

SPECIAL TOPIC: REL 196. **Judaism Then and Now**

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Course Description and Overview

What is Judaism, or should we ask: Who is a Jew? It is a multifaceted question that is still being debated in different contexts, and has even reached the Israeli Supreme Court in some cases of complex situations.

In the course of our semester together we will try and find our own definitions and notions of that ancient monotheistic religion and its' many trials and tribulations. Typically to Judaism some dilemmas might stay unsolved while others will have an array of answers.

During 4,000 years Judaism has evolved and changed more than any other organized religion. Judaism is the only religion that suffered persecution century after century culminating in the most horrible genocide: the Holocaust. Judaism is the only religion that has become a state: Israel. Judaism has had such an impact on Western History that it is difficult to imagine that there are merely 14.1 million Jews in the world today.

Our voyage in time will start in 1812 BCE, with Abraham, the first Jew. We will discuss the first and second destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Diaspora that followed. As we advance in History we will learn the different movements: Beth Shamai and Beth Hillel, the Kabala, the Hassidic movement, and we'll get acquainted with some of the great Rabbis and philosophers, we will browse different schools of thought, beliefs and practices and get familiar with terms like Torah, Talmud, Midrash and Mishna. We will explore briefly some prayers, blessings and a few life cycle events. You will end up by knowing the meaning of some important Jewish Holidays and of course, the importance of the Sabbath.

But the main issue we will search and research will be Judaism now: is it just a religion or has it become a state in the Middle East and merely another culture amongst others' in the western world? What about Jewish Humor, literature, music and cinema? We will not overlook the impact of the Jewish Mother nor of Jewish cooking we might get to savor.

Judaism is part of our heritage. Understanding its history and evolution will augment your understanding of western civilization and your own background

Learning Goals

You will learn to identify the different movements of Judaism nowadays and in the past.

You will enhance your writings skills as most of the work done in class will be written

You will become knowledgeable of the different traditions and costumes in Judaism.

You will comprehend the basic philosophy of Judaism.

You will better understand the history of the Jewish people.

You will enhance your awareness of discrimination, persecution and of diverse forms of biases and prejudices.

We will all become better ambassadors in the service of understanding and tolerance.

Course Requirements

You will be required to do your own research and not only soul-search. Un-kosher food for thought will include subject like relations between man and God, man and man, man and woman, free-will and beliefs system in a constantly changing world.

The course will greatly depend on your **direct involvement and impassioned curiosity**, as we gather in a round-table form. Some of the topics will be selected by you, according to your own interests, and some by the instructor. You will have to write for each and every class and thus enhance your writing skills.

Some of the written assignments will be graded. There will be other un-graded assignments relating to reading, researching on line and in the library.

The major assignments will be:

A. **Midterm** will be a research on a topic you are passionate about, 3-5 pages long with a list of references you will use. One or two aspects of Judaism you will choose and would like to become involved with and pursue in depth. For example: The role of women in Judaism, or: The transformations Judaism had gone through during the last century, or: The influences Christianity has had on Judaism and vice versa. Your personal point of view and beliefs should be part of your essay as well.

Final essay: You could choose the same topic for your final essay, or choose another one. The final essay will be 5-10 pages long, you will use and quote a few sources you will use, and in your final essay your own input and personal experience is extremely important.

B. You will do some **creative writing** each week, 1-2 pages long, a personal view on the facets of Judaism we will be discussing in class. You will receive feedback from fellow students, constructive suggestions for improving your skills of expression, whenever these are read in class. By talking in turn about your chosen subjects, in open discussion, we will all educate ourselves on these matters.

C. You will keep an **informal journal** of your reading as well as about the various presentations and interactions taking place in class. Each week print out a copy and bring to class for the instructor. Be ready to share your entries with your fellow-students.

D. You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours a week to your different reading and writings.

Grading

1. Contribution in class discussion.....20%
2. Attendance..... 20%
3. Presentations in class.....10%
4. Written works.....25%
5. Research papers on your chosen topic.....25%

Expectations

You are expected to show up to every class, and on time. Missing lessons and lateness will interfere with learning and hence affect your grade. Since there is a large emphasis on teamwork you will be required not to disrupt your fellow student's creativity and to be considerate. No ringing cell-phones and no eating during class.

All assignments will be presented in print; hence you have to master computer skills.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to perform your academic work honestly and fairly. Since you can choose your subject and your writing is supposed to be personal you are expected to write on your own each and every assignment. The consequences of failure to meet those expectations are out lined in the current *Student Handbook* and in the *Statement on Academic Honesty at Moravian College*.

Required Texts

The Bible

Jonathan Rosen *The Talmud and the Internet*

Primo Levi *Survival in Auschwitz*

Recommend Texts

Adin Steinsalz *The Essential Talmud*

Dennis Prager & Joseph Telushkin *The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism*

Bernard Evslin *The Spirit of Jewish Thought*

Barry W. Holtz *Back to the Sources* Reading Classic Jewish Texts

Joyce Antler *America and I*

Alan Dershowitz *The Case for Peace*

Schedule- with possible modifications according to students' researches

Date

Week I

Tuesday January 15

Thursday January 17

Week II

Tuesday January 22

Thursday January 24

Week III

Tuesday January 29

Thursday January 31

Topic and Reading Assignment

Introduction and ground rules

What is the Bible?

Read: Genesis

Abraham's covenant

The Ten Commandments

Read: Deuteronomy

Written legacy

Destruction of Second Temple

Read: Isaiah and Jeremiah, Josephus Flavius

Week IV	
Tuesday February 5	Diaspora then and now
Thursday February 7	Talmud and its intricacies
	Read: The Talmud
Week V	
Tuesday February 12	Libel and persecution
Thursday February 14	Judaism and love – the Jewish Valentine
	Read: Primo Levi
Week VI	
Tuesday February 19	The cycle of Jewish life
Thursday February 21	Jewish life in America
	Read: Eli, the Fanatic by Philip Roth
Week VII	
Tuesday February 26	Mid-term paper due
Thursday February 28	Jewish mysticism
	Read: the Kabala
Week VIII	
Tuesday March 4	Spring Recess
Thursday March 6	Spring Recess
Week IX	
Tuesday March 11	Kabala then and now
Thursday March 13	Interpretations and miss-interpretations
	Read: online about Judaism and mysticism
Week X	
Tuesday March 18	Jews and Zionists
Thursday March 20	Purim and its meaning
	Read: Handouts about Jewish holidays
Week XI	
Tuesday March 25	20 th century anti-Semitism
Thursday March 27	The creation of the Israeli State
	Read: Handouts about the history of Israel
Week XII	
Tuesday April 1	Judaism in the 21 st century
Thursday April 3	Jews and Israel
	Read: Alan Dershowitz and others
Week XIII	
Tuesday April 8	Final essays due
Thursday April 10	Judaism in America
	Read: short stories handouts
Week XIV	
Tuesday April 15	The new anti-Semitism
Thursday April 17	Passover and its meaning
	Read: handouts about Passover
Week XV	
Tuesday April 22	Are we more tolerant now?

Thursday April 24

Conclusions

Notes

- 1) You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours per week outside of class, reading and preparing assignments.
- 2) Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact the Dean of the Comenius Center as soon as possible to enhance the likelihood that such accommodations are implemented in timely fashion.
- 3) Do not hesitate to address me with any kind of problem you have during class or after.
- 4) This syllabus is subject to change.