

***Introduction to Rabbinic Texts I***  
***RAB 010***

Professor Solomon Schimmel  
Fall 2008  
Hebrew College  
Tel: 617 559 8621  
E-mail: [sschimmel@hebrewcollege.edu](mailto:sschimmel@hebrewcollege.edu)

Through guided reading of primary sources this preparatory course familiarizes students with the structure, idiom, vocabulary and thought of the classical rabbinic *tannaitic* texts, *Mishna*, *Tosefta*, and *Midrash Halakha*. The laws, rituals and teachings formulated in the *Mishna* and related early rabbinic texts deal with diverse aspects of Jewish life. Among these are agricultural activity and produce; protection of and care for the needy and oppressed; Shabbat and festivals; theology, prayer and blessings; sexual behavior, family relations and personal status; crime, punishment and the judicial system; torts, commerce and employer-employee relationships; Temple worship; dietary rules; ritual defilement and purification.

Class sessions will be devoted to close study of the assigned primary texts. Secondary readings include traditional and critical approaches to the study of *Mishna*, *Tosefta* and *Midrash Halakha*. It is important that you read the Schiffman, Jaffee, Cohen, and Goldberg readings, and *peruse* the Strack and Stemberger chapters, within the *first three weeks* of class, so that you will be better able to put the *tannaitic* texts into an historical and scholarly context.

Appended to this syllabus will be a list of the *mishnayot* and other *tannaitic* texts which will be studied during the semester, either in class, or as homework on your own with the help of dictionaries, translations, commentaries, reference works, or with a study partner (*hevruta*).

Course requirements include advance preparation for class, completion of all readings, regular class attendance and participation, audio recording of selected texts, periodic quizzes (oral and/or written) and a final exam (oral and/or written).

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS:

- 1) *Tanakh* (to be brought to all class sessions).
- 2) A copy of the entire *Mishna* in Hebrew. Each week you will be told which particular *Mishnaic* and other *tannaitic* texts are to be prepared in advance and to be brought to class. *Do not bring to class the English translation of these texts*. However, to assist you in *preparing for class* you can, when necessary, make use of an English translation (e.g. Blackman; ArtScroll; Danby; Neusner; Soncino; Kehati).
- 3) Copies of the *Tosefta* and of *Midreshei Halakha* are on Reserve in the library and in the main Beit Midrash, and the Kekst Beit Midrash. These are also available online and in several Judaica databases.
- 4) Schiffman, Lawrence H. *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*. KTAV Publishing House, 1991 (pgs. 139 - 200). (on library reserve).

5) Goldberg, Abraham. Chapter Four: *The Mishna - A Study Book of Halakha*, pgs. 211-251. In *The Literature of the Sages* (Editor: Shmuel Safrai). (on library reserve).

6) Strack, H. and Stemberger, G. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, T & T Clark, 1991, pages 119 – 181, Chapters on The Mishnah and on The Tosefta (much of this is technical and bibliographical information for your reference use. It is on library reserve, but I recommend that you own a copy).

7) Jaffee, Martin S. *Early Judaism*, Prentice-Hall, 1997, pages 78 – 91; 213 - 223 (on library reserve).

8) Cohen, Shai. *From the Maccabees to the Mishna*, pages \_\_\_\_\_.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

1) Acquire familiarity with the origin, general structure and specific organization of the *Mishna*, *Tosefta*, and *Midreshei Halakha*.

2) Acquire familiarity with the political, sociocultural and religious situation in first, second, and early third century C.E. *Eretz Yisrael*.

3) Study many *tannaitic texts* and acquire an understanding of a wide range of *halakhic* concepts in *tannaitic* literature.

4) Master a glossary of *tannaitic* words, expressions, and idioms.

5) Read *tannaitic* texts accurately (pointed or not pointed, depending on your level of competence in reading Hebrew) and eventually fluently.

6) Become familiar with how *tannaitic* texts sound when read aloud (as they were studied and transmitted for many centuries). You will record yourself reading the *tannaitic* texts, then listen to your recordings to check your pronunciations and make note of your errors, and then record again corrected versions. You will submit your final recorded readings to me for review, on assigned dates.

The specific texts from the *Mishna*, *Tosefta*, and *Midreshei Halakha* will be included in a separate handout to be distributed in the first week of class.