

**Rabbinical School
RB-PRAC-490 – Homiletics
Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld
2 Graduate Credits
Spring Semester 2019**

Contact Information:

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Class Hours:

Thursdays, 2:30-4:00 p.m.

Office Hours:

Office hours for this course will generally be immediately following class, on Thursdays from 4:00-6:00 p.m. Other appointments can be scheduled as needed through my assistant, Helaine Friedlander, at hfriedlander@hebrewcollege.edu or 617-559-8775.

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 tefilah*, 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 10-15 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 (10-15 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 10-15 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 *bevruta*” 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 *bevruta* 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:

Reading assignments for first day of class

- Barbara Brown Taylor, from Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process, pp. 153-163
- Margaret Moers Wenig, from Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process, pp. 185-191
- Patti Smith, *How Does it Feel*, in The New Yorker, December 14, 2016

February 7

Introduction to the course

Sermon as Dialogue
Goals of Sermons
Knowing yourself and your own creative process
First Steps in Sermon Preparation
Learning how to work with your own strengths and weaknesses
Fears about sermon writing and delivery
Course requirements/sign-ups
Giving and receiving feedback

➤ Reading assignments for week of 2/14

- 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

February 14

Sermon Preparation: Between Text and Life

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 2/21

- Jacob Zahalon, A Guide for Preachers: On Composing and Delivering Sermons (Or Hadarshanim), translation and introduction by Henry Adler Sosland, pp. 119-155
- Marc Saperstein, “Structural Options”, from Jewish Preaching 1200-1800, pp. 64-79
- Richard Israel, “Seven Approaches to a D’var Torah”, from The Kosher Pig and Other Curiosities of Modern Jewish Life, www.MyJewishLearning.com

February 21

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 2/28**

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

February 28

**Sermon delivery – Guest teacher
Lauren Garlick**

March 7

Developing the Sermon – Sermon as Narrative

Developing a narrative plot
Resolution and lack of resolution

Workshop Session:

Student #1: _____

Student #2: _____

March 14

Developing the Sermon – Beginnings and Endings

Workshop Session:

Student #3: _____

Student #4: _____

➤ **Reading assignment for week of 3/28**

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

March 21

PURIM – No class

March 28

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

➤ **Reading assignment for week of 3/30**

- 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

April 4

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: _____

Student #6: _____

➤ **Reading assignment for week of 4/11**

- Barbara Lundblad, “No Prayer for Nineveh” from Marking Time: Preaching Biblical Stories in Present Tense, pp. 99-103
- 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

April 11

“Political” or “Prophetic” Sermons, Part I

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

Workshop Session:

Student #7: _____

Student #8: _____

April 18

“Political” or “Prophetic” Sermons, Part II

Workshop Session:

Student #9: _____

Student #10: _____

➤ **Reading assignment for week of 5/2**

- Dan Oren, guest columnist, Moment Magazine, August 1995

April 25

PESACH – No class

May 2

Ethical Issues in Preaching

Plagiarism and privacy
Self-care and sermon writing

Workshop Session:

Student #11: _____

Student #12: _____

May 9

Invocations and Benedictions (Or the Art of the Kavanah)

Workshop Session:

Student #13: _____

Student #14: _____

May 16

From Piles to Files: Organizational Strategies

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

Workshop Session:

Student #15: _____

Student #16: _____

May 23

Closing Reflections