

Dear Students,

Welcome to the 2027 cycle of the **Introduction to Judaism** program at Temple Emanuel and Congregation Beth Israel at the Tri-City Jewish Center at Beit Shalom. We are using an adapted/expanded version of the URJ's introduction to Judaism curriculum.

The Introduction to Judaism program lasts approximately a year and is held weekly on **Wednesday evenings (6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.) in-person, at Beit Shalom starting Jan 12, 2027-Sep 15 2027** (with a month break in July).

Our Wednesday evening schedule will typically look like:

6:00pm-6:15pm Mincha and/or Ma'ariv (depending on the time of year)

6:20pm-6:50pm Hebrew Decoding/Literacy B'Chevruta (tied to the syllabus when possible)

6:50pm-7pm Break

7:00pm-8:00pm Shiur/Class on Weekly Topic

As the rabbi of Temple Emanuel and the Congregation Beth Israel, I look forward to teaching you as well as learning from you! This course will provide an introduction to the core ideas, tenets, rituals, practices, cultures, philosophy and history of Judaism to adult learners. The course is open to anyone who wants to learn about and deepen their understanding of Judaism and is geared towards three categories of learners:

1. **Adult learners who are already Jewish** (or to put it in more technical terminology: 'who already have acquired Jewish status') and who may or may not be a member of our congregations. To this group of learners, the course may provide a deepening of a pre-existing connection to Judaism and strengthen Jewish identity, knowledge and practice.
2. **Adult learners who are not Jewish but 'Jew-curious'**. They may have no desire to convert (because of a religious and cultural identification of their own) but are interested in joining a structured class to learn more about Judaism.
3. **Adult learners who are exploring the possibility of conversion to Judaism** (in more technical terms 'acquire Jewish status'). While eligibility for conversion is contingent on completing the course, *completing the course itself does not guarantee eligibility for conversion.*

For all students of the class, we hope to create a supportive, inclusive environment that will allow you to find joy in your Judaism and Reform/Conservative Jewish practice. Reform or the Conservative Movement. In reality, the Beit Din convened in the state of Iowa is a Reform Beit Din, but this does not need to impact those who seek to learn Conservative Judaism, accept its practices and adhere to its conversion standards.

Communal Norms

Kavod (Respect) Respect for yourself and others by not sharing about anyone's individual experiences outside of the classroom without explicit permission.

Betzelem Elohim (Divine image) We're all made in the divine image and do our best to honor that truth by listening with care and curiosity to one another.

Shmirat Ha'Lashon (Awareness of language) Guarding the use of language by using "I" statements and not assuming others' practices or beliefs. We have a diverse learning community and everyone is coming from different places, stories, and contexts.

Anavah (Humility and awareness of airtime/ space taken) Paying attention to how much you're sharing and whether you can open up holy space for others to share as well. Jewish thinker Alan Morinis describes this as "No more than my space, not less than my place," challenging learners to be aware of when it is appropriate to share and when it is appropriate to make sure others have the same kinds of opportunities.

Temicha (Support) Support is always available to you. Please feel free to reach out if you feel like you've been missed, hurt, or have tender feelings come up over the course of our learning. We're here to support you and build a classroom community that cares for and is accountable to one another.

Yetzer haTov (Good inclination) Assume good intent both when we listen to people share, and when we receive feedback from others about the ways our language may have hurt them. We each will try our best to show up grounded from a place of care, and assume others are as well.

Required books (Please reach out if the cost is a burden, there are funds available):

- [*'Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur, transliterated*](#) (Reform Siddur/prayer book)
- [*Sim Shalom for Shabbat & Festivals*](#) (Conservative Siddur/prayer book)
- [*Etz Hayim: Torah & Commentary*](#) (Conservative Chumash/Torah & Haftarah)

Recommended Books:

- [*Jewish Publication Society Tanakh*](#) (Hebrew Bible)
- *Learn Hebrew Today: Alef-Bet for Adults* by Paul Michael Yedwab and Howard I. Bogot
- *Choosing Judaism*, by Lydia Kukoff (I have many copies to lend/gift in my office)
- *Diamant, Anita. Living a Jewish Life: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families, Revised and Updated Edition.* Harper Collins, 2007.

Shalom uv'rachah, with peace and blessing,

Rabbi David Magazine Malamud (rabbidmm@gmail.com)

For Adult Learners who are exploring the possibility of conversion to Judaism:

It should be stressed that the Introduction to Judaism program does **not** automatically lead to conversion. Any person is welcome to attend this course in a desire to learn more about Judaism after meeting with the rabbi and at the rabbi's discretion to admit an individual to the program. Those seeking to acquire Jewish status will be required to complete the course (and its requirements). When the rabbi considers the candidate ready to complete conversion, the candidate will be invited to appear before a *Beit Din* (rabbinic court) who will be the authority to convey Jewish status upon the individual after an interview, immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) for all genders and *milah* (circumcision) for cisgender men.

The requirements of the program are meant to invite the individual students into a process of formal learning, personal growth and communal integration, as well as a reimagining of one's personal Jewish identity. With this comes the recognition that conversion to Judaism is a joyful and transformative but also a potentially psychologically stressful experience. The rabbi is here – within the confines of his professional role – to offer support during this process. The rabbi encourages candidates to be in active, evidence-based therapy or counseling with a licensed mental health professional should it be necessary for the wellbeing of the student.

I hope that participants will find the course meaningful, transformative and enjoyable and draw them closer to God, Torah and the Jewish people. Conversion to Judaism is a sacred, covenantal and ethical process that nurtures, protects and honors the convert as well as the receiving community. It is a privilege and a joy for rabbis to work with conversion candidates specifically and all adult learners generally.

Requirements:

As with any program of learning, there are a few baseline requirements specified to a greater degree in this pack (mainly attendance of classes and worship services, adopting personal Jewish observance, social integration into community life, reading and one written assignment) with the understanding that there is flexibility with regards to personal needs and circumstances. If an issue or question comes up, please do not hesitate to speak to the rabbi and find a creative solution.

Conversion candidates will have a choice whether they wish to convert through the Class requirements (for those seeking conversion):

- Regular attendance of classes is mandatory (contact the rabbi in advance if you cannot make it). *You are allowed to miss no more than 20% of classes.* The expectation is that the student tracks the missing sessions and works out a 'catch up'

arrangement with the rabbi. If you have extenuating circumstances, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

- Regular attendance of Friday night and/or Saturday morning services, *defined as a minimum of two Friday night and/or Saturday morning a month as well as High Holy Day services, a home or the communal Passover Seder and Shavu'ot, Sukkot and Chanukkah and Purim events.*
- Regular (defined as monthly or more frequent) consultations with an evidence-based mental health practitioner/social worker. Conversion is a major life step and it is imperative that candidates care for their mental health in this time of transition and growth. Pastoral care with a rabbi can only cover so much.
- Commitment to involve oneself in community life and learning
- Development of a personal observance of Shabbat, kashrut (dietary laws) and prayer in line with Reform/Conservative Jewish standards
- Suggested reading list: will be provided
- End Paper: an end paper (3000 words as flexible guideline) on a topic of your choice OR a description of your 'Jewish journey' should be submitted in advance of the Beit Din appearance
- Hebrew literacy: a Hebrew literacy course (teaching you how to read the Hebrew alphabet) will be offered alongside the class
- Journaling: it is recommended that you journal your growth and development into Judaism on a weekly basis.