

## **REL 126 Judaism Then and Now – Spring 2015**

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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 and first 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 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

The most important lesson will be about yourself, your set of beliefs, your spirituality and your capacity to encompass differences, to grow and thrive.

### **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 your classmates and the instructor. You will have to write for each and every class. 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, 4-6 pages long with a list of the 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 6-7 pages long, you will use and

quote a few sources, your own input and personal experiences are extremely important.

B. You will do some 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 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. You will have to print out your journal and submit it to the instructor every class. Be ready to share your entries with your fellow-students.

D. You will have several presentations in classes about topics you will choose.

### **Blackboard**

You are expected to use Blackboard for course information and assignments throughout the course. You will be enrolled in Blackboard and you have to make sure you check Blackboard after each class.

### **Grading**

1. Active contribution to class .....	20%
2. Group work .....	10%
3. Journals.....	15%
4. Presentations in class.....	10%
5. Written assignments .....	20%
6. Midterm .....	10%
7. Final essay.....	15%

## **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, **no text messaging** and no eating during class. All assignments will be presented printed; no handwritten assignments.

## **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 outlined in the current *Student Handbook* and in the *Statement on Academic Honesty at Moravian College*.

## **Required Texts**

*The Bible(Old Testament)*

George Robinson *Essential Judaism*

## **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*

**Helpful: Judaism 101** - <http://www.jewfaq.org/index.shtml>

**Schedule-** *with possible modifications according to student topic researches*

Week I

Monday January 19 Introduction

Week II

Monday January 26 written legacy

Week III

Monday February 2 Tu b'Shevat and its meaning

Week IV

Monday February 9 history and her story

Week V

Monday February 16 love and marriage

Week VI

Monday February 23 death and dying

Week VII

Monday March 2 midterm due

Week VIII

Monday March 9 Spring recess

Week IX

Monday March 16 prayers and blessings

Week X

Monday March 23 Kashrus

Week XI

Monday March 30 Passover and its meaning

Week XII

Monday April 6 Jews and Zionists

Week XIII

Monday April 13 Jewish mysticism

Week XIV

Monday April 20

final essay due

Week XIV

Monday April 27

affirmations

## **Notes**

- 1) You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours per week outside of class, reading and preparing assignments.
- 2) Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability must contact Ms. Elaine Mara, assistant director of academic support Services for academic and disability support at the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.
- 3) The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.
- 4) Do not hesitate to address me with any kind of problem you have during class or after.
- 5) This syllabus is subject to change.