Course goals:

Sermons offer an important context for meaningful dialogue between a darshan/it and a community. A sermon, or a dvar torah, does not take place in a vacuum. Congregants and community members bring a whole array of individual and shared experiences to the act of listening, and the darshan/it brings his or her lived questions and concerns to the act of writing and speaking.

The sermon, at its best, is a sacred meeting ground – between darshan/it and listener, between text and life, between individual and community, between community and God. As such, the sermon is an opportunity for a rabbi or hazzan to bring Torah to life -- in other words to illuminate and enliven the text itself, and to share it with members of a kahal in a way that has meaning and relevance for their lives.

This course is designed to help students cultivate the following skills with regard to sermon preparation and delivery:

- Discerning questions and concerns that are meaningful and relevant to community members
- Using learning and imagination to bring Torah to bear on those questions
- Finding one’s own voice as a darshan/it
- Expressing ideas in a manner that can be heard and understood by others
- Soliciting and responding constructively to feedback from colleagues and community members
- Offering constructive feedback to other colleagues
- Developing a range of styles and forms to suit a multiplicity of goals, circumstances, and listeners

Rabbinical School Homiletics Benchmarks:

**Rabbinic skills: Writing** – be able to write a well-organized, articulate, substantive d’var torah on an assigned parasha, using at least one biblical passage from beyond the parasha, one rabbinic text, and one contemporary source.

**Rabbinic skills: Public speaking** – deliver a 5 minute d’var torah on an assigned parashah, involving (but not limited to) a classical or modern commentary or additional source, and including original thought. Deliver a brief d’var tefillah, enriching the understanding or practice of a liturgical custom, demonstrating sound knowledge of the custom and reflection on it.

**Rabbinic Skills: Public speaking** – Deliver a 15-minute d’var torah that engages biblical, rabbinic, and contemporary sources.
**Course requirements:**

1. All students are expected to attend every class session and participate actively in class discussions.

2. In order to participate thoughtfully in class discussions, you will need to be conscientious about preparing the weekly reading assignments. These will be brief essays, articles, or sermons (approximately 50 pages per week).

3. You will be expected to prepare and deliver one brief vort (3-4 minutes) over the course of the semester.

4. You will be expected to prepare and deliver one full length sermon (15 minutes) over the course of the semester. Preparation for full-length sermon will include the following:
   
   a. You will sign up at the beginning of the semester for a date when you will “workshop” your sermon in class. This will be an opportunity for you to deliver a draft of a sermon that you intend to give elsewhere during the semester before a community or congregation. The expectation is that you will spend a total of at least 15 hours preparing the drash (from start to finish).
   
   b. At least one week prior to presenting your draft sermon in class, you will meet with your “homiletics hevruta” to review an initial outline or draft.
   
   c. Following your “workshop” session, you will receive verbal and written feedback from the other students in the class and from me. You will meet a second time with your hevruta after that session to review and discuss the feedback. (You may also request a follow-up meeting with me, if you wish, but this is not required). You will then have an opportunity to incorporate the feedback you’ve received before giving the final version of the sermon in a “real life” setting.
   
   d. You will circulate the final version of your sermon once you have delivered it, along with some brief reflections on how you felt giving it and how it was received.

5. You will be expected to respond to other students’ sermons thoughtfully, honestly, and respectfully.

**Class Sessions and Topics:**

**September 10**

Introduction to the Course

- Sermon as Dialogue
- First Steps in Sermon Preparation
- Fears about sermon writing and delivery
- Goals of Sermons
- Course requirements/sign-ups

➢ **Reading assignments for week of 9/24**


- Margaret Moers Wenig, from Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process, pp. 185-191
Marc Saperstein, “The Preachers and Their Congregations” from *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800*, pp. 44-63

Fred B. Craddock, “The Life of Study”, from *Preaching*, pp. 69-83

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**September 24**

**Sermon Preparation: Between Text and Life**

Knowing yourself and your own creative process
Learning how to work with your own strengths and weaknesses
Using classical and contemporary sources
Using Jewish and non-Jewish sources
Starting from the text, starting from life
Making the connection between text and listener

➢ **Reading assignment for week of 10/1**

- Marc Saperstein, “Structural Options”, from *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800*, pp. 64-79

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**October 1**

**Developing the Sermon – Structural Options**

Ways of structuring a sermon
Exploring different forms – thinking about personal style, context, congregation, goals
Introduction to Workshop Process
Reflections on giving and receiving feedback

➢ **Reading assignment for week of 10/8**

- Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, pp. XIX-38

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**October 8**

**Developing the Sermon – Sermon as Narrative**

Developing a narrative plot
Resolution and lack of resolution

Workshop Session:
Student #1: __________________________________________
Student #2: __________________________________________
October 15  Developing the Sermon -- Beginnings and Endings

Workshop Session:
Student #3: ___________________________________________
Student #4: ___________________________________________

➢ Reading assignment for week of October 22

- Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, “On Happiness”, Yom Kippur 5767, delivered at Newton Center Minyan

- William Sloane Coffin, “Eulogy for Alex”, delivered at Riverside Church ten days after the death of his son

October 22  Sermon Writing -- “Use of Self”

Exploring different ways of bringing yourself to a sermon
Considering issues of self-revelation, honesty, boundaries, credibility

Workshop Session:
Student #5: __________________________________________

October 29  Sermon writing – Use of Imagery and Metaphor

Workshop session:
Student #6: ___________________________________________
Student #7: ___________________________________________

➢ Reading assignment for week of November 5


- Simeon Maslin, “Adjusting to Horror”, delivered at the Sabbath Eve Service of September 13, 1968, pp. 19-26

- Steve Cohen, Yom Kippur Morning 5769/2008, delivered at Congregation B’nai B’rith, Santa Barbara, California, pp. 1-4

November 5  “Political” or “Prophetic” Sermons

Writing and delivering sermons that are meant to persuade or rebuke
Addressing controversial topics in sermons
Addressing a politically diverse/divided community in a sermon

Student #8: ___________________________________________
Reading assignment for week of November 12

- Jacob Zahalon, *Or HaDarshanim*, pp. 138-155

November 12  Sermon Delivery – Guest Instructor

Reading assignment for week of November 19

- Reinhold Niebuhr, “Humour and Faith”, from *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, pp. 49-60
- Lawrence Kushner, from *Honey From the Rock*, pp. 34-36, 85-87

November 19  Sermon Writing -- Use of Stories in Sermons
Rabbi Dan Judson (Guest instructor)

December 3  Invocations and Benedictions

Workshop Session:
Student #9: ________________________________
Student #10: ________________________________

Reading assignment for week of December 4


December 10  Ethical Issues in Preaching

Plagiarism and privacy
Self-care and sermon writing

Workshop Session
Student #11: ________________________________
Student #12: ________________________________

December 17  From Piles to Files: Organizational Strategies

Finding, choosing and keeping track of your sources
Dealing with drashot on short notice