

Silicon Valley Beit Midrash Summer 2016 Class Schedule & Descriptions

Morning Class - 10:00-12:30 AM (M,Tu,We,Th, Fri)

- WEEK 1 -

Have Talmud, Will Travel - Introductory Talmud

David Levin-Kruss

This course examines different *sugyot* (sections) of the Talmud that deal with travel and leave-taking. What prayers do we say before and after we travel? Is there a Jewish way to say good-bye? What is the purpose of going from one place to another? For what reasons is it permissible to leave the land of Israel? Most of the selections will be given in Hebrew/Aramaic and English but some will only be in the original and you will have the opportunity of decoding with the help of a handy work list.

Conflicts on the Journey towards Covenant: The Connection Between Body and Soul – Interm/Adv. Talmud

Yaffa Epstein

The Bible tells us that Shabbat is one aspect of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Circumcision is another aspect of this covenant. The 19th chapter of Tractate Shabbat deals with what happens when these two aspects of covenant come into conflict with each other. Interestingly, many critical questions of Jewish Law are discussed in this chapter, and in fact the very questions of how Rabbinic Law is created and instituted. Together we will try to make sense of the concept of a Covenantal Relationship - with God, Ourselves, and other Jews.

- WEEK 2 -

The Promised Land or the Land of Promise - Introductory Talmud

David Levin-Kruss

The Rabbis of the Talmud loved the Land of Israel but many chose to remain in Babylon. This class examines the relationship the rabbis had with Israel but also examines the paradoxical relationship that the rabbis had with their homeland, which was not quite their home. Most of the selections will be in Hebrew/Aramaic and English but some will only be in the original and you will have the opportunity of decoding with the help of a handy work list.

At Home In Galut- Intermediate/Advanced Talmud

Charlotte Fonrobert

One way to describe the Babylonian Talmud is as a translation of the rabbis' Torah into the *galut* (exile) of what they thought of as *Bavel* (Babylon). The rabbinic sages of that Talmud, which became *our* Talmud, made *Bavel* the home of their Torah learning. We will study Talmudic texts (mostly from Tractate Eruvin) in which the rabbinic sages shape exile into a Jewish place.

The Ideal State - Bible

Michael Hattin

Over the course of human history, many civilizations have dreamt of building the ideal state. Our tradition also preserves the record of such an attempt, one that flourished for a brief moment of time at the dawn of the First Temple period. We will consider its rise and fall through the life and times of its main protagonist, King Solomon. Textually, our study will focus upon the beginning of *Sefer Melachim* (Book of Kings 1, Chapters 1 – 12) but we will ponder much other material as we investigate the death of David, the ascent of Solomon to the throne, the consolidation of his rule and reorganization of the realm, the great undertaking of the building of the First Temple, and his ignominious end. Although Solomon finished his life in failure and the Temple was eventually destroyed, the memory of the ideal state continued to exist in the Messianic visions of the later prophets, whose dreams of an ideal state continue to inspire us today.

Mid-Day Class - 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM (M,Tu,We,Th)

- WEEK 1 -

Midrash: Myth, Poetry, Dialogue – Midrash

Jake Marmer

Midrash reflects a creative impulse of innumerable generations of Jewish thinkers and dreamers. It is a form of Biblical commentary – and a great deal more than that. While interpretive and discursive, it is often witty, mystical, poetic, and wildly imaginative. Midrash is a way of locating oneself in relationship to sacred Jewish writings – asking difficult questions and posing challenges. You will read ancient midrashim, explore contemporary midrashic art, and even try your own hand at midrash-making.

The Journey of Ruth: An Immigrant's Experience - Bible

David Booth

Ruth is the ultimate immigrant. The first documented convert to Judaism, Ruth's journey speaks to our acceptance of the stranger and the importance of chesed or love. Ruth becomes a kind of second Abraham returning Jewish law back to a path informed deeply by love and fidelity. We will take a close look at the story and person of Ruth, including traditional and contemporary commentary, as we ourselves journey towards a more full understanding of the redemptive quality of love.

- WEEK 2 -

When Torah Study Goes Beyond Words: Theater Midrash Workshop

Tova Birnbaum

Torah Study is more than just words: It consists of emotion, motion, sound, space and more. This course introduces unique Midrash techniques taken from the field of Theater and Drama, through which we will encounter traditional texts and discover new and exciting depths of surprising and unexpected worlds of Torah. No theater or art background required.

Bible As Literature?

Jake Marmer

We're used to thinking of the Bible as the central religious text of the Western Civilization. What if, instead, we examine it as a poetic, inherently literary text? After all, innumerable works of literature drew inspiration from Biblical images, motifs, and themes. In this class

we'll read closely some of the most famous Biblical stories (Tower of Babel, Binding of Isaac, and others) and see how writers, poets, philosophers, and literary critics have (re)interpreted these iconic, deeply influential narratives.

Afternoon Class - 3:15-5:15PM (M,Tu,We,Th)

- WEEK 1 -

Prayer: A Journey Toward God or A Journey Toward Self?

Yaffa Epstein

Ever felt bored in synagogue? Overwhelmed by trying to make sense of all that Hebrew? Unsure about the place of prayer is in your life? Then this class is for you! These sessions will explore the development of the Jewish Prayer book. We will explore questions such as: When did Jewish prayer begin? Who wrote our prayers? At what point in Jewish history did different sections of the prayer service become canonized? Through these questions we will attempt to understand our own connections to the prayers, and how we can make them more meaningful in our lives.

Had I not been there I would not have believed: The Mad Adventures of Raba Bar Bar Chana

David Levin-Kruss

Who was Raba Bar Bar Chana who traveled by sea and desert with his Arab guide? He was truly the Simbad the Sailor of the Talmud. What made him travel so? What purpose is there in including these stories in the Talmud? Are these just fantastical stories or do they have something to teach us about the nature of teaching and learning Torah?

- WEEK 2 -

The Greatest Code In Jewish History?

Michael Hattin

Maimonides was arguably the greatest codifier of law in Jewish history. We will look carefully at selections from his magnum opus - the *Mishne Torah* or "Restatement of Jewish Law" - in order to understand what motivated his massive undertaking and how it revolutionized the study of Torah until this very day. Our studies will make use of a well-known case study in order to put the Rambam's achievement in perspective. What does a discussion of law look like in the Mishnah and Talmud? How did earlier authorities before Rambam attempt to organize the material and make it accessible? In what crucial ways does Rambam differ from his 11th and 12th century commentary predecessors such as *Rashi*, *Tosafot*, *Rif*, and *Rosh*? In what ways did Rambam influence his successors, including what would become the "final word" in Jewish law - the *Shulchan Aruch* of the 16th century? Participants will have the opportunity to meet some of the great medieval authorities of Jewish law and to study their works in the original. Along the way, we may succeed in tracing the contours of a complex and convoluted process - how Halakha develops over the millenia.

So What's Next: A Travel Guide

David Levin-Kruss

Does Judaism believe in life after death? What is the difference between your soul, the world to

come and the resurrection, and why do we need a messiah? This course not only examines Jewish ideas about the world to come but also gives hints as to how to get there.

Public Evening Classes – TBD

Our evening lectures are open to the entire Bay Area Community.