SYLLABUS: Homiletics

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Nachshon Siritsky, MAHL, MSSW, RSW, BCC, PP

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About your instructor

Rabbi Nachshon uses he/him and they/them pronouns. Rabbi Nachshon has extensive experience as a rabbi, chaplain and social worker. Ordained in 2002 from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, they spent several years living in Jerusalem and studying at Pardes, as well as other Orthodox yeshivas. A member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and a mentor to newly ordained rabbis, with a background in theatre and many years of experience teaching at the university level, including social work and counseling, as well as twenty years of serving congregations- large, small and virtual, Rabbi Nachshon integrates lived experience and pastoral insight with their approach to teaching homiletics, and believes that every student needs to try everything as they find their rabbinic voice and hone their homiletic skills to best serve their evolving rabbinate.

Overview

The purpose of this course is to build foundational homiletical practices into your life as a darshan (preacher) and maggid (storyteller). The course also has relevance for students who may not be preaching pulpits, the majority of PRS students, but will use public speaking skills regularly in their life and work. This course will not focus on the theories of analyzing text or theology of preaching. Instead, this will give you the practical skills needed to begin preaching effective sermons and other speeches today.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- To articulate multiple theoretical approaches to homiletics
- To define the traditional Jewish approaches to what is now called “homiletics”
- To name some of the great Jewish preachers
- To identify different hermeneutic techniques used in sermons
- To identify different sermon styles for different contexts
- To understand the basic techniques for delivering a sermon
- To deliver the same sermon in more than one manner
- To articulate their own theology of preaching and how it connects to their rabbinate

Readings and Texts

Saperstein, M. (2008). Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800 - 2001. London: Liverpool University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvhn0844
(book is strongly recommended but not required)

More Sermon Material:
Dr. Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949):
https://soundcloud.com/user-477765711/sets/stephen-s-wise-collection)

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman (1918-2008):
https://fa.americanjewisharchives.org/friedman/inventory/?series=e

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum (1925-1992):
https://fa.americanjewisharchives.org/tanenbaum/inventory/?series=a

Rabbi Moses J. Gries (1868-1918):
http://catalog.americanjewisharchives.org/Presto/content/Detail.aspx?ctID=ZWY4ZGQ5NDctMTExMS00YmI4LWFkODEtOTJhMzk4ZmFlMjQ4&qcf=&ph=VHJ1ZQ==&rID=NTA=

Rabbi Ferdinand M. Isserman (1898-1972):
http://catalog.americanjewisharchives.org/Presto/content/Detail.aspx?ctID=ZWY4ZGQ5NDctMTExMS00YmI4LWFkODEtOTJhMzk4ZmFlMjQ4&qcf=&ph=VHJ1ZQ==&rID=NzI=

Rabbi Alvan D. Rubin (1920-2006):
http://catalog.americanjewisharchives.org/Presto/content/Detail.aspx?ctID=ZWY4ZGQ5NDctMTExMS00YmI4LWFkODEtOTJhMzk4ZmFlMjQ4&qcf=&ph=VHJ1ZQ==&rID=ODg5

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise: What Has Judaism to Say on Poverty, Racial Hatred, International War? 1934 April 15:
http://catalog.americanjewisharchives.org/Presto/content/Detail.aspx?ctID=YzJmOGMzMDMtNjZjYS00YjU4LThhMjEtMmEwNDBjODE5NTNm&rID=MjMzMQ==&qrs=RmFsc2U=&q=d2lzZSB0cmFuc2NyaXB0&ph=VHJ1ZQ==&bckToL=VHJ1ZQ==&rrtc=VHJ1ZQ==

Rabbi Angela Buchdahl (2018) “Can we still sing Carlebach?”:
https://youtu.be/m9XO0Gv8pO8

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks’ Speech at The Becket Fund’s 19th Annual Canterbury Medal Dinner
http://s3.amazonaws.com/becketpdf/Rabbi-Sacks-Speech-Transcript.pdf
and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocXAqbVy9o8

Rabbi Shalom Paltiel (2020) Yom Kippur Sermon: Finding G-d on Zoom:
https://fb.watch/5LPPlUtnzD/

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968) “I’ve been to the mountaintop”
https://youtu.be/DKWCxKq0i1k

Joel Osteen (2019) Miracles in your mouth
https://youtu.be/RR57tZSNwgo

Resources for writing your own sermons

Stan Reid (2017) An Overview of the Four Pages of the Sermon
https://austingrad.edu/2017_SeMiNaR/4_5_Overview%20of%20Four%20Pages_Reid.pdf

The three-point sermon
https://www.sermon-preparation-tips.com/how-to-write-a-3-point-sermon/

Me-We-God-God-You-We Sermons
https://assistcx.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MeWeGodYouWe.pdf
Introduction-Explanation-Application
https://seniorpastorcentral.com/4234/introduction-explanation-application-effective-way-write-sermons/

Jewish Hermeneutics
https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hermeneutics

Robert O'Lynn: Developing a transformative theology for preaching
https://ul.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A31551/attachment/ATT-0/

Course Outline

Session #1
Introduction to the class
Introduction to the weekly drash-reflection exercises
Overview of different sermon styles
Overview of traditional Jewish hermeneutics
Overview of traditional approaches to preaching: Maggid/Darshan/D'var Torah

Session #2
Non-Jewish approaches to sermons
Techniques and frameworks
Different manners/methods

Session #3
Presentations on Rabbi Saperstein's books and great Jewish sermons

Session #4
Identifying the burning platform within a sermon/within one's self
How to translate the fire into words that can be heard

Session #5
Developing one's own theology to preaching

Session #6-9
Sermon Clinic- students will take turns giving sermons and providing feedback to one another. Each student will be required to give the same sermon in two different manners (a traditional sermon and another method of their choosing).

Assignments and Assessments

Note: All assignments are mandatory and attendance is required. Any student who has to miss a class will have to complete an assignment to make up for what they missed, and more than two classes missed will result in an incomplete. Furthermore, students who do not complete an assignment will not pass the course.

1. **Drash Reflection Paper (**40 points; 5 points each) – due every class

Each class (except the first), every student must submit a drash-reflection paper. This is NOT a sermon but prepares the student for the components of work necessary to prepare for a sermon. It will be a 3 page paper that will include the following: 1. A one-page drash on the Torah portion of the week using at least one traditional rabbinic source, 2. A one-page reflection paper on why this part of the Torah portion was selected by the student (specific references to one's personal story and personal dynamics, as well as reflections on current/external dynamics, along with a reflection on why other parts of the parsha were not selected), 3. A one-page reflection on the deeper pastoral issues that this drash may address or evoke for congregants (what are the psychological and spiritual issues that a congregant might be facing… do you have anyone in particular in mind/who needs to hear this and why?). 4. A one page refection on the reactions of the following "ploni" congregants or listeners: A) Hannah: elderly Holocaust survivor whose husband died and whose children are estranged. B) Kris: university student from an interfaith family who is just beginning to explore their Jewish identity. C) Joe: first time in shul since Bar Mitzvah, is dating someone who wanted to stop off for Yahrzeit before going out for dinner. D) Doug: Recently retired and just received a diagnosis… searching for meaning and comfort in a scary world. 5. A one sentence summary of what you want your listeners to remember/do differently as a result (when they get home and tell their neighbor about the amazing sermon they heard, what will they say?). 6. A title for your drash.

2. **Sermon delivery** (5 points)- due session 3

Each student will also practice delivering a sermon of their choosing from Rabbi Saperstein's book or amongst the "More Sermon Material" of the syllabus. Students can choose to read verbatim the sermon written by someone else, or to try to paraphrase it as best they can, staying as true as possible to the author's initial style. If the sermon is very long, the student is to select a section that is **not more than 5 minutes long).**

3. **Outline of a sermon from Rabbi Saperstein's book** (5 points)- due session 4

Each student will provide a reflection about one of the sermons in Rabbi Saperstein's book, (this can be the same as above or different) and discuss how this sermon impacts their own personal theology and perception of themselves as a rabbi. WHAT are the current issues that are your personal "burning platform". This is a presentation (about 5-7 minutes), not a written paper.

If the student does not have access to Rabbi Saperstein's book, they must do the same exercise with a sermon that they find online, that would be deemed to have "historic" value, and they must add a reflection as to why they consider it to have historic value.

4. **Developing one's own theology of preaching** (10 points)- presentation due session 5 (5 points) and written paper due session 9 (2-3 pages/5 points)

Each student will prepare a 5 minute presentation on their theology of preaching, and how it connects with their evolving understanding of their rabbinate. This will be due on the 5th session, and a written paper will be due on the last day of class. The written paper must include a reflection on how one's theology has evolved over the course of the class.

5. **Sermon Delivery (2 sermons, 20 points each)**

Each student will have the opportunity to deliver a sermon on a topic of their choosing. They will need to present it in two different manners. The first is required to be in "traditional" sermon style, using some of the techniques learned in the class, and delivering the sermon from a written document. The second sermon style is their own choice, and should be reflective of their respective visions for their rabbinate- for example, it could be in song, it could be a discussion, it could be using Zoom technology, it could be in any format that the student wishes… however, the sermon's underlying message must remain the same. Students will also be expected to provide constructive feedback to each other, in order to ensure learning and growth.

Given the large class, to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, and to ensure that we practice concise speaking: each sermon must be maximum 8-10 minutes total. Both sermons will be given back to back. 20 minutes each student for BOTH sermons. 3 people per class/sessions 6-9.