

WR – 234: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Hello to you all:

My name is Jim Nauenburg and I just wanted to take a moment to write to you about WR-234 and to explain a few introductory concepts before you begin your study of Judaism online at Henry Ford Community College. WR-234 is entirely online, and you will communicate with me via email at the class website and the discussion board at the site which is known as “The Kosher Kitty.” You will need to visit the campus bookstore to buy your text, and also to perform research at either the HFCC or UM-D libraries. The textbook is: *Understanding Judaism*, Rabbi Mordechai Katz. Mesorah Publications, 2006. ISBN: 1-57819-518-7

We will be reading from the Bible as well, and an excellent online version is available at: <http://www.godweb.org/nrs/index2.htm>

There will be weekly readings from your textbook and the Bible, as well as a number of materials I have created specifically for the course. Every 2 weeks you will be asked to provide some analysis and insight about a particular theme from the reading. There will be six assignments of this kind and one research essay. Further discussion of the issues will be available through “The Kosher Kitty.”

If you are unsure about your readiness for the commitment of an online course take the self-test on the HFCC Ucompass login page: <http://henryford.ucompass.com>. Click the **Student Resources** link and then click; “**Is online for you?**” to learn if your learning style and self-discipline is suited for online learning. To ensure that your computer is ready for online learning click “**PC Requirements**” in **Student Resources**. The **Technology Analysis** at the bottom of the page will evaluate your computer to make sure you have the necessary software applications to access the course content. If you do not have the correct version of an application there is a link to a free upgrade page. You will log into Ucompass using your **WebAdvisor username** and the four-digit **mmdd of your birth** as your password (if your birthday is July 4, your password would be 0704). If you do not know your WebAdvisor username find it through the HFCC website <http://www.hfcc.edu>. Click the blue WebAdvisor box, then click the link for Students and follow the prompts to display your username.

Probably, the first thing you should know is that the Christian Old Testament is the entirety of the Bible for Jews and that Jews have many of the books of the Old Testament arranged in an order that is different from the order we will actually be using in the class. For Jews, the Old Testament is simply called the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is most usually referred to by Jews as a Jew from Nazareth who had a number of ideas about the Sabbath that were radically different from the accepted Jewish norm.

Judaism got its formal start among the ancient Israelites probably around 1250 BCE or so. It springs from a wealth of Near Eastern traditions which were even more ancient and it incorporates a great deal of original developments as well. Now, some 3000 years later, a rich tradition and cultural identity of long standing has resulted in what we all call Judaism here in the United States. What exactly does this mean? For a great many of us the knowledge necessary for understanding and appreciating Judaism is hard to come by. After all, it is a religion which is

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practiced by less than 4% of the population of the entire world. And even within that 4% there is a great deal of discussion about who is right and who is wrong and what it is exactly that makes someone a religious Jew.

This class will be an effort at filling in the blanks for students who want to know more about a history and a practice that has shaped very fundamental aspects of their lives, and yet of which they remain uninformed. We will read segments from many of the foundational documents of Judaism, and we will hear the opinions of one of the modern era's representatives for the traditions of Judaism. Students will be asked to offer examples of their understanding of the reading and encouraged to form a position on Judaism that combines appreciation with reasoned analysis. I think, in the end, you will draw new connections between your own experiences in today's United States with the experiences of the ancient Israelites so long ago, and as a consequence you will discover that Judaism has colored all our lives from the beginning in both wonderful and difficult ways.

Excelsior!

Jim Nauenburg