

Date: Sep. 2025

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

***Jewish Identity, Leadership and Leaders through the Ages***

**Prof. Adam Ferziger|** **Dept. of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry**O4-669-80

04-670-80

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| **Course Type:** | Lecture |
| **Scope of credits:** | 3 |
| **Year of study:** | 2025-26 |
| **Semester:** | Fall & Spring |
| **Day & Time:** | Mondays 12-15 |
| **Reception Time:** | Monday 18-19 |
| **Lecturer Email:** | adam.ferziger@biu.ac.il |
| **Moodle Site:** | <https://lemida.biu.ac.il/course/view.php?id=86557> |

**Course description and learning goals.**

**Course Abstract**

This course explores selected religious leadership figures who lived during medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary times who played key roles in articulating new perceptions of Jewish identity in their lifetimes and influenced the ensuing trajectory of Judaism within the environments and communities with which they were connected. Using biographical, religious, and literary sources we will look at central dilemmas that confronted Jews in these periods. As the course progresses, we will focus on the tension between continuity and innovation that became an ever more central issue in modern times. We will examine the various strategies adopted and the debates that ensued.

**Learning objectives**

The student will gain familiarity with key figures, historical episodes and debates/tensions related to Jewish identity through the ages, through oral, written, and debate-like analysis of primary sources and reference to secondary ones, including the considerable published material of the instructor on the subject.

**Values (if applicable)**

Critical appreciation and ability to engage central issues in the historical and contemporary experience of Jews.

**Active learning –** **lessons plan:**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Required Reading | Topic of the Lesson | Number of Lesson |
|  | Introduction |  |
| Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* | Meir of Rothenberg and Ashkenazi Martyrdom |  |
| Gerson Cohen, "Messianic Postures in Ashkenaz and Sepharad" | Shmuel ha-Nagid and Sephardic Duality |  |
| [Abraham Halkin and David Hartman.](https://www-cambridge-org.proxy1.athensams.net/core/journals/ajs-review/article/halkinabraham-and-hartmandavid-crisis-and-leadership-epistles-of-maimonides-philadelphia-jewish-publication-society-of-america-1985-x-292-pp/0CE15CC7AA22C53EB9E8272D89CC6E6E) *[Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides](https://www-cambridge-org.proxy1.athensams.net/core/journals/ajs-review/article/halkinabraham-and-hartmandavid-crisis-and-leadership-epistles-of-maimonides-philadelphia-jewish-publication-society-of-america-1985-x-292-pp/0CE15CC7AA22C53EB9E8272D89CC6E6E)* | Maimonides: Philosopher, Codifier, and Leader |  |
| Rachel Elior, "Exile and Redemption in Jewish Mystical Thought" | Isaac Luria: Exile and Mysticism |  |
| Gerschom Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi* | Shabbetai Sevi the Mystical Messiah |  |
|  |  |  |
| Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism* | Israel "Ba'al Shem Tov" and the Rise of Hasidism |  |
|  |  |  |
| Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius* | Elijah the "Gaon of Vilna" and the Rise of Mitnagedism |  |
|  |  |  |
| Shmuel Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn* | Moses Mendelssohn and the Jewish Enlightenment |  |
| Adam Ferziger, "Abraham Geiger and the Denominational Approach to Jewish Life" | Abraham Geiger and Jewish Reform |  |
| Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy" | Hatam Sofer and Hungarian Orthodoxy |  |
| Adam Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy* | SR Hirsch and *Torah im Derekh Erez* |  |
| Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer, and the Bais Yaakov Movement*  | Sarah Schenirer and Female Jewish Leadership |  |
| Avi Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism* | A.I. Kook and Redemptive Zionism |  |
| Zvi Zohar, "Sephardic Rabbinic Responses to Modernity: Some Central Characteristics" | Ben-Zion Meir Hai Ouziel and the Halakhic Tradition of Eastern Jewry |  |
| Mel Scult, *The Radical American Judaism of MM Kaplan* | Mordecai Kaplan and Judaism as a Civilization |  |
| Shai Held, *Abraham Joshua Heschel* | Abraham Joshua Heschel and Spiritual Ethics |  |
| Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer* | Joseph Soloveitchik and Orthodox Existentialism  |  |
| Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction" | Aaron Kotler and American Haredism |  |
| Menachem Friedman and Samuel Heilman, *The Rebbe* | Menachem Mendel Schneerson and Outreach |  |
| Nissim Leon, "Zikui Harabim: Ovadia Yosef's Approach toward Religious Activism and his Place in the Haredi Movement within Mizrachi Jewry" | Ovadiah Yosef and the Israeli Eastern Neo-Traditionalist Revolution |  |
| Tamar Ross, "Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism" | Blu Greenberg and Orthodox Feminism |  |
| Yaakov Ariel, "Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius" | Shlomo Carlebach – Hasidism and New Age |  |
| Arnold Eisen et al., *The Jew Within* | Sharon Brous and Emergent Judaism |  |

 (In a course that lasts a whole year, the additional sessions should be added)

\* There may be changes in the syllabus depending on learning progress and effectiveness

**Final grade**: Active Attendance & Participation: 30%; Written Assignment: 30%; Final Exam: 40%



**Bibliography: Up-to-date** **reading, viewing, and listening content items**

Ariel, Yaakov “Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius: The House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, 1967–1977,” *Religion and* *American Culture* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 139–65;

Cohen, Gerson. “Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim,” in Gerson Cohen, *Studies in the Varities of Rabbinic Culture* (Philadelphia and New York, 1991), 271-298.

Eisen, Arnold and Cohen, Steven. *The Jew Within* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana U. P., 2000).

Elior, Rachel "Exile and Redemption in Jewish Mystical Thought," *Studies in Spirituality* 14 (2004): 1-15. [http://www.cismor.jp/uploads-images/sites/3/2008/02/Exile-and-Redemption-in-Jewish-Mystical-Thought.pdf]

Feiner, Shmuel, *Moses Mendelssohn* (New Haven: Yale, 2010).

Ferziger, Adam S. *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Non-Observance and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

----"Feminism and Heresy: The Construction of a Jewish Metanarrative," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 77, 3 (September 2009), 494–546

-----"Between Catholic Israel and the K'rov Yisrael: Non-Jews in Conservative Synagogues (1982-2008)," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, LXI, 1 (Spring 2010), 88-116

----"'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy (1964-1986)," *Religion and American Culture* 22, 1 (Winter 2012), 83-130

----"From Lubavitch to Lakewood: The 'Chabadization' of American Orthodoxy," Modern Judaism 33, 2 (2013), 101-124.

-----"Abraham Geiger and the Denominational Approach to Jewish Religious Life," in Christian Wiese (ed.), *Jüdische Existenz in de Moderne: Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2013), 179-192.

----“Beyond Bais Ya'akov: Orthodox Outreach and the Emergence of Haredi Women as Religious Leaders,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14, 1 (2015), 140-59.

----"On Fragmentary Judaism: The Jewish “Other” and the Worldview of R. Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein," *Tradition* 47, 4 (2015), 34-68.

Finkelman, Yoel. “An Ideology for American Yeshiva Students: The Sermons of R. Aharon Kotler, 1942–1962.” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 58, no. 2 (2007), 314–32.

[Halkin, Abraham and Hartman, David. *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985](https://www-cambridge-org.proxy1.athensams.net/core/journals/ajs-review/article/halkinabraham-and-hartmandavid-crisis-and-leadership-epistles-of-maimonides-philadelphia-jewish-publication-society-of-america-1985-x-292-pp/0CE15CC7AA22C53EB9E8272D89CC6E6E)).

Held, Shai. *Abraham Joshua Heschel* (Bloomington, Ind., Indiana U.P., 2013).

Kaplan, Lawrence. “*Daas Torah*: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority,” in Moshe Sokol (ed.), *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy* (Northvale, N. J., 1992), 1-60.

Katz, Steven T. “Irving (Yitzchak) Greenberg,” in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Washington, D.C.: Bnai Brith Books, 1993), 59–90

Lasker, Daniel. “Rabbanism and Karaism: The Contest for Supremacy,” in Raphael Jospe and Stanley Wagner (eds.), *Great Schisms in Jewish History* (Denver, 1981), 47-72.

Leon, Nissim, "Zikui Harabim: Ovadia Yosef's Approach toward Religious Activism and his Place in the Haredi Movement within Mizrachi Jewry, " *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* (2008), 150-68.

Lichtenstein, Aharon: “Brother Daniel and the Jewish Fraternity,” *Judaism* 12 (1963), 260-280.

Loewenthal, Tali “Contemporary Habad and the Paradox of Redemption,” *Perspectives On Jewish Thought And Mysticism*, ed. A. I. Ivry, et al. (Amsterdam, 1998), 381-402.

Maciejko, Paweł. *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement*, *1755-1816* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Mirsky, Yehudah. *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale, 2014), Intro-92.

Ravitzky, Aviezer. *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Rosman, Moshe, *Founder of Hasidism* (Berkely: UC Press, 1996).

Ross, Tamar. “Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* XVI (2000), 3-38.

Scholem, Gerschom. “Isaac Luria and his School,” *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), chapter 7 [244-286].

----“Redemption Through Sin,” in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), 78-141.

Scult, Mel. *The Radical American Judaism Of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Indiana University Press 2013),

Silber, Michael, “The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition” in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminar, 1992

Soloveitchik, Haim, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* Vol. 28, No. 4 (Summer 1994)

Spiegel, Shalom. *The Last Trial* (Longhill: Woodstock Vt., 2000).

Stern, Eliyahu, *The Genius* (New Haven: Yale,

Webber, Jonathan. “Modern Jewish Identities,” in: Jonathan Littman (ed.), *Jewish Identities in New Europe* (London, 1994), 74-85.

Weisman, Deborah R. “Bais Ya’akov as an Innovation in Jewish Women’s Education.” *Studies in Jewish Education* 7 (1995), 278–99.

Yaron, Zvi. *The Philosophy of Rav Kook* (Jerusalem, 1991).

Yuval, Israel Jacob. *Two nations in your womb: perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Zohar, Zvi. "Sephardic Rabbinic Responses to Modernity: Some Central Characteristics, " *Jews among Moslems*, eds. Shlomo Deshen and Walter Zenner(London, Palgrave, 1996), 64-80.