

EMMANUEL LEVINAS MINI-COURSE: DOES THE WORLD NEED JUDAISM?

Detailed Syllabus

Session 1 - February 14 , 1P (Beth El Library)

Introduction to Levinas – life and thought.

Background Information:

- Emmanuel Levinas Biography
 - Origins
 - Education
 - Early Career
 - Meeting with Shoushani
 - Lectures Talmudiques
 - Later Career
 - Posthumous Fame
- Jewish Intellectuals in 20th century France
- Levinas: Athens and Jerusalem

Handouts:

Selected Events in Levinas' Biography
Jewish Intellectuals in 20th century France
Psalm 1/Pindar-Nemean 8/Celan-Psalm

Optional Readings:

E. Levinas, Discovering Existence with Husserl
E. Levinas, Totality and Infinity
E. Levinas, Otherwise than Being
E. Levinas, Nine Talmudic Readings
E. Levinas, Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism
J. Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" in J. Derrida, Writing and
Difference
J. Derrida, Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas
R. Alter, The Book of Psalms
A. P. Burnett, Pindar's Songs for Young Athletes of Aigina
M. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness

Selected Events in Levinas' Biography

- Born 1906 in Kaunas, Lithuania
- Traditional Early Education in Jewish texts (“I learned the square letters before the Roman ones”)
- University education in Strassburg and Freiburg beginning in 1924, studying with E. Husserl and then M. Heidegger. Meets lifelong friends M. Blanchot and C. Blondel
- Publishes thesis on Husserl in 1930
- Marries Raïssa Levi
- After graduation works as High School teacher, translates Husserl and Heidegger into French
- Naturalized French citizen 1939
- French Army Officer in 1939 (German and Russian translator). Prisoner of War from 1940 – 1945, forced labor. Wife and daughter are hidden and protected by Blanchot in a monastery. The rest of his family are murdered.
- Director of Jewish School in Paris, 1947
- Loss of second daughter, birth of son, 1946-1949
- Encounters with Chouchani, 1949 -
- Increased activity in Jewish intellectual circles, 1950 –
- Publishes Totality and Infinity (Docteur ès Lettres) 1961
- Appointed Professor in Poitiers (1961), Paris-Nanterre (1967), Paris-Sorbonne (1973)
- Four Talmudic Readings published 1968
- Multiple publications and increasing fame 1975-1995
- Raïssa Levinas dies 1994
- Emmanuel Levinas dies 1995

Some Leading Jewish Intellectuals in 20th Century France

R. Aron (journalism)
E. Benveniste (linguistics)
H. Bergson (philosophy)
M. Bloch (history)
C. Cohen-Tannoudji (physics)
J. Derrida (philosophy)
E. Durkheim (sociology)
A. Finkielkraut (politics)
F. Jacob (medicine)
C. Levi-Strauss (anthropology)
A. Maurois (writer)
M. Mauss (sociology)
D. Milhaud (composer)
P. Monteux (conductor)
P. Nora (publisher)
M. Ophuls (film director)
M. Proust (literature)
P. Vidal-Nacquet (classics)
A. Weil (math)
S. Weil (philosophy)

Honorable Mention:

L. Blum (PM)
D. Cohn-Bendit (activist)
S. Gainsbourg (singer)
P. Mendès-France (PM)

PSALMS

BOOK ONE

ספר ראשון

1 Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent;
²rather, the teaching of the LORD is his delight, and he studies^a that teaching day and night.
³He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever ^bit produces thrives.^{-b}

⁴Not so the wicked; rather, they are like chaff that wind blows away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not survive judgment, nor will sinners, in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶For the LORD cherishes the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed.

2 Why do nations assemble, and peoples plot^a vain things;
²kings of the earth take their stand, and regents intrigue together against the LORD and against His anointed?
³"Let us break the cords of their yoke, shake off their ropes from us!"

^a Or "recites"; lit. "utters."
^{b-b} Or "he does prospers."
^a Lit. "utter."

א *אשרי האיש אשר | לא הלך
 בעצת רשעים
 ובדרך חטאים לא עמד
 ובמושב לצים לא ישב:
²כי אם בתורת יהוה חפצו
 ובתורתו יהגה יומם ולילה:
³ויהיה כעץ שתול על-פלגי מים
 אשר פרו | יתן בעתו
 ועלהו לא יבול
 וכל אשר-יעשה יצליח:

⁴לא-כן הרשעים
 כי אם-כפמץ אשר-תדפנו רוח:
⁵על-כן | לא-יקמו רשעים
 במשפט
 וחטאים בעדת צדיקים:
⁶כי-יודע יהוה דרך צדיקים
 ודרך רשעים תאבד:

ב למה רגשו גוים
 ולאמים יהגור-ריק:
²יתיצבו | מלכי-ארץ
 ורוזנים נוסדו-יחד
 על-יהוה ועל-משיחו:
³ונתקה את-מוסרותימו
 ונשליכה ממנו עבתימו:

v. 1. בכתב היד שלנו כל פרק בספר בצורת שירה

Pindar - Nemean 8

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n envy.

Turn 1

Herald of Aphrodite's awakening,
Youth, season of desire, enthroned
in the glances of maidens and boys—
there are those who feel
your force in gentleness
and those whom you move
another way.

In all I do
I would wish
to observe decorum,
and meet

with the better love,

(1-5)

Counterturn 1

such love as hovered over the bed
of Zeus and Aigina, tending
the gifts of Aphrodite:
and there came to flower
a son, the King of Oinona,
supreme in might
and counsels.

Many a time
men prayed to behold him,
heroes of the lands
who hastened in peace,

eager to observe his decisions—

Stand 1

both those who ranged their hosts
in rocky Athens and the Pelopid
marshals of Sparta.

A suppliant of Aiakos
on behalf of his city and his people here,
I touch his sacred knees, bringing
a crown of Lydian fabric, intertwined
with whistling strains of the flute,

to adorn

Deinis and his father Megas, winners
in the double race at Nemea.

The happiness
sown by a god's hand endures the longer—

(11-17)

Turn 2

Kinyras felt it once and flourished
with wealth in Kypros of the sea.
I stand on light feet now,
catching breath before I speak.
For there are songs in every style,
but to put a new one to the touchstone
for testing is all danger.

Words are a morsel
to the envious,
and their envy always
fastens on the noble,
but leaves the base alone.

(18-22)

Counterturn 2

It bit into the son of Telamon
and doubled him onto his sword—
a man, surely, with no glib tongue
but proud of heart, now lies crushed
in darkness, under bitter strife.
For they gave the best prize
to the glistening lie:
the Danaans with secret votes
favored Odysseus, and Aias,
stripped of the golden arms,
rolled
thrashing in his own blood.

(23-27)

Stand 2

Surely they were different wounds
that they tore in the warm flesh
of their foes and then pulled back for shelter
in the shadow of his spear—
around Achilles' body
and on other days when the fighting
raged.
Yes, hateful slander existed
long ago, partner of flattering tales,
hatcher of schemes, doer of evil, reproach
that overwhelms the brilliant
and lifts into view
the spurious glory of the obscure.

(28-34)

Turn 3

May I never have such a character, father Zeus!

May I tread the simple paths of life,
leaving behind in death
no infamy to taint my children.

Some men pray for gold,
others for limitless land,
but I would wish

to lay my limbs in earth
beloved by my fellow citizens,
because I praised the praiseworthy
and scattered blame

on those who deserved it.

(35-39)

Counterturn 3

Like a tree fed by fresh dews,
virtue soars into the air,
raised among the good and the just
toward the shimmering ether.

From those we love
we know a thousand favors
valued most in times of trouble.

But in joy too

we feel the need of something
to rely on.

O Megas,

to bring your soul back to life again

(40-44)

Stand 3

is not open to me:

empty hopes

fatten on emptiness.

But I hasten to raise

this stone of the Muses for Aigina
and the Chariadai, honoring your speed
and your son's, victorious twice.

And I rejoice in having cast

a boast to befit what I have done.

Once a man charmed the pain out of toil
with incantations.

and the song of praise

also existed long ago, even before
Adrastos and the Kadmeians came to blows.

(45-51)

P S A L M

No one kneads us again out of earth and clay,
no one incants our dust.
No one.

Blessèd art thou, No One.
In thy sight would
we bloom.
In thy
spite.

A Nothing
we were, are now, and ever
shall be, blooming:
the Nothing-, the
No-One's-Rose.

With
our pistil soul-bright.
our stamen heaven-waste,
our corona red
from the purpleword we sang
over, O over
the thorn.

P. Celan