Objectives

1) To increase facility in reading the text of the gemara
2) To increase facility in reading the commentary of Rashi and using it as a tool in understanding the gemara
3) To further ability in understanding the fundamental concerns and values behind statements and debates in the gemara and apply those values and concerns sensibly
4) To increase knowledge of Rabbinic statements about tefillah and achieve greater understanding of Rabbinic notions of tefillah

Required Texts

1) Massekhet Berakhot. You must own a copy of the “Vilna Shas” printing of מסכת ברכות. It is not sufficient to work off of photocopies, downloads from computer programs, websites, or copies of individual פרקים. In addition, though it is not required, you are strongly encouraged to own a relatively recent copy of the tractate, for two reasons: a) editions printed in roughly the last 20 years or so will have bold-faced דיבורים מתחילים in the פירוש, which will make you a much happier student. b) Education scholarship has shown how much students’ experience of Talmud is influenced by the material nature of learning; old copies of Talmud, with dry, thin, and/or yellowed pages, affect the way many people think about the content of our study in negative ways. It's thus worth the extra money to buy yourself a copy of the מסכת that you will enjoy touching and looking at.

2) Frank, Practical Talmud Dictionary. I can think of nothing that will have a more beneficial effect on your learning than owning your own copy of this invaluable resource. The בית.modal has copies, but you will be constantly waiting for others to finish using it, returning it to others, etc. I will reference this work constantly, and even now I regularly use it in my own learning.

Course Requirements

1) Class participation/preparation (15%). Attendance is required; if you know that you must miss a class, please notify me in advance. When you miss class, you are expected find out what you missed from your hevruta and/or me and to submit, within a week of the missed class, one page (or more, if you choose) summarizing your understanding of what was discussed that day.

Also, you will be regularly called on, and your ability to read and explain the text will be the primary component of this grade. Please be aware that many people can read fluently without understanding what they are reading, while others may stutter and sound unprepared despite complete
comprehension. You will be assessed based on your comprehension and ability to explain, not your charismatic (or uncharismatic) reading style.

2) **Vocabulary quizzes** (15%). There will be three vocabulary quizzes over the course of the semester, covering technical terms (i.e. those terms found in the Frank dictionary) that have appeared in our sugyot until that point. They will be emailed to you following class on: Thursday 17 October; Thursday 7 November; and Tuesday, 10 December. They will be due in hard copy prior to the start of the following class (i.e. Tuesday 22 October; Tuesday 12 November; and Thursday 12 December respectively). Although these are “take-home” quizzes, they are closed book. You will be asked to translate the technical term into Hebrew (if the term is Aramaic), into English, and to explain what the term does/how it functions in a sugya.

3) **Outlines** (15%). At the conclusion of each sugya, you will prepare, in English or in Hebrew, an outline to be turned in, in hard copy, **no later than one week after the class in which we completed the sugya**. The outline should paraphrase each step of the sugya and describe what function that step plays in the larger structure (e.g. attack, resolution, question, etc.). This requirement will likely be unclear to many of you early in the semester, but do the best you can, and as you get these back with my comments, it will become clearer and easier.

4) **Blog commentaries** (15%). Our class will be writing a blog commentary on the fourth chapter of ברכות together this year. For each sugya on the syllabus below, one of you is assigned to write the commentary. Your commentary should be between 1 and 3 pages and provide a summary (not a translation, but a clear description of any relevant “back-and-forth”) of the sugya as well as your own thoughts and insights on the ideas conveyed in the text. These thoughts may take the form of a lengthier explanation of one aspect of the sugya that interests you (a la Tosafot), or briefer comments on a number of points in the sugya (more like Rashi). Your first draft is due one week after the class in which we complete the sugya (i.e. at the same time as your outline—yes, that means that one student will have two assignments due that day). If revisions are necessary/appropriate, we will work out together (one-on-one) the timeline for those revisions before posting.

5) **Oral midterm review** (20%). During the week of Monday, 4 November-Friday 8 November, each student will be scheduled for a 30-minute slot of time, in which we will learn one or two previously-studied passages together and discuss them. Your grade will be based equally on your understanding of פנתן of the passage(s) as well as your demonstrating in our conversation, through comments that are rooted in the text, that you have thought about the relevance and meaning of these texts to a thoughtful Jewish life.

6) **End of semester oral evaluation** (20%). Our final exam will be a take-home final consisting of 3 sections: a) a closed-book test of outlining previously-studied sugyot; b) an essay in response to one of several questions about tefillah incorporating ideas from the material studied this semester; and c) an open-dictionary assessment translating a previously-unseen sugya.

**Benchmarks**

By the end of this **year** (not necessarily semester) you should:

1) Have a reasonably large vocabulary of technical Talmud terms (i.e. those terms found in the Frank dictionary).
2) Be able to identify the components of a סוגיא, i.e. מוניות, ברייתות, מימרות, and anonymous sections.

3) Be able to identify the following key rabbis with their location and generation: Rabban Gamliel, R. Yehoshua, R. Akiva, R. Yehudah, Rav, Shmuel, R. Yehoshua b. Levi, R. Yohanan, Reish Lakish, Rava, and Abaye. Additionally, you should be able to distinguish between Babylonian and Palestinian sages, even if previously unknown to you, in the Talmud.

4) Be able to read confidently סוגיות that feature primarily attributed sources (tannaitic material and מימרות.

5) Be able to work independently through anonymous סוגיות, even if with some difficulty, understanding at least the gist of the סוגיא prior to coming to class.

6) Be able to speak more thoughtfully about the various human needs that תפילה can potentially meet; the relationship of תפילה to other Jewish forms that might meet those needs (e.g. תורה, קרבנות, שירה, etc.); and the various aspects of human experience that are relatively highlighted or ignored by each.