



Notre Dame welcomes global Jewish philosopher for major public lectures

The University of Notre Dame Australia will welcome internationally renowned scholar [Associate Professor Samuel Lebens](#) (University of Haifa) to Sydney and Perth this July for a significant program of public events exploring Jewish philosophy and ethics, past and present.

Presented by Notre Dames's [Centre for the History of Philosophy](#) (CHOP), the program reflects Notre Dame's commitment to fostering deeper interfaith dialogue and understanding through world-class scholarship and public engagement.

Rabbi Dr Lebens is a leading international voice in contemporary Jewish philosophy and an important public intellectual. The author of six books, including [The Principles of Judaism](#) (Oxford University Press), and nearly 60 scholarly publications, he has lectured widely across Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States. A close student of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, his work is renowned

for presenting rigorous academic scholarship to the public in an accessible and exciting way.

Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton, Chief Minister of The Great Synagogue, Sydney, praised Rabbi Dr Lebens and remarked on the importance of his visit: “Lebens is a superstar in the world of Jewish philosophy and ethics. His visit to Australia is a major event for the Jewish community and beyond, and his lectures will be highly stimulating, providing both intellectual engagement and spiritual inspiration,” said Rabbi Dr Elton.

Rabbi Dr Lebens’ visit will anchor three major events, including the second annual [John and Anna Belfer Oration](#) in the History of Jewish Philosophy, to be held on 1 July 2026 at The Great Synagogue, Sydney.

Following the success of the inaugural event in 2025, which attracted an audience of more than 350 attendees, including NSW Governor Margaret Beazley AC KC, NSW Chief Justice Andrew Bell, Archbishop Anthony Fisher and leading members of the Jewish community and other faith communities, the Belfer Oration has become a significant fixture in the University’s calendar.

In this year’s oration, Rabbi Dr Lebens will present on the topic: “Is Free Will an Illusion? Authoring the Story of Our Lives with Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo.”

Drawing on two influential medieval Jewish philosophers, the lecture will explore enduring questions of human agency, divine influence and moral responsibility. The evening will conclude with a conversation between Rabbi Dr Lebens and ABC Radio National’s Andrew West.

The event is co-presented by CHOP and The Great Synagogue, Sydney, with the generous support of the Belanna Trust.

Professor David Bronstein, Co-Director of CHOP, said the return of the Oration reflects both its strong debut and growing importance.

“The remarkable response to last year’s inaugural Belfer Oration demonstrated the appetite for thoughtful, accessible engagement with the great questions of human life,” Professor Bronstein said.

“We are delighted to welcome Rabbi Dr Lebens, one of the world’s leading scholars of Jewish philosophy, to continue this important tradition.”

In addition to the oration, Rabbi Dr Lebens will deliver a four-part public lecture series in Sydney’s Bondi Junction titled: “After Bondi – A Light in Dark Times: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ Jewish Vision of Hope.”

Held across four evenings in July at The Central Synagogue, the series will reflect on the legacy of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and offer intellectual and spiritual insight following the Bondi tragedy in 2025. Drawing on Sacks’ A Letter in the Scroll, the lectures will explore themes of identity, purpose, community and hope, with opportunities for open discussion.

Presented in partnership with The Central Synagogue and the Central Academy and established as an initiative of Ruth Magid and Robert Magid OAM, the lecture series aims to provide an inclusive space for reflection and dialogue for both Jewish and wider communities.

The program will conclude in Perth, where Rabbi Dr Lebens will present his Belfer Oration lecture at the Perth Hebrew Congregation in Menora on 9 July, extending the reach of this significant intellectual exchange across Notre Dame's national footprint.

Professor Bronstein said the program reflects Notre Dame's commitment to engaging diverse philosophical traditions and fostering meaningful dialogue across faith communities.

"At a time when communities are seeking connection and understanding, these events offer an opportunity to reflect on profound questions with clarity, depth and hope," he said.

"Importantly, our work in the history of philosophy extends beyond any single tradition, creating space for interfaith understanding and engagement across religious and intellectual perspectives."

All events are open to the public.

Event details:

The John and Anna Belfer Oration in the History of Jewish Philosophy ***"Is Free Will an Illusion? Authoring the Story of Our Lives with Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo"***

Date: 1 July 2026

Time: 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Location: The Great Synagogue, Sydney

[Register Here](#)

"After Bondi – A Light in Dark Times: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' Jewish Vision of Hope"

Dates: 7, 14, 21 and 28 July 2026

Time: 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Location: The Central Synagogue, Bondi Junction

[Register Here](#)

The Rabbi David and Aviva Freilich Oration ***"Is Free Will an Illusion? Authoring the Story of Our Lives with Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo"***

Date: 9 July 2026

Time: 7:30 pm
Location: Perth Hebrew Congregation, Menora
[Register Here](#)

-ENDS-

For media enquiries, please contact:

Email: media@nd.edu.au

Phone: [+61 437 992 984](tel:+61437992984)

Visit us online for more [Notre Dame News](#).