

Information on the New Mexico Miller Introduction to Judaism Class

Updated August 14, 2020

- Below are the 18 topics of the New Mexico Miller Introduction to Judaism Program.
- The program meets on Tuesday evenings starting October 6, 2020. Our last session is May 11, 2021 for a total of 35 hours of learning.
- Most topics will be covered by 2 one and a half hour sessions which are indicated below. These sessions will run from 7:00 to 8:30pm. Four of the topics will be covered in 3-hour sessions. The four 3-hour sessions will run from 6-9pm. The dates for those sessions are October 20, 2020; December 22, 2020; March 2, 2021; April 6, 2021.
- Fifteen minutes on Hebrew instruction (30 minutes for 3 hour sessions) are set aside for each session, with the goal of every student achieving the ability to phonetically read basic Hebrew. Students should leave each Hebrew learning session with a clear understanding of what they are expected to practice in between.
- Breaks: For 1 and ½ hour sessions we will have a ten-minute break. For the 3-hour sessions we will have two 8-minute breaks.
- Because of the pandemic, our classes will be held on Zoom. Zoom. Instructions for log in for participants will be sent after applications are received. We will take strong security measures to protect the privacy and safety of all participants. If the pandemic ends at some point during the program, we will go to in person classes supplemented by zoom for remote students.
- Inclusivity is a key value of the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program. We welcome and embrace learners from all religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and all sexual orientations.

For more information, write to Suzy Savage YourwaytoJudasim@gmail.com or calling her phone at: 505 600-5530 before September 15th or lead teacher, Rabbi Dov Gartenberg, rdg@bnaiisrael-nm.org 206 739-9924

Dates and Topics

- 1. Topic One: Beginnings: From Creation to the Edge of the Wilderness. October 6th and 13th, 2020 Instructor: Rabbi Dov Gartenberg**
Overview of the Torah: its basic narratives, personalities, and themes. Exploration of the concept of brit (covenant) as a basic motif of the Torah.
- 2. Topic Two: The World of the Bible. October 20th, 2020. Special 3-hour session from 6-9pm. Instructor Rabbi Dov Gartenberg**
Overview of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient history (Conquest of Canaan to Babylonian Exile) of the Jewish People. Discussion of the ways that the Bible is used in Jewish liturgical life. Examination of selected texts and concepts from Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

- 3. Topic Three: Heart of Many Rooms. October 27th and Nov. 3rd, 2020.**
Understanding Jewish Diversity Understanding the varieties of Jewish-ness — including exploration of geographic, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Development and ideology of the modern Jewish denominations. Introduction of the concept of mitzvah and halakha as a lens to examine the philosophic underpinnings of Jewish religious diversity.
- 4. Topic Four: Holy Days: The Wheel of the Jewish Year. November 10th and 17th, 2020.**
Overview of the narratives, rituals, and themes of the major Jewish holidays, including: the Shalosh Regalim, the High Holy Days, Hanukkah, Purim, and Tisha b'Av
- 5. Topic Five: Shabbat: Palace in Time. November 24th and December 1st, 2020**
Exploration of the practice of Shabbat, from its origins in the Ten Commandments to its contemporary observance. Overview of the principles of shmirat Shabbat, with an emphasis on helping students to determine how to begin incorporating elements of Shabbat observance into their lives. Examination of the meaning and practice of Shabbat rituals in the home.
- 6. Topic Six: When Do I Bow? And Other Questions About Jewish Prayer. December 8th and 15th 2020.**
Exploration of the mechanics and meaning behind Jewish prayer. Focus on the general rubrics of the prayer service, keva/kavanna, ritual garb and symbols, and comfort in the synagogue environment. Building familiarity with basic prayers and blessings—including Sh'ma, Amidah, Kaddish, and the basic blessing formula.
- 7. Topic Seven: Passover: The Jewish Master Story. December 22nd, 2020. Special 3-hour session 6-9pm**
Study of the Passover narrative, emphasizing its importance to shaping Jewish identity and values.
- 8. Topic Eight: God: Encountering the Holy. January 5th and 12th, 2021.** Jewish approaches to theology, with emphasis on the concept of “wrestling with God” and a variety of ways of understanding God. Exploration of selected Jewish texts about God from the Bible, rabbinic literature, and the prayer book. Opportunity for developing and articulating a personal theology.
- 9. Topic Nine: Talmud: Argument for the Sake of Heaven. January 19th and 26th, 2021**
Overview the development of Rabbinic Judaism and the ways in which it is distinct from earlier Biblical practice. Historical context of the late-Second Temple Period and the existential challenge posed by the destruction of the Temple. Examination of illustrative

examples of rabbinic literature, particularly noting how rabbinic texts adapt, expand, and update Biblical concepts.

10. Topic Ten: Starting Over: The High Holy Days. February 2nd and 9th, 2021

Exploring themes and observances of the High Holy Day period—from Rosh Hodesh Elul through Yom Kippur, emphasizing the practice of teshuvah. Study of key symbols, prayers, and what to expect from Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services.

11. Topic Eleven: Kashrut: The Original Soul Food. February 16th and 23rd, 2021

Exploration of the practice of kashrut—its basic rules and concepts and how to practically apply them to daily life. Emphasis on a developmental approach to taking on Jewish eating practices. Also, study the practice of brachot before and after eating.

12. Topic Twelve: Philosophers, Poets, and Mystics: The Jewish Middle Ages. March 2nd 2021. 3-hour session, 6-9pm

Overview of Jewish history from the end of the Talmud Period until the dawn of the Modern Period. Focus on the contributions of Rashi, Rambam, and Joseph Karo. Overview of the development of Kabbalah, including a basic discussion of the Zohar and the Tsfat/Lurianic tradition. Emphasis on the question: What role does the contributions of the Middle Ages—literary, halakhic, and mystical play in contemporary Judaism?

13. Topic Thirteen: Marriage, Love & Kosher Sex. March 9th and 16th, 2021.

Study of Jewish rituals for sanctifying relationships, with an in-depth focus on marriage rituals. Discussion of mikvah—both for conversion and for taharat ha-mishpacha.

Exploration of Jewish ethics around intimate relationships and sexuality. Discussion of inclusion of LGBTQ Jews in contemporary Jewish life.

14. Topic Fourteen: From Birth to B'nai Mitzvah: Raising a Mensch. March 23rd and 30th, 2021.

Exploration of the rituals and meaning behind Brit Milah and Simchat Bat, with a discussion of the significance of circumcision both for infants and for converts. Choosing a Jewish name, again focusing on both infants and conversion. Jewish parenting and different modes of Jewish education (both formal and informal). The significance of the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony.

15. Topic Fifteen: A Time to Mourn: Traditions for Death, Grief, & Healing. Special 3-hour session. 6-9pm April 6th, 2021

Understanding Jewish practices toward illness and healing, particularly the mitzvah of bikkur holim. Exploration of Jewish ethics regarding end-of-life, including questions about life support, autopsy, organ donation, etc. Overview of funeral and burial practices, as well as mourning practices including shiva, shloshim, and yartzeit. Jewish views on the afterlife.

16. Topic Sixteen: Out of the Darkness: Stories from the Holocaust. April 13th and 20th, 2021

History of anti-Semitism, from Biblical stories (Purim & Hanukkah), to Jews under Christian and Muslim rule, to the advent of racial anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Holocaust survivor testimony and discussion of Jewish responses to the Holocaust.

17. Topic Seventeen: Israel: Dreaming of Deliverance. April 27th and May 4th 2021

The significance of Israel in Jewish life and thought. Historical survey from Herzl through the founding of the State of Israel, with an emphasis on understanding the meaning and varieties of Zionism. Overview of Israeli geography and key sites. Focus on understanding the connection between American Jews and Israel, including the question of how we are to understand and respond to Israel's domestic and international struggles.

18. Topic Eighteen: The Jewish Mission to Heal the World. May 11th, 2021 Instructor: Rabbi Dov Gartenberg

Closing the Topic with an exploration of three big concepts-- Tzelem Elohim, Tzedaka, and Tikkun Olam — which serve as the foundational principles of ethical monotheism. Closing celebration for the program and discussion of next steps for continuing learning.