

Torah Core I: Bereshit (Genesis)
RB-Bible 100
Rabbinical Students, Hebrew College Fall 2014 2015

Instructor:	Contact:
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FALL SEMESTER

Bereshit (RB-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”, i.e. 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 “Schoolology”.

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. **Weekly Reflection Papers/Divrei Torah** (60%). These ten written assignments entail weekly reflections on the primary readings, *parshanut* and articles that we will be reading over the course of the semester. They may serve as the basis for future *Divrei Torah* that you will present orally to the class and/or to your future congregations. The work (2-3 pages double-spaced, up to 500 words) will be sent to me (by email), and I will then respond with suggestions/feedback and open the papers up for peer review (at the discretion of the student). Every week, from Wed. Sept. 17th (second week of classes), one student will present a *Devar Torah*.
3. **Research Paper** (30%). Each student will submit one critical essay of 10 - 12 pages (double-spaced, 12 point, 1” margins), including footnotes and

bibliography. Possible topics are listed below; alternative topics must be approved by instructor. The paper should be submitted in two stages:

- a) By Fri. Nov. 14th, 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 10-12 pages, I expect the quality of argumentation to be high. Be concise and focus your topic. It is worth 30% 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. **Wednesday, Dec. 17th.**

1. First Week (Classes 1 & 2) *Beri’at ha-’Adam (Creation of the Human)*.

Wed. Sept. 10th Introduction; Reading Genesis in its Ancient Mesopotamian Context.

Primary Reading: Gen. 1:24-31 Genesis 2:4b-25.

Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 2—36.

Fri. Sept. 12th 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).

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

2. Second Week (Classes 3 & 4) **The Garden of Eden**

Wed. Sept. 17th: Two Versions of the Creation of Woman;

FIRST DEVAR Torah _____

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

Secondary Reading: Phyllis Trible, “A Love Story Gone Awry,” in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1978), 72-135 (posted to Schoology); Adelman, Rachel, “Re-creating Eve”, *Le’ela* 52 (2001) 19-24 (also on Schoology); OPTIONAL: Bal, Mieke, “Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character”, in *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 104-130.

Fri. Sept. 19th The Sin in the Garden

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

Secondary Reading: AS ABOVE.

#1 –First Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Mon. Sept. 22nd!

3. Third Week (Class 5), Tues. Sept. 23rd (Friday classes on Tuesday).

Primary Reading: Gen. 6:1-4 “The sons of God (or divine beings, *bnei elohim*) and the daughters of man (*benot adam*)”; selections from the Book of Watchers (*I Enoch* 1-36); *Jubilees*; *Genesis Rabbah* and *Pirqa de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

Secondary Reading: U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1961), 290-300 (posted to Schoology; also on reserve in the library/Beit Midrash).

No classes from Wed. Sept. 24th through Oct. 3rd HIGH HOLIDAYS

4. Fourth Week (Class 6), Oct. 8th (‘*erev* Sukkot) **PRE-SUKKOT SPECIAL.**
“**The Tree of Knowledge**” (as related to the ‘*arba’ah minim*). #2 – Second Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Oct. 22ⁿ!

No Class from Wed., Oct. 8th after 1 p.m. through Oct. 17th,
Sukkot/Shmini ‘Atzeret/Simchat Torah
Tuesday October 14th Friday classes are being held
Classes are being held on campus during the intermediate days of Sukkot Oct 13-15

#2 –Second Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Tues. Oct. 14th!

5. Fifth Week (Class 7) Primordial History in Genesis

Tues., Oct. 14th **Devar Torah (#2)** _____; *Migdal Bavel*

Primary Reading: Gen. 11:1-9 “The Tower of Babel” & *dor ha-plagah*; selections from the *Pseudepigrapha*; *Genesis Rabbah* and *Pirqa 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).

6. Sixth Week (Class 8 & 9) The Selection of Abraham

Wed. Oct. 22nd (Class 8) Selection of Abraham Part I; Abraham of Ur in the Ancient Near Eastern Context; *toledot* and the Table of Nations; **Devar Torah (#3)** _____

Primary Reading: Gen. ch. 11-12.

Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 81-119.

Fri. Oct. 24th (9th class) The 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)

7. Seventh Week (Classes 10 & 11) The Wanderings of Abraham

Wed. Oct. 29th “The Wanderings of Abraham – *Lekh-lekha*”; *Devar Torah* (#4)
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Primary Reading: Gen. 12:1-9; *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.

Secondary Reading (opt): Avivah Zornberg, “Travails of Faith”, in *Genesis, The Beginning of Desire*, pp. 72-96 (on reserve in the library and in the Beit Midrash)

Fri. Oct. 31st _ **The Wife-Sister Motif.**

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

Secondary Reading: Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) pp. 23-69 (on reserve in the library; uploaded to Schoology).

#3 – Third Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Nov. 5th!

8. Eighth Week (Classes 11 & 12) *Brit bein Ha-betarim* (The Covenant between the Pieces)

Wed. Nov. 5th **OPEN with *Devar Torah* (#5)**_____

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

Secondary Reading: Sarna, pp. 120-136.

Fri. Nov. 7th. Gen. 15, according to the *mefarshim* and Midrash.

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

Paper Proposal due Friday Nov. 14th!

9. Ninth Week (Classes 13 & 14); Abraham, Sarah and Hagar;

Wed. Nov. 12th **OPEN with *Devar Torah* (#6)**_____

Primary Reading: Gen. ch. 16 & 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).

Fri. Nov. 14th Discussion and Follow-up: How to Read Texts of Terror. Paper proposal due today!

10. Tenth Week (Classes 15 & 16): The Covenant of Promise

Wed. Nov. 19th The Covenant of Circumcision; **OPEN with *Devar Torah* (#7)**_____

Primary Reading: Genesis ch. 17-18:15,

Secondary Reading: R. W. L. Moberly, "On Reading Genesis 12-50" in *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, 121-150 (on reserve in the library).

Fri. Nov. 21st The Anunciation Scene

Primary Reading: Gen. ch. 18:11-15; "And Sarah laughed..."

Secondary Reading: Rachel Adelman, "On Laughter and Re-membling" in *Nashim* 8 (2004), 230-244 (posted to Schoology).

#4 – Fourth Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Nov. 26th!

11. Eleventh Week (Class 16): Sodom and Gomorrah

Wed. Nov. 26th (before Thanksgiving): ***Devar Torah* (#8)**_____

Primary Reading: Gen. 18:15-19:38; *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.

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); J. Kugel, "The Proud and the Stingy", in *The Bible as It Was*, 187-189 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library).

NO Class Fri. Nov. 28 th – Thanksgiving
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12. Tenth Week (Classes 17 & 18) The Binding of Isaac (*ha'Aqedah*)

Wed. Dec. 3rd ***Devar Torah* (#9)**_____

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

Secondary Reading: Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," from *Mimesis*, 3-23; Avivah Zornberg, "Abraham Bound and Unbound," in *The Murmuring Deep*, 169-207; Jon Levenson, "Isaac Unbound" in *Death and the Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, p. 125-42, 243-4 (posted to Schoology; on reserve in the library)

Fri. Dec. 5th **The Binding of Isaac** (*ha'Aqedah*) Part II

Primary Reading: Gen. 22:1-2, plus *Daf Mekorot*;

Secondary Reading: Phyllis Trible, "The Sacrifice of Sarah", in *Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, 170-191 (on Schoology).; Avivah Zornberg, "Hayyei Sarah: Vertigo -- The Residue of the Akedah" in *Genesis, The Beginning of Desire*, pages 123-143 (on reserve in the library).

#5 – Fifth Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Wed. Dec. 10th!

13. Eleventh Week (Classes 19 and 20): **The Isaac and Jacob Cycle**

Wed. Dec. 10th *Toledot Yitzhak*: Between Abraham and Jacob;

***Devar Torah* (#10)** _____

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. 12th The Stolen Blessing

Primary Reading: Gen. 27:1-28:10, plus *daf mekorot* with guideline questions.

Secondary Reading: Avivah Zornberg, "From Sincerity to Authenticity", in *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*, 216-242 (on reserve in the library).

14. Last Week NO CLASSES; Dec. 14th – 16th

Final Research Paper due Wed. Dec. 17th at 9 a.m.

Suggest Topics for Research Papers

Genesis in art or literature (re: Creation of Man/Woman, the Flood)

The concept of sin the Garden of Eden

Feminist interpretation of Genesis: Adam and Eve

Humans and the environment in Genesis

The Tower of Babel in the Ancient Mesopotamian Context

Enoch

Melchizedek

Jacob as Angel Wrestler

Sister-Wife Motif

Aqedah: the Binding of Isaac narrative in art/poetry/fiction

The Covenant(s)

The motif of land

The barren wife motif

Overturn of Primogeniture

Bibliography

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- Aschkenasy, Nehama, *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.
- Auerbach, Erich, "Odysseus' Scar", in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*; translated by Willard Trask. Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday, 1957.
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- . *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*. 2nd ed. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991.
- Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses: A New English Translation with Commentary and Notes*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.
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- Kugel, James. *The Bible as It Was*. Cambridge, Ma: Belknap Press 1997.
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- Pardes, Ilana. *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

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- . *JPS Commentary to Genesis*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- John Skinner. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1969).
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- Zornberg, Avivah Gottlieb. *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995.
- . *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Rabbinic Unconscious*. New York: Schocken Books, 2009.

Useful URLs

- 1) [JPS: Tanach](http://www.breslov.com/bible/) - Hebrew and English
<http://www.breslov.com/bible/>
- 2) Comparing translations. You may access the NRSV on line at:
<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>. To compare translations see:
<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/>
 See also Bible Gateway with online search engine,
<http://www.biblegateway.com/>
- 3) <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>
 - 6) The Jewish Encyclopedia <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/index.jsp>
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>
 - 12) **Resources for the Study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha:** Online Critical Pseudepigrapha <http://ocp.tyndale.ca/> (original language of extant texts); for English translations see: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha>
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>.