

Schools of Aggadah

JTP XXX

Monday 6:05-7:20PM Wednesday 6:20-7:35PM
Fall 2025, Stern College for Women
Professor: Ari Bergmann

Description of the Course

The Babylonian Talmud, known simply as the Bavli, is the collaborative effort of generations of sages and it is the foundational legal and ethical document of rabbinic Judaism. Part of the magnetic pull of the Talmud is the fact that it not only contains legal discussions and rulings but rather it also encompasses theology, magic, rabbinic stories, medicine, and history. These non-legal narratives are an essential part of the Talmud, and their interpretation was always as varied as the schools of interpreters. It evolved creatively throughout the generations. This course will examine in-depth several demonstrative Talmudic narratives (aggadah) through the lens of the evolution of the major critical schools of the past century and contrast them with the interpretative approach of the various traditional schools throughout the ages. The course will start with an analysis of the definition of aggadah and its distinction from the legal content of the Talmud, moving on to analyzing narratives and evaluating chronologically how the various interpretative schools dealt with the text. The course will further investigate how these various scholars dealt with the evolution of *sugyot* between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. All Texts will be read in the original, but translations will be provided. Basic knowledge or previous study of Talmud is required.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Identify the various types of talmudic narratives.
- Discern between the various approaches to understanding aggadah.
- Understand and contextualize the diachronic development of the various interpretative models throughout the ages.
- Explore the social context of the rabbinic society in Babylonia during the talmudic era.
- Evaluate and analyze the various interpretative approaches and their impact upon the understanding of the text and the development of *sugyot* between the bavli and yerushalmi..
- Apply the various approaches to close readings of talmudic narratives.
- Develop interpretive strategies for analyzing diverse literary texts.
- Appreciate the continuing significance of talmudic narratives.

Course Outline

Please note that these reading assignments are tentative. They may be adjusted and refined throughout the semester.

Week I: August 25th -27th

Introduction
Talmudic Narrative and Its Meaning

Primary Texts:

Maimonides, *Teshuvot Harambam* (Blau) II:769 (458)
Maimonides, *Moreh Hanevukhim* "Introduction to the First Part," p. 9-10
Maimonides, *Moreh Hanevukhim* III:43 (p. 573)
Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Wars and Kings* 12:2

Lewin, *Otsar Hageonim Pesahim* 170 (p. 70/71)
b. Hagigah 4b
Lewin, *Otsar Hageonim Hagigah* 5 (p. 4)

Levita, Elijah, *Tishbi* s.v. agd

Required Readings:

Stephen G. Wald, "Talmud, Babylonian," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, Second Edition*, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007)

David Flatto, "Tradition and Modernity in the House of Study: Reconsidering the Relationship between the Conceptual and Critical Methods of Studying Talmud," *Tradition* 43:4 (Winter 2010): 1-20

Berachyahu Lifshitz, "Aggadah Versus Haggadah: Towards a More Precise Understanding of the Distinction," *Dine Israel* 24 (2007): 11-28

Randall Fuller, *Bright Circle: Five Remarkable Women in the Age of Transcendentalism* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2024), 1-9

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "Talmudic Stories and Their Rewards," in *Why Study Talmud in the Twenty-First Century?* ed. Paul Socken (Lanham, Boulder, New York et al.: Lexington Books, 2009), 177-94

Louis Jacobs, *A Tree of Life: Diversity, Flexibility and Creativity in Jewish Law* (Oxford & Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 3-24

Yakov Nagen, "Scholarship Needs Spirituality, Spirituality Needs Scholarship: Challenges for Emerging Talmudic Methodologies," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 16 (2012-2013): 101-133

Yaakov Elman, "Why Study Talmud: Wellsprings of Torah and the Individual Soul," in Paul Socken, ed., *Why Study Talmud in the Twenty-First Century: The Relevance of the Ancient Jewish Text to Our World* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 135-149

Shimon Gershon (Shagar) Rosenberg, *In His Torah He Meditates: The Study of Talmud as a Quest for God (Hebrew)* (Efrata: The Institute for the Advancement of Rav Shagar's Writings, 2009) 149-80

The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha'aggadah, edited by Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, translated by William G. Braude, introduction by David Stern (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), xvii-xxii, 3-5

Yair Lorberbaum, "Changes in Maimonides' Approach to Aggadah (Hebrew)," *Tarbiz*, no. 78 (1) (2008): 81–122

Randall Fuller, *Bright Circle: Five Remarkable Women in the Age of Transcendentalism* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2024), 269–306.

Week II: September 3rd - 8th

The Inter-relationship of Halakhah and Aggadah

Primary Texts:

b. Bava Qamma 60b

b. Pesahim 50a

b. Megillah 7a

Lewin, *Otsar Hageonim Pesahim* 170 (p. 70/71)

b. Hagigah 4b

Lewin, *Otsar Hageonim Hagigah* 5 (p. 4)

Shelomo b. Aderet (Rashba), *Hiddushey Aggadot* b. Berakhot 6a, 10b, 32b

Required Readings:

Robert M. Cover, "The Supreme Court, 1982 Term - Foreword: Nomos and Narrative," *Harvard Law Review* 97 (1983): 4–68

Yair Lorberbaum, "Reflections on the Halakhic Status of Aggadah," *Dine Israel* 24 (2007): 29–64

Suzanne Last Stone, "On the Interplay of Rules, 'Cases,' and Concepts in Rabbinic Legal Literature: Another Look at the Aggadot on Honi the Circle-Drawer," *Dine Israel* 24 (2007): 125–134

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 38–62

Daniel Boyarin, "Jesting Words and Dreadful Lessons: The Two Voices of the Babylonian Talmud," *Socrates & the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 133–91

Yonah Fraenkel, *Sippur Ha'aggadah: Ahdut Shel Tokhen Vetsurah (Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Ben Hayim, 2001), 220–35

Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei Ha-Aggadah Ve Ha-Medrash (Hebrew)* (Tel Aviv: Yad Lataalmud, 1996), 481–500

Medan, Meir. "Levita, Elijah." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 730–732. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007

Shimon Gershon (Shagar) Rosenberg, *In His Torah He Meditates: The Study of Talmud as a Quest for God (Hebrew)* (Efrata: The Institute for the Advancement of Rav Shagar's Writings, 2009) 149–80

Week III: September 10th - 15th

The 16th Century Aggadah Renaissance
The Literalist Approach

Primary Texts:

b. Bava Batra 25a-b

b. Gittin 56b

Azariah De’Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, Translated from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by Joanna Weinberg (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 201-15, 296–304

Maharal, *Be’er Hagolah Be’er Shishi*

Required Readings:

Marjorie Lehman, *The En Yaaqov: Jacob Ibn Habib’s Search for Faith in the Talmudic Corpus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 51–52, 58-60, 63-76, 80- 82

Azariah De’Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, Translated from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by Joanna Weinberg (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii-xxxi

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Marjorie Lehman, *The En Yaaqov: Jacob Ibn Habib’s Search for Faith in the Talmudic Corpus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 51–82

Azariah De’Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, Translated from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by Joanna Weinberg (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii-xlv

Natan Slifkin, “The Sun’s Path at Night” (2010), 3–18, www.RationalistJudaism.com

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, in *The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies*; (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 55–75

Lester A. Segal, "Aggadic Exegesis: Between Azariah's Critical Analysis and Maharal's Denunciations," in *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de Rossi's Meor Einayim* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 133-152

Lester A. Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de Rossi’s Me’or ‘Einayim* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 153–61

Week IV: September 17th - 29th

The 16th Century Counter-Revolution
The Maharal and the Mystical Approach

Primary Texts:

b. Gittin 56b-57a

Maharal, *Netsah Israel* 128-9, 149-50, 158-9

Originalism in Rabbinic Interpretation: *Sources*

Required Readings:

Binyamin Gross, "Between Rationalism and Mysticism: Maharal's Place in Jewish Thought," in *Rabbinic Theology and Jewish Intellectual History: The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague*, edited by Meir Seidler (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2012), 33–43

Giuseppe Veltri, "Maharal Against Azariah De' Rossi: The Other Side of Scepticism," in *Rabbinic Theology and Jewish Intellectual History: The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague*, edited by Meir Seidler (London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2012), 65–76

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Chaim Eisen, "Maharal's Be'er Ha-Golah and His Revolution in Aggadic Scholarship," *Hakirah* 4 (2007): 137–94

R.J.W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History 1576–1612* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 196–242

Maharal of Prague, *Be'er Hagolah: The Classic Defense of Rabbinic Judaism Through the Profundity of the Aggadah*, adapt. Yitzchok Adlerstein (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2000), 227–40

"Judah Loew (Liwa, Loeb) ben Bezalel." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 11. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 506–509. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 29 Mar. 2016

Joanna Weinberg, "The Maharal of Prague and the Republic of Letters," *Tablet Magazine* (30 December 2016), available here (<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/219878/maharal-of-prague-joanna-weinberg>)

Antonin Scalia, *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law: An Essay* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3–47

Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 73–106

October 1st – 19th

Hagim Break: No Class

Week V: October 20th–22nd

The Evolution of the Mystical Approach I
17th and 18th Centuries

Primary Texts:

b. Pesahim 94b

b. Bava Batra 25a-b

Maharal, *Be'er Hagolah Be'er Shishi*

R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (Ramhal), *Adir Bamarom*

R. Shmuel Melzen (Gr"a), *Even Shlema*

R. Moshe Shapiro, *letter*

Hazon Ish, *Yoreh De'ah Trefot* 5:3

Hazon Ish, *Kovets Igrot* 33

Required Readings:

R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (Ramhal), *Ma'amar al Ha'aggadot*

Natan Slifkin, "The Sun's Path at Night" (2010), 18–30, www.RationalistJudaism.com

Andre Neher, *The Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century*, Translated from the French by David Maisel (Oxford, New York & Toronto: Oxford University Press - Published for The Littman Library, 1986), 205–11, 245–50

Shimon Cowen, “The Torah and the Worldly Sciences in the Teaching of the Maharal of Prague and Chabad Chassidism,” in *Rabbinic Theology and Jewish Intellectual History: The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague*, edited by Meir Seidler (London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2013), 162–75

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Shaul Stampfer, “On the Creation and the Perpetuation of the Image of the Gaon of Vilna,” in *The Vilna Gaon and His Disciples*, edited by Moshe Hallamish, Rivlin Yosef, and Raphael Shuchat (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 39–69

Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013), 37–62

Immanuel Etkes, “Ha-Gaon He-Hasid: In His Own Time and For Succeeding Generations,” in *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 10–36

Elijah J. Schochet, “The Nature of Lithuanian Jewry: The Legacy of the Gaon of Vilna,” in *The Vilna Gaon and His Disciples*, edited by Moshe Hallamish, Rivlin Yosef, and Raphael Shuchat (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 72–90

Aharon Feldman, *The River, the Kettle and the Bird* (CSB Publications, 1987), 1–6

Maharal of Prague, *Be'er Hagolah: The Classic Defense of Rabbinic Judaism Through the Profundity of the Aggadah*, adapt. Yitzchok Adlerstein (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2000), 208–26

Dan, Joseph, and Joelle Hansel. "Luzzatto, Moses Hayyim." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 13. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 281-286. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 29 Mar. 2016

Spyros Makridakis, Robin M. Hogarth, and Anil Gaba, *Dance with Chance* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2010), 1–15

Week VI: October 27th - 29th

The Evolution of the Mystical Approach II
Messianic Zionism

Primary Texts:

b. Megillah 3a

Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *The Lamentation in Jerusalem: On the Death of Dr. Theodor Herzl* (1904), i-xii

Required Readings:

Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 417–31

Rafael B. Posen, “Targum ‘Onkelos’ From Sinai? - An Examination of the Sinaitic Origins of ‘Targum Onkelos’,” *Sidra* 15 (1999): 95–110

Abraham Isaac Kook, “The Unification of Halakha and Aggadah,” in *The Lights of Penitence, the Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters and Poems* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), 196–8

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 7–42

Yosef Salmon, *Religion and Zionism First Encounters* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2002), xiii-xxvii

Eliezer Segal, “Judaism: Contemporary Expressions,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, edited by Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess (Malden & Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 192

Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *Igrot Ha-Re'iyah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1961), I:122–4 (103)

Hananel Mack, “How is One to Regard the Aggadah,” in *The Aggadic Midrash Literature* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1989), 21–9

Jody Elizabeth Myers, “The Messianic Idea and Zionist Ideologies,” in *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era: Metaphor and Meaning*, edited by Jonathan Frankel (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–13

Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Revealed End' Messianic Religious Zionism,” in *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79–144

Raphael B. Shuchat, “The Influence of the Vilna Gaon's Theory of Redemption on the Thinking of Rav Kook,” in *A World Hidden in the Dimensions of Time* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2008), 295–315 (Hebrew).

Rabinowitz, Louis Isaac. "Onkelos and Aquila." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 433-434. Vol. 15. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007

Zinger, Zvi, and Benjamin Ish-Shalom. "Kook (Kuk), Abraham Isaac." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 289-293. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 30 Mar. 2016

Week VII: November 3rd - 5th

The Academic Approach
The Contribution of the *Stam* to Aggadah

Primary Texts:

b.Shabbat 35b

Required Readings:

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative, Art, Composition and Culture* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1–33

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggada,” in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, ed. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 417–420

Yakov Z. Mayer and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Talmud: A History of Learning (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2025), 96-108

DID THE POST-TALMUDIC STAMMAIM CONTRIBUTE TO TALMUDIC AGGADA?
<http://www.kotzkblog.com/2020/08/288-did-post-talmudic-stammaim.html>

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggada," in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, ed. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 417–440

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 158–62

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 41–61

Isaiah Gafni, "Rethinking Talmudic History: The Challenge of Literary and Redaction Criticism," *Jewish History*, no. 25 (2011): 355–75

Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhey Ha'aggadah Ve Hamedrash (Hebrew)* (Masada, Israel: Yad Lataalmud, 1991), 235–85

Yakov Z. Mayer and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Talmud: A History of Learning (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2025), 108–19

Week VIII: November 10th - 12th

A Rabbinic Romance: R. Akiva and Rachel
Shamma Friedman

Primary Texts:

b. Ketubbot 62b-63a

b. Nedarim 50a-b

Focal Point: <https://www.thegreatcourses.com/digital-library/course/view/id/2140/format/1/>

Required Readings:

Shamma Friedman, "A Good Story Deserves Retelling: The Unfolding of the Akiva Legend," *Jewish Studies - An Internet Journal* 3 (2004): 55–62

Tal Ilan, "The Quest for the Historical Beruriah, Rachel and Imma Shalom," *AJS Review* 22, no. 1 (1997): 8–11

<http://thetalmudblog.wordpress.com/2014/05/06/an-interview-with-shamma-friedman/>

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Shamma Friedman, "A Good Story Deserves Retelling: The Unfolding of the Akiva Legend," *Jewish Studies - An Internet Journal* 3 (2004): 62–93

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/at-israeli-prize-tradition-meets-science/>

Daniel Boyarin, "Internal Opposition in Talmudic Literature: The Case of the Married Monk," *Representations*, no. 36 (1991): 87–113

Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 134–66

Shamma Friedman, *Talmudic Studies: Investigating the Sugya, Variant Readings and Aggada (Hebrew)* (New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2010), 3–61

Azzan Yadin, “Rabbi Akiva’s Youth,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 4 (2010): 573–97

Anonymous, *And Rachel Was His Wife*, researched and annotated by Ben Zion Sobel, revised and edited by Marsi Tabak (Jerusalem & New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1990)

Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, *Are You Not a Man of God?: Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 161–73

Ruth Calderon, *A Bride for One Night: Talmud Tales*, translated by Ilana Kurshan (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2014), 75–83

Week IX: November 17th – 19th

b. Ta’anit 21a:
Torah and Mundane Life

Primary Readings:

b. Ta’anit 21a
b. Avodah Zarah 10b, *Rashi* s.v. *yatza*
Epistle of Rav Sherira Ga’on

Required Readings:

Moshe Sokol, *The Snake at the Mouth of the Cave* (Jerusalem: Touro College and University System & Maggid Books, 2021), 121–39

Reuven Margolies, *Margaliyot Hayam*, Introduction

Ina Garten, *Be Ready When Luck Happens* (New York: Random House, 2024), 358–85.

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 41–61

Joseph De La Vega, *Confusion de Confusiones*, 1688 ed., selected and translated by Hermann Kellebenz (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), v–xxi

David Shatz, “Practical Endeavor and the Torah u-Madda Debate,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1991–92): 98–149

Aryeh Leibowitz, “The Pursuit of Scholarship and Economic Self-Sufficiency: Revisiting Maimonides’ Commentary to Pirkei Avot,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 40, no. 3 (2007): 31–41

Mihir A. Desai, *The Wisdom of Finance* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Hartcourt, 2017), xi–9

Aharon Lichtenstein, “Does Involvement in Torah Study Exempt One from Mitzvot,” *Alei Etzion* 16 (2009) 71–108

Lawrence Kaplan, “Moses Maimonides’ Laws of the Study of Torah,” in Lawrence Fine, ed., *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages Through the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 171–185

Yaakov Elman, “Torah ve-Avodah: Prayer and Torah Study As Competing Values in the Time of Hazal,” in Adam Mintz and Lawrence Schiffman, eds., *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2005), 61–124

Yaakov Elman, "Why Study Talmud: Wellsprings of Torah and the Individual Soul," in Paul Socken, ed., *Why Study Talmud in the Twenty-First Century: The Relevance of the Ancient Jewish Text to Our World* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 135-149

Week X: November 24th – 26th

b. Sotah 20a-22a
Women and the Study of Torah

Primary Texts:

Moses Maimonides, *Sefer Hamitsvot: Makor Wetargum*, Positive Commandment 16

y. Sotah 3:4
b. Sotah 20a-21b
b. Eruvin 53b-54a
b. Berakhot 10a
b. Berakhot 51b

Torah Temimah (Epstein) Genesis 24:1
Hakhmot Nashim (excerpt), S.Y. Agnon

Required Readings:

Gila Fine, *The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2024), 1-23.

Judith Hauptman, "A New View of Women and Torah Study in the Talmudic Period," *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal (JSIJ)*, no. 9 (2010): 249–57

Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Are Women in the Covenant?" in *A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud: Introduction and Studies*, ed. Tal Ilan et al. (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 24–42

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Daniel Boyarin, "Studying Women: Resistance from Within the Male Discourse," in *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 167–80

Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halakhic Sources* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 29-43

Judith Hauptman, "A New View of Women and Torah Study in the Talmudic Period," *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal (JSIJ)*, no. 9 (2010): 249–92

Daniel Boyarin, "Studying Women: Resistance from Within the Male Discourse," in *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 167–96

Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, *Are You Not a Man of God?: Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 82–126

Ruth Calderon, "The Beruria Incident," in *A Bride for One Night: Talmud Tales*, translated by Ilana Kurshan (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2014), 133–8

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Tal Ilan, "Feminist Interpretations of Rabbinic Literature: Two Views," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 4 (2001): 7–14

David Goodblatt "The Beruriah Traditions," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1975): 68-85

Isaac Sassoon, *The Status of Women in Jewish Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 100–18

Mayer I. Gruber, "The Status of Women in Ancient Judaism," in Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds., *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part Three, Volume Two* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 151-176

Week XI: December 1st – 3rd

Beruriah
Women's Voices in the Talmud

Primary Texts:

- b. Sotah 20a
- b. Eruvin 53b-54a
- b. Berakhot 10a
- b. Pesahim 62b

Rashi on b. Avodah Zarah 18b s.v. *veika*
Torah Temimah (Epstein) Genesis 24:1

Required Readings

Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, *Are You Not a Man of God?: Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 82–126

Tal Ilan, "The Quest for the Historical Beruriah, Rachel and Imma Shalom," *AJS Review* 22, no. 1 (1997): 1–8

Gila Fine, *The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2024), 117-41.

Eitam Henkin, *Studies in Halakhah and Rabbinic History*, edited by Chana Henkin (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2021), 102-27.

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Gila Fine, *The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2024), 141-57.

Moshe Simon-Shoshan, "The Death of Beruriah and Its Afterlife," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 110 no. 3 (2020): 363-411

Ruth Calderon's Maiden Knesset Speech: <http://youtu.be/S8nNpTf7tNo>

Ruth Calderon, *A Bride for One Night: Talmud Tales*, translated by Ilana Kurshan (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2014), 31–8, 133-8.

Daniel Boyarin, "Studying Women: Resistance from Within the Male Discourse," in *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 167–96

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Tal Ilan, "Feminist Interpretations of Rabbinic Literature: Two Views," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 4 (2001): 7–14

Tal Ilan, "The Quest for the Historical Beruriah, Rachel and Imma Shalom," *AJS Review* 22, no. 1 (1997): 11–17

David Goodblatt "The Beruriah Traditions," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1975): 68-85

Judith Hauptman, "A New View of Women and Torah Study in the Talmudic Period," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 9 (2010): 249-292.

Elitzur A. Bar-Asher Siegal and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "'Rejoice, O Barren One Who Bore No Child': Beruria and the Jewish-Christian Conversation in the Babylonian Talmud," in Christine Hayes, Tzvi Novick, Michal Bar-

Asher Siegal, eds., *The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 199-219

Week XII: December 8th – 10th

The Worlds of the Bavli and the Yerushalmi
A Comparative Analysis

Primary Texts:

y. Berakhot 1:4 10b [1:4 11]
b. Berakhot 12a
Florence Manuscript

y. Avodah Zarah 2:9
b. Avodah Zarah 38a

Required Readings:

Leib Moscovitz, "The Formation and Character of the Jerusalem Talmud," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 663–77

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 23-28

Yakov Z. Mayer and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Talmud: A History of Learning (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2025), 90-6, 146-51

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 16-38

Shai Secunda, "Gaze and Counter-Gaze: Textuality and Contextuality in the Anecdote of Rav Asi and the Roman (b. Baba Metzi'a 28b)," in *The Aggada of the Bavli and Its Cultural World*, eds. Geoffrey Herman and Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2018), 149-171

Aaron Amit, "The Homilies on Mishnah and Talmud Study at the Close of Bavli Bava Metsia 2 and Yerushalmi Horayot 3: Their Origin and Development," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102:2 (Spring 2012): 163-189

Yaakov Elman, "The Beginning of Tractate Pesahim in the Bavli and Yerushalmi: Questions of Redaction and Formation (Hebrew)," in *Melekhet Mahshevet: Studies in the Redaction and Development of Talmudic Literature*, ed. Aaron Amit and Aharon Shemesh (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011), 9–25

Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 81-111

Yaakov Elman, "The Suffering of the Righteous in Palestinian and Babylonian Sources," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 80, no. 3/4 (1990): 315–39

Yaakov Elman, "Righteousness as Its Own Reward: An Inquiry Into the Theologies of the Stam," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1990–1991): 35–67

Menachem Katz, "Division Into Sugyot in the Yerushalmi: Redactional Trends and Their Significance (Hebrew)," in *Melekhet Mahshevet: Studies in the Redaction and Development of Talmudic Literature*, ed. Aaron Amit and Aharon Shemesh (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011), 69–86

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/good-schools-arent-the-secret-to-israels-high-tech-boom-1490051053>

Yakov Z. Mayer and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Talmud: A History of Learning (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2025), 108-19, 151-62

Week XIII: December 15th - 17th

Hanukkah:
The Evolving Versions of a Holiday

Primary Texts:

b. Shabbat 21a

Vered Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History with a Critical Edition (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003), 103–7

Uriel Rappaport, *The First Book of Maccabees: Introduction, Hebrew Translation and Commentary (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2004), 163–65

Daniel R. Schwartz, *The Second Book of Maccabees* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2004), 77, 82–83

Maharal, *Ner Mitzva*

R Shlomo Fischer, letter

Hararay Kedem

Required Readings:

Vered Noam, “The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil: The Metamorphosis of a Legend,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* LXXIII (2002): 191-205

Glatzer, Nahum N. "Megillat Ta'anit." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 769. Vol. 13. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007

The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, Translated by William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hedrickson Publishers, 2006), 328

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Vered Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History with a Critical Edition (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003), 19–27

Vered Noam, “The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil: The Metamorphosis of a Legend,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* LXXIII (2002): 205–226

Isaiah M. Gafni, *Jews and Judaism in the Rabbinic Era: Image and Reality* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 59–75

Week XIV: December 22nd - 24th

The Snake Oven – *Tanur shel akhnai*
The Polyvocality of Aggadah

Primary Texts:

b. Bava Metzi'a 59a-b

Maharal, *Hiddushey Aggadot* BM 59b
Maharal, *Netivot Olam II Netiv Ahavat Hareya*: 2

Required Readings

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “When the Rabbi Weeps: On Reading Gender in Talmudic Aggadah,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender*, no. 4 (2001): 56–83

Gila Fine, *The Madwoman in the Rabbi’s Attic* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2024), 159-76.

Suggested Readings/Additional Bibliography:

Gila Fine, *The Madwoman in the Rabbi’s Attic* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2024), 176- 202.

Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates & the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 194–230

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “Torah, Shame, and ‘The Oven of Akhnai’ (Bava Metsia 59a-59b),” in *Talmudic Stories: Narrative, Art, Composition and Culture* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 34–63

David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 107–8
Louis Jacobs, *A Tree of Life: Diversity, Flexibility and Creativity in Jewish Law* (Oxford & Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 18–9

Menahem Elon, *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, translated by Bernard Auerbach and Melvin J. Sykes (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 261–5

Yizhaq Heineman, *Darkhei Ha’aggadah (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1970), 11

Jonathan Sacks, “Creativity and Innovation in Halakhah,” in *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, edited by M. Sokol (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992), 127–30

Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, *Are You Not a Man of God?: Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 46–81

Hyam Maccoby, *The Philosophy of the Talmud* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 173–89

Requirements of the Course

1. **Attendance, Preparation and Participation (20%):** Participation grades will be based on attendance, preparation of the course readings before class, and your performance during class. **Being prepared means that you have read all the week’s required readings and that you have brought ideas and questions to the class that are important to you.** Punctual attendance is required at all classes, if you cannot attend a class, please send me an email in advance. Class participation will be assessed based upon the degree to which you manifest genuine attention to, and interest in, the material being discussed, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing the discussion.

2. **Class Blog (20%):** You are expected to actively participate and contribute to the class blog by discussing the assigned readings of the upcoming class, the previous class, and the postings. You should contribute a minimum of five postings discussing your thoughts, comments, and opinions and engaging in the conversation. Blog participation will be assessed based upon the degree to which you manifest genuine attention to, and interest in, the

material being discussed, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing the discussion. They will be graded based upon quantity (five postings is the required minimum) and their insightfulness and quality.

3. **Mid Semester Assignments (20%):** Two short papers (2 to 3 pages) discussing a *sugya* while applying one of methods learned in class will be assigned throughout the semester.

4. **Final Paper (40%):** A final paper is due on the last day of class, December 24th. The paper should be around 12-5 pages in length. The assignment is to do a literary analysis of a Talmudic narrative (*Aggadah*) and to apply one or more of the theories that we have discussed over the course of the semester.

Course Readings

All course readings are available on Canvas. No book purchases are required for this course.

Web Resources

1. Jastrow Dictionary on line: www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/jastrow/
2. Soncino English Translation of the Babylonian Talmud: www.halakha.com/

Contact Information and Office Hours

ari.bergmann@yu.edu

212 688 8800

Office Hours: by appointment via Zoom (please email to make an appointment).

Outside of class, I will be available to address any questions, concerns or suggestions you have by email and during office hours..

Course Policies

1. **Disability and Difficult Circumstances:** Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, berenODS@yu.edu during the first week of class. The office is located in 215 Lexington Ave, Suite 505. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.
2. **Laptops and Tablets:** You may use laptops or tablets in this class to consult online readings or to take notes. Laptops or tablets, however, are not allowed during the discussion portion of the class. In addition, any other use of these devices and the use of cell phones is strictly prohibited. Place your phone on mute before you come to class. Violating this policy will negatively impact your participation grade.
3. **Difficult Circumstances:** It is unfortunately inevitable that some students will face difficult circumstances in the course of their time in school. Please let me know if you are facing circumstances that may interfere with your coursework and I will make efforts to accommodate you.
4. **Academic Integrity:** The University Code of Academic Integrity is central to the ideals that under gird this course. Students are expected to be independently familiar with the Code and to recognize that their work in the course is to be their own original work that truthfully represents the time and effort applied. Violations of the Code are most serious and will be handled in a manner that fully represents the extent of the Code and that befits the seriousness of its violation.

5. ***AI Use Policy (Assistive Only):*** This course follows Stern's Academic Integrity Policy on artificial intelligence. The use of generative artificial intelligence or any platform with generative artificial intelligence capabilities is prohibited in this course. The use of assistive artificial intelligence is allowed on this course. Pre-approved assistive AI platforms include Hemmingway, MS Editor. Any platform not listed above is not approved for use. If you are unsure whether a platform or technology is allowed, please inquire directly. Please see <https://www.yu.edu/academic-integrity> for further information.
6. ***Academic Support:*** Academic support is available to you. If you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. Below is the link to sign up for an appointment. Click on Beren Camous, then click on Beren Learning Success Center, then click on the date and time you would like to set up an appointment. <https://yu2.mywconline.com>.