

**Building Blocks of Judaism**  
**Congregation Beth Am/ Lehrhaus Judaica**  
**5772**

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This course is intended to be a general introduction to the world of Judaism. It should help students gain a basic understanding of Jewish beliefs and practices. Students should also become familiar with Jewish history, the State of Israel, the Holocaust, and elements of Jewish culture. This course will specifically seek to achieve the following goals:

- To introduce students to basic concepts of Judaism
- To build a working Jewish vocabulary
- To familiarize students with Jewish calendar and holidays
- To familiarize students with Jewish lifecycle events
- To examine the structure and themes of Jewish prayer
- To familiarize students with important Jewish texts and their historical contexts
- To introduce students to a broad overview of Jewish history
- To introduce students to Jewish understandings of community and peoplehood
- To explore the significance of Israel in the Jewish tradition
- To gain a sense of Jewish community through weekly class meetings as well as participating in a *Shabbat* (Sabbath) experience, worship experience, and holiday celebrations
- To enable and encourage students to ask the questions that are pertinent to them and to their relationship with Judaism

**Required Texts:**

- *Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice* by Rabbi Wayne Dosick
- *A Short History of the Jewish People* by Raymond Scheindlin

**Required Assignments:**

- Please keep a journal that you can share with me. At the end of each class, I will give you potential topics, and you can always write about whatever is on your mind. This will help me to gauge where you are, and more importantly, it will help you to put down onto paper what you are thinking and to keep track of your Jewish journey. You may submit your entries via email, but I prefer you keep a paper journal.
- At the end of the year, I will ask you to write a final essay about where you are in your Jewish journey. What have you gotten out of this class? Where would you like to go from here? The journal entries should help you create this.

## Course Syllabus

- Sept 6** Introduction to the course: What is Judaism? Who/What is a Jew?  
**Read for next time:** *Living Judaism*, Chapter 3, pgs. 73-84, 92-105, 114-118  
For further reading:  
\* *Who Wrote the Bible?* by Richard Elliott Friedman  
\* *Back to the Sources*, edited by Barry W. Holtz
- Sept 13** The Jewish Canon  
**Read for next time:** *Living Judaism*, Chapter 1, pgs. 7-19, 35-36  
For further reading:  
\* *Finding God* by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme  
\* *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought* by Eugene B. Borowitz
- Sept 20** God  
**Read for next time:** *Living Judaism*, Chapter 4, pgs. 119-138, 147-151, excerpt from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Sabbath*  
For further reading:  
\* *The Jewish Way* by Irving Greenberg
- Sept 27** Jewish Time: Introduction to the calendar  
Holidays Part 1: Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Simchat Torah  
**Read for next time:** *Living Judaism*, Chapter 4, pgs. 151-182, 195-199
- Oct 4** Holidays Part 2: Chanukah, Tu BiSh'vat, Purim, Passover, Shavuot, Yom HaShoah, Yom HaAtzmaut, and Tisha B'av  
**Read for next time:** *Living Judaism*, Chapter 7, pgs. 285-303  
For further reading:  
\* *Berit Mila in the Reform Context*, edited by Lewis M. Barth  
\* *The New Jewish Wedding Book* by Anita Diamant
- Oct 11** The Jewish Lifecycle Part 1: Birth, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and Marriage  
**Read for next time:** *Living Judaism*, Chapter 7, pgs. 303-312  
For further reading:  
\* *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* by Maurice Lamm  
\* *Kaddish* by Leon Wieseltier
- Oct 25** The Jewish Lifecycle Part 2: Death and Mourning  
**Read for next time:** excerpts from *My People's Prayer Book*, "Minhag Ami" and "Introduction to the Liturgy"  
For further reading:  
\* *My People's Prayer Book: Volumes I and II*, edited by Lawrence Hoffman  
\* *Entering Jewish Prayer* by Reuven Hammer

- Nov 1**           Worship Part 1: Overview, Opening Prayers  
**Read for next time:** handouts TBD
- Nov 8**           Worship Part 2: Amidah, Torah Service, Concluding Prayers  
**Read for next time:** *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel
- Nov 15**          Shabbat in Depth: Meaning, Observance, Contemporary Rituals  
**Read for Nov 22:** *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pgs. 1-69
- Nov 18**          **(FRIDAY) SHABBAT EXPERIENCE AT BETH AM**  
Service at 6:15  
Dinner (families are welcome) at 7:30
- Nov 22**          History of the Jews Part I: The Biblical Period – The Rise of Islam  
**Read for next time:** *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pgs. 71-146  
For further reading:  
\* *The Jews of Arab Lands* by Norman Stillman  
\* *Alienated Minority* by Kenneth Stow
- Nov 29**          History of the Jews Part II: The Middle Ages  
**Read for next time:** *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pgs. 149-197  
For further reading:  
\* *Response to Modernity* by Michael Meyer
- Dec 6**           History of the Jews Part III: The Rise of Modernity  
**Read for next time:** *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pgs. 199-213  
For further reading:  
\* *The War Against the Jews* by Lucy Dawidowicz  
\* *Night* by Elie Wiesel
- Dec 13**          The Holocaust  
**Read for next time:** *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pgs. 217-248  
*A History of Israel* by Howard Sachar
- Jan 3**           The Modern State of Israel part I  
**Read for next time:** Newspaper articles TBD
- Jan 10**          The Modern State of Israel part II  
**Read for next time:** Excerpt from *Discovering Jewish Music* by Marsha Bryan Edelman
- Jan 17**          Jewish Music
- Jan 24**          *Siyum* (Conclusion)