



COURSE CATALOG

5784
2023-2024



Jewish Ethics
Dr. Julie Goldstein

This course traces the development of a Jewish ethical attitude from the bible onward. It also examines the concepts of repentance, virtue and free choice in Jewish thought and asks two major questions with regard to religion and morality in Jewish Thought: a) Does Jewish tradition recognize an ethic independent of Halakhah and b) Is ethical reasoning operative in the determination of halakha? It also examines principles of Jewish ethics, including the concepts of imitatio dei and love of neighbor.

Epistemology of Religion: Theories of God
Dr. Julie Goldstein

Does God exist? Is it epistemologically justified to believe that God exists? These two questions are addressed in this class through analyses of teleological, cosmological and ontological approaches to the existence of God. Examining Jewish and non-Jewish philosophical approaches to the topic, students are introduced to arguments based on evidence, the absence of evidence, practicality, rationality and faith.

Problems and Methods in Judaic Studies: Amudim and Yesodot
Dr. Julie Goldstein

One of the cornerstones of Amudim's educational philosophy is that students should become independent learners and that the year in Israel should introduce them to the tools that they will need to engage in a lifetime of Torah study, long after they have left the walls of Amudim's Beit Midrash. This class is designed to venture into the realm of sophisticated Talmud Torah by directly presenting the variegated methods and approaches available to the modern lamdanit. Looking at case studies in Gemara, Tanakh and Jewish philosophical and historical texts, this class models and analyzes the approaches of academia, "lumdu" (specifically Brisk), Nechama Leibowitz, "The Gush," the phenomenon often called "Torat Eretz Yisrael," Rashi's innovations and more, each of which students encounter and are taught to apply in their other classes at Amudim.

The Contemporary Jewish Short Story
Dr. Julie Goldstein

In this class, students read, analyze and reflect upon Jewish short stories, from Kafka to Nathan Englander. Stories are chosen based on the following criteria: Variety, substance, intellectual level, Jewish content, relatability, readability and manageability.

Must-Reads: Survey of Contemporary Jewish Writings
Dr. Julie Goldstein

This course examines some of the seminal, most profound and impactful articles on Jewish topics, primarily Jewish philosophy, written by Modern Orthodox thinkers in contemporary times. Students are required to read the articles prior to class in order to substantively facilitate discussion during class.

Akedah through the Ages
Dr. Julie Goldstein

In this class, we examine Jewish (and occasionally Christian and Muslim) written and visual portrayals of the biblical narrative of the Binding of Isaac from antiquity to the modern period, analyzing Talmudic, midrashic and later exegetical sources, addressing the philosophical and ethical conundrums associated with the narrative and emphasizing the interplay between gender, sonship, and sacrifice within Jewish culture and inter-religious polemics.

Jewish Women through the Ages
Dr. Julie Goldstein

Surveying a wide range of halakhic, midrashic and folkloric Jewish literature, this course examines the role and inner worlds of Jewish women throughout history (in the home, on the education front, synagogue, economically) and during times of crisis.

Jewish-Christian Polemics
Dr. Julie Goldstein

This class focuses on the historical split between Judaism and Christianity, early Christian approaches to Jews and Judaism, and arguments harnessed by Jews, mostly in the Middle Ages, against fundamental Christian doctrines and Christological readings of Tanakh.

Talmud 101 and 102
Rabbanit Leora Balinsky; Rabbanit Shira Zimmerman

In this course, we study Masekhet Makkot in depth, with five primary goals: 1) improving basic Talmudic skills – reading Aramaic, parsing terms, following the structure of a sugya, etc, 2) understanding the content of the Gemara – getting a sense both of the small details and the larger picture, 3) learning additional texts and commentaries pertaining to the texts – Rishonim, Tosefta, Yerushalmi, midrashim, and historical texts, 4) cultivating the ability to analyze and reason about the Talmud independently – becoming familiar with traditional lomdut, and 5) adding modern tools of analysis – getting to know current trends in scholarship such as historical scholarship, literary methods, use of manuscripts, etc. The class includes independent study be-havruta as well as lecture time.

Halakhah Seder and Shiur
R. Matthew Nitzanim

Halakhah seder and shiur is devoted to the intricate network of legal theories, principles, and practices that permeate Jewish life and infuse it with meaning. Tracing the halakha from its Talmudic origin through the rishonim, achronim and modern poskim, we see the halakhic process in action as we strive to balance ancient texts and modern realities. Along the way, we will come to appreciate the value and beauty of living a life of commitment and intricacy.

Tanakh Seder and Shiur: Bamidbar, Yirmiyahu and Iyov **Pesha Fischer**

This three-hour Tanakh class covers the books of Bamidbar, Yirmiyahu and Iyov. The Bamidbar class focuses on the major personalities and themes in Sefer Bamidbar. We study the pshat, midrash, classical, and modern commentaries, with the goal of understanding the different approaches applied to the themes. The Yirmiyahu portion of the class focuses on prophecies of rebuke and consolation through close analysis of the role of the prophet, the time period of prophecy and the tragic figure of Yirmiyahu himself. The Iyov portion of the class primarily focusees on how we "friend." As we make our way through the speeches of Iyov's friends, we focus on how one responds to the sorrows of others, and how we ourselves view the concept of tzadik ve-ra lo, the suffering of the righteous.

Midrash Agnon **R. Jeffrey Saks**

S.Y. Agnon (1888—1970), Hebrew literature's only Nobel laureate, absorbed the entirety of the Beit Midrash, its books and ethos, distilling millennia of Jewish sources and pouring them into the mold of modern literature—what Rav Kook described poetically as Agnon's "authentic Jewish/Hebrew writing, flowing through the divine channels with no barrier." In this semester we will read a wide variety of Agnon's short stories (in English translation, with Hebrew texts available for those who will brave them), teasing apart the sources on which he drew, to explore the relationship between text and the master-texts of classical biblical and rabbinic literature he mined in crafting his writing. We will consider the major themes he explored: The relationships between tradition and modernity, Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora, and the pull that the past exerts upon the present. Also: What is the role of literature and reading in the life of a thinking, religious Jew?

Philosophy of Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik **R. Jeffrey Saks**

Is mankind meant to master its surrounding or submit passively to God? What is the place of Jewish faith in the modern world? How does modernity pose a challenge to religious life? What is the viability of forming community today? These questions stand at the center of Rabbi Soloveitchik's masterful *The Lonely Man of Faith* and associated essays and we will explore them as we make a careful reading and exploration of the sources on which the Rav zt"l drew in composing one of the 20th century's most significant treatments of religious philosophy and Jewish faith. In the second semester we move on to explore the major themes of the Rav's *Halakhic Man*, including the manner in which halakha serves as the basis for Jewish thought and shapes a Jew's worldview.

The Thought of Maimonides: Law & Philosophy **Rabbi Jeffrey Saks**

Maimonides (aka Rambam, 1135-1205) has long held pride of place as rabbinic Judaism's most foundational and prominent halakhist and philosopher. This class surveys some of his most important writings and ideas, especially the interplay and balance between philosophy and law in his prescriptions for the formation and development of a successful Jew. The rich nexus of those two fields invites us to encounter his writing which has shaped so much of Jewish life and learning.

Students will emerge with a sense of what it means to read Rambam, what issues to be alert to as they read, and will have a good grounding in the ideas and issues he undertook to explicate and advance.

Ethics of the Fathers for Thinkers

R. Uri Goldstein

As one of the foundational texts of Jewish thought, Mishna Tractate Avot has long been a source of ethics and reflection as well as a guide to spiritual and intellectual practice. This course is premised on the assertion that the lessons that the rabbis wish to convey throughout this tractate are best understood when the Mishnayot are subjected to rigorous analysis. To that end, in this course we study Avot in the same manner that we study other tractates of Mishna, with attention to literary and linguistic nuance, along with the clarification of conceptual ideas. In addition, we look at historical, biographical and philosophical material that can enhance our understanding of the background and impact of the various and diverse ideas found in the Masekhet. By the conclusion of the course, students will view Pirkei Avot through a new lens and appreciate that its true nature can only be apprehended through a full and thorough understanding.

Introduction to Jewish Mysticism

R. Dr. Eliezer Shore

For millennia, Kabbalah – the Jewish mystical tradition – was a highly guarded, orally transmitted body of esoteric knowledge. Today, Kabbalah is everywhere, from the internet, to Madonna, to popular charms and amulets. This course presents both an introduction to the basic principles of Jewish mysticism, as they have changed and developed over the centuries, as well as the way in which Kabbalah has entered into diverse forms of contemporary spirituality, new-age thought, religious cross-fertilization (i.e. Buddhist Kabbalah), art, cinema, and even politics.

The course is divided into two parts. Part One focuses on experience (ecstatic) Kabbalah. Following an introduction into the nature of mystical experience, and a discussion of Biblical mysticism, the course zigzags through history – jumping from earlier generations of thinkers to contemporary Kabbalists and Hasidic masters. In this way, the student sees how ancient, mythic ideas receive modern interpretation.

Part Two deals with Kabbalistic cosmology (Theosophic Kabbalah) from its origins in the Middle Ages until its contemporary expressions. Over the course of the class, we examine Kabbalistic writings on such issues as the nature of the Divine, the reasons for creation, and humanity's role in the process of redemption, contemporary Jewish meditation, Kabbalistic theories of love and romance (and, perhaps, right-wing religious Zionists), Kabbalah in art and architecture, feminism, psychology and environmentalism (time permitting). Various perspectives on God and the universe, the human body and sexuality, meditation, ritual, and

healing are also examined. Throughout the course, the rich picture of the Jewish mystical tradition is complimented by frequent comparison to other great spiritual traditions of the world.

Psychology and Tanakh **Rabbanit Leah Herzog**

What does it mean to be human and also “created in the image of God”? This course understands the text, human characters and stories of Tanakh through the lens of the main psychological theories from the past 130 years, including those of Freud, Jung, Erikson, Piaget, Skinner, Maslow, Frankl, Kohlberg, and Gilligan. We explore various theories and models of psychology, including psychodynamic, cognitive, behavioral and interactional models, to deepen our understanding of the human experience and how that experience appears in the Tanakh. These approaches, together with select parshanut ha-Mikra, enable us to develop a richer and more nuanced appreciation of both the actual text of Tanakh and the stories, characters, themes and concepts that emanate from the text.

Hassidut on the Parsha **Rabbanit Leora Balinsky**

The Hasidic movement originated in the 18th century and continues to flourish today. In this shiur, we study the teachings of Hasidic masters on the Parshat HaShavua and discuss whether/how these teachings are relevant and resonant for us. We also learn about the history of Hassidut and the stories of the rabbis whose Torah we study together and become acquainted with the flavor of homiletics that characterizes different teachers and schools. Come with open minds and hearts.

God's Guide to God **Rabbanit Leora Balinsky**

We shout them repeatedly during Selihot, lein them on fast days, sing them on Yom Tov. But what do God's thirteen attributes of mercy mean? What do they say about God, and what do they say about us?

In this class, we take a deep dive into each Middah as well the group of Middot as a whole. This exploration takes us through Tanakh and Talmud, as well as seeing the Middot through the lenses of different Jewish thinkers. By seeking to understand how those before us understood these attributes as well as the ritual of reciting them, we have the opportunity to connect to this ancient tradition on a deeper level.

Women in Judaism **Rabbanit Shira Zimmerman**

The role of women is one of the most discussed and debated topics in contemporary halakhic and philosophical discourse. This course covers the following topics: women's Torah learning, mitzvot aseh shehazman grama, zimmun/birkat hamazon, tefilla betzibur, kriyat hatorah/aliyot, women rabbis, halla,(nidda),hadlakat haner, and the concept of women's mitzvot, changing minhagim after marriage, and birth control.

Modern Orthodoxy **R. Aaron Wexler**

This course introduces the most important theological and philosophical issues confronting Am Yisrael in the 21st century. Focusing on hot button issues such as the move to the 'Right,' role of women, evolution, biblical criticism, the differences between the denominations and many more issues that pose a challenge the Jewish people within our globalized world, this course prepares students to take an active role in the saga of Jewish history as it unfolds before her.

The Philosophy of Rav Kook

R. Ari Ze'ev Schwartz

Unfortunately, for most of the English-speaking world, Rav Kook (1865-1935) has become one of those cliché thinkers that many people have heard about, but very few have actually learned and become inspired from his own words. This course is an in-depth study of Rav Kook's writings, who spearheaded religious Zionism. We study his philosophy of individuality, teshuva (spiritual growth), Torah, Zionism, atheism, faith, vegetarianism, and universal redemption.

The Meaning of Shabbat

R. Ari Ze'ev Schwartz

For many, Shabbat is a day of restrictions. Yet according to Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah, all of the laws of Shabbat are spiritual and psychological tools that help a person experience the power of God, family, inner peace and the ability to focus on the present moment. It is not a day of restrictions but a day of celebration. In this course, we study many classical Jewish sources such as the Talmud, the Shulhan Arukh, the Mishna Berura, Penini Halakha, as well as many philosophical and mystical texts such as the Guide for the Perplexed, the Kuzari, the Zohar, Rebbe Nahman, Rav Kook, and Rav Shagar.

This course focuses not only on analyzing the laws but also on uncovering the meaning of the laws and customs. Examples of the laws and customs that we study include: hallah, kiddush, candles, three meals, muktzah, pikuah nefesh, Shabbat clothes, Shabbat prayers vs. weekday prayers, havdala, refraining from using electricity/phone.

The main goal of this class is to transform Shabbat into something meaningful for one's life.

The Soul of Kashrut

R. Ari. Ze'ev Schwartz

In this course, we study the laws of Kashrut and uncover their inner meaning and relevance for our life. We look at classic Jewish texts such as the Talmud, Shulhan Arukh, Mishna Berura and Penini Halacha, as well as study philosophical and mystical texts such as the Guide for the Perplexed, the Kuzari, the Zohar, Rebbe Nahman, Rav Kook, and Rav Shagar.

Each class focuses on a specific halakha and its spiritual meaning. The main goal of this class is to transform Kashrut into something meaningful for one's life.

R. Shagar and Post-Modern Spirituality

R. Ari Ze'ev Schwartz

Rav Shagar (1949-2007) was an extremely original and influential religious Zionist thinker. His students went on to establish many of the most important religious Zionist institutions of modern Israel. Rav Shagar believed that Torah learning should be a quest for personal meaning and connection to God. In this course, we study Rav Shagar's writings on such diverse topics as: Hassidut and new age spirituality, tolerance vs. fundamentalism, creativity and film, teshuva as self-acceptance, Jewish romance vs western romance, responding to suffering, happiness versus sadness, freedom versus Jewish Law, and studying Torah as a quest for personal meaning.

Hovot HaTalmidim **R. Ari Winter**

Written by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira the Grand Rabbi of Piaseczno, Poland, who authored a number of works and was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust, Hovot HaTalmidim (The Students' Obligation) is a collection of essays aimed at teenagers which has become a standard textbook in many Yeshivot. It was first published in Warsaw in 1932. In this Sefer, Rabbi Shapira argued that a child must be imbued "with a vision of his own potential greatness" and be enlisted "as an active participant in his own development." Likewise, teachers "must learn to speak the language of the student and graphically convey the delights of a life of closeness to God." Rabbi Shapira argued for positive, psychologically sensitive, joyous educational methods. It is important to emphasize that R. Shapira's educational philosophy was not only a response to the crisis of secularization among the youth of his time. Rather, it should also be seen as an organic component of his entire Hasidic outlook and as part of his vision to revitalize all of Hasidic society. In this class, we examine Rabbi Shapiro's philosophy and how we can apply it to our lives.

Re-Reading Sefer Bereishit **R. Dr. David Harbater**

We are accustomed to saying things like "The Jewish view is...", or "According to Judaism...", and the like, as if there were one established and authoritative Jewish belief, worldview, and way of life. The truth, however, is that Judaism is a complex faith and religion which has always included a range of beliefs, worldviews, and norms of behavior.

In this course, we discover, through a careful reading of the text, that already in the opening chapters of Bereishit there appear to be different perspectives on God, on the nature and essence of human beings, on the relationship between the man and the woman, and much more. We discuss these perspectives and their deeper meaning and significance for our lives today.

Build-A-Shiur Workshop **R. Josh Yuter**

Introduces students to the craft of developing their own shiurim (classes). Together, we engage in critical analysis of shiurim to extrapolate design decisions and their impact while also exploring strategies for research and organization. Students have the opportunity to demonstrate these skills to research, design, and deliver their own shiurim.

Speak to Me!: Conversational Hebrew Immersion

An innovative and exciting approach to the acquisition of Hebrew language! Amudim, in collaboration with the "Speak to Me!" program partners each student with a native Hebrew speaker for weekly meetings in which they converse entirely in Hebrew.

Modern Books: Literary Hebrew Immersion

An innovative and exciting approach to the acquisition of Hebrew language! Amudim, in collaboration with "Modern Books," publisher of simplified translations of classical English novels for those who desire to improve their Hebrew reading skills and, for the first time, complete reading a novel in Hebrew, has developed a curriculum for the communal reading and weekly discussion of the translated version of "Around the World in Eighty Days."

Introduction to Aggadah

Gila Fine

This course, devoted to the stories of the six named heroines of the Babylonian Talmud, has three objectives. First, it introduces students to talmudic narrative (Aggada), familiarizes them with its unique poetics, and teaches them the textual skills and literary techniques required to interpret it (at a later stage of the course, students will be asked to work with talmudic commentary and academic analysis alongside the primary talmudic text). Second, the course explores the Rabbis' remarkable sensitivity toward the female experience, and their surprising – so as not to say proto-feminist – attitudes toward questions of modesty and women's visibility, the female body and sexuality, childbirth and marital relations, women in the public and political sphere, and female Torah study. Finally, as women in the Talmud often represent the paradigmatic Other, the course seeks to uncover the moral messages that lie at the heart of their stories.

The Amudim Seminar

Various Scholars

This course provides students with the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to interface and study with some of the most creative and dynamic thinkers in the incomparable world of Jewish intellectual life in Israel. The Amudim Seminar, a series of lectures in Tanakh, Talmud, Jewish history, Jewish thought and culture, Jewish philosophy, ethics and art, taught by leading scholars and artists, introduces students to a realm of Jewish scholarship that exists only in Israel. This course requires student to attend a weekly two-hour seminar, to engage in meaningful discussion with the speakers and, twice per year, write a response paper. Speakers bring source material from traditional Jewish texts (including Tanakh, Talmud, Rishonim and Ahronim), historical documents and artwork, as well as their original research.

Israel and the Middle East Conflict

Matthew Lipman

This course provides an in-depth understanding of the Zionist narrative and how it conflicts with the Palestinian narrative. Topics covered throughout the course include Jerusalem,

Palestinian refugees, settlements, border disputes, security concerns and the struggle for peace. By addressing these complex issues head on, students will gain the knowledge to effectively articulate an informed position regarding one of the longest running modern conflicts.

Religious Zionism
R. David Fine

What does it mean to be a religious Zionist in the twenty-first century? How central is the State of Israel to our religious identity? To answer these questions, this class explores central texts and theories of Religious Zionism from the early days of the Zionist movement into the twenty-first century. Along the way we explore such central questions as the role of messianism, the authority and religious standing of the state. We also explore the thought of those who object—sometimes vehemently—to the Zionist movement and its settlement in Eretz Yisrael. This course affords students the opportunity to explore in depth a component of modern orthodoxy—one that is often taken for granted, but is in actuality rich in sophisticated nuanced ideas.

Sefer Mishlei
Brie Reich

This class provides an in depth look at the timeless wisdom composed by the wisest of men. We will dissect the brilliance of Shlomo Hamelekh through the genius of the Vilna Gaon. By delving into the Gaon's unique ideologies and perspectives, we will extract relevance and inspiration for how to lead a life of purpose in the modern world.

Physical Fitness: Krav Maga; HIIT
Orna Alexander

As part of Amudim's goal to foster healthy mind, body and spirit, Hiltz Atzamot sessions take students out of the Beit Midrash and into the great outdoors (or studio, during non-Covid years) to study and practice various physical skills which this year includes krav maga and boxing. With their friendly, energetic, encouraging, and goal-oriented style of training, our instructors push students to discover and work to their potential without going beyond their maximum limits of exertion.

Torat Hayim (Experiential) Mini-Courses

The Bible in Historical Perspective: Museum Tanakh
Rabbanit Leah Herzog

This particularly exciting and innovative Tanakh class is held off-campus, at the Bible Lands Museum, where the latest archaeological discoveries bring Tanakh to life as we stand in front of the actual objects described in the text, giving us new perspective and fodder for analyzing it. From the Tower of Babel to Megillat Esther, items on display spark deep discussion about some of our most intriguing texts and concepts, for example, the origins of written language,

the development of the Hebrew script, the evolving nature of idol worship in the Near East and Egypt, notions of the afterlife, the nature of warfare in ancient Israel and its environs, royal life in Persia, and much more. By looking at the Torah within its cultural context, we come to understand the depth of the stories we know and love (and some we are less familiar with) and that we frequently take for granted.

Comparative Religion: Judaism and Abrahamic Religions **Peta Jones Pellach**

This course offers a survey of Christianity and Islam through Jewish eyes, while exploring Jerusalem as a city holy to three religions. Topics include: The life and death of Jesus the Jew, the split between Judaism and Christianity, Christianity as a source of antisemitism, Nostra Aetate, Evangelicals and Evangelism, the life of Mohammed and his encounters with Jews, the spread of Islam and its transformation into a world religion, The Ottoman Empire, Israel and the Islamic World, Muslim radicalism and Islamist movements.

The Jewish Biblical Portrait: Written and Visual Midrash **R. Uri Goldstein; Efrat Shani**

This mini course consists of a theoretical component, taught by R. Uri Goldstein, and a practical hands-on component, taught by Efrat Shani.

The theoretical component focuses on Midrash and how it works. Through careful and close readings of Midrashic texts, we look beyond a superficial understanding to uncover profound commentary on the Torah text and the broader religious world of the reader.

The experiential aspect is extendable to become a year-long academic drawing course, which includes the study of proportions, anatomy, and the values of classical aesthetic and beauty. We put an emphasis on the expression on the personal interpretation and expression with an affinity for the material studied in the Midrasha. We work with a variety of materials. Throughout the course we focus on the personal projects of each student, which culminates in our end-of-the-year exhibit.

Mental Health and Halakhah **R. Yoni Rosensweig**

While positions regarding a multitude of scenarios in the realm of physical health have been crafted over centuries of halakhic literature, questions of mental illness have unfortunately received very little attention. This course examines how halakhah responds to mental illness, considering topics from their earliest sources to contemporary application. We consider various scenarios (people who experience psychotic episodes, anorexia, and borderline personality disorder), examine the challenges that come with them, and the various solutions that might be offered to mitigate these challenges. Questions addressed include: May one violate Torah prohibitions in order to prevent a psychotic episode? Is someone suffering from anorexia exempt from any obligation on their way to recovery? May we allow journaling on Shabbat for someone suffering from depression or Borderline Personality Disorder? Can mindfulness be practiced despite its idolatrous history? Does one need to respect an abusive parent?

Hebrew Letters and the Scribal Arts

R. Dov Laimon

This course introduces students to the midrashic, kabbalistic, and hassidic perspectives on the significance and meaning of letters of the Hebrew alphabet (vis examination of writings in the Tanhuma, Raba, Zohar, Pardes, Tanya, and Moshe Idel), and also teaches students how to form kosher letters using genuine sofer's materials while encouraging them to find creative graphic expression incorporating the Hebrew letters. Along the way, we consult halakhic sources such as the Mishnah Brurah, Keset HaSofer, Shaarei Sofrim to address major halakhic concerns associated with women and the scribal arts.

Other Torat Hayim courses include:

Toldot Yerushalyim

R. Jeffrey Schrager

Jewish Filmmaking and Cinematography

Maaleh Film School; Yocheved Feinerman

Kinesthetic Kashrut

R. Ari Silberman

Discourses of Dress

R. Yoni Rosensweig; Dr. Julie Goldstein

Towards Shabbat Bateva: Practical Hilkhhot Shabbat

Mrs. Naomi Schrager