

Kashrut
RAB 426

Tuesday 2:30-4:00

Fall 2014

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Course Description

In this course, we will study the laws of “*kashrut*,” i.e. laws pertaining to what foods are permissible to eat and in what circumstances, and when it is possible and how to *kasher* items that have been rendered “*treif*.” We will focus on both practical *halakhah* and on developing an approach to *kashrut* that can be explained to congregants, students, or any other people with whom we may work in the future.

Goals and Objectives

- 1) To complete our “tool-box” of technical terms and concepts in the laws of “*kashrut*.”
- 2) To have an at-the-ready set of responses to common kashrut questions.
- 3) To increase familiarity with and ability in reading the text of the *Shulhan Arukh*.
- 4) To think critically/reverently about previous halakhic rulings and to apply increasing familiarity with those rulings in thinking about the costs and benefits of various modern approaches

Assessment:

- 1) Class participation (attendance, evidence of preparation through in-class reading and/or participation in discussion): 25%
- 2) Weekly assignments (assessments of recall of basic concepts and terms already covered in class): 25%
- 3) Take-home final exam: 50%

Required books:

You *must* prepare those texts required in Hebrew from a “traditional” page layout version of the *Shulhan Arukh*. The material we will be studying comes (almost entirely) from *Yoreh Deiah* 87-108; I am currently trying to get Israel Book Store to carry individual volumes for purchase. Other options include the commonly-sold combination editions of Tur/Beit Yosef/Shulhan Arukh (you will need two volumes, the one on תערוכות and the one on בשר בהלב); photocopying the *beit midrash* or library copies; or printing out from www.hebrewbooks.org. Using printouts from the Bar-Ilan CD or other programs (unless they reproduce the actual layout of the common editions of the *Shulhan Arukh*; I know of none that do) is not acceptable.

Also, a set of *Shulhan Arukh* is an invaluable (and I dare say indispensable) resource for all rabbis to have in their libraries. If you are thinking about major purchases to make this year, this would be a significant, but extremely useful, investment to make.

For the first class, I will provide sources, and I will be able to speak after class to anyone with questions about editions, various options, etc.

Assignments:

Because of the diversity of interests, time constraints, and dis/comfort with preparation of rabbinic texts, each assignment will be divided into three sections:

- 1) *Seifim* for *iyun*: this section will include 1-3 סעיפים of the *Shulhan Arukh* (including the Rema) that you will be expected to prepare carefully, in the original Hebrew, paying attention both to translation and to the content (guiding questions will usually, though not always, be provided). The purpose of this section is to provide a focus for our classroom learning/discussion and to give all students an opportunity to improve their technical skills in reading.
- 2) *Seifim* for *bekiyut*: this section will include more סעיפים (typically about 7-10) to be studied in lesser depth, in either Hebrew or in translation. (Full disclosure: there is no existing translation of *Yoreh Deiah* into English, which is why section 1 is so important. But you can find many of these סעיפים on the internet, either via wikisource, or by googling the relevant topic and finding it cited, in passing, in someone's article or blog post. You may also find it worthwhile, as a class, to divide-and-conquer these סעיפים, with each student taking some number over the course the semester to translate and share with your classmates. Of course, everyone should try to do as much of this in Hebrew as possible, since it will only increase your skill, and at times offer nuances that cannot be achieved through translation). The purpose of this section is to increase the number of halakhic concepts around food to which you are exposed, and often to provide more data for our speculation about the intent of various kinds of food law.
- 3) Additional work. This section will include citations from earlier and later works (e.g. *Bavli*, *rishonim*, *Beit Yosef*, classic commentators on the *Shulhan Arukh*, contemporary responsa in Hebrew and English). This section is *not* required, but I sincerely hope (even as I know what it means to be a second-semester "senior") that those of you who move through sources with more speed, as well as those of you who find yourself particularly interested in a topic one week, will try your hand at some or all of this. These sources will introduce more voices and approaches than what we can get from the *Shulhan Arukh* alone, and therefore make our speculations more grounded and our meaning-making richer.

Class schedule: