



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Genesis & Ethics: Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2021

Course Number: BIBL 4931H C [CRN: 15708]

Sessions Meet: M/W 11:55am—1:10pm [Location: Midtown, 1015]

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Overview

This course will provide a comprehensive survey of and meditation on the book of Genesis, specifically through the lens of ethics. We will begin with some introductory material concerning the genre of Genesis and narrative, more broadly, as a mode of ethical instruction. And then we will turn to the a section by section analysis of the text's structure, themes, characters, and theologies, as seen through the readings of major exegetes, from the sages to the commentators of today—with a central focus on the claims of Leon Kass's *The Beginning of Wisdom*. From the dawn of life to the death of the Egyptian viceroy, we will assess the ethics embedded in the text and the tales that have shaped the Jewish imagination for millennia.

Required Texts

For this course there are no material's that you will be required to purchase—all readings will be made available on canvas or are available online and will be linked or indicated on the canvas page.

Attendance and Participation

This class is a collaborative endeavor and depends for its success on your steady attendance and informed participation, so your final grade may well be swayed by the quality—in addition to the quantity—of your participation in class. Poor attendance (i.e., more than three absences during the term and/or frequently arriving late to class) will lower your final course grade noticeably.

Due Dates

Assignments must be turned in on the date and hour they are due unless an extension has been arranged in advance. If you anticipate needing an extension, please let me know well before the due date. Readings listed above a particular date are to be read for that date.

Please be aware of the University's *Academic Integrity Statement* as all students are expected to abide by it, and note the following two announcements:

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu during the first weeks of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Academic support is available to you if you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. She is available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am - 6pm. To make an appointment, go to yu2.nyuwconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support".

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation – 10%

Midterm – 40%

Final – 50%

Week 1: Overview

Readings: n/a

August 25th: Welcome and Overview

Week 2: Introduction I—The Purpose of the Book

Readings: **Rashi** 1:1; **Ramban** 1:1; **Netziv** Introduction; **Rabbi J. Sacks**, “*The Book of Teaching*”

August 30th: Ethical Introductions

Readings: **Matthew R. Schlimm**, *Ethics, Emotion, and Experience: The Power of Stories*

September 1st: Narrative Ethics

Week 3: Rosh Hashanah

Week 4: Introduction II—The Shape of the Book

Assignment: 4-10 Chapter Headings [Due September 13th @ 9am]

September 13th: [REMOTE] Narrative Landscape

Readings: n/a

September 15th: *Erev Yom Kippur*

Weeks 5-6: Sukkot

Week 7: Bereishit—Genesis 1:1-6:8

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 1

October 4th: Awesome Beginnings

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 4

October 6th: Fratricide and Founding

Week 8: Noach—Genesis 6:9-11:32

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 7

October 11th: Paternity and Piety

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 8

October 13th: Babel: The Failures of Civilization

Week 9: Lech Lecha—Genesis 12:1-17:27

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 9

October 18th: Educating the Fathers: Father Abraham

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 10

October 20th: Educating Father Abraham: The Meaning of Marriage

Week 10: Vayera—Genesis 18:1-22:24

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 11

October 25th: Educating Father Abraham: The Meaning of Patriarchy

Readings: **Sacks**, *Not in God's Name*, Chapter 6

October 27th: The Half-Brothers

Week 11: Chayei Sarah—Genesis 23:1-25:18

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 12

November 1st: Inheriting the Way: From Father to Son

Readings: **Genesis 24:3**—Radak; Chizkuni; HaKetav VeHakabbalah; Kli Yakar.

November 3rd: Genetics, Ethics, and Ego

Week 12: Toldot— Genesis 25:19-28:9

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 13

February 8th: The Education of Isaac: From Son to Patriarch

Readings: *****MIDTERM*****

November 10th: *****MIDTERM*****

Week 13: Vayitzei—Genesis 28:10-32:3

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 14

November 15th: The Adventures of Jacob: The Taming of the Shrewd

Readings: **Genesis 28:12**—Rashi; Netziv; Seforno; Chizkuni; Meharil; Imrei Emet; Kedushat Levi.

November 17th: Building Blocks

Week 14: Vayishlach—Genesis 32:4-36:43

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 15

November 22nd: Brotherhood and Piety: Facing Esau, Seeing God

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 16

November 24th: Politics and Piety: Jacob Becomes Israel

Week 15: Vayeshev—Genesis 37:1-40:23

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 17

November 29th: The Generations of Jacob: The Question of Leadership

Readings: **Genesis 37:29-30**—Rashi; Abravanel; Netziv; HaKetav VeHakabbalah; Shadal; Imrei Emet

December 1st: Guilt and Responsibility

Weeks 16: Miketz—Genesis 41:1-44:17

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 18

December 6th: Joseph the Egyptian

Readings: **Genesis 41:8**—Rashi; Hertz; Malbim; Netziv.

December 8th: Ethics and Imagination

Weeks 17: Vayigash—Genesis 44:18-47:27

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 19

December 13th: Joseph and His Brothers: Estrangement and Recognition

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 20

December 15th: Israel in Egypt: The Way Not Taken

Weeks 18: Vayechi—Genesis 47:28-50:26

Readings: **Kass**, Chapter 21

December 20th: Losing Joseph, Saving Israel: Jacob Preserves the Way

Readings: **Kass**, Epilogue

December 22nd: The End of the Beginning

January 7th @ Midday: *Final Assessment Due*