

EXPLORATIONS: AN INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM 2001-2002

*Rabbi Michael L. Feshbach,
Rabbi Gerald Serotta*

*Temple Shalom
8401 Grubb Road
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815
301-587-2273
www.templeshalom.net*

In this course, we will be exploring Judaism together at a number of different levels. We begin with a free, three week "Taste of Judaism" meant to touch some of core ideas and experiences of Jewish life. We will continue with a look at Jewish history, the cycle of Jewish holidays and life cycle events, and some of the special issues facing Jews and Judaism today. We will also, however, try exploring Judaism experientially, and we will ask the personal question: Can all this information be meaningful in our lives?

This class is intended for at least three groups: first, *couples of mixed religious backgrounds*, either engaged or married, where the non-Jewish partner is exploring Judaism with the Jewish partner. This may be either for the purpose of conversion, or simply to deepen an understanding of Judaism. Second, *individuals who are exploring Judaism* as part of a spiritual quest, and, finally, *any congregants or born-Jews*, who wish to expand or refresh their own knowledge of our history, culture and religious life. These groups interact with and enrich each other over the course of the year.

Those who are taking this class with the idea of possibly converting to Judaism will meet privately with one of our clergy on a number of occasions, in addition to the Tuesday night class. Introductory interviews concerning the conversion process should be set up on a one-to-one basis as soon as possible.

Classes meet from 7-8:15 PM unless otherwise noted. We may, as well, meet for a Shabbat or holiday dinner together. We will pick out an appropriate date for this as a group.

Please buy the following books, which will serve as our basic texts for the course:

- * Stephen M. Wylen, *Settings of Silver* (Paulist Press)
- * Michael Strassfeld, *Jewish Holidays* (Harper and Row)
- * Daniel B. Syme, *The Jewish Home* (UAHC)
- * Morris Kertzer, *What Is A Jew?* (as revised by Lawrence Hoffman)

The following books are highly recommended:

- * Lydia Kukoff, *Choosing Judaism*
- * Strassfeld, Strassfeld & Siegel, *The Jewish Catalog* and *The 2nd Jewish Catalog*
- * *Tanakh* (Jewish Publication Society Bible translation)
- * H. Kemelman, *Conversations with Rabbi Small*
- * Paul and Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings: When Jews and Christians Marry*

You may order any of the above books through the Temple. Order forms will be available from the first session of the class.

SYLLABUS

EXPLORATIONS I: A TASTE OF JUDAISM: ARE YOU CURIOUS?

A free, easy access introduction to Judaism and Jewish life.
Meant as either the beginning of the Introduction to Judaism course,
or a quick "taste" for anyone who is curious.
("Taste of Judaism" will be repeated on Sunday mornings in January.)

10/16: God and Spirituality	1/13: God and Spirituality
10/23: Ethics and Values	1/20: Ethics and Values
10/30: Community	1/27: Community

EXPLORATIONS II: GOD, TORAH AND ISRAEL

- 11/6 Jewish Identity: The Essence of Judaism -- People, Nation, Religion, Family or Civilization?
What is Judaism and who are the Jews?
Wynen, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-14) and 4 (p.53- top of p. 65)
Various other texts and handouts (distributed)
- 11/13 Torah as a Concept: A Brief History of Judaism and Jewish Literature
Wynen, Chapter 2, (pp. 15-36); Hirsch, "Our Literary Legacy" (distributed)
Various other texts and handouts (distributed)
- 11/20 God: Explorations and Encounters
Jewish Theology and Thought: Philosophy, God and Revelation
Wynen, Chapter 3 (pp. 37-52)

EXPLORATIONS III: SINGLE SUBJECT SEMINARS

- 12/4 **A Hands on Chanukah**
Strassfeld, *Holidays*, 161-177; Syme, 4 (pp.19-22); *Introduction to Judaism*, (pp.29-44);
- 12/11 **The Meaning of the Miracle of Chanukah;**
Our Neighbors, Ourselves: Judaism and Christianity
Feshbach, "What Is the Miracle of Chanukah?" (distributed)
Shulweis, "Peering Into The Limbo of Judeo-Christian" (distributed)
Wynen, second half of Chapter 4 (pp. 65-75) and Chapters 12-13, (pp. 185-220);
- 12/18 **Sanctifying Time: Shabbat**
Wynen, Chapter 8 (pp. 124-136); Syme, 2 (pp. 2-8); *Introduction to Judaism*, (128-139);
excerpts from the Torah and from Heschel, *The Sabbath* (distributed)

EXPLORATIONS IV: JEWISH HISTORY

From the Talmud to the Telescope: Jewish History to the Dawn of Modernity

- 1/8 History I: The Time of the Talmud - Rabbinic Judaism
Various texts (distributed)
- 1/15 History II: Inner Lights in a Brutal World - Jewish Philosophy, Mysticism, and Shtetl Life
Wynen, Chapters 15-18 (pp. 233-312)
- 1/22 History III: Judaism and Modernity - The Three Movements
Wynen, Chapters 19-20 (pp. 313-357), various handouts

EXPLORATIONS V: JEWISH SACRED LITERATURE

A Taste of Talmud and Midrash

- 2/5 An Introduction to Mishnah
Wynen, Chapter 14, (pp. 221-232)
Various texts (distributed)
- 2/12 A Taste of Talmud
Various texts (distributed)
- 2/19 Midrash as Mirror
Various texts (distributed)

EXPLORATIONS VI: JEWISH HOLIDAYS

The Cycle of the Jewish Year

- 3/12 Holidays I: Purim Revisited
Strassfeld, *Holidays*, pp. 187-200; Syme, Chapter 5, (pp. 23-27);
Feshbach, "On Pastry, Groggers and Murder: Purim Revisited," (distributed)
- 3/19 Holidays II: The High Holy Days
Syme, Chapter 6-7, (pp. 28-36), Strassfeld, *Holidays*, (pp. 95-124),
Holidays III: Sukkot and Simchat Torah
Strassfeld, *Jewish Holidays*, pp. 125-160.
Syme, Chapter 12, (pp. 49-55).
- 3/26 Holidays IV: Passover: The Secret of Success
Strassfeld, *Holidays*, pp.5-23 and 34-45;
Syme, Chapter 3 (pp. 9-18); Wynen, 10 (pp. 127-140)
Feshbach, "The Secret Message of the Seder," (distributed)

Holidays V: Shavuot

Strassfeld, *Holidays*, pp. 69-94.

Syme, Chapter 10 (pp. 43-45)

EXPLORATIONS VII: MODERN JEWISH HISTORY

Auschwitz and Jerusalem

- 4/9 History IV: Anti-Semitism and the Shoah
Wylen, Chapter 21 (pp. 358-379); Strassfeld, *Holidays*, pp. 56-62
- 4/16 History V: Zionism and Israel: A State for the Jews or a Jewish State?
Wylen, Chapter 22 (pp. 380-406); Strassfeld, *Holidays*, pp. 62-67
Special Slide Show
- 4/23 The Jewish World Today;
How to Save the World: Tzedakah, Social Action and Messianism
Wylen, Chapters 23-24 (pp. 407-439)
Third Jewish Catalog, pp.12-32 and 47-50 (distributed)
The Scary Thing: Talking about God;
Gates of Mitzvah, pp. 97-115;
Borowitz, *Liberal Judaism*, pp. 139-189
(all distributed)

EXPLORATIONS VIII: THE JEWISH LIFE CYCLE

"Hatch, Match and Dispatch"

- 5/7 Life Cycle I: Birth, Naming, Education, Bar/Bat Mitzvah
Syme, Chapters 13-15 (pp. 56-74); *Second Jewish Catalog*, Chapter 17-40, pp. 61-83
- 5/14 Life Cycle II: Marriage, Sexuality and Family Life
Syme, Chapters 16-17, (pp. 75-97); *Jewish Catalog*, pp. 158-166;
Second Jewish Catalog, pp. 91-99; *Introduction to Judaism*, pp. 75-99;
texts on sexuality (distributed)
- 5/21 Life Cycle III: Death, Mourning and the Afterlife
Syme, Chapter 18 (pp. 98-129); Wylen, Chapter 7 (pp. 90-101)