



Core Text: Torah- Shemot 2:
The Book of Exodus from Sinai to Mishkan
RB-BIBLE-413, Spring 2019

Instructor:	Contact:
Rachel Adelman, Ph.D. Hebrew University of Jerusalem Assistant Professor in Hebrew Bible at Hebrew College	E-Mail: radelman@hebrewcollege.edu Office: Room 216 Hours: Monday 9 - 11 a.m., or by appointment at other times. Phone: 617-955-7122

Class: Wednesdays 2-3:30 pm; Fridays 11:30 am – 1:00 pm.

Beit Midrash Preparation: Wednesdays 9:45-12:30; Fridays 9-11 am.

Course Description

From Sinai to the consecration of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), this course engages in a deep reading of the narrative and legal sections in the book of *Shemot* following the redemption of Israel from slavery. We will focus on the main events in the wilderness: the theophany at Sinai, the Sin of the Golden calf, and the building of the Tabernacle. We will draw upon interpretations primarily from classic rabbinic midrash and Medieval commentaries: the Mekhilta, Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra. We will also engage in a reading of the Revelation at Sinai through the lens of modern biblical criticism (the documentary hypothesis: E, J, P, D, and even R).

Requirements:

- Bereshit RB-Bible 100 and RB-Bible 101 and Shemot, RB-Bible 200 (or instructor approval).

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 *Shemot* is read in its *sitz im leben* (lit. “setting in life”, i.e. historical context).
- Hone 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.
- Read the biblical text carefully with an eye to discovering the “exegetical gap” or

“hook” upon which the classic interpreters may base their reading. We will address fissures in the verse, as well as overall narrative structure, with a focus primarily on comparing Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban’s commentaries.

- Expand students familiarity with the midrashic corpus on *Shemot*, including exegetical midrash (*Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael* and *Shemot Rabbah*), as well as homiletical midrash (e.g. *Tanhuma Yelamdenu*), and narrative midrash (e.g. *Pirquei deRabbi Eliezer*).
- Sensitize ourselves to the literary patterns, feminist perspectives, as well as major themes and motifs in the *Shemot*: the relationship between narrative and law, sacred space and time in the building of the Mishkan, issues of chronology and literary structure, and alternative approaches to the Sinai Revelation (source criticism, rabbinic commentary, and Hassidic understandings)

Required Texts:

- Any Hebrew Bible. Recommended: The bilingual *JPS Tanakh* or the bilingual Koren edition (preferred!).
- *Miqra’ot Gedolot* on *Shemot* (including Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra); recommended *Torat Haim* (2 vols. published by Mosad Ha-Rav Kook).
- Sarna, Nahum, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 2nd ed. 1996) [From hereon **Sarna**]
- Recommended: Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York: Doubleday 2001) [From hereon, **Zornberg, Particulars**]; Carol Meyers. *Exodus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) [from hereon **Meyers, Exodus**].
- All other readings will be placed on Reserve in the library and/or uploaded to “Schoolology”.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

1. **Bi-weekly Reflection Papers (50%).** These five written assignments entail bi-weekly reflections on the primary readings, class discussions, and/or articles read 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 1,000 words) will be sent to me (by Schoolology), and I will then respond with suggestions/feedback and open the papers up for peer review (at the discretion of the student). These are due on the following dates: **Feb. 18th, March 4th, March 18th, April 8th, and May 6th.**
2. **Final Project: Teaching a Passage from *Shemot* (30%).** Each student will submit one lesson plan, along with a source (including a selected text from *Shemot*, and at least two passages from the Medieval exegetes, a midrash and/or modern literary piece) and teach it to the class as a model *shiur*:

- a) A week before your presentation, you are to submit a detailed (2-3 pages) outline of your shiur, with clear questions, sources for study, and secondary sources (modern commentary) that you will be drawing upon. I will work closely with you to help you with design and putting together the source. But the questions should be your own!
 - b) The class will be presented in the last few weeks of the semester. There will be an attempt to move chronologically (but not necessarily), following the narrative in *Shemot*. **Alternatively**, a student may opt to present their class in alignment with the syllabus. ***If this is your choice, let me know well in advance and I will build it into the syllabus.
3. **Self-evaluation** (10%). Due in the final week of classes (by May 17th). Write up a self-assessment (approximately 1,000 words or less) that reflects upon your growth over the course. Where were areas in which you grew intellectually or spiritually? How do you expect to apply the knowledge that you gained in your rabbinic calling or further education? What lingering questions do you have? This may take the tone of a journal, a blog-post, a sermon idea in the works, a letter, or a work of artistic expression. The self-evaluation is worth 10% of your overall grade and will be assessed on the basis of honesty, integrity, quality of the writing, and clarity of ideas.

1. First Week (Classes 1 & 2), Feb. 6th and 8th: The Theophany at Sinai

Wed. Feb. 6th: The Revelation at Sinai (Revisited): Exodus 19-20 and 24. .

Primary Reading: Exodus, chapters 19 and 24; Mekhilta, Rashi, Ramban and Ibn Ezra on the chronological alignment of chapter 24.

Secondary Reading: Baruch Schwartz, "What Really Happened at Sinai?"

<http://thetorah.com/what-happened-at-mount-sinai/>.

Fri. Feb. 8th *Na'aseh ve-Nishma*

Primary Reading: Exodus 19:24:, 24:3 plus selected commentary; Mekhilta & b. Shabbat 88b.

Secondary Reading: Emmanuel Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation", in *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 30-50.

2. Second Week (Classes 3 and 4) The Sinai Covenant Part 1

Wed. Feb. 13th (Class 3): What did the Israelites hear?

Primary Reading: Exod. 20:1, 15-20, selected passages from the *Mekhilta*, Medieval commentators, and ḥassidut.

Secondary Reading: Benjamin Sommer, "Revelation at Sinai in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Theology", *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 79, No. 3. (Jul., 1999), pp. 422-451; or selections from Sommer's *Revelation and Authority* (TBD).

Fri. Feb. 15th (Class 4): The Ratification of the Covenant.

Primary Reading: Close reading of Exod. 24; Comparison with ANE Vassal Treaties.

Secondary Reading: Jan Assman, *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus*, Chapter 8, "Treaty and Law", pp. 204-236.

First Bi-Weekly Reflection Paper due Monday Feb. 18th!

3. Third Week (Classes 5 and 6): The Sinai Covenant Part 2

Wed. Feb. 20th (Class 5): What did the Israelites see?

Primary Reading: Exod. 24:9-11, Aramaic Targum & midrashic sources.

Secondary Reading: "Rhapsody in Blue: The Origin of God's Footstool in the Aramaic Targumim and Midrashic Tradition," in *Midrash and the Exegetical Mind -- Proceedings of the 2008 and 2009 SBL Midrash sessions*, eds. Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2010), 13-32.

Fri. Feb. 22nd (Class 6): **The Decalogue ('Asseret ha-Dibrot)**

Primary Reading: Comparing Exod. 20 and Deut. 5.; questions of layout on the Tablets; Close Study: "Thou Shalt Not Covet".

Secondary Reading: Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, pp. ; Meyers, *Exodus*, 163-179.

4. Fourth Week (Class 7 and 8): Selected Laws from Mishpatim & Comparison with the Hammurabi Code

Wed. Feb. 27th (Class 7): A Miscellany of Laws & Hammurabi Code

Primary Reading: Selections from Exodus chapters 21-23.

Secondary Reading: Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 158-189, Meyers, *Exodus*, 179-205.

Fri. March 1st (Class 8): In-depth study: "Do not oppress the stranger".

Primary Reading: Selections from Exodus chapters 21-23.

Secondary Reading: Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, 279-390.

Second Reflection Paper due March 4th

5. Fifth Week (Classes 8) The Mishkan and the Golden Calf

No Class on Wed. March 6 th : Yom Iyyun
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Fri. March 8th (Class 8) The Mishkan and the Golden Calf: Questions of Chronology.

Primary Reading: Exod. 24:17-18 and 25:1-9; Midrash Tanhuma, Rashi, Seforno and Ramban and Cassutto

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*, 315-322; Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, 459-470.

6. Sixth Week (Class 9): Focus on the MISHKAN

Wed. March 13^h (Class 9): Theophany Between the Cherubim.

Primary Reading: **Exod. 24:10-22 & commentary**

Secondary Reading: Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 190-215; Zornberg, *Particulars*, 334-343.

No Class on Friday March 15th, Rachel is in Israel
Substitute Assignment, Write up as Third Reflection Paper, due March 18th

7. Seventh Week (Class 10)

No Class on Wed. March 20th, 'Erev Purim

Fri. March 22nd (Class 10) Parashat Tetzaveh

Primary Reading: selections from Exod. 28-31; the Priestly Garments.

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*, 351-365

8. Eighth Week (Class 11 and 12) The Golden Calf

Wed. March 27th (Class 11) The Golden Calf; Focus on the Role of Aharon

Primary Reading: Exod. 32:1-6.

Secondary Reading: Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 215-220; Zornberg, *Particulars*, 398-404.

Fri. March 29th (Class 12) Moses Intercedes; The Punishment

Primary Reading: Exod. 32:7-36.

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*,

9. Ninth Week (Class 13 and 14): In the Wake of the Golden Calf

Wed. April 3rd (Class 13) Theophany in the Cleft of the Rock

Primary Reading: Exod. 33:1-34:8

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*,

Fri. April 5th (Class 14) In the Cleft of the Rock (con't...)

Primary Reading: Exod. 34:1-8; the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy;

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*,

Fourth Reflection Paper due April 8th

10. Tenth Week (Class 15 and 16) The Shabbat & Mishkan Nexus

Wed. April 10th (Class 15) Moses Descends with the Second *Luhot*, "And he did not know that his face shone..."; Chronology Revisited.

Primary Reading: Exod. 34:28-35;

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*,

Fri. April 12th (Class 16) – The Shabbat & Mishkan Nexus

Primary Reading: Exod. 35:1-5

Secondary Reading:

11. Eleventh Week (Class 17) The Righteous Women of the Exodus (Revisited)

Wed April 17th The Women's Copper Mirrors and the Making of the Laver.

Primary Reading: Exod. 30:8 and 38:18.

Secondary Reading: Zornberg, *Particulars*, 57-65; Adelman, A Copper Laver Made from the Women's Mirrors, <https://thetorah.com/a-copper-laver-made-from-womens-mirrors/>.

No Classes, April 19 th – April 28 th : Passover Break
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12. Twelfth Week (Class 18 and 19), Parashat Pequdie-VaYakhel

Wed. May 1st (Class 18) Parashat Pequdei: Bezael in the Shadow of God

Primary Reading:

Secondary Reading: TBD.

Fri. May 3rd (Class 19) The Consecration of the Mishkan

Primary Reading:

Secondary Reading: .

Fifth Reflection Paper Due, Monday May 6th
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13. Thirteenth Week (Class 20 and 21)

Wed. May 8th Student Model Shiurim (2): _____

Fri. May 10th Student Model Shiurim (2): _____

14. Fourteenth Week (Class 22 and 23)

Wed. May 15th; Student Model Shiurim (2) _____

Fri. May 17th; Student Model Shiurim (2): _____

Final Reflection/Self-Evaluations due May 17th!

Suggest Topics for Teaching

The Revelation in Hassidic Sources

Laws in Mishpatim:

- four and fivefold restitution;
- the thief breaking in;
- take no bribes;
- do not oppress the stranger;
- do not withhold a widow's garment
- many others...

The *Luhot ha-Brit* (the first and second)

The Role of Aharon in the Sin of the Golden Calf

The Role of the Levites in the wake of the Sin

Moses as Intercessor

The Theophany in the Cleft of the Rock

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

Moses Did not Know that His Face Shone

The Contents of the Mishkan:

The Ark

The Cherubim

The Menorah

The Mirrors (donated by the women) in the making the laver (wash basin)

The Altar

The Mishkan and Shabbat

The Completion of the Mishkan

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