

The Bronfman Fellowship Summer 2018 Shiurim Topics

During the summer, most mornings begin with shiurim in small groups with a faculty member. Members of the faculty teach a shiur, a seminar course of their own design (five sessions, 75 minutes each). Groups of Fellows are reconfigured each rotation. Study is interactive, requiring the participation of teacher and student. All texts are available in the original language, with English translation.

Autonomy and Obligation | Professor Jon Levisohn

Some of us operate with the assumption that autonomy, choice, setting one's own path in the world, is central to human flourishing. Those folks may have a hard time with the idea of obligation. Some of us, on the other hand, operate with the assumption that accepting obligations, submitting to what someone (or Someone) else asks of us, is the noblest way to live. Those folks may have a hard time with the idea of autonomy. We will study texts from the Tanakh, from the rabbinic tradition, from philosophy, and from modern Jewish thought, to help us make sense of the tension between autonomy and obligation, and to begin to envision ways that we might embrace both.

Free Agency | Rabbi Yehuda Sarna

Some of the great promises of modernity is the possibilities of self-authorship and free agency. Individuals aspire to become their own person, to be true to themselves, to follow their passions. Yet, the bonds of community, the entrapments of identity and the forces of reality often bring these possibilities to their knees. Inspiration often comes from stories of individuals who have succeeded, for some reason, in transcending these obstacles or subduing them. This course is an exploration of that transcendence, in all its complexity, richness, and relevance to our lives. It summons celebrated characters, two at a time, from great Biblical narratives to debate each other as we eavesdrop and occasionally interrupt. As we identify shared themes across millennia, we will accept, reject or modify the positions taken by these figures in seeking to direct our own lives with agency.

Threatened with Resurrection | Hannah Kapnik Ashar, Faculty Member and Manager of Fellowship Year Experience

It's rare, if possible, to feel at once entirely honest and entirely secure. Part of interpersonal and human-divine relationship is the movement between safety and depth, or stability and consciousness. We will explore these poles through: mystical sources about the need to inquire of God and to attend to our own experience, excerpts from liturgy that model a variety of emotional expressions and ways of being, and classical rabbinic and modern texts about the project of prayer. The title of the shiur is drawn from the discussion of Julia Esquivel's poem "Threatened with Resurrection" in Parker Palmer's [The Active Life](#).

Family Matters: Modern Jewish Identity | Dr. Annie Polland

America's relative "newness" as a country means that it does not have a medieval history of Jewish discrimination or persecution. More important, the country's heralding of separation of church and state and freedom of religion and freedom of conscience offered untold opportunity to Jews. Yet, as a rabbi in the late 19th century observed, freedom of religion can also mean freedom *from* religion. In the modern era, many opportunities afforded to individuals have the power to erode an individual's obligation to the collective. This shiur takes a look at how American Jews have wrestled with identity through the lens of the Jewish family. To what extent does the social, political and economic environment of the United States, at various times, challenge or foster the Jewish family? How have Jewish family members responded to these challenges? While this course will focus on families in the 18th through 19th centuries, we will extract questions, negotiations and debates that help us understand contemporary Jewish identity.