



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Media Release

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Notre Dame hosts leading Jewish philosopher for second annual Belfer Oration

The University of Notre Dame Australia's Centre for the History of Philosophy (CHOP), in partnership with The Great Synagogue Sydney, has welcomed internationally recognised scholar Rabbi Dr Samuel Lebens to Australia as the keynote speaker for the 2026 Belfer Oration in the History of Jewish Philosophy.

Held on Wednesday 1 July, the annual Oration is named in honour of Sydney couple John and Anna Belfer and is supported by the Belanna Trust.

Attended by more than 200 people, this year's lecture, *Is Free Will an Illusion? Authoring the Story of Our Lives with Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo*, explored fundamental questions of human agency, divine influence and moral responsibility through the thought of two medieval Jewish philosophers.

Rabbi Dr Lebens, a philosopher at the University of Haifa and one of the leading contemporary voices in Jewish philosophy, challenged the audience to consider how philosophical ideas developed centuries ago continue to shape modern understanding of personal identity, choice and human flourishing.

The lecture was followed by a conversation between Dr Lebens and ABC Radio National's Andrew West.

Established in 2025, the Belfer Oration brings distinguished scholars of Jewish philosophy to Sydney to deepen academic and public understanding of one of the world's great intellectual traditions.

Professor David Bronstein, CHOP Co-Director, said last year's response showed strong interest in serious public discussion of philosophical and religious ideas.

"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.

"It is a privilege to have had Rabbi Dr Lebens, one of the world's leading scholars of Jewish philosophy, join us in continuing this important tradition."

Through CHOP, Notre Dame has established itself as a global leader in the study of Abrahamic philosophical traditions and their ongoing relevance to today's society.

Bringing together scholars, faith leaders and members of the broader community, the Belfer Oration highlights the long tradition of shared intellectual inquiry between the Abrahamic faiths.

In addition to the oration, Rabbi Dr Lebens will deliver a [four-part public lecture series](#) at Central Synagogue in Sydney titled: *After Bondi – A Light in Dark Times: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' Jewish Vision of Hope and* present [The Rabbi David and Aviva Freilich Oration](#) in Perth.

The University of Notre Dame Australia thanks The Great Synagogue Sydney, the Belanna Trust and all those involved in making the 2026 Belfer Oration a success.

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