

## Torathon 2018 Courses

7:00-7:50 pm

### A1. GOD “BAGGAGE”

George Burns, Whoopi Goldberg, Morgan Freeman, Alanis Morissette and a few other actors portrayed God in very different ways, and often vastly different than the God we remember from our childhood. . In this session, we will discuss how our beliefs in God have changed and how those changes are reflected in Jewish theologies. We will also look at whether belief in God is essential for being Jewish. We will conclude by debating the actor we think best represented God in the movies. Charlton Heston for the win?!

**RABBI VALERIE COHEN, Temple Emanuel Sinai, Worcester**

### A2. INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH ETHICS: LAW, NARRATIVE, AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

What is Jewish Ethics? How does it differ from “regular” ethics? What is the relationship between Jewish Law and Ethics? Is the minimum of the law sufficient? How is it possible and what does it mean to be a scoundrel with the Torah’s permission? We will work and study to answer these questions and others. **RABBI AVIVA FELLMAN, Congregation Beth Israel, Worcester**

### A3. THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS AND THE U.S.-ISRAEL ALLIANCE

The recent mid-term elections, once again, resulted in tremendous turnover in Congress. In the last 10 years more than 445 new members have been elected. While the Middle East remains in turmoil and threats to Israel unrelenting, hear an off-the-record briefing from AIPAC’s Regional Director about how the election results – and the new Congress – will affect the U.S.-Israel relationship. **ERIC GIESSER, Regional Director for AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee)**

### A4. CONNECTIONS IN FAITH; INTERFAITH EXPLORATIONS OF OUR HOLY TEXTS AND THE TEXTS OF OUR LIVES

In the past year, over 200 people have come together in small group conversation and to learn about the faith traditions of each other. Join Rabbi Rachel Gurevitz of Congregation B'nai Shalom and Dr. Saleem Khanani of the Islamic Society of Greater Worcester for a comparative study of Cain and Abel/Qabil and Habil and an opportunity to join the conversation as we connect our holy texts to the texts of our lives.

**RABBI RACHEL GUREVITZ, Congregation B’nai Shalom, Westborough**  
**DR. SALEEM KHANANI, Islamic Society of Greater Worcester, Oncology Physician**

### A5. THE POWER OF THE ROUND

Singing Hebrew rounds has a long tradition of being inviting and powerful. This genre creates more engaging and communal music, and also encourages attentive listening. Please join us as we learn some simple lines and then create very pleasing sounds together. No experience necessary!

**DR. JEREMY GOLDING, Co-Editor of Siddur Chaveirim Kol Yisrael, family physician and MICHELE ROBERTS, medical writer, editor**

## **A6. THE WORCESTER BLACK-JEWISH ALLIANCE: RENEWING THE PARTNERSHIP**

The African American and Jewish communities have a long history together as allies, working together to promote civil rights and the dignity and freedom of all American citizens. In this workshop we will discuss the Worcester Black-Jewish Alliance, a group formed almost two years ago through the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts, the Worcester NAACP and the Worcester Black Clergy Association. Rabbi Michael Swartz will facilitate the conversation, along with Pat and George Yancey of NAACP.

**RABBI MICHAEL SWARTTZ, Beth Tikvah Synagogue, Westboro, Coordinator of Harold Cotton Leadership Center of JFCM, Jewish Chaplain of the Phillips Academy, Andover, MA**

## **A7. THE LIFE AND WORK OF ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER; A LINK BETWEEN GENERATIONS?**

In this class we will take a closer look at the life and work of one of the greatest storytellers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Isaac Bashevis Singer. This famous Yiddish author was the winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize for literature. We will also explore a short story, and discuss his legacy as a potential link between generations. Come and learn!

**MARCIA TANNENBAUM, Lawyer, Mediator, WISE Teacher**

**8:00-8:50 pm**

## **B1. DOCTORS, LAWYERS AND POLITICIANS?**

Maybe it wasn't a Jewish parent's expectation, but did you ever wonder who was Worcester's first Jewish elected official, and what year he/she was elected? Learn the history of the immigration patterns, the transition from Worcester's Jewish immigrants to a variety of elected positions, and explore the social/demographic changes that helped make this happen. Democrats, Republicans and Unaffiliated are all welcome! **MOE BERGMAN, Attorney, Worcester City Councilor At-Large**

## **B2. GENESIS 22: THE AKEIDA THROUGH SARAH'S EYES**

"The Binding of Isaac" is one of the most famous stories in all of Torah. It has tremendous theological significance in Judaism as it is open to a myriad of interpretations. In this session, we will study and read through the story of The Binding of Isaac and then study some commentaries that will tell it through the lens of the feminine voice of our matriarch. **RABBI AVIVA FELLMAN, Congregation Beth Israel, Worcester**

## **B3. ADDRESSING THE "GREAT WHOMEVER"; BIBLICAL NAMES FOR GOD THAT MAY SURPRISE YOU!**

Traditional Jewish texts use various words as names for God. Some may be surprising, some appealing, and some not. Do the common names for God we use satisfy you intellectually but leave your heart wanting more? Come explore three Biblical texts that offer you new ways to understand the experience in your life that some might call "Encounters with God." **RABBI CAROL GLASS, Director of Field Education at The**

**Rabbinical School of Hebrew College, Newton, MA and Spiritual Director in private practice, Mussar teacher**

#### **B4. ARE WE LIVING IN THE MESSIANIC ERA?**

Judaism predicts the advent of a human Messiah. We'll examine the origin of the messiah in primary Judaic sources and chart its evolution throughout Jewish history. Do world history and the world today look different when viewed through a "messianic" lens? You be the judge. **RABBI MOSHE GREEN, Chabad of Westboro**

#### **B5. JEWISH DRUMMING WITH AN OPEN HEART**

The drum is the external manifestation of our individual and community heartbeat. Lets come together and explore ways to connect on a primal, heart centered, embodied path towards connection, sacred space, Judaism and community building. Bring a drum or use one that is provided. Open to all skill levels - or no experience at all. **MITCHELL GORDON, Musician, Sacred Drummer**

#### **B7. THE ONE VS. THE MANY**

The Classic joke is that of the row boat passenger who bores a hole under his seat, and when others complain, responds "What's your beef, it's under my seat not yours." Judaism has traditionally valued both the rights of individuals and the good of the community, yet in the political world, those values often come into conflict. This session will explore that tension in both Jewish and American thought. Join the discussion. **GREG WEINER, Associate Professor of Political Science, Assumption College**

**9:00-9:50 pm**

#### **C1. MENTAL ILLNESS FROM A NUMBER OF JEWISH PERSPECTIVES**

Come join in an important discussion about a serious, relevant topic. What do the Torah and Talmud say about mental health? Where and how do we draw on our Jewish values to form our opinions and help others (and ourselves) in Jewish healing practices. Anecdotes, case studies and a wide range of experiences based on Rabbi Blotner's 40 years of work on the mental health wards will be included. **RABBI YA'AKOV BLOTNER, Congregation Shaarai Torah West, State Certified Prison Chaplain**

#### **C2. FROM SILVERMAN TO SHUMER-JEWISH WOMEN IN COMEDY**

We will look at Jewish female comediennes over the last 3 decades, including Sarah Silverman, Amy Shumer, Judy Gold, and Iliza Vie Shlesinger. How do they contribute to our general society and what messages do they convey about our Jewish heritage and values? Do the newer comediennes push the boundaries of comedy too far? Let's explore and have some laughs! **EJ DOTTS, Beth Israel Synagogue, Westborough**

#### **C3. PRAYER 101- IS PRAYER FOR US OR G-D?**

Most of us have experienced some element of prayer in our lives, yet may struggle with making it our own or understanding its purpose. In this session we will discuss the

origins of prayer and the central place it holds in the Jewish Tradition. Come learn with an open mind and heart as we explore together. **RABBI MOSHE M. LIBEROW, Associate Rabbi of the Central Mass Torah Center. Member of the Boston Beit Din (Rabbinical Court)**

#### **C4. KUMSITZ – LET’S SING ALONG**

A “kumsitz” is a social gathering in Israel around a campfire, which usually happens at night on the beach or in a field, inevitably with a guitar present along with coffee and food to cook on the fire. While our kumsitz will not have a campfire, come join Cantor Rachel Reef Simpson and Musician Ian Simpson for this fun time of singing old and new favorites and popular Israeli songs. **CANTOR RACHEL REEF-SIMPSON, Temple Emanuel Sinai, Worcester, MA and IAN SIMPSON, Song Leader, Worcester, MA**

#### **C5. “AND YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOMES, AND UPON YOUR GATES”**

The mezuzah is one of the common symbols of a Jewish home and a daily reminder of our Jewish identity and faith. In this workshop you will learn about a kosher mezuzah and have an opportunity to make one for your home, for your child, your grandchild or any loved one. **ZIVA ROSENHAND, Educator, Congregation Beth Israel, Worcester**

#### **C6. A CRITICAL LOOK AT ISRAEL’S NATION STATE BILL**

The Israeli Knesset recently passed a bill which includes various principals that enshrine Israel as A Jewish State. We will look at our understanding of the Nation State Bill, what it means, and some context for the criticism it is receiving. This law has added a complexity to Israel’s outreach and public relations efforts, as well as for us in the USA and the rest of the diaspora. We will also examine the impact and effect the bill will have for Jewish and Arab Israelis. **STEVEN SCHIMMEL, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts**

#### **C7. JEWISH LIFE ON CAMPUS AND BEYOND**

There are many paths to discovering your Jewish identity on campus beyond joining Hillel or visiting Israel on a Birthright Trip. Discover how a panel of Clark University, WPI and Worcester State University students have forged their Jewish paths in Worcester and beyond. Their Jewish journeys may surprise you! Join the discussion. **BETH WHITMAN, Clark Hillel Director, with college student panel**