

# Endorsements

Disputation has been a cardinal feature of Jewish civilization since the very first Jew, Abraham, debated with God as recounted in the Book of Genesis. *Great Debates in Jewish History*, developed under the guidance and direction of one of America's foremost Jewish scholars, Prof. Lawrence H. Schiffman, introduces students to some of the most memorable and significant of these debates. Anyone who has ever followed a great debate, or engaged in one, will appreciate the historical and religious perspectives that this course offers.

## **JONATHAN D. SARNA, PHD**

University Professor and Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History,  
Brandeis University  
Author, *The History of the Jewish People* and other titles

*Great Debates in Jewish History* touches on a central aspect of Jewish culture and society since its earliest days, already rooted in the Hebrew Bible, until today, and surely into tomorrow: how to respectfully disagree with and challenge one another (and God) on matters of existential importance without descending into sectarian enmity and mutual debilitation. Where better to begin this history than in the late Second Temple period, with the window provided by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls seventy years ago? Here is a group that renounced other streams of Judaism, claiming alone to be the true Israel, even while placing great emphasis on procedures for its members to fulfill the biblical mandate to constructively reprove one another without engendering hatred. The early rabbis, in the aftermath of Rome's destruction of the Second Temple and suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt, sought to find the right balance between modeling "argument for the sake of

heaven" and rooting out "gratuitous hatred." Largely due to their success, we are here today to confront the same challenge. I applaud the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute for enriching us through serious engagement with these timely and timeless debates.

## **STEVEN D. FRAADE, PHD**

Mark Taper Professor of the History of Judaism  
Chair, Program in Judaic Studies,  
Yale University  
Author, *Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarials and Sages* and other titles

Students of Jewish history at whatever level should, like all students of history, learn that in the past, just as in the present, women and men argued over texts and over changes in the political, economic, and cultural realities around them. Those who lived before us were no more united than we are as they faced new ideas and new circumstances. That is a lesson that this project imparts so well. Each one of these learning modules will allow students to view actors in history as people divided and therefore engaged in intense debates about the best ways to face to the future.

## **HASIA DINER, PHD**

Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Professor of American Jewish History  
Director, Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History,  
New York University  
Author, *A New Promised Land: A History of Jews in America* and other titles

The Dead Sea Scrolls are the only writings of a Jewish group in the Second Temple period to have survived

to modern times. Although the group was withdrawn from the larger society, they allow us to see firsthand what the group thought about key issues and often what their opponents believed about them. I am gratified to see the Rohr JLI present this topic to the public in *Great Debates in Jewish History*.

**JAMES. C. VANDERKAM, PHD**

Professor of Hebrew Scriptures and Biblical Studies,  
University of Notre Dame  
Author, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* and other titles

Disputation is an essential element in the learning process, and over the centuries, it has been much prized by scholars and educators of every background. Jewish scholars, especially, have earned renown for their contributions to Jewish learning because of their skills in making arguments and defending their views with equal energy and imagination. In *Great Debates in Jewish History*, some of the finest scholars of the Jewish experience will examine six perennial debates. Understanding the questions raised by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the revolt at Masada, the tension between faith and reason in the life and works of Maimonides, among other topics, will offer rich illumination of Jewish history. This is an opportunity not to be missed by all who value Jewish learning.

**ALAN KRAUT, PHD**

University Professor and Professor of History,  
American University  
Past President, Organization of American Historians  
Author, *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society* and other titles

The new initiative of the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute studying the *Great Debates in Jewish History* is truly innovative. By learning about these key moments in Jewish history, the participants will be enriched by an intellectual and spiritual experience that may guide their thinking in the years to come. This process will not only deepen their understanding of the past, but will also make them aware of some of the issues of the present. I cannot think of a better director of the program than the erudite and experienced Professor Lawrence H. Schiffman of New York University, who conceived the idea of the series and is an expert in all its themes.

**EMANUEL TOV, PHD**

J. L. Magnes Professor of Bible Emeritus,  
Hebrew University  
Former Editor in Chief, *International Publication Project of the Dead Sea Scrolls*

Designed in consultation with the distinguished New York University Professor Lawrence Schiffman, *Great Debates in Jewish History* explores six fractious moments in the Jewish past. Starting with the ancient Dead Sea sectarian community, the course ends in the twentieth century, as American Jews argue over whether displaying a menorah on public property violated the Constitution's wall of separation between church and state. Sponsored by the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, which is dedicated to inspiring Jewish learning around the world,

*Great Debates in Jewish History* opens a window onto the distant and recent Jewish past.

**PAMELA S. NADELL, PHD**

Patrick Clendenen Chair in Women's and Gender History  
Director, Jewish Studies Program,  
American University  
Past Chair, Academic Council of the American Jewish  
Historical Society  
Author, *American Jewish Women's History* and other titles

The long way that led the Jewish people from antiquity to the present is, in fact, not a single route, but rather a series of ideological, political, halakhic, and theological junctions. The bitter struggles, fundamental debates, painful schisms, and fateful decisions that took place during and following turning points in Jewish history are all components of Jewish current identity, whether we are aware of it or not. Therefore, I highly endorse the fascinating course *Great Debates in Jewish History*, launched by the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, which will explore six crucial debates of great historical significance, from the Second Temple era to recent Jewish American disputes, from issues of early halakhah through medieval philosophy, the rise of Hassidism and up to current political-ideological movements.

**VERED NOAM, PHD**

Professor of Talmud  
Chair of the Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and  
Archaeology,  
Tel Aviv University  
Author, *Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History* and  
other titles

*Great Debates in Jewish History* guides students through significant moments when Jews vigorously disagreed. From each, our people emerged transformed. JLI's course was developed in consultation with Professor Schiffman, who brings the rigor of the scholar and the heart of the believing Jew to each and every debate.

**STEVEN FINE, PHD**

Dean Pinkhos Churgin Professor of Jewish History,  
Yeshiva University  
Founding Director, Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies  
Author, *Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in  
Roman Antiquity* and other titles

Abraham Lincoln put it best: "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it." The internal controversies that have marked Jewish history cast long shadows. Revisiting that history is a first step toward learning who we are and what we would wish to be.

**RALPH LERNER, PHD**

Benjamin Franklin Professor Emeritus,  
The College, The University of Chicago  
Author, *Maimonides' Empire of Light* and other titles

The JLI course on *Great Debates in Jewish History* is of interest to anyone who wants to understand some of the great moments in Jewish history. Six debates are planned, spanning the millennia and the continents. The scope is breathtaking, but the focus on six critical disputes ensures an engagement that will pique most intellectual curiosities. I can think of few others who could present the debates surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls

better than Professor Larry Schiffman. His book, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1994), marked a shift to rabbinics in the scholarly study of these most famous of manuscripts.

**TIMOTHY H. LIM, PHD**

Professor of Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism,  
University of Edinburgh  
Author, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Very Short Introduction* (2017)  
and other titles

Over many millennia, Jews have made sense of Judaism and themselves by debating about meanings and practices. Rohr JLI's focus on six important debates in Jewish history is most welcome. I hope JLI course participants will learn that Jews are a people who fruitfully disagree

about the meaning of their Judaism, while these very disagreements reinvigorate the Jewish people.

**YOHANAN PETROVSKY-SHTERN, PHD**

Crown Family Professor of Jewish Studies  
Professor of Jewish History,  
Northwestern University  
Author, *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* and other titles

By revisiting controversies that help define Judaism, the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute's program *Great Debates in Jewish History* will enable participants to understand and grapple with some of the big questions that divide Jews to this day. I highly recommend it!

**MICHAH GOTTLIEB, PHD**

Associate Professor of Jewish Thought and Philosophy,  
New York University  
Author, *Faith, Reason, Politics: Essays on the History of Jewish Thought*