

Syllabus: Misnagdic Jewish Thought

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The term “Misnagid,” or “one who opposes,” is one that defined the leaders of the Lithuanian Yeshiva world by highlighting its differentiation from the Hasidic way of life. The problem with the term is that it summarizes a worldview solely in way it opposed another. In fact, those whose intellectual lives was linked to the Yeshiva of Vilozhin and its worldview have given us a classics of Jewish thought, all making the case for the study of Torah, and the rigorous observance of halakha, as lying at the center of the spiritual life. This course will examine three different complex works, each of which can be considered a classic of Misnagdic Jewish thought: the mystical *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* of Rabbi Hayyim of Vilozhin, with a focus on the fourth part; the *J cøco gmF cxt* 'of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, known as “the Netziv,” with its focus on Humash, Midrash, and Talmudic texts; and Rabbi Joseph. B. Soloveitchik’s *Halakhic Man*, which describes the worldview of his ancestors utilizing a philosophical idiom. We will discuss what these works have in common, how they differ, and what each of them has to teach us today.

Critical Engagement of Primary Sources

Each one of these works is complex, and will require intense engagement. We will study these classics carefully in class, consider the arguments presented, and discuss the difference between

Grades will be assigned based on the following structure: 1/3 attendance; 1/3 reading responses; and 1/3 final paper.

Part I: Rabbi Hayyim of Vilozhin

Primary Text: *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim*, Part IV

