## Course Description:
In this course, we will study major trends in Jewish legal thinking from Medieval times to the 21st century, emphasizing what they can teach us about religious leadership today. From authority and structure to tolerance and fluidity, we will relate each time period and theme to contemporary situations.

## Class Format:
Each class will contain 4 components:
- Classroom discussion of a primary Jewish text
- Lecture on secondary literature associated with the text
- A five-minute break
- Paired and group discussion about contemporary scenarios in religious and communal leadership related to that week’s theme.

## Course Goals:
1. Students will become familiar with the arc of Jewish intellectual history from the Middle Ages until today.
2. Students will appreciate diversity of opinion, as well as historical context and consciousness as factors which shape legal thinking.
3. Students will learn to discuss and form opinions about Jewish primary texts.
4. Students will learn about universally valuable leadership principles from local situations.
5. Students will learn to engage with the past in order to be able to lead in the future.

## Texts:
The required text for the course is *The Cambridge Companion for Contemporary Jewish Philosophy*. It is available at the NYU Book store.
Additional readings will be posted to NYU Classes 2 weeks in advance or are available on the internet (links indicated on syllabus, or available through Library Resources on NYU Classes as E-Book or Journal).

There is no language pre-requisite. All primary texts will be made available in English. All biblical texts can be found in Hebrew and English at mecon-mamre.org. All texts from the Babylonian Talmud (BT) can be found in Aramaic and English at halakhah.com. We will provide all other primary texts in translation as PDFs.

Requirements:

Attendance: Students are required to attend all classes and complete all assignments on time. A student must notify one of the instructors by email before class if s/he is unable to attend. Class will begin on time. Lateness will result in a deduction from one’s class participation grade. If a student is more than 10 minutes late, s/he will be marked absent.

Oral Presentation: 4 Credit Students Only Each student will give one oral presentation during the semester related to the readings for a particular week. Each presentation should last up to 10 minutes only and should summarize a reading and relate it to an issue in contemporary religious leadership.

Mid-term AND Final Paper: Mid-way through the semester, each student will hand in a 1200-1500 word paper highlighting one topic discussed during the semester. The papers will be graded, and students will revise the papers and hand them in at the end of the semester for a final grade. Papers will be graded on a) quality of writing, b) degree of depth and analysis reflected and c) the ability to discuss texts specifically studied for the course.

Evaluation:
2-Credit Students:
- 40% class participation (Class participation means comments or questions that reflect having done the assigned readings.)
- 25% mid-term paper
- 35% final paper

4-Credit Students:
- 40% class participation (Class participation means comments or questions that reflect having done the assigned readings.)
- 20% oral presentation
- 10% mid-term paper
- 30% final paper
Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected and required of all students. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty.

Students with Disabilities: New York University is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If a student has a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services, s/he may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help her/him succeed in this course. If a student has a documented disability that requires an accommodation, s/he should notify instructor within the first two weeks of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

GRADING SCALE


F = 63 or below

Tips for thoughtful and engaged college-level reading:
Give yourself ample time to complete, highlight, and make mental or actual notes on the readings. Eliminate distractions and allow yourself to be alert and to become mentally involved in your reading.

If it is difficult for you to absorb new information from reading, do not attempt to read in one sitting; read portions of the readings at a time.

Make a habit of highlighting or underlining brief passages in the text. If an idea is new to you, if it confirms what you already know or agree with, if a passage is confusing, if you do not agree with it, if something is particularly thought-provoking, highlight it. Highlighting and taking notes or writing your thoughts in the margins helps you to recall key themes, to remember what you read, to study for tests and to write papers.

Think of an article or chapter as a story that is being told to you or conversation that you are having, and make mental connections in your reading. Is what you’re reading new? Had you ever thought about what the author is saying before? Is the reading connected with other things you have read? Do certain ideas in the reading excite or inspire you, make you angry or sad or confused, confirm what you believe or experience? Do you agree or disagree with what everything or only certain things the author is saying? Do you believe what the author is saying is true?—Ask yourself these types of questions in your mind as you read.
Thurs. Jan. 31
Summary of Fall Semester; Introduction to Requirements and Content of Spring Semester

Feb. 7 – The Rebellious Wife - Muslim Influence?
PRIMARY TEXT:
Rabbi Sherira Gaon Responsum on “Rebellious Wife”
SECONDARY TEXTS:
Gideon Libson, “Halakhah and Law in the Period of the Geonim,” An Introduction to the History and Sources of Jewish Law, excerpt only.
For further reading:
Robert Brody, The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture, chs. 3, 10, 18 and Epilogue

PRIMARY TEXT:
Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Rebels 3:1-3
SECONDARY TEXTS:
CONTEMPORARY:
For further reading:

Feb. 21 – Religious Leadership and Tragedy
Ephraim Kanarfogel, Halakha and Meziut (Realia) in Medieval Ashkenas: Surveying the Parameters and Defining the Limits, Jewish Law Annual 14 (2003)
CONTEMPORARY:
Further Reading:

Feb. 28 – Provence: Tolerance
Koryakina, Nadezda, “‘Halakha’ and alternative ways of lawmaking in rabbinic responsa of Provence in the 12th-14th cent., Studia Anthropologica (2010) 102-111
Further Reading:
Jacob Katz, Exclusiveness and Tolerance, chs. 1,2,14
Gerald Blidstein, “Menahem Meiri’s attitude toward gentiles - apologetics or worldview?,” Binah 3 (1994) 119-133

March 7 – The Status of Conversos – Troubled/Complicated/Dual Identities
Benzion Netanyahu, The Marranos of Spain, pps 1-22
CONTEMPORARY:
Further Reading:

March 14 – Who has Authority – Books vs. People
CONTEMPORARY:
Robert Wuthnow – America and the Challenges of Religious Pluralism, pages TBA

March 21 – Spring Break

March 28 – False Messianism
Gershom Scholem, Sabbatai Sevi: Mystical Messiah, pps 1-21 (The Background of the Sabbatean Movement)
April 4th – Critical Methods vs. Traditional Religious Beliefs...
*Baruch Spinoza and the Naturalization of Judaism*, Steven Nadler (Cambridge Companion)

April 11th – Dissolution of Religious Authority
Michael K. Silber, “The emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy : the invention of a tradition,” *The Uses of Tradition* (Jack Wertheimer), 23-84
*The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn*, Allan Arkush (Cambridge Companion)
Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius*, chapter 5 (*The Biur and the Yeshiva*)

April 18th – Denominationalism and Post-denominationalism

April 25th – Zionism – Extremes meeting in the middle?

Further Reading:
*Joseph Soloveitchik and Halakhic Man*, Lawrence J. Kaplan (Cambridge Companion)
May 2 – 20th century – Gender and Fluidity

*Feminism and Modern Jewish Philosophy*, Tamar Rudavsky (Cambridge Companion)
*Women’s Roles in Religious Leadership*

Elizabeth Richman, *Ordaining Gays and Lesbians: Denominational Approaches* -
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Sex_and_Sexuality/Homosexuality/Gay_Communities/Rabbinic_Ordination.shtml

Rabbi Joel Roth, *Homosexuality Revisited*

Rabbis Elliot N. Dorff, Daniel S. Nevins, Avram I. Reisner, *Homosexuality, Human Dignity and Halakhah*  

Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, *Statement of Principles*  
http://statementofprinciplesnya.blogspot.com/

Rabbis Yoel Bin-Nun, Daniel Sperberg, Joshua Maroof, *Responsa on Further Reading:*

Rabbi Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men*

Dr. Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism*

May 9 – Rupture and Reconstruction – Holocaust/Technology


*Emil Fackenheim, the Holocaust and Philosophy*, Michael L. Morgan (Cambridge Companion)

Further Reading: