



Temple Beth Torah

TORAH SCHOOL AND FAMILY PROGRAMS 2021 – 2022



WELCOME

Welcome to our Torah School community! We offer a full program that enrolls approximately 75 students and encompasses grades preschool to high school. Our mission is to develop educated Jews who are deeply tied to their Jewish identity and connected in meaningful ways to the Jewish community at Temple Beth Torah and in southern California as well as to the world at large. We are deeply committed to defining our school as an inclusive learning community, moreover, and actively nurture diversity among our students and staff members.

As we embark on this new school year, we are fully aware of the continuing challenges presented by COVID-19, especially the delta variant. We will be proceeding with caution and will adhere strictly to the protocols defined by Ventura County public health officials and the Ventura Unified School District. Fortunately, we have beautiful weather in Ventura during the fall, so we will be taking advantage of outdoor learning as much as possible to minimize risk of exposure. This situation remains fluid, and we will be adjusting our plans as necessary to preserve everyone's safety.

In addition to our formal training, we offer a variety of family programs, including monthly family Shabbat services, youth group activities, Madrichim program, and child-oriented holiday programs/services. We trust our students and parents truly find a home with us, and we look forward to actively partnering with our families in furthering each of our students' Jewish journey.

L'Shalom,

Clifford Wilcox, Ph.D.
Director of Education and Operations

OUR TORAH SCHOOL

Overview

Our Torah School curriculum emphasizes three critical areas:

- **Judaica** - instruction in Bible stories and key figures, Jewish values and ethics, and Jewish history and culture.
- **Hebrew** – starting from recognition of letters in our classes for our youngest students, continuing with increasing level of sophistication in reading prayer book Hebrew through grades 6-7, and culminating in the focused study during grade 7 for students preparing for their b'nei mitzvah ceremonies.
- **Tefillah** – understanding the deeper meaning of Jewish prayers and rituals. It is our intention that each student gain insight into the meaning of Jewish practices, history,

and culture so that they may develop a strong sense of their own Jewish identities as well as have the basis of knowledge and understanding that will enable them to be lifelong learners who will contribute in deep and meaningful ways to our society.

While much of our focus is placed upon preparing our students for completion of their b'nei mitzvah, we are also committed to offering programs or classes for post-b'nei mitzvah students. In particular, we strive to offer thoughtful and engaging activities that provide meaningful experiences for learning, community service, and development of a sense of Jewish community for students during their high school years.

Linking our program together across all class and age levels is a shared commitment among all teachers to exploring the meaning and relevance to our students of ten key Jewish values:

- Bracha (be a blessing)
- Torah (study Judaism)
- Tikkun Olam (heal the world)
- Tzedek (justice)
- Kehilla (participate in community)
- Simcha (live with joy)
- Chochma (seek wisdom)
- L'Dor V'Dor (teach each generation)
- Shalom (create peace)
- Rachamim (act with compassion)

Curriculum and Schedule

We offer Torah School classes on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. Specific classes are as follows:

Mishpacha - Select Sundays (twice per month), 9:30 am – 11:15 am

The day you were born is the day God decided that the world could not exist without you.
– Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

Jewish practice is traditionally rooted in the family experience. Our first class is designed for preschool children, ages 2-4, and is based upon a family-centric model in which parents attend class with their young children. This family or *mishpacha* experience provides a perfect setting for development of community among families with young children; these families form informal or defined groups (*havurot*) and continue to support each other throughout the time their children are in Torah School. In addition to the very important Jewish socialization that happens in this class, we also provide age-appropriate exposure to Jewish holidays, stories, songs, and Hebrew letter recognition. We emphasize development of a connection to the synagogue and help children to see the temple as a place where we have fun, see friends, and grow in our understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

TK-K - Sundays, 9:30 am – 11: 30 am

Love your neighbor as yourself.

– Leviticus 19:18

In TK-K, we build upon the introduction to Jewish life provided in the Mishpacha class, focusing in particular on introducing the Torah as a guide to being a good person. We discuss behavior and explore how the Torah can teach us to act. We stress the core Jewish teaching of “love your neighbor as yourself” and show how this awareness and practice can lead to a better world. We also build upon the recognition of Hebrew letters we began in Mishpacha, discuss the observance and meaning of Jewish holidays, and familiarize children with the synagogue, focusing both on etiquette and recognition of temple objects. Finally, we introduce core Bible stories dealing with creation, patriarchs and matriarchs, Israel, and the giving of the Torah. We especially want to cultivate a sense of connection for each of our students to the Jewish tradition – a sense that their history is not merely an account from the distant past but rather timeless stories with which they can connect personally as we work with them to help construct their growing sense of Jewish identity.

Grades 1-2 - Sundays, 9:30 am – 11: 30 am

For Jews, education is not just what we know. It is who we are.

– Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

As our students move into the first and second grades, they show dramatic increases in cognitive skill levels. Our teaching is intended to match this maturation, and in the first/second grade class, we elevate the level of instruction in Hebrew to include letters as well as vowels, explore the Jewish holidays in greater depth focusing on both observation as well as meaning, and introduce the concept and experience of Shabbat, both objects and rituals. We also start discussion of the Land of Israel, birthplace of Judaism.

Grades 3-4 - Sundays, 9:30 am – 11: 30 am

Wednesdays (Zoom), Hebrew, 30-minute sessions, between 3:30 pm – 7:00 pm

The Hebrew language will go from the synagogue to the house of study and from the house of study, it will come into the home and become a living language.

– Eliezer Ben Jehuda

In grades 3-4, our students begin more formal Hebrew instruction, and they attend class on both Sunday and Wednesday. Sunday morning instruction covers all three major areas of learning, Judaica, Hebrew, and Tefillah. Wednesday afternoon instruction is focused specifically on Hebrew, and students work for 30 minutes remotely over Zoom with a dedicated Hebrew teacher in groups (or “pods”) of typically three students of matched abilities. Hebrew instruction proceeds from decoding of characters and vowels to reading combinations and

simple words as well as to learning the basic prayers, including the Shema, Bar'chu, and Brachot l'Shabbat. From a Judaica perspective, students are introduced to a historical view of the development of Judaism in which they study the biblical accounts of creation, Abraham and the covenant, slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, and the Exodus. In addition to exploring key stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs and main events of ancient Israel, class teachings focus on the moral and ethical dimensions of the lessons that emerge from the biblical stories, with particular effort to highlight the relevance of these lessons to our contemporary lives.

Grades 5-6 - Sundays, 9:30 am – 11: 30 am

Wednesdays (Zoom), Hebrew, 30-minute sessions, between 3:30 pm – 7:00 pm

The Jewish tradition of learning – is learning. Adam and Eve chose knowledge instead of immortality. – Elie Wiesel

In the fifth and sixth grade class, Hebrew instruction intensifies as students move from mere decoding to reading of words and prayers. Mastery of prayers accelerates, moreover, as students learn the dozen key prayers necessary for b'nei mitzvah preparation. In learning to read Hebrew and the key prayers, students are building the foundation that will enable them to participate fully in Jewish prayer services. Study of biblical lessons also deepens as the focus turns toward exploration of the writings of the Hebrew prophets. From study of the prophets, students are introduced to the concepts and importance of the Jewish commitment to social justice. Using the lens of social justice, we connect biblical stories and events to Jewish values and highlight their relevance to us as Jews today.

Grade 7 (B'nei Mitzvah Preparation) - Wednesdays, 6:00 – 6:45 pm

Through faith we experience the meaning of the world. Through action we are to give it meaning.

– Rabbi Leo Baeck

The seventh-grade class focusses on preparation by individual students for b'nei mitzvah. In this process, students have the opportunity for one-on-one learning with Cantor Robin and Rabbi Lisa. Rabbi Lisa also leads class discussions in which the class explores together the meaning and significance of the b'nei mitzvah experience. Effort is made to see the process as more than mere intellectual preparation. The b'nei mitzvah experience certainly represents culmination of much academic study. But it also represents a confirmation of character development, a recognition of the power of Jewish values and community to shape one's life both up to age 13 and beyond as one moves forward into adulthood. The b'nei mitzvah class thus represents a class to assist in mastering Hebrew, Torah reading, and prayers, but also to explore the deeper spiritual meaning associated with that Jewish journey.

Grades 8-10 - Wednesdays, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, “in the coming world they will not ask me: “Why were you not Moses?” They will ask me: Why were you not Zusya?”

– Martin Buber

In the Upper School, we meet on Wednesday evenings, and we offer two distinct pathways based upon grade level. All students from grades 8-10 participate together in a session led by Cliff Wilcox called Contemporary Issues/Jewish Perspectives, which explores such topics as Israel/Palestine, Israeli art and culture, Jewish social justice, and Jewish resilience and memory. During these discussions, we explore several contemporary Jewish/Israeli topics in depth. We will concentrate on developing ourselves as critical thinkers capable of understanding complex issues from multiple viewpoints and learning to find the human elements in all sides of the issues that we explore. We will eat dinner together midway through these evening sessions and hopefully continue our discussions while sharing a meal as a community. Following dinner, we will have a session designed for 8-9th grade students led by Tassi Benjamin, in which we will discuss current “Hot Topics” and seek to bring Jewish perspectives to such issues as climate change, inequality, sexual identity, social and racial justice, and more. At the same time as the 8th-9th grade students are in the Hot Topics session, Rabbi Lisa will conduct our capstone Confirmation Class for our 10th grade students. In this class, she will explore big ideas in Jewish thought and experience, including questions about the existence of God, Judaism as a way of life, the practice of social justice, and the definition of personal and spiritual identity. Through this class, Rabbi Lisa helps students form a personal conception of themselves as Jews and define the path they want to take as they move forward as Jewish adults. A true highlight of the Confirmation Class experience is the trip to Washington, DC to participate in the L'Taken seminar sponsored by the Reform Action Center.

Teachers and Staff

We are pleased to have a highly trained and experienced team of teachers and staff members:

Tassi Benjamin



- Torah School Teacher, Grades 5-6 and Grades 8-10 (Hot Topics Class)

- Hebrew Teacher, Grades 5-6
- Youth Group Coordinator

Taylor Paskin



- Torah School Teacher, Grades TK-K
- Hebrew Teacher, Grades 5-6

Alli Silverman Quiroz



- Mishpacha Teacher

Tali Rapps



- Torah School Teacher, Grades 1-2

Gil Ramot



- Torah School Teacher, Grades 3-4
- Hebrew Teacher, Grades 3-4

Cantor Robin Faigin



- Music Specialist, all grades
- Cantorial Soloist, Temple Beth Torah

Rabbi Lisa Hochberg-Miller



- Torah School Teacher, Grade 10 (Confirmation Class)
- Rabbi, Temple Beth Torah

Danielle Stoyanoff



- Torah School and Family Programs Coordinator

Cliff Wilcox



- Torah School Teacher, Grades 8-10 (Contemporary Issues/Jewish Perspectives Class)
- Director of Education and Operations, Temple Beth Torah

BUILDING JEWISH COMMUNITY

Building a vibrant and sustaining Jewish community is one of the key goals not only of the Torah School but also of Temple Beth Torah in general. Building Jewish community depends, however, on more than any single element. For our young people, Torah School is an essential component of the process of L'Dor V'Dor. Yet it is only a single element in that process. Jewish community is formed and maintained in a holistic process of participation and family involvement in activities that ranges from Family Shabbat and holiday programming to the madrichim program and youth group. We strongly encourage all families to participate actively in these programs. Indeed, the greatest rewards typically come to those who approach temple activities as both consumers and producers, giving as much or more than they take, and thus creating a self-sustaining experience of Jewish community.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO JEWISH COMMUNITY

