

During the past 25 years Jewish Studies and Hebrew language courses have become part of the curricula of many major colleges and Universities in the United States. In a few instances where student demand, administrative support and faculty expertise coincide, the offerings have included courses on rabbinic literature. While the ongoing study of Torah has been the central value of rabbinic Judaism for nearly two millennia and hence nothing new internal to the system, the presentation of the classic texts of rabbinism as part of the humanities curriculum of a secular university is novel and poses several problems.

Courses in Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud at the University address the classical texts either in the original Hebrew and Aramaic or in English translation. In analyzing the nature of such offerings we need to treat several issues independently. First, what are the goals and expectations of instruction of rabbinic texts in the original languages as part of the advanced Hebrew curriculum? How does the background of students affect the presentation? How does one select texts and textbooks? What are the secondary resources available? How does one achieve content-based language-skill acquisition?

My experiences at the University of Minnesota since 1976 illustrate how I have met some of the concerns we face. I have taught two to three courses each year in upper division undergraduate Hebrew courses mainly dealing with rabbinic texts of late antiquity through the middle ages. The size of the classes has varied each quarter from at most 15 to at least 2 students. Let me pause here to answer the inevitable (and mostly irrelevant) question: the majority (60% or more) of the students in these courses over the years has been Jewish. Some of those students had Talmud Torah backgrounds. Often students have been products of our own Hebrew program with no prior parochial Jewish training. It should be noted that non-Jewish students study these texts mainly to fulfill requirements for a Hebrew or Jewish Studies major. This pattern of student enrollment in Hebrew text courses contrasts sharply with that of our larger Jewish Studies courses where enrollments are estimated to include up to 60-70% non-Jewish students (e.g., 250-300 out of a large "Introduction to Judaism" class of 400), most with no previous exposure to the subject.

The goals of my Hebrew text courses vary. In "Talmudic Texts," a two-quarter sequence, my aim has been to introduce the student to the Mishnah, Tosefta and Talmud Bavli. Generally, in the first quarter I focus on Mishnah and Tosefta. I expect students to learn a tractate or several chapters. I conduct the class as a seminar with students presenting their assigned texts and analysis. At times I require them to memorize their materials to demonstrate better the formal traits of the "Oral Torah." I gradually introduce issues of literary and form criticism, manuscripts, editions and textual variants, dictionaries, grammars, classical commentaries and modern scholarship. Students then progress to study the overall structure and contents of the tractate and of Mishnah as a whole. Next they investigate Tosefta as a supplement and commentary to Mishnah and as a repository for independent traditions.

In the second quarter we turn to the Talmud on the same tractate. Naturally in thirty classroom hours we can tackle only a few selections from an average length Talmud Tractate. I choose these to illustrate how Talmud builds on Mishnah and uses Tosefta, how it independently analyzes pericopae of Mishnah, and how it seeks out and sometimes harmonizes contradictions in the Tannaitic sources. I select other texts to demonstrate the nature of Amoraic traditions, especially those that epitomize features of rabbinism in late antique Babylonia.

From this brief precis it should be clear that I do not use the traditional Yeshiva-approach to designing a syllabus, i.e., start on page 2A and learn as much as time permits in the tractate. I also do not emphasize the notion of the texts as part of "the Halakhah." This concept is a relatively modern construct, composed of many strata

of texts, commentaries and codes. Some would argue it is a tool of those who foster rabbinic authority rather than a purely intellectual asset of our rabbinic heritage.

The editions of texts I use vary according to what is available for a given tractate. Hanok Albeck's edition of Mishnah (Jerusalem, 1952-9) is clear, and Pinhas Kahati's (Jerusalem, 1977) is also valuable. Lieberman's Tosefta is preferable to Zuckerman. The Steinsaltz Talmud (Hebrew Edition) is useful for beginning students for obvious reasons. It has vocalization, punctuation, background information and a modern Hebrew commentary. I have tried the new Random House edition with English translation in one course. The students and I found the presentation cumbersome and distracting. The volume in fact ignores recent academic scholarship in the field of rabbinics. I judged that using this volume inhibited the development of independent skills of textual analysis in advanced undergraduate students.

For a dictionary I mainly use Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, New York, 1971 (reprint) but encourage students to consult the newer Abraham Even-Shoshan Hebrew Dictionary (Jerusalem, 1979), a viable and accessible resource for those who can handle it. I assign and expect students to read secondary modern scholarly treatments of a variety of subjects related to the style and content of these texts.

During the class presentations I introduce students to a variety of morphological, grammatical and syntactical concerns. I highlight the distinctions between Biblical and Mishnaic (Middle) Hebrew. I introduce this material inductively. As we move into Talmud I discuss Aramaic in contrast to Hebrew. I present abstract concepts of the language only as they relate to the text and content we deal with directly in the course. Under a grant, we developed *MILIM* and *VERB*, Hebrew instructional software for IBM computers. Students who wish also may avail themselves of automated vocabulary and verb drills for all the texts in our Jewish Studies Center Computer lab. By the end of the second quarter, students reach a level of mastery enabling them to do independent primary textual study in the original on an elementary to intermediate level.

Here are some excerpts of course syllabi and assignments to illustrate various approaches to the pedagogic tasks of presenting rabbinic texts in the original to undergraduates.

A. Text-based presentation I. In this course I used the new Random House Steinsaltz text. As I said, I found that when using this edition, students did not progress to develop sufficiently independent skills for text study. This is from my "Talmudic Texts, Syllabus."

"This course teaches the student how to undertake the critical study of selected Talmudic texts. The course focuses on texts in the Mishnah, Tosefta and the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. The course introduces the student to the tools necessary for the study of these texts and guides the student in the explanation and analysis of selected pericopae. The course will focus also on a systematic study of Babylonian Aramaic through a study of a selection of Talmud texts.

"Each student will be assigned specific texts from the tractate and prepare an explanation of the selection to be presented first in class and later in writing to the instructor."

For the main texts we used:

A. Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: A Reference Guide*, New York, 1989
_____, *The Talmud: Volume I. Tractate Bava Metzia. Part I* ("Two are holding"), New York, 1989

_____, (Hebrew/Aramaic edition) *Tractate Bava Metzia*. Chapter 2: "These are the found objects"

_____, (Hebrew/Aramaic edition) *Tractate Bava Metzia*. Chapter 3: "He who deposits"

For the grammar and syntax of Babylonian Aramaic I used David Marcus, *A Manual of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic* (Lanham, 1981), which I found far more manageable for students than the alternative (in Hebrew), Y.N. Epstein, *A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic*, Jerusalem, 1976.

The supplementary readings included:

J. Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud*, second edition, San Francisco, 1984

_____, *Judaism: the Evidence of Mishnah*, Chicago, 1981

_____, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Yerushalmi*, Chicago, 1983

_____, *Judaism: The Classical Statement*, Chicago, 1986

_____, *The Mishnah: an Introduction*, Northvale, 1989

T. Zahavy, *The Traditions of Eleazar Ben Azariah*, Missoula, 1977

_____, *The Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers*, Atlanta, 1987

_____, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Berakhot*, Chicago, 1989

The following was one major assignment in this course. Each student was assigned a text and asked to complete these tasks:

Talmud Exegetical Assignment

1. Break text into cognitive units
2. Translate text in cognitive units
3. Translate Rashi
4. Provide relevant background texts and cross references: use of Tosefta and of baraita materials
5. Stylistic analysis: literary forms of discourse
6. Logical analysis: flow of the sugya
7. Context analysis: relation to previous and subsequent material
8. Scriptural application if any
9. Authoritative basis
10. Era and biography of rabbis where possible
11. Specialized language and rhetoric. Define terms.
12. Critique of Steinsaltz commentary

B. Text-based presentation II. In a more successful course I focused on a chapter from tractate Hullin to highlight aspects of talmudic reasoning as well as the standard issues of forms and redaction. Students found the material easy to grasp in spite of the theoretical abstraction of the talmudic hypothesis. Part of the syllabus explained:

"This course teaches the student how to undertake the critical study of selected talmudic texts. The course focuses on texts from the Mishnah, Tosefta and Babylonian Talmud Tractate Hullin (unconsecrated animals). The course introduces the student to the tools necessary for the study of these texts and guides the student in the explanation and analysis of selected pericopae.

"Each student will be assigned specific texts from the tractate. The student will read and translate the text and prepare a commentary on the selection. Excerpts which bear upon a reconstruction of talmudic logic and reasoning will be chosen for analysis. Students will discuss the relationship between the contents of the texts and the unfolding of rabbinic law and philosophy. Particular attention will be paid to evidence pertaining to the *sugya* of the live birth from a slaughtered animal as it relates to talmudic notions of *kashrut* and dietary ritual."

Required texts included:

Mishnah Hullin, chapter 4

Tosefta Hullin, chapter 4

Talmud Babli Hullin, chapter 4

Background readings were drawn from:

J. Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud*, San Francisco, 1984

_____, *Judaism: The Classical Statement*, Chicago, 1986

C. Literary approach. In the presentation closest to my own graduate training at Brown, I have taken students through the basics of the historical development and literary traits of early rabbinic texts. For texts I have used tractates Berakhot, Rosh Hashanah and Megillah to illustrate my points. In this pedagogic mode I teach students to use dictionaries, commentaries and recent scholarship mainly on the Mishnah and Tosefta. At the completion of the course the student knows the contents and structure of one or two tractates of Mishnah and is familiar with their relationships to parts of the accompanying Tosefta. In addition, supplementary readings help the student understand the role of Mishnah and Mishnah-study in rabbinic Judaism past and present.

As in most courses of the type, the student presents text in the classroom, completes a mid-term and final exam and a recitation of a chapter of Mishnah. Topics are accompanied by assigned primary texts and secondary literature and are broken down as follows:

- I. Introduction; the Talmud as religious literature; history of early Rabbinic-Pharisaic Judaism; texts of Mishnah and Tosefta
- II. Forms, mnemonics, the problem of oral or written transmission
- III. Larger editorial units; structures of Mishnah; mishnaic Hebrew
- IV. Redactional Criteria
- V. Central concern or problematic of a tractate
- VI. Tosefta as commentary and supplement to Mishnah; as autonomous.
- VII. Classical Mishnah commentaries: Rambam, Sens, Bartinoro, Tosafot Yom Tob. Mishnah Rishonah. Rambam's code as an alternate theory of redaction
- VIII. The logical and historical development and weaving of rabbinic laws
- IX. Judaism: the evidence of the Mishnah
- X. The limitations of Mishnah and the Genesis of Talmud

One course I taught based on this version of the syllabus received the highest student approval rating of all the various alternatives I presented (6.7 out of a possible 7 in student opinion surveys of the 15 students taking the course).

D. Topical approaches. In some instances I have designed the undergraduate syllabus for rabbinic texts around specific topics. These have included the following:

1. Problems in historiography, e.g., biographical studies out of rabbinic literature.
2. Problems in literary-historical criticism, e.g., form-criticism of rabbinic literature.
3. The evidence of the historical development of rabbinic Judaism, e.g., early Jewish liturgy in the second through fifth centuries; the unfolding of rabbinic ritual practices; recitation of the *Shema* and the *Amidah* liturgies; the relationship between literary references to the synagogue in Mishnah, Tosefta, Yerushalmi and Babli and the material remains of ancient synagogues in Israel; Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions in ancient sites; rabbinic involvement in the administration of synagogues in late antiquity.

Courses Dealing with Texts in Translation

Jewish Studies courses in our curriculum dealing with rabbinic texts in English Translation reach a larger and more varied student audience. Our offering "Mishnah

and Midrash in translation" enrolls up to fifty students. Accordingly my second area of discussion is what are the goals and expectations for instruction of rabbinic texts *in translation* as part of the general liberal arts curriculum? What distribution requirements might be fulfilled by such courses? How does one accomplish training in content and methodology? What should be the criteria for selection of texts and textbooks and secondary resources? How does the background of students affect the presentation?

Let me contrast two approaches to the pedagogic presentation of rabbinic texts in English. One can see herein also the evolution of academic scholarship in rabbinics. In 1977 I taught "Midrash in Translation" and in 1989 I taught a much different syllabus in "Mishnah and Midrash in Translation."

The syllabus description of the earlier course explained that this was an examination of "Midrash," a literary genre and process in late antique rabbinism. Attention was focused on the midrash to Exodus, the Mekhilta. Forms and content were analyzed and other rabbinic compilations were compared and contrasted to it. The course also treated selection from Sifra, a halakhic midrash and studied it with corresponding excerpts from the Mishnah to illustrate one polemical purpose of midrash. Early Christian and Qumran texts were examined as examples of non-rabbinic Palestinian midrash. Selections from Philo's works were studied as examples of Hellenistic rhetorical "midrash."

The texts were taken from Jacob Lauterbach's *Mekhilta* (Phila., 1933-5), the Passover Haggadah, Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1970), Jacob Neusner's, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities*, volumes 6 and 8 (Leiden, 1975), and other appropriate editions and sources.

I modified the syllabus greatly in the most recent incarnation of this course in 1989. Here are the syllabus, mid-term and final examinations.

Jewish Studies 3115
Fall, 1989, Course Syllabus

Mishnah and Midrash in Translation

Description: Rabbinic writings in their original contexts and as living texts for the present. Interpretations of the Bible by early rabbis that address moral, theological, and literary problems. Modern methods for the study of rabbinic literature. Jewish laws as a mirror of human culture.

Textbooks:

Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: an introduction* (Northvale, 1989) = MAI
_____, *Invitation to Midrash* (New York, 1989) = ITM
_____, *Invitation to the Talmud* (San Francisco, 1984) (supplementary) = ITT

Schedule, week of:

9/21 What is the Mishnah? MAI, 1-39
9/26 The Religion and Society of Mishnah. MAI, 40-120
10/3 Mishnah's view of women. Mishnah's philosophy of life. MAI, 121-199
10/10 The Dual Torah and the Mishnah. MAI, 200-230
10/17 Mishnah and Scripture. ITM, 19-56
Mid-quarter exam.
10/24 What is Midrash? ITM, 1-18
10/31 Midrashic modes of interpretation: reading out. ITM, 57-98
11/7 Midrashic modes of interpretation: reading in. ITM, 99-187 (selections)
11/14 The stories of Midrash. ITM, 187-234
11/28 Discourse and propositions of Midrash. ITM, 235-262
Contemporary issues and Midrash. ITM, 263-280

Mishnah, Midrash, Talmud. ITT, all

Final exam

Mid-quarter exam

Select four questions. Base your answers on classroom lectures, discussion and the readings in Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: an introduction*.

1. What is the purpose of Mishnah within rabbinic Judaism? Who wrote the Mishnah? When was the book written?
2. Explain the three components of the social vision of Mishnah. Give a brief example of a statement in Mishnah reflecting each.
3. Characterize Mishnah's concept of economics. Give an example of a ruling that reflects it.
4. What was Mishnah's view of women and of marriage. Give an illustration of each.
5. Explain Mishnah's philosophy of history. Give an example of an historical statement in Mishnah.

Final exam

Select four questions. Base your answers on classroom lectures, discussion and the readings in Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to Midrash*.

1. Explain the type of midrash wherein interpretation is mainly exegesis yielding propositions. Give an illustration from Sifra or Sifre to Numbers.
2. Explain the type of midrash wherein interpretation is mainly propositions yielding exegesis. Give an illustration from Genesis Rabbah.
3. What are two major ways that Sifra and Leviticus Rabbah differ in their approaches to the same book of the Torah? Give examples.
4. How does Pesiqta deRab Kahana differ from other midrashic compilations? What are its main theological points?
5. Explain the difference between narrative that is midrash and narrative that is not midrash with reference to *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*.
6. Discuss how Bavli and Yerushalmi organize propositions around verses of Scripture.

In another instance rabbinic literature plays the major role in the syllabus of our offerings. The course **Judaism in the Time of Early Christianity** (enrolling 50 or more students) covers the main developments in Judaism from 70 to 640 C.E. in Israel and Babylonia in the context of late antique culture. It surveys the period's history and social setting and draws on recent scholarly analysis of rabbinic Judaism and its literature. The course examines in detail studies of the issues of rabbinic biography and the development of the ritual of Jewish prayer in the era as responses to the changing social and political circumstances of the era.

Readings for this course include the following:

Required books:

Jacob Neusner, *There We Sat Down*, Nashville, 1971
_____, *The Oral Torah*, New York, 1985
_____, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine*, Chicago, 1987

Supplementary books (reserve):

Tzvee Zahavy, *The Traditions of Eleazar Ben Azariah*, Missoula, 1977
 _____, *The Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers*, Atlanta, 1987
 _____, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Tractate Berakhot*, Chicago, 1989

Additional Readings (photocopy):

Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, London, 1971, excerpts
 _____, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity."
 M. Avi-Yonah, *A History of the Jews in Palestine*, Oxford, 1976, excerpts
 Tzvee Zahavy, "Recent Methodological Advances in the American School of Talmudic Scholarship." (Minneapolis, 1987)
 _____, "On an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Observed in Orthodox Judaism." (Minneapolis, 1988)

Video Tape (Walter Library): T. Zahavy, "Ancient Synagogues Explored."

The main topics I cover in the course are:

- I. The major trends of late antiquity in the near East.
- II. The development of rabbinic Judaism: power, myth and function.
- III. Analytical study of Babylonian Judaism and the Talmud.
- IV. Critical biographies of Judaic religious leaders.
- V. The development of liturgical rituals and the role of the synagogue.
- VI. Conflict between scribal and priestly interests in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple.
- VII. Interpretation of scriptural concepts in the fourth century.

I expect students to be able to answer questions such as the following:

What is the Mishnah and how do the religious authorities of early rabbinic Judaism justify its authority? Define briefly: Tosefta, Pirke Avot, Midrash, Sifra, Leviticus Rabbah, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi. Summarize Neusner's main argument in *The Oral Torah*. Describe the role of the rabbi in the culture of Babylonian Judaism in late antiquity. Based on Neusner's *There We Sat Down* and on Peter Brown's essays, describe the role of the rabbi as a holy man in the culture of Babylonian Judaism in late antiquity. Discuss the problem of reconstructing the biography of the ancient rabbis using traditions of Eleazar ben Azariah as examples. Explain several main elements of the nature and development of Judaic ritual in the first and second centuries C.E. based on the analysis of early Jewish prayer in Mishnah and Tosefta.

Conclusions: I have provided some general principles and a series of illustrations for undergraduate level course syllabi drawing on rabbinic literature. In all cases these have been examples of courses I have taught in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, a state sponsored public university. These courses are well-subscribed. They fulfill major and distribution requirements of the liberal arts curriculum for language, literature or history, and draw for enrollment upon a cross section of the student body at large.

As more instructors trained in the serious academic study of Judaism enter the ranks of college teachers I believe we will see courses like these proliferating within the North American schools. Classical Judaic literature increasingly will take its place alongside other corpora of significance in the liberal arts and humanities curricula of our mainstream academic institutions.

Tzvee Zahavy, born in New York City in 1949, was married to Bernice Helfgott in 1974 and is the father of two sons. He attended Yeshiva College and was graduated in 1970 with a B.A. in mathematics as a member of Pi Mu Epsilon the national mathematics honor society. In 1973 he received a masters degree in Jewish History and rabbinic ordination from Yeshiva University where he studied for four years with Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. From 1973 to 1976 he studied with Jacob Neusner in the History of Judaism in late antiquity program of the religious studies department at Brown University.

After receiving his Ph.D. from Brown University in 1976 Zahavy was appointed to the faculty of the University of Minnesota. He was promoted to associate professor

with tenure in 1980 and to full professor of Classical and Near Eastern Studies in 1988. In 1980 Zahavy was a visiting associate professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1988 he was visiting Gumenick Professor of Judaic Studies at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Zahavy was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend in 1988, the Distinguished Teaching Award from the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota in 1985, a Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture Fellowship in 1984, an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship in 1983, and an Award for Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship from Yeshiva University in 1978.

His books include *The Traditions of Eleazar Ben Azariah*, and *The Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers: Tractate Berakhot*, both published by Scholars Press for the Brown University Judaic Studies series, and *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Tractate Berakhot* published by the University of Chicago press in 1989. His most recent book is *Studies in Jewish Prayer*, published by University Press of America, Lanham, Md.