

Beit Midrash - for Jewish thought - Barcelona

Activity Report 2025



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

The Beit Midrash for Jewish thought offers systematic and comprehensive programs, spanning from ancient times to the present. Through a critical interpretation of classical texts of the Jewish "bookshelf": Bible, Talmud, medieval philosophy, Kabbalah, Hasidut, modern and contemporary theory, the program delves into the foundational principles, philosophies, concepts, and debates that have shaped Jewish thought throughout history.

For details please see: <https://www.ejbarcelona.org/beit-midrash-for-jewish-thought>

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 2025 Activity Report and our appeal for continued support of the program in 2026.

1. Content

Beit Midrash Barcelona – 2025 Curriculum:

34 study sessions and lectures were delivered on 2025, by the program's director Dr. Zeev Maor with 8 Guest and visiting scholars, local & International.

The year 2025 was a difficult one in the shadow of the war in Israel and Gaza, which sent shockwaves that strongly affected the Jewish communities in Barcelona as well. In response to what was identified as confusion, a crisis of identities, and growing polarization, it was decided to dedicate the autumn semester to examining the current crisis, its various dimensions, and its implications.

1.1 Introduction to Jewish Thought

Spring Semester 2025 (February – May 2025) - From Kabbalah to Modernity

Dr. Ze'ev Maor

Wednesdays 18:00 -20:00 at Casa Adret.

N	Date	Session	Title
1	Feb 19	Kabbalah A	HaSod - The secret: Esoteric Judaism
2	Feb 26	Kabbalah B	Girona circle and Nachmanides
3	Mar 5	Kabbalah C	Yetzira and The Zohar
4	Mar 12	Musar (Moral) Literature	Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda
5	Mar 19	Sabbateanism & Frankism	Shabtai Tzvi and Yaakov Frank
6	Mar 26	Modern Jewish thought A	Moses Mendelssohn and Emancipation
7	Apr 2	Modern Jewish thought B	Hasidim – the Baal Shem Tov circle
8	Apr 9	Modern Jewish thought C	Abraham Isaac Kook (and Zionism)
9	Apr 23	Modern Jewish thought D	Hermann Cohen - Franz Rosenzweig
10	Apr 30	Contemporary Sefaradi thought A	Jacqueline Kahanoff - Albert Memmi
11	May 7	Contemporary Sefaradi thought B	Meir Buzaglo - Hivva Pedaya

1.2 Cinema History Through the Lens of Jewish Thought

Spring Semester 2025 - (February 10 – May 12)

Mr. Roee Messinger - “CineLab”

Mondays 18:00 -20:00 at Casa Adret.

N	Date	Session
1	Feb 10	Introduction to Film Language and Course Methodology
2	Feb 17	Revolutionary Frames: Sergei Eisenstein and Cinema’s Political Awakening
3	Feb 24	Laughing Through Ethics: Charlie Chaplin and Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed
4	Mar 3	Harmony in Chaos: Jean Renoir and Spinoza’s Ethics
5	Mar 10	The Uncanny Screen: Hitchcock’s Psycho and Freud’s Mind
6	Mar 17	Dream Factories: Classical Hollywood and the Power of Myth (Martin Buber)
7	Mar 24	Cinema After Auschwitz: Italian Neorealism and Adorno’s Critique of Culture
8	Mar 31	Reproducing Reality: The French New Wave and Benjamin’s Aura
9	Apr 7	The Language of Dreams: Fellini and Noam Chomsky’s Linguistic Theory
10	Apr 14	Faith and Doubt: Bergman’s Cinema and Leibowitz’s Radical Ethics
11	Apr 28	Truth in Fragments: Kurosawa’s Rashomon and Bloch’s Historical Method
12	Apr 5	The Future of Storytelling: Independent Cinema and Harari’s Post-Humanism
13	May 12	Gender in Flux: Pedro Almodóvar and Judith Butler’s Performativity

1.3 Jewish Myth & Messianism: Between Theology, Philosophy and Politics

Autumn Semester - (September – December 2025)

Dr. Ze'ev Maor & guest scholars

Wednesdays 18:00 -20:00 at Casa Adret.

N	Date	Session
1	Sep 24	Jewish Myth & Messianism A On (Jewish) Myth: Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, Yehuda Liebes and Shalom Rosenberg.
2	Oct 8	Jewish Myth & Messianism B Between Rationalism and Mysticism: Yehuda Halevi and Maimonides
3	Oct 22	Jewish Myth & Messianism C The Messianic Idea in Judaism: Origins and Transformations
4	Nov 5	Jewish Myth & Messianism D Messianism and Political Theology: Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben
5	Nov 26	<i>Catedra Ben Adret for contemporary Jewish thought</i> Title: "Tikkun Olam in a Minor Key" Guest Scholar (online): Prof. Vivian Liska , the Institute of Jewish Studies, University of Antwerp.
6	Dec 3	On Political Imagination and Activism Guest Scholar (online): Dr. Norma Musih , The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

1.4 ZMAN EMET (Real Time)

A Space for Thought in a Time of Emergency

18:00 -20:00 at Casa Adret

N	Date	Session
1	Sep 30	What became of the humanist values of the Jewish tradition? Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz
2	Oct 10	On dog and man Danny Filk & Ghadir Hani - Omdim Yahad
3	Oct 21	Between Victim and Victimizer – The Occupation from Within Michael Sefard - Human rights attorney
4	Dec 16	Here and There Between the Jordan and the Sea Prof. Hillel Cohen, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



4. Evaluation

As a means of 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)

3.1 Sample Participant Testimonials

3.1.1 Dominique Tomasov Blinder - I am an architect dedicated to Jewish heritage, as a researcher, educator and activist. Study is fundamental to my work and for my own personal growth. As a member of Masorti Congregation Atid I have taken classes with our rabbis for over 20 years. It was a privilege to attend a one year (2007/08) International master in Jewish studies organized by our first rabbi as a collaboration between HUJI and Barcelona University. Unfortunately, the program did not repeat. Since, it was impossible to find anything with that educational approach in Barcelona or in Spain. Distance learning made it possible for me to study with excellent scholars, either through lectures or short courses, not with planned curricula though. This is something I continue to do and enjoy. I had long hoped for the right program to be available in town and am so very happy to participate in Beit Midrash Barcelona courses since it was launched. Dr. Ze'ev Maor has the ability to impart knowledge also allowing for interaction with students. His choice of guest lecturers is always very appropriate to the subject matter. I am very happy to share classes with people of different professional backgrounds who, whether Jewish or not, have the same enthusiasm for learning and delving into texts to explore beyond the obvious. I was just looking for this kind of positive study dynamic and environment.

3.1.2 Valeri Serret - The objective that I had set for myself of obtaining a vision of philosophical Judaism in its history and intellectual development, explained by academics with in-depth knowledge of the Jewish language and tradition, has been fully achieved. I especially value the historical-philosophical design of the course for its internal coherence, the bibliography provided and commented. It has been magnificent to be able to have online connections with people of such an excellent academic level, for me of incomparable value, in addition to being able to interact with them in relation to the content of the classes. At a didactic level, I have been very pleasantly surprised by the dynamics of dialogue between us, focused on specific texts, which has allowed us to "live" the how of learning and commenting on the Texts presented. Despite the extensive panorama of religious tradition and its expression in Jewish philosophy, I think I have been able to acquire a "map" on which to navigate in the future. Thank you so much.

3.1.3 Corinne Zara - Well, the truth is that the course has been a surprise because I had very few notions about Jewish thought and it has revealed to me a complex and very rich world. This type of knowledge transports me to another dimension of reality that I was not used to observing. I found the topics related to the Bible and related texts, as well as the presentation of various philosophers, very interesting. I was also surprised by the high level of the students, which made the sessions more complete. The teacher was excellent, very clear in his explanations and with a lot of knowledge on the subject. I think the group is very diverse but at the same time, very cohesive. I think that a long-standing line of knowledge has begun and it would be very valuable to maintain activities on it. Not only courses, but also visits to important places related to Jewish culture, watching films, concerts...well, what you already do, then continue!!

3.1.4 Margot Fuentes Kratter - 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. These 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.

3.1.4 Enric-Ernest Munt - 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.

3.2 Feedback Survey Report

The evaluation of the Beit Midrash programs was conducted using several key parameters measuring the quality, structure, and relevance of the learning experience. Participants were asked to rate each parameter on a scale of 0–100.

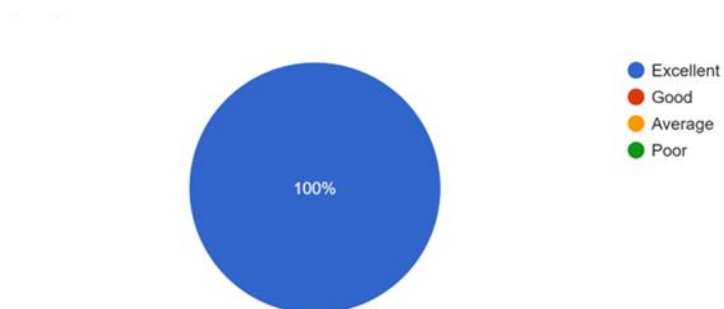
Parameter	Score
Understanding of Jewish Thought	95
Overall Quality of the Program	100
Usefulness of Learning Materials	95
Structure and Organization of Sessions	96
Encouragement of Critical Thinking and Discussion	94
Facilities and Administration	80
Relevance to Contemporary Reality	98

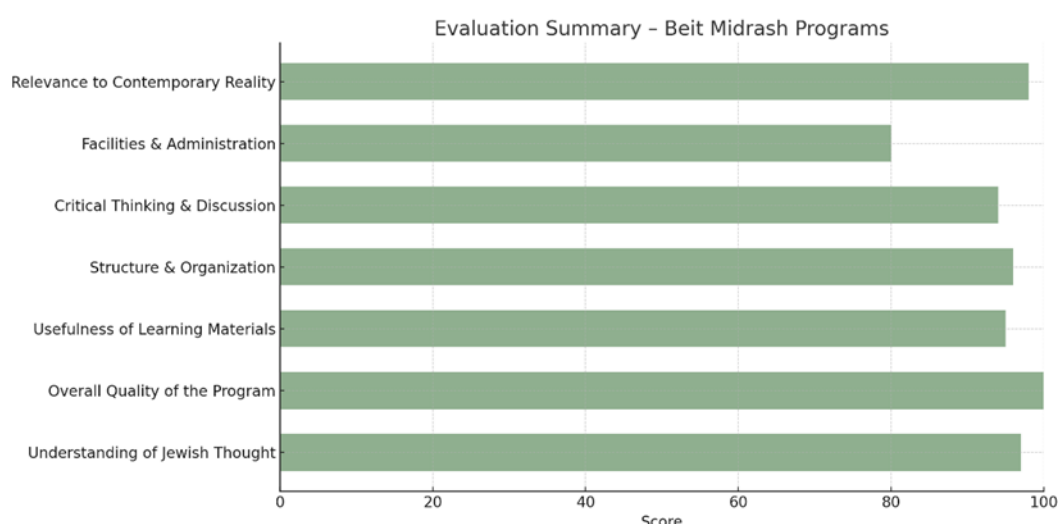
An analysis of the scores across all evaluation indicators shows a high level of satisfaction with the Beit Midrash programs and with the way they were delivered.

Participants expressed strong appreciation for the quality of teaching, the relevance to contemporary reality, and the structure of the sessions, which encouraged critical thinking and meaningful discussion.

The logistical and administrative aspects were identified as an area for improvement; the main criticism concerned the lack of an effective heating system at Casa Adret.

Please rate the overall quality of the program:





5. Summary and Conclusions

At the conclusion of its third year of activity, the Beit Midrash can be seen as increasingly established as a consistent and meaningful intellectual and cultural hub in Barcelona, gradually gaining recognition from the local authorities as well. Clear community impacts are also evident, reflected in a high number of returning participants and in participants who go on to engage in other activities of the Instituto de Estudios Judíos Barcelona (EJB).

The Beit Midrash has also developed into a community nucleus for local activists from different Jewish communities, alongside participants who are not affiliated with the city's established Jewish institutions. In addition, it serves as a platform for inviting leading scholars in the field of Jewish thought, thereby enriching critical discussion, study, and reflection within Barcelona's Jewish cultural landscape.

Looking Ahead – 2026 Program

In 2026, we plan to continue consolidating the existing Beit Midrash programs, while developing and launching a new study program focused on Judaism and the Anthropocene (the ecological crisis). In parallel, and in response to what we perceive as an urgent need of the present moment, we aim to further develop and implement the "Convivencia" Interreligious Beit Midrash, based on the shared study of texts from the three Abrahamic traditions, in collaboration with the Association of Muslim Students of Barcelona.

We are grateful to the Matanel Foundation for its trust and support, and for enabling us to realize our vision.

At your disposal for any questions or clarifications.

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