



Yeshiva University
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Tehilim and the Human Condition

(Psalms BIBL 3209H)

Spring 2022

Dr. Shaina Trapedo
shaina.trapedo@yu.edu
Office: 215 Lex, 701
Hours: MW by appt

Course Meeting Info:
Tuesday / Thursday
11:50 am – 1:05 pm
Location: 215 Lex, 210

Course Description

This course will cover the authorship, canonization, style, and significance of Sefer Tehillim and the central position it has come to occupy in Jewish thought and practice. Using classical *meforshim*, we will come to understand the literary features and distinct genres (including *mizmor*, *shir*, *maskil*, etc) of the timeless biblical text at the core of personal and collective religious expression from the Temple era until today. In addition to Tehilim's lyrical texture, we will examine the range of human emotions voiced in its carefully crafted chapters— from grief to gratitude, desire to despair, anger to atonement, and shame to salvation— as well as its unique capacity to furnish wisdom and exert theurgic influence over divine decrees as laid out in rabbinic literature and *midrashim*.

In accordance with the Straus Center mission, we will conclude our course by surveying the reception and appropriation of Tehilim in Western culture. The particularism of Israel's experience encapsulated in the Psalms has found universal appeal and applicability in various communities and contexts. From Renaissance poetry to American abolition to international diplomacy, individuals and institutions have been turning to Tehilim for evocative imagery and moral inspiration for centuries and continue to do so today.

Course Objectives

- Students will gain an understanding of the unique literary features of Psalms as biblical poetry, as well as their theological import in Jewish thought and practice.
- Students will develop reading, vocabulary, and grammar skills needed to analyze a chapter of Psalms on their own and convey their analysis in writing.
- Students will gain an appreciation of larger influence of Psalms on Western literature and culture.

Course Materials

Sefer Tehilim is easily accessible online. Recommended links will be posted on Canvas. Secondary assigned readings will also be available on Canvas weekly.

Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Reflective Writings: 15%

Presentation: 15%

Midterm Assignment: 30%

Final: 30%

Expectations

Although **attendance and participation** count for 10% of your grade in the course, active and collective engagement are essential for a successful learning experience. Understandably, life happens, and should you need to miss class you are responsible for making up what you miss by obtaining any materials and notes generated in your absence. Up to three unexcused absences are allowed, but after that you must have documentation (i.e., medical emergency), to avoid your participation grade being lowered by one letter grade. In the event of an emergency of some kind, I will do my best to support your continued progress in our class. Of course, attendance and participation are not the same thing. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and reflected on the assigned materials and explicitly draw on that preparation to propel conversations by posing and responding to questions and stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Participation will make our sessions more productive and will ensure that you develop a "habit" of thinking and communicating creatively and critically at an educated level.

In the event we need to meet over Zoom, to make our learning environment as rich and engaging as possible, please keep your camera on, stay in one place, and mute yourself if background noise may disrupt the group. In a pinch, I may end up delivering a class or two from my parked car, but not from my bed or neighbor's pool, so I ask that you kindly reciprocate. Taking advantage of your Zoom environment to show off cute pets, siblings, or paraphernalia is welcome if the occasion arises (especially if you can connect them to our discussion).

In addition to active participation in the classroom, to enhance our discussions, students will contribute three short **reflective written responses** (between 200 – 250 words) to our on-going discussion forum over the course of the semester (15%). Prompts will be posted weekly, though students can select which weeks they'd like to participate.

Students will also work in pairs to give a joint **presentation** (15%) on a specific psalm. Guidelines will be shared in class, and some class time will be allotted toward your preparation.

A **midterm** assignment (30%) and **final** (30%) will conclude the semester. More information will be provided in class.

Lastly, given the ongoing COVID situation, we all need to tend carefully to keeping lines of communication open. Similarly, as we experience new formats and platforms, we may need to adjust as we find our learning rhythm. I will work to challenge you as much as I can without overwhelming you. To support your progress throughout the course, I plan to check in throughout the semester, not only to make sure you're keeping up with the reading and writing but to make sure that you are doing well. And when you're not, to help you find the support you need. Patience— with oneself and with others— will be key this semester.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to uphold the highest levels of academic integrity according to the policy of our university, summarized in the YU academic integrity statement available on the YU website. Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at Yeshiva University. Cheating, forgery, dishonest conduct, and plagiarism erode YU's educational, research, and social roles. They devalue the learning experience and its legitimacy not only for the perpetrators but for the entire community. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with YU's [Academic Integrity Statement](#) and abide by it. Since plagiarism is a serious transgression of ethics, any instances of plagiarism will be pursued through the appropriate disciplinary channels and may include receiving a failing grade for the assignment or class. Since this course will require research work and the use of secondary material, you must be aware of your intellectual obligations and take care to document your work diligently. We will discuss academic integrity (and how and why to avoid plagiarism) in class. If you ever have any doubts or questions, please ask.

Academic Support

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. You are welcome to make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. To make an appointment, go to yu2.mywconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support."

Special Accommodations

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rhohn1@yu.edu, during the first week 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 those accommodations.

Library Support

Get all the support you need with research for your courses. The **Yeshiva University Libraries** (library.yu.edu) offer individualized consultations that will help you locate and cite journal articles, books, and other credible sources for solid papers, presentations, and reports. Skilled information-seekers succeed academically and in the workplace. Prepare for the future by contacting the library at https://library.yu.edu/ask_the_library.

The Beren Writing Center at Stern

The Beren Campus Writing Center (located in 714 in Lex 215) offers free, confidential tutoring that can support your writing for this course. Find out more and make an appointment [here](https://www.yu.edu/writing-centers/beren) (<https://www.yu.edu/writing-centers/beren>). I highly recommend booking well in advance.

Out of Class Assistance

I am happy to meet with you to discuss your progress in the course and address any individual questions/concerns you might have. You are always welcome to email me to set up an

appointment.

Schedule of Classes

This schedule is a "living" document that will be modified as schedule needs dictate throughout the semester. All readings and due dates will be available on Canvas and any alterations will be posted and announced in class.

Dates	Course Materials
Week 1 Tuesday 1/25 & Thursday 1/27	Course Introduction - Authorship, Organization, Genre - "A Handbook for Jewish Emotions" - Psalms: 1, 33, 21, 150
Week 2 Tuesday 2/1 & Thursday 2/3	Gratitude and Praise - Tehilim in the Temple Era - Psalms: 28, 29, 30, 75, 113 – 118
Week 3 Tuesday 2/8 & Thursday 2/10	Shame, Guilt and Regret - Psalms: 4, 17, 51, 78, 86
Week 4 Tuesday 2/15 & Thursday 2/17	Discomfort and Distress - Psalms: 5, 20, 31, 77, 79, 102, 130
Week 5 Tuesday 2/22 & Thursday 2/24	Love and Longing - Psalms: 11, 37, 40, 43, 72, 123, 136, 143
Week 6 Tuesday 3/1 & Thursday 3/3	Fear and Awe... and Anger? - Psalms: 25, 45, 47, 76, 85, 90, 103, 111
Week 7 Tuesday 3/8 & Thursday 3/10	Enemies and Haters - Psalms: 3, 7, 10, 21, 44, 59, 68, 74, 109
Week 8: Tuesday 3/15 <i>No Class Purim 3/17</i>	Loneliness and Despair - Psalms: 13, 22, 38, 39, 43, 69, 73, 82, 88
Week 9: Tuesday 3/22 & Thursday 3/24	Happiness and Joy - Psalms: 14, 16, 32, 84, 100, 126, 127
Week 10 Tuesday 3/29 & Thursday 3/31	Comfort and Hope - Psalms: 68, 71, 97, 121, 126, 144, 145, 146
Week 11 Tuesday 4/5 & Thursday 4/7	Student Presentations
Week 12 Tuesday 4/12	Zoom Lecture by Robert Alter
Pesach Break 4/14 – 4/24	

Week 13 Tuesday 4/26 & Thursday 4/28	Psalms in the Medieval & Early Modern Periods - Psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
Week 14 Tuesday 5/3 <i>No Class Yom Haatzmaut 5/5</i>	Psalms in Western Literature and Culture - Psalms: 8, 18, 19, 23, 115, 135, 137
Week 15 Tuesday 5/10 & Thursday 5/12	Psalms in Politics - Psalms: 12, 46, 91, 94, 139, 147
Final	Date TBA