

Rabbinical School
RB-RAB-100-C1: Talmud I: Berakhot 2
Micha'el Rosenberg
4 graduate credits
Spring 5779/2019
4 February–17 December
(Tuesday/Thursday 2:30–4:00)

Contact Information:

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Course Description: In this course, we will continue our study of the fourth *perek* of *massekhes Berakhot*, and then continue onto selected other passages from throughout the *massekhta*. Our primary interests will be in acquiring and developing skills in understanding and making meaning of Bavli *sugyos*, including both attributed materials as well as *stam* dialectic. We will also interrogate Rabbinic prayer, asking why the Rabbis construct Jewish prayer as they do, what they accomplish thereby, and what they lose in the process.

Learning Objectives:

- To increase facility in reading the text of the *gemara*
- To increase facility in reading the commentary of Rashi and using it as a tool in understanding the *gemara*
- To further ability in understanding the fundamental concerns and values behind statements and debates in the *gemara* and apply those values and concerns sensibly
- To increase knowledge of Rabbinic statements about *tefillah* and achieve greater understanding of Rabbinic notions of *tefillah*

To pass this course, you must:

- 1) Have a reasonably large vocabulary of technical Talmud terms (i.e. of those terms found in the Frank dictionary).
- 2) Be able to identify the components of a סוגיא, i.e. מימרות, ברייתות, משניות, and anonymous sections.
- 3) Be able to identify the following key rabbis with their location, era (i.e. tannaitic or amoraic), and, for *amoraim*, their generation: Rabban Gamliel, R. Yehoshua, R. Akiva, R. Yehudah, Rav, Shmuel, R. Yohanan, Reish Lakish, Rava, and Abaye. Additionally, you should be able to distinguish between Babylonian and Palestinian sages, even if previously unknown to you, in the Talmud.
- 4) Be able to read confidently סוגיות that feature primarily attributed sources (tannaitic material and מימרות).
- 5) Be able to work independently through anonymous סוגיות, even if with some difficulty, understanding at least the gist of the סוגיא prior to coming to class.
- 6) Be able to speak more thoughtfully about the various human needs that תפילה can potentially meet; the relationship of תפילה to other Jewish forms that might meet those needs (e.g. שירה, קרבנות, תלמוד תורה, etc.); and the various aspects of human experience that are relatively highlighted or ignored by each.

Required Texts:

- 1) *Massekhes Berakbos*. You must own a copy of the “Vilna Shas” printing of **מסכת ברכות**. It is not sufficient to work off of photocopies, downloads from computer programs, websites, or copies of individual **פרקים**. In addition, though it is not required, you are **strongly encouraged** to own a relatively recent copy of the tractate, for two reasons: a) editions printed in roughly the last 20 years or so will have bold-faced **דיבורים מתחילים** in the **פירוש רש"י**, which will make you a much happier student. b) Education scholarship has shown how much students’ experience of Talmud is influenced by the material nature of learning; old copies of Talmud, with dry, thin, and/or yellowed pages, affect the way many people think about the content of our study in negative ways. It’s thus worth the extra money to buy yourself a copy of the **מסכת** that you will enjoy touching and looking at.
- 2) Frank, *Practical Talmud Dictionary*. I can think of nothing that will have a more beneficial effect on your learning than owning your own copy of this invaluable resource. The **בית מדרש** has copies, but you will be constantly waiting for others to finish using it, returning it to others, etc. I will reference this work **constantly**, and even now I regularly use it in my own learning. Buy it, put it on your nightstand and read from it a bit every night before you go to sleep, and enjoy.
- 3) Recommended: Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. You’re going to need to own this at some point, and though you can get by for the time being with the copies in the *beit midrash* and the version available online, you’ll gain a lot by having your own copy that you can take home with you, mark up, curl up with as you go to sleep, etc.

Digital devices in class

All digital devices must be set to airplane mode in class. In addition, **telephones must be turned OFF and stowed safely underneath your seat**; a posture of hands held underneath the table with face turned downwards is disrespectful to your classmates and to me, and I will ask individuals in such a physical position to put their phones away. Consistent problems with this policy will affect your participation component of the grade.

Additionally, I **strongly** encourage students not to make use of any laptops, iPads, or other such devices during class. There are significant costs to abstaining from such use—for me as well as for you—but I believe that the benefits outweigh the costs. Although distractions from the internet will not be a problem (because you’re in airplane mode), screens affect the quality of conversation in a classroom, even if everyone using them is using them for purposes directly related to class. For more on this, see

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/> .

Assessment:

Please note that for all assignments during the semester, i.e. smaller daily assignments, vocabulary quizzes, and the midterm, work turned in late will be given credit for passing, *but I will not check it*. This means that if you are falling behind, neither you or I will know it, which may in turn lead to a poor performance on your final examination.

- 1) *Class participation/preparation* (20%). Attendance is required; if you know that you must miss a class, please notify me in advance. **When you miss class, you are expected to find out what you missed from your hevrusa and/or me and to submit, within a week of the missed class, one page (or more, if you choose) summarizing your understanding of what was discussed that day.** Also, you will be regularly called on, and your ability to read and explain the text will be the primary component of this grade. Please be aware that many people can read fluently without understanding what they are reading, while others may stutter and sound unprepared despite complete comprehension. You will be assessed based on your comprehension and ability to explain, not your charismatic (or uncharismatic) reading style. You will also receive a very brief assessment from me during the week of 5 November. These are non-binding, but rather are intended to give anyone who is underperforming an early warning. **Please also feel free to contact me at any time during the semester if you are concerned that your performance in class is unrepresentative of your work and/or understanding of the material.**

2) *Vocabulary quizzes* (20%). There will be two vocabulary quizzes over the course of the semester, covering technical terms (i.e. those terms found in the Frank dictionary) that have appeared in our *sugyos* until that point. The first of these will be posted on Schoology following class on Thursday 21 February and due back at the start of our next class, Tuesday 26 February. The second vocabulary quiz will be posted following class on Thursday 4 April and due back on Thursday 16 April. **Although these are “take-home” quizzes, they are closed book.** You will be asked to translate the technical term into Hebrew (if the term is Aramaic), into English, and to explain what the term does/how it functions in a סוגיא.

3) *Outlines and other daily assignments* (20%). For each סוגיא, you will prepare, in English or in Hebrew, an outline to be turned in, in hard copy. **These will sometimes be due when you come to class (i.e. before having studied the sugya together in class), and sometimes will be due following class. The assignment sheet for each sugya will make clear which it is.** The outline should paraphrase each step of the סוגיא and describe what function that step plays in the larger structure (e.g. attack, resolution, question, etc.). This requirement will likely be unclear to many of you early in the semester, but do the best you can, and as you get these back with my comments, it will become clearer and easier. There will also be other short assignments over the course of the semester as well, which will be explained in class. You should expect to have a short assignment due each class.

4) *Takehome midterm review* (20%). Our midterm exam will be a take-home examination. It will be posted following class on Tuesday 12 March, and due back in hard copy by the following Tuesday 19 March at the start of the class. It will consist of five sections: a) a vocabulary test (of the same sort as the two described above; this is in lieu of a third vocabulary test over the course of the semester); b) a translation and outline of a previously studied *sugya*; c) a section in which you will be asked to parse a previously unseen *sugya*; d) a section requiring you to identify “benchmark rabbis;” and 3) a 3-5 page essay synthesizing a number of *sugyos* in response to a thematic question.

5) *End of semester oral evaluation* (20%). During the week of 13 May (finals week), we will have our final examinations, which will be in the form of a one-one-one oral examination with me. Our class will not meet that week to give you time to review. We will study 1-2 previously seen *sugyos*, and you will be asked to speak intelligently about what they teach you about prayer and human needs, drawing evidence from both the texts themselves and your own experience. We will also look at a previously-unseen *sugya*.

Course Accommodations for Disabilities:

Hebrew College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in programs. Accordingly, if a student has a documented disability, and as a result, needs a reasonable accommodation to attend, participate or complete course requirements, then he or she should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course. For further information, see the Student Handbook at

http://hebrewcollege.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook.pdf.

If you require course accommodations because of a documented disability or an emergency medical condition, please email your instructor as soon as possible. We are happy to work with you on any issues you have to ensure that you can participate fully in the class and complete the course requirements. Please do not wait until the assignments are due for a retroactive accommodation, but discuss the situation with your instructor before you experience difficulty.

Course Structure (Dates, Topics, Readings and Assignments):

5 February: Entering and leaving the בית מדרש (bBer 28b)

7 February: Constructing a sugya exercise

12 February: How many blessings? (bBer 28b)

14 February: Blessing the heretics (bBer 28b–29a)

19 February: Havineinu (bBer 29a)

21 February: Havineinu (cont'd); Vocab quiz #1 handed out

26 February: Missed additions (bBer 29a–b); Vocab quiz #1 due

28 February: Missed additions (cont'd)

5 March: Keva and abbreviated prayer (bBer 29b)

7 March: תפילת הדרך (bBer 29b–30a)

12 March: תפילת הדרך (cont'd); Midterm handed out

14 March: Purim learning

19 March: Purim learning; Midterm due

21 March: NO CLASS (Purim)

26 March: Riding donkeys, traveling (bBer 30a)

28 March: Riding donkeys, traveling (cont'd)

2 April: Musaf and community (bBer 30a–b)

4 April: Davening in community (bBer 30b); Vocab quiz #2 handed out

9 April: NO CLASS (Yom Iyun)

16 April: Pesah learning; Vocab quiz #2 due

18 April: Pesah learning

23 April: NO CLASS (Pesah)

25 April: NO CLASS (Pesah)

30 April: Evening *shema* (bBer 10b, 4a–5a)

2 May: Morning *shema* (bBer 9b)

6 May: Gender and תפילה (bBer 20a–b)

9 May: תפילה and/as resistance (bBer 31a–b)

14 May: NO CLASS (final exams)

16 May: NO CLASS (final exams)