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This course will explore and analyze the various perspectives of the Talmud and various other seminal Jewish works regarding important aspects of work and the good life in contemporary times. These perspectives will be contrasted and debated in relation to various worldviews of influential thinkers and the top works on these subjects. We will explore the importance and the value of incorporating the Humanities into professional work and daily life, by analyzing the rich perspective of the Talmud and various rabbinic authorities, as well as of the top contemporary thinkers, on these issues. We will be reading excerpts of the most influential works by top thinkers who have imparted their wisdom and experience. Topics to be covered are: life mission; Torah and mundane life; time management; the fallacy of control, Jewish identity and observance of halakhah; hurtful and improper speech; economic perspectives and the value of money; wealth, income inequality and social responsibility; among others. Primary texts will be learned together in class and translations will be provided.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Think about the mission and the structure of a meaningful life.  
Learn the collective

## Course Outline

Please note that these reading assignments are tentative. They may be adjusted and refined throughout the semester.

### Section I

#### *Introduction*

Learning to find perspectives in the Talmud on defining our life-mission.

Topics to be discussed: Balancing spirituality with mundane work, finding meaning in gainful professions, setting goals and priorities. We will be examining various sugyot dealing with the topic of exiting the world of Torah into the mundane world, and how various thinkers from diverse ideologies developed new interpretative methods to justify their approaches.

### Week I: January 24<sup>th</sup>

#### Introduction

Life Mission: b. Berakhot 35b and b. Shabbat 33b-34a

#### **Primary Texts:**

b. Berakhot 35b

b. Shabbat 33b

*Mesilat Yesharim*, Chapter 1, 26

Torah Shlema

#### Required Readings:

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**Week II: January 31<sup>st</sup>**

Life Mission: b. Ta'anit 21a

**Primary Texts:**

b. Ta'anit 21a  
b. Avodah Zarah 10b, *Rashi* s.v. *yatza*  
Epistle of Rav Sherira Ga'on

**Required Readings:**

Moshe Sokol, *The Snake at the Mouth of the Cave* (Jerusalem: Touro College and University System & Maggid Books, 2021), 121–39

Reuven Margolies, *Margaliyot Hayam*, Introduction

**Suggested Readings:**

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 41–61

David Shatz, "Practical Endeavor and the Torah u-Madda Debate," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1991–92): 98–149

Joseph De La Vega, *Confusion de Confusiones*, 1688 ed., selected and translated by Hermann Kellebenz (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), v-xxi

Mihir A. Desai, *The Wisdom of Finance* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Hartcourt, 2017), xi-9

**Section II**

***Life Balance***

Perspectives and frameworks on finding a rich life-balance.

Topics to be discussed: Balancing risk-taking with risk-aversion, examining the "fallacy of control" dilemma, placing boundaries between work, family and other pursuits, aiming for a balanced life. We will be studying seminal Jewish works and contrasting their views with the works of great contemporary thinkers as Makidrakis, Bahcall and others as well as the biographies of great entrepreneurs and their risk-taking philosophy.

**Week III: February 7<sup>th</sup>**

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Required Readings:

Spyros Makridakis, Robin M. Hogarth, and Anil Gaba, *Dance with Chance* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2010), 1–15, 59–86

Suggested Readings:

Safi Bahcall, *Loonshots* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019), 45–64

Craig Wright, *The Hidden Habits of Genius* (New York: Dey St., 2020), 191–207

Aharon Lichtenstein, *By His Light: Character and Values in the Service of God* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2016), 117–40

Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Bold* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 71–139

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Aaron Lopiansky, *Ben Torah for Life* (Jerusalem: ESHEL Publications, 2019), 29–40

**Week VIII: March 13<sup>th</sup>**

Income Inequality and the Social Gap II:  
Charity as a Means of Redistribution

**Primary Texts:**

t. Pe'ah 4:17  
b. Baba Batra 8b, 10a  
*Ahavat Chesed*, 2:15

**Required Readings:**

Tzvi Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," *The Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 1 (2012): 33–52

Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (London & New York: Continuum, 2003), 105–24

**Suggested Readings:**

Aaron Levine, *Economics & Jewish Law* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1987), 107–137

Gregg E. Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–35, 139–56

Rivka Ulmer and Moshe Ulmer, *Righteous Giving to the Poor: Tzedakah ("Charity") in Classical Rabbinic Judaism* (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2014), 45–67

Moses L. Pava, "Jewish Ethical Perspective on Income and Wealth Distribution," in *Handbook of Spirituality and Business*, edited by Luk Bouckaert and Laszlo Zsolnai (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 111–17

Aryeh Cohen, "The Violence of Poverty," in *Wealth and Poverty in Jewish Tradition*, edited by Leonard J. Greenspoon (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015), 33–52

**Section IV**

***Interpersonal Conduct***

Building a framework on interpersonal and halakhic behavior.

Topics to be discussed: The value of interpersonal relationships, Truth and dishonesty, Verbal abuse and use of foul language and the impact of gossip and slander on society. We will also explore halakhic adherence as a form of identity expression and the role of consistency in this process. We will be analyzing various Talmudic sugyot, contrasting the rabbinic ideas with the social research of Dan Ariely, Margaret G. Holland and Adam Grant among others.

**Week IX: March 20<sup>th</sup>**

Halakhic Observance:  
Kashrut, Shabbat and Holidays, Male/Female Interactions

**Primary Texts:**

Numbers 32:12  
*Torah Temimah*, ibid.

m. Shekalim 3:2  
*Iggrot Moshe*, OH 2:40



Henri Atlan, *Fraud: The World of Ona'ah*, Translated by Nils F. Schott (Stanford, California: Stanford University

Required Readings

Margaret G. Holland, "What's Wrong with Telling the Truth? An Analysis of Gossip," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (April 1996): 197–209

Moses L. Pava, "The Art of Moral Criticism: Rebuke in the Jewish Tradition and Beyond," in *The Oxford Handbook of Judaism and Economics*, Edited by Aaron Levine (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 295–306

Suggested Readings:

Adam Grant, *Give and Take* (New York: Viking, 2013), 126-54

Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 3–16, 84–96

Daniel Z. Feldman, *False Facts and True Rumors: Lashon HaRa in Contemporary Culture* (New Milford: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University Press, 2015), 2.5 (,)3 ( 20)12

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manifest genuine attention to, and interest in, the material being discussed, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing the discussion.

**2. Class Blog (20% of grade):** You are expected to actively participate and contribute to the class blog by discussing the assigned readings of the upcoming class, the previous class, and the postings. You should contribute a minimum of five postings discussing your thoughts, comments, and opinions and engaging in the conversation. Blog participation will be assessed based upon the degree to which you manifest genuine attention to, and interest in, the material being discussed, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing the discussion. They will be graded based upon quantity (five postings is the required minimum) and their insightfulness and quality.

**3. Mid Semester Assignments (20% of grade):** You will be assigned twice through the semester to write a posting (2 to 5 pages) discussing the topic and the *sugya* learned in class. One of these postings should include an interview and discussion with a professional and the other should be based on a critical review of a contemporary article on of the topic. The postings will be assigned to different students every week and they are to be posted on the discussion board. These assignments will be graded, and they will represent 20% of the total grade of the semester.

**4. Final Paper (40%):** A final paper is due on the last day of class, May 8<sup>th</sup>. The paper should be around 12-15 pages in length. The assignment is to present your perspective on one or more of the topics discussed in class incorporating the works on the Additional Bibliography.

### Course Readings

All course readings are available on Canvas. No book purchases are required for this course.

### Web Resources

1. Jastrow Dictionary on line: [www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/jastrow/](http://www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/jastrow/)
2. Soncino English Translation of the Babylonian Talmud: [www.halakha.com/](http://www.halakha.com/)

### Contact Information and Office Hours

ari.bergmann@yu.edu  
212 688 8800  
Office Hours: (Wed

disability. Requests for academic accommodations need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except under unusual circumstances, to arrange reasonable accommodations.

2. ***Laptops and Tablets:*** You may use laptops or tablets in this class to consult online readings or to take notes. Laptops or tablets, however, are not allowed during the discussion portion of the class. In addition, any other use of these devices and the use of cell phones is strictly prohibited. Place your phone on mute before you come to class. Violating this policy will negatively impact your participation grade.

3. ***Difficult Circumstances:*** It is unfortunately inevitable that some students will face difficult circumstances in the course of their time in school. Please let me know if you are facing circumstances that may interfere with your coursework and I will make efforts to accommodate you.

4. ***Academic Integrity:*** The University Code of Academic Integrity is central to the ideals that under gird this course. Students are expected to be independently familiar with the Code and to recognize that their work in the course is to be their own original work that truthfully represents the time and effort applied. Violations of the Code are most serious and will be handled in a manner that fully represents the extent of the Code and that befits the seriousness of its violation.

### **Additional Bibliography**

#### **Week I**

#### Introduction

Life Mission: b. Berakhot 35b and b. Shabbat 33b-0.002 Tc 0.005 4(5b6.9 (1)6 )Tj0.0-6 Tc -0.003



**Week VII**

Income Inequality and the Social Gap I:  
The Talmud's Perspective on Wealth

Shraga Bar-On, "The Art of the Chain Novel in b. Yoma 35b: Reconsidering the Social Values of Babylonian Yeshivot," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 88 (2017): 55–88

Alyssa Gray, "Wealth and Rabbinic Self-Fashioning in Late Antiquity," in *Wealth and Poverty in Jewish Tradition*, edited by Leonard J. Greenspoon (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015), 53–81

Aaron Levine, "Aspects of the Ideology of Capitalism and Judaism," in *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, edited by David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 265–308

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Translated by Talcott Parsons (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1992), 1–12, 102–25

Thomas Piketti, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 25-71

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Aaron Levine, "Ethical Dilemmas in the Telemarketer Industry," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 1–39

Perez Zagorin, "The Historical Significance of Lying and Dissimulation," *Social Research* 63, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 863–912

Amir Mashiach, "The Performative Speech: Interpersonal Vs. Human-Divine Speech," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 84–5 (2013–2004): 173–206

### **Week X**

### Hurtful Words, Verbal Abuse and Profanities

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "The Bavli's Ethic of Shame," *Conservative Judaism* 53:3 (Spring 2001): 27-39

Henri Atlan, *Fraud: The World of Ona'ah*, Translated by Nils F. Schott (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 85-97

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, "When the Rabbi Weeps: On Reading Gender in Talmudic Aggadah," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender*, no. 4 (2001): 56–83

Bernard Septimus, "The Face of Shaming: Between Palestinian Blushing and Babylonian Blanching," in Elitzur A. Bar-Asher Siegal and Aaron J. Koller, eds., *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew and Related Fields* (New Haven: Yale University, 2017), 241-264

Elisha S. Anselovits, "Embarrassment as a Means of Embracing Authorial Intent," in Tzemah Yoreh, et al., eds., *Vixens Disturbing Vineyards: Embarrassment and Embrace of Scriptures - Festschrift in Honor of Harry Fox* (leBeit Yoreh) (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 351-384

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "The Shaming of Abdan," in Moshe Benovitz et al., eds., *Torah le-Shamma: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of Professor Shamma Friedman* (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2007), xx-xxvii

Lillian R. Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," in Athalya Brenner, ed., *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 149-175

Lyn M. Bechtel, "The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel," in Lewis M. Hopfe, ed., *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 79-92

### **Week XI**

### The Damage of Gossip and Slander: Moral Criticism and the Healing Power of Speech

Moshe A. Zipor, "Talebearers, Peddlers, Spies, and Converts: The Adventures of the Biblical and Post Biblical Roots L'GR and LC'R," *Hebrew Studies* 46 (2005): 129–44.

Dani Shapiro, "Evil Tongue," *Ploughshares* 38, no. 2/3 (Fall 2012): 141–50

Ryan Holiday, *Conspiracy: Peter Thiel, Hulk Hogan, Gawker, and the Anatomy of Intrigue* (Ne3TJ/TT0 1 ),' and6n0 Td(,),15w.3 ( and



Nahum Rakover, "On Lashon Hara and the Punishment Within Mishpat Ivri," 51 (1962): 197-209 (Hebrew)

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-small-town-takes-a-stand-it-banned-gossip-11556204479>

Elise Springer, "Moral Feedback and Motivation: Revisiting the Undermining Effect," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11, no. 4 (August 2008): 407–23

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 285–371

Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 133–61

Roberta Rosenberg, "Larry David's 'Dark Talmud'; or Kafka in Prime Time," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 32, no. 2 (2013): 167–85

[https://download.yutorah.org/2018/1053/Rosh\\_Hashanah\\_To-Go\\_-\\_5779\\_Rabbi\\_Adler.pdf](https://download.yutorah.org/2018/1053/Rosh_Hashanah_To-Go_-_5779_Rabbi_Adler.pdf)

## **Week XII**

Halakhic Observance:  
Kashrut, Shabbat and Holidays, Male/Female Interactions

Mark Smilowitz, "The Lonely Man of Faith as Halakhic Philosophy," *Traditions* 55, no. 2 (2023): 138–75

Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel*, translated by Bernard Drachman (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1899), 135–58

## **Week XIII**

The Information Revolution:  
Integrating Technology and AI

Steven Poole, *Rethink: The Surprising History of New Ideas* (London: Random House Books, 2016), 219–86

Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 25–62, 495–525

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 111–73

Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 283–402

