

**INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM: COURSE SYLLABUS
FROMM INSTITUTE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING
RABBI STEPHEN S. PEARCE**

Wednesdays, April 12-May31, 2017, 10am-11:40a

- *Education is what is left when what has been learned has been forgotten.*
—BF Skinner
- *The First Law of Religion: For every religious philosophy, there exists an equal and opposite philosophy.*
- *The Second Law of Religion: They're both wrong (because the way I learned it was...)*

I—Bible Survey

- Biblical Criticism: Who wrote the Bible?
- Who interprets and reinterprets the Bible, especially when original intentions/meanings are lost: why the Talmud begins on page (bet) two; the Creation narratives; Adam the hermaphrodite; Passover antecedents: pascal offering—hastily made bread, apparition; wife-sister adoption
- The Body Ritual of the Nacrma
- Translation of the Holy Writ—It is not as easy as it seems: Isaiah 7:14.
- Michelangelo's horned depiction the result of a mistranslation.





Michelangelo's Moses

- Biblical Narrative—there must be more than meets the eye
- The Exodus narrative
- Primogeniture and the ascendancy of the younger child—toward what end?
- Early and Late Prophets

II—Vote or Veto: The 70 Faces of the Torah—Change or Die
—Is change to/transformation of the immutable Holy Writ possible/permissible and if so, at what rate and under whose authorization?
—“It is not in heaven.”

- READING:** *Seal The Torah Among My Disciples*—Norman J. Cohen
- The process is never ending—Modern Midrash on the Akedah—The poorly understood centerpiece of the High Holy Days
- The Binding of Isaac and Christian comparatives. What happened to the Creation Myth?

—The Midrashic model on the development of Rabbinic Literature and Early Christianity

•**READING:** Galatians 3:6ff; 4:21ff

III—Leaving a personal legacy

—Charter Narrative and Ethical Willa—little-known literary forms

IV— Jewish Time: lunar-solar calendar—Intercalation of a 364-day year vs. 354.2425-day year (29.5X12).

—Did a Sabbatical Year ever exist?

—He who controls the calendar...

—The goal of time

—Transcendence of time

—Cultural Biases: Viewing ancient customs, celebrations and traditions through modern eyes: How are ritual and holiday celebrations transformed by changing times?

V—The Pharisaic Revolution: The Template for Normative Judaism

Shifting Landscapes: *The Response of Modernity to Faith, Social Advocacy, and Demographic Change*

—PaRDeS—P'shat, Remez, Drash, and Sod—The mystical interpretations of Torah

VI—Responsa Literature—The Revolution Continues

Modernity and Zionist, Secular, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Hasidic, Renewal, New Age Judaism and Judaism's influence on early Christianity

—Redefining Jewish Groupings: Swingers, Switchers, Religious Promiscuity, and Religious Infidelity—the development of contemporary religious beliefs and practices other than those of origin.

—New "Non-traditional" lines of division

—Two Jews...Three Synagogues—historical divisions:

—Primogeniture: Displacing the first born, establishing the legitimacy of a sacrificial cult; Levites vs Cohanim; pro- and anti-Monarchy Forces; Hillel and Shammai; Pharisees and Sadducees; Haskalah, Hasidim and Mitnagdim; traditional and secular; Reform, Conservative, Orthodox

—"We've always done it that way."

—Compromise: menorah, mezuzah, women, etc.

—The triple-negative response to orthodoxy to modernity—“Nothing that never done was before should not be done now.”

VII—Living the commanded life of Mitzvot: *For the commandment is a lamp and the Law is light*—Proverbs 6:23

—*kehilah*—community, *sh’lom bayit* domestic tranquility that nurtures a peaceful home; *hach’nasat orchim*—hospitality to strangers; *tzedakah*—righteous giving; *Talmud Torah*—Jewish learning; *bikur holim*—visiting the sick; *g’milut hasidim*—acts of kindness; *neemanut*—faithfulness; *chesed*—benevolent goodness; *tikkun olam*—perfecting a broken world

—Adapting mitzvot to changing times: The Prozbul

—The Jewish Tripod: Creation, Revelation, Redemption

—We (Said We) Were Slaves in the Land of Egypt: How the narrative of the Egyptian experience shaped Holiday & Life Cycles

—A Reality: Former slaves and slave ownership

•**READING:** “Ownership of The Sacred” Raskas

VIII—Agricultural/Holiday Cycle

—Passover— sedition and the Haggadah—a seditious book

Preparing for the Days of Awe and Fall Chagim—Pilgrim Festivals: Sukkot (Koheleth/Ecclesiastes), Simhat Torah, Shavuot (Ruth) Minor Holidays—Tu Bishvat, Lag B’Omer and interim days between Passover and Shavuot—

—Rosh HaShanah: Akedah—Poorly understood centerpiece: The Binding of Isaac and Christian Comparatives. What happened to the Creation Myth?

—Yom Kippur & Self Reflection: What is the nature of *teshuvah*—forgiveness?

IX—Rituals of Dying, Death, Messiah & Resurrection, Afterlife

—Last Rites, Eulogy, Funeral, Mourning Practices

—Yizkor: Remembrance

—The Theodicy and Theology—the Jewish views of God

—Confronting Bad Things Happening to Good People

—Pilgrim Festival: Shavuot (Ruth)

—Hanukkah

—Yom HaShoah—Holocaust Remembrance Day

X—Anti-Semitism

XI—Yom Haatzam’ut—Israel Independence Day

XII—Life Cycle

—Conversion

—Marriage/Divorce

—Birth, Circumcision, Naming

—Parting Ways: Christianity's struggle with circumcision: not of the flesh but of the heart.

—Rituals of Education & Coming of Age: Bar/Bat Mitzvah

•**READING:** Galatians 3:6ff; 4:21ff

•**READING:** "Bar/Bat Mitzvah from The Other Side of the Pulpit"—Stephen S. Pearce

XIII—Yiddish Language & Culture—The Bintel Brief

•**READING:** Yiddish Dictionary

XIV—Philosophers: Spinoza, Maimonides, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Buber, Joseph B. Soloveitchik

XV—Authoritarian vs Humanistic Religion

XVI—Prophet vs Mystic

DISCLAIMER—TORAH ON ONE FOOT—YOU CANNOT DO IT ALL!

For an overview of the Jewish history cycle, please view all nine one-hour segments of Eban, Abba, *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews (1984)*—A Nine One-Hour Series. NY: PBS Channel 13. [Please note that segment 9 is dated and missing the last 30 years of history in the Middle East.] Segments 1-7 and 9 are available online as a free download at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxVoVQi5imSfXKjQghPfcB5DgIC h7iinV>

Part 8 is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D0ks6IV3g0>