THE BOOK OF EXODUS: HASIDIC READINGS

Hebrew College Rabbinical School
Spring semester 5774/2014
A. Green, Instructor

This course is intended to serve a quadruple purpose (if not higher!):

1) To introduce you to Hasidism and its ways of understanding Torah
2) To improve your skill in reading Hasidic, and hence other, sources in rabbinic Hebrew
3) To continue familiarizing you with Sefer Shemot and its place in Jewish religious teaching and self-understanding.
4) To help you reflect on and develop your own religious life, based on the example of Hasidism’s re-reading of the erhalten שמות sources in personal devotional ways.

These four goals will hopefully be taught in ways that complement and reinforce one another. That will not always be entirely obvious; sometimes they will compete with one another for class and assigned reading space. But we will do our best. In order to facilitate this, the class will be carefully structured, as follows:

Tuesdays 11:30-12:15. Discussion of assigned secondary readings. These will begin with the history of Hasidism, then move into literary and theological aspects of its teachings. We will do best if you come into class with questions prepared as you do the reading.

Tuesdays 12:15-1:00. Reading/discussion of the Hasidic sources. Please be prepared to be called upon to read and explain the texts.

Thursdays 11:30-12:00. Reading/discussion of the Hasidic sources. Ditto.
Thursdays 12:00-1:00. Open hour, varied. See below.

For our purpose, Sefer Shemot will be divided into three major thematic sections: מִסְפַּר הַשֵּׁם - the Exodus, מִסְפַּר הַתּוֹרָה - the Revelation, and מִסְפַּר מְצֻוּר - the Tabernacle. We will devote four weeks to each. Following the fourth Thursday of each section there will be a review-summary and a test, partially in-class oral (during the fourth "open hour"), partially take-home written.

Journal Keeping. An important part of this course will be personal journaling. That means writing a journal of your own reflections on the texts (the Shemot verses as well as the Hasidic readings) and what they say to you personally: as an individual, as an educator, as a future rabbi/Jewish community leader. You are expected to write a journal entry AT LEAST twice a week, following each class. (Do them on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon or evening, while the material is still fresh. Do not delay or get backed up; that defeats the purpose.) More than two per week are most welcome. Each of you should choose a "journal hevruta," someone with whom you mutually share and discuss your journals. One volunteer will co-ordinate the group journal project, so that once monthly (in the third "open hour" of each course third) we will have readings (anonimity protected, if you wish) from journals and discussions of the entries. This is meant to help us share collectively in the personal growth aspect of this course.

Open hours. As you will see, the first two "open hours" of each of the three course sections indeed do remain "open." I will fill in the first two, the first with some reading/discussion of Neo-Hasidism, the second with a contemporary hasid/mitnagged debate - (volunteers needed!). The other four hours are yours to prepare, in groups. I would especially welcome presentations of Shemot themes in art, music, and literature as well as parallels to Hasidic insights from other mystical/devotional traditions. I'm asking for a volunteer to co-ordinate these four sessions, helping you to form those groups and develop your presentations. There are six such slots; everyone should be in at least one group.

Since many Hasidic readings focus on the opening verse of a פרשה and they often assume an awareness of מִסְפַּר הַשֵּׁם, you will be expected to learn מִסְפַּר הַשֵּׁם to some key verses, often on the opening verse(s) of each פרשה. You will also be expected to know by heart the order of מִסְפַּר שְׁמַה in מִסְפַּר הַשֵּׁם and to commit some key verses to memory.

The first test of the semester will be in the open hour of February 27. I'll let you know beforehand what will be covered.
BOOKS NEEDED

**Speaking Torah** (available through Jewish Lights or Amazon)

**The Language of Truth**: Teachings from the Sefat Emet (Available by special order from Jewish Publication Society. I suggest you do a group order.)

 Maaror Tzim

 קדושה לוב (Both are available from seforimcenter.com. Look for the one-volume editions in square characters)

Scoped Amah, Shemah Look for the most recent edition, with footnotes. You may need to buy the whole five volume set.

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Reading for first session, February 4: **Speaking Torah**, Introduction pp. 1-28; 50-74. (History of Early Hasidism)