

BHCBE Hebrew High School: Beit Midrash Program

אֵלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאָדָם אוֹכֵל פְּרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהִקְרָן קִיָּמַת לוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְאֵלוּ הֵן: כְּבוֹד אָב וְאִם, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, וְהִשְׁפָּמַת בֵּית הַמְדָרֵשׁ שְׁחֲרִית וְעֲרֵבִית...

Welcome to the new BHCBE Beit Midrash! We will be studying texts from the Tanach and the gemara in Hebrew and Aramaic, incorporating traditional commentaries, historical framework, and modern interpretations. By the end of the course, you should be able to fluently read aloud the original texts of our tradition, identify problems in the text and how these problems can be solved in a variety of sources, and to formulate original interpretations that tackle textual problems, both in line with and potentially in opposition to the traditional commentaries.

לֹא תִלְכוּן אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרִים מֵאֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם:

This year's courses will follow a common countercultural theme. *The Superhero and the Princess* will psychoanalyze Shimshon, the Jewish mighty man. Unlike the Greek demigods or the modern American superheroes, Shimshon is deeply conflicted about his destiny. Every act of violence and crime of passion is expressed with the strangled poetry of a man on fire, the neverending struggle of soul within to escape the muscles without. Into his life comes Delilah, the middle-aged, frizzy-haired surprisingly unsexy woman of unknown ethnicity, who offers him a solace he cannot refuse. Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be superheroes, warns our Torah. Their destiny will haunt them until the day of their death.

The course will continue with the marketing trend and examine the political career and unfulfilled dreams of Princess Michal, youngest daughter of the first king of Israel. Her story contains all the elements of a classic princess story: a whirlwind romance with the handsome David, a wicked father bent on driving them apart, a nighttime rescue, a damsel in distress. But in the end, Michal and David's differing views of kingship and *kedushah* drive a wedge between them that will split the palace apart. Why then, does the gemara try so hard to reconcile them into a happily ever after?

קָנָא קִנְיַתִּי לַה' אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת כִּלְעִזְבוּ בְּרִיתְךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל...

Religious violence is a common theme in our century, and we as Jews are often overeager to point fingers at the zealots of other religion. Our second course, *Kano Kineiti: Zeal and the Swordsman*, examines the members of our own tradition for whom violence is the first and best resort. From Shimon and Levi, the original extremists, to Yael the Kenite and Eliyahu the prophet, we will find ourselves caught between reproach and admiration for the bad@\$ses of our faith. When are their acts justified? God is often described as *El Kana*: what is the difference between a zealot and a criminal?

EXPECTATIONS

צְאוּ וְרֵאוּ אֵיזוֹהֵי דְרָךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּדְבַק בָּהּ הָאָדָם.

We are very excited to offer this new course of study at BHCBE Hebrew High School. The Beit Midrash program synthesizes a more academic approach to Bible study with dynamic teaching and student contributions. As such, this course will involve more academic expectations than some of the more informal Hebrew High sessions. It will involve materials that students

should commit to bringing to class and reading that students should be comfortable doing outside of class. Students will be expected to check the class webpage for resources and post on the class blog. Emailing and texting the instructor outside of class will be encouraged, both for scheduling check-ins and for questions about the texts we are studying. To that end, our learned teachers Rabbi Cohen and Rabbi Kensky may also be consulted. Both the topics and the skills we are learning will be cumulative: students will be engaging with characters, quotations, questions, and catch-words which they will be expected to remember from week to week.

✿ MATERIALS

קנה לו דברי תורה, קנה לו חיי העולם הבא:

Just like in regular high school, you will be able to assimilate more content and recall older material more effectively if you take notes. You can expect to take notes on new vocabulary, Biblical references, and answers to in-class writing prompts. Then you can refer to your notes for accuracy when you contribute to the class blog. To that end, please be prepared to bring the following to class every week:

- **A complete TANACH, Hebrew or Hebrew/English.** Every Jewish scholar should have their own Bible for reference. Choose it, read it, love it, and respect it. We will be flipping around quickly for references in other books of the Bible, and you will want to be able to read the passages at which we are looking.
- A notebook exclusively devoted to this class, for notes as above. You will probably not want to take notes in your actual Tanakh. Please do not lose this notebook or leave it under your pillow in the morning.
- A writing implement. No excuses!



✿ ASSIGNED READINGS

ואל תאמר לכשֶׁאֶפְנֶה אֶשְׁנֶה, שְׁמָא לֹא תִפְנֶה:

One of the big skills we will be working on is facility with Hebrew texts. We will be reading aloud throughout the Tanach, and our goal will be to do so fluidly and with facility, using the trope as rough guidelines for proper punctuation. To that end, we will frequently assign readings (~2-5 *psukim*) ahead of time, so that students will have the opportunity to practice reading over their segments ahead of time. We will also sometimes assign readings with translation for content knowledge, so that the *shiur* can begin with all students already familiar with the plot. Students will be expected to locate these texts in a volume of Bible or Talmud at home, or use the links on the class webpage to locate the online versions.

The Beit Midrash format is built on student participation and student input. Like a real high school, it presupposes a high level of student commitment and a willingness to engage outside the classroom. Know yourself: if you have 5-15 minutes per week to spend adventuring in Biblical texts, this track is for you.

I am ready to commit to a small amount of study outside of class every week.

Student signature: _____

Parent signature: _____

✿ ATTENDANCE

שְׂמַאי אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה תוֹרַתְךָ קִבֵּעַ. אָמור מְעַט וְעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה...

Nothing impedes serious study more than when the assigned reader cannot be bothered to show up for *shiur*. Ask yourself whether the orthodontist appointment could be scheduled at any other time, or if Zayde's legacy would be better served by studying Torah or by going out for bagels. If family commitments, college visits, high-level tournaments, or other serious matters prevent you from coming to the Beit Midrash, you are expected to email or text the teacher well in advance—**by Saturday night at the absolute latest**. This way, someone else can be asked to look over the readings which had been yours, and the *shiur* will not have to grind to a halt because no one has prepared. If you are ill or cannot get out of bed on Sunday morning, a text message to the teacher is also appropriate. Class activities often involve assigned partners, and this courtesy allows Mrs. Eliaser to regroup people properly without wasting class time.

A thousand years ago—even two thousand!—businessmen expected to show up at the Beit Midrash every morning before work and every evening after dinner. This time commitment is not entirely consistent with a modern high school student's lifestyle! However, if you have one or two solid hours every Sunday morning to study Torah, if you are willing to make this a regular weekly commitment with only the occasional deviation, this program will tremendously enrich your life as a Jew, as a student, and as a human being.

I am ready to commit to regular attendance at the Beit Midrash, and if I cannot come to class one week or decide for any reason to switch out of the program, I will inform the teacher.

Student signature: _____

Parent signature: _____

✿ ACCOUNTABILITY

רק השָׁמֵר לְךָ וּשְׁמֵר נִפְשְׁךָ מְאֹד
פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ:

An amateur dabbles without need for depth, but a true professional in any field holds him or herself responsible for the content he or she has learned. The Beit Midrash program encourages students to challenge themselves as scholars rather than dilettantes. To that end, students will hold themselves accountable for the material in a variety of different forms. Like in any language course, new vocabulary will be of paramount importance. We will respond to tough issues in the class blog, compare texts in written prompts, and synthesize units via *divrei Torah*. Every student in the class can expect to write a short *dvar Torah* at some point in the year, to be shared online or even shared with the congregation!

Exercise for the student: try to translate at least four of the eight verses contained in this document. How do they relate to what is being discussed?

Extra credit: how many of these verses can you identify? They can all be found in some form in a siddur, except for the two that can be found in some form in a chumash. There will be a prize for the student who can identify them all! (Hint: there is a library book that can help you.)