

**Save this syllabus! You will need the information, topics and journal assignments until the end of course.**

**Rabbi Sabine Meyer, Ph.D.**, Director, Introduction to Judaism-West [smeyer@urj.org](mailto:smeyer@urj.org)

**Course hosted by: Congregation Beth Israel**

10460 N 56<sup>th</sup> Street  
Scottsdale, AZ 85253

**Time: Tuesdays, 7-9 PM PLEASE COME ON TIME!**

**Instructor: Rabbi Sara Mason-Barkin** [rabbimasonbarkin@cbiaz.org](mailto:rabbimasonbarkin@cbiaz.org)

Date	Class Topic
1. Oct 9	<p><b>BEGINNINGS – THE JEWISH CALENDAR <b>SMB</b></b>  <b>SHABBAT I</b>            Orientation            The Jewish sense of time and the role of Shabbat            The concept of holiness in Judaism            Home blessings  <i>Parashat haShavuah</i> (the weekly Torah portion)  <b>Reading:</b> <i>SOS</i> 79-85; 124-36; <i>LJL</i> 26-60; 141-49; <i>TEN</i>, 3-8; 37-46  <b>Journal:</b> Write a personal statement about where you are in your religious life now.</p>
2. Oct 16	<p><b>ROSH HASHANAH <b>SMB</b></b>            Creation, Sin, Repentance (<i>teshuvah</i>)            Jewish New Year and creation of the world            Different concepts of sin and salvation in Judaism and Christianity  <b>Reading:</b> <i>SOS</i> 137- 44; <i>LJL</i> 152-63; <i>TEN</i>, 47-56  <b>Journal:</b> In looking over the past year, what are aspects of your life you would like to change? What are the obstacles? How can Judaism help you achieve your goals?</p>
3. Oct 23	<p><b>YOM KIPPUR <b>SMB</b></b>            Forgiveness and communal responsibility for transgressions            Yizkor (memorial for the dead)  <b>Reading:</b> <i>SOS</i> 144-52; <i>TANAKH</i>: Jonah  <b>Journal:</b> What does it take to really let go of a hurt and forgive someone? Do you need to forgive yourself? Are there people from whom you need to ask forgiveness? How can Judaism help you work toward making changes in your life?</p>

**Homework:** Please read the assigned passages in *Settings of Silver SOS*, *Living a Jewish Life (LJL)* and *Judaism's 10 Best Ideas (TEN)* each week prior to attending class.

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4. Oct 30      **SUKKOT and SIMCHAT TORAH and Jewish Texts**    **SMB**  
 Permanence and fragility  
 Simchat Torah and the centrality of Torah in Jewish life  
*Ushpizin* (Guests) - Notable Jews from Abraham to Wiesel  
 Ecclesiastes/Kohelet  
**Reading:** **SOS** 15-36; 172-75; **LJL** 71-81; 164-70; **TEN**, 57-63; TANAKH: Ecclesiastes  
*Jewish Study Bible* (optional): chapters on Classical Rabbinic Interpretation through  
 Modern Jewish Interpretation and Modern Study of the Bible  
**Journal:** *What does it mean to say that the Torah is sacred? In what way does our  
 Jewish identity as the People of the Book affect the way we act in the world?*
5. Nov 6      **LIFECYCLE I: Birth, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, Lifelong Learning**    **SMB**  
 God's covenant with the Jewish people.  
 Entering into the covenant at birth: berit milah and baby naming  
 The concept of *mitzvot* - obligations, commandments or commitments?  
 The role of Torah, Jewish education and lifelong learning  
**Reading:** **SOS** 53-56; 85-87; **LJL** 211-33; **TEN**, 65-74  
*Jewish Study Bible* (optional): chapters on Classical Rabbinic Interpretation through  
 Modern Jewish Interpretation and Modern Study of the Bible  
**Journal:** *A child born to Jewish parents enters the covenant with a ceremony of  
 welcome. What kinds of welcome do you want or need to begin/continue your  
 journey in Judaism?*
6. Nov 13      **HISTORY I: From the Bible to the Roman Empire; the Role of Jerusalem**    **NB**  
**Reading:** **SOS** 10-14; 185-220; **LJL** 98-99; Timeline 279-83  
 Interactive timeline <http://www.odveda.com/en/>  
**Journal:** *Discuss three ideas/facts from this week's reading that you found most  
 interesting/surprising/disturbing.*
7. Nov 27      **CHANUKAH**    **SMB**  
 Jewish identity and assimilation  
 Hellenism and its role in the Chanukah story  
 December Dilemma  
**Reading:** **SOS** 175-78; **LJL** 171-77  
**Journal:** *What is the message of Chanukah for you and how can you communicate it in a  
 non-Jewish world?*
8. Dec 4      **LIFE CYCLE II: Marriage, Family, Jewish Home**    **SMB**  
 The Jewish Wedding Ceremony  
 Commitment Ceremonies  
 Establishing a Jewish home; Kashrut  
**Reading:** **SOS** 89-98; **LJL** 234-48; 82-92 (continued on next page)
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*Journal: Kiddushin is the Hebrew term for wedding. What makes a relationship “sacred?” In what ways can you enhance the holiness of your relationship?*

9. Dec 11      **LIFE CYCLE III: Death, Mourning, Afterlife and Ethical Wills SK**  
*Reading: SOS 93-6; 110-16; LJL 255-67; TEN, 75-84*  
*Journal: How would you like to be remembered?*

**Winter Break**

10. Jan 8      **SHABBAT II: Prayer SE**  
 Prayer as experienced particularly during Shabbat  
 Synagogue worship and home blessings; the prayers in the service  
*Reading: SOS 99-109; LJL 61-70; TEN, 85-92; A Day Apart or Gates of Shabbat (peruse)*  
*Journal: How might you observe Shabbat in a meaningful way? Think of two things you might want to do.*

**January 12      SHABBATON/Learner’s service**

11. Jan 15      **HISTORY II: Jewish Communities under Different Rulers: Expulsion from Spain to the Holocaust, Yom Ha-Shoa (Holocaust Remembrance Day) NB**  
*Reading: SOS 233-51; 252-86; 358-79*  
*Journal: What values do you glean from studying the Holocaust?*

12. Jan 22      **PEOPLEHOOD (2<sup>nd</sup> hour facilitated by Ginny Keller) OR Conversion Panel - SMB**  
*Reading: SOS 3-9; 53-75; 133-35; 407-27; 434-39; LJL 93-99; TEN, 19-27*  
*Journal: Watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED Talk, “The Danger of Single Story.”*  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en)  
*At the half-way point of this course, take some time to reflect: Is there a “single story” of Judaism that we tend to embrace? Did you have your own “single story” about Judaism? What was it? How have your assumptions been challenged during the last few weeks?*

13. Jan 29      **CONVERSION (GERUT) SMB**  
*Reading: SOS 87-89; LJL 249-54*  
*Journal: What does it mean to be part of a (religious) community? What seem to be the important reasons for converting to Judaism? What Hebrew name might you choose, and why*

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14. Feb 5      **PURIM and Anti-Judaism in the Ancient World NB**  
 Reversals, Subversion and Celebration  
 Anti-Judaism through the lens of Purim  
**Reading:** SOS 178-81; LJL 182-85  
**Journal:** *For what would you be willing to risk your life? Considering the realities of history, what would be reasons for parents wanting to raise Jewish children?*

**EXAM REVIEW: EXAM QUESTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED DURING THIS CLASS FOR STUDENTS TO COMPLETE AT HOME.**

The completed answers should be returned to the instructor at the last class session of the course, unless you make an alternative arrangement.

15. Feb 12      **JEWISH THEOLOGY: Different Views of God SMB**  
 The role of faith in Judaism  
 The Messiah (Moshiach)  
**Reading:** SOS 37-52; 116-23; TEN, 9-17; 29-35; Sonsino. *Finding God* (entire book)  
**Journal:** *Which idea of God resonates most with you? Why? How does it compare with the view of God with which you grew up?*
16. Feb 19      **PASSOVER and Model Seder SMB & SE**  
**Please bring your Haggadah and seder supplies!**  
 Exodus – Redemption – Memory  
**Reading:** SOS 153-84; LJL 186-200  
**Journal:** *What is Pesach about? How do you understand liberation? Why do Jews emphasize the Seder ritual?*
17. Feb 26      **HISTORY III: Israel and Zionism, Yom Ha-Atzma'ut (Israel Independence Day) SK**  
**Reading:** SOS 133-35; 182; 380-406; LJL 201-4  
**Journal:** *What does Israel mean to you? How would you like to live or visit there?*
18. Mar 4      **SHAVUOT- Revelation and REFORM JUDAISM in America SMB**  
 Revelation and The Ten Commandments  
 The Reform Platforms of 1885 and 1999  
 Jewish Denominations  
**Reading:** SOS 170-72; 336-57; LJL 205-8; 99-104; TANAKH: *The Book of Ruth*; Principles of Reform Judaism from 1885 (Pittsburgh Platform) and 1999 (Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism) at <http://ccarnet.org/documentsandpositions/platforms>

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*Journal: How do you respond to the 1999 principles? Which of the 1999 principles resonate most with you?*

**FINAL EXAMS DUE!**

**Notices to all Students of URJ Introduction to Judaism**

An official ***Certificate of Completion*** will be issued by the URJ Introduction to Judaism program to every student who completes all the course requirements upon request. This certificate is worth having and saving. A Bet Din for conversion generally requires the certificate.

**Course Requirements**

- 1) A Saturday morning learners' service (***Shabbaton***) will be offered on January 12 (appr. 9:30 AM–2 PM). Attendance at one Shabbaton is a course requirement.
- 2) Attendance at three Shabbat services (at different synagogues) is also required. Please write up a paragraph about your experience for your instructor for each service attended.
- 3) Attendance at all 18 class sessions: You can make up missed classes during the following semester(s) or another URJ course location. Check the URJ website at <https://reformjudaism.org/IntroAZ> for start dates/locations. Please make sure you sign in on the attendance sheet to get credit. Students have three years from the original sign-up date to complete their coursework.

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## **Required Books**

Diamant, Anita. [\*Living a Jewish Life\*](#) (Updated and Rev. Edition) HarperCollins, 2007. \$16.99  
Green, Arthur. [\*Judaism's 10 Best Ideas\*](#). Jewish Lights, 2014. \$9.95  
Silberman, Shoshana. [\*A Family Haqqadah\*](#). Kar-Ben, 2011. \$4.95  
Sonsino, Rifat and Syme, Daniel. [\*Finding God: Selected Responses\*](#). Behrman/URJ Press, 2002.  
Wylen, Stephen. [\*Settings of Silver\*](#). Paulist Press, 2000. \$29.95

A Jewish Bible (Tanakh) (JPS English translation) will be used in the class.

[\*The Jewish Study Bible\*](#), Oxford University Press, 2004 or 2014. \$45.00

We also recommend you buy a guide for observing Shabbat.

Zion/Fields-Meyer. [\*A Day Apart: Shabbat at Home\*](#). Shalom Hartman Institute, 2004. \$24.95  
or Mark Shapiro. [\*Gates of Shabbat\*](#). CCAR Press, (rev. ed.) 2016. \$18.95

Books are available (new and used or e-books) online at [Amazon](#)

Please make sure you buy the most recent edition of the books.

## **Optional**

Diamant, Anita. [\*Choosing a Jewish Life\*](#). Schocken, (rev. ed.) 2016. \$14.95 - Highly recommended for participants interested in conversion

Lieberman/Person eds. [\*Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity\*](#). CCAR Press, 2017. \$32 -  
A reader recommended for participants interested in Reform sources about Judaism's wisdom, practices, customs and beliefs.

Scheindlin, Raymond. [\*A Short History of the Jewish People\*](#). Oxford University Press, 1998.  
\$17.95 - Recommended for participants interested in academic history on the subject.

Syme, Daniel. [\*The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living\*](#). Behrman House, 2017. \$16.95 -  
Recommended for participants looking for a clear and comprehensive introduction to Jewish holidays and life-cycle events.

Waskow, Arthur. [\*Seasons of Joy\*](#). Jewish Lights, 2012. \$18.95 - Recommended for participants interested in exploring both the basics and the deeper meaning of the Jewish holidays.

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