

The 2019-2020/ 5780
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 suffering of the innocent and as new as gene editing and artificial intelligence. Along the way, students will encounter classical Biblical and Rabbinic texts, as well as ancient Greek and Roman works, contemporary feminist Midrash and foundational, modern Zionist tracts.

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 29, 2019
to
March 10, 2020

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



Purchase a Beit Midrash
Subscription for the Year!
Register Now:
kanestreet.org/beit-midrash

Classes

Hebrew and the Jews: The Death and Rebirth of a National Language

Dr. Aaron Koller

October 29 and November 5 and 12 , 2019

Hebrew has been the language of the Jews for thousands of years, but for much of that time, no one spoke it as a living language. We will look at some of the sources for Hebrew from ancient times, and see how it was challenged by other languages – Greek and especially Aramaic, creating the “language wars” of two thousand years ago. Then we will turn our attention to the 19th and 20th centuries, when Zionism created the need for a spoken Jewish language. How did Hebrew come “alive” again, over the doubts of even Herzl? Could it serve as a secular language, against the wishes of some religious leaders? How does one revive a language, anyway? We will meet Eliezer Ben Yehudah and explore his contributions, and trace some of the social history of Hebrew – in Israel, but also in the US and the rest of the Jewish world – down to today. No Hebrew knowledge is necessary to participate, just curiosity and interest!

Body and Soul: Current Questions in Jewish Bioethics.

Rabbi Daniel Nevins

**November 19 and 26 and
December 3, 2019**

Rabbi Danny Nevins of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards have been focusing his research on topics related to bioethics and technology. As biotech researchers and companies reconfigure life, basic questions about human identity, distinctiveness and responsibility grow ever more urgent. While the technologies are new, many of the ethical questions that they pose are ancient. Come learn what guidance Jewish law has to offer.

Classes

(continued)

Our Greek Heritage

Dr. Raymond Scheindlin December

December 10 and 17, 2019 and January 7, 2020

Chanukah 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 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. The two works are the Letter of Aristeas (mentioned briefly in last year's lecture on the Septuagint) and The Fourth Book of Maccabees (mentioned last year in the lecture on the Second Book of Maccabees). We will also deal with a third work, not written in Greek, but appropriate for the Chanukah season: The biblical book of Daniel.

Rabbinic Judaism on Human Suffering

Dr. David Kraemer

January 14, 21, and 28, 2020

Suffering is a universal human experience, one of which all religious traditions try to make sense—to provide comfort. Yet responses to suffering are complex and often inadequate, and the sufferer is often at a loss to find meaning in their suffering. Rabbinic Judaism is particularly complex and even bold in its responses to suffering. In these sessions, we will examine some of the rabbis' most challenging responses.

Classes

(continued)

Jewish Queer Women in *Halakha*/Jewish Law

Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox

February 4, 11 and 18, 2020

Much of the literature about homosexuality has been focused on the question of men. Comparatively little energy has been spent on unpacking the unique question of women in this regard. This course will unpack the history of this *Halakhic* question with an eye to understanding the foundational texts of the Talmud, Maimonides and the Code of Jewish Law. In addition, the concluding session will address some contemporary questions that Jewish queer women are struggling with in the 21st century.



Kingmakers: The Wives of David

Dr. Rabbi Barat Ellman

February 25 and March 3 and 10, 2020

This course will explore the characters and roles of the three of David's wives most associated with his kingship: Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba. These three women play unusually prominent roles in David's amassing of power, and together, their stories map the trajectory of David's life, from unknown shepherd to guerilla warrior, to dynastic leader. The biblical text considers these important women only in relationship to David, but through close reading of the Davidic stories, along with midrash and modern scholarship, we may be able to uncover their own stories.

Faculty



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.



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.

Faculty

(continued)



Dr. Aaron Koller is professor of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University, where he is chair of the Beren Department of Jewish Studies. His last book was *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge University Press), and his next is

Unbinding Isaac: The Akedah in Jewish Thought (forthcoming from JPS/University of Nebraska Press in 2020); he is also the author of numerous studies in Semitic philology. 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, NY 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. 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).

2017-2018 Open Beit Midrash

Faculty

(continued)



Rabbi Daniel Nevins is the Pearl Resnick Dean of the JTS Rabbinical School. He also serves as dean of the Division of Religious Leadership, which includes the H.L. Miller Cantorial School, the Center for Pastoral Education, and the Block-Kolker Center for Spiritual

Arts. A graduate of JTS and of Harvard College, where he studied Middle Eastern History, he worked for 13 years as Rabbi of Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, MI. A scholar of contemporary Jewish law, Rabbi Nevins serves on The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, for which he has written responsa on topics of science, technology, bioethics, sexuality and disability. His writings can be found at www.rabbinevins.com. Rabbi Nevins lives in NYC with his family.



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



KANE STREET SYNAGOGUE

CONGREGATION BAITH ISRAEL ANSHEI EMES

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