



Foundations for a Thoughtful Judaism What to Expect



מכון שאלום הרטמן
SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE



FOUNDATIONS FOR A THOUGHTFUL JUDAISM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Shalom Hartman Institute?

- The Shalom Hartman Institute is a think tank and an educational center for the Jewish people. It is based in Israel (in Jerusalem) and in North America (New York, with offices across the country).
- Both bases are often referred to, separately or together, as “Hartman.” The Shalom Hartman Institute of North America is sometimes referred to by its acronym, SHI NA.
- Hartman develops ideas that identify, frame, and bring Jewish wisdom to bear on the challenges that face the world’s Jews today.
- Find the latest news and resources at shalomhartman.org

What is Foundations for a Thoughtful Judaism?

- A pluralistic curriculum powered by Hartman
- A sophisticated introduction to foundational concepts of Judaism and Jewish life
- An invitation for learners to join Judaism’s interpretive conversation
- A distillation of the best of Hartman Torah as taught over decades
- A curriculum designed specifically to be accessible for adult learners taking their first steps into Jewish thought

What are the basic aims of the Foundations curriculum?

- To explore and make accessible the most compelling and deepest questions in Jewish thought
- To demonstrate the principles and debates that underlie our Jewish heritage
- To reject the assumption that every learner is on track toward practicing Judaism in a specified way

Do learners need a set level of Jewish practice?

- No.

Who would use the Foundations curriculum?

- Rabbis, educators, and centralized adult education programs seeking to teach and implement a flexible foundational curriculum for learners
- Learners are diverse and interested in exploring foundational Jewish concepts and ideas. They might include:
 - Young marrieds
 - Interfaith couples
 - Book groups
 - Empty nesters
 - Teens

Why should anyone use the Foundations curriculum?

- North American Jews and interfaith families are searching to understand aspects of Jewish identity.
- Jewish wisdom draws on an unbroken record of experience and thought facing vital questions in the world and society. Hartman brings millennia of thoughtful debates and framing to bear on our own, contemporary world.
- This curriculum is based on ideas and not practice. It presents options, conversations, conflicts, and deep understandings surrounding Jewish life and concepts. It is not a “how to” guide.

What does the curriculum look like?

- Four volumes, each devoted to one of four themes (Ethics, Peoplehood, Faith, Practice)
- Each volume contains 10-12 classes
- The classes are designed to be modular and adaptable for a variety of audiences
- Each volume is accompanied by a series of podcasts and 10-minute videos
- Each volume has a leaders’ guide and suggested source sheets for learners

CURRICULUM IN FOUR VOLUMES:

PEOPLEHOOD

This volume explores questions related to the collective experience of Jewish life: What does it mean to be part of Jewish community? How does one enter? What is the purpose of community? Moreover, what is the value proposition of the largest umbrella of Jewish community: Jewish peoplehood? To what extent can communities and even the Jewish People hold diversity and shared values at the same time? What does Jewish peoplehood entail today when the centers of Jewish life, North America and Israel, are so different and independent from one another?

Contents:

UNIT 1 UNDERSTANDING JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

- **Class 1** Being and Becoming
- **Class 2** Peoplehood in the Hierarchy of Values
- **Class 3** Particularism and Universalism

UNIT 2 BELONGING TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

- **Class 1** Multiple Entrances/Multiple Belongings
- **Class 2** The Jewish People as a Tribal Family
- **Class 3** Navigating Divisive Communities
- **Class 4** What Members of a People Owe Each Other

UNIT 3 PEOPLEHOOD AND THE CENTRALITY OF PLACE

- **Class 1** The Centrality of Place
- **Class 2** Diaspora, Citizenship, and the Modern State of Israel
- **Class 3** From No Home to Two Homes

FAITH

This volume explores questions related to what a relationship with God and a life of faith entails: Where does faith come from? What does it entail? What are the models in Jewish tradition for a complex relationship with God which includes reverence and joy, but also anger and argument? Where does doubt fit into a life of faith? Where do Jews who do not believe fit in?

Contents

UNIT 1 UNDERSTANDING FAITH

- **Class 1** Pathways to Faith
- **Class 2** Faith, Trust, and Risk
- **Class 3** Faith and Knowledge

UNIT 2 THE COMPLEXITIES OF FAITH

- **Class 1** Argument and Submission
- **Supplement** Faith: Judaism as an Interpretive Tradition
- **Class 2** Intimacy and Distance
- **Class 3** Faith and Ethics

UNIT 3 GOD AND OUR LIVES

- **Class 1** Divine intervention—Biblical Perspectives
- **Class 2** Divine Intervention—Rabbinic Approaches
- **Class 3** Divine Intervention and Human Initiative
- **Class 4** Faith and Tragedy
- **Class 5** Faith and Blessing

PRACTICE

This volume explores questions that are fundamental to Jewish practice: What is the system of *mitzvot* trying to accomplish? Why the need for ritual action at all beyond belief? How have Jewish thinkers conceived of the meaning of *mitzvot* in an age of radical human autonomy? What are our obligations to others, to God, to the collective? How does sanctification of time, space, and body lead to holiness?

Contents

UNIT 1 BELIEF AND ACTION

- **Class 1** Understanding Mitzvah
- **Class 2** Sincerity and Ritual
- **Class 3** Obligation and Autonomy

UNIT 2 SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

- **Class 1** Caring for Others
- **Class 2** Connecting with God
- **Class 3** Identifying with the Collective
- **Class 4** Refining Oneself

UNIT 3 IMBUING SANCTITY

- **Class 1** Understanding Holiness
- **Class 2** Sanctification of Time
- **Class 3** Sanctification of Space
- **Class 4** Sanctification of the Body

ETHICS

This volume brings into focus Jewish conversations about ethical questions that impact all of us: What do I owe my inner circle, and what do I owe to others? How do I maintain relationships with integrity when people wrong one another? How should I balance competing values when making a decision? What are the obligations of parents to children and vice versa?

Contents

UNIT 1 A DUAL SYSTEM OF ETHICS

- **Class 1** Creation Ethics
- **Class 2** Covenantal Ethics
- **Class 3** Tensions between Creation and Covenantal Ethics
- **Class 4** Creation and Covenant: Environmental Ethics

UNIT 2 INTERPERSONAL ETHICS

- **Class 1** Bystander Effect
- **Class 2** Ethics of Rebuke
- **Class 3** Ethics of Sacrifice
- **Class 4** Building Community

UNIT 3 MAKING MORAL CHOICES

- **Class 1** The Moral Imperative Approach
- **Class 2** The Moral Concern Approach
- **Class 3** Managing Tensions

UNIT 4 MAKING MORAL CHOICES

- **Class 1** Why People Choose to Parent
- **Class 2** Mutual Obligations—Parents and Children
- **Class 3** Dilemmas and Parenting

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you are an organization looking to learn more, please contact:

Michelle Stone

michelle.stone@shalomhartman.org

If you are an educator looking to learn more, please contact:

Rebecca Starr

rebecca.starr@shalomhartman.org

Cover photograph: *Luke Thornton/Unsplash*