

**JS 180: Introduction to Judaism**  
University of Southern California and  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Fall 2005  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30-4:50pm  
Classroom: 110 HUC  
Office: Hebrew Union College, Rm. 8 (basement)

Professor Sarah Bunin Benor  
E-mail: [sbenor@huc.edu](mailto:sbenor@huc.edu)  
Phone: 213-765-2124  
Office hours: by appointment

This class is an introduction to Jewish beliefs, practices, and history from the biblical period to the present. Students will become familiar with Jewish holidays, lifecycle events, and philosophical issues by reading key texts of the Jewish tradition. The diversity within the Jewish world - according to geography, gender, and modern religious movement - will be represented.

**Required texts** (available at the USC bookstore – please bring the designated texts to class)

*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1st Special edition, 1985.

*Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, edited by Barry W. Holtz, Simon & Schuster, 1986.

*The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Simon & Schuster, 1988/1993.

*The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions*, by Steven M. Lowenstein, Oxford University Press, 2002.

*The Life of Judaism*, edited by Harvey E. Goldberg, University of California Press, 2001.

*The Sabbath*, by Abraham Joshua Heschel, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975.

Course reader.

**Course Requirements**

I. Regular attendance and participation are essential for the creation of a stable, stimulating learning environment and are therefore required. You will be held responsible for all material presented in class, as well as the reading assignments.

II. Critical comprehension of assigned readings and knowledgeable engagement in class discussions are essential. Because class discussion will revolve around the readings, you will

be expected to come to class having completed all of the reading. Once again, you must prepare for each class in order to participate effectively.

### III. Three mini-assignments

Assignment #1: Writeup of Shabbat experience (Shabbat dinner or Shabbat services) (2-3 pages)

Assignment #2: Writeup of Simchat Torah synagogue visit (2-3 pages)

Assignment #3: Writeup of museum visit (1-2 pages)

### IV. Research paper (8-10 pages – see possible topics below)

### V. A final exam

### **Grading**

Your grade in the course will be based on the following formula:

Class participation	20% (attendance and informed discussion)
Research paper	25%
Other 3 assignments	30% (10% each)
Final examination	25%

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another individual. Most simply, plagiarism can be characterized as “academic theft.” As defined in the University Student Conduct Code, plagiarism includes: “The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student’s own work whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near verbatim form;” “The submission of material subjected to editorial revision by another person that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style;” and “improper acknowledgment of sources in essays or papers.” Because of the serious penalties for plagiarism, you should ensure that any writing you submit represents your own assertions and abilities and incorporates other texts in an open and honest manner. In academic assignments, writing is assumed to be the original words and thoughts of the student unless otherwise noted (i.e., material from other sources is clearly and properly cited). The best way to avoid plagiarism is to be careful to document your sources, even when you are only making use of data or ideas rather than an actual quote. Students who violate academic standards will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. In accordance with these standards, plagiarism will result in an ‘F’ grade for the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the University.

### **Accommodation of Disabilities**

Students requesting academic accommodations due to disabilities must register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) as early in the semester as possible (STU 301, tel. 740-0776, open 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday). Please bring me your letter of verification for approved accommodations, and let me know if you need any assistance with this process.

## Schedule

Readings marked (cr) are in the course reader. Readings marked (d) will be distributed in class before they are due.

### Aug 23: First class

#### Aug 25: Introduction to Judaism

Fishbane, Michael. 1988. *Judaism: Revelation and Traditions*. San Francisco: HarperCollins. 3-24. (cr)

Pirkei Avot (Chapters/Ethics of the Fathers/Ancestors), Chapters 1, 2. *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 603-619. (cr)

#### Aug 30: Tanakh (Bible)

*Back to the Sources* 31-37 (excerpt from “Biblical Narrative” by Joel Rosenberg).

Selections from the *Tanakh*:

- Genesis chapters 1-3, 12:1-9
- Deuteronomy 12-16
- I Samuel 17-20
- Jeremiah 1-2:22
- Psalms 19
- Proverbs 1-2

#### Sept 1: Rabbinic literature: stories

*Back to the Sources* 177-212 (“Midrash” by Barry W. Holtz).

In class: selections of Midrash (bring *Tanakh*)

#### Sept 6: Rabbinic literature: law

*Back to the Sources* 129-172 (“Talmud” by Robert Goldenberg).

In class: selections from the Talmud (bring *Tanakh*)

#### Sept 8: Rosh Hashanah (New Year)

*The Jewish Way* 17-33.

*The Jewish Way* 182-199.

Blessings in *Siddur Sim Shalom* 708-715. (d)

In class: discuss God (bring *Tanakh*)

#### Sept 13: Reform Judaism

Pittsburgh Platform (1885), Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism (1937), Reform Judaism – A Centenary Perspective (1976), A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism (1999), various documents on mixed marriage (In *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents*, Michael A. Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut, eds. New York: UAHC Press. 161-173; 197-212.). (cr)

Furman, Frida Kerner. “Synagogue Life among American Reform Jews.” In *The Life of Judaism*. 51-61.

Guest speaker: Rabbi Zoë Klein, Temple Isaiah

Sept 15: Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)

*The Jewish Way* 200-215. (bring *Tanakh*)

“Avinu Malkenu.” In *Siddur Sim Shalom*. 124-127. (d)

In class: discuss sin, atonement, *teshuva*, *ba'alei teshuva*

Sept 20: Orthodox Judaism

“Rabbi Avraham Yesha’yahu Karelitz on Extremism.” In *The Blackwell Reader in Judaism*.

Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds. 245-6. (cr)

Heilman, Samuel. “Orthodoxy in an American Synagogue.” In *The Life of Judaism*. 63-77.

Additional reading on Jewish mysticism. (d)

Guest speaker: Rabbi Dov Wagner, Chabad @ USC

Sept 22: Sukkot (Booths)

*The Jewish Way* 94-118. (bring *Tanakh*)

“Amidah.” In *Siddur Sim Shalom*. 106-123. (cr)

In class: visit HUC *sukkah*

Sept 27: Diversity of religious practice in the Diaspora, synagogues

*The Jewish Cultural Tapestry* 1-19, 85-117

In-class: visit HUC sanctuary, images of synagogues around the world

*Shabbat experience should be completed by now*

Sept 29: Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in Torah), musical manifestations of Judaism

*The Jewish Cultural Tapestry* 175-195.

In class: listen to religious and secular Jewish music

Oct 4 – no class (Rosh Hashanah)

Oct 6: Marriage

Ramon, Einat. “Tradition and Innovation in the Marriage Ceremony.” In *The Life of Judaism*.

105-119.

In class: wedding videos, discuss *niddah* (laws of ritual purity)

*Assignment #1 due*

Oct 11: Chanukah

*The Jewish Way* 258-282.

Gold, Manuel. “A Closer Look at the Maccabees.” In *Introduction to Judaism: A Sourcebook*.

Stephen J. Einstein and Lydia Kukoff, eds. New York: UAHC Press. 29-35. (cr)

Wolfson, Ron. “Confronting the December Dilemmas.” In *Introduction to Judaism: A*

*Sourcebook*. Stephen J. Einstein and Lydia Kukoff, eds. New York: UAHC Press. 42-50.

(cr)

In class: discuss secular Judaism, “assimilation”

Oct 13 – no class (Yom Kippur)

By Monday, October 17, please e-mail your proposed research paper topic to

[sbenor@huc.edu](mailto:sbenor@huc.edu).

Oct 18 – no class (Sukkot)

Oct 20: Birth, Bar Mitzvah

Sabar, Shalom. 2002. "Childbirth and Magic: Jewish Folklore and Material Culture." In *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. David Biale, ed. New York: Schocken Books. 671-693. (cr) (article goes to 722, available on reserve in the HUC library).

Weissler, Chava. 1986. "Coming of Age in the Havurah Movement: Bar Mitzvah in the Havurah Family." In *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality*. Steven M. Cohen and Paula Hyman, eds. New York: Holmes and Meier. 200-217. (cr)

In class: decide where each student will go for Simchat Torah services

Oct 25 – no class (Shmini Atzeret, Simchat Torah), but –

Attend services tonight! Each student goes to a different synagogue.

Oct 27: Purim (Lots)

*The Jewish Way* 224-257. (bring *Tanakh*)

Assignment #2 due

Nov 1: Linguistic manifestations of Judaism

*The Jewish Cultural Tapestry* 49-67.

In class: Babel story (bring *Tanakh*), discussion of Jewish English

Nov 3: Reconstructionist Judaism

Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1934. "Judaism as a Civilization." In *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America. 173-208. (cr)

Guest speaker: Rabbi Rick Brody, Temple Ami Shalom

Nov 8: Pesach (Passover)

*The Jewish Way* 34-65.

Goodman, Allegra. 1996. "The Four Questions." *Commentary* 101/4. 42-50. (cr)

Nov 10: Pesach, visual manifestations of Judaism

Sered, Susan Starr. "Religious Roles of Elderly Women." In *The Life of Judaism*. 40-49.

Beit-Arié, Malachi. 1992. "The Art of the Hebrew Manuscript: 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC – 15<sup>th</sup> Century AD." *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*. Eli Barnavi, ed. New York: Schocken Books. (d)

In-class: Look at illuminated Haggadot, images of Sacrifice of Isaac (bring *Tanakh*)

Nov 10: Shavuot (Weeks)

*The Jewish Way* 66-93.

Ruth (In *JPS Tanakh*)

In class: discuss *kashrut*

Nov 15: Conservative Judaism

Readings on Conservative Judaism: (Emet Ve-Emunah – A Statement of Principles; A Responsum on Sabbath Observance; Joel Roth: Ordination of Women; Dorff:

Homosexuality and Sexual Ethics). In *The Blackwell Reader in Judaism*. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds. 256-267. (cr)  
Guest speaker: Rabbi Brian Schuldenfrei, Sinai Temple

Nov 17: Tisha B'Av (The Ninth of Av) and Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day),  
Anti-Semitism

*The Jewish Way* 283-303, 314-341.  
Lamentations (In *JPS Tanakh*)

Nov 22: Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israeli Independence Day) and Zionism

*The Jewish Way* 373-388.  
Contemporary debate about Zionism between Rabbi Daniel Gordis and Rabbi Jill Jacobs. (d)

Nov 24 – no class (Thanksgiving)

Nov 29: Shabbat

*The Jewish Way* 127-181.  
Heschel, *The Sabbath* 2-58.

Dec 1: Last class

Brief student presentations of research, wrap-up

Dec 8: Research papers due

### **Takeaway messages for this class**

1. Being Jewish is not just adhering to a religion but also belonging to a people
2. There is a chain of Jewish knowledge, belief, textual production, and practice stretching from Biblical times to the present
3. Judaism and Jewish culture have had diverse manifestations around the world and throughout history, influenced and affected by local non-Jewish cultures
4. Three of the most important aspects of Judaism are God, Torah, and Israel
5. Judaism emphasizes actions over beliefs

### **Research paper: Suggested topics**

1. Compare how two movements deal with one issue in contemporary American Judaism.
2. Trace the historical development of one philosophical issue in three time periods.
3. Discuss the manifestations of the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition in one Jewish community outside of North America.
4. Another topic: must be approved by instructor.

When writing your papers, please follow the specifications and suggestions in the writing guide, to be distributed in class. I recommend that you set up an appointment to discuss your topic with me.

**Suggestions for further reading (on reserve in the HUC library)**

- Fishbane, Michael. 1988. *Judaism: Revelation and Traditions*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Einstein, Stephen J, and Lydia Kukoff, eds. 1999. *Introduction to Judaism: A Sourcebook*. New York: UAHC Press.
- Gillman, Neil. 1990. *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Barnavi, Eli, ed. 1992. *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Biale, David , ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Artscroll Siddur* (Orthodox prayer book).
- Siddur Sim Shalom* (Conservative prayer book).
- Sha'are Tefilah: Gates of Prayer* (Reform prayer book).
- Kol Haneshama: Shabbat v' Hagim* (Reconstructionist prayer book).

**Useful websites**

My Jewish Learning

<http://myjewishlearning.com>

Interactive Jewish Calendar

<http://www.hebcal.com/hebcal/>

Jewish History Resource Center

<http://www.dinur.org//1.html>

Jewish Language Research Website:

<http://www.jewish-languages.org/>

Jewish Music Web Center

<http://www.jmwc.org/>

Modiya: Jews/Media/Religion

<http://dlibdev.nyu.edu/modiya/>