**Introduction to Judaism**

| HBJD-UA 102 // RELS-UA 679 | Professor Alex Jassen – apj205@nyu.edu |
| J-Term 2019 | Teaching Assistant Ilana Ben Ezra – ibe209@nyu.edu |
| Time: M/W/Th 10–2 | Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies |
| Location: 45 West 4th St, room B06 | KJCC, room 101 (53 Washington Sq S) |
| 4 units | Office Hours: by appointment |

**Course Overview**

The course provides a general introduction to Judaism in its many ancient and modern expressions. Students are introduced both to the historical narrative of the Jewish people and the beliefs and practices of the Jewish religion. We begin our story of Jewish history by examining the emergence of Judaism from the world of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and ancient Israel and then explore encounters between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the medieval world. We then turn to the dramatic transformations that have shaped Judaism in the modern period. We address the questions of “what do Jews believe?” and “what do Jews do?” through close analysis of different forms of Judaism across time and space. We seek to address the issue of what unites these diverse forms of Judaism and marks them all as Jewish. The central ideas and motifs of Judaism to be addressed include: the Bible in Judaism, rabbinic literature, theology, Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) and philosophy, Jewish law, Jewish nationalism, anti-Semitism, messianism, Jewish culture and identity, the synagogue, ritual and worship, life cycle, festivals and calendar.

We will take advantage of the many resources in New York City for understanding Jewish history and culture. This will include visits to the Jewish Museum, The Center for Jewish History, the Eldridge Street Synagogue, the Lower East Side, and the second cemetery (1805-29) of the Spanish and Portuguese community. These visits complement our in-class topics of study. All museums admission costs are covered by NYU.

There are no prerequisites for this course. It is intended to provide students with a general introduction to Judaism and stimulate interest in exploring further aspects of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies.

**Textbooks**

- All other readings are available to download from NYU Classes

**Course Requirements**

- Midterm exam (take home – distributed Jan 16; due Jan 21) (20%)
- Final exam (take home – distributed Jan 17; due Jan 27) (30%)
- Short essays (due by class time Jan 9, 10, 14, 16, 23, 24) (30%)
- Participation and attendance (20%)
Classroom Policies and Useful Resources

Classroom Decorum and Use of Laptops
Please be sure to arrive in class on time. Unless there is an emergency, there is no reason to leave class early. Please do not use your cellphone or other electronic devices during classes. This is discourteous to your instructors and your fellow students and hinders your learning. Laptops are permitted for the exclusive purpose of taking notes. Please think carefully about whether having a laptop open will be beneficial to your learning or merely distract you. Note as well that all PowerPoint files, handouts, or other media used in lectures will be available on the NYU Classes site. You do not need to copy down the material that appears on PowerPoint slides.

Attendance
Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Students are expected to come to each class with the assigned readings and any assignments completed. If you have specific questions related to the readings, please come to class prepared to ask these questions. This will improve your own understanding and that of your classmates. Attendance and active participation in class discussions is essential to successful completion of the other course requirements. If you miss a class due to illness, please let me know before class and then contact a fellow student to find out what you missed.

Late Work
The writing assignments are due on the date in which they are assigned. E-mail submissions will not be accepted. If you have a justifiable reason for requiring an extension, you must make arrangements with me before the due date. All late work will be dropped one third of a letter grade per late class day. Assignments over a week late will not be accepted and will be given a 0 grade.

Grading
Final course grades will be assigned according to the following scale: 100-95=A, 94-90=A-, 89-87=B+, 86-83=B, 82-80=B-, 79-77=C+, 76-73=C, 72-70=C-, 69-60=D, 59-0=F. (S/N: S=70%).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism
All student work is expected to represent the independent thinking and research of each student. All students are expected to abide by NYU’s honor code (http://cas.nyu.edu/page/honorcode) and expectation of Academic Integrity (http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity). We will spend some class time discussing proper ways to draw upon secondary scholarship and how to forge your own independent thinking in dialogue with earlier scholarship. For a useful guide on what constitutes plagiarism, see http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/object/academic_integrity.html

➢ Any student who is found to have committed plagiarism will received an automatic zero on the assignment. Further cases of plagiarism will be reported to the department Director of Undergraduate Studies and subject to further disciplinary action.

Student with Disabilities
The Henry & Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (31 West 4th Street) facilitates equal access to the programs and activities of the College and NYU. Matters relating to students who visit the Center are strictly confidential. Services cover a wide range of disabling
conditions. In addition to working with students who have mobility, visual, and hearing impairments, the Center assists a significant number of students with learning disabilities and many others with chronic impairments, such as diabetes, cancer, HIV infection, psychiatric illness, head trauma, and seizure disorders. The Moses Center is staffed by a group of specialists who have a wealth of experience in helping students obtain necessary academic adjustments and accommodations based upon individual needs. In order to receive services from the Center, students must provide appropriate documentation.

**Helpful Campus Resources**

**University Learning Center (ULC)** Any NYU student is eligible to receive academic support through the University Learning Center. Conveniently located: Academic Resource Center (ARC) 18 Washington Place (lower level); University Hall (UHall) 110 East 14th Street, UHall Commons (lower level). The ULC provides individual and group review sessions for specific courses as well as Academic Skills Workshops, absolutely free of charge. Late hours are available. Learn more at [www.nyu.edu/ulc](http://www.nyu.edu/ulc).

The **Writing Center** (411 Lafayette, 998-8866) is a part of NYU’s Expository Writing Program, College of Arts and Science. It is a place where one-on-one teaching and learning occur, where work always focuses on writing. [http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html](http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html)

Writing Center consultants are studying for or already hold advanced degrees. Many are published writers. They receive significant training in the teaching of writing, and they teach writing courses for undergraduates across the University. At the Writing Center, students work with consultants in private one-on-one sessions to become better writers and thinkers. Students work with consultants at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of writing except for exams. Schedule an Appointment Online: [https://nyu.mywconline.com](https://nyu.mywconline.com)

**Class Schedule**

- All assigned reading should be done in advance of the class meeting
- All primary source readings are available to download at NYU Classes.

January 7: The Textual Foundations of Judaism
- A Crash Course in the Jewish Bible
- What is Rabbinic Judaism?

Scheindlin, 25-69
Primary Sources: (1) Genesis 22 and Its Later Interpretations; (2) Account of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai’s escape (in Babylonian Talmud); (3) Selections from Rabbinic literature on Temple, Sacrifice, and Prayer; (4) The Rabbinic chain of transmission in Mishnah Avot; (5) A sample passage of the Babylonian Talmud with interactive media at: [http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/TalmudPage.html#Page](http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/TalmudPage.html#Page)

January 9: From Medieval to Modern
- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Medieval World
- The Flourishing of Jewish Creativity; Poetry, Philosophy, Mysticism, and Piety
Scheindlin, 71-122
Primary Sources: (1) The Zohar, The Personality of God; (2) Law and Philosophy in the Writings of Moses Maimonides (3) German Pietists (Hasidei Ashkenaz) Sefer ha-Hasidim

January 10: Judaism in the Modern World, Part 1
- Modernity in the West and East
- Religious Reform, Antisemitism, and Nationalism

Scheindlin, 123-78

January 14: Judaism in the Modern World, Part 2
- Jewish Movements and Migrations
- Visit to the Center for Jewish History (15 W 16th St)

Scheindlin, 199-234
Primary Sources: (1) A Zionist's Proposal to Make Salonica an International City [1912–1913]; (2) In Praise of Intercommunal Cooperation: A "Rothschild of the East" on Progress and Tolerance (1874); (3) A Socialist Manifesto in Ladino (1911); (4) A Socialist Resolution on the Jewish Question (1917); (5) Leon Pinsker, Auto-Emancipation (1882); (6) Theodor Herzl, A Solution of the Jewish Question (1896); (7) Decisions on the Nationality Questions (1899, 1901, 1905, 1910), the Bund

January 16: Jewish Thought and Culture
- The Varieties of Modern Judaism

Aaron Tapper, * Judaism*, 1-7, 140-67 (NYU Classes)
Primary Sources: Browse through the websites of the Union for Reform Judaism (urj.org); United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism (uscj.org); Orthodox Union (ou.org); Jewish Reconstructionist Movement (http://jrf.org/); Alliance for Jewish Renewal (aleph.org); Women of the Wall (womenofthewall.org.il); Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (jfrej.org/); browse through the websites of The Jewish Community Center of Manhattan (www.jccmanhattan.org); Tablet Magazine (http://www.tabletmag.com); Workman’s Circle (https://circle.org); find a “Jewish” group on Facebook;

January 17: Spaces
- Body, Home, Community
- Visit to the Jewish Museum (1109 5th Ave @ 92nd St)

January 21: No Class (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

January 23: Ritual and Time
• Jewish Prayer and Worship
• The Jewish Life Cycle
• Visit to the second cemetery (1805-29) of the Spanish and Portuguese Community (76 W 11th St)

Primary Sources: (1) Selections of Traditional Prayer: the Shemah and the Morning Amidah; (2) On prayer in Hasidic Judaism; (3) watch a Bar or Bat Mitzvah and Jewish wedding video on YouTube; (4) browse the website of the Hebrew Free Burial Association https://www.hebrewfreeburial.org; (5) “Cemeteries of Congregation Shearith Israel” http://www.sephardicstudies.org/csi11.html

January 24: The Jewish Experience in Perspective

• Visit to the Lower East Side and Eldridge Street Synagogue (12 Eldridge St)

Film: “Hester Street” (1975)