



Me'ah Select Classes – Fall 2019-20

Led by outstanding faculty from Me'ah Classic and sponsored by Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP), Me'ah Select is a one semester, in-depth exploration of a specific theme, text, personality or slice of Jewish history, taught at the college level but without papers and assignments.

Beverly, Temple B'nai Abraham: “The Modern Jewish Experience through the Lens of Short Stories”

- **Instructor:** Dr. Jacob Meskin
- **Meets:** Wednesday evenings, 7:00 – 9:30 pm, beginning October 30.
- **Full class schedule:** October 30; November 6, 13, 20; December 4, 11, 18; January 8, 15, 22. Snow/sick day January 29.
- **Cost:** \$250 for temple members, \$350 non temple members.

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Most of us learn the history of Jews and Judaism in the modern period from scholarly texts and original documents. This invaluable view of the big picture leaves out the lived dimension of the events.

How did Jewish individuals in widely separated and quite different communities experience the challenges and changes of modernity? How did these experiences, and the feelings they evoked, shape new Jewish hopes and projects?

This course uses Jewish short stories, beginning in the late 19th century, from England, Russia, Eastern Europe, Israel, and America.

The stories give us unique insights into generational struggles, changing gender roles, and the search for “authentic Judaism” outside the precincts of religion. The most recent stories highlight the fear that traditional forms of Jewish memory and identity may be disappearing entirely, and ask whether these can be replaced with a commitment to social justice or with “Israeliness.”

Cambridge, Harvard Worship and Study: “Eight Essential Jewish Thinkers-A User-Friendly Guide to Modern Jewish Thought”

- **Instructor:** Dr. Jacob Meskin
- **Meets:** Sunday afternoons, 3:00 – 5:30 pm, alternating weeks, beginning October 27.
- **Full class schedule:** October 27; November 10, 24; December 8; January 5, 19; February 2, 23; March 8, 22. Snow/sick day: March 29.
- **Cost:** \$350.

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Modernity introduced decisive changes into the lives of Jews. This course offers a hands-on and clear introduction to eight of the most important Jewish thinkers who have reflected on the meaning of being Jewish in the modern period. These thinkers approach the question of modern Jewish existence from a wide variety of different perspectives ranging from an emphasis on Jewishness as a secular political identity, through attempts to combine modernity either with orthodox Judaism, or with a mystical and deeply religious understanding of Zionism.

Some of the issues we will be considering include:

- the origins of antisemitism
- the place of Jews in modern, western societies
- how a modern Jew ought to read the Hebrew Bible
- Jewish life and tradition the nature of human fulfillment
- the relevance of talmudic thinking to modern life
- the central role of human relationships in thought and life
- the ultimate meaning and importance of Zionism
- the dangers of totalitarianism
- the psychological implications of Judaism

Historical background on each thinker will be presented each week, along with manageable excerpts from his or her writings. The goal each week will be to try to get a working grasp of the basic ideas and directions of each thinker. Bibliographies will also be provided so that students can continue to deepen their acquaintance. The eight thinkers are: Benedict Spinoza, Sigmund Freud, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Emmanuel Levinas, and Aviva Zornberg.

Dedham, NewBridge on the Charles: "From Darkness to Light: The New History of Jewish-Christian Relations"

- **Instructor:** Dr. Jacob Meskin
- **Meets:** Fridays mornings, 9:30 – 11:30 am, alternating weeks, beginning October 25.
- **Full class schedule:** October 25; November 7, 22; December 6, 20; January 10, 24; February 7, 28; March 13, 27; April 17. Snow/sick day: May 1.
- **Cost:** \$300.

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Thoughtful Jews and Christians stand at a rare moment in the early twenty-first century. Recent developments point to a future that might be very different from what was often a sad and tragic past. For example, the famous declaration “Nostra Aetate”, issued by the Catholic Church in 1965, offered a new and sympathetic perspective on Jewish Christian relations. In addition, fascinating advances in scholarship by both Jewish and Christian researchers have invited all of us to re-imagine, in radical ways, the original emergence of what we now call “Christianity” from the matrix of Judaism in the first century CE.

These and other developments promise new hope for those who seek to repair the complex and often tragic history of Jewish Christian relations, and who look forward to Jews and Christians living side by side, in their respective faiths, as friends and allies.

In this course, we will study the often painful history of Jewish Christian relations, drawing on the latest scholarship and innovative paradigms. Our focus will be on what happened, on why it happened and, above all, on how understanding the deep reasons behind past events can liberate us to envision a better future. Through this kind of study contemporary Jews and Christians can fully grasp that the future need not be like the past.

Among other topics, we will take up the following issues: the Jewishness of Jesus, the essential role of Paul and the relationship between his teachings and Judaism, the central nature of Rabbinic Judaism, Church doctrine and theological ideas about Jews in the middle ages, the Crusades, popular prejudices against Jews in Europe, the Reformation and the Jews, Christian Hebraism, British Protestant attitudes toward Jews, Vatican II and the Jews, and the relationships between Evangelical Christianity and Jews. All readings, including those from the Tannah and the New Testament, will be made available free of charge to registered students. As with previous Me’ah Select courses, the instructor intends to strike a balance between providing information frontally, and facilitating spirited conversation among the usually well-informed and engaged students at Newbridge!

Lexington Collaborative: “The Five Megillot,” meeting at Temple Isaiah.

- **Instructor:** Rabbi Neal Gold
- **Meets:** Mondays evenings, 7:00 – 9:30 pm, beginning November 4.
- **Full class schedule:** November 4, 11, 18, 25; December 2, 9, 16; January 6, 13, 27. Snow/sick days: February 3.
- **Cost:** \$350
- Registration for this class is through [chaverweb](#). Please note that when registering via chaverweb, Temple Emunah members may use their login; all others may create a guest account. Then go to “events sign-up” and look for “Me’ah Select.”

Five unusual biblical books—Ruth, Esther, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes—have a unique role in Jewish life: each provides a liturgy for a festival in the cycle of the year. Beyond that, each of these books is delightfully idiosyncratic compared to the rest of the Bible. We will discover together just what makes these books so special, through a close reading of the primary texts as well as secondary literature that puts them in the context of Israel’s experience in the ancient Near East.

Lexington Collaborative: “The Creation of The Modern Jew: European Nationalism, Zionism, and American Jewish Life,” meeting at Temple Emunah.

- **Instructor:** Dr. Jacob Meskin
- **Meets:** at Temple Emunah, Thursdays mornings, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., beginning October 24.
- **Full class schedule:** October 24, 31; November 7, 14, 21; December 5, 12, 19; January 9, 16. Snow/sick day: January 23.
- **Cost:** \$350.
- Registration for this class is through [chaverweb](#). Please note that when registering via chaverweb, Temple Emunah members may use their login; all others may create a guest account. Then go to “events sign-up” and look for “Me’ah Select.”

The advent of the Enlightenment in Europe led to legal Emancipation that freed Jews from their centuries-long separate existence. As nationalism led to the establishment of culturally distinct nation-states, Jews found themselves “officially” invited to become citizens. But this new legal status did not by itself alter the religious and cultural otherness of the Jews. The Jews’ new status was challenging and often entailed adverse and even tragic consequences.

How did Jews — and some non-Jews — respond to this situation?

In this course we will begin with the background of nineteenth and twentieth century nationalism, and will then focus on to the two most important responses to this challenging

situation: Zionism and the creation of American Jewish life. Both endeavored to make it possible for Jews to fit into a society and to call it “home.” Modern Jewish life is a direct consequence of these two responses.

I. The Background of Nationalism

We will first consider the all-important phenomenon of European nationalism. After introducing the history of nationalism in general, and in Europe in the nineteenth century specifically, we take up three non-Jewish writers — one Scottish, one English, and one Irish — who created a Jewish hero or heroine in order to work out issues connected to the nationalism of their own time and place. Through excerpts from their novels, we will encounter Walter Scott’s enchanting and inspiring Jewish heroine Rebecca (Ivanhoe), George Eliot’s proto-Zionist English Jew Deronda (Daniel Deronda), and James Joyce’s famously Jewish hero and anti-hero, Leopold Bloom (Ulysses). Interestingly, for each one of these writers, it is a Jewish protagonist who will open up new perspectives on the sort of Scottish, or English, or Irish nationalism each author champions.

II. Zionism

In the second part of the course, we will examine the best-known Jewish response to European nationalism: Zionism, which is often held to be at least partly a translation of European nationalism into Jewish terms. We will read selections from nineteenth Jewish essayists and thinkers who preceded Herzl, such as Moses Hess, Leon Pinsker, and Rabbi Judah Alkali. We will then move on to selections from Herzl’s novel *Old New Land*, essays by Ahad Ha-Am, and some of the kabbalistic-nationalistic writings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. We will end our explorations with extracts from contemporary Israeli texts and memoirs that describe civic identity, day-to-day life, and nationalism in Israel from varied and divergent points of view.

III. Creating Jewish Life In America

Finally, we will study ways in which American Jews in the mid-twentieth century helped to formulate and disseminate an image of America that was welcoming to outsiders and accepting of diversity. On the one hand, we will explore attempts to characterize Jewish traditions and Judaism as just another American religion, which allowed to Jews participate more or less completely in American life. On the other hand, we will study how the unique message that Jewish writers, composers, and producers infused into Hollywood movies and Broadway musicals: that America is a welcoming place for all outsiders, including Jews, and that America’s greatness lies in her underlying values of pluralism and tolerance. We will watch selected clips of these movies and musicals to further enrich this learning experience.

Newton, Hebrew College: “Old New World: The History of Zionist Ideas”

- **Instructor:** Rabbi Neal Gold
- **Meets:** Tuesday mornings, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm, beginning November 5, 2019
- **Full class schedule:** November 5, 12, 19; December 2, 10, 17; January 7, 14, 21, 28. Snow/sick day: February 4.
- **Cost:** \$350.

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Zionism sprouted from modernity, the 19th century social and intellectual trends that challenged just what, exactly, it meant to be a Jew in a new era of history. In this class we'll explore how those ideas impacted the Jewish people in Israel and in America. We'll look at the key ideas of Zionism, including the writings of Theodor Herzl, Ahad Ha'am, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Henrietta Szold, Louis Brandeis, and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. And we'll learn the post-1948 and post-1967 changes expressed by the thinkers, poets, and artists who shaped these generations. To understand their ideas is essential for understanding why and how the State of Israel came to be, why it looks the way it does today, and what it all means for 21st Century Judaism.

Newton, Hebrew College: “Cinematic Midrash: The Movies "Take" on Biblical Text”

- **Instructor:** Dr. Lynne Heller
- **Meets:** Thursday evenings, 7:00 - 9:30 pm, beginning October 24
- **Full class schedule:** October 24, 31; November 7, 14, 21; December 5, 12, 19; January 9, 16. Snow/sick days: January 23, 30
- **Cost:** \$350.

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Cinema grapples with levels of reality as well as themes from antiquity and frequently is in conversation with a biblical text. We shall do a close reading of selected foundational biblical texts. Then we will screen award-winning movies from recent Jewish Film festivals, as well as scenes from the super hero genre (Wonder Woman and Black Panther) to unpack and further interpret biblical themes through the lens of modernity and social commentary. Bring your Bible, your brain, and critical eye. Artisan popcorn will be provided!

Newton, Hebrew College: “Modern Jewish Mystical Masters”

- **Instructor:** Rabbi Natan Margalit
- **Meets:** Thursday mornings, 9:45 am - 12:15 pm, beginning October 24
- **Full class schedule:** October 24, 31; November 7, 14, 21; December 5, 12, 19; January 9, 16. Snow/sick days: January 23, 30
- **Cost:** \$350.

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In this class we'll get an opportunity to study the thought, practices and lives of some of the most profound and influential Jewish mystics of the modern era. Building on the earlier mystical traditions of heavenly ascents, Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah, numerology and early Hasidic spirituality we'll delve deeply into some middle and later Hasidic masters such as Yehudah Arie Leib Alter (the S'fat Emet), Mordecai Yosef Leiner, (the Ishbitzer Rebbe), Kalman Kalonymous Shapiro (the Piazetzner Rebbe) as well as 20th and 21st century figures who took Jewish mysticism into new directions such as Abraham Isaac Kook, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Zalman Schachter Shalomi, and contemporary teachers of mystical Judaism such as Shefa Gold and Arthur Green. English translations of texts will always be available and the class is open to all.

Newton, Temple Emanuel: “Crucial Moments in the Israeli Experience Through the Lens of Short Stories”

- **Instructor:** Dr. Jacob Meskin
- **Meets:** Wednesday mornings, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., beginning October 23
- **Full class schedule:** October 23, 30; November 6, 13, 20; December 4, 11, 18; January 8, 15. Snow/sick days: January 22, 29.
- **Cost:** \$325; \$625 if you register for both fall and spring class. Financial aid is available; please contact meah@hebrewcollege.edu for details.
- **Please register** through the Temple Emanuel website:
<https://www.templemanuel.com/event/meah-select-crucial-moments/2019-10-23/>

This course aims to introduce students to certain critical moments in the history of the modern state of Israel through short stories that range from the earliest days of the pioneers to the twenty-first century. Written by men and women, Ashkenazim and Sefardim/Mizrachim, Jews and Arabs, secularists and traditionalists, these stories open up for us uniquely visceral and imaginative windows on many of the compelling events that have shaped the history of Israel.

Although our focus each week will be on the stories, excerpts from various academic and secondary sources will also be supplied, in order to provide historical background for the

setting of each story. Depending on logistical considerations we may also screen one or two Israeli films, which tie in to some of the stories.

Metrowest in Sudbury, Congregation B'nai Torah, "The Making of the Modern Jew: European Nationalism, Zionism, and American Jewish Life"

- **Instructor:** Dr. Jacob Meskin
- **Meets:** Thursdays evenings, 7:00 – 9:30 p.m., beginning October 24.
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Wellesley, Temple Beth Elohim: "In Search of Character: Exploring Biblical Personalities"

- **Instructor:** Rabbi Benjamin Samuels
- **Meets:** Wednesday mornings, 9:30-11:30 a.m., beginning October 23
- **Full class schedule:** October 23, 30; November 6, 13, 20; December 4, 11, 18; January 8, 15; January 22, 29. Snow/sick day: February 5.
- **Cost:** \$300

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The Hebrew Bible shares precious little description about the personalities that fill its pages. Rather, the character of its personalities inheres in their words and deeds. Join us for a series of interactive text studies of major and minor biblical personalities explored through the interpretive readings of the Talmud, the Midrash, as well as of medieval and modern commentaries.

12 Topics:

- Abraham and the Discovery of God
- Love Shared, Love Lost: Rachel and Leah
- The Dynamics of Remorse: The Repentance of Joseph's Brothers
- The Ethics of Extremism: How are Zealots, Heroes, and Thugs Different?
 - The Case of Simon and Levi
- Moses: The Early Years, Leadership and Its Development
- Counselor and Confidante: Jethro
- Miriam: Prophetess of a Nation
- The Blasphemer: Rebel with a Cause
- The Politics of Rebellion; Korach and His Assembly
- Property, Power, and the Politics of Gender: The Daughters of Tzelaphechad

- The Problem of Pain in the Book of Job
- Paragons of Virtue or Fallible Human Beings? The Morality of our Patriarchs, Matriarchs, and Biblical Heroes

Financial Aid is available for all Me'ah Select courses – please contact Marilyn Stern, Associate Director of Me'ah, at meah@hebrewcollege.edu or 617-559-8614.