

RAB 415 – Halakhah and Aggadah

Dr. Gail Labovitz

Mon./Weds. 11:15 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Course description

RAB 415 is intended as an opportunity to introduce students to modern, critical, and scholarly approaches to reading rabbinic literature, and particularly the Babylonian Talmud. In this session of RAB 415, we will be using gender as an organizing theme to explore historical, literary, and cultural reading strategies as applied to rabbinic writings. In each unit, we will begin by reading a passage or passages from the Talmud, often together with related material from other rabbinic and non-rabbinic sources. After discussing our own understandings and impressions of the materials, we will read several different scholarly interpretations of the rabbinic writings and related materials (all readings will be available in the course packet and/or on reserve at the library and/or on-line). As part of class discussion, we will compare and contrast the different reading strategies: What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? What sort of information does each seek, and what sort of results is it likely to produce? What does each method prioritize, and what does it de-emphasize, overlook, dismiss?

Course requirements:

1. Regular and prompt class attendance. Missing more than 3 classes without extreme extenuating circumstances and consultation with me will result in your grade being lowered by one increment.
2. Class preparation and participation.
 - a) Primary sources: I highly recommend preparing primary texts in hevruta partnerships/groups. You should be able to read and translate the assigned materials in class with attention to vocabulary, grammatical forms, and syntactic structures. Please come to class with the proper Hebrew/Aramaic text(s) for that session in book or photocopy form.
 - b) Secondary readings: All secondary readings should be read before the session for which they are assigned, and you should be prepared to participate in class discussion about them. While reading, you might consider such questions as:
How is this author defining gender?
What does this author want to know about the functioning of gender in rabbinic literature and/or Jewish society/ies in late antiquity?
What approach(es) is this author bringing to the text(s) at hand?
What other sources (literary, documentary, material), if any, does this author find relevant to her/his central concerns and questions, and how does s/he understand the relationship between these sources and rabbinic literature?
3. Journals. You should use your journal to articulate reactions to the texts (both primary and secondary) which we study for this class, and to raise questions, either about things which are unclear to you or thoughts which are inspired by our in-class learning. Journals are meant as an opportunity to expand the dialogue which takes place in class, and to insure a place for issues and concerns which we may not always have time for in our regularly scheduled meetings. Entries, at least one per week, may take any form and length, so long as they are done seriously and with consideration. I will collect journal entries approximately every other week and add my own

responses. Your journals will not be graded, though I may ask for further response on your part when I return them to you. Moreover, repeatedly failing to turn in journals, turning them in late, or turning in work that is obviously sloppily and haphazardly done will negatively affect your grade.

4. Each student will be expected to apply what s/he has learned. You will choose (in consultation with me) a sugya, or related sugyot, or a sugya and related materials from other rabbinic or non-rabbinic literature, and apply one or more of the reading strategies discussed in class to analyze your chosen text(s). Each of you will:

a) Present your text(s) and your reading during one of the last two sessions of class. Using feedback from your classmates and me, you will then...

b) Write up your reading in a 10-15 page paper. Your paper should explain your choice of method (why you chose it and a summary of its basic approach), and demonstrate the reading which results when applied to your chosen text(s). Your paper should also include your own translation of the text(s) under discussion, either incorporated into the body of the paper or as an appendix; this is an additional opportunity for you to discuss difficulties of interpretation, unusual constructions and phrasings, semantic nuances of the Hebrew/Aramaic, etc.

Schedule:

1/21 Introduction

What is gender? How does one read for gender? How can rabbinic texts be read for gender?

Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Linda J. Nicholson, ed., pp. 39-62

Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "The Impact of Feminism on Rabbinic Studies: The Impossible Paradox of Reading Women into Rabbinic Literature," in *Jews and Gender: The Challenge to Hierarchy*, Jonathan Frankel, ed., pp. 101-118

1/26 Unit One: Creation and Gender/the Creation of Gender

Rabbinic texts:

mBer. 9:5: up to יעשנו קפנדריא ולא

bBerakhot 61a: דרש רב נחמן בר רב חסדא... אבל מנה תפילין לית לן בה

1/28

Emmanuel Levinas, "And God Created Woman," *Nine Talmudic Readings*, pp. 161-177

2/2

Rabbinic texts:

Gen. R. 8:1 (Theodor-Albeck p. 54-5)

bKet. 7b-8a: ת"ר מברכין ברכת התנים בעשרה כל שבעה... ולבסוף נברא אחד

(pay special attention to Rashi, ד"ה חדא יצירה הואי/בתר מהשבה אזלינן, and Tosafot, ד"ה חדא יצירה הואי)

bEruv. 18a-b: תנן התם ר' יהודה אומר... אין לו חלק לעולם הבא

(ד"ה בשלמא למ"ד... see also Tosafot, ...)

Other primary sources:

Galatians 3:23-29

Plato, *Symposium*, Speech of Aristophanes

2/4

Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, chapter 1: “Behold Israel According to the Flesh’: On Anthropology and Sexuality in Late-Antique Judaism,” pp. 31- 46 (you are not required to read the rest of the chapter, though you are, of course, welcome to do so). Also, if you have not read the Introduction to this book (last semester or on some other occasion), please do so now: pp. 1-30. (note: this book is also available through the library on-line)

2/9

Judaism Since Gender, Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, eds.:

Miriam Peskowitz, “Engendering Jewish Religious History,” pp. 17-39

Judith Baskin, “Rabbinic Judaism and the Creation of Woman,” pp. 125-130

2/11 Unit Two: Desire

Rabbinic texts:

mKid. 4:12-14

tKid. 5:9-10;14-15

2/16 – No class, Presidents’ Day

2/18

Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History*, “Introduction: Stories about Spinners and Weavers,” pp. 1-25; chapter 2, “Daily Labors,” pp. 49-76 (note: this book is also available through the library on-line)

2/23

Rabbinic texts:

bKid. 80a-82a: begin with the mishnah and complete the gemara to it (ending with the three words at the top of 82a); if you are feeling particularly ambitious, look at the next mishnah (on 82a) and (short) gemara to it

2/25

Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis*, “Introduction,” pp. 1-14; chapter 2, “Relations Between the Sexes,” pp. 30-59

3/1

Gail Labovitz, “A Fire at Rav Amram’s: Reading Law, Narrative, and Desire in the Bavli”

(note: This article is a personal work in progress. Some of our discussion will therefore focus on my process in writing it, with an eye towards your own work on your presentations/papers.)

3/3 Unit Three: The Erotics of Torah Study, Male Version (Akiva and his wife)

Rabbinic texts:

mKet. 5:6

bKet 61b-62a: התלמידים יוצאין לתלמוד וכו'... שאני התם דאית ליה הרווחה

bKet. 62b-63a: הספנים אחת לששה חדשים...לא מר איפסיק ולא מר איפסיק

3/8 (Shushan Purim)

Rabbinic texts:

bNed. 50a: ר' עקיבא איתקדשת ליה...איעתר רבי עקיבא מן כלבא שבוע

Gen. R. 95:30 (Theodor-Albeck p. 1232)

Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, chapter 5, "Lusting After Learning: The Torah as 'the Other Woman,'" pp. 134-166

3/10

Aryeh Cohen, *Rereading Talmud: Gender, Law and the Poetics of Sugyot*, chapter 4, "Talmud as Literature and Cultural Production," pp. 71-130

3/15

Shulamit Valler, *Women and Womanhood in the Talmud*, "Introduction," pp. 1-9; chapter 4, "Leaving Home to Study Torah," pp. 51-76

3/17

Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature*, "Introduction," pp. 1-48 (skim pp. 3-9; you may skip the discussion of *Androgynous Judaism*, pp. 25-27); pp. 78-82, 107-08, 118-20, 156-57, 174-83, 206-15, 274-77, 289-96

3/22 Unit Four: The Erotics of Torah Study, Female Version (*Ma'aseh d'Beruriah*)

Rabbinic texts:

mKel. 11:4 and tKel., Baba Metzia, 1:6

bBer. 10a: הנהו בריוני...בנים לגיהנם כותיכו

bEruv. 53b-54a: רבי יוסי הגלילי...שכח תלמודו

bAZ 17b-18b: אתוהו לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון...ממעשה דברוריה

concentrate on:

a) the introduction to the story, 17b: אתוהו לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון...בקובה של זונות

b) 18a: ועל בתו לישב...בשעת צדוק הדין

c) 18a-b: בריריה דביתהו דר' מאיר...ממעשה דברוריה

d) Rashi, ד"ה ואיכא דאמרי משום מעשה דברוריה, 18b

You may skim the rest of the passage in Hebrew or English

3/24

David Goodblatt, "The Beruriah Traditions," *Journal of Jewish Studies* XXVI:1-2 (1975), pp. 68-85

(on the historicity of Beruriah, see also Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers*, pp. 27-31, 57-58, 68-73, 85-88, 288-89)

3/29

Rachel Adler, "The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah," *Tikkun* 3:6 (1988), pp. 28-32; 102-05

3/31

Rabbinic texts:

mSotah 3:4

bSotah 21a-b:

a) ויש זכות תולה...אף תורה מגינה לעולם (21a)

b) רבינא אמר לעולם...מי לא פלגאן בהדייהו (21a)

c) אומר בן עזאי...והחכמה מאין תמצא (21b)

Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, chapter 6, "Studying Women: Resistance from Within the Male Discourse," pp. 167-196

(note: as a close to this unit, you may want to look at "How Shall We Tell the Story of Beruriah's End," by Brenda Socachevsky Bacon, in *Nashim* 5, pp. 231-239)

4/5, 4/7, 4/12, 4/14 – Spring/Passover Break

4/19 Unit Five: Female Resistance, or the Bavli's "Guerrilla Girl"

Rabbinic texts:

bBer. 61b: עולא אקלע לבי רב נחמן...ומסמרטוטי כלמי

bKid. 70a-b: ההוא גברא דמנהרדעא...נישוויך כשאר עם הארץ

(note: story continues through מלכא בנהר)

bNid. 20b: ילחא אייתא דמא...אגמריה סמך

4/21

Rachel Adler, "Feminist Folktales of Justice: Robert Cover as a Resource for the Renewal of Halakhah," *Conservative Judaism* 45:3, pp. 40-55

(If you have not read Robert Cover's article "Nomos and Narrative," you may wish to do so now; it can be found in *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: the Essays of Robert Cover*, Martha Minow, Michael Ryan, and Austin Sarat, eds. "The Folktales of Justice: Tales of Jurisdiction" in the same volume is also well worth reading)

4/26

Charlotte Fonrobert, "Yalta's Ruse: Resistance against Rabbinic Menstrual Authority in Talmudic Literature," in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, Rahel R. Wasserfall, ed., pp. 60-81

4/28

Rabbinic texts:

bKid. 70a-b, Munich manuscript

Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers*, pp. 121-129

5/3

Student presentations

5/5

Student presentations