

# **Zimet Religious School Curriculum**

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Congregation Emanuel of the Hudson Valley

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## Introduction to Our Course of Study

Our purpose is to present a realistic course of study, one which will help our children achieve higher goals rather than the mere acquisition of information. Our curriculum is spiral-based, with children building up their skills, practice, knowledge, values and experience from year to year. Lessons have been designed using a variety of methodologies and activities so that they will be fun, engaging and inspiring to many kinds of learners.

The school will present and teach these subjects and values to the best of our ability. The Religious School is only one force for the children to develop their love, understanding and appreciation of Judaism. The learning that takes place is contingent not only on our teachers presenting material, but on parents ensuring their children's attendance as well as reviewing material at home and reinforcing it through active involvement in our community.

## School Philosophy

Zimet Religious School is committed to teaching the essential skills of Jewish living and imparting the knowledge of our rich tradition. We seek to create and foster an educational environment that promotes joy in learning and that meets each person

בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא-שָׁם (*ba'asher hu-sham*)/ "where (s)he is" (Gen. 21: 17).

## Specific Aims for Zimet Religious School's Curriculum

- ❖ To demonstrate a commitment to Judaism's three-fold foundation of Torah, *avodah* and *g'milut chasadim* (study, worship and acts of loving kindness) (Pirkei Avot 1:2) as essential to a Jewish education.
- ❖ To inspire a commitment to lifelong Jewish learning.
- ❖ To teach our children Hebrew, tefilot, Jewish holidays, history and literature, including the Bible, Talmud, Midrash and other sources, as they contribute to each child's strength as Jews.
- ❖ To teach each child that Hebrew is the language of the Jewish people, encouraging them to develop a relationship with Hebrew through the reading, writing and speaking of this language, focusing on Biblical/prayer-based Hebrew, as well as introducing modern/conversational vocabulary throughout their school careers.
- ❖ To foster in our children a positive Jewish identity along with strong moral and ethical values, incorporating values such as *derech erez* (manners), *tikkun olam* (repair of the world) and *ba'al tashchit* (care of the environment).

- ❖ To help our children develop pride, self-awareness and knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture.
- ❖ To teach our children to be participating members in constantly widening circles of Judaism: the home, school, local community and in the world.
- ❖ To prepare our students and their families to become competent and confident with Jewish life and observance in the home, school, synagogue, local community, and in the world.
- ❖ To provide an arena for Jewish peers to socialize, and promote a sense of community among the students.

**Students who complete our entire program will have an understanding and appreciation for:**

- ❖ Components of the prayer service.
- ❖ Basic concepts and values of Jewish holidays and rituals.
- ❖ Major events of Jewish history from the Torah to today, including a focus on Israel.
- ❖ Values that define modern Judaism and how they have evolved from biblical times.
- ❖ What it means to be a Reform Jew today and how to make responsible Jewish choices about observing mitzvot.
- ❖ How to read Hebrew text and how to translate basic words and phrases.

We accomplish this by putting students in small learning groups with thoughtful and engaging discussion, direct instruction, art, music, dance and cooking experiences. Children will develop a sense of community, connection to and confidence in their Judaism.

## School-wide initiatives

### Prayer Service Participation

Attending services are an important component of Jewish education. **All students, *shorashim* (preschool) through kitah chet (grade 8), are required to attend a minimum of ten (10) additional services throughout the school year.** This includes the two grade-level Friday night services scheduled throughout the year. To meet this requirement, students may attend Tot Shabbat (when age appropriate), any Friday night service, Saturday services when there is no Religious School, and/or any holiday services held during the year (e.g. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Simchat Torah, Purim).

These services are recorded by the parent and/or student in the blue 3-ring notebook in the lobby.

## Areas of the Zimet Religious School Curriculum

This curriculum divides each grade into core areas:

- 1. Grade Focus**
- 2. Specific Goals**
- 3. Hebrew**
- 4. Holidays, Customs & Ceremonies**
- 5. Prayers/Liturgy**
- 6. Torah**
- 7. Israel/History**
- 8. Mitzvot/G'milut Chasadim**
- 9. Connecting with Community**

### **1. Grade Focus**

The Grade Focus describes the overall mission of the class and what separates it and makes it unique from grades younger and older.

### **2. Specific Goals**

Specific Goals breaks down what we expect to be transmitted from teacher and school to each individual child. These specific goals are an overview of what will be taught in the following six areas: Hebrew, Holidays/Calendar, Prayers/Liturgy, Torah, Israel/History, and Mitzvot.

### **3. Hebrew**

Hebrew is the language of the Jewish people. For thousands of years we have prayed, conversed, sung in Hebrew, and performed dances with Hebrew songs. In our Hebrew School we focus more on biblical, prayer-based Hebrew than conversational Hebrew. We do introduce modern Hebrew vocabulary in every grade and we focus our energies on the Prayers and Liturgy the children will hear and need to know for lifelong participation in Jewish life.

### **4. Holidays, Customs & Ceremonies**

The Jewish calendar is host to holidays—some happy times, some sad times—but all times in which we reflect on our history as a collective people. We learn of our struggles and triumphs that have brought us to the present and how our collective history is something that binds all Jewish people together. We have both school-wide and multi-grade programs, such as our Passover Model Seder and Yom HaShoah Program. We make a concerted effort to reach children on their developmental levels, meaning we teach Chanukah differently to Gan (K) than we do to our Kitah Vav (6th) children.

Learning about Jewish ceremonies, that include life-cycle events such as *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) and *simchat bat* (a baby girl's naming), are moments in a Jewish person's life. A goal of our program is to create connections through these ceremonies to our own family traditions.

## **5. Tefillah (Prayers) and Liturgy**

*Tefillah* (Prayers) and Liturgy are central to the Jewish learning in our Religious School. We want our children to grasp the meanings and intentions of each prayer (*kavanah*), and not only recite them from memory. One goal of this is to enable our students to be able to travel around the world and be able to actively participate at any synagogue they visit.

Each grade focuses on specific prayers for the year (although they will be exposed to more than those), and during their grade's Friday night services they lead some of those prayers for the congregation. These prayers are available in a packet for students and parents to practice at home and are available online and in school.

## **6. Torah**

The Torah is the backbone of the Jewish people. It tells our story from Beresheit/ Genesis (or literally "From the Beginning"), through the death of Moses. Students learn how the Torah is relevant to both today's world and to themselves. In age-appropriate ways (stories, games, activities, dramatic pieces) they learn bible stories, who are our heroes and heroines in the Torah, and values that they can apply to their own lives.

At each level there are enduring understandings, which are foundational concepts for Jewish learning. Enduring understandings are the big ideas that have lasting value to our students long after they have left the classroom. The overarching understandings for each level are:

- Torah is an ongoing dialogue between the text and its students.
- Torah is real in our daily lives; it goes with us wherever we are.
- Developing the skills to study Torah is essential to integrating Torah into our lives.

Each grade level includes an age-appropriate additional enduring understanding.

## **7. Israel/History**

From the earliest grades we teach about the homeland of the Jewish people through song, movies, food, cultural arts and more. From our annual Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) program to Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) celebration, we make Israel and Jewish history part of our Hebrew School experience.

## **8. Mitzvot/G'milut Chasadim**

Judaism has 613 commandments, or *mitzvot*. We incorporate learning the mitzvot as part of our learning experience. We approach everyday situations and show how Jewish values (*middot*) and the *mitzvot* of our faith guide not just the big-picture world that we live in, but also our daily lives. We provide multiple opportunities each year for our students and families to participate in *tikkun olam* (repair the world) with activities like our annual Tzedakah fair.

**9. Connecting with Community (CE community and community at large)**

At Congregation Emanuel of the Hudson Valley we are blessed to have a dynamic, warm community. Throughout the school year there are opportunities as a school and with families to connect with other students, families and community members through education, field trips, school-wide events, and more. They are integral to the development of each child's positive Jewish identity and to the overall mission of our growing Religious School.



## Hebrew Curriculum

In addition to teaching how to read the language, our Hebrew program continually presents and reinforces:

1. Hebrew is an authentic language of Jewish prayer and ritual and is one element that binds the diverse Jewish people to one another.
2. Prayer and ritual are essential behaviors in living a Jewish life.
3. Hebrew is a living language, and therefore, it has evolved from ancient to medieval to modern times.
4. Hebrew is a powerful means of expressing Jewish uniqueness, binding Jews to God and to one another.
5. Many concepts and ideals of Judaism are best expressed in Hebrew, and translation can be inexact.
6. The prayer service has altered over time, in content, structure, and leadership, in order to address changed perspectives in the world.
7. Some knowledge of the structure of the Hebrew language can assist in our understanding of familiar prayers and blessings, even without the ability to translate proficiently.

Throughout the program, we will also address the following questions:

1. Why is the Hebrew language special for the Jewish people?
2. What distinguishes Hebrew as a language of Jewish prayer?
3. How has Hebrew evolved to adapt to changes in Jewish culture?
4. How does the Hebrew language enable me to relate to G-d and the people of Israel?
5. How does knowledge of the Hebrew language help me to express my Jewish identity?
6. How do the Jewish people use Hebrew?
7. What benefit is there to me to learn any Hebrew?
8. What is the purpose and effect of a set order of prayer?
9. Can I learn what God wants of me from the study and practice of prayer/ceremony?
10. Do I have to believe in God to pray?
11. Do I have to pray in a certain way to do it “right”?
12. What method/custom/minhag of prayer touches me?
13. Is there a difference in using Hebrew or English in Jewish prayer and ceremony?

14. How important is the exactness of translation in a siddur?

15. What tools do I need to understand the Hebrew?

There are currently three levels of Hebrew. One level is not better than the other; it is a nod to the fact that students learn at different paces, have varying degrees of attendance and follow up outside of the classroom setting, and varying degrees of motivation. After completing kitah bet (second grade), all students will be given a Hebrew assessment. From there they will be placed in a Hebrew class (most often level 1). Students move to the next level once they are ready. The Hebrew classes do not reflect grade level or intelligence, but simply Hebrew level. At the end of the year, students receive a Hebrew assessment and recommendation from their Hebrew teacher as to the level most fitting their ability for the following year. Students can take the assessment at any point during the year, should they feel strongly about moving up to the next level.

Each class level has specific goals that students are striving toward in terms of Hebrew word recognition, reading fluency and prayers. The ultimate goal is to prepare students for being able to be fully participating adults at b'nai mitzvah and into adulthood—allowing them to feel comfortable participating in any temple service worldwide.

In successfully learning to decode Hebrew and to practice Jewish prayer and ritual, students must have opportunities to read, listen to and pronounce Hebrew words. Therefore, our comprehensive school program includes tefillah (prayer), singing in Hebrew, and the use of blessings and Hebrew words in the classroom and synagogue venues.

For students to be successful Hebrew learners, they must practice, practice, practice:

### **1. Practice—as in Training**

In our classrooms, Hebrew is an academic pursuit. We work on reading and vocabulary, explaining the rudiments of grammar, and examine the Jewish concepts inherent in our siddur. Classrooms are the place for explanation and “rehearsal” of Jewish ritual and prayer.

### **2. Practice—as in Observance**

Our comprehensive Hebrew program helps to develop a context for Jewish practice by presenting occasions for observance of ritual and prayer during and outside of school hours. Teaching happens in the classroom, while opportunities for actual observance require services that are consistent with Jewish tradition. This means that students will experience Shabbat service at school, but Hebrew can also be reinforced by attendance at Shabbat and holiday services on days there are no classes. To this end, students are required to attend a minimum of ten (10) outside services during the year, meaning services that are not held on school days.

Students become familiar with prayers before they read them. For example, getting used to hearing the *V'ahavta* chanted will help children read the prayer once their skills have reached that level.

### **3. Practice—as in Routine**

Eventually, students must become independent of the school in order to make Jewish practice and living a real part of their lives. Students need to see and hear information and behavior outside of the classroom context for it to be viewed as valuable to everyday living. Parents and the home are essential to this endeavor. Our school offers opportunities for parental involvement and education, homework and application of material learned (e.g., participation in services and holiday ritual) outside of the classroom.