

# ALEF-BET

## Basic Building Blocks of Jewish Life

*22 Interactive Learning Sessions with Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie*

**You're curious about Judaism and what this 3,000 year old tradition has to offer your life?**

**Welcome.**

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In this course I will plan to share with you some of the highlights, core concepts, master stories, key figures and building blocks of what Judaism means to me, what it has meant to so many generations before us, and why I find it a compelling path towards a life of meaning, mindfulness, creativity and connection.

Each of the 22 concepts chosen to outline this course offer a glimpse into Judaism's emphasis on a life of learning, spiritual practice and communal responsibility. This is an everybody-friendly course, open to all seekers regardless of background or beliefs. Curiosity, respect for others, open mind and heart are mostly all that's needed. Each session will be a conversation, encouraging multiple perspectives, inquiries and questions.

Inspiring readings for each week will be assigned ahead of time, and additional readings and viewing options will be suggested as the course progresses.

The group's digital communication and file sharing will be crowd-sourced and co-determined once the group is formed.

I look forward to meeting you and going on a meaningful journey together,

- Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie

*Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie is the founding spiritual leader of Lab/Shul NYC and the founding director of StorahTelling, Inc. An Israeli-born Jewish educator, writer, and performance artist, he received his rabbinical ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 2016. Rabbi Amichai has been hailed as "an iconoclastic mystic" by Time Out New York, a "rock star" by the New York Times. He was a Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Leadership Institute in Israel (2008-2009), served on the advisory committee of Faith House Manhattan, is a consultant to the Reboot Network, and a member of the URJ Faculty Team.*



*photo credit: Victoria Will*

# 22 Conversations

**WHERE:** All sessions are conveniently held at Lab/Shul's downtown office, 125 Maiden Lane, Suite 8B

**WHEN:** Tuesdays, 7:00-9:00pm

*Please Note:* For experiential learning, a few sessions (marked with an \*) will be held on Fridays or Saturdays in private homes, location TBD.

1. Feb 6 2018 - Shvat 21 5778

**KAVANA/INTENT** Fine-tuning Focus

*Welcome. We'll begin by setting intentions for this journey of exploration, inspired by poetic models from the Talmud, offering optional top three values for what meaningful Jewish life can be about.*

2. Feb 13 2018 - Shvat 28 5778

**L'CHAYIM/TO LIFE** Mapping the Jewish Year

*Exploring the Jewish calendar and its evolution + mapping of what and why exactly is every fast and feast day on the annual cycle, and how are they connected.*

3. Feb 20 2018 - Adar 5 5778

**V'AHAVTA/RE:LOVE** Begin with Basics

*On one foot, under the bed, and in each prayer, one of Judaism's core value is refining the art of loving. An introduction to Biblical and medieval liturgy and literature.*

4. \* Friday, Feb 23 2018 - Adar 8 5778

**KODESH/SACRED** Sanctifying Space and Time - Shabbat Dinner Together

*Sacred space, time, and experience: How have these concepts evolved in Jewish life and where do we tap into the holy in our lives today?*

5. Feb 27 2018 - Adar 12 5778

**ZACHOR/REMEMBER** The Art of Jewish Memory and the Return of the Repressed

*What is the role of memory and what are we instructed to remember? A look at Jewish identity and its formation through prep for Purim and the Book of Esther.*

6. March 6 2018 - Adar 19 5778

**TORAH/WISDOM** The Written + Spoken Body of Knowledge

*On the mountain, in public squares, or in communal discourse: What is Torah? What are its origins and how did it evolve into the central sacred Jewish story?*

7. March 13 2018 - Adar 26 5778

**PARDES/ENTER THE ORCHARD** Entering the Orchard of the Soul

*Entering the Pardes, Hebrew for "orchard," is a poetic term that describes the process of deep learning. Pardes is also an acronym, describing a four-step methodology with which to make sense and meaning of life.*

8. March 20 2018 - Nisan 4 5778

**AGADA/LEGEND** The Rituals of Storytelling

*Prep for Passover and the night of epic storytelling with a focus on the "master story" and how it's been told for generations. Learn more about the Seder and the role of ritual in a diverse community/society.*

9. \* Saturday, March 24 2018 - Nisan 8 5778

**HAVDALA/HOW TO DIVIDE** Havdala Ritual + Learning

*Can modern Judaism celebrate both open inclusivity and the maintenance of firm boundaries of particularism?*

*Participation in a Havdala ritual followed by conversation about the firm, the fluid, and the flexible. (Joined session with students of Advanced Intro to Judaism course)*

## Pre-Course Informational Calls

(Choose One)

Tuesday January 9th // 7-8pm

Sunday January 21 // 5-6pm

Dial: 641.715.3296

Password: 978294#

10. March 27 2018 - Nisan 11 5778

**MIDRASH/MYTH** How We Spin New Meaning from our Oldest Texts

*Fight, flight, faith and/or freedom? Cross the Sea of Reeds again through study of this biblical story through the prism of midrash - a metaphoric method used to retell and spin sacred texts as motivating narratives that offer us virtues and values.*

11. April 3 2018 - Nisan 18 5778

**MITZVAH/OBLIGATION** What is the 614th Commandment?

*Mitzvah is Hebrew for a good deed that is conducted for our own well being and/or that of others. We'll examine this term through its evolution and manifestations, focusing on the most recent suggested addition to the list: the "614th Commandment," to remember the Holocaust. Ahead of Yom HaShoah/Holocaust Memorial Day, this session will enable us to grapple with some of the key theological responses to personal and public suffering.*

12. April 10 2018 - Nisan 25 5778

**HALACHA/THE PATH OF LAW** Walk the Talk, from Legendary to Legalistic Rendering of Jewish Life

*An overview of the evolution of Halacha - the Jewish legalist system - with a focus on specific laws, customs and perspectives of the various denominations in today's Jewish world.*

13. \*Friday, April 13 2018 - Nisan 28 5778

**SHECHINA/DIVINE PRESENCE** In the Presence of the Infinite, and Community

*Join the Lab/Shul Community for Sabbath Queen - our Friday Night worship event - followed by a private dinner and study session about the evolution of God with Rabbi Amichai and guests from the community.*

14. April 17 2018 - Iyar 2 5778

**ISRAEL/GOD-WRESTLING** Making Sense of our Relationship to the People, Land and Legacy of Israel

*The Biblical battle between Jacob and a stranger became the basis for the name and virtue of the Jewish people as well as their modern state: Yisra-El, Israel - the one who wrestles with the Divine. Ahead of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, we'll focus on two stories of wrestlers and founders, and share our own stories, questions and connections to Israel.*

15. April 24 2018 - Iyar 9 5778

**HINENI/HERE I AM** Cultivating Spiritual Practice

*What's the history of Jewish prayer and its meanings for our many modern needs and modes of spiritual practice? Learn the basics and structures of Jewish prayer, focusing on the role of prayer in the cultivation of a personal reflective practice and a culture of collective consciousness raising.*

16. \*Friday, May 18 2018 - Sivan 10 5778

**KOSHER/LEGITIMACY** Recipes and Rituals of The Jewish Gastronomical Traditions

*This Sabbath Eve dinner will focus on food and its central role in Jewish life. What's ok or not, and how to make the most of every feast and fast, year round.*

17. May 22 2018 - Sivan 8 5778

**EMET/TRUTH** One Truth - Or Many?

*Is there still solid truth in a pluralistic postmodern world of alternative facts? Classical and contemporary Jewish thinkers explore the origins and meanings of faith and doubt.*

18. May 29 2018 - Sivan 15 5778

**MINYAN/COMMUNITY** Who's In, Who Counts? The Evolving Norms of Communal Culture

*Jewish ritual and culture has traditionally emphasized the importance of "separation." Let's talk about the boundaries and borders that divide us to unite us.*

19. June 8 2018 - Sivan 25 5778

**MAZELTOV/CONGRATULATIONS!** Jewish Lifecycle Celebrations 101

*An overview of life cycle moments and the rituals and customs associated with them in Jewish traditions: birth, coming of age, marriage and, sometimes, divorce.*

20. June 12 2018 - Sivan 29 5778

**KADDISH/MOURNING** How to Handle Death and Dying

*Judaism developed powerful and intricate paths to help us deal and heal when death and mourning happens. This closing session will provide an overview of Judaism's key perspective and practices that focus on the end of life.*

21. June 19 2018 - Tamuz 2 5778

**TZEDEK/JUSTICE** What it Takes to Fix the World

*The pursuit of justice as a way to constantly improve the world is a key element of Jewish life. Can this call inspire and empower us to be more conscious of the needs of others and step up a life of kindness, care and justice for all?*

22. June 26 2018 - Tamuz 13 5778

**TIKKUN/FIX** Closing Session

*Coming full circle for a wrap up conversation, reflection and celebration.*

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## How to Make the Most of this Course:

- Attend each session. If you have to miss a session please notify us ahead of time and take time to review the sources and study texts.
- Come on time, unplug, be present and focused.
- Complete the required readings for each session and have fun choosing which of the other optional recommended books interest you the most.
- Online communications - stay on it/in it.
- Deliver one short presentation (3-5 min.) on any of the given topics during the course.
- Sign up for "snack potluck."
- Contact me if there are any topics you'd like to explore that are not listed.
- Take time to explore religious services, cultural programs and volunteer options within the Jewish community during the course. We'll offer suggestions. Got a good idea? Please share with the group.

## Suggested Readings:

- **Anita Diamant**, [Living a Jewish Life, Updated and Revised Edition: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families](#)
- **Arthur Green**, [Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition](#)

## Extra Readings: (Choose at least 3 of these titles for further reading during the course)

### History

- **Raymond P. Scheindlin**, [A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood](#)
- **David N. Myers**, [Jewish History: A Very Short Introduction](#)
- **Norman Solomon**, [Judaism: A Very Short Introduction](#)

### Holidays/Seasons

- **Arthur Ocean Waskow**, [Seasons of Our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays](#)
- **Abigail Pogrebin**, [My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew](#)
- **Arthur Green**, [These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life](#)
- **Jill Hammer**, [The Jewish Book of Days: A Companion for All Seasons](#)
- **Irving Yitz Greenberg**, [The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays](#)

### Bible

- **Richard Elliott Friedman**, [Who Wrote the Bible?](#)
- **Karen-Armstrong**, [The Bible - The Biography](#)

### Theology

- **Judith Plaskow**, [Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective](#)
- **Jay Michaelson**, [Everything Is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism](#)
- **David J. Wolpe**, [Why Be Jewish?](#)

### Literature

- **Adam Kirsch**, [The People and the Books: 18 Classics of Jewish Literature](#)

### Symbols and Art

- **Cecil Roth**, [Jewish Art: An Illustrated History](#)
- **Marc-Alain Ouaknin**, [Symbols of Judaism](#)

## Watch:

- **PBS Series:** [Simon Schama's, Story of the Jews: Finding the Words \(1000 BCE - 1492\)](#)