

Beit Midrash Curriculum

This year begins a new level of instruction in Bible for post bar- and bat-mitzvah students. The Hebrew High Beit Midrash program is designed for BHCBE Academy and Solomon Schechter graduates seeking in-depth study of Hebrew texts. Each course will take a common theme or a single book of Tanach and explore the richness of the commentary provided by our tradition.

GOALS FOR BEIT MIDRASH

- To fluently read aloud the original Hebrew texts of our tradition
- To read aloud from a tractate of Talmud (*menukad*) and identify common Hebrew roots
- To identify problems in the text, whether grammatical, narrative, or thematic issues
- To synthesize the traditional commentaries, including Talmudic midrash, Rashi, and other sources found in the Hebrew or English *Mikraot Gedolot*
- To explore modern English commentaries and midrashim related to the characters in question
- To formulate original interpretations that tackle textual problems, both in line with and potentially in opposition to the traditional commentaries

COURSE I (2011-2012): THE SUPERHERO AND THE PRINCESS

This yearlong course will explore three fascinating characters in Tanakh: Shimshon the strongman, Michal bat Shaul—the closest our tradition comes to a Disney princess—and, in the spring, Ruth. We will begin with a straightforward reading of Judges 13-18, exploring the psychology of the Torah's only superhero: his motivations, his inner turmoil, and the open-eyed decision he made to place his fate in the hands of a woman whom he knew was about to betray him. In addition to our first foray into Rashi, we will also explore the commentaries of David Grossman in his exegetical work *Lion's Honey* and Tikva Frymer-Kensky in *Reading Women of the Bible*.

Our next in-depth analysis will explore the story of Michal, King Saul's daughter, from her romantic beginnings in Samuel I 18 to the final rupture in Samuel II 6. This princess, whose life is plagued by the political jockeying of Saul and David, lives anything but happily ever after—or does she? We will also explore the treatment of Michal in Tractate Sanhedrin, whose description of a gorgeous, pious, tefillin-laying damsel in distress seems somewhat at odds with the *pshat*, the plain meaning of the original text. Why are the rabbis so eager to sweeten this bitter story?

The last 4-6 weeks of the year we will spend reading Megillat Ruth in preparation for Shavuot. This story of prejudice, exploitation, love, and acceptance is also a study in human motivation, and the lengths to which people will go to achieve their heart's desire. Our studies will touch on the traditional commentaries, as well as the work of Aviva Zornberg.

COURSE II (2011-2012): *KANO KINEITI*: ZEAL AND THE SWORDSMAN

It is fashionable in this century to attribute religious fanaticism wholly to other sects, and to universally decry anyone who resorts to violence in the name of religion. However, our own faith is far from uniform in its condemnation of the zealous avenger, the swordsman—or

swordswoman!—whose faith leads him or her to retribution. Beginning with Shimon and Levi and their four generations of progeny and ending with Yehu ben Nimshi, that reckless king of Israel, we will explore a new text every month to evaluate the issue: what is the difference between tyrannicide and terrorism? The following texts will be studied:

- Dinah’s Vengeful Brothers (Shimon and Levi)
 - Genesis 32 and associated commentaries
 - “The Tale of Joseph and Asenath” excerpt, from the Apocrypha
 - “Shimshon’s Prison,” from *Sisters at Sinai*, by Rabbi Jill Hammer
- The Golden Calf (Shimon and Levi, continued)
 - Exodus 22 and associated commentaries
- Pinchas Defeats the Free Love Movement (Shimon and Levi, concluded)
 - Numbers 25 and associated commentaries
- Ehud the Sinister
 - Judges 3 and associated commentaries
- Judges 4: Yael
 - Judges 4 and associated commentaries
 - Midrash Rabbah
 - Tractate Nazir 25b and Megillah 15b
 - “Yael,” from *Reading Women of the Bible*, by Tikva Frymer-Kensky
 - “The Book of Judith” excerpt, from the Apocrypha
- Eliyahu the Prophet
 - Kings I 17 – Kings II 2 and associated commentaries
- Yehu Overthrows a Dynasty
 - Kings II 9-10 and associated commentaries