Torah Core 1: Bereshit (Genesis) Part II
RB-BIBLE-101
4 graduate credits
“The Jacob Saga and Joseph and His Brothers”
Rabbinical Students, Hebrew College Spring 2015

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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 Jacob & Wives & Sons (and daughter) in the last half 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!).
- *Miqra’ot Gedolot* on *Bereshit* (including Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra); recommended: *Torat Haim* (published by Mosad Ha-Rav Kook).
- 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 via Schoology, and I will then respond with suggestions/feedback and students may post to discussion board for peer response. These short papers are due on the following dates: **Feb. 16th, March 9th, March 30th, April 20th, and May 4th**.
3. **Final Project: Teaching a Passage from Bereshit** (30%). Each student will submit one lesson plan, including sources (at least two passages from the Medieval exegetes, a 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 the last few weeks of the semester. There will be an attempt to go chronological, following the narrative in Bereshit. Alternatively, if a proposal for a given class comes up earlier, then that student may opt to present their class in alignment with the syllabus.

c) In the last weeks of classes, students will write up a reflection/post-evaluation of their shiur. This will be due before the final week of classes, Fri. May 15th.

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, also on Friday, May 22nd.

1. **First Week:** Jacob’s Dream of Ascension (Classes 1 & 2)

   **Wed. Feb. 4th** Jacob and Esau  
   Primary Reading: Gen. 25:24-35, plus *daf mekorot* with guidelines questions.  

   **Fri. Feb. 6th** Anatomy of a Blessing  
   Primary Reading: Gen. 27:1-28:10, plus *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.  

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

   **Wed. Feb. 11th** Jacob’s Ladder  
   Primary Reading: Gen. 28:9-22 & *daf mekorot*.  

   **Fri. Feb. 13th** 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)

#1 -- First Reflection Paper due Monday Feb. 16th! Please upload to Schoology.
3. Third Week (Class 5 & 6):

Wed. Feb. 18th  Collusion of Sisters
Primary Reading: As Above, plus daf mekorot.
Secondary Reading: Rash on Gen. 29:17, and 25-26; and Selections from Genesis
Rabbah, Tanhuma Yelamdenu, and Talmud Bavli; Avivah Zornberg, The
Murmuring Deep, pp. 279-284; 405 (notes) (On Reserve; uploaded to Schoology).

Fri. Feb. 20th  “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.
Secondary Reading: Avivah Zornberg, Genesis, The Beginning of Desire, pp. 303-305;
selections of poetry by Rachel (Bluwstein), from Wendy Zierler, And Rachel
Stole the Idols, pp. 81-90 (uploaded to Schoology).

4. Fourth Week (Class 7 & 8)

Wed. Feb. 25th  Jacob Wrestles the Angel; Reconciliation with Esau
Primary Reading: Gen. 33; 35:10-12 & daf mekorot

Fri. Feb. 27th  Toledot Ya’aqov
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; Beshit Rabbah 84:2 and Midrash Tanhuma VaYeshev 1.
Principle: ma’aseh avot siman le-banim.
Secondary Reading (over-view of the Joseph story): Nahum Sarna, Understanding
Genesis, pp. 211-227.

5. Fifth Week (Class 9 & 10)
Wed. March 4th  FAST OF ESTHER
“Passing Strange: Joseph and Esther in the Imperial Court”
Primary Reading: Sources comparing Esther and Joseph (A Purim Special)

PURIM: Thursday, March 5th

Fri. March 6th  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 Monday, March 9th!

6. Sixth Week (Class 11 & 12)
Wed. March 11th  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, Pirke deRabbi Eliezer 38, Eleh Azkarah, selections from Thomas Mann, Joseph and His Brothers.

Fri. March 13th 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).

7. Seventh Week (Class 12 and 13): Joseph, the Dream Interpreter
Wed. March 18th Joseph in the Pit

Fri. March 20th Joseph and Pharaoh’s Dreams
Primary Reading: Gen. 41:1-36 & daf mekorot; Secondary Source: Dream Interpretation in Ancient Near East;

8. Eighth Week (Class 15 and 16): Judah and Tamar
Wed. March 25th 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; Selections from: Breshit Rabbah, b. Sotah, Targum Neofiti;

Fri. March 27th Judah and Tamar Part II Tamar’s Courage and Judah’s Confession
Primary Primary: As above & daf mekorot. 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).

#3 -- Third Reflection Paper due Monday, March 30th!

9. Ninth Week (Class 17) Joseph, Lost and Found (Part I)
Wed. April 1st  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.res/lehitnaker); pangs of conscience & confession.

NO CLASSES, Friday April 3rd, Wed. April 8th of Fri. April 10th; PESACH

10. Tenth Week (Class 18 and 19)

Wed. April 15th – Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home?
Secondary Reading:  Yoel bin Nun, “Why Didn’t Joseph Write Home” (Part I and II) (Uploaded to Schoology).

Friday April 17th Why did Joseph Conceal His Identity?  Recovering Joseph.
Primary Reading:  Gen. 42:6-29-43:13 & daf mekorot; “Yosef einenu”; Reuben and Judah appeal to their father; the role of the guarantor.

Fourth Reflection Paper Due, Monday April 20th

11. Eleventh Week (Class 20 & 21)
Wed. April 22nd  The Goblet in the Sack
Primary Reading:  Genesis 43:14-34-44:1-9 & daf mekorot; Rashi on 43:19; Ramban and Seftorno on 44:1; key word: g.n.b.

Fri. April 24th  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. Gen. 50:15-21 & daf mekorot.

12. Twelfth Week (Class 22 & 23)

Wed. April 29th MODEL SHIURIM (2)
Fri. May 1st  MODEL SHIUR (2)

#5 – Fifth Reflection Paper due Fri. May 4th!

13. Thirteenth Week (Class 24 & 25)

Wed. May 6th  MODEL SHIURIM (2)

Fri. May 8th;  MODEL SHIURIM (2): __________ ___________

14. Fourteenth Week (Class 26 & 27)

Wed. May 13th; Model Shiurim: __________ ___________

Fri. May 15th; REVIEW CLASS

Reflection/Evaluations of Model Shiurim due May 15th!


15. Exam Week: No Classes

Final Take-Home Exam – Review of Principles of *Parashanut*, Due May 22th

**Bibliography**

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1944 *Joseph and His Brothers, IV: Joseph the Provider* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf)

Sarna, Nahum

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1992 *Ma’aseh Yehuda ve-Tamar: Breshit 39 ba-Mikra, ba-targumim ha’atikim uvasifrut ha-Yehudit* (Jerusalem: Mifale ha-mehkar shel ha-Makhon le-madae ha-Yahadut) [Hebrew].

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2004 *And Rachel Stole the Idols* (Detroit Mi: Wayne State University Press).

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