Campus Fellows Report: March 2020

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Rabbi Hayyim Angel

To our members and friends

We congratulate our Campus Fellows for their ongoing programming through this difficult time of COVID-19. They have transitioned to Zoom and other technologies to reach their peers, and now their programs are available to students on other campuses. We appreciate how our Ideas and Ideals are bringing meaningful discussion to students everywhere.

Looking ahead to next year, if you know of college students who might be good representatives for our Institute on their campuses, please have them contact me, hangel@jewishideas.org.

Here are the latest programs from our Fellows.

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

National Scholar

Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals

Yona Benjamim (Columbia)

In my initial proposal I outlined two events, one on the memory of the history of the Mishnah, and one on the uses of text criticism in learning. This changed slightly wherein I instead chose to have the two topics be both related to text study. One being lower criticism, and the second being higher criticism. I hosted both gatherings in the dorms and each had about 13-15 attendees.

The first event began with a discussion of what lower criticism entails (explaining the manuscript traditions and the ways in which they can be compared.) We then discussed why this mode of criticism has at times been more acceptable in traditional circles, as it does not threaten the aura of the text but rather discusses its recension through time. However I brought a case in which lower critical observations show that traditional understandings of a topic in the Mishnah are perhaps misinformed due to very early scribal errors. This case was meant to show that the insights the method provides are large and should be invited, but that one should not think that one will not be challenged by what one learns. We discussed the idea of Yeridat-Hadorot as a way to understand the potential failures of textual transmission in our tradition.

The second event largely concerned higher criticism, which I disseminated some prior reading about. We discussed how it might initially seem to be antithetical to a reverential attitude towards Rabbinic texts and Halacha, however I offered a Shamma Freidman article I had read in a previous class which outlines what I consider to be a positive take on what text study can offer. I also taught a series of Mishnayot and their parallel texts which I was writing my final research paper on so as to explain what learning with a source critical perspective can look like.

Overall both events were a success. I discussed the institute at both and explained how I felt the values of the institute were reflected in the learning we were doing. This was received well and I expect similar enthusiasm could be had for more events like this in the future.

Zac Tankel (McGill University)
Last semester, we had two Institute events. The first was on October 3rd, and it was a shiur by David Chaim Wallach, a Judaic studies teacher from one of the local high schools. The topic was religiously observant Jews in prison and repentance. You can see the social media page for the event here: https://www.facebook.com/events/2473512592698137/.

The second was a discussion group that I ran on November 28th, based on *Afterlife in Jewish Thought* from *Keys to the Palace.* https://www.facebook.com/events/474138363453231/

Ayelet Rubenstein (University of Pennsylvania)
I am planning on leading a discussion about different models of Jewish leadership over Zoom. In addition, I am working on planning a Pesach-oriented discussion related to the topic of freedom in our lives today.

Avi Siegal (Princeton University)
Rabbi Yitzchak Blau's class on "Women in the Exodus Narrative" on 3/2 was a success. It was publicized as "Co-sponsored by the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals." The class was well-attended given our community's size: around 20 students came. Before Rabbi Blau began speaking, I said a few words about the Institute and then passed around a sheet on which students could write down their names in order to subsequently receive information from me about signing up for the University Network. I later followed up with those students.

For my second event this semester, I'm thinking of leading a Zoom chaburah on the topic of triage in Halakhah.

Marta Dubov (Ryerson University)
On February 15, we organized about 12 students to come together and experience a community-wide Shabbaton together. A number of them have expressed interest in joining the university network, as

well as potentially taking on the role as fellows on their own campuses.

Ari Barbalat (University of Toronto)
In partnership with Rabbi Aaron Greenberg of JLIC, we hosted scholar Roy Doliner. He spoke on the topic: “The Ox and the Donkey: The Secret Meaning of the Bible’s Odd Couple.”

Eli Hyman, Ora Friedman (Yeshiva University)
We’re working with Steven Gotlib (RIETS) to plan two panel discussions (see Steven Gotlib’s report below).

Additionally, the event that we were planning on doing (a Shiur followed by a discussion/Q and A with Rabbi Hajioff), is still on. We hope to have it over Zoom early in May, and the topic will be “Five Signs We Are Close to Mashiach and the End of Days.”

Steven Gotlib (Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary, Yeshiva University)
For this semester's events, I'll be transitioning online and hosting two panel discussions on "Reimagining Jewish Community in the Wake of COVID-19." Each panel will be framed by some words of Torah I give, followed by a discussion on how we've can make the best of the situations we find us in.

The first panel, scheduled for next Thursday evening from 8:30-10pm will be framed with "Zooming into the Future: R. Shagar, R. Nachman and the Matrix" followed by a panel discussion with speakers representing the four corners of Jewish community: Yeshiva, Day School, Campus, and Synagogue.

The second panel, Date TBD, will be framed around "Love, Romance, and Covenant Across Social Distance" and will focus more on interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships from both a psychotherapeutic and rabbinic perspective.