

J.E.M. Jewish Educational Manna - Intellectual Food for the Wondering Jew

Adult Learning Programs 2006-2007

1. In Search of Vashti

September 11, 2006

Evan Tapp

JCC

We all know a little about Vashti from the Book of Esther which we read every Purim. But what really ever happened to Vashti after she refused King Achashvarosh's request? Like many other powerful feminist heroes, Vashti's story has been erased from history. Recent events in the Middle East have made Vashti's story even more relevant. The voice of so few strong female leaders in international (both Middle Eastern and Western) politics is a sad reality.

2. Magic and Superstition in Jewish Culture

September 18

Nancy Pazner

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Over the centuries Jews have developed a host of protective rituals and utterances to ward off evil. Who can blame them? Judaism is a religion based on faith as well as practice, and where there's room for the unexplained, there is superstition and magic. It is said that one should not believe in superstitions, but it is best to be heedful of them. Some beliefs of our grandparents are often thought of as superstitions today. Which of our beliefs will be treated as such by our wonderful grandchildren (poo, poo, poo)? Heed this talk which promises to be magical and enlightening.

3. Jewish Genetics: Who is Related to Whom?

October 16

Bill Chodirker

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Whether you are a Cohen, a Levi or an Israelite, you will find this to be a fascinating presentation on the application of state-of-the-art DNA procedures to the study of Jewish identity and history back to biblical times. Are Moses, David and Aaron part of your family tree?

4. International Law: Is Israel On Side?

October 23

Joe Samuels

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

We constantly hear claims from many sources including Arab propagandists that Israel is an illegal state unlawfully occupying territories and using unethical tactics in its wars. Is this true, false or somewhere in between? Joseph Samuels, a well-known legal arbitrator and an expert in International Law, was a professor of International Law for 19 years and was the legal advisor to the Canadian Red Cross Society and the Government of Canada at the experts meetings and diplomatic conferences leading to the 1977 Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions on humanitarian law. He will help us understand where Israel stands with regard to these claims.

5. History of Rabbinic Jewry

October 30

Rabbi Lazer Gurkow

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

There have been three primary points in the history of Judaism where rabbis have had to shift their method of teaching because of historical circumstances. Some of the wisest rabbinic minds our people have ever known decided on each of these shifts because of specific events in our Jewish history, e.g. the destruction of the temple and the diaspora. In this session, Rabbi Lazer Gurkow will describe key events and how the Rabbis responded to each. This will provide a great insight into the workings of Jewish history.

6. Chronicles: A Little-Read Book of the Bible

November 6

Kivi Shapiro

Temple Israel

Drama. Action. War. Dancing. Intrigue. Compelling characters. David, Solomon, Jehosophat, the Queen of Sheba. Exciting, and so racy that it could come with an "R" rating. So how come so few people have read it? And what was the author trying to accomplish?

7. Religious Pluralism in Israel: Does your Jewishness Count?

TUESDAY, November 14

Paul Liptz

Temple Israel

Israel is unique in that it is both a religious state and a democracy. The state religion, of course, is Judaism. There are many ways to interpret Judaism but the Israeli Government has largely codified Orthodox Judaism as the "state religion," creating schisms between Jews and Jews. Conservative and Reform Judaism have not been considered as legitimate as Orthodox Judaism, which is - by rule of law - the Israeli version of "normative" Judaism. Thus Reform and Conservative Jews do not have certain rights that, for example, Christians and Muslims do have in Israel.

Professor Paul Liptz will address the history of this situation, and the current status of pluralism after many years of legislation and negotiation. He has taught for many years at Tel Aviv University and HUC-JIR/Jerusalem, where he teaches modern Jewish and Israeli history and politics.

8. & 9. An Introduction to the Talmud (A Two-Session Program)

November 20 and November 27

Art Benjamin

Temple Israel

The Talmud is the central body of literature for Jews. Its contents took centuries to construct and can take lifetimes of study. These two sessions will provide an introduction to what it is, how it was prepared and what its significance is today. No knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic is necessary.

10. The Time of the Judges: The "Wild, Wild East"

December 4

Carl Erlich

Temple Israel

When Israelites first settled in the Promised Land, Jews fought Jews as often as they fought their non-Jewish neighbours. Learn more about the ancient times of Jephthah, Deborah and Samuel. And, of course, there's Samson's famous haircut.

11. The Kaddish: The Paradoxical Prayer

December 11

Rabbi Joel Wittstein

Temple Israel

The Kaddish is one of our more unusual prayers. Most of it isn't in Hebrew; it can only be recited in the presence of a minyan; and there are five different versions of it. Though it is recited by mourners, it contains not a word about death. Although deeply meaningful, it also serves a simple structural purpose in the service. Where did this prayer come from, and why is it so compelling?

12. L'Dor V'Dor: The Seven Cycles of Jewish Life

December 18

Art Benjamin

Temple Israel

From the time we are born, we Jews live through the cycle we call "daily" slightly more than 30,000 times. We also live approximately 4500 weeks, 1000 months and, as they say, "You should live forever to 120." There are other cycles, too, that individual Jewish people and The Jewish People live through. We'll look at each of those seven cycles to understand Jewish life from a new perspective.

13. Srul Irving Glick: The Consummate Jewish Composer

January 8, 2007

Fred Ball

Temple Israel

In this Jewish Arts presentation we will learn about the life of Canada's own master of Jewish music composition - the late Srul Irving Glick. He is recognized around the world as a superb composer of both religious and secular music. Enjoy a glimpse into his life, from his humble beginnings as the son of a chazzan to his decision to strike out on his own as a full-time composer.

Besides sampling and discussing some of Glick's Jewish compositions, we will hear anecdotes about the life and career of this daring and innovative musician.

14. & 15. Understanding our Siddur, And Learning to Love It (A Two-Session Program)

January 15 and January 22

Bill Klein

Temple Israel

Do you find services boring? Does the Siddur seem to go on forever? Don't you wish it all just made more sense? In this two-session program, you'll learn about the architecture of the service, how it grew and what the major segments are. Then you'll explore some of the oddities of the Siddur, including hidden signatures, prayers about praying, what happens when there isn't a minyan and information about the Siddur's choreography - the sitting, standing, bowing, knee-bending, swaying and when you're not allowed to say "amen." After this program, going to shul will never be the same for you.

16. The Jews of Rhodes: Will They Survive?

January 29

Carol Herbert

Temple Israel

For over 2300 years, Jews have lived on the beautiful island of Rhodes, and the medieval city with its narrow cobbled streets had its own Jewish Quarter. Built in 1577, the synagogue is one of the oldest in Europe. Yet under German occupation, over 1700 Jews were deported to Auschwitz in 1944, and only about 35 Jews remain today. The presentation will be given by Dr. Carol Herbert, a descendent of the Sephardic Jews of Rhodes.

17. Applying the Insights of Jewish Texts - The Beginning of Life

February 5

Rabbi Michal Shekel

Temple Israel

When does Jewish life begin? When does an embryo get a human soul? What are the rights of the mother of a developing fetus? What are the rights of the father and of the baby itself? These and many other questions about the beginning of life have been asked and answered in our Jewish tradition, with wisdom and creativity often missing from the shrill debates of today.

18. Applying the Insights of Jewish Texts - The End of Life

February 12

Mark Poznansky

Temple Israel

When does Jewish life end? Where does Judaism stand on mercy killing, assisted suicide, cremation and donation of body parts? We will examine what the Torah, Talmud, Halachic Codes and Responsa have to say on these and the many other issues with which our modern society wrestles. You will be surprised at the sanity and thoroughness of our Halachic tradition on the subject.

19. Moses: One of the First CEO's?

February 19

Sandra Safran

Temple Israel

Following the departure of the Jews from Egypt, Moses spent much of his time as a judge, settling large and small disputes. Luckily Jethro acted as a consultant on how to re-organize the management structure and delegate some responsibility so that Moses could focus on the "big picture" to get his people to Israel. How would Moses have rated as a CEO in a modern corporation or community? What were his strengths and weaknesses?

20. How Jews Govern Jews

February 26

Art Benjamin

Temple Israel

From benevolent despot (Moses) to democratic republic (today's State of Israel), throughout our history the Jewish people have tried just about every form imaginable to govern ourselves. Even when we had no state of our own, we usually had some degree of self-government. This session reviews how we applied Jewish law to our daily lives, how we policed ourselves, made decisions, punished criminals and prepared to defend ourselves.

21. The Karaites and the Samaritans: The Making of a Jewish Schism

March 5

Nancy Pazner

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Offshoots of ancient Jewish people, the Karaites and Samaritans have their own version of the Torah and Jewish practices, yet both groups reject Talmudic rabbinic law. Although few in number, they still practice their traditions in Israel today. In this session, you will learn about their rise and fall, some of their fascinating personalities and their impact on mainstream Judaism.

22. Alexander the Great and the Jews: The Legends and the Facts

March 19

Naomi Sheinbaum

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Alexander the Great "liberated" Israel from benign Persian rule and made it part of his own empire. He visited Jerusalem, admired the Jewish people, and granted them political and religious freedom. This visit was the basis for a raft of legends, some of which might even have been true! After his death his successors imposed an unpopular legacy of Hellenization that set the stage for the story of Chanukah.

23. The Haggadah: Why is this Book Different from all other Books?

March 26

Josh Dubitsky

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

When you sit down to the Passover seder, do you ever wonder how the Haggadah took shape? How did it emerge in the second century out of excerpts from Exodus, discussions and opinions from the Talmud, Mishnah, Gemara and Midrash and then evolve to the forms it has now? Why were certain prayers and songs incorporated? Why is Moses not mentioned? Your seder will mean more to you after hearing about this "guidebook" to it.

24. Lost and Found: Biblical Archeology and How it has Changed over Time

April 30

Jim Stevens

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Although Jews are known as the "people of the book," our curiosity about Biblical sites and history goes far beyond the book itself. When did archeologists begin adding to our knowledge of our Jewish and Biblical history? What information has provided keen insights? How has this information changed our view of ourselves? We will dig deep to provide you with all the pertinent information.

25. From Moses to Moses to Moses

May 7

Rabbi Joel Wittstein

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

When Moses Maimonides (12th century) lived, a popular saying was, "From Moses to Moses there have been none like Moses," referring to Moshe Rabbainu. When Moses Mendelssohn (18th century) lived, the saying was, "From Moses to Moses to Moses there have been none like Moses." We will look briefly at the life and contribution of each of these three people, as well as some other great people named Moses in Jewish history, and see what traits they had in common.

26. What does Torah Teach Us about Raising Children?

May 14

Laya Block

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Our Torah provides us with much interesting and insightful information on how to raise children. Morah Block, a renowned educator, will talk about how we can apply these to our own children today.

27. Lilith and Satan: A Dark Side of Jewish Mythology

May 28

Rabbi Michal Shekel

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Who is Lilith she and why are new mothers afraid of her? Why don't we hear much about Satan? Is it an accident that both sexes are represented in our mythological dark side? This promises to be a "helluva" presentation!

28. Three Jewish Philosophers of Three Different Periods

June 4

Art Benjamin

Or Shalom, Anna Leff Building

Philo lived in Alexandria in the first century and knew no Hebrew, Spinoza lived in the Netherlands in the 17th century and was excommunicated, and Heschel was just special and lived in the 20th century in Poland, Germany and the United States. Three very different periods, locations and philosophies. By understanding how each thought of his received history of Judaism and comparing the resulting philosophies, we will increase our appreciation of the breadth and depth of Judaism.