

# MAIMONIDES LECTURE ON SCEPTICISM

WEDNESDAY  
16 FEBRUARY 2022  
18:00

## Intentional Ambiguity in the Pentateuch's Revelation Narratives: Doubt as a Religious Value in the Lawgiving in Exodus

*Benjamin D. Sommer*

Many modern critics of religion, along with many fundamentalist adherents of religion, assume that claims to revealed knowledge bolster dogmatic certainty: that which has been clearly revealed by God must be entirely and undeniably true. Revealed religion, then, seems to have no room for doubt; scepticism must be the anti-thesis of faith. Ben Sommer will not only undermine these assumptions shared by critics of religion and fundamentalists (who understand religion in nearly identical ways and differ only in their evaluation of it); he will also argue that the story of lawgiving in Exodus 19–20 overturns these assumptions. That narrative, like several other crucial passages in Exodus and Numbers, deliberately makes it difficult to be sure what God said during the revelation, as opposed to what Moses interpreted God as saying. Sommer's close readings of biblical texts will bolster liberal theologies of modern Judaism, especially those of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Franz Rosenzweig. This view of revelation cultivates a positive attitude towards a degree of religious scepticism. Doubt fosters an epistemological humility that is at the core of religious consciousness, in opposition to the dogmatic confidence that critics of religion and fundamentalists regard as the essence of religion.

**Benjamin D. Sommer** is a professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a senior fellow at the Kogod Center for Contemporary Jewish Thought at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America.

ZOOM

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Contact:  
[maimonides-centre@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:maimonides-centre@uni-hamburg.de)  
Information:  
[www.maimonides-centre.uni-hamburg.de](http://www.maimonides-centre.uni-hamburg.de)

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