



Herzog Global Course Syllabus

Teaching Shemot: The Birth of the Jewish Nation (Shemot Chapters 1-15)

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COURSE GOALS

- 1) To help teachers explore the fundamental themes of the seminal story of slavery and Exodus from Egypt.
- 2) To offer teachers intertextual skills and help them develop a broader view of the story of the Exodus and how it fits within the Tanakh.
- 3) To examine some rabbinic and medieval exegetical texts and illustrate how best to use these texts in a useful and compelling manner in the classroom.
- 4) To offer teachers a deeper understanding of Ancient Egypt as a realistic and meaningful background for the Tanakh stories and themes.
- 5) To consider the goals of Tanakh study and offer tools for making the study of Tanakh narratives come alive in a high school classroom.
- 6) To explore various pedagogical methods and goals, with an eye toward developing practical strategies and conceptual approaches for classroom teaching.

COURSE OUTLINE

Unit 1: The Book of Names and Namelessness: An Inexorable Slide from Slavery to Genocide (Shemot 1)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will explore what happens when the children of Israel transition from their role as a family in the land of Canaan to a nation in the land of Egypt. More specifically, we will examine how Israel loses its names in Egypt (ironically, in Shemot, the book of Names) and the evil committed in a society that lacks names. As part of this examination, we will look at a later biblical period – that of the first settlement in the land (Sefer Shoftim) - and examine its concluding stories, which describe a society made up of nameless people.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will focus on forging linguistic comparisons between different biblical books: how to do so and to what end.



Unit 2: Midwives and the Role of the Women (Shemot 1)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will explore the redemptive role of the midwives in the story of Egypt. We will examine their identities and their place in society, and especially their adamant refusal to obey the king's deadly decree. What enables these women to defy the powerful Pharaoh? What is the role of women in this story and do other Tanakh stories situate women in a similar courageous posture? In this unit, we will also examine the midrashim that address the role of the women in the story of Shemot.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will discuss using Midrashim and Medieval exegesis in the classroom.

Unit 3: Birth Stories: A Type Scene (Shemot 2)

Synchronous Zoom Lesson

This unit will analyze how Moshe's birth story differs from other birth stories in Tanakh (and in ancient literature). We will analyze the structure of the birth story and its cast of characters to understand how the story of Moshe's birth prepares us for his successful leadership.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will address the value and drawbacks of using Ancient Near Eastern Texts in a Torah classroom.

Unit 4: Moshe: The Making of a Leader (Shemot 2)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will explore the events that take place as he emerges from the palace into adulthood. We will use literary methods to determine the nature of this opening presentation of Moshe's character in a bid to understand why God chooses Moshe for the daunting upcoming mission. We will also consider the role of Moshe's in-laws in this and later stories and examine the linguistic parallels between this initial encounter and the dramatic encounter between Moshe and Yitro in Shemot 18.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will focus upon using literary tools in the classroom: How to discern and use structure, analyze leading words, and read the text closely.



Unit 5: The Burning Bush: Moshe's Encounter with God (Shemot 3)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will view Moshe's initial encounter with God as a paradigm for understanding the nature of the human-divine encounter. We will draw parallels between the story of Moshe at the burning bush and the face-to-face meeting between Israel and God on Har Sinai. Finally, we will note how these lessons inform the daily God-Israel encounter in the Mishkan. This lesson will draw together the three major sections of the book of Shemot (Egypt, Sinai and Mishkan), offering a broader understanding of the book as a whole.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will offer a close reading of the chapter. We will also broaden the lens and examine how seeing a story within its broader context can offer sharper and deeper meaning to the text.

Unit 6: Five Consecutive Refusals: Signs and Serpents (Shemot 3-4)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will explore Moshe's multiple attempts to deflect the mission with which God tasks him. After making sense of the structure that shapes his five refusals, we will examine the ominous signs that God offers Moshe, in a bid to understand their deeper significance and their messages about Egypt, God and Israel.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will illustrate the usefulness of discerning a structure and its meaning in a complex, lengthy, and seemingly repetitive narrative.

Unit 7: Pharaohs and Slavery in Ancient Egypt (Shemot 5)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will explore the societal attitudes and cultural norms of ancient Egypt, especially as it relates to slavery and its depiction in Shemot 5. We will look back at Shemot 1 for clues to identify the particular period in which our story takes place and how that may impact our understanding of the Shemot story. Finally, we will look ahead to the numerous references back to Egypt later in the Torah, where Israel's society is shaped by its opposition to the moral bankruptcy that they experienced firsthand as slaves in Egypt.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will discuss archeology of Ancient Egypt; its usefulness for the biblical stories and what remains unresolved.



Unit 8: Introducing God's Name and the Restoration of Israel's Names (Shemot 6)

Asynchronous Unit

We will examine the introduction of God's name to His people in Shemot 6, including the literary structure of that introduction and the way that it fits into the broader schemes of the narrative. In particular, we will pay attention to the contrast that is drawn between the nameless people and their nameless Pharaoh as opposed to God, whose (new?) name attracts so much attention in the narrative. We will return to some of the themes presented in Units 1 and 7 to search for the ultimate goal: emerging from the condition of slavery to build a new sort of society.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will return our focus to using literary tools in the classroom: How to discern and use structure, analyze leading words, and read the text closely.

Unit 9: The Purpose of Ten Plagues (Shemot 6-7)

Asynchronous Unit

In this unit, we will examine the basic question as to the purpose of the plagues. The assumption of this unit is that God could have removed Israel from Egypt with one blow; therefore, the narrative's repetitious and detailed weave must be designed to offer a more profound purpose than simple extrication of the Israelites from slavery. In this unit we will examine the text of Shemot, midrashim and medieval exegesis to answer this question. We will also examine the Plague story within its broader context, to understand how it moves Israel forward in its quest to build an ideal society.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will return our discussion to using Midrashim and medieval exegesis in the classroom. We will also discuss how to study passages using intertextual methods.

Unit 10: Structure and Meaning in the Plague Narrative (Shemot 7-10)

Synchronous Zoom Lesson

This unit will examine the literary weave of the lengthy plague narrative, with an eye toward understanding its aims and messages. We will consider several different divisions for the ten plagues, in a bid to mine the narrative for its deeper objectives. We will conclude this study with a bid to understand the famous division of R. Yehuda (*detzkh, adash, beachav*), whose irregular numerical division of 10 into 3 units of 3 plus 1 necessitates a compelling explanation.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will examine the value of finding patterns in biblical stories, especially lengthy stories that seem to contain a great deal of repetitions.

Unit 11: Leaving Egypt: The House, the Blood and the Meal (Shemot 12)

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will explore Shemot 12 and the dramatic moments that precipitate Israel's Exodus from Egypt. We will examine the significance of the commandments that God gives the people on the evening of the Exodus and how we continue to commemorate those events today. We will consider the importance of the "House" in Shemot 12 (and in the Jacob story) and how the importance of the House weaves into the story of the Jewish people. Finally, we will note how difficult it is to leave Egypt and how that difficulty impedes and informs Israel's future.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will focus upon literary tools and intertextual connections with other stories.

Unit 12: The Splitting of the Sea and Shirat Hayam: Israel's National Anthem

Asynchronous Unit

This unit will examine the seminal Song of the Sea, sung by Israel following the miraculous events of the splitting of the Reed Sea. We will consider the structural divisions of the song and reflect upon how the form of the song and its poetic techniques shape and convey its meaning. We will then note the echoes of this song throughout Tanakh and its important place in Jewish liturgy. Finally we will discuss the idea of expressing one's gratitude to God and its place in later biblical conceptions of redemption.

Methodological/Pedagogical Goals of this Unit: This unit will discuss biblical poetry; its unique challenges and literary techniques. We will focus on dividing the poem into stanzas, discerning its leading words and showing how poetic techniques reflect the poem's meaning.

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