlife READ: BL 440-66; EE, 24-27 ("Eschatology: Our Vision of the Future") For further reading: Ron Wolfson, <i>A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort</i> ; Jack Riemer, <i>Jewish Reflections on Death</i> ; Leon Wieseltier, <i>Kaddish</i>
2/26	Tue	Jewish Life Cycle: Marriage and Divorce READ: BL 324-36, 357-95; 403-411
3/12	Tue	God, Humankind, and the Spiritual Practice of Blessing READ: JL 736-38 [Blessing/B'racha]; EE 17-19 ("God") Practice: Various blessings
3/19	Tue	Kashrut: Dietary Laws and Practices READ: BL 66-93, JL 699-702 [Kosher/Kashrut] For further reading: Rachel Barenblat, "Rethinking Kashrut: An Interview with Rabbi Morris Allen" (http://www.zeek.net/711kashrut/); Samuel H. Dresner and Seymour Siegel, <i>Jewish Dietary Laws and Practices</i> ; Elizabeth Ehrlich, <i>Miriam's Kitchen, Kosher for the Clueless but Curious</i>
3/26	Tue	Mitzvot and Middot as a Life of "Normal Mysticism" READ: JL 545-47 [commandment/Mitzvah]; BL 22-65 (speech and work); read one of the entries in the JL Jewish Ethics section (pp. 548-595) that is meaningful

Date	Day	Class or Event
		to your life and be prepared to speak to it in class; EE 19-23 (“Halakah”)
4/9	Tue	Jewish History Standing on One Foot READ: JL 115-254 (browse any of the sections in Parts 2, 3, and 4 according to your interest) For further reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raymond P. Scheindlin, <i>A Short History of the Jewish People</i> • Eli Barnavi and Miriam Eliav-Feldon, <i>Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present</i>. New York: Schocken Books, 1994; • <i>A History of the Jewish People</i>, Haim H. Ben-Sasson (Editor) Harvard University Press, 1985 Book Review
4/16	Tue	Passover Torah Study Read: Exodus, Chapters 6-15; BL pp. 231-243, Practice: Pesach blessings and songs
4/23	Tue	Omer and Shavuot Read: BL: 244-255 JL: #311, Counting the Omer and Shavuot
4/30	Tue	Introduction to Jewish Texts I READ: BL 139-75 (Torah); JL 149-62, 206-11, 528-39, 643-44 [Oral Law, Babylonian Talmud, Halakha; Kabbalah, Code of Jewish Law; Guide to Perplexed, Response Literature, Mishneh Torah, Zohar; Haggada]; EE 43-45 (“Talmud Torah”) For further reading: <i>Back to the Sources</i> (ed. Barry W. Holtz) Practice: Blessing for studying Torah
5/14	Tue	Introduction to Jewish Texts II (reading t.b.d.)
5/21	Tue	Yom Ha-Shoah/Yom Ha-Zikaron/Yom Ha-Atzma’ut (reading t.b.d.)
5/28	Sat	The Tragedy of “the Three Weeks”: Tisha B’Av. (reading t.b.d.)
6/11	Tue	Living Judaism SIYUM

The following experiences will be scheduled/discussed throughout the year:

- Kabbalat Shabbat Services at shul followed by Shabbat dinner
- Weekday morning minyan
- Baking, Taking, and Blessing Challah
- Making Hamantaschen for Purim
- Kashering for Everyday and Pesach

Bibliography:

Nonfiction

- Eli Barnavi and Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*
- Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (out of print)

- Martin Buber, *The Way of Man*
- Harvey Cox, *Common Prayers: Faith, Family and a Christian's Journey through the Jewish Year*
- David J. Wolpe, *Healer of Shattered Hearts* (focus on relationship to God in contemporary life)
- David J. Wolpe, *Why Faith Matters*
- Daniel Gordis, *God Was Not in the Fire: The Search for a Spiritual Judaism*
- Blu Greenberg, *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*
- Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*
- Harold Kushner, *To Life*
- Marcia Prager, *The Path of Blessing: Experiencing the Energy and Abundance of the Divine*
- Herman Wouk, *This Is My God*

Novels and memoirs

- Aharon Appelfeld, *The Conversion*
- Lawrence Kushner, *Kabbalah, A Love Story*
- Chaim Potok, *Davita's Harp, The Chosen, or The Gift of Asher Lev*
- Jonathon Rosen, *Joy Comes in the Morning*
- Milton Steinberg, *As a Driven Leaf*
- Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen* (memoir)

Conversion

- Conversion to Judaism Resource Center: <http://www.convert.org/>
- Catherine Hall Myrowitz, *Finding a Home for the Soul: Interviews with Converts to Judaism* (Jason Aronson Inc., 1995).
- Maurice Lamm, *On Becoming a Jew* (Jonathon David Publishers)

Cookbooks

One of the most delightful ways to learn and live Judaism is by becoming familiar with a great Jewish cookbook, such as:

- Rabbi Robert Steinberg's *The Sephardic Kitchen*
- Claudia Roden's, *The Book of Jewish Food*
- Joan Nathan's *Jewish Cooking in America* (history of recipes and how cooking changed after Jews came to America).

A Beginner's Checklist of Jewish Practice:

Below is a list of basic Jewish practice (*mitzvot*, commandments, and *minhagim*, customs) with which you will become familiar with over the coming year. These practices form the basis of an observant Jew's life in the home, the synagogue, and the work place. Please remember that this is a minimal list and does not comprise the whole fabric of Jewish life.

Please keep track of the times when you experience these rituals and occasions in a journal, noting your impressions, insights, and questions.

I. Common Halachic Practices

By the end of the year participants should be familiar with and know how to practice the following:

- Aliyah to the Torah
- Wearing tallit and tefillin
- Shabbat observance, including Shabbat table rituals
- Knowledge of Shabbat rules and prohibitions
- Shabbat-ending Havdalah service: *Attend at least one havdalah service at BT or with a mentor*
- Chanting the Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals)
- Kashering and basic kashrut practice
- Use of the mikveh

II. Shabbat and the weekdays

We ask participants to attend the Shabbat services at the synagogue. Shabbat is the core of synagogue life. Regular attendance will help you to learn the centrality of Shabbat in Jewish life. Involvement in a morning minyan will also expose you to the prayer traditions of Jews practiced around the world.

III. Festivals and Fast Days Services

The services listed below have been chosen by the Rabbi for their importance and distinctiveness. They will involve freeing up these days or services from work obligations. This is one of the first and more important aspects of taking Jewish religious life seriously.

While observant Conservative Jew do more than what is listed below, specifically observing (not working and setting aside these days for feasting and celebration) two days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and two days of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and the beginning and end of Passover as well as two days of Shavuot, participants are encouraged to incorporate Festival observance into their lives by beginning with the list below. Your instructor will discuss the outlines of such observance over the course of the year. Please make sure you have a Jewish calendar so you can know when the holidays fall this year.

	Service	Date
1	First night of Chanukkah (at home)	Dec. 2
2	Shabbat of Chanukkah	Dec. 8
3	Reading of Megillat Esther on Purim	Mar. 20
4	First Day Passover Services	Apr. 20
5	Lail Tikun: All Night Shavuot Study Session	June 8
6	Evening Tisha b'Av Services	Aug. 10

IV. Home Ritual of the festivals

Below is a list of home rituals connected to the festivals that you should experience during the year. These are events that you will experience with your congregational mentors.

- A ritual meal in the sukkah
- The ritual lighting of the Hanukkah menorah
- Bedikat Hametz ritual on the eve of Passover
- The Passover seder
- A Yom Tov Festival meal besides Sukkot and the Passover Seder

V. Life Cycle

Below is a list of life-cycle rituals that we hope you will experience during your year of studies:

- A ritual circumcision ceremony for a boy and a covenanting ceremony for a girl, either done in the synagogue or a home
- A Jewish wedding ceremony
- A Jewish funeral and going to a Shiva House for a Shiva minyan
- A Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony on a Shabbat morning