

Beit Midrash - for Jewish thought - Barcelona

Activity Report 2024



The Beit Midrash for Jewish thought is the flagship program of the **Institute for Jewish Studies Barcelona (EJB)**. An Organization in the making that is dedicated to the revival of Jewish culture in Spain, through the study and research of Jewish intellectual heritage.

The Beit Midrash for Jewish thought program aims to promote interdisciplinary Jewish studies of the highest academic standards within the local academia and the public sphere, and to actively support cross-cultural dialogue and a pan-European paradigm. (For details please see: www.ejbarcelona.org)

We at the EJB are grateful to our enabling partners: The Matanel Foundation, for the encouragement and support. We are proud to present the Matanel Foundation Board with the Beit Midrash 2024 Activity Report and our appeal for continued support of the program in 2025.

1. Content

Beit Midrash Barcelona - 2024 Curriculum:

33 study sessions were delivered by the program's director Dr. Zeev Maor with 16 Guest and visiting scholars, local & International.

Spring Semester 2024 - The Idea of Sefarad

N	Date	Sessions
1	Feb 1	Opening: The Idea of Sefarad
2	Feb 8	The Sephardic Category & Identity
3	Feb 15	"Language for the Faithful" - On the concept of Tradition
4	Feb 22	<u>Guest Scholar</u> : Prof. Meir Buzaglo . Hebrew University of Jerusalem "Sephardi heritage & contemporary Vocations"
5	Feb 29	<u>Guest Scholar</u> : Prof. David Ohana . Ben-Guryon University/the Van Leer institute "On Myth and Political Theology in the holy land"
6	Mar 7	<u>Guest Scholar</u> : Prof. Ángeles (Angy) Cohen . University of Calgary "Post-colonialism and Sephardi studies"
7	Mar 14	Visiting Scholar: Prof. Lucía Conte Aguilar . UPF Barcelona "The Sephardic Textual Experience"
8	Mar 21	<u>Visiting Scholar</u> : Prof. Sílvia Planas i Marcé . Instituto de Estudios Nahmánides "La història de les dones jueves a la Catalunya medieval"
9	Mar 28	Urban Workshop A: The Barcelona Cathedral Archives <u>Visiting Scholar</u> : Noelia Bernardez
10	Apr 4	<u>Guest Scholar</u> : Uriel Macías "La idea de Sefarad"
11	Apr 11	<u>Guest Scholar</u> : Prof. Irene E. Zwiep . University of Amsterdam "Futures of Jewish/Sephardic studies"
12	Apr 18	<u>Visiting Scholar</u> : Evan Kapros "The Sephardic Diaspora – Greece"
13	May (6, 7, 8)	<u>Visiting Scholar</u> : Prof. Haviva Pedaya . Ben-Guryon University/ Van Leer institute "The East (HaMizrah) Writes Itself" / "Cabala de Catalunya - Girona workshop"
14	May 9	<u>Guest Scholar</u> : Prof. Yuval Evri . Brandeis University "The return to Sefarad"
15	May 16	Urban Workshop B: Call de Barcelona Visiting Scholar: Arc. Dominique Tomasov Blinder – Yad Miriam
16	May 23	"Sephardi studies" - Concluding workshop & Peer Presentations

Autumn Semester 2024 - Introduction to Jewish thought (A)

N	Date	Session	Title
1	Sep 18	Introductions	PARDES - On Hermeneutics: Text and Interpretation
2	Sep 25	Biblical Faith	God, Prophet, King - Political theology of the Bible
3	Oct 9	<u>Visiting Scholar</u>	Dr. Neil Frau-Cortes - the silence of the Aleph
4	Oct 30	Second Temple Literature	Children of light - Children of darkness
5	Nov 6	Rabbinic Literature A	From Sacrifice to Text - On Talmud controversy
6	Nov 13	Rabbinic Literature B	On Reading the Talmud - On Halacha (Jewish law)
7	Nov 20	Jewish Philosophy A	Philo of Alexandria – the Hellenistic option
8	Nov 27	Jewish Philosophy B	Rabi Saadia Gaon - On The rivers of Babylon
9	Dec 4	Jewish Philosophy C	Yehudah Halevi - On Behalf of the Despised Religion
10	Dec 11	Jewish Philosophy E	Maimonides - Mishneh T / Guide for the Perplexed
11	Dec 18	Jewish Philosophy F	Hasdai Crescas – Or Hashem

Annual LABA Artist Fellowship Program 2024 - Textual Study Theme: “Night”

#	Date	Session
1	Apr 2	Night at the Pardes
2	Apr 16	On Darkness
3	Apr 23	Study Tour: Call, Cathedral archive
4	Apr 30	Seder Night (Passover)
5	May 5	The Girona Kaballah Workshop
6	May 21	LABA Global (Song of songs)
7	June 4	On Dreams
8	June 11	Midnight Tikun (Shavuot)
9	June 25	On Daemons
10	July 9	Study Tour: Montjuic

Autumn Semester 2024 - Emmanuel Levinas - "Nine Talmudic Readings"

N	Date	Session Title
1	Sep` 12	Introductions to Levinas -Life and thought
2	Sep` 19	Toward the Other
3	Sep` 26	The Temptation of Temptation
4	Oct 10	Promised Land or Permitted Land
5	Nov 7	As Old as the World
6	Nov 14	Judaism and revolution
7	Nov 21	The Youth of Israel
8	Nov 28	Desacralization and Disenchantment
9	Dec 5	And God Created Woman
10	Dec 12	The damages of fire
11	Dec 19	Summary - presentations

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2. Participants

In 2024, the Beit Midrash for Jewish Thought in Barcelona welcomed 27 participants, including Jews and non-Jews, consisting of academics (professors and students), educators, artists, and cultural activists.

2024 - Enrolled students list:

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----|----------------------|
| 1. | Valeri Serret i Corbella | 24. | Gil Dori |
| 2. | Corinne Zara | 25. | Janet Lenore Stein |
| 3. | Mark Newton | 26. | Micaela Clubourg |
| 4. | Dmitry Muchnik | 27. | Mai Choma |
| 5. | Klim Ionah Bat Nuur Maikov | 28. | Xavier Arnau Manresa |
| 6. | Joaquim Gea Guiral | 29. | Silvia Sardi |
| 7. | Paula Saez Bosch | | |
| 8. | Roger Ferran i Baños | | |
| 9. | Mounir Arjdal | | |
| 10. | Enrique Caradonna Friedberg | | |
| 11. | Alex Pinós Simmel | | |
| 12. | Enric-Ernest Munt | | |
| 13. | Josep Roma Millan | | |
| 14. | Dominique Tomasov Blinder | | |
| 15. | Gabriel Mundó | | |
| 16. | Josep Bertolin | | |
| 17. | Dídac Pintor Codina | | |
| 18. | Kevin Buckland | | |
| 19. | Margot Fuentes Kratter | | |
| 20. | Juan Carlos Medran del Bas | | |
| 21. | Dorin Visotzky | | |
| 22. | Dafne Ortiz Salazar | | |
| 23. | Eyal Zadik | | |

3. Evaluation

As a means of objectively evaluating the qualities of the program, the manner of execution and the impact, a survey is conducted at the end of each semester.

The students were also asked to submit their impressions in writing (testimonials)

Below is a summary of the students' feedback.

3.1 Participant's Testimonials

3.1.1 This semester, I had the pleasure of participating in the program Jewish Thought in Levinas's Study.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the program is its chavruta structure. This approach transforms the experience into more than just studying texts; it also introduces participants to the methodology of chavruta itself. Above all, it creates a unique space for encounters, debates, and dialogues among people from diverse cultural, religious, and national backgrounds. This dynamic fosters a broadening of dialogue and understanding on multiple levels. For many participants unfamiliar with chavruta, it is an introduction to the core of Jewish tradition.

Additionally, the carefully selected texts and materials, combined with Zeev Maor's insightful approach to each session, allow for the exploration of deep and exciting perspectives. These sessions provide the opportunity to understand Jewish concepts both from within their traditional context and from a universal viewpoint.

The fact that this study is open to non-Jews makes it an even richer and more meaningful experience. It is especially significant today in Barcelona, where there are few, if any, spaces for such encounters with "the other"—understood as a dialogue between Jews and non-Jews, rooted in thought, culture, and traditions.

Kol Hakavod!

Margot Fuentes Kratter

3.1.2 My time at the Beit Midrash has been incredibly enriching. I've gained insights into aspects of Jewish culture that were previously unfamiliar to me, while also reflecting on specific topics that have sparked my curiosity and motivated me to delve deeper.

I particularly appreciated the format of the classes, which were not only varied but often featured guest experts who brought fresh perspectives to the discussions.

Another highlight was the welcoming and engaging atmosphere among the students, which made the sessions both enjoyable and intellectually stimulating. The course takes

place in a historic building located on a street named after a renowned Jewish philosopher, which adds a unique and almost inspirational touch to the experience.

In summary, this program has opened doors to new knowledge and interests for me, and I am deeply grateful for it.

Enric-Ernest Munt

3.1.3 Since I had very little knowledge of Jewish culture beforehand, I found it incredibly interesting to delve into the study of Jewish thinkers. It was the first time I encountered the major philosophers connected to Jewish tradition up close: from the early thinkers of antiquity, Maimonides, the traditions of Girona and Barcelona during the Middle Ages, the thinkers of the Enlightenment, the 20th century, and modern times.

The method we followed seemed very well designed. Having access to the original texts of the thinkers we studied—reading, deliberating, and discussing them—was both useful and stimulating. I particularly learned a great deal from the most recent seminar on Levinas, a philosopher I had always wanted to understand better given my ties to the French language and culture. This methodology of "reading and discussing" is, in my opinion, highly suitable for deep and meaningful thought.

Finally, I want to express my admiration for Zeev's exceptional ability to lead and teach these seminars. His knowledge is vast, and his capacity to share it is equally remarkable. Congratulations!

If I may suggest a topic for the future, we could explore a seminar-workshop on Jewish poetry—poetry written by Jewish authors from around the world and across all periods. I believe this is a subject with great potential.

Thank you for everything,

Josep Roma

3.1.4 Around every session topic and issue I have discovered myself once and again swimming in an unexpected sea of reflections. I choose the word "reflection" on purpose because of the light/thought association. Levinas's reflections render throughout every chapter his polite yet daring insights that left me in awe-inspiring reflection before a few selected pieces of the oldest Talmudic writings.

Reflecting on reflections, I enjoyed the midrashim, these timeless waters of Jewish wisdom that incarnate the intricate and heterogeneous fabric of the Talmud and the outstanding yet painstaking paths that invited me (lonely sailor) to catch just a glimpse of both our unrivalled Jewish heritage and the huge challenging scenarios of our shared future.

I'm almost illiterate in philosophy and sometimes missed some of the bright sparks that Zeev and my classmates managed to bring out of the texts, but the amount of

bright ideas that came up every session left me intellectually fulfilled and eager to continue studying.

Xavier Arnau Manresa

3.1.5 How can I sum up my experience in the Beit Midrash course in just a few words? It's certainly a challenge, but I'll do my best to try.

I'd say that every Wednesday opened up a parenthesis in my daily life—as a husband, a father, and a professional—leaving my everyday world momentarily suspended in the air. And in that suspended space, the Beit Midrash sessions would flow in, like a gift to my inner self, transporting me to other places, other times, other scents, and other sounds.

And yes, I speak of sounds, because I was deeply moved by hearing Hebrew spoken, as well as by seeing texts written in it. Let me be clear—I didn't understand a thing, nor was that the goal. But I loved being surrounded by those sounds, and I found myself mesmerized, trying to spot patterns, like how often the letter “alef” appeared in a text.

It took me back to the young man I once was, returning to the world of philosophy and philosophers—this time, Jewish philosophy. It's been over three decades since I last read such texts, back in high school or university, and I absolutely loved it. These texts are challenging; they push you to give your very best just to grasp even a small piece of their meaning. And they remind you of the sheer joy of thinking, of asking questions, and of having the chance to engage in discussions with fellow participants—people who are interesting, generous, and deeply human.

And reading together. It might seem trivial, but I truly loved reading together. It had been many years since I'd read alongside a group, focusing on the same text at the same time, and then hearing each person contribute their perspective to enrich the experience. Simple, isn't it? Simple and wonderful.

Finally, I want to thank Zeev and Nathalie for giving me the opportunity to share this testimony and for everything they've taught me.

Juan Carlos Medran del Bas

3.2 Feedback Survey Report

2024 was a transformative period for the Beit Midrash program. Participants engaged in deep discussions, critical analysis, and an exploration of Jewish thought through structured learning sessions. This document provides a detailed analysis of the feedback gathered from participants. It highlights strengths, identifies areas for improvement, and outlines recommendations for the future. By reflecting on this feedback, we aim to enhance the Beit Midrash experience for both current and future learners.

3.2.1 Understanding of Jewish Thought

Participants overwhelmingly rated the program as highly effective in enhancing their understanding of Jewish thought. A common thread in the feedback emphasized the program's ability to present complex ideas with historical consistency and relevance.

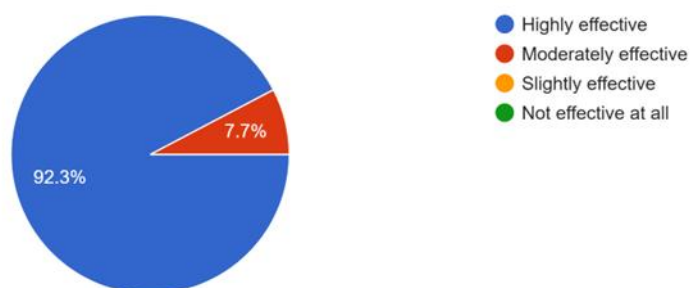
- Many respondents praised the program for providing a clear and engaging exploration of foundational Jewish texts. Specific mentions included the integration of historical context with modern applications, which deepened their intellectual engagement.

"The historical consistency and content relevance made the material accessible and meaningful."

"I appreciated how the program connected classical Jewish thought to contemporary ethical dilemmas."

Keep in mind for next semester: Continue prioritizing content that balances academic rigor with practical relevance, ensuring that students can connect theory to their lived experiences.

How would you rate the effectiveness of the program in deepening your understanding of Jewish thought?



3.2.2 Most Valuable Aspects of the Program

When asked about the most enjoyable elements, participants highlighted the interactive discussions, the variety of topics covered, and the expertise of the instructors.

-Respondents frequently mentioned the structured discussions at the end of lectures as a highlight. These moments allowed for collaborative reflection and personalized insights.

-Several participants also appreciated the inclusion of diverse learning methods, such as group activities and textual analysis workshops. For instance:

“The teacher’s knowledge and enthusiasm made every session engaging.”

“The interaction among participants was enriching, offering different perspectives on the same text.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Expand opportunities for small group discussions and peer-led activities to further foster collaborative learning and diverse viewpoints.

3.2.3 Overall Quality of the Program

The majority of participants rated the program’s overall quality as excellent, reflecting satisfaction with the course structure, materials, and delivery.

-Comments highlighted the seamless organization of the program. Participants felt that the sessions were well-paced and thoughtfully structured.

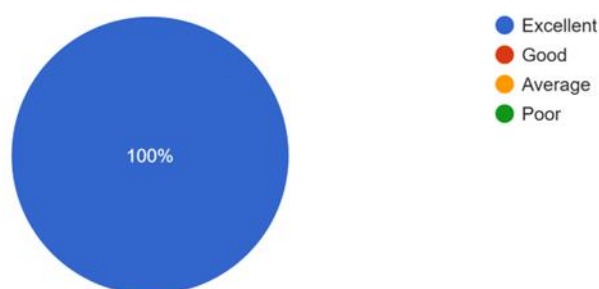
-Some noted that the balance between theoretical and practical components added significant value.

-“Each session felt cohesive, with a clear beginning, middle, and end that tied into the larger curriculum.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Maintain the high standards of organization and continue gathering mid-semester feedback to address potential gaps in real-time.

Please rate the overall quality of the program:

Figure 1



3.2.4 Usefulness of Learning Materials

Participants found the provided learning materials—including handouts and readings - to be extremely helpful in their learning process.

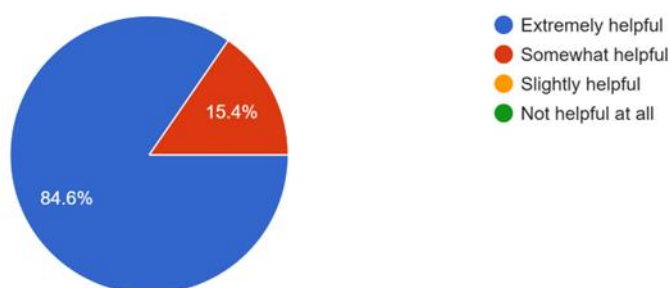
-Many respondents appreciated the curated selection of texts, which complemented the lectures effectively. Digital accessibility of materials was also commended.

-However, a few suggested adding more recommendations for supplemental readings to explore topics in greater depth.

“The handouts were comprehensive, but I’d love a list of additional readings to further my understanding.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Introduce a supplementary reading list for each module and consider integrating multimedia resources, such as recorded lectures or podcasts, for varied learning styles.

Were the learning materials provided (handouts, readings, etc.) helpful in your learning process?



3.2.5 Structure and Organization of Sessions

The program’s structure received high praise, with participants describing the sessions as very well-organized and logically sequenced.

-Respondents appreciated how each session built upon the previous one, creating a sense of progression.

-Some noted that the clear objectives set at the beginning of each session helped them stay focused and engaged.

“The progression of topics was logical, and each session felt like a step forward in a larger journey.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Ensure that session outlines are shared in advance, allowing participants to prepare and follow along more effectively.

3.2.6 Encouragement of Critical Thinking and Discussion

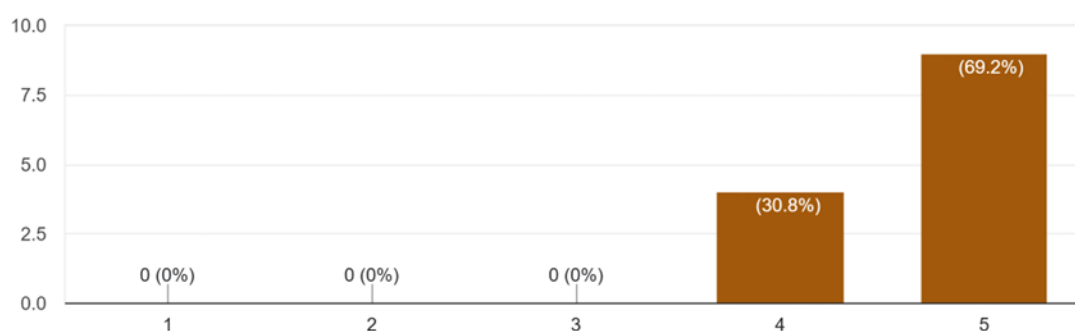
The program successfully encouraged critical thinking, with participants noting its emphasis on open dialogue and diverse perspectives.

-While the majority rated this aspect highly, a few participants felt that more time could be allocated for in-depth discussions.

“I enjoyed the debates, but sometimes we had to rush through them due to time constraints.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Allocate dedicated time at the end of each session for unstructured, open-ended discussions to encourage deeper exploration of the material.

Did the program encourage critical thinking and discussion among students?



3.2.7 Interest in Future Topics

Participants expressed interest in a broad range of future topics, including:

- Ethics inspired by Jewish thought
- The works of Ibn Gabirol
- Hebrew for beginners
- Jewish secularism and reformist thought in the 19th century
- Jewish poetry and the experiences of Arabic Jews

These suggestions reflect a desire for both advanced and introductory content, indicating the need to cater to a diverse audience.

3.2.7 Facilities and Administration

Most participants rated the facilities and administrative processes as excellent, though a few mentioned minor issues.

-Positive feedback highlighted the comfortable learning environment and smooth enrolment process.

-Suggestions for improvement included better accessibility for individuals with mobility challenges.

- “The facilities were good overall, but ensuring accessibility for all participants should be a priority.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Review and upgrade facilities to meet accessibility standards and streamline the enrolment process further for new participants.

3.2.8 Likelihood of Recommendation

The majority of participants stated they were very likely to recommend the program to others.

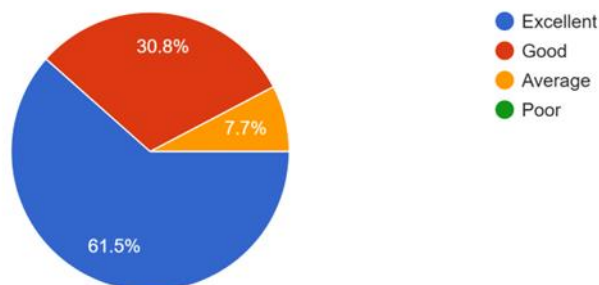
-This sentiment underscores the overall satisfaction with the program’s quality and impact.

-Participants noted that the program’s reputation as a welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment made it easy to recommend.

“This program is unique in its ability to make everyone feel included while challenging us intellectually.”

Keep in mind for next semester: Encourage alumni to serve as ambassadors for the program, sharing their experiences with broader networks.

How would you rate the installations/facilities provided during the course?



3.2.9 Additional Suggestions

Participants shared a variety of constructive suggestions for improving the program:

- Introduce more reading recommendations
- Provide opportunities for informal gatherings outside class
- Expand outreach efforts to attract diverse participants

The feedback from 2024 participants reflects a deeply impactful Beit Midrash program that excels in fostering intellectual growth and community engagement. By addressing the

suggestions and building on the program's strengths, we can ensure that the Beit Midrash Barcelona remains a cornerstone of Jewish learning and dialogue.

