

Initial ideas re contents of the Gateway Course by Shlomo Aronson

Next to the issue of the target population, please let me raise the following questions and matters regarding the substance, in an – obvious – and yet simplistic fashion:

In my view, Jewish Civilization's uniqueness and contribution to the other monotheistic civilizations should be highlighted.

Regarding the basic texts and basic developments of Jewish Civilization:

The Tanach – do we want to discuss the issues of Eye for Eye, and Remember Amaleq, or stress Abraham's Covenant, the Ten Commandments, the legacy of the Exodus from Egypt, and the social-universal credo of the various prophets? The Book of Job and related issues? Kohelet? The Psalms? The historical parts leading to the destruction of the First Temple and its interpretation?

The Second Temple and its destruction – Yavne and the transformation Jewish Worship, its basic traits in exile.

The nature of the Talmud and its significance. Pirquei Avot - the morality of Judaism as expressed therein.

Judaism's contribution to Christianity and Islam – the basic differences. Judaism as non-missionary, national civilization and the issue of its universal vis-à-vis ethnic character.

"Ashkenazi" and "Sepharadi" traditions – the common denominators and the differences.

Judaism in the Middle Ages – Maimonides and the impact of Greek and Moslem cultures.

The Zohar and the Shabtai-Zvi episode. Its impact on rabbinical Judaism and the birth of the Chassidic Movement. The contents of both.

The birth of the Reform Movement.

Israel Salanter and the birth of the Mussar Movement.

Early religious Zionists – Kalischer and supporters.

A major textual contribution could be found in the (English versions) of the late Jacob Katz scholarship, thanks to his comparative approach combined with deep knowledge of Jewish culture. In my view, if we manage to offer a reasonable discussion of the above during one semester, we could proceed with another course – up until our time and age – in the next semester.