

New JLI Course Addresses Dissonance Between Religion and Western Values

This November, Chabad of Charlotte will offer Wrestling with Faith, a new six-session course by the acclaimed Rohr Jewish Learning Institute (JLI), that openly addresses common challenges people have in their relationship with God.

Beginning Tuesday, October 23, at 7:30 PM for the evening class and Wednesday, October 24, 11 AM for the morning class, participants in the course will grapple with issues that many struggle with, including beliefs in Judaism that seem primitive or outdated, reconciling scientific findings with ideas that cannot be proven in a lab, and the role of religion regarding gender roles, relationship choices, and other such controversial issues.

"We recognize that almost everyone has some degree of skepticism when it comes to religion," says Rabbi Yossi Groner of Congregation Ohr HaTorah, the evening JLI Instructor. "We've created this course for participants to think critically about these challenges - to approach them with an array of insightful perspectives - so we can articulate our beliefs to ourselves and to the next generation with clarity and conviction.

"I like to think of this course as more of a journey, because, intellectual questions aside, it's mostly the deep emotional blockages that seem to hinder our relationship with God. It's not a polem-

ics course, but one that speaks to the inner struggles we experience and to the heart of the issues that concern us deeply," said Rabbi Groner.

Wrestling with Faith explores questions such as: Why do I need God if I can live perfectly well without Him? Does God really care about the nuances of Jewish practice? Doesn't the concept of "Jewish chosenness" seem racist? How can we relate to a loving and caring God amid the experience of tragedy and suffering? How do we reconcile compelling evidence for evolution and the age of the universe with a Bible that tells a different story? And: Is it even possible to develop a relationship with a God I cannot perceive with my five senses?

"People often deal with such issues by going on the defense," explained Rabbi Zalman Abraham of JLI's New York headquarters. "In this course we stay away from that. Instead, we embrace the challenges wholeheartedly and seek a broader context through which to understand the issues."

Jennifer Wiseman, an astrophysicist at NASA and the director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion, commented about the course: "At a time when science and technology dominate the mechanics and framing of our

modern lives, it is more important than ever to ask the bigger questions of life's purpose and values. This course enables the seeker to embrace the achievements of modern science while seeking the higher gifts of wisdom, meaning, and a personal relationship with God."

Like all JLI programs, this course is designed to appeal to people at all levels of knowledge, including those without any pri-



or experience or background in Jewish learning. All JLI courses are open to the wider Charlotte community.

The JLI has raised the bar of Jewish erudition in Charlotte by examining important issues of Judaism in a deep yet comprehensive way. It has succeeded in demystifying the complex and opening the doors to Jewish knowledge to the greater Charlotte community.

Rabbi Yossi Groner will lead the evening JLI classes, morning classes will be led by Rabbi Shlomo Cohen. Each student will be provided with a textbook as well as online resources through the myJLI.com website. Fee for the course is \$99 per single and \$180 per couple.

Interested in taking the course? Please call 704-366-3984 or visit www.myJLI.com for registration and for other course-related information. JLI courses are presented in Charlotte as part of Chabad's effort to raise the level of Jewish knowledge within our community. ✪

Temple Solel Embraces the New Year Ahead

Just a short time ago it was the beginning of our year. Hopefully we haven't already veered off the path and are staying the course. Being able to recount and recalibrate our current course is such an opportunity. We don't have to be like those who wait until later in life and realize they haven't accomplished all they dreamt of. To modernize a Yiddish Proverb, "A person is not old until their regrets take the place of their dreams." At any age, we can embrace our most Holy Days all year long as a time we redefined a new vision for our lives. It is a time to forgive. It is a time to dream. It is a time for tikkvah or hope.

A motivational business con-

sultant once asked, "Are you with people who will support your vision or goals? Do you have the right friends? Are you connected with the colleagues who will take you to the next level?" He proceeded to discuss that in most cases, we need to be prepared and willing to completely change in order to embrace new paths. Our Temple chose the name "Solel" because it means "pathfinder" and "trailblazer." It describes the pioneering spirit of our congregants who are full of life, ideas, and goals.

Recently a new Presidents' Council was hosted by the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte and led by Alison Lerner. The first

meeting was held and this group of local leaders described their organizations, what was working well, and potentially what areas they needed help or insight to improve. It is an example how finding opportunities to consult with like-minded people can be like an icebreaking vessel to provide safe passageways for other boats to follow. There will always be people who know more than we do. There will always be people who we can help. This year make a goal to find one new person or a group of people who you can relate to and join together with and support each other.

(Continued on page 19)

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