Bereshit (Genesis) Part II
Bible 101
“The Jacob Saga and Joseph and His Brothers”
Hebrew College Spring 2014

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Spring Semester

Bereshit (Bible 101)

Wednesdays 11:30 am – 1:00 pm; Fridays 11:30-1:00 p.m.

Description

Colorful coats, dreams and near fratricide, famine, exile, and reconciliation mark the dramatic narrative of Joseph and His Brothers in the last third of Bereshit. This course will engage in a careful reading of the biblical text, drawing on midrash as well as modern literary responses, from Israeli poetry to Thomas Mann's great novel. In addition to honing our text skills, we will consider various themes such as the problem of continuity/discontinuity (toledot), dreams and their interpretation, models of recognition and teshuvah, and family secrets and shame.

Requirements:

- “Genres and Themes in Biblical Literature” (Bible 502a/502b) or the academic equivalent; Hebrew VI or above and/or the approval of the professor.

Goals of the Course:

- Reinforce text reading skills of the Humash in the original Hebrew, by reviewing some salient features of Biblical Hebrew phonology, morphology, and syntax, and through the usage of the concordance, B.D.B., and grammar resources.

- Review critical approaches to biblical scholarship: Source Criticism (the Documentary Hypothesis), textual criticism, and form criticism. Develop skills to access how Bereshit is read in its sitz im leben (lit. “setting in life”, historical context).

- Train ourselves in the distinction between peshat (plain meaning, contextual reading) and derash (applied or extended meaning of the text), and the tools each
level of exegesis requires.

➢ Learn to read the biblical text carefully, with an eye to discovering the “exegetical gap” or “hook” upon which the classic interpreter may base his or her reading. We will focus on reading Rashi and his midrashic sources in order to discern “What is Rashi’s question?”

➢ Introduce students to traditions of interpretation and their respective literary forms: exegetical midrash (e.g. Bereshit Rabbah), the “Re-written Bible” of the Pseudepigrapha (e.g. Jubilees), homiletical midrash (e.g. Tanhuma Yelamdenu), and narrative midrash (e.g. Avot deRabbi Natan, Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer).

➢ Sensitize ourselves to the literary patterns, feminist perspectives, as well as major themes in the Book of Genesis: covenant, overturn of primogeniture, type scene, barren wife motif and so forth.

Required Texts:

• Any Hebrew Bible. Recommended: The bilingual JPS Tanakh or the bilingual Koren edition (preferred!).

• Migra’ot Gedolot on Bereshit (including Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra); recommend Etz Haim (published by Mosad Ha-Rav Kook).

• Sarna, Nahum. Understanding Genesis (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America 1966, 2nd ed. 1970) [From hereon Sarna]

• All other readings will be placed on Reserve in the library and/or uploaded to “Schoology”.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

1. Participation (10%). Attendance and active involvement in discussion is critical to progress in this course. Preparation for class each week entails thorough Havruta study in of a section in Bereshit in the original Hebrew (up to 20 verses), plus a daf mekorot (source sheet with guideline questions for the Beit Midrash), and at least one secondary source, introducing a critical article/reading pertinent to the passage at hand.

2. Biweekly Reflection Papers/Divrei Torah (40%). These five written assignments entail reflections on the primary readings, parshanut and articles that we will be reading over the course of the semester. They should serve as the basis for future Divrei Torah for your future congregations. The work (500-1000 words) should be sent to me, and I will then respond with suggestions/feedback and open the papers up for peer review (at the discretion of the student). These short papers are due on the following dates: Feb. 14th, Feb. 28th, March 14th, April 4th, and May 2nd.
3. **Final Project:** Teaching a Passage from *Bereshit* (30%). Each student will submit one lesson plan, including sources (at least one Medieval exegete, midrash and/or modern literary piece) and present it to the class as a model *shiur*:
   a) A week before your presentation, you are to submit a detailed (2-3 pages) outline of your *shiur*, with clear questions, sources for study, and secondary sources (modern commentary) that you will be drawing upon.
   b) The class will be presented in accordance with the syllabus (depending on the topic chosen).
   c) In the last weeks of classes, students will write up a reflection/post-evaluation of their *shiur*. This will be due during the final week of classes, Fri. May 16th.

4. **Final Take-Home Exam/Review – Short Answer Questions** reviewing the basics exegetical principals that we covered in class over the whole year, e.g. *peshat, derash, homiletical midrash, exegetical midrash, pseudepigrapha* etc.... Due the final day of class, Friday, May 23rd.

1. **First Week:** Jacob’s Dream of Ascension

   **Wed. Feb. 5th** Anatomy of a Blessing
   Primary Reading: Gen. 27:1-28:10, plus *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.

   **Fri. Feb. 7th** Jacob’s Ladder
   Primary Reading: Gen. 28:9-22 & *daf mekorot*.

2. **Second Week** (Classes 3 & 4) The Jacob-Rachel-Leah Conundrum

   **Wed. Feb. 12th** Rivalry between Sisters
   Primary Reading: Gen. chs. 29-30; focus on Gen. 29:16-35; 30:1-24.
   Secondary Reading: Jan Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, pp. 123-141; Ilana Pardes, “Rachel’s Dream: The Female Subplot”, in *Countertraditions*, pp. 60-78. (Uploaded to Schoology)

   **Fri. Feb. 14th** Collusion of Sisters
   Primary Reading: As Above, plus *daf mekorot*.

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<th>#1 -- First Reflection Paper due Fri. Feb. 14th!</th>
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3. **Third Week** (Class 5 & 6):
Wed. Feb. 19th  “When Rachel Stole the Idols…”
Primary Reading: Gen. 31:19-36; Gen. 35:16-18, 48:7 (Rashi loc. cit. and Ramban), Jer. 31:15-18.

Fri. Feb. 21st  Jacob Wrestles the Angel; Reconciliation with Esau
MODEL SHIUR: Elizabeth and Lev (?)
Primary Reading: Gen. 33; 35:10-12 & daf mekorot (selections & suggested reading from Elizabeth and Lev).

4. Fourth Week (Class 7 & 8)

Wed. Feb. 26th  Toledot Ya’agov
Primary Reading: Gen: 37:1-4; An overview of the chronology; Jacob and Joseph – parallel lives; “son of his old age”; origins of favoritism & sibling rivalry; Rashi on Gen. 37:1-4; *Breshit Rabbah* 84:2 and *Midrash Tanhuma VaYeshev* 1.
Principle: ma’aseh avot siman le-banim.

Fri. Feb. 28th  Joseph’s Dreams and their Interpretation
Primary Reading: Gen 37: 5-11 & daf mekorot. “A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read”
Questions: Who interprets the dreams? Why these symbol? The brothers’ response: jealousy, hatred. Source: selections from *b. Berakhot, Or haChaim*, and *Zohar*.

#2 -- Second Reflection Paper due Fri. Feb. 28th!

5. Fifth Week (Class 9 & 10)

Wed. March 5th  The Sale and the Consequences
Primary Reading: Gen. 37:12-36; *Amos 2:6, plus daf mekorot*.
Questions/topics: Reuben’s mourning & Jacob’s mourning; sold to Ishmaelites or Midianites? Sold for the price of shoes; Sources: *Testament of Zebulon* 3:1-2, *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* 38, *Eleh Azkarah*, selections from Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*.

Fri. March 7th  The Story of Judah and Tamar
Primary Reading: Gen. 38:1-19 & daf mekorot. Thwarted toledot; mourning (‘er and onen); levirate marriage; deception/seduction at the crossroads (Petah ‘Enayim); Deception and Recognition; key terms: ‘arev (guarantee); haker na…tzadka mimeni; the birth of twins; Peretz (breach) – towards the messianic line (Gen. 49:10, Ruth 4:18-22). Selections from: *Breshit Rabbah, b. Sotah, Targum Neofiti*;

6. Sixth Week (Class 11 & 12)
Wed. March 12th Joseph in Potiphar’s House
Primary Reading: Gen. 39:1-23 & daf mekorot. Joseph’s good looks; his master’s wife; Yosef ha-tzaddik; the face (ikonin) of his father; Sources: the Quran, Breshit Rabbah 87:8, b. Sotah 36b.
Secondary Reading: James Kugel, In Potiphar’s House, pp. 21-42 (uploaded to Schoology).

Fri. March 14th “Passing Strange: Joseph and Esther in the Imperial Court”
Primary Reading: Sources comparing Esther and Joseph (A Purim Special)

#3 -- Third Reflection Paper due Sunday March 14th!

7. Seventh Week (Class 13 and 14): Joseph, the Dream Interpreter
Wed. March 19th Joseph in the Pit/Prison

Fri. March 21st Joseph and Pharaoh’s Dreams

8. Eighth Week (Class 15 and 16): Joseph, Lost and Found (Part I)
Wed. March 26th Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?
Secondary Reading: Yoel bin Nun, “Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home” (Part I and II) (Uploaded to Schoology).

Fri. March 28th Famine in the Land & The Brothers Go Down to Egypt
Primary Reading: Gen. 42: 6-28 & daf mekorot; shever/sever; Joseph not recognized (nun.kuf.reshtehimaker); pangs of conscience & confession.
9. Ninth Week (Class 17 and 19) Joseph, Lost and Found (Part II)

Wed. April 2nd Did the Brother's do Teshuva? **May not have class; Pre-Pesach Yom Iyun!**
Primary Reading: Gen. 42:6-29-43:13 & daf mekorot; “Yosef einenu”; Reuben and Judah appeal to their father; the role of the guarantor.
Secondary Reading: Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Bereshit, pp. 457-461 (the Teshuvah theory)

Fri. April 4th Why did Joseph Conceal His Identity? Recovering Joseph (the psychological theory)

#4—Fourth Reflection Paper due Friday April 4th!

10. Tenth Week (Class 19)

Wed. April 9th The Goblet in the Sack
Primary Reading: Genesis 43:14-34-44:1-9 & daf mekorot; Rashi on 43:19; Ramban and Seforno on 44:1; key word: g.n.b.

No Classes from Fri. April 11th-April 22nd Passover Break
Rachel is in Israel

11. Eleventh Week (Class 20 & 21)

Wed. April 23rd The Revelation of Identity and The Narrative of Shame
Primary Reading: Gen. 45:1-15 and 50:15-21, Rashi on Gen. 45:2, 3-5, and 15; Ramban on 45:27 and Or HaChaim 45:26 and 50:15.

Fri. April 25th The Reconciliation between Father and Son
Gen. 45:21-28; Rashi on 45:24-27; Ramban, Ibn Ezra, and Radak on Gen. 45:25 and 27; Bereshit Rabbah 94.

12. Twelfth Week (Class 22)

No Class on April 30th Community Wide Learning for Rosh Chodesh

Fri. May 2nd What if Joseph Hates us?
Primary Reading: Gen. 50:15-21 & daf mekorot.

#5 – Fifth Reflection Paper due Fri. May 2nd!

13. Thirteenth Week (Class 23 & 24)

Wed. May 7th Model Shiur: ___________________

Fri. May 9th, MODEL SHIUR: ____________________

14. Fourteenth Week (Class 25 & 26)

Wed. May 14th, Model Shiur: ___________________

Fri. May 16th MODEL SHIUR: ____________________

Reflection/Evaluations of Model Shiurim due May 16th!


Final Write up of Model Shiur Due May 16th/19th!

15. Exam Week: No Classes

Final Take-Home Exam – Review of Principles of Parashanut, Due May 23rd

Bibliography

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