

Possible Study Topics with Rabbi Kummer

1. **A History of Anti-Semitism and Possible Steps to Counter it:** One of the impacts of the events in Israel in Gaza has been a dramatic increase in anti-Semitic acts in the US and around the world. Please join us to explore a history of what has been called “the world’s oldest hatred,” along with some thoughts about how anti-Semitism might be countered.
2. **"Zionism: Source of Jewish Vilification or Jewish Pride?"** What do you know about Zionism? Does it conflict with what you hear in the news? Is Zionism a point of Jewish pride for you or for others you know, or is a connection with Zionism something that makes you cringe? The term Zionism has been used — or mis-used — of late as a rallying cry with what some might say are anti-Jewish overtones. Please join us for an opportunity to explore what Zionism actually is and what it isn’t, along with looking at a brief history of Zionism and prospects for the future.
3. **Judaism and warfare:** There has been so much in the news in the past 10 months about Israel and warfare. What makes for a just war, and what guidance does our Jewish tradition offer about how we are to conduct ourselves when at war? Please join us to study some texts regarding Judaism’s attitudes towards war and some of the Israeli Defense Forces official doctrine of ethics.
4. **Jewish Business Ethics:** On a daily basis we hear news stories of scandals in the business world. For Jews, when a Jewish name is associated with one of these scandals, it can make us cringe with shame. What guidance does our Jewish tradition offer us in our business dealings, whether in matters of big business or small, or even around the ways we as individuals conduct our financial matters? Is there wisdom to be found in the reflections and teachings of our sages from ages past that may have relevance for us today? Please join us to learn together about some of the facets of this intriguing topic.
5. **A History of the Jews of Ukraine:**With the current war in the Ukraine, many American Jews look back at family connections to this vast area in Eastern Europe. Please join us as we learn about the history of the Jews of Ukraine and examine some of the significant Jewish movements that originated in that area.
6. **Jewish Attitudes toward the Commandments:** Many Jews have a complicated relationship with Jewish law. While Jews tend to be a highly ethical people, there are a variety of different attitudes in the Jewish community towards Biblical and Rabbinic commandments. Ask any non-Orthodox Jew about their religious observance level and the reasons for it, and you may be in for an extensive explanation! In honor of the springtime Jewish holiday of Shavuot, celebrating the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, please join us for a study session and discussion focusing on the variety of Jewish attitudes towards commanded laws, as well as the content and structure of the 10 commandments if there is time.
7. **Did God Write the Bible?** While there is an accepted sense in the Jewish world about the Divine authorship of the Bible, in reality there are a lot of different views among members of the Jewish people about how the Biblical text came into being. A discussion on this topic invariably brings out discussion also about some of the different ways of conceiving of a Divine presence and our relationships with the Divine. Please join us as we wrestle through some of the different nuanced aspects of this topic, sharing our own beliefs and views in the mix.

8. **Who wrote the Bible?** Description: How did the Bible come into being? Do you believe God gave it to Moses at Mount Sinai, or dictated it to him there? Is it possible that it evolved more slowly over the course of time, and if so, what do we know about how it might have been compiled? What do historians have to say about this topic, and what evidence can they point to in the text to back up their claims? Please join us to learn about the Documentary Hypothesis and possible origins of our sacred text.
9. **From “How To” to “Why Bother?”** In the 1970’s, many young Jewish Americans wanted to practice the traditions of their grandparents but weren’t exactly sure how. Many turned to texts like “The Jewish Catalog.” Imagine “The Joy of Cooking,” but instead of recipes, the guide to Jewish living had friendly instructions for hosting Shabbat dinners, building a sukkah and taking part in Jewish rituals from birth to death. The Jewish Catalog sold 300,000 copies and remains in print today.

Fifty years later, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, one of “The Jewish Catalog” authors, has written a new book that he calls a “bookend” to “The Jewish Catalog.” If the first book is a Jewish “how to,” the latest is, he says, a “why bother?” [“Judaism Disrupted: A Spiritual Manifesto for the 21st Century”](#) asserts that an open society and egalitarian ethics leave most Jews skeptical of the rituals and beliefs of Jewish tradition. In the face of this resistance, he argues that the purpose of Judaism is not obedience to Torah and its rituals for their own sake or mere “continuity,” but to “encourage and remind us to strive to live a life of compassion, loving relationships, and devotion to our ideals.”

Please join us for a discussion of the text and ideas and your own responses and experiences. Why bother, indeed?

10. **“As the Year Turns: Reflecting on Jewish High Holiday Themes and Our Lives.”** We will review some of the major themes of the Jewish High Holiday season and discuss their relevance for people living in this day.
11. **Teachings on Rosh Hashanah** The Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah offers us more than an opportunity to gather with loved ones to eat brisket and apples and honey. It invites us to reflect on aspects of our lives and our aspirations in life, as we seek insight and clarity of purpose. Please join us for reflections on an insightful text written by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks about how the holiday themes of Rosh Hashanah can deepen our lives.
12. **Sukkot: the Festival of Insecurity** How do we manage to live in uncertain times, in uncertain circumstances? How do we live this way as individuals, as a nation, as a people? For us each as individuals, we face uncertainty and insecurity at times in our lives. Our Jewish people have long experienced living with insecurity and uncertainty, as we lived without political autonomy for nearly 2000 years, from the time the second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 CE until the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. What wisdom can we turn to from our Jewish tradition about how to live in the face of uncertainty? Please join us as we study an insightful text written by the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and blend his wisdom on this topic with our own.
13. **History behind the Holiday of Chanukah** The Jewish holiday of Chanukah is a joyous time, but it commemorates some serious historical events. Please join us to study some text about the holiday and the history behind it.

14. **Vashti and Esther: a Feminist Perspective**