



2023-2024

Beit Midrash

Family Handbook

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Welcome to Beit Midrash!

On behalf of the faculty and staff at Temple Beth-El, welcome! We are glad your family has joined us as partners in your child's Jewish Education. Together, we will continue to work as a team to ensure that all the students in our school foster lasting and meaningful relationships with one another, their teachers, and our rich religious traditions.

We are in a new world and are making every effort to meet these challenges with thought, data, and innovation. For years and years, we called ourselves Religious School, but we are now Temple Beth-El's *Beit Midrash*. Synagogue buildings are meant to act as 3 things: a *beit t'filah*, a house of prayer, a *beit k'nesset*, a house of gathering, and a *beit midrash*, a house of study.

We are more than a school, teaching classes and giving grades. We are a community of learners, working together to find what impact Judaism can have on our lives and how we can make an impact on the Jewish world. We will study what is important to our congregation, our families, and ourselves and explore these topics in a Jewish lens in our own *Beit Midrash*.

Within these pages we will outline our curricular model and highlight the important details you will need to know for the year.

We proudly feature:

- A host of classes for students to choose from for themselves, based on their own interests
- A guide and administrative support to keep with a road map on which to grow their Jewish literacy.
- 9 key-content areas (Community, Holidays, *Mitzvot* and Values, *Tanach*, God, Israel, Culture, Lifecycle, and History) that students explore in myriad ways throughout their studies.
- Formal Hebrew instruction in grades 3-6 with options for private tutoring, family tutoring, and small group classes.
- Classes for students of all interests from Minecraft to cooking to science.
- Access to the Bendiner Library and its fantastic, contemporary collection of books to check out.
- Family education opportunities for each grade level to build community.

We surely have a fabulous year ahead of us!



Ellen Barshop, Director of Congregational Learning

How Classes Work – Guided Learning

Students will design their course work from Kindergarten through Grade 7 to see how Judaism interacts with their preestablished interests. Science, theater, book clubs, art– all of these can be made Jewish.

During their 8 years in our program, students will enjoy classes in 9 key-content areas. Students working toward becoming *bar* or *bat mitzvah* will complete one to three classes from each content area throughout the course of their studies, with ample room for free choice. Our guidance chart is on page 4.

Classes are offered based on three age groups:

- Primary (Grades K-2)
- Intermediate (Grades 3-5)
- Advanced (Grades 6-7)

After you register, you will receive an email with a class selection form. Students can rank their choices for what to take that year or leave it up to us. You will be placed in classes depending on what you have completed, how many students select that option, and if it will be offered again in the coming year. So, pick what fits you! Stick with your friends or siblings, choose a subject that you love – in our *beit midrash* you design your *own* unique program.

Community – 2 courses

Classes designed to help students understand that we are part of local community and their role in the larger American and global Jewish community.

Culture – 2 courses

Classes designed to let students experience the colorful culture of Judaism.

God – 1 course

Classes designed to give students space to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings about God. Students will learn that throughout history Jews have explored their relationship with God.

History – 1 course

Classes designed to help students develop a meaningful identification with Jews past and present through studying events, people, and their own families.

Holidays – 3 courses

Classes designed to help students familiarize themselves with the rituals and traditions observed around our calendar of Jewish holidays.

Israel – 2 courses

Classes designed to help students understand the connection between the Jewish people and Israel through learning about the land, the state, and the people who live there.

Lifecycle – 2 courses

Classes designed to teach students how Jews mark passages of time and season through their lives and the Jewish moments that help define them.

Mitzvot – 3 courses

Classes designed to help students practice our ethical and ritual commandments and connect them to the values they and their families hold.

Tanakh – 2 courses

Classes designed to help students learn what is in the Tanakah (the Hebrew Bible) and the other sacred texts from which Judaism originated.

Free choice – 3 courses

Students who participate in the *beit midrash* with the goal of becoming *bat* or *bar* mitzvah will be able to complete classes in this guide with 3 courses to spare to be used as they progress when they are excited about a course or teacher and have already completed that content area.

Hebrew Program, Grades 3—6: Health and Safety

Goals and Curriculum

The goals of our Hebrew curriculum are multi-faceted; the primary emphasis is on the study of the *siddur* (prayer book). We strive to balance the need to both *kevah* (the routine) and the *kavanah* (spirituality) of prayer. To become fluent participants in a worship service, students learn to decode Hebrew text with accuracy and fluency, gain a working Hebrew vocabulary of approximately 100 words, and develop some basic knowledge of Hebrew grammar. Students also can explore the concepts expressed in Jewish liturgy as they sing and chant many prayers from the evening and morning services.

To achieve these goals, we use the Mitkadem curriculum, a Hebrew program developed by the Union for Reform Judaism. As a highly adaptable program, it allows us to individualize instruction for each student. Students can progress at their own speed allowing our teachers to interact with the students in a more personal manner.

Additionally, we offer a Transitional Specialist whose primary function is to work with students who need extra support before joining their grade level or who benefit from small group instruction. Placement with the transitional specialist is possible after meeting with a family and assessing their needs.

Education Programs for Post-B'nai Mitzvah

For students in Grades 8-12, we offer the following courses in addition to our Madrichim program and SAFTY.

Preconfirmation, Grade 8-Grade 9:

Grades 8-9 begin their Confirmation studies in our **Preconfirmation Class**. This group spends two years learning our material – one year of Jewish Culture and Comparative Religion and a second year of Reform Jewish History. The class is a seminar style of instruction. 8th grade is taught by Billy Bloomberg, Director of Youth Programming and Informal Education, and 9th grade is taught by Rabbi Yergin. Students are challenged to take more difficult and nuanced topics than in years before as they prepare for the challenge of Confirmation.

Grade 10

In our Reform tradition, Confirmation is a significant lifecycle event. This ceremony marks an academic milestone in the students' process of Jewish learning and their informed affirmation of their commitments as Jews. Our Confirmation students will have the opportunity to study primarily with Rabbi Nathan and Cantor Berlin to prepare for the Confirmation Service. The Confirmation curriculum focuses on the various ways we think about God and develop a personal understanding of what a relationship with God means.

Grades 11 and 12

Post-Confirmation students meet once a month throughout the city of San Antonio from 12:30-2:00 pm. This seminar-style series allows students to use Judaism as a relevant lens through which to see the world around them. Led by Billy Bloomberg, Director of Youth Programming and Informal Education, students will discuss issues that impact their lives and join as voices for justice in the broader Jewish community. The highlight of the year is a trip to Washington, D.C. to attend the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's L'Taken Social Justice Seminar.

Health and Safety

Students are expected to be free of fever (temperature less than 100.4° F) and free of communicable diseases in order to attend Religious School. If it becomes apparent that a child is not feeling well during school hours, every effort will be made to contact a parent/guardian. If this happens, please pick up your child as soon as possible. In order to minimize the spread of potentially contagious illnesses at Religious School please keep your child home until the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without anti-fever medication. We will keep hand sanitizer in each classroom (under strict teacher supervision) and will encourage its use after coughing, sneezing or nose-blowing.

No medication will be dispensed without the direct written permission of a parent/guardian. If a child needs prescribed medication during school hours, parents are expected to advise the Education Office and arrange to have the medication available.

If your child has a life-threatening allergy that requires the use of an epi-pen in the event of contact with the allergen, please make sure that you provide an epi-pen with clearly written instructions, in a ziploc bag, clearly marked with your child's name. The epi-pen will be kept in the Religious School office.

Class Hours

Preschool (3 & 4 year olds)	Temple Beth-El	Sunday, 9:30 am – 11:00 am <i>(optional childcare 11:00-12:00)*</i> Beginning August 27
Beit Midrash • Includes Hebrew time for Grades 3-6 (Kindergarten – Grade 7)	Temple Beth-El	Sunday, 9:30 am – 12:00 noon Beginning August 27
Pre-Confirmation (Grade 8-9)	Temple Beth-El	Wednesday, 6:30-8:30 Beginning September 6
Confirmation (Grade 10)	Temple Beth-El	Wednesday, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm Beginning September 6
Post-Confirmation (Grades 11-12)	Temple Beth-El	Sunday, 12:30-2:00 pm Beginning October 15
Wednesday Midweek Hebrew	Temple Beth-El	Wednesday, 4:30 – 6:00 pm Beginning September 6

*For families who have older children that will be picked up at noon.

Dates to Remember

Sunday, August 27th - First Day of Religious School

Wednesday, September 6th - First Day of Hebrew Classes

Sunday, November 12- Consecration ceremony (K-2 first year students)

Sunday, May 18 – Confirmation service (grade 10)

Sunday Drop Off and Pick Up

The covered entrance on the San Pedro side of our building is the entrance we use on Sundays. Our carpool line moves quickly, but we would love to have you come inside to say hello and to enjoy *t'filah* when you drop off your students.

Preschool-Grade 2

Students should be dropped off and picked up at the classroom door, or meeting place, by a parent. For pick up, a middle or high school aged sibling may pick up a primary student, if arrangements have been made with the Religious School office.

Grades 3-7

Students may be dropped off via the carpool lane or by a parent or older sibling walking them inside. Students who are picked up via the carpool lane will wait until their ride pulls up to the door, so we know that every student gets home safely.

Wednesday - Hebrew School Drop Off and Pick Up

Drop off and pick up will be at the Rosenberg Way entrance. If you need your student to be released early, come into the building, and sign them out. Sending a note or calling the Religious School office can expedite an early pick up.

Eligibility for Religious School

The purpose of the Religious School of Temple Beth-El is to provide a Jewish religious education for Jewish children. A Jewish child is defined as the child of at least one Jewish parent who is being raised as a Jew and is not formally identified with any other religion.

If a child has no Jewish parents but is being raised as a Jew by a Jewish adult, a Conversion Certificate will be issued to him/her privately at the time of his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah or Confirmation.

Synagogue membership is a prerequisite for registration in our Religious School.

In consideration of the developmental skills needed for a smooth adjustment to Religious School, **children entering Kindergarten must be age 5 by September 1st.**

Registration Fee

The annual Religious School registration fee is non-refundable and includes the costs of instruction, books, materials and supplies, special programs, and retreats.

In addition to Religious School classes and Hebrew studies, there is a separate *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* fee that is payable during the year of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, which helps to offset a portion of the extra costs of tutoring and special services.

Scholarships

We are absolutely committed to providing for the Jewish Education of all our members' children, regardless of their ability to pay. Scholarship assistance will be available to all families with demonstrated need. Those families receiving scholarship assistance can demonstrate their commitment to the program by ensuring regular attendance (at least 50% of classes).

Scholarships are available for religious school, Jewish camps experiences, and Israel programs. Participation in our Religious School program is a prerequisite for summer program scholarships.

All requests for scholarships should be submitted in writing to Ellen Barshop. The deadline for applications for Religious School is June 1st and the deadline for summer programs is February 1st.

Enrichment Programs

We proudly offer several different enrichment programs which are part of our weekly schedule. Each is designed to expand and enrich your student's experiences in Jewish learning and living. Holiday assemblies, field trips and Family Education programs and retreats round out our program.

Retreats

Jewish Education can happen almost anywhere, so we believe in bringing students out of the classroom as much as we can. Retreats help students build Jewish identity and help transform our community of peers into a community of friends. Our weekend retreat programs include time for recreation and social activities combined with prayer and the study of Judaism.

Mark your calendars as the 2nd-6th grade will be heading to Greene Family Camp the weekend of October 27th-28th 2023.

With any questions about retreats, please contact the Religious School office.

Family TzEDek Days

Each of our classes has a unique opportunity to participate in a hands-on *mitzvah* project with organizations in the community. In the spirit of *tzedek tirdof*, pursuit of justice, and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, you are invited to participate in our Family *TzEDek* Days. As families, you will meet the teachers and Ross Halfant, Temple's Social Justice Coordinator, at an assigned service site in or around San Antonio. This is in lieu of their regular Hebrew and Judaics classes at Temple.

Special Needs and/or Circumstances

Temple Beth-El is committed to meeting the individual needs of each student. If your child has a learning disability, medical condition, behavioral disability, or if there has been a special circumstance (birth, death, divorce) in your family, it may affect your student's learning experience. By informing our religious school staff or clergy of your circumstances, you will enable us to help guide your student through religious school in a manner that addresses their individual needs such that we can provide the best possible experience for the whole family.

***B'nai Mitzvah* Program**

Becoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is a significant lifecycle event, shared by a student, family, and Temple community. Traditionally, a Jewish person becomes Bar/Bat Mitzvah at age 13, but we believe that this *simchah* (joyous event) should be available to anyone age 13 or older who wishes to study Jewish tradition and Hebrew and is willing to take on the commitments of our faith.

To qualify for our *B'nai Mitzvah* program, students should complete four years of Judaic and Hebrew education, including regular attendance during Sunday and mid-week classes and

enrollment through their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* school year. In doing so, students will be able to decode Hebrew with a certain degree of proficiency.

Those who wish to become *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and who, because of extenuating circumstances, are unable to participate in the traditional Hebrew program should reach out to Ellen (210-733-9135 x105, ebarshop@beth-elsa.org) for information on how to proceed. We will work with you to ensure your student is able to reach this milestone in his or her Jewish life.

A two-part *B'nai Mitzvah Shabbaton* is scheduled for all students in Grade 6 and their parents. This is a chance for your family to meet with the clergy to understand the steps involved in our program from study to celebration, learn about our #MitzvahQuest mitzvah project system, and discuss their feelings about preparing for and embracing life as a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

Students Attending the Eleanor Kolitz Hebrew Language Academy

We are happy to welcome students who attend EKHLA to be part of our learning community at Temple as well. EKHLA students devote additional hours to Hebrew and are likely to have strong reading skills. As part of our *B'nei Mitzvah* program, they might be exempt on a case-by-case basis from attending Hebrew instruction, particularly during Grade 3. If you think your child might qualify for this exemption, please contact Ellen or the Religious School office.

Stay in Touch!

Director of Congregational Learning:

Phone:
Email:

Ellen Barshop

(210) 733-9135, ext. 105
ebarshop@beth-elsa.org

Education Administrator:

Phone:
Email:

Sara Planto

(210) 733-9135, ext. 108
sara@beth-elsa.org

- Please let us know when your child will be absent by calling the Religious School office or Sara at 210-733-9135 x108
- If you are running late for pick up, please give us a call 210-733-9135 x108. Students will be waiting for you in the Education office.
- If your child has an allergy or other condition that might require medication during Religious School, please help us by making arrangements to keep those remedies on hand. If your child carries an Epi-Pen, please send that to school in a ziploc bag along with clearly written instructions including your child's name.
- If your child is being picked up by someone other than a parent, please let us know in advance so we can make sure your child has a safe way home. Students must be picked up by a known adult; we will not send home students in cabs or rideshares without a parent present.

- Please contact us in advance if your child needs to leave school early. In these circumstances, please plan to come inside to sign your child out. A staff member will get your child from the classroom.
- We are happy to have your child bring a friend to class. Please let us know in advance so that we are sure to have precautionary forms on hand for all our guests. This helps us keep everyone safe.
- To cut down on cell phone use in the classroom, we ask that you please use our office numbers to reach your students while they are in class.
- Be on the lookout for regular, grade-level updates of school happenings from Sara. Be sure to add sara@beth-elsa.org to your list of safe senders since these updates will be your main source of information about upcoming events.

A Final Note

We want you to feel comfortable and confident about your child's Jewish education. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ellen. We want to work with you to allay your concerns and provide the best possible experience for your entire family. Thank you for entrusting us with your child's religious education. We look forward to sharing this journey with you!