



## **Introduction to Judaism: An Evolving Civilization**

Conversion Course syllabus

**Rabbinic advisor/mentor: Rabbi Eva Goldfinger**

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### **Introduction & Jewish Ideas and Practices through the Ages**

- Introduction to Judaism - What is Judaism\\What is a Jew\\Who are the Jewish People\\Jewish Languages\\Jewish Calendar
- Evolving Judaism -- Proto\\Priestly\\Rabbinic\\Mystical\\Chasidic\\Messianic -- 2000BCE - 1800
- Modern Judaism -- Reform\\Orthodox\\Conservative\\Reconstruction\\Zionism\\Jewish Renewal
- Secular Humanistic Judaism

**Meeting 1 to discuss four Judaism lessons**

### **Rhythms of Jewish Life--Evolution of Festivals & Life Cycle Events**

- Rosh Chodesh\\Rosh Hashana\\Yom Kippur\\Sukkot
- Shabbat\\Chanuka\\Tu Bishvat\\Purim
- Pesach\\Yom Hashoah\\Yom Haatzmaut\\Shavuot

**Meeting 2 to discuss three festival lessons**

- Life Cycles\\Birth\\Death\\Mourning
- Education\\Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Courtship\\Marriage\\Intermarriage

**Meeting 3 to discuss three life cycle lessons**

### **History of the Jewish People**

- Nomadic to Talmudic Period -- 2000BCE - 500
- Golden Age of Spain\\Crusades\\Inquisition\\Ghettoization\\Shtetl -- 500 - 1800
- Haskalah\\Jewish Emancipation\\Anti-Semitism\\Zionism -- 19th century
- North America\\Palestine\\Holocaust\\Israel -- 20th century
- Contemporary Jewish Issues

**Meeting 4 to discuss five history lessons**

### **Jewish Literature and the Arts through the Ages**

- Ancient Writings -- T'nakh\\Apocrypha\\Pseudepigrapha\\Dead Sea Scrolls
- Rabbinic Writings -- Talmud\\Commentaries\\Responsa\\Shulchan Arukh\\Siddur
- Secular and Enlightenment Jewish Writings
- Contemporary Secular and Religious Writings -- North America\\Israel

**Meeting 5 to discuss four culture lessons**

- Jewish Culture -- music\\art\\drama\\film\\dance\\prayer\\food...

**Meeting 6 to discuss final culture lesson (can be joined with #5)**

### **Required Texts and Reading:**

1. *Introduction to Judaism: An Evolving Civilization* by Rabbi Eva Goldfinger (Notes for 20 Lesson Conversion Course) (electronic version included in cost of course)
2. *Basic Ideas of Secular Humanistic Judaism* **\$27.00** payable upon registration (or can be sent electronically at no cost) (lesson 4)
3. *Judaism in a Secular Age* (order from Oraynu) (lessons 4, 18 & 19)

4. *The Jewish Festivals* by Hayyim Schauss, Union of American Hebrew Congregations 1938 (Jewish Bookstore or Amazon.ca or purchase from Rabbi Goldfinger) (lessons 5-7)
5. *The Lifetime of a Jew* by Hayyim Schauss, Union of American Hebrew Congregations 1950 (AbeBooks.com or purchase from Rabbi Goldfinger) (lessons 8-10)
6. *Wanderings* by Chaim Potok, Fawcett Crest Books, N.Y. 1978 (Jewish Bookstore or Amazon.ca) (lessons 11-14)
7. *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: from the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present* Ed Eli Barnavi, Schocken Books, NY 1992 (Jewish Bookstore or Amazon.ca) [excellent reference book] (lessons 11-14)
8. *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures* The New JPS Publication (Jewish Bookstore or Amazon.ca) (lesson 16)

#### Humanistic Judaism Movement Websites:

[www.oraynu.org](http://www.oraynu.org)  
[www.shj.org](http://www.shj.org)  
[www.iishj.org](http://www.iishj.org)

#### Educational Websites:

[www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com)  
[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)  
[www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com)  
<http://en.wikipedia.org>

#### For information on the Jewish Movements access their websites

For web searching, I recommend that you use [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) as your search engine. When you sign up under "Who do you Goodsearch for?" insert Society for Humanistic Judaism – SHJ (Farmington Hills, MI). Once you are established as a supporter, every time you use goodsearch, they will make a donation of \$0.05 to the SHJ. It adds up and your help is always appreciated.

#### Further Readings and References:

- Biale, David. *Cultures of the Jews*.
  - Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Atlas of Jewish History*.
  - Eban, Abba. *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*. (p140-148)
  - *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
  - Gaster, Theodor H. *Festivals of the Jewish Year*
  - \*\*Gilbert, Martin. *Atlas of Jewish History*.
- A wonderful book of maps showing lots of history. (bookstores or Amazon.ca) (lessons 11-14)
- \*\*Holtz, Barry W, ed. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (bookstores or Amazon.ca) (lessons 16-17)
  - \*\*Society for Humanistic Judaism. *Guide to Humanistic Judaism*, Volume XXI, Number III-IV (order from Oraynu or [www.SHJ.org](http://www.SHJ.org)) (lesson 4)
  - Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary*. This is a book giving a modern religious perspective on the festival

#### Oraynu Bookstore - a selection of items with Humanistic Jewish themes

- **Judaism in a Secular Age, An Anthology of Secular Humanistic Jewish Thought**, edited by Renee Kogel and Zev Katz, softcover \$35
- **Judaism Beyond God** by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, hardcover \$33
- **Staying Sane in a Crazy World** by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, softcover \$23
- **Celebrating Jewish Holidays: An Intro for Secular Jewish Families**, published by CSJO, \$30
- **Basic Ideas of Secular Humanistic Judaism**, written and compiled by Eva Goldfinger \$27
- **The Early Modern Roots of Secular Humanistic Judaism**, written and compiled by Karen Levy \$27
- **A Provocative People: A Secular History of the Jews**, by Rabbi Sherwin Wine softcover \$35.00
- **Let Justice Well Up Like Water** by Bennett Muraskin \$30
- **Holiday Booklets**, published by Society for Humanistic Judaism \$10 *High Holidays, Sukkot, Hanukah, Tu B'Shevat, Purim, Passover, Shavuot, Shabbat*
- **Roots and Branches: A Humanist Haggadah for Passover** by Sandi Horwitz, Barry N. Olshen and Lisa Wright \$10.00
- **Oraynu Sings**, a CD of 18 songs by the Oraynu Congregation Choir \$20 (3 or more copies: \$18 each)