Introduction to Talmud
Oral Torah and the Power of Words
CG-RAB-520
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Welcome to the world of the Talmud, an ocean of text, a world unto itself, a body of literature that is like no other. The primary goal of this course is to build skills that will start you off on your way to becoming a Talmud student. The actual content of the Talmudic texts we will study, while absolutely fascinating, is of secondary importance. The methods used to prepare for class are critical and must be consistent with the goals. Minimally, each class session will require two hours of Bet Midrash time to work on text in hevruta, aside from additional time for English readings done outside the Bet Midrash. Hazara, review of the material on an ongoing basis, is essential.

One of the first objectives will be to familiarize you with the page of Babylonian Talmud as laid out by the widow and brothers Romm in Vilna in the 1880’s and thereby enable you to begin studying from it. The skills necessary to actually study Talmudic material and its accompanying commentary include reading and understanding unpointed Hebrew and Aramaic, navigation through text without punctuation, reading the font generally reserved for Rashi and other commentary, using Hebrew letters in place of numbers and getting to know some common abbreviations. Over the course of the semester we will work on all those skills. Along with text study, we will read Solomon Schechter's Aspects of Rabbinic Theology to get a more general sense of rabbinic ideology.

There will be 3 written tests and an oral final exam. There will be a creative writing assignment which will require writing a mishnah and an accompanying sugya in English using Hebrew and Aramaic signal words connecting the power of words and hevruta study. You will also be asked to give a 5 minute synopsis to the class of a chapter from Aspects of Rabbinic Theology.

Books required: Aspects of Rabbinic Theology, by Solomon Schechter, Tanakh
Reference books recommended: Jastrow, Frank, Carmell, Steinzaltz Reference Guide

No English translations are to be used for any rabbinic texts.