

**RELS 426 = JWST 426 = NELC 486
RABBINIC WRITERS ON RABBINIC CULTURE**

Tues/Th. 10:30- Noon, 204 Logan Hall
Dr. Talya Fishman
tfishman@sas.upenn.edu

Fall '07
(o) 225 Logan Hall
215/898-5837

Office Hours: Tues. and Thurs. 1:45- 3 PM, and by appointment

DESCRIPTION: The course traces reflections on rabbinic culture produced within Jewish legal literature of the classic rabbinic period – Midrash, Mishna and Talmud—and in later juridical genres – talmudic commentary, codes and responsa. Attention will be paid to the mechanics of different genres, the role played by the underlying proof-text, the inclusion or exclusion of variant opinions, the presence of non-legal information, the balance between precedent and innovation. Texts will be available in English translation.

REQUIRED BOOKS: (At Penn Book Center, 34th between Walnut and Sansom)

Strack and Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash

COURSE PACK at Wharton Reprographics, basement of Steinberg-Dietrich Hall, 3620 Locust Walk.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: (a) regular attendance and participation in class discussions; (b) Four 5 page papers to be submitted at the beginning of the relevant class meeting.

Because of the Jewish holidays, classes will not be held on three Thursdays: Sept. 13th, Sept. 27th and Oct. 4th. MAKEUP CLASSES WILL BE SCHEDULED.

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SYLLABUS

Note: All readings [enclosed in brackets] are to be brought to class and completed prior to the session in which they will be discussed.

1) Introduction; Meanings of “Torah” & “Sefer” in Biblical Settings

[Sources to be distributed. At Home: Analyze the meanings of Torah in Ps. 119.]

2) Role of Text in Contemporary Orthodoxy

[H. Soloveitchik, "Rupture & Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy" at [http: www.lookstein.org/links/orthodoxy.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/links/orthodoxy.htm)
& M. Friedman, "Life Tradition & Book Tradition in the Development of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism".]

3) Justifications of Rabbinic Authority

[Dt. 17:8-12; *bSan.* 89; *mAvot* 1:1; *bMen.* 29b; *bBM* 59b.]

4) Why is the "Oral Torah" Oral? The View from Tradition

[*yPeah* 2:4 /2:6; selection from Intro to Menahem b. Zerah, *Zeidah laDerekh*; selection from Profet Duran, Intro to *Ma'aseh Efod*; selection from Intro to Moses of Coucy, *Sefer Mizvot Gadol*; selection from Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha'Iqqarim*.]

5) Rabbinic Regulations Regarding Written Matters and Oral Matters

[*bGit.* 60a-b; *bTem.* 14b; *Midrash Tanhuma, VaYera* 6; *tShab.* 13:2; *tShab.* 13:4; *bShab.* 115a-b; *bBM* 92a with Rashi, *megilat setarim*.]

6) Other Variables of Transmission & Their Significance

[C. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Ancient Palestine*, pp. 134-44; *bSan.* 22a -22b; *bMeg.* 8b-9b; selections on Torah Scroll and codex from Nehemiah Allony, *Bet Miqra* 78; *bMeg.* 26b; selections from S. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*.]

7) Techniques of Memorization and Oral Transmission

[Dov Zlotnick, *The Iron Pillar: Mishna*, pp. 46-71; C. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Ancient Palestine*, pp. 98-99; Rabbinic Techniques of Memorization; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* pp. 164-167; *mHorayot* 3:4-8; *bHor* 13a-14a.]

8) Sherira Gaon on Memorization

[*selections from the Epistle of Sherira Gaon.*]

9) Sherira Gaon on the Evolution of the Corpora of Oral Matters

[*selections from the Epistle of Sherira Gaon.*]

10) Sherira Gaon on the Inimitability of Mishna

[*selections from the Epistle of Sherira Gaon.*]

11) The Orality of Talmud in Geonic Pedagogy and Adjudication

[Sherira Gaon; Gaon Aaron Sarjado; Shalom Gaon; Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia*, pp. 156-165; Hai Gaon, *Ozar HaGeonim, Teshuvot*, RH #117.]

12) Approaches to Talmud in Kairouan: Pedagogy & Adjudication

[Pes. 49a-b; *Teshuvot HaGeonim*, #380; R. Nissim Gaon, Intro to *Mafteah Man'ulei HaTalmud.*]

13) Rabbenu Hananel's Commentary on Talmud

[selections from Rabbenu Hananel's Commentary]

14) Approaches to Talmud in Al-Andalus: Pedagogy & Adjudication

[selections from Al Barceloni, *Perush liSefer Yetzira; Sefer Ha'Itim*; Shmuel HaNagid, Oath Poem.]

15) Maimonides' Mishneh Torah

[Maimonides, Intro to *Mishneh Torah.*]

16) Critical Reactions to Codification

[I. Twersky, "The Beginnings of *Mishneh Torah* Criticism"; M. Elon, *Jewish Law*, vol. 3, pp. 1215-1235; M. Elon, *Jewish Law* v. 3, pp. 1309-1366; *Shulhan 'Arukh*, OH 334:26.]

17) Preservation of Orality in Sephardic Codes

[Selections from Maimonides; Caro, Intro to first edition of *Shulhan 'Arukh*]

18) Authorship & Textual Emendation in Medieval Jewish Culture

[*b*Yeb. 42b; selections from Shraga Abramson, "*Meihem u-Vahem*" (2 pp.); from Rabbenu Tam, Intro to *Sefer HaYashar*; *Sefer Hasidim* #'s1052; 1945; from T. Fishman, "Pietist Critiques of Authorship"; C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, pp. 36-40.]

19) What can be Lesrned from Midrash Aggada?

[D. Stern, "Midrash and Indeterminacy"; G. Bruns, "The Hermeneutics of Midrash".]

20) The Authority of Aggadah

[BB 73a-74a; selections from Sa'adiah Gaon, Shmuel ben Hofni, Sherira and Hai on aggadah; from Maimonides, Intro to *Pereq Heleq*; Ramban, Disputation at Barcelona; M. Saperstein, "The Aggadah: Problem and Challenge".]

21) The Murderous Acts of Pious Jews: Making "Sense" of 1096 - A

22) The Murderous Acts of Pious Jews: Making "Sense" of 1096 - B

23) The Inscription of Talmud in Northern Europe: Rashi & the Tosafists

[from M. Elon, *Jewish Law*, vol. 3, pp. 1113-1127; Jacob Katz, "Economic Intercourse and the Religious Factor", in *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, pp. 24-47; *Teshuvot Rabbenu Gershom* #21; Tosafot, AZ 7b, "*ba-golah*"; Tosafot, AZ 11b, "*bagolah*"; Tos., AZ 2a, "*asur*"; Rashi on BM 33a, "*vi-eyna midah*" via Bodleian Library manuscript.]

24) Medieval Jewish Witnesses to Cultural Shift

[from the Shneur brothers of Evreux; from HaMeiri, Intro to *Bet HaBehira* on Avot.]

25) Medieval Perceptions of "Talmudocentrism"

[Samuel HaNagid poem, "The House of Prayer"; from Intro to Bahya Ibn Paquda, *Torat Hovot HaLevavot*; from Profet Duran, *Sefer Ma'aseh Efod*.