

# RELТ10191

## Introduction to Judaism

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Credit rating	20
Unit Level	1
Contact Hours	33, Semester 2
Teaching Staff	Professor Alex Samely



### The things you will learn about:

- ✧ Hebrew Bible and the Talmud
- ✧ Gender in Judaism
- ✧ Modern Orthodox practice, Mysticism
- ✧ Festivals and Sabbath, Jewish art
- ✧ The role of interpretation and authority
- ✧ Story-Telling as Theology
- ✧ Modern Jewish identities
- ✧ Israel and Zionism
- ✧ Antisemitism
- ✧ Orthodoxy, Haredi, Reform, non-religious forms of Judaism
- ✧ Approaches to the study of a non-Christian “religion”



Hasidic boy

Women carrying the Torah scroll, Carlebach Synagogue New York<sup>1</sup>

## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Upon successful completion, you will have learned to:

- 1) Distinguish critically some of the key trends and stages in the historical development of Judaism
- 2) to provide a critical account of ways in which there is unity and diversity within Judaism
- 3) to consider the meaning of some of the key ideas in Judaism, and the texts and practices in which those ideas function
- 4) To discuss critically how Judaism has related to other cultures
- 5) And to identify and evaluate various approaches to the academic idea of “religion”

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jofa.org/Education/TorahTouching>



## TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS

In the two-hour lecture the main topics and academic methodologies will be introduced and discussed. Students are expected participate actively during the lectures, which include regular opportunities for discussions and questions. The readings relating to each lecture topic are discussed in the seminar of the week. Students are expected to prepare the lecture materials (available on Blackboard) and the reading in the days before and after the lecture. You will have an opportunity to introduce the compulsory reading at the seminar, and contribute critically to its discussion. The weekly reading assignments therefore require regular work outside classes and in advance of the seminars, including close study of assigned texts, note taking, summarizing or excerpting, as well as the creation of texts in note form. Preparation of the assessed Essay will be guided by an exercise, formal advice in the lecture and on documents on Blackboard, as well as feedback on the exercise.

## ASSESSMENT METHODS

Assessment task	Length	Weighting within unit
Draft Introduction to an Essay	500 words	formative assessment (feedback) (no contribution to your mark – just an opportunity to try out the task)
Written Essay	1800 words	50%
Written Open Book Examination	(should take about 4.5 hours to complete)	50%



### Indicative Reading

Judith Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin (eds), *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (2010)

Susannah Heschel (ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (1983),

Philip Alexander, *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism* (1984);

Nicholas De Lange, *An Introduction to Judaism* (2000, 2010<sup>2</sup>)

Norman Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction* (1996, 2000<sup>2</sup>)

Alan Unterman, *Jews: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (1981)



## Weekly topics:

- 1 General introduction and Hebrew Bible
- 2 Textual sources of Judaism
- 3 The birth of Judaism in antiquity
- 4 The role of commandments
- 5 Gender roles in Judaism
- 6 The role of interpreting texts

7 Authority and interpretation in religious discourse

8 Judaism in the encounter with non-Jewish cultures

9 Antisemitism in Christian Europe

10 Jewish culture after the Holocaust

11 Jewish everyday life in nation states

12 Advice for Exam Revision

## Summer activities:

You may wish to take a look at Simon Schama's five-part programme "The Story of the Jews". Part one:

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x65yi3v>

or a book introducing Judaism, for example, Nicholas de Lange, *Judaism* (Oxford University Press 1987), or: Norman Solomon's *Judaism – A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1996)