

The VAAD: Board of Rabbis of Greater Philadelphia and the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies of the University of Pennsylvania invite you to attend the 2013 Penn-VAAD seminars for rabbis:

Thursday, February 28, 2013

Old York Road Temple-Beth Am
971 Old York Road, Abington, PA 19001

What Can the Jewish Middle Ages Teach Us about Modern Judaism?

Marina Rustow

Any pulpit rabbi is probably all too familiar with the many aspects of shul politics. As one rabbi once said (paraphrasing Newton's Third Law of Motion), "for every action of the rabbi there will be an equal and opposite reaction from the congregation..." That being the case, can the Jewish Middle Ages offer any lessons about community politics? Drawing on her work on the Cairo Geniza, Professor Rustow will show how rabbis who lived in the medieval Islamic world were able to deal creatively with opposition from many quarters and, more generally, with community politics through dynamic coalition building and much constructive thinking.

Marina Rustow is Charlotte Bloomberg Associate Professor in the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University. Her research focuses on the Jewish communities of the medieval Mediterranean and, more broadly, medieval Middle Eastern history. She authored *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (2008) and co-edited *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition* (2011).



RSVP: Jackie Lehner, by email: jlehner@oyrtbetham.org or by phone: 215-886-8000, ext. 148.

Tuesday, April 9, 2013

Beth Am Israel
1301 Hagys Ford Road, Penn Valley, PA 19072

The Problem of Free Will in Classical Jewish Philosophy

Charles Manekin

Although it is a rabbinical commonplace that Judaism teaches the doctrine of "free will," an analysis of the Jewish philosophical tradition shows that the matter is much more complicated. For one thing, there is no agreement on just what "free will" consists of; the Hebrew phrase *behirah hofshit* ("free will") does not appear before the fifteenth century. For another, different thinkers disagree about what sort of freedom is required in order to hold humans accountable for their actions. Complicating the question even further is whether God's knowledge and providence are determining factors in human action. This seminar will consider the variety of medieval Jewish philosophical positions on the "free will" issue in light of the intellectual worldviews of their adherents.

Charles Manekin is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maryland. His research focuses on Aristotelian and humanist logic in Hebrew; the philosophy of Levi Gersonides; and the free will problem in Jewish philosophy. He authored *On Maimonides* (2004) and edited *The Routledge Jewish Philosophy Reader* (2000) and *Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (2007).



RSVP: bethamisrael@comcast.net or by phone: 610-667-1651.

<http://katz.sas.upenn.edu>

Schedule:

11:00–11:15 Greetings

11:15–11:45 Talk

11:45–12:15 Lunch

12:15–1:00 Discussion

