



## Religious School Overview

5781 (2020-2021)

*Congregation Beth David's Religious School is committed to experiential education, instilling students with a strong and joyful Jewish identity. We serve children and their families from Pre-K through 7th grade with a teen program for older students.*

### **Our Mission: To Pass On Our Rich Inheritance**

*Morasha Kehilat Yaacov:* It is recorded in the Talmud (Sukkah 42a) that as soon as a child learns to speak we must teach them Torah and the Shema. The text asks what does Torah mean in this context and Rav Hamnuna answers that Torah means this specific verse: "Moses commanded us Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4). This is codified in *Shulchan Arukh*, (Yoreh De'ah 245:5), the major 16<sup>th</sup> century law code, as the first verse a parent is to teach their child once they begin to speak.

From this beginning we come to our end goal: graduates of our religious school should understand that the Torah, broadly understood to mean the collective wisdom of our people, is their inheritance. The Torah belongs to them. An inheritance is something that is valuable that the inheritor is worthy to acquire. We must demonstrate that Torah is valuable, meaningful and relevant to the lives of our students and they in turn must feel that they have the skills necessary to use the Torah to bring meaning, purpose, and joy into their lives. This is a double act of faith, we have faith that the Torah is valuable to our students and we have faith that our students will take ownership of the Torah and by adding their unique voice, enrich it.

Congregation Beth David's Religious School is committed to experiential education. When the Israelites received the Torah, they responded *na'aseh v'nishma* "we will do and we will understand" (Exodus 24:7). Understanding comes only through doing. In Proverbs we are told to "train a child according to their way and in old age they shall not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Our learning must be lived, using project based learning that create learning outcomes that are relevant to the students' lived experiences and integrated whenever possible to what they are learning in their secular schools. Successful learning takes place when we put the students and the subject matter into a relationship, taking both equally seriously.

**By the time they graduate, our students will be able to articulate how the Torah and the Jewish Tradition as a whole is their inheritance. They will be able to reflect on how the stories and values contained within it are relevant to them, enriching their lives with joy, meaning, and purpose. They will have integrated Jewish teachings and values into their identity and acquired the motivation and skills necessary to continue their journeys as lifelong Jewish learners.**

## **Our Foundations: *Al Shlosha D'varim***

Shimon the Righteous, the first of the sages to speak in Pirkei Avot, Wisdom of Our Ancestors teaches us that the world stands on three things: Torah, Avodah (prayer), and G'millut Hasadim (acts of Loving kindness) (Pirkei Avot 1:2). These three principles can also be seen as the foundations of Jewish life. By focusing on these three values, our students will connect deeply with our sacred texts (Torah), understand they are part of a larger spiritual community with sacred practices and rituals (Avodah), and will be inspired to learn and live our values (G'millut Hasadim).

By returning again and again to these three foundational concepts we create a spiral curriculum where every year students will have the opportunity to take what they have learned previously and develop it in ever more complex ways as they enter new stages of intellectual and social development. As our sage Ben Bag Bag said, "turn it and turn it again, for all is in it." (Pirkei Avot 5:22)

### **Torah**

Although this can be narrowly defined as the five books of Moses, Torah can more broadly be understood to include not only the rest of the Tanakh/Hebrew Bible (Neviim/Prophets and Ketuvim/Writings), and the oral law/rabbinic writings that make up our sacred cannon. Torah is the ongoing dialogue between these texts and every generation of Jewish people who have inherited it and then added their voice to it and passed it on.

**Our goal is to give our students the tools to become Torah literate Jews. They will acquire familiarity with the various types of Jewish sacred literature, develop the skills necessary to study it, reflect on the ways it is personally relevant to their lives, and build the confidence to add their voice as the most recent link in our chain.**

Students will:

- Develop an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual engagement with Torah.
- Acquire the skills necessary to begin to study Torah independently.
- Be able to identify the major types of Jewish Sacred literature and place them in their historical context
  - o Written (Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim) and
  - o Oral Torah (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Codes, Responsa)
- Explain and differentiate P'shat and Drash as modes of interpreting Torah.
- Be able to navigate a physical Chumash and Tanakh, finding any verse asked for.
- Acquire familiarity with classic and modern commentators, learning how to use books such as a Mikraot G'dolot as well online tools like Sefaria to find commentaries on specific verses.
- When asked, students can name favorite story(ies)/ person(people) from Torah and explain how they are relevant to their lives.

Performance Tasks: Bibliodrama/Storahtelling, Torn paper midrash, Torah debates, B'nei Mitzvah D'var Torah.

## Avodah

Avodah is worship/service of God. Also called by the rabbis the service of the heart. Avodah is the work that we do to forge connections between ourselves and God, our deepest selves, our community, and other Jews around the world and through time. By engaging in the work of avodah we can enrich our lives with beauty, meaning and insight.

**Our goal is to help our students create a personal prayer life. They will develop familiarity with the traditional Jewish liturgy, able to confidently sing and read the prayers in Hebrew, as well as reflect on the meaning of the prayers and how they relate to them. Students will feel at home and comfortable in synagogue. Students will be empowered to create and express their own prayers. Students will become familiar with the cycle of the Jewish year and its holy days as well as the lifecycle events that celebrate key moments in a Jewish life.**

Students will:

- Develop an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual engagement with prayer.
- Become prayer literate through multiple modalities (music, discussions, movement, art, and mindfulness).
- Experience the joy of communal prayer and the value of personal prayer.
- Identify the main furnishings of a synagogue and what they symbolize (Ark, bimah, ner tamid)
- Identify and properly wear Jewish ritual garments (kippa, tallit, tefilin), understand their meaning and how they can enhance prayer.
- Differentiate between keva and kavvanah, articulating the importance of each.
- Understand the overall structure of Jewish Prayer Services. Being able to navigate a siddur during a service.
- Serve as shlichie tzibbur.
- Reflect on different reasons people pray and formulate why prayer is personally meaningful to them.
- Identify in order the major Jewish holy days, explain their significance and identify key rituals of each.
  
- For each individual prayer taught, students will:
  - Be familiar with musical versions of the prayer.
  - Be able to fluently recite and/or chant the prayer.
  - Know the theme and key concepts in the prayer including background/where the prayer comes from.
  - Understand a few key Hebrew words in the prayer to help them uncover meaning.
  - Identify Jewish values associated with the prayer.

- Be able to engage in the proper movements/choreography associated with the prayer.
- Feel a personal connection to the prayer. Reflecting on how this prayer affects them.

Performance Tasks: Demonstrate prayer fluency at junior congregation, as well as in the main service, write and share personal kavvanot for prayers, create personal siddur with reflections, write their own personal prayers, serve as prayer leader at b'nei mitzvah.

A Note on Hebrew: The primary goal of Hebrew language instruction will be for our students to acquire the ability to fluently decode the Hebrew of the Siddur and their Torah and Haftarah portions. Secondary goals include students learning to recognize key Hebrew roots found in the liturgy, as well as common prefixes and suffixes to help understand the themes of specific prayers. In addition key Hebrew vocabulary will be used in all class settings (talmidim instead of students, sefarim instead of books, etc...), and core Jewish concepts will be taught. Students will learn the story of Modern Hebrew and understand that it is the language of the State of Israel and is an important value.

## Gimilut Hasadim

This specifically means acts of lovingkindness, but we expand this final pillar to include more broadly all Jewish values, *middot* (character traits), and *mitzvot bein adam l'chavero* (obligations we have to each other). It is not enough for us to learn our texts and develop a communal and personal prayer life within the walls of our synagogue and our homes. We are obligated to go out into our broken world and do our part to make it a better and holier place. Students will be introduced to the modern state of Israel as a place where Jewish values are expressed in the public sphere as well as the values of Zionism and love of Israel.

**Our goal is to ensure that our students become mensches. A MENSCH is someone who feels empowered to Make a difference; has Empathy for others; has Nice words and actions; Shares and collaborates; has the Courage to do the right thing; and Helps others in need. Our students will see that their actions have an impact on their family and friends, and their community, and will see the need to take personal responsibility to make the world a better place.**

Students will:

- Articulate key Jewish values, explaining how they are both particularly Jewish and universally human.
- Uncover Jewish values from Torah texts.

- Show how our prayers and holiday celebrations can help encourage positive values.
- Reflect on how their actions have an impact on the world around them and how the work of developing positive *middot* (character traits) can help improve their family, their peer group, their community and the larger world.
- Be able to see problems in the world at the local, national, and global levels. Identify the Jewish values that demand that action be taken to address those problems and feel empowered to work fix them.

Performance Tasks: Mitzvah Day, Bnei Mitzvah project, collect and distribute tzedakah to various charities they research.

### **Themes of each year**

- Pre-Gan/Gan: The Journey of the Jewish Year
- Aleph: The Journey into the Jewish Story
- Bet: Mitzvot u'Middot: Responsibility and Values as Guideposts on the Journey
- Gimmel: Holidays and Values (Etgar Yesodi)
- Dalet: Jewish Lifecycle/ My Personal Jewish Journey
- Hey: History and Community: Jewish Journeys in Time and Space
- Vav: My Jewish Journey: My Torah, My Avodah, and My Gemilut Hasadim (with Moving Traditions)
- Zayin: Hineini Here I Am, The Journey to Jewish Adulthood (with Moving Traditions)