



NOW OFFERED ONLINE

EXPLORING JUDAISM

is an engaging multi-session course for anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of Jewish life. Discover what could be meaningful to you in Liberal Judaism.

All people, perspectives, and questions are welcome!

**New Course
starts
7 September
2024**

THE ARK
SYNAGOGUE





What to Expect from Exploring Judaism

Welcome to Exploring Judaism! We hope this course will be an exciting and rewarding experience. We aim to create an engaging, curious, and supportive community where all questions of both the heart and mind are honoured and welcomed.

Exploring Judaism is an engaging multi-session course for anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of Jewish life through a Liberal Jewish lens. Open to all, this course is designed for individuals and couples from various faith traditions and cultural backgrounds and those who have had no religious upbringing. The course is perfect for interfaith couples, those raising Jewish children, spiritual seekers, individuals considering conversion, and Jews who want a meaningful adult Jewish learning experience.

Exploring Judaism is not a university lecture course nor is it a class in comparative religion. We ask that you engage with the material -- to "do" as well as "learn." We hope that you will take the opportunity to experience Jewish worship, visit Jewish places, read Jewish books, celebrate Jewish holidays and life cycle events, sample Jewish recipes, and sing Jewish melodies.

Your Teachers

The course is taught by the rabbis of The Ark Synagogue, each of whom is delighted to be a resource for your exploration of Judaism and to assist you with next steps into the Jewish community after the course ends.

Classes normally take place on the first Saturday of the month (on occasions this changes to accommodate Jewish festivals) between 1 and 3:30pm. Please see the course overview on the next pages for course dates and topics.

Course Books

We ask that all students buy the following two books:

- **LJ** – Tobias, Pete. *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century*, Liberal Judaism, 2013. (costs £9.99)
- **HTEM** –Lieberman, Beth and Hara Person, eds. *Honoring Tradition, Embracing Modernity: A Reader for the Union for Reform Judaism's Introduction to Judaism Course*, CCAR Press, 2017. [Purchase here](#). (the pdf version currently costs \$28)

These books have been carefully selected to enhance your exploration and study of Judaism during the course. We anticipate that you will want to return to these books many times in the years ahead. For ideas of additional books and resources to explore see the end of this booklet.



Prepare for Each Session

Please make every effort to complete each “Prepare for the Session” assignment. Plan to spend 60-90 minutes on preparation between sessions. You don’t have to do this all in one go and might want to spread it across the month. The readings, web links, and/or videos have been chosen to help you get the most from the course. The additional resources listed will help you dig deeper into each topic that we cover in class.

Invite your partner to join you!

Students who are in committed relationships are encouraged to invite their partner to take the course with them. Learning together strengthens relationships and learning about Judaism together can help you have meaningful and important conversations about your shared household, family, and future.

Connect with the Rabbis

We encourage all participants to build a strong relationship with the rabbis. Those students who are exploring conversion to Judaism should make sure to regularly arrange meetings with one of the rabbis for further study and guidance along the journey.

Worship Opportunities and Communal Events

We hope that you will attend Shabbat services, experience Jewish holidays, and explore events at our congregation and in the wider Jewish community. Please make every effort to immerse yourself in Jewish life. Often members of the class continue to come together for Jewish worship, holiday, home and life-cycle celebrations after the course concludes.

Accessibility

We want Exploring Judaism to be accessible for all our class members. If you have any concerns (e.g. English is not your first language, trouble hearing, mobility concerns, etc.), please let us know so we can, confidentially accommodate you.

Please be in touch with any questions or concerns. We look forward to learning together!

Course Overview

Our Exploring Judaism course is based on the material from the Introduction to Judaism Course of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) in the US. The URJ has generously given us permission to use and adapt their curriculum, for which we are immensely grateful.

The course will cover five units, each covering 2-4 topics. On each course date, we will normally cover two topics. The units are:

- A. Jewish People, Beliefs and Sacred Texts
- B. Living A Jewish Life
- C. Living in Jewish Time
- D. The Jewish Story
- E. Choosing Judaism and Your Story

Session	Topic	Date
1	Introduction to the course	7 September 13:00-15:30
	A - What is Judaism? Who are the Jewish People?	
2	C - The Yamim Nora'im (High Holy Days): The Days of Awe	5 October 13:00-15:30
	C - The Three Pilgrim Festivals	
3	A - The People of the Book	2 November 13:00-15:30
	C - The Calendar and Shabbat	
4	A - Jewish Prayer and the Synagogue	7 December 13:00-15:30
	D - From Creation to the Enlightenment	
5	A - What Do Jews Believe?	4 January 2025 13:00-15:30
	C - Other Jewish Holidays	
6	B - Marriage, Partnership and More	1 February 13:00-15:30
	D - The British Jewish Experience	
7	B - Creating a Jewish Life and Home	1 March 13:00-15:30
	D - The Shoah (Holocaust)	
8	C - The Three Pilgrim Festivals: Pesach	5 April 13:00-15:30
	D - Israel and Zionism	



9	B - Raising the Next Generation	3 May 13:00-15:30
	E - Becoming Part of a Jewish Family and the Jewish People, Jewish Journeys	
10	B - End of Life, Death, and Mourning	7 June 13:00-15:30
	E - Next Steps and Being Part of the Jewish Community	
11	Time for additional unanswered questions (TBC)	5 July 13:00-15:30

Contacts

Rabbis

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein: 01923 822 592 (The Ark Office), 07764 192 696 (mobile), rabbiaaron@arksynagogue.org

Rabbi Lea Mühlstein (on sabbatical until January 2023): 01923 822 592 (The Ark Office), rabbilea@arksynagogue.org

The Ark Synagogue Administrative Assistant


Debbie Morris: 01923 822 592 (The Ark office), debbiem@arksynagogue.org





Additional Books for Your Library

1. Butnick, Stephanie, Liel Leibovitz and Mark Oppenheimer, *The Newish Jewish Encyclopedia: From Abraham to Zabar's and Everything in Between*, Tablet Magazine, 2019.
2. Citrin, Paul, ed. *Lights in the Forest: Rabbis Respond to Twelve Essential Jewish Questions*, New York: CCAR Press, 2014. An anthology of essays written by a wide cross-section of progressive rabbis, responding to a range of theological and philosophical questions.
3. Davids, Stanley M. and Lawrence A. Englander, eds. *The Fragile Dialogue: New Voices of Liberal Zionism*. New York: CCAR Press, 2018. This book wrestles with and attempts to frame the very fragile dialogue surrounding Zionism and Israel in the 21st century Progressive Jewish community and offers a multiplicity of views.
4. Diamant, Anita. *Living a Jewish Life: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families, Revised and Updated Edition*. Harper Collins, 2007.
5. Eskanazi, Tamara Cohn and Andrew L. Weiss, eds. *The Torah: A Women's' Commentary*. New York: CCAR Press, 2008. A groundbreaking volume, with downloadable companion study guides also available.
6. Forman, Sharon. *Honest Answers to Your Child's Jewish Questions*, URJ Press, 2006. (out-of-print but available through online used booksellers). Suggested responses for when your young child asks questions like, "What does God look like?" or "Why am I Jewish?"
7. Green, Arthur. *Judaism's Ten Best Ideas: A Brief Guide for Seekers*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2014. A collection of short essays on topics like Joy, Repairing the World, Getting off the Treadmill, and more.
8. Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1951. A classic work; republished many times.
9. Holtz, Barry W. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. Essays analyze the major traditional texts of Judaism from literary, historical, philosophical, and religious points of view.
10. Hurwitz, Sarah. *Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life – in Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)*, New York: Random House, 2019.
11. Kaplan, Dana Evan. *A Life of Meaning: Embracing Reform Judaism's Sacred Path*, New York: CCAR Press, 2018.
12. Klein-Halevi, Yossi. *Like Dreamers*. New York: Harpers, 2013. Traces the history of Israel and the divergent ideologies shaping it from the Six-Day War in 1967 to the present.
13. Knobel, Peter, ed. *Mishkan Moeid: A Guide to the Jewish Seasons*, New York: CCAR Press, 2013. Also available in a PDF electronic version. A survey of the sacred days of the Jewish yearly cycle.
14. Knobel, Peter, ed. *Navigating the Journey: The Essential Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle*, New York: CCAR Press, 2018. An introduction to the Jewish life cycle.
15. Mack, Stan. *The Story of the Jews: A 4,000-Year Adventure—A Graphic History Book*, Jewish Lights, 2001. A pictorial journey through the millennia of ups and downs faced by the Jewish people.
16. Olitzky, Kerry M. and Ronald H. Isaacs. *The Complete How-to Handbook for Jewish Living*. Ktav Publishing, 2004. How to practice Jewish rituals, presented in a step-by-step format.

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17. Person, Hara, ed. *Voices of Torah: A Treasury of Rabbinic Gleanings on the Weekly Portions, Holidays and Special Shabbatot*. New York: CCAR Press, 2012. Also available in a PDF electronic version. Multiple perspectives on every Torah portion, written by Reform rabbis.
 18. Plaut, W. Gunther, ed. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition*, New York: CCAR Press, 2005. Available as an e-book. Updated edition of North America's most popular Torah commentary.
 19. Pogrebin, Abigail. *My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew*, Fig Tree Books LLC, 2017. Jewish holidays through the eyes of a wondering Jew, with brief reflections from prominent rabbis and Jewish thinkers.
 20. Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Customs and Rituals*. Atria Paperback, 2016. Comprehensive guide to the religious traditions, everyday practices, philosophical beliefs, and historical foundations of Judaism.
 21. Sarason, Richard. *Divrei Mishkan T'filah: Delving into the Siddur*. New York; CCAR Press, 2018. Essays on the liturgy of the Reform prayer book. Also available as an e-book.
 22. Scheindlin, Raymond. *A Short History of the Jewish People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Presents the major geographical, cultural, and political forces and the many individuals that have shaped the course of Jewish history.
 23. Shapiro, Mark Dov, ed. *Gates of Shabbat, A Guide for Observing Shabbat, 25th anniversary edition*. CCAR Press, 2016. A practical and inspiring volume for a liberal approach to Shabbat observance. Please check that you are purchasing the latest edition.
 24. Silver, Mitchell. *The Veterans of History: A Young Person's History of the Jews*. Boston Workmen's Circle Center for Jewish Culture and Social Justice, 2014. Written for young adults, it provides the historical basis for an exploration of Jewish identity rooted in Jewish cultural literacy and traditions of social justice.
 25. Sonsino, Rifat and Daniel B. Syme. *Finding God: Selected Responses, Revised edition*. Behrman House, 2002. Essays on significant Jewish thinkers' responses to the questions: Is there more than one way to perceive God? How can we know God? What does God "want" from us? Please check that you are purchasing the latest edition.
 26. Steinberg, Milton. *As a Driven Leaf*. Behrman House, 1939. A classic novel, republished many times. Tells the tale of renegade Talmudic sage Elisha ben Abuyah's struggle to reconcile his faith with the allure of Hellenistic culture.
 27. Strassfeld, Michael. *A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice*. Jewish Lights, 2006. Traditional Jewish teachings presented as a guide to behavior and values for all the cycles of life.
 28. Syme, Daniel B. *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*, Behrman House, 2017. (Revised edition) Its question-and-answer format makes it an excellent reference book.
 29. Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy, Revised edition: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History*. William Morrow, 2008. Helps answer the question of what it means to be a Jew, in the largest sense.
 30. Washofsky, Mark. *Jewish Living: Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, revised. URJ Press, 2010. The definitive guide for Reform Jewish practice.
 31. Wylen, Stephen. *Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism*, Paulist Press, 2000.



Web Resources

We wholeheartedly recommend the following trusted websites for Jewish information.

ReformJudaism.org

Reform Judaism – Liberal Judaism’s sister movement in the US (despite its name Reform Judaism US is closer in ideology and theology to Liberal Judaism than Reform Judaism in the UK) – is the largest synagogue movement and a leading voice in the discussion of Jewish life. Find information on Jewish rituals, culture, holidays, and more. This comprehensive website for the Reform Movement of Judaism offers articles, videos, how-to’s and blogs on a variety of subjects of Jewish interest. Your first stop for Jewish information online.

[MyJewishLearning](https://MyJewishLearning.com)

Explore Jewish Life and Judaism at MyJewishLearning, a trans-denominational website of information about Judaism.

[BimBam \(YouTube.com/BimBam\)](https://www.youtube.com/BimBam)

Want to feel confident walking into a synagogue, *seder* or *shiva*? This website offers short, animated videos for adults and children. Start with the Judaism 101 video collection.

Podcasts of Jewish Interest

1. [On the Other Hand: Ten Minutes of Torah](#). Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, offers something to think about from the weekly Torah portion, in ten minutes or less.
2. [Stories We Tell](#). Each episode gives you a new story from Jewish tradition to reflect on and discuss with the people in your life.
3. [Wholly Jewish](#). A new podcast that explores the experience of Jews of Color who share their experiences, insights, and how their identities enrich and create a more vibrant Jewish community.
4. [Unorthodox](#). A smart, fresh, fun take on Jewish news and culture, each weekly episode includes a friend from another faith or cultural background with a question they’ve always wanted to ask about some aspect of Judaism.
5. [Israel Story](#). Modeled after This American Life, Israel Story brilliantly shares everyday stories, told by and about regular Israelis.
6. [Streetwise Hebrew](#). A bite-size podcast that discusses Modern Hebrew language gems. From slang to etymology, textual graffiti, Biblical idioms that are still around, influences from other languages, and other linguistic phenomena – host Guy Sharett shows us what we can learn about the Israeli psyche, society, and culture through its language.
7. [The Kibitz](#). A monthly podcast on everything Jewish-ish. Part conversation, part Q & A, part audience call-in, this podcast is about asking interesting questions, some big, many little and exploring all you’ve ever wanted to know about Judaism through a cultural and funny lens. “Kibitz” is a Yiddish word that means “to chat.”