

The Kuzari and Contemporary Jewish Thought

“Every Jewish intellectual might be called a Maimonidean or a Halevian. He either believes that Judaism can and needs to be harmonized with the advanced thought of his age, or he doesn't. He considers the highest level of Jewish self-realization to lie either in the inward or the outward life. He regards the notion that one can be born with a Jewish soul as either fanciful nonsense or an intuitive truth. He thinks of himself as belonging first to the species of Jew and then to the genus of man or vice versa.”

-Hillel Halkin, *Yehudah Halevi*

The goal of this seminar is to carefully study Halevi's great work *The Kuzari* in its entirety, and to consider the implication of its unique worldview for Judaism and Jewish thought in the age in which we live. Every week, students will join a reading from *The Kuzari* with a selection from modern Jewish thought. In particular, we will focus on two twentieth century Jewish theologians profoundly impacted by Halevi: Franz Rosenzweig and Michael Wyschogrod. We will also, in this context, study with fresh eyes the thought Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Rabbi Soloveitchik's engagement of philosophy is often associated with, and compared to, that of Maimonides; we will ponder, in our seminar, the similarities that can be seen between his worldview and that of Halevi.

In the process, we will consider the following questions: Have Jews seeking to mediate between tradition and the modern world too often found a role model in Maimonides and not enough in Halevi? What might the *Kuzari* teach educated modern Jews about the virtues, and limitations of philosophy, and of the intellect? Can Jewish thought place chosenness at the heart of its theology and still stress universalism as essential to Judaism's worldview? What can Halevi's love of the Land of Israel teach us about the virtues, and flaws in political Zionism? What solutions might be found in Halevi to the problems facing contemporary Jewry today?

Before every class, students will be expected to ponder the commonalities and contrasts of these two readings, and to write short essays of reflection in response. Along with the final, students will be asked to compose a paper in which apply Halevi's work to a contemporary issue of great import to the Jewish community. Grading will be based on the following: one third on reading preparation, preparatory essays, and class participation; one third final exam; and one third the paper.

Week 1: Introduction: Who was Halevi?

Hillel Halkin, *Yehudah Halevi*, Selections.

Poetry of Halevi, selections.

Week 2: Faith and the Redeeming God

Kuzari, Part I (p. 37-81)

Maimonides, *Yad Ha-Hazakah, Hilkhos Yesodei Hatorah* Chapter 1.

Michael Wyschogrod, “Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust,” *Tradition* Fall 1977.

Week 3: The Land of Israel, and the Temple in Halevi

Kuzari, Part II, p. 87-105; Part III, p. 159-163.

Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, "Judaism and the Land."

Michael Wyschogrod, *the Body of Faith*, selections.

Week 4: Israel, the Nations, and the Parable of the Heart

Kuzari, Part II, p. 105-133.

Soloveitchik, Joseph B. Yemei Zikaron, "The Wisdom of the Head and the Wisdom of the Heart."

Week 5: The Mitzvot: Hukim and Mishpatim

Kuzari, Part III, p. 135-159.

The Halakhic Mind, Part IV; and "Majesty and Humility."

Week 6: Rabbinical Judaism and the Karaites

Kuzari Part III, p. 165-197.

Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, "Why is the Theology of Karl Barth of Interest?"

Batnitzky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*

Reconsidered, Chapter 1.

Week 7: The Shekhinah and Divine Indwelling

Kuzari Part IV, p. 198-217.

Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel*, selections.

Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*,

Week 8: The Divine Names and the Identity of God

Kuzari part IV, p. 217-247.

Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, "The Personality of God"

Leora Batnitzky. "Reconsidering Rosenzweig and Modern Conceptions of God"

Week 9: Judaism vs. Philosophy

Kuzari Part V, 249-279.

Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, "A Partial Knowledge."

Week 10: Free Will

Kuzari Part V, 279-289.

Joseph Soloveitchik, *On Repentance*, "Repentance and Free Choice."

Ibid., *Halakhic Man*, Part II.

Week 11: Jewish Election and Conversion

Kuzari, selections.

Meir Soloveichik, *God's Beloved: Election and Tradition in the Thought of Michael Wyschogrod*, Chapter 5, "Carnal Election and Conversion."

Maimonides, *Letter to Obadiah the Convert*

Franz Rosenzweig, correspondence, selections.

Week 12: Zionism and Halvey

Kuzari Part V, p. 289-295.

Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, Selections.

Joseph Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek*.

Week 13: The Kuzari and Contemporary Jewry

Kuzari, selections.

Micah Goodman, *Halomo Shel Ha-Kuzari*, selections.

Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, "Franz Rosenweig's *The Star of Redemption*," "A Theology of Jewish Unity."