



MINYAN MA'OR: Adult Education, Fall, 5784/2023

Weeks of Nov. 6, 13, 20; Dec. 4, 11, 18

From Oral Tradition to Sacred Text: How the Mishnah Transformed Jewish Life and Thought

The Mishnah, the first book of Rabbinic Judaism, pursues an agenda different from the Bible, setting Judaism in new directions. Responding to the destruction of the Temple in 70 c.e. and the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem after the Bar Kochba war (ca. 135 c.e.), the Mishnah offers guidance on resilience in the face of catastrophic loss.

How did the Mishnah, with its radically new form and content, become the foundation for later rabbinic Judaism's theology and practice? What hints do we find in the Mishnah about its audience and goals? In our own world, living in America 80 years after the destruction of the European Jewish center, what would a new Mishnah look like?

Our class will begin with a review of the Mishnah in its historical and literary contexts. Then we will explore three tractates that each serve as an introduction to the Mishnah: Berachot ("On Blessings"), Avot ("On Foundations") and Eduyyot ("On Testimony"). Our final class will explore excerpts from throughout the Mishnah as we imagine together how this text can guide us today.

This class honors the recent publication of The Oxford Annotated Mishnah; edited by Shaye J.D. Cohen, Robert Goldenberg z"l, and Hayim Lapin

Instructor: Rabbi Leonard Gordon, D. Min.

Lgordon613@gmail.com

Cell: 215-630-3578



All texts can be found in Hebrew and English at Sefaria.org

SESSION ONE:

Introductions; From Bible to Mishnah; Early Judaism and Early Christianity

READINGS:

Books of the Bible (PDF)

Excerpts from the Gospel of Matthew (PDF)

Leonard Gordon, "Who Were the Rabbis" (PDF)

SESSION TWO-THREE:

Three Introductions to the Mishnah:

(1) The First Tractate: Berachot (On Blessings)

READINGS

Tractate Berachoth (all) (PDF)

SESSION FOUR:

(2) An introduction for non-Rabbis: Tractate Pirkei Avot (On Foundations)

READINGS

Avot can be found in many siddurim or on Sefaria.org

SESSION FIVE:

(3) An introduction for Rabbis: Tractate Eduyyot (On Testimonies)

READING

Excerpts from Tractate Eduyyot (PDF)

SESSION SIX:

Select texts from other Tractates

Conclusions; What would a new Mishnah look like?

READINGS

Mishnah Excerpts (PDF)

Mishnah Excerpts Hebrew (PDF)