



**Rel 210: Introduction to Judaism & Jewish Tradition  
Centre College Fall 2017**

Prof. Shayna Sheinfeld  
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Phone ext. 5258  
Course day/time:  
MWF 10:20–11:20  
Location: SUTC 329

Office: Crouse 438  
Office hours:  
Monday 1:30–3:30  
Tues/Thur 2:20–3:30  
Wednesday 1:00–2:00  
And by appointment

**Course Description:**

Judaism is a dynamic religious tradition that has developed many forms during a more than 3000-year history that has spanned nearly the entire globe. In an effort to understand the ways in which Jews have lived their lives, we will explore how Jewish self-identity, textual traditions, and religious practices combine to define “Jew” and “Judaism” from its inception until today.

This course will be divided into three main sections: 1) Historical Framework, 2) Beliefs & Practices, and 3) Topics in Judaism & Jewish Studies. In studying the traditions, we will examine textual evidence, theological tracts, and more personal accounts of what it is to *be* Jewish and to *practice* Judaism. We will end the course taking a step back into the academic study of Judaism by examining the history and use of the term “Jew” in order to think about how terminology may affect our academic approach to the tradition.

**Required Texts:**

NOTE: Electronic versions are discouraged as you will not be able to access them in the classroom.

- *Introducing Judaism*, Eliezer Segal (ISBN: 978-0415440097)
- *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals*, George Robinson (ISBN: 978-1501117756)

- *Surprised by God: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love Religion*, by Danya Ruttenberg (ISBN: 978-0807010693)
- *Jew*, Cynthia Baker (ISBN: 978-0813563022)
- Other texts available on Moodle.

### **Course Expectations:**

- This course will be a mixture of interactive lecture, discussion, and in-class active learning. You are expected to actively engage in all aspects of the class.
- Readings are listed in the course schedule according to the date they will be discussed. Be sure to **read and annotate** the assigned reading **before coming to class** and bring copies of the readings to class for reference.
- My expectation is that you will spend **at least two hours** preparing for each hour that you are in class. Look ahead at your readings, as some readings will take more time than others.
- Electronic Devices: Laptops, tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices are **NOT** allowed and must be silenced and stored out of easy reach during class, unless we have planned otherwise.

### **Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course, a diligent student will be able to:

1. describe central Jewish beliefs, holidays, and life cycle events
2. recognize the diversity of the thought and practice of the Jewish people over time
3. identify, read, and critically engage with Jewish texts and Jewish interpretive tradition
4. identify central ideas and practices which persist throughout the history of Judaism
5. analyze some arguments in a central issue in the field of the academic study of Judaism
6. observe Judaism as a lived religious tradition

### **Assessment:**

Attendance & Active Participation	10%
Thinking Pieces (10 x 1% each)	10%
Papers (3 x 10%)	30%
Tests (2 x 15%)	30%
Final Project/Paper	20%

Nb. Numbers below correlate to which course object above the assessment, if done successfully, meets.

**Attendance and Active Participation:** Attendance and *enthusiastic participation* are a necessary component of learning in this course. You are expected to attend each class session. You may miss up to 3 classes without penalty, but you will be responsible for the material and readings covered. Four or more missed classes unless excused (with missed work completed) will result in a letter grade reduction in the final grade. Participation will be marked on active engagement during class, including clear engagement with the readings, asking and responding to questions, in-and out-of-class writing, and participating in discussions. *You will also be asked to engage in chavruta study.\** #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

**\*Chavruta** (meaning “fellowship”) is a traditional rabbinic approach to studying texts—arising out of the idea that studying a text together promotes the best kind of learning, where readers can work with a partner to independently learn, discuss, and debate. In class we will engage in chavruta to discuss and analyze the readings.

There are **two required convocations** as part of this class. Please mark them in your calendars early and plan accordingly:

10/16, 7:30pm Weisiger Theatre: Interfaith Dialogue Panel

11/14, 7:00pm Weisiger Theatre: Reckoning with Anti-Semitism Today

### **Thinking Pieces:**

As part of your homework on many class days, you will be asked to produce an informal, one-page, single-spaced, *legible* (typed is encouraged) exploratory response to a specific text. Bring these “thinking pieces” to class, where they will be collected (as noted in the syllabus schedule). Each thinking piece is worth up to 1 point (1% of the final grade—but they add up!); partial credit may be given. To receive full marks on a thinking piece, it must address the assigned text/question, show that you have done the required reading, reveal interesting, engaged thinking, and be at least one *single-spaced* page long. Questions will be posted on Moodle. Thinking pieces will not be graded based on grammar/spelling—they are meant to show your engagement with the text, not with *knowing the right answer*. No late thinking pieces accepted (if you have to miss class *for an excused absence* you can email your thinking piece to me ahead of time; this is the only time electronic submission for Thinking Pieces is acceptable). #1, 2, 3

Would you like to understand why I assign thinking pieces? See my brief, co-written article on them here: [“Students think better with Thinking Pieces.”](#)

### **Short Papers:**

In addition to regular low-stakes writing, you will write three papers this term on the ideas and experiences within Judaism, due on the date listed in course schedule.

**Paper #1: Synagogue Visitation Reflection:** At some point during the semester you will observe at least one synagogue service. There will be numerous opportunities to go; dates/times will be posted to Moodle. This paper will be a reflection of your observations. Papers (hard copy & Moodle submission) may be **turned in any time between September 28 and November 13**. More information/instructions will be posted on Moodle. #1, 6

**Paper #2: Shifting Ideas paper:** Select a major belief in Judaism and describe, using a close textual reading of multiple sources, how the belief has (or has not) shifted throughout history. Paper should be 4–5 pages. Further details will be announced in class/posted to Moodle. Due 10/2. #1, 2, 3, 4

**Paper #3: Book Review:** You will write an approximately 1000-word book review on the book *Jew* by Cynthia Baker. The review should (1) summarize the arguments in the book as

well as provide (2) critique and (3) praise. Further details will be announced in class/posted on Moodle. Due 12/1. #5

**Tests:** Tests will cover specialized terminology and main points/ideas from the lectures (including any multi-media) and readings. Tests will be given in class. Make-up tests are only allowed for *excused* absences. Test #1: 9/20. Test #2: 10/30. #1, 2, 3, 4

**Final Project/Paper: “The Unessay”:** This final project will be on a topic/question of your choice about Judaism. You will be encouraged to present this topic/question creatively. Final projects/papers will be due during the final exam period at Centre: Thursday, 7 December 8:30–11:30am. More details will be discussed in class & available on Moodle. Potential for any #1–6, depending on topic and medium selected.

**Additional Information:**

**Late Policy:** All assignments are due by the start of class on the date specified on the syllabus unless otherwise noted. Assignments may be turned in up to two days late; late assignments may have up to one letter grade subtracted (A- becomes B+) for each day late. If you think you will be more than two days late with an assignment, *you must make an appointment with me ahead of time* in order to discuss the situation, otherwise **assignments more than 2 days late will not be accepted.**

**Grading:** All assignments will be graded within 2 weeks of being submitted. If there is ever extenuating circumstances that may affect this deadline, I will be upfront about it with you during our class.

**Communication:** I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week, and within 36 hours on weekends or breaks. If there is an impending deadline, I will attempt to respond as soon as possible. I encourage you to take advantage of office hours; if you can’t come during office hours, send an email to arrange a meeting. Please use proper language and grammar as well as courtesy in your emails; I may choose to not respond to curt or rude emails. *Check the syllabus for your answer before emailing, please!*

**Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a serious issue.** Students are required to observe the honor code. Plagiarism—any attempt by a student to represent the work of another as one’s own—will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, all of the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or substantially restating the work of another person or persons in any oral or written work without citing the appropriate source, and collaboration with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging their contribution. All instances of plagiarism will be dealt with according to university policy, *no matter how minor.*

**I am committed to making our classroom an inclusive and supportive learning environment for people of all ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.**

**Learning Challenges:** Students who may need additional assistance due to learning differences or challenges are expected to see me during the first two weeks of the semester. I am willing to make accommodations whenever possible, but only if proper documentation has been provided *and you see me in advance.* If you think you need accommodations but are not certain how to find them, I can assist you by helping you reach the College’s coordinators for disabilities, Dr. Mary Gulley (x5223), who will prepare a signed Accommodation Notice. Note that in any course the instructor must sign

the back of the Accommodation Notice before any necessary accommodations can take effect.

## Course Schedule

### Mon 8/28: Introduction

Wed 8/30: What is Judaism?

Reading: Segal 1–7; Tapper 1–7 (Moodle)

**Thinking Piece Due.** Using your response in class on Monday and your readings, respond to the question “What is Judaism?” Remember that thinking pieces are a place to *think* not to get the “right” answer.

## Part I: Historical Framework

### Fri 9/1: Biblical Foundations

Reading: Segal, chapter 1; Selection from Tanakh (Moodle); Skim Robinson 263–314 for an idea of what is found in Tanakh

### Mon 9/4: Second Temple Judaism

Reading: Segal, chapter 2; Josephus, 2 Maccabees, Letter of Aristeas (Moodle)

### Wed 9/6: Rabbinic Judaism I

Reading: Segal, chapter 3; Robinson 333–342, 348–351; Oven of Aknai; Mishnah and Talmud excerpts (Moodle)

### Fri 9/8: Rabbinic Judaism II

Reading: Robinson 355–356, 358–364; Midrash selection (Moodle)

### Thinking Piece Due

### Mon 9/11: Medieval Judaism

Reading: Segal chapters 4 & 5; Segal p. 207–209; Robinson 419–424 (primary sources; pay special attention to the 13 Principles of Faith)

### Wed 9/13: Jewish Mysticism

Reading: Segal chapters 6 & 12; skim Robinson 365–392

### Fri 9/15: Contemporary Judaism

Reading: Segal chapter 7; Be sure to bring Robinson to class, where we will focus on some of the documents from pages 525–555

### Thinking Piece Due

### Mon 9/18: Thinking about the Holocaust

Reading: Segal chapter 14; additional reading TBA  
*Guest Speaker: Dr. Alana Vincent, University of Chester*

### Wed 9/20: Test #1

**Fri 9/22: No Class (Rosh Hashana)**

**Part II: Beliefs and Practices**

**Mon 9/25: God**

Reading: Segal, chapters 8 & 9

**Wed 9/27: Messianism, Death, and Life After Death**

Reading: Segal 163–173; Segal chapter 11; Robinson 187–197

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Fri 9/29: Turning Towards God; Tikkun Olam**

Reading: Segal 285–288; Robinson, 99–103, 246 (Tikkun Olam); Mishneh Torah: On Teshuvah (Moodle)

**Mon 10/2: Zionism and the State of Israel**

Reading: Segal 173–178; Robinson 556–559 (pay special attention to these primary sources)

**Paper Due 10/3: 11:55pm (Moodle): Shifting Ideas**

**Wed 10/4: The Sacred Calendar: An Overview**

Reading: Segal, chapter 18

**Fri 10/6: Sacred Time; Shabbat**

Reading: Robinson 79–93, Heschel *The Sabbath* excerpt (Moodle)

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Mon 10/9: The High Holy Days, Sukkot, Simchat Torah**

Reading: Robinson 94–113;

**Field trip to a Sukkah**

**Wed 10/11: Passover & Shavuot**

Reading: Robinson 120–130; Excerpts from the Haggadah (Moodle)

**Fall Break: October 12–15**

**Mon 10/16: Minor Holidays & Fast Days**

Reading: Robinson 114–120, 132–139

**Wed 10/18 Oct 18: Synagogue & Prayer**

Reading: Robinson 9–53; Primary Source Selection from the prayerbook (Moodle)

**Fri 10/20: Keeping Kosher**

Reading: Segal 269–277; Robinson 254–261

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Mon 10/23: Lifecycles; Who is a Jew**

Reading: Robinson 141–187; Intermarriage in Conservative Judaism (Moodle)

**Wed 10/25: Jewish Household; Taharat Hamishpacha**

Reading: Segal 258–265; Robinson 246–250; “In defense of the ‘Daughters of Israel’: Observations on Niddah and Mikveh” (Moodle)

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Fri 10/27: Q & A with a Rabbi**

Guest Speaker: Rabbi Moshe Smolkin of Ohavay Zion Synagogue, Lexington KY. Come to class prepared with questions.

**Mon 10/30: Test #2**

**Part III: Topics in Judaism & Jewish Studies**

**Wed 11/1: Women, & Judaism**

Reading:

Segal 259–265; “Halachot of Hair” (Moodle)

Watch (outside of class): Women Unchained (on reserve)\*

**Fri 11/3: LGBTQ+ and/in Judaism**

**Reading:** “What does Judaism say about LGBT People?” (Moodle); “Come to the Bimah and Read from the Torah! But First, What’s your preferred gender pronoun?” (Moodle); “A Camp tries to Reinvent the Hebrew Language, so transgender kids can fit in” (Moodle)

Watch (outside of class): Trembling before G-d (on reserve)\*

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Mon 11/6: Hasidim in American**

Watch (outside of class): A Life Apart: Hasidism in America (on reserve)\*

*\*We will attempt to arrange a viewing time for the class to view this together; the DVD will also be on reserve.*

**Wed 11/8: One first-hand perspective: Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg**

Reading: Ruttenberg, Introduction & chapters 1–3

Nb. If you use twitter, I encourage you to tweet your reading/comments of the book. The author, Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg is active on twitter (@TheRaDR); please consider tagging her.

**Fri Nov 10: First-hand perspective, cont.**

Reading: Ruttenberg, chapters 4–5

**Mon 11/13: first-hand perspective, cont.**

Reading: Ruttenberg, *finish*

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Due 11/13: Last day to turn in a Synagogue Visitation Reflection (Moodle & hard copy submission)**

**Tues 11/14: Required Convocation:**

“Reckoning with Anti-Semitism Today.” Prof. J. Judaken, Rhodes College, 7pm, Weisiger Theatre

**Wed 11/15: Anti-Semitism**

Guest speaker: Prof. Jonathan Judaken

Reading: TBA

**Fri 11/17 Nov 17: Reclaiming “Jew”**

Reading: Op-Ed by Mark Oppenheimer “Reclaiming ‘Jew’”; Listen to Unorthodox podcast episode:

“On the [Jew] Media” (Both linked on Moodle)

**Thinking Piece Due**

**Mon 11/20: No class; Society of Biblical Literature Annual Conference**

**Due (Moodle): Final Project Description**

**Thanksgiving Break: 11/22–11/26**

**Mon 11/27: Academic Study of Judaism: Constructing “Jew”**

Reading: Baker, Introduction & chapter 1

**Wed 11/29: Cont. “Jew”**

Reading: Baker, chapter 2

**Fri 12/1: Siyum & Conclusion**

Reading: Baker, chapter 3

**Due 12/1 (Moodle) 11:55pm: Book Review on Baker *Jew***

**Final Project Due during final exam period: Thursday, 7 December 8:30–11:30am**

A 93-100 A- 90-92	Excellent work; clear and concise thesis; an original and well-supported argument with evidence from the text. Clean and proofread text, a paper where the reader encounters few mistakes and learns a good deal about your topic.
B+ 88-89 B 83-87 B- 80-82	Very good work. A clear thesis with well-written evidentiary support containing a well-thought argument. Clear and logical structure. Few errors in grammar/spelling/punctuation.
C+ 78-79 C 73-77 C- 70-72	Above to average work. An identifiable thesis with some evidentiary support. Thesis may not be strong; supporting arguments are lacking, poorly organized and/or do not support the thesis.
D 60-69	Barely acceptable work. Scattered prose with no clear thesis or directional argument. Less than clear prose.
U 0-59	Unacceptable. No argument or direction and lack of clear use or knowledge of the text. Poor writing and grammar.