



August 30, 2023

Hello Beit Midrash Families,

Welcome to Beit Midrash, Beit Am's Jewish congregational school!

### Our Curriculum

Our school operates on a four-year curriculum cycle, with the entire school focusing on one theme for the entire year. This model allows us to dive deeply into a theme and explore it in all of our programming throughout the year. Every week that Beit Midrash meets, every class will study the same topic at the appropriate level for their age group. The four years of our cycle are:

Year 1: *Avodah* עבודה (Jewish practice)

Year 2: *Torah* תורה (Jewish text)

Year 3: *Derekh Eretz* דרך ארץ (Jewish values) ← We are here!

Year 4: *L'dor vador* לדור ודור (Jewish history)

### Intro to Our *Derekh Eretz* Year of Learning:

The Hebrew term דרך ארץ literally means “way of the world.” The phrase was employed in rabbinic literature (Talmud, Midrash, etc.) to refer variously to natural, normal human behavior (something like human nature), to one's worldly occupation or trade, or to correct, proper conduct and behavior. *Derekh Eretz* in this latter sense has come to be the term's common and accepted definition, effectively synonymous with courtesy, etiquette, politeness, or good manners. The Rabbis held this kind of *Derekh Eretz* in high regard, recognizing that our behavior reflects not just upon us as individuals, but upon our communities, our teachers, and even upon our God!

Although the Rabbis often found verses in Tanakh that support practices of *Derekh Eretz*, these weren't generally included as formal laws in the *halachic* codes. In other words, some aspects of *Derekh Eretz* are properly classified as *mitzvot* – religious obligations. For example, Maimonides calls *tzedakah* (charitable giving) a *mitzvah* [in his classic law code Mishneh Torah](#). Other aspects, meanwhile, are held to be more like recommendations or guidelines and often vary in their application with time and place.

Similarly, some aspects of *Derekh Eretz* are what we'd call, in modern terminology, “ethics,” while others are more like “values.” Ethics are the actions, or sometimes, constraints on the actions that righteous people take. Values, on the other hand, are principles and ideals that help us in thinking about what's most important and in making judgments about how we're going to act. Values are what motivate us to act ethically. *Tzedakah*, within this framework, is the ethic which we are motivated to perform because of our concern for *tzede*k (justice, fairness, equality).

In this curriculum year, we will explore *Derekh Eretz* holistically – embracing all of these various dimensions.



## Family Engagement (during a typical year)

### *Student & Family Tefillah*

All students start their day at Beit Midrash with Tefillah in our beautiful sanctuary. We ask that a parent or guardian stay with younger children for this time. By making this a family learning time, parents can connect with other families and model the importance of Jewish learning for their kids.

### *Sunday Schmoozes*

Parents/guardians are always invited to stay and schmooze (chat) in the social hall after Tefillah. Generally these gatherings are impromptu but occasionally we may organize a group discussion about Jewish parenting issues and someone might bring bagels and coffee or donuts. It's a time to build community and be together.

### *Beit Midrash Havdalah*

At least once during the school year, we gather to end Shabbat and start our week in the *sweetest* way possible.

### *Mitzvah Days*

Mitzvah Days are a central part of the Beit Midrash curriculum, when students get to see their Jewish values put into action. Family participation on these days helps to underscore the importance of service learning and we can do more in the community! We also welcome help planning the many logistics of Mitzvah Days.

### *Volunteering*

We are always in need of volunteers! Each year there will be many opportunities for parents (and teens) to support Jewish learning at Beit Midrash. We often need folks to assist with purchasing snacks, keep our building tidy, help teachers prep special projects, and help supervise during occasional trips to the forest sanctuary or Arnold Park. Please plan to volunteer for something at least twice a year.

### *Closing Circle*

As always, families are invited to participate in Closing Circle, which begins about 5 minutes before pickup. This is a chance to come together once more before lunch and Hebrew classes begin for older students.

### *Pizza Lunch Fundraiser*

What began as a Teen Fundraiser for the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence (CARDV) has now become an integral part of the Beit Midrash experience. Pizza Lunch! Signups are at the door each Beit Midrash morning and Woodstock's Pizza is delivered after Beit Midrash ends, just in time for lunch. Everyone who wants is welcome to stay and socialize over pizza (or any vegetarian lunch you want to bring). Pizza slices are reasonably-priced and all proceeds are donated to CARDV.

### *Kitah Keshet*

Kitah Keshet is the epitome of family engagement! This special program is open to infants and toddlers through the age of 3 along with their caregivers, to explore Jewish songs, dancing, crafts, and play and engage with other self-identified Jewish families. Kitah Keshet runs at the same time as preK-7th Beit Midrash classes but uses a different registration form. More information and registration forms can be found under the "Kitah Keshet" link.



## Beit Midrash Funding and Support

Beit Midrash staffing, educational supplies, and snacks are made possible through several means of support: Beit Am Membership Dues fund over 70%; and Beit Midrash tuition, paid by the families who are able, just about covers the remaining 30%. Community donations to the Beit Midrash Fund vary from year to year, and also help to cover any supplemental programming, as well as tuition for families requesting a reduction or waiver.

*Membership in Beit Am is a prerequisite to participation in Beit Midrash.* If you have not yet returned your annual membership form, please fill one out on the Beit Am website, or using this link to the [online fillable form](#).

Tuition payment options this year are: Full payment by the first day of class or monthly ACH payments divided evenly from October through May (8 payments spread evenly, rather than prorated for the # of classes each month). An ACH form is available on the registration page, should you choose the monthly tuition payment option. You can also contact the Beit Am Administrator at [office@beitam.org](mailto:office@beitam.org) to make alternate payment arrangements.

*Financial considerations should never be a barrier to participation in the Beit Midrash youth education program.* If you need a tuition reduction or waiver, or to make alternate payment arrangements, please contact our Beit Am Administrator at [office@beitam.org](mailto:office@beitam.org).

***Please return registration forms by September 27th by either filling them out online or printing and delivering them to the Beit Am office.***

Beit Am, as a whole community, continues to place Jewish education for all of our children as one of our highest values and priorities as an organization. We are honored to provide quality Jewish education for your children, your families, our community, and our collective future.

Please look for additional announcements about High Holiday programming for your child(ren) and teens.

Here's to another year filled with warmth, welcome, and Jewish learning at Beit Midrash!

Sincerely,

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