

# **Introduction to Judaism**

## *Ritual, System & Symbol*

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Office Hours: Tu 1-2, Th 11-12  
MWF by appointment

Jewish Studies 150 /Religion 250  
TuTh 930-1045  
SCTR W201

### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to Judaism as a cultural and religious system. Special attention will be paid to the development of Judaism through the interpretation of traditional texts and ritual practices (some of them unusual). We will approach these texts and practices from several angles: anthropological, theological, and (to a lesser extent) historical, as a way toward understanding Judaism (or at least some versions of it) as a distinctive way of life.

### **Reading**

1. Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe, by Ivan G. Marcus  
A fascinating case study in historical anthropology, focused on a particularly rich set of customs practiced by medieval Ashkenazi Jews.
2. The Sabbath by Abraham Joshua Heschel  
This is one of the classics of 20<sup>th</sup> Century theology. A poetic and theoretical defense of the traditional Jewish Sabbath by a leading Jewish thinker.
3. A Short History of the Jewish People by Raymond P. Scheindlin  
Just what it sounds like.
4. Eight Theories of Religion, by Daniel L. Pals  
An excellent overview of classic theories of religion which will help us theorize about Judaism.
5. Goodbye, Columbus : And Five Short Stories by Philip Roth  
One of the greatest and funniest works of 20<sup>th</sup> Century fiction, which also manages to depict post-war American Jewish life.

*Readings on Blackboard* Some of the readings for this course will be primary sources (Jewish texts in translation), secondary discussions of these sources and theoretical readings (e.g. Durkheim, Geertz, Turner) posted on the Blackboard course website and/or handed out in class.

## Assignments & Grades

Participation	10%
Response Paper	10%
Midterm	20%
Paper	30%
Final	30%

N.B. All assignments must be completed to receive a grade in the course.

## Course Policies

Attendance is, of course, expected, as is reading and participation. Late assignments will not receive full credit. Unless you have a pressing educational reason, I prefer laptops to be closed and tablets to be off (otherwise I worry that you are doing what I would be doing.)

## Topics, Readings & Assignments

### Week 1

T 9/4 *Syllabus & A Sweet Puzzle*

**Req. Reading (in class):** Marcus, *Childhood Ritual*, p. 1 (only).

Tr 9/6 *A Sweet Puzzle Continued*

**Req. Reading (bef. class):** Pals, *Eight Theories*, Chapter 8, "Clifford Geertz," focusing especially on the brief section titled "Cultural Interpretation and Religion."

### Week 2

T 9/11 *Ancient Origins: Israelite History and Religion*

**Req. Reading:** Scheindlin, *Short History*, Chap 1.

Biblical Handout in Class

Tr 9/13 *From Israelites to Jews*

**Req. Reading:** Scheindlin, *Short History*, Chaps 2-3.

Talmud Handout in Class

PLUS: *Seasonal Interlude 1: Rosh Hashana and other New Years*

In Class Handouts (Primary Texts)

### Week 3

T 9/18: **No Class: Rosh Hashana**

Tr 9/20 *Medieval Ashkenaz and a Return to our Puzzle*

**Req. Reading:** Scheindlin, *Short History*, Chap 5; Marcus *Childhood Ritual*, Chap 1.

Friday 9/21 Lecture of Professor Peter Machinist on the Book of Job (Harvard), 430, location to be announced. **Reaction Paper, Option 1.**

## Week 4

T 9/25 *Symbols & "Thick Description"*

**Req. Reading:** Marcus *Childhood Ritual*, Chap. 2. Pals, *Eight Theories*, Chapter 8, "Clifford Geertz." For the full text of Geertz's classic article, "Religion as a Cultural System," see [http://hypergeertz.jku.at/GeertzTexts/Religion\\_System.htm](http://hypergeertz.jku.at/GeertzTexts/Religion_System.htm)

**Reaction Paper (Option 1) Due**

Tr 9/27 *Teaching & Culture*

**Req. Reading:** Marcus, *Childhood Ritual*, Chap. 4

PLUS: *Seasonal Interlude 2: Yom Kippur, Scapegoats, & Repentance*  
In Class Handouts (Primary Texts)

## Week 5

T 10/2 **No Class: Festival of Sukkot**

Tr 10/4 *Putting Marcus Back Together Again 1*

**Req. Reading:** Marcus, *Childhood Ritual*, Chap. 5

PLUS: *Seasonal Interlude 3: Agricultural Huts, Dancing with Fruit & the Divine*

## Week 6

T 10/9 **No Class: Festival of Sukkot**

Tr 10/11 *Putting Marcus Back Together Again 2*

**Req. Reading:** Marcus, *Childhood Ritual*, Chap. 6.

## Week 7

Tu 10/16 *Rosh Hodesh (First of the Month) & Women's Rituals*

**Req. Reading:** tba

**Midterm Review**, time & place tba

Tr 10/18 **Midterm Exam**

## Fall Recess October 20-28

## Week 8

T 10/30 *Abraham Joshua Heschel & What Does a Theologian Do?*

**Req. Reading:** Heschel, *Sabbath*, pp. 2-26.

Tr 11/1 *How To Read Heschel (& How to Write a Paper for this Course)*

**Req. Reading:** Heschel, *Sabbath*, pp. 26-44.

## Paper Topics Assigned

## Week 9

T 11/6 *Temporal Architecture? Heschel's Big Theory*

**Req. Reading:** Heschel, *Sabbath*, pp. 44-62

Tr 11/8 *Heschel as 20<sup>th</sup> Century Intellectual & the Problem of Technology*

**Req. Reading:** Heschel, *Sabbath*, pp. 64-71 & Epilogue

## Week 10

T 11/13 *Shema: Monotheism or Monolatry?*

**Req. Reading:** Deuteronomy 6:4-8 and 11:13-22 and Numbers 15:37-42.

Tr 11/15 *Shema: Credo or Commitment?*

**Req. Reading:** Pals, *8 Theories*, Chapter on Durkheim, "Society as Sacred." Find text of Nicene Creed and Shahada and bring them into class.

## Week 11

T 11/20

*Shema: Ethos Instantiated, Symbols Clothed*

**Req. Reading:** Re-read Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," first 5 pages.

Tr 11/22 **Thanksgiving**

## Week 12

T 11/27 *Judaism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century & the Holocaust*

**Req. Reading:** Scheindlin, *Short History*, Chaps 9-10

Tr 11/29 *Varieties of American Judaism: 5 or 6 Flavors & Some Problems*

**Req. Reading:** Scheindlin, *Short History*, Chap 11 & tba

### Paper Due

## Week 13

T 12/4 *Varieties of American Judaism Continued & a Short Introduction to Jewish American Literature*

**Req. Reading:**

Th 12/6 *A Short Introduction to Jewish American Literature & a Story by Philip Roth*

**Req. Reading:** Roth, *Goodbye Columbus*, "Conversion of the Jews."

## Week 14

T 12/11 *Philip Roth & the Anxieties of Assimilation*

**Req. Reading:** Roth, *Goodbye Columbus*, "Eli the Fanatic."

Tr 12/13 *Current Trends & Crises in Judaism*

**Req. Reading:** Seriously, would you read anything new at this point?

Tr 12/20 9-11:00

**Final Exam**