

TORATHON 2021: A CELEBRATION OF JEWISH LEARNING

Great ideas that define Judaism

Full Course Descriptions:

Courses starting at 7:00

“The Gifts of God Flow Through You: Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude in Judaism.”
Rabbi Aviva Fellman, Congregation Beth Israel, Worcester

There is a connection in Judaism between Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude. We are to live our lives with an awareness that we did not create ourselves but to also understand that we are God’s gift in this world. God’s grace and blessings flow through us. In this text/discussion session we will start with a few variations on how to read the third line of Psalm 100; 1) Acknowledge that the Lord is God. God made us and we are God’s. 2) Acknowledge that the Lord is God. God made us and not we ourselves. 3) Acknowledge that the Lord is God. God made us for God’s self and we are... and look at how this notion can both boost ego and humility at the same time.

The Rabbi and the Scholar: Jacob: Afraid to Come Face to Face with himself?

Everett Fox- the Allen M. Glick Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies at Clark University, Worcester

Rabbi Cherie Koller-Fox- President of NewCAJE, Rabbi Emerita at Congregation Eitz Chayim, Cambridge

The next Shabbat (parashat Va-Yishlach) tells the story of Jacob's encounter with his brother Esau and his wrestling match with a strange "man" in the night. We will look at the language of the story to see what the text itself is trying to teach us through the lens of scholarship. We will also see what we can learn from Jacob's struggle about our own lives from the perspective of the rabbis.

*This course is 2 hours, from 7:00-9:00 with a short break in the middle

The Ingathering of the Exiles: The Youth Aliyah project

Carol Kaufman, Hadassah National Chair of the Youth Aliyah B'nai Mitzvah Program

Nearly a third of children in Israel live in poverty, and almost half a million suffer from high-risk situations such as physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and learning disabilities. Still others come to us — alone — from places around the world where it is no longer safe to be a Jew. Come and learn how Youth Aliyah saves children’s lives and helps them to become productive citizens of Israel.

A 'Tel' Tale of Sukkot

Rabbi Suri Krieger, Rabbi of B'nai Or, Jewish Renewal of Greater Boston

Tel > an archaeological mound containing stratified layers of debris from its various inhabitants, which in turn, contain clues to the import of each.

The import of Sukkot has changed and shifted over the centuries, and in this respect, can be studied much like an archaeological Tel. In this class we will reveal, through Text study, how Sukkot { aka *heChag* } was apparently The most celebrated holiday in Biblical times.

The Jewish Art of Rethinking

Rabbi Michael Swartz, Beth Tikvah Synagogue, Westboro, Coordinator of Harold Cotton Leadership Center of JFCM, Jewish Chaplain of the Phillips Academy, Andover, MA

Most of us would agree that intelligence is one of the most important factors in our ability to think and learn. But in a turbulent world, there's another set of cognitive skills that might matter more—the ability to rethink and unlearn. So argues Adam Grant in his recent book *Think Again*. We will discuss Grant's exploration about the importance of rethinking in our time of rapid change, the role it has played throughout Jewish history and its significance in Jewish thought.

Oliver Sachs : share his extraordinary vision through his own words

Marcia Tannenbaum, Attorney, Mediator, WISE teacher

The late Dr. Oliver Sacks (1933-2015) was known for his creativity, his imagination, his dedication to healing and his openness to adventure throughout his life. His Memoir: *On the Move, A Life* was published by Vintage shortly after his death in 2015. We will meet him in old age where he is filled with wisdom and still fascinated with life.

We will look together at his final book of essays, a graceful small book called *Gratitude*, published by Knopf in 2019, which ends with a profound essay entitled Sabbath, informed by his Orthodox childhood and his desire to make meaning out of his memories.

Come meet this neurologist, adventurer, humanitarian, and lover of LIFE.

Torathon Courses starting at 8:00

Bereisheet, the Big Bang, and Beyond

S. Leslie Blatt, Professor Emeritus of Physics and Education, Clark University, Worcester

The Torah tells us what happened “in the beginning” and goes on to describe the six-day period as the world unfolded, including the arrival of the living things around us, as well as human beings. Research studies by modern-day astronomers, physicists, and cosmologists tell us that the beginning of the universe occurred nearly 14 billion years

ago, in a singular event they call the “Big Bang”. Later developments have been studied and described by geologists, paleontologists, chemists, and biologists, plus specialists in many other disciplines. I will outline, and indicate relationships between the two apparently different timelines of these descriptions. Along the way we’ll talk a bit about some of the Jewish thinkers and scientists who made important contributions to these approaches toward understanding our world.

The Greatest Sayings of the Greatest Rabbis

Rabbi Eve Eichenholtz, *Congregation Agudat Achim, Leominster*

The most often quoted Rabbinic text is the Mishnah Avot commonly called ‘The Ethics of the Rabbis’. It is a fantastic compilation of the greatest moral and ethical values proposed by our greatest rabbis of old. Many of these quotes adorn the walls of clergy offices. They greet visitors in synagogue hallways, and inspire residents and visitors in Jewish homes around the world. This session will explore the text of selections from Pirkei Avot using written and artistic commentaries.

The Rabbi and the Scholar: Jacob: Afraid to Come Face to Face with himself?

Everett Fox- *the Allen M. Glick Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies at Clark University, Worcester*

Rabbi Cherie Koller-Fox- *President of NewCAJE, Rabbi Emerita at Congregation Eitz Chayim, Cambridge*

*2-hour course, see description at 7:00 time slot

Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Life Values Derived from Judaism's Shmita Practice: What These Two Lenses on Ecosystem Survival Can Offer Us Today

Rabbi Carol Glass, BCC, SD; Mussar teacher & Spiritual Director in Greater Boston, Hospice Chaplain, Marlboro, MA

Mishy Lesser, Ed.D., *Learning Dir, Upstander Project; Co-Dir, Upstander Academy; Emmy Award Winner (2018) Dawnland; Fellow, Dodd Impact—Part of the Human Rights Institute, UCONN.*

Come learn about the guiding principles of Indigenous Ways of ‘Knowing and Being’, including Relationality and Reciprocity, and how they can inform our stewardship of the planet. A short film that incorporates these principles will be shown and discussed. Then, following a brief review of ancient and modern texts about Shmita (An every-7th-yr, Biblical practice of releasing agricultural land from production, remitting unpaid debts, and declaring stored and wild-growth food ownerless and available to all) we will discuss ways to apply some of the practical ramifications for to today's care for the Land and other eco-systems that support life.

Understanding the BDS Movement

Aviv Jerbi, *Our very own Israeli Shaliah!*

In order to gain an understanding about the BDS Movement, (boycott, divestments, sanctions against Israel) we are going to talk about the history of the movement, introduce it's major players, and explore the goals and strategies. We will try to answer the question: "do Israelis really feel the impact of this movement on their daily lives"? Join us for an invigorating discussion!

Focus & Perspective in today's world

Rabbi Moshe M. Liberow, *Associate Rabbi, Torah Center, Worcester, and Director of Boston Rabbinical Court*

How does the human being reconcile the lure of the material world with the souls quest for spiritual fulfillment? Can the demands upon the individual, in a world governed by the bottom line, allow space for a transcendent reality? Join us for a text based study and discussion exploring the words and worlds of our sages to this age old question as they manifest in the Chassidic discourse titled "Mayim Rabim" delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe מ"ר in 1978.

Torathon Courses starting at 9:00 pm

"Moshiach": Jewish Values and Beliefs About the Messiah

Rabbi Yaakov Blotner, *Shaarai Torah West, Worcester*

Many Jewish people are confused about the origins of "Moshiach" or "Messiah", and wonder if it's really a Jewish concept. What is its original source? What are the unique laws as to who is the Moshiach and what, in fact, he will do? Together we will unravel some of the misunderstandings about this important topic.

The "Death" of Prophecy

Rabbi Valerie Cohen, *Temple Emanuel-Sinai, Worcester*

Our Bible is filled with stories of the prophets, special individuals who were singled out by God to share God's message. Yet Divine prophecy is no longer part of Judaism today. What happened? What caused the "death" of prophecy? Come find out!

Food for Thought - Sipporim - Jewish Stories

Mitch Gordon, *Musician, Mediator, Storyteller*

Join us as we tell Jewish stories and share the joy of being Jewish through story. Peninnah Schram has said that Jews are people of the book - that we tell stories. Please bring a 5-6 minute story to share (or any part of a story you are just starting to tell), or bring your ears and come just to listen to others. And my suggested topic is Stories about Food. Hey we are Jews - we all tell stories and we all eat food. Your story could be a traditional story or folklore, or perhaps a food story from your own life... So come, bring a "tell" about one...so nu!

Fifty years of women in the rabbinate - the journey with

Rabbi Rachel Gurevitz, Ph.D., Congregation B'nai Shalom, Westborough

In 2022 we will celebrate 50 years since the first woman was ordained as a rabbi by a seminary. The journey to 1972, however, begins quite a while earlier. We'll learn about the women who would be rabbis, the first woman known to be ordained (well before 1972), and the ways that women in the rabbinate have shaped the role and served communities of all kinds.

Useful Jewish Technology: Mitzvot

Rabbi Ahuva Loewenthal, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College 2021

What is the point of doing ritual Jewish actions? Answers vary, depending on philosophy and theology. We'll consider the notion of mitzvot as potent little packets of communication, which when opened, can steer us toward a good life. Let's look at ritual *mitzvot* as technology that can support us through times easy and hard—Useful Jewish Technology.

As He Loved His Own Soul: What Can We Learn from the Jonathan and David Story?

Dale Rosenberg, Director of Learning and Engagement at Congregation Beth Israel, Worcester

The Hebrew Bible, in the books of Samuel, describes a close relationship between Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and David, Saul's successor and the founder of the Davidic dynasty. Traditional Jewish and Christian sources have viewed this relationship as an example of a non-sexual loving friendship, as have many biblical scholars. A newer wave of biblical scholars and gay activists interpret the text as indicating a romantic and/or homoerotic relationship between the two. In this talk we'll read some relevant verses about the David/Jonathan relationship, look at relevant commentary, examine artwork depicting them over the centuries, and consider a variety of views on the nature of the bond between them.