Torah Core 1: Bereshit (Genesis)  
RB-Bible-100  
Rabbinical Students, Hebrew College Fall 2013

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FALL SEMESTER

Bereshit (Bible 100)

Wednesdays and Fridays 11:30 am – 1:00 pm.

Description

In this course, we will engage in close readings of selected passages in Genesis (Bereshit), with special attention granted to the the matriarchs and patriarchs. We will hone our Hebrew text reading skills, with occasional forays into parallel Ancient Mesopotamian sources. We will also concentrate on Rashi’s commentary and the midrashic sources that he draws upon to familiarize ourselves with classic questions of rabbinic exegesis (parshanut). Focus will be on how questions of gender relations – the dynamics of husband/wife and father/mother in relation to their offspring -- have been understood in the past and how we read them through our own contemporary lens.

Requirements:

- “Genres and Themes in Biblical Literature” (Bible 502a/502b) or the academic equivalent; Hebrew V 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); recommend *Torat 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** (50%), due dates: 1) Oct. 2nd; 2) Oct. 16th; 3) Oct. 30th; 4) Nov. 13th; 5) Dec. 11th. 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* that you will present orally to the class and/or your future congregations. The work (2-3 pages double-spaced, up to 500 words) will be sent to me (by email), and I will respond with suggestions/feedback, and possibly open the papers up for peer review (at the discretion of the student). Every week, from Wed. Sept. 25th (second week of classes), one student will present a *Devar Torah* based on a weekly reflection.
3. **Research Paper** (40%). Each student will submit one critical essay of 12-15 pages (double-spaced, 12 point, 1” margins), including footnotes and bibliography. The paper should be submitted in two stages:

   a) By Wed. Nov. 20\(^{th}\), you are to submit a detailed (1 page) outline of your paper, with a clear research question, title, and bibliography (5 secondary sources, use “Chicago Manual of Style” – Bibliography & Notes). Your bibliography must include at least 5 items (in addition to the Bible) – books or Journal articles all relevant to the topic at hand.

   b) Since I am restricting the length to 15 pages (max), I expect the quality of argumentation to be high. Be concise and focus your topic. It is worth 40% of your final grade and is due on the date specified below. The paper will be evaluated on the basis of: content, structure and organization, evidence of independent thought, use of primary sources, use of secondary sources, and style/grammar/spelling. The final paper is due during the last week of classes at 9 a.m. **Friday, Dec. 20\(^{th}\).**

1. **First Week** (Classes 1) *Beri’at ha-’Adam (Creation of the Human).*

   **Wed. Sept. 18\(^{th}\)** Introducing Rashi and his midrashic sources.

   **Primary Reading:** Gen. 1:24-31; “Let us make ‘man’?”
   **Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 2—36; Optional: Harold Bloom *The Book of J,* pp. 60-62 and 175-187; Robert Alter *Genesis,* pp. 4-10 (on hold in the library).

   **No Classes held from Thurs. & Fri., Sept. 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) – SUKKOT**

2. **Second Week** (Class 2 & 3): *The Creation of Woman and Man & The Sin in the Garden of Eden*

   **Tues. Sept. 24th** (instead of Friday’s class).

   **Primary Reading:** The Two Creations of Eve; Gen. 1:24-31 & Genesis 2:4b-25, plus *daf mekorot* and guideline questions.

   **Wed. Sept. 25\(^{th}\)** (3\(^{rd}\) class): The Sin in the Garden of Eden;
   **OPEN with Devar Torah:**

   **Primary Reading:** Genesis ch. 3, plus *daf mekorot* and guideline questions.
   **Secondary Reading:** AS ABOVE.

   #1 – First biweekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Oct 2\(^{nd}\)!
No classes Thurs. & Fri., Sept. 26th & 27th – Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

3. Third Week (Class 4 & 5): Primordial History in Genesis

Wed., Oct. 2nd (4th class): OPEN with Devar Torah;_________________________

Primary Reading: Gen. 11:1-9 “The Tower of Babel” & dor ha-plagah; selections from the Pseudepigrapha; Genesis Rabbah and Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer.
Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 67-80; U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part II (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1961), 238-249 (posted to Schoology; also on reserve in the library/Beit Midrash).

Fri. Oct. 4th (5th class) NO BEIT MIDRASH (just class, from 9-11 am, before Shabbaton): The Table of Nations and Toledot in Bereshit

4. Fourth Week (Class 6 & 7): The Selection of Abraham

Wed. Oct. 9th (6th Class) OPEN with Devar Torah;_________________________
Selection of Abraham Part I; Abraham of Ur in the Ancient Near Eastern Context

Primary Reading: Gen. ch. 11-12.
Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 81-119.

Fri. Oct. 11th (7th Class) Selection of Abraham Part II: Rashi and his Midrashic Sources
Primary Reading: Gen. 11:26-32; daf mekorot on “Abraham and the Fiery Furnace”, with guideline questions.
Secondary Reading (opt): Simi Peters, Learning to Read Midrash, pp. 112-124 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library)

#2 – Second biweekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Oct. 16th!

5. Fifth Week (class 8 and 9) The Wanderings of Abraham

Wed. Oct. 16th OPEN with Devar Torah;_________________________
“The Wanderings of Abraham – Lekh-lekha”

Primary Reading: Gen. 12:1-9; daf mekorot with guideline questions.
Secondary Reading (opt): Avigail Abarbanel, “Travails of Faith”, in Genesis, The Beginning of Desire, pp. 72-96 (on reserve in the library and in the Beit Midrash)

Fri. Oct. 18th “The Covenant with Abraham”; the contrast with Noah
Primary Reading: Gen. 9:8-17; Gen. 12:7; 13:14-18, SKIM (in English) Gen. ch. 15 and 17; daf mekorot with guideline questions.
6. **Sixth Week** (Classes 10 and 11): *Brit bein Ha-betarim* (The Covenant between the Pieces)

**Wed. Oct. 23rd OPEN with Devar Torah.**

**Primary Reading:** Genesis ch. 15; Jer. 34 – covenant in the Ancient Near Eastern Context.

**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 120-136.

**Fri. Oct. 25th**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. ch. 15 & daf mekorot with guideline questions.

#3 – Third biweekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Oct. 30th!

7. **Seventh Week** (Classes 12 and 13): The Wife-Sister Motif; Abraham, Sarah and Hagar; Isaac and Rebekah

**Wed. Oct. 30th OPEN with Devar Torah.**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. chs. 12:10-20; Gen. 20:1-18; Gen. 26:6-11.


**Fri. Nov. 1st**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. chs. 16 and 21; plus daf mekorot with guideline questions.

**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 154-165; Phyllis Trible, “Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection,” in *Texts of Terror*, pp. 9-35 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library).

8. **Eighth Week** (Class 14 and 15): The Covenant of Circumcision and The Promise

**Wed. Nov. 6th OPEN with Devar Torah**

**Primary Reading:** Genesis ch. 17-18:15, plus daf mekorot.


**Fri. Nov. 8th**: Beit Midrash only (Rachel away in NYC); work on FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL due Wed. Nov. 20th
9. **Ninth Week** (Classes 15 & 16): Sodom and Gomorrah Part I

**Wed. Nov. 13th OPEN with devar Torah :**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 18:15-19:38.
**Secondary Reading:** Sarna, pp. 157-163; R. Hendel, C. Kronfeld and I. Pardes “Gender and Sexuality”, in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, pp. 71-91 (posted to Schoology).

**#4 – Fourth biweekly Reflection Paper due Wednesday Nov. 13th**

**Fri. Nov. 15th:** Sodom and Gomorrah Part II

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 18:15-19:38; *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.
**Secondary Reading:** J. Kugel, “The Proud and the Stingy”, in *The Bible as It Was*, 187-189 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library).

10. **Tenth Week** (Classes 17) **The Binding of Isaac** (*ha’Aqedah*)

**Wed. Nov. 20th OPEN with devar Torah :**

**Primary Reading:** Genesis ch. 22; plus *Daf Mekorot*; 

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**No class Fri. Nov. 22nd -- Professor Adelman at SBL Conference**

11. **Eleventh Week** (Classes 19): **The Binding of Isaac** (*ha’Aqedah*) Part II

**Wed. Nov. 26th The Sacrifice of Sarah OPEN with devar Torah :**

**Primary Reading:** Gen. 23:1-2, plus *Daf Mekorot*;


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**NO Class Fri. Nov. 28th – Thanksgiving**
12. **Twelfth Week** (Classes 20 and 21): **The Jacob Cycle**  
**Wed. Dec. 4th**  *Toledot Yitzhak*: Between Abraham and Jacob.  
**OPEN with Devar Torah** ; __________________________  

**Primary Reading**: Gen. 25:19-34.  
**Secondary Reading**: Sarna, pp. 181-190; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, pp. 40-62 (on reserve in the library)

**Fri. Dec. 6th**  The Stolen Blessing  

**Primary Reading**: Gen. 27:1-28:10, plus *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.  
**Secondary Reading**: Avi Zornberg, “From Sincerity to Authenticity”, in *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*, 216-242 (on reserve in the library).

**#5 – Fifth biweekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Dec. 11th!**

13. **Thirteenth Week** (Classes 22 and 23): **Jacob’s Ladder**  
**Wed. Dec. 11th** **OPEN with Devar Torah** ; __________________________  

**Primary Reading**: Gen. 28:9-22 & *daf mekorot*.  
**Secondary Reading**: Sarna, pp. 191-210.

**Fri. Dec. 13th**: “The Collusion of Sisters: Jacob, Rachel and Leah”  

**Primary Reading**: Gen. chs. 29-32; focus on ch. 29; *daf mekorot*.  

14. **Last Week**  NO CLASSES

**Final Research Paper due Fri. Dec. 20th at 9 a.m.**
Bibliography


### Useful URLs

1) **JPS: Tanach** - Hebrew and English  

2) Comparing translations. You may access the NRSV on line at:  
   [http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm](http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm). To compare translations see:  
   [http://www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org). See also “The Unbound Bible”, which has an effective search engine and allows you to compare versions:  
   [http://unbound.biola.edu/](http://unbound.biola.edu/)

   See also Bible Gateway with online search engine,  

3) [http://earlyjewishwritings.com/](http://earlyjewishwritings.com/)
-Includes Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha (Deuterocanon), Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, and Philo

4) Machon Mamre, Tanach in Hebrew (including one with cantillation marks), English (JPS 1917), and parallel Hebrew and English, plus Targum Onqelos
http://www.mechon-mamre.org/

5) Glossary of Basic Terms in Judaism http://www.jewfaq.org/glossary.htm

This website contains the complete contents of the 12-volume Jewish Encyclopedia, which was originally published between 1901-1906.

7) Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)-- historical overview (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, and so forth), as well as ANET (Enuma Elish, Epic of Gilgamesh, Code of Hammurabi, Atrahasis etc…).
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook1.asp
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook.asp

8) Sacred Texts, includes ANET, as well as sources for comparative study -- books about religion, mythology, folklore and the esoteric online.
http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm

9) Orion Center For The Study Of The Dead Sea Scrolls - An invaluable site, which includes a Qumran cave tour, Orion Center DSS Bibliography, and online index of DJD volumes.  http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/index.html

10) The Dead Sea Scrolls Project (DSS) and Other Hebrew Manuscripts
http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/scr/

11) Septuagint Studies (LXX) – new English translation, includes also online resources for the study of the Septuagint: http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/#res

Or http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/ (includes Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha (also called Deuterocanon), Pseudepigrapha, Philo and Josephus)

CDs available:
1) Bible Works – excellent collection of resources (comparative translations, searchable, grammars, lexicons) http://www.bibleworks.com/

2) The Bar Ilan Project – Judaica Responsa (Bible & Rabbinics)
http://www.biu.ac.il/jh/Responsa/books.htm