

The 2018-2019 / 5779  
Open Beit Midrash  
at Kane Street Synagogue  
Sol and Lillian Goldman  
Educational Center

Explore Classical Jewish Texts with expert  
teachers, through modern lens

LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION



**Beit Midrash** is a term given to the House of Text Study in the traditional Jewish community. Its atmosphere is fundamentally different from the secular educational schools with which we are generally more familiar. In universities, for example, classes are quiet and ordered, and in libraries the most focused study occurs in separate, private carrels. The Beit Midrash atmosphere, in contrast, is energetic, even boisterous. Students often sit around tables, and the physical proximity encourages them to listen, share, argue and imagine together.

*What explains the passion and intensity of the Beit Midrash?*

Jewish text study comes primarily not from intellectual interest, but from a love affair. From Sinai, 3300 years ago, Jews have been drawn to the study of the Torah and other sacred writings because these addressed their most important questions about life. Just as we learn about ourselves in our intimate, loving personal relationships, so study of texts helps us to discover who we want to become. As in all relationships of love, the connection to the texts is marked by reflection, unpredictability, struggle and joy.

By exploring Jewish literature of all ages, Open Beit Midrash illuminates key moral and spiritual challenges which we face today. This year, we will study questions as old as the appeal of messianism, and as new as the Jewish legal status of a baby born through IVF or surrogacy. In addition to classical Jewish texts, several courses will also read comparative literature including ancient Greek and Roman works, The Christian Testament, the Qur'an and contemporary Palestinian poetry and fiction.

Open Beit Midrash is for learners of all levels. We value diversity. Come whether you have studied Jewish texts for twenty years or are a complete novice. All texts are studied in English translation.

Open Beit Midrash is held almost every Tuesday evening, from October 16, 2018 to March 5, 2019. We begin with a catered dinner at 6:45 and the class is from 7:30-9:00 pm.

While the program is drop-in and you may attend as much or as little as you like, please consider the full 18-week program, in order to appreciate the journey and growth of Jewish wisdom from Sinai to the 21st Century. As detailed below, we offer a subscription option which enables you to attend all of the sessions for the year.

# Open Beit Midrash

Rabbi Samuel Weintraub, Dean  
Tuesday Evenings

October 16, 2018  
to  
March 5, 2019

6:45pm Dinner  
7:30 - 9:00pm Class

Class Cost: \$40 per three-week course (includes catered dinner), or you may purchase a subscription for \$180 for the year (all six courses, including all dinners). See below.

236 Kane Street  
(between Court and Clinton)  
Cobble Hill, Brooklyn  
For more information contact:  
[BeitMidrash@kanestreet.org](mailto:BeitMidrash@kanestreet.org)



Purchase a Beit Midrash  
Subscription for the Year!  
Register Now:  
[kanestreet.org/beit-midrash](http://kanestreet.org/beit-midrash)

# Classes

## Bar Kochba: Rebel, Failure, Hero

Dr. Aaron Koller

**October 16, 23 and 30, 2018**

Until archaeologists discovered letters from Bar Kokhba himself in the 1960s, we didn't even know his real name (it's not Bar Kokhba!). We still know nothing of where he came from or how he wound up leading a revolt that took the Romans near four years to quash, and involved soldiers from as far away as Britain. We will look at what we know of the revolt – its causes, the battles, and how it was eventually lost – and the image of the man who led it. How could this man be the cause of the banishment of the Jews from Jerusalem, a false messiah, and also a folk hero, and the subject of innumerable tall tales, novels, poems, and plays? This three-part class will take up these issues, looking at the letters of Bar Kokhba himself, the documents of his followers, and how later sources, Jewish, Christian, and Roman, remembered him.

## The Torah of Health

Dr. David Kraemer

**November 6, 13 and 20, 2018**

The common stereotype of a Jew portrays a person who cares for the health of his mind but not his body (and the stereotype is most surely male). But without a healthy body, there can be no healthy mind, a fact that Jewish teachers recognized many centuries ago. In these sessions, we will study the “Torah” of protecting one's health—what is the nature of this obligation? How did Jewish teachers envision a healthy body? How did they understand the mind-body connection as it pertains to mitzvot and Torah?

# Classes

(continued)

## Our Greek Heritage

Dr. Raymond Scheindlin

**December 4, 11, and 18, 2018**

Chanuka is the holiday that is officially devoted to celebrating the freedom of Judea from the tyrannical rule of Antiochus IV of Syria and his policy of Hellenization. But we might also use it to celebrate the fruitful interaction between Hellenic and Jewish culture that began around the same time (second century BC), lasted for several centuries, and to which the Antiochene persecutions were only an episode. This interaction created a whole branch of Jewish literature to which Jews have traditionally been indifferent, but which has particular fascination for Jews like us, who are similarly immersed in a non-Jewish culture that has fructified our own. These lectures will introduce some of the outstanding works by Jews who wrote in Greek, showing how they made use of language and perspectives of Greek culture in the service of Jewish commitments and traditions.

## Protest and Political Engagement In Israeli and Palestinian Poetry and Fiction

Dr. Beverly Bailis

**January 8, 15 and 22, 2019**

This course will provide an analysis of politically engaged writing from and about Israel from 1948 onwards by Ashkenazi-Israeli, Mizrahi, and Palestinian-Israeli writers. It will bring together literary texts by Natan Alterman, Haim Gouri, Ronny Someck, Adi Keissar, Almog Behar and Sayed Kashua, among others, to explore the various ways writers have articulated political commitment and dissent. Topics under discussion will include: war, militarism and the Arab-Israeli conflict, Mizrahi identity, social, economic and gender inequality, and the complex question of belonging. This course is intended as a continuation of the earlier Beit Midrash course, "Conflict and National Identity in Israeli and Palestinian Literature," but is open to all and can be taken on its own.

2017-2018 Open Beit Midrash

# Classes

(continued)

## Jewish Law, Science, Science Fiction and Fantasy— Going Beyond The Boundaries Of the Texts of Our Tradition

Rabbi Jeffrey Fox

**January 29 and February 5 and 12, 2019**

What happens when science moves beyond the boundaries of what Halakha, traditional Jewish Law, can imagine? What is the status of a baby born through IVF and surrogacy? Can a person have a host mother, a donor mother and a father? Which parent is determinative regarding questions of status? In order to address some of these questions from within the world of Jewish Law we need to first think about the nature of the fetus and the embryo. This course will use classic texts of rabbinic Judaism to build a framework to answer some of the most complex contemporary questions.

## Hagar in the Bible and Beyond

Dr. Rabbi Barat Ellman

**February 19 and 26 and March 5, 2019**

The Egyptian maid-servant of Sarah and Abraham and the mother of Abraham's first son, Hagar holds a remarkable place in the Hebrew Bible. She is one of two women (the other being Eve) with whom God speaks and the only woman to receive a divine promise of peoplehood.

But who is Hagar? The 29 Biblical verses in which she appears tell us very little. Midrash, the New Testament, the Qur'an add to her story, and modern commentary has expanded it further. In this course, we will look at a variety of traditions around Hagar and explore various ways that this "marginal" character has been understood.

# Faculty

**Dr. Beverly Bailis** currently teaches courses in Hebrew language and literature at Brooklyn College. She received her Ph.D. in Hebrew Literature from the Jewish Theological Seminary and her M.A. in Jewish Civilization from the Hebrew



University of Jerusalem. She specializes in Modern Hebrew, Jewish Literature and Gender Studies. She has taught courses at JTS, The Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the JCC in Manhattan, and other adult education programs in New York City. She has published in Prooftexts and elsewhere, and her most recent article, "Reading the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish in the Transnational Classroom" will appear in the volume *Teaching the Arab Israeli Conflict in the College Classroom*, published by Wayne State Press in spring 2019.

**Dr. Rabbi Barat Ellman** (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, '04, '11) is a scholar of Hebrew Bible. Her areas of research interests include: biblical religion and theology, the social world reflected in the Bible, and ways to draw upon biblical material in



contemporary social justice work. She is the author of *Memory and Covenant: The Role of Israel's and God's Memory in Sustaining the Deuteronomic and Priestly Covenants* (Fortress, 2013). A Wexner Graduate Fellow and a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Rabbi Dr. Ellman is an adjunct professor of Theology at Fordham University and on the faculty of the Bard Prison Initiative. In addition to her academic positions, Rabbi Dr. Ellman is actively involved in social justice work with organizations such as Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ); T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights; Just LeadershipUSA; and New Sanctuary Coalition.

# Faculty

(continued)

**Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox** currently serves as the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Maharat, the first Orthodox institution to ordain women to function as full members of the clergy. Rabbi Fox was the first graduate of the Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School and previously served as the spiritual leader of Kehilat Keshet: The Community Synagogue of Tenafly and Englewood for nearly seven years. In addition, he has taught as part of the faculty of the Drisha Institute, Mechon Hadar and the Florence Melton Adult Education Center. He is also a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Shalom Harman Institute of Jerusalem. He lives in Riverdale with his wife Beth and their four boys.



**Dr. Aaron Koller** is associate professor of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University, and chair of the Robert M. Beren Department of Jewish Studies. His most recent book is *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), and his next book, *Unbinding Isaac*, on the 'akedah in religious philosophy, is forthcoming. He also coordinates adult and collegiate programs at the Drisha Institute. Aaron has served as a visiting professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and held research fellowships at the Albright Institute for Archaeological Research and the Hartman Institute. He lives in Queens with his wife, Shira Hecht-Koller, and their children.



**Dr. David Kraemer** is Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Librarian (Director of The Library) at The Jewish Theological Seminary, where he has also served as Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics for many years. As Librarian, Prof. Kraemer is at the helm of the most extensive collection of Judaica—rare and contemporary—in the Western hemisphere.



On account of the size and importance of the collection, Prof. Kraemer is instrumental in setting policy and establishing vision for projects of international importance.



# Faculty

(continued)

Prof. Kraemer is a prolific author and commentator. His books include *The Mind of the Talmud* (1990), *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (1995), *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (2000), and *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages* (Routledge, 2007), among others. His latest book, *Rabbinic Judaism: Space and Place*, will appear shortly.

Prof. Kraemer is a popular lecturer and teacher. He was associated for many years with CLAL—The National Jewish Center of Learning and Leadership—under whose auspices he lectured around the country. He has also been a teacher at The Skirball Institute for Adult Jewish Study (Temple Emanuel) and Meah (Hebrew College of Boston).

Dr. Kraemer lives in New York City.

## **Dr. Raymond Scheindlin**

is professor emeritus of medieval Hebrew literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the author of books and academic studies of the subject. He is also active as a translator from Hebrew, having published a



verse translation of the Book of Job and translations of other works, both literary and academic. He has been associated with the Kane Street Synagogue since 1974, serving as part-time rabbi from 1979 to 1982. In addition, for over forty years, he served as High Holiday Cantor and continues to lead a Yom Kippur study session. His books include: *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (1986); *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul* (1991); *A Short History of the Jewish People* (1998); *The Book of Job* (1999); and *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Pilgrimage* (2008). His most recent book is *Vulture in a Cage: Poems by Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, which appeared in 2016. More information about his books and a selection of his informal essays are available on his website, [raymondscheindlin.com](http://raymondscheindlin.com)



# KANE STREET SYNAGOGUE

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