

# THE EMOTIONAL WORLD OF THE BAVLI

Fall 2019

Thurs 8:40-11:25 a.m., K306

Professor Sarah Wolf

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This class will explore how we should think about emotions in Late Antiquity in general and in the Babylonian Talmud in particular. To what extent should we see the Bavli as being concerned with a category of “emotion” that resembles our own sense of what that means? What happens to notions of interiority when emotions and law are put into conversation with one another? We will engage with these questions by looking at concepts including *yisurin*, *ye'ush*, *kinui*, and *boshet* in rabbinic sources, and we will read these texts through the lens of scholarship on interiority and the self in rabbinic literature, affect theory and emotions in antiquity, and emotion in law and literature.

## Objectives

In this class we will explore the portrayal of emotions in the Babylonian Talmud. Some of the questions we will ask along the way are:

- Does it even make sense to talk about emotions in Late Antiquity?
- How and when does the Bavli talk about emotions? What does the Bavli understand emotions and their significance to be?
- Does the Bavli's depiction of emotions differ from other cultures'?
- Does the Bavli's depiction of emotions differ from other works of rabbinic literature?
- Does the Bavli's depiction of emotions change depending on the genre of sugya (legal discussion, short anecdote, Biblical exegesis, lengthy narrative)?
- How does gender play into the Bavli's depiction of emotions?

## Expectations, Assignments, and Grades

You are expected to come to class having spent significant time preparing both primary sources (sugyot and other related texts) and secondary sources (scholarly book chapters and articles). I encourage you to prepare primary sources with a study partner, though this is not mandatory. You should expect to be called upon to read and translate at any point, which means being prepared to provide definitions of all words, syntax and probable punctuation for sentences, and function of phrases within the sugya (i.e. is the phrase a support, challenge, question, new idea, etc).

You should complete all readings—both primary and secondary—**by the date under which they are listed in the syllabus and bring them to class that with you that day.**

Your participation is what will make this seminar rewarding. If you must be absent because of an illness, a family obligation, a professional commitment, or an emergency, email me before class. Repeated absences will count against your grade.

There will be one midterm and one final assignment for the class.

### **Midterm assignment**

Rabbinical and graduate students: You will receive a take-home midterm in which you will write responses to two essay questions that you will choose out of three options.

For List College students who want the course to count for Talmud skills credit: You will receive a separate skills-based take-home exam *instead of* the above exam.

All other List students may choose between the two above options.

The midterm will be posted on Canvas after class on Oct. 24 and will be due before the beginning of class on **Oct. 31**.

### **Final assignment**

All students will write a final paper that offers an argument—this can be historical, literary, or theological—about an emotions-related Bavli passage in conversation with at least one scholarly source.

For List College students, this should be an approximately 10 page paper, and can respond to any Bavli passage and scholarly source from the class (or other sources of your choosing).

For RS and GS students, this should be an approximately 15 page paper, and must respond to a Bavli passage or a scholarly source we have *not* read in this class. I am happy to offer suggestions upon request.

The final paper is due **Dec 12**.

Your grades will be calculated as follows:

**Class Participation: 25%**

**Midterm: 35%**

**Final project: 40%**

*Please be advised that I may make minor changes to this syllabus during the course of the semester.*

### **Resources**

All course readings will be available on Canvas.

### **Academic Integrity**

Students in this class are expected to maintain academic integrity; academic dishonesty will not

be tolerated. JTS Student Disciplinary Procedures can be found at:

[http://my.jtsa.edu/ICS/Policies/Student\\_Disciplinary\\_Procedures.jnz](http://my.jtsa.edu/ICS/Policies/Student_Disciplinary_Procedures.jnz)

JTS students are expected to bear sole responsibility for their work, to learn the rules and definitions that underlie the practice of academic integrity and to uphold its ideals.

### **Students with Disabilities**

JTS is committed to accommodating students with disabilities. The JTS policy on disabilities may be found at: [http://my.jtsa.edu/ICS/Policies/Students\\_with\\_Disabilities.jnz](http://my.jtsa.edu/ICS/Policies/Students_with_Disabilities.jnz)

## **Course Schedule**

### **Sept 5: Introduction—What are emotions?**

### **Sept 12: How do we talk about emotions in other times, places, and cultures?**

Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”  
Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, Introduction

### **Sept 19: Are there emotions in the Bible?**

Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1  
Jacqueline E. Lapsley, “Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy”  
David Lambert, “Refreshing Theology,” *pp. 341-352 only*

### **Sept 26: Did concepts of emotion and the self change from the Mishnah to the Bavli?**

Mishnah Bava Metzia Ch 2  
Ayelet Libson, *Law and Self-Knowledge in the Talmud*, Ch 1  
Ishay Rosen-Zvi, “The Mishnaic Mental Revolution”

### **Oct 3: Did concepts of emotions change from the Mishnah to the Bavli? (cont.)**

BT Bava Metzia 21b-22a  
Chaya Halberstam, *Law and Truth in Rabbinic Literature*, Ch 2

### **Oct 10: What does it mean to legislate emotions?**

BT Pesachim 68b  
Gary Anderson, “The Expression of Joy as a Halakhic Problem in Rabbinic Sources”

### **Oct 17: How did emotions function in different religious contexts in Late Antiquity?**

BT Arakhin 16b-17a  
Sarah Wolf, “Suffering and Sacrifice: The Hermeneutics of *Yisurin* in the Babylonian Talmud”  
Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*, Ch 4

**Oct 24: How did other Late Antique cultures talk about emotions?**

m. Bava Kamma 8:6

Jonathan A. Pomeranz, “The Rabbinic and Roman Laws of Personal Injury,” 303-321

Robert Kaster, “The Shame of the Romans”

**Oct 31: How do depictions of emotions differ across genres in the Bavli?**

BT Bava Kamma 86b-87a

Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity*, Ch 5

**Nov 7: How do depictions of emotions differ across genres in the Bavli? (cont.)**

BT Horayot 13b-14a

Jeffrey Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, Ch 4

**Nov 14: How is emotion in the Bavli gendered?**

BT Bava Batra 9a-9b

Charlotte Fonrobert, “When the Rabbi Weeps: On Reading Gender in Talmudic Aggadah”

Lynn Kaye, “Protesting Women: A Literary Analysis of Bavli Adjudicatory Narratives”

**Nov 21: How is emotion in the Bavli gendered? (cont.)**

Numbers 5:11-31

BT Sotah 2a-3a

Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual*, Ch 8

**Nov 28: Thanksgiving – no class**

**Dec 5: God’s feelings in the Bavli**

BT Berachot 7a

David Stern, “*Imitatio Hominis*: Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature”