THEOLOGY OF PRAYER

The course is meant to provide meaning and orientation to the themes of Shanah Aleph, the study of Tefillah and the Siddur. Our hope is that you will use this year to gain as wide and deep a familiarity as you can with the varied worlds of Jewish prayer, including the siddurim of differing traditional and contemporary communities, styles of prayer, the inner life of prayer as taught by various masters, and the theologies that both underlie prayer and proceed from it. This is your opportunity to learn your way around the language and texts of tefillah. We also hope you will find here an opportunity to think through, articulate and discuss with others your own emerging theology of prayer, including your doubts and questions. Although structured historically, the focus here is on gaining deep appreciation of the act and process of prayer as experienced within the Jewish tradition.

EXPECTATIONS:

There are readings and/or texts to be prepared for each session. Preparation precedes the session, so we may proceed on the assumption that everyone in class has read/prepared the materials. PLEASE BE PREPARED FOR FIRST CLASS!

Please regularly bring a TaNaKh and a traditional siddur to class (books, not online tools).

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Due at second class meeting: “STRUGGLING WITH PRAYER” – a THREE-five page personal reflection on your own prayer-life as you begin Shanah Aleph.

2. Due at fourth, seventh and tenth class meetings: “D’VAR TEFILLAH” – a one-two page original reflection on a particular term, phrase, or text of the liturgy, something you would say or read in leading a service.

3. Due at the end of semester: An eight-ten page PAPER growing out of some aspect of the course. You may choose a research focus, exploring more fully a particular approach to prayer, using a historical, theological or comparative lens. Please check in with me about your topic shortly after handing in your second “Dvar Tefillah.”
I. WHAT IS PRAYER? VARIETIES OF THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PRAY?

READINGS:
Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, “The Field of Prayer.” (Prepare Hebrew text)
M. Fishbane, “Prayer.”
D. Steindel-Rast, Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer, 26-59.

II. TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF JEWISH PRAYER

READINGS:
A. J. Heschel, “Pikuah Neshamah”
A. Green, “An Addendum on Prayer.”

III. PRAYER IN THE TANAKH

READINGS:

IV. FROM BIBLICAL TO RABBINIC

READINGS:
Psalms 104, 96, 6, 42, 30.
Sefer ha-Aggadah, Tefillah, # 157-163; 178; 180-181
L. Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls, 289-301.

V. CLASSICAL JEWISH PRAYER: PRAISE AND PETITION

READINGS:
Sefer ha-Aggadah tefillah 193-196; 203, 206, 209, 257.
L. Hoffman, My People’s Prayerbook, v. 2, 9-36
D. Landes, “Prayer as Petition” in ibid, 1-8.

VI. PRAYER AS PROTEST: HANNAH AND MOSES AS MODELS

READINGS:
Berakhot 31a (last 4 lines) through 31b (5 lines from end); 32a (4 lines from top) through bottom.
VII. ESOTERIC PRAYER IN EARLY JUDAISM

READINGS:
Merkavah texts (from Schaefer edition)
C.R.A. Murray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism”
A. Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* 3-41; 167-69

VIII. JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: MAIMONIDES ON PRAYER

READINGS:
*Mishneh Torah*, hilkhot yesodey ha-torah 2:1-2
*Hilkhot Tefillah* 1:1-4; 4:16.
M. Fox “Interpreting Maimonides, “Prayer and the Religious Life”

IX. PRAYER IN CLASSICAL KABBALAH

READINGS:
R. Meir Ibn Gabbai, ‘avodat ha-Kodesh, selection
A. Green, *Guide to the Zohar* 28-59, 134-144

X. HASIDIC PRAYER

READINGS:
Meshullam Feibush Heller, *Likkutim Yekarim*, Selections
L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* 70-115
A. Green and B. W. Holtz, *Your Word Is Fire*

XI. MODERN VOICES ON PRAYER

READINGS:
H. Zeitlin, Prayer
Zelda Schneersohn, Prayer
A. I. Kook, Selected Writings, 135-139; 207-215
M. Buber, *I and Thou*, 3-13; 75-79.

XII. BE’ER LE-HAI RO’I: A NEW COMMENTARY ON THE SIDDUR
(Selections)