



THE GATES QUEST PROGRAM

2023-2024

**Arnold Rotenberg,
Director of Congregational Jewish Living**

Rabbi Matt Cutler

**Josh Cooper-Ginsburg,
Director of Administrations and Operations**

Welcome to *Gates Quest*, where learning comes alive and engages young minds in a vibrant exploration of Jewish heritage, traditions, and values. Our innovative, student-centered approach goes beyond textbooks and lectures, embracing a hands-on, immersive experience that captivates children and fosters a lifelong love for Judaism.

We understand that children learn best when they are actively involved in their education. That's why we have designed a curriculum that integrates interactive activities, games, storytelling, art, music, and even field trips to create a rich and multidimensional learning environment.

As we delve into Jewish history, holidays, ethics, and Hebrew, we encourage critical thinking, curiosity, and dialogue. Students are encouraged to ask questions, engage in open discussions, and express their own perspectives. We believe that fostering a spirit of inquiry and intellectual exploration lays the foundation for a lifelong journey of Jewish learning. We actively promote a sense of community and belonging in a warm and supportive environment helps children develop strong connections with their peers and instills a deep appreciation for the collective heritage that binds them together. Through collaborative projects, celebrations, and acts of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), our students develop a sense of responsibility to make a positive impact on their community and the world at large.

Come and be a part of our vibrant community, where Jewish education comes alive, and children are empowered to connect, learn, and grow in a nurturing and experiential environment. Together, let us embark on a journey of discovery, understanding, and celebration of our shared Jewish heritage.

Arnold Rotenberg
Director of Congregational Jewish Learning

Gates Quest Vision

**18 Jewish Things a Young Jew Should Know, Care About, and Be Able to Do
by Age 18**

- 1. Connect with the Jewish People in its diversity.**
- 2. Cultivate Jewish friendships.**
- 3. Engage with Jewish role models.**
- 4. Recall Jewish history, memory, and tradition.**
- 5. Participate in the Jewish community.**
- 6. Discover Judaism's relevance to life's questions.**
- 7. Explore God, Spirituality, and Prayer.**
- 8. Celebrate rituals and holidays.**
- 9. Pursue justice and tzedakah.**
- 10. Practice mitzvot and customs.**
- 11. Immerse oneself in the holiness of nature and the environment.**
- 12. See oneself as an expression of God's creation.**
- 13. Interpret Jewish texts, Torah, and core narratives.**
- 14. Care of Israel and its people.**
- 15. Access Hebrew and Jewish terminology.**
- 16. Partake in Jewish culinary traditions.**
- 17. Experience Jewish arts and culture.**
- 18. Respond to issues facing contemporary Jewry.**

The 18x18 Educational Dimensions for Jewish Life,
developed by M2: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education,
are based on the 18x18 Framework,
created by Dr. Benjamin M. Jacobs and Dr. Barry Chazan.

The GATES QUEST Program

Gates Quest Juniors

A play-based educational program, ***GATES QUEST*** Juniors (ages 3—4 by September 1) immerse children in Jewish learning, discovery, creativity, and community on Sunday mornings. Parents are invited for family programs several times throughout the year to plant and nurture the seeds of Jewish identity and commitment as a family.

Children in ***GATES QUEST*** Juniors get to do music, Hebrew through Movement, Tefillah (prayer), and much more, helping your child develop a love of Jewish tradition and the joys of being a part of the Gates of Heaven community. Non-members welcome, it's a great way to check out ***GATES QUEST***!

Kindergarten – Second Grade

Our K-2 program meets weekly and seeks to connect children with the ongoing creative life of the Jewish people through music, art, dance, stories, Hebrew, prayer, and discussion.

In Kindergarten and 1st grade, families take part in two programs:

Kadimah! (Let's go!)

In this exciting ***Gates Quest*** program for Kindergarten and 1st grade, students will go on a Jewish “quest” to explore Jewish holidays, values, traditions, prayers, and Torah stories by using all five of their senses. Kadimah students will engage in cooking, building, art, games, outdoor activities, music, and more – to bring Judaism to life in multiple and exciting ways! The Kadimah curriculum is a two-year cycle that includes the Yad b'Yad curriculum—two family programs during the year, along with opportunities for parents to volunteer for projects such as cooking and games.

2nd Grade

Tzofim (Scouts)

Calling all 2nd graders! A year of adventures awaits, as Tzofim (2nd grade “scouts”) will go on journeys to discover what it means to be Jewish in the world. Tzofim includes quests related to Israel, synagogues, and Jewish values, and “Junior Sofer Corps,” (*Sofer—one who writes a Torah Scroll*) in which students create their own Torah Scroll and as well as learn the mitzvah helping others. This is a year of ***GATES QUEST*** you don't want to miss!

Third through Sixth Grade ‘Tracks’

Philosophy of *GATES QUEST* “Tracks”

At Gates of Heaven, we acknowledge – and celebrate – the many ways to connect to Judaism and Jewish life. Like adults, children connect to Judaism in different ways, and we are delighted to offer a variety of paths of Jewish learning in *Gates Quest* to match the various learning styles and passions of the children in our community. Each track extends for approximately 4-5 weeks and includes our comprehensive Hebrew & prayer curriculum. These programs (except Hebrew) are based on a 2-year project-based learning cycle.

Third and Fourth Grade Curricular themes: God, Torah, Israel

Teva – Nature

Teva (teh-vah) is our nature program. Students explore God, Torah, and Israel through the lens of nature and the outdoors. While usually classroom-based, this program includes opportunities for outdoor learning (as weather permits) around the Temple, Central Park and beyond as we celebrate and learn about seasonal, eco, and wilderness-based traditions of the Jewish people. For example, we might have discussions around a fire in an outdoor classroom/ “campground”, take a short hike to connect with the experience of Moses climbing Mt. Sinai to get the 10 commandments, or participate in a vegetable garden project connecting with Israel and the holidays. Teva, where we will make connections between Jewish life and the natural world!

Bonim – Builders

Bonim (boh-neem) is the opportunity to learn about God, Torah, and Israel through the experience of construction and building projects both big and small. Activities may include model projects such as building a ‘mini-Israel’ as well as full-size projects such as building a sukkah. A wide variety of materials will be used – everything from Legos to clay to wood and more!

Omanut – Art

Omanut (oh-mah-noot) is an art program to explore the topics of God, Torah, and Israel through the lens and modality of art. In Omanut students can spend time immersed in Jewish art, deepen artistic skills and spirituality, learn about many of the great Jewish artists and Jewish art-forms, and create their own works of art based on Jewish topics. For example, students in Omanut may study different Jewish views about God, and then create art pieces in the style of Israeli artist Yaakov Agam to reflect their differing relationships with God.

Fifth and Sixth Grade Curricular themes: Jewish History and Ethics

Masa – Journey

Masa is a culinary and crafty journey around the world. Students will get their hands dirty while traveling through Jewish history! In this exciting track, students learn about Jews around the world by making things—making food (cooking) as well as other items (crafts) that have been part of different Jewish communities. For example, students might learn about Moroccan Jews by making and tasting Moroccan dishes and creating “jeta de la mezuzah’s,” which Moroccan Jews hung on their doorposts. Masa will be a tasty, fun, hands-on cultural adventure!

Shira- Music

Shira is an exciting exploration of Jewish ethics, traditions, and history through the lens of music, as well as audio/visual media and video production. Students in Shira go on a Jewish journey using technological and online resources. The students use video, film, and sound technology to learn about and express their connection to their Jewish heritage. Students will write their own songs, create Jewish parodies of popular music, and even produce their own music video! Shira is all about Judaism, music, hands-on video production and being creative. It is a fun-filled musical Jewish learning adventure!

Y’tzira – Storytelling

In Y’tzira students draw upon their creativity and imagination to bring Jewish history and ethics to life through various mediums of storytelling. You will participate in theatre games, create, and act in short skits, write poems and short stories, watch, and discuss film clips and create simple sets to immerse yourself and your peers in the topics of study. Examples of activities range from creating three-dimensional sets that visually represent Jewish historical periods, to using improv theater games to understand different Jewish ethical teachings. Each unit of study will also include an interactive storytelling experience whereby students will have to work together to solve a mystery relating to the topic. Here your creative juices will flow!

Shorashim – Roots

Shorashim (Roots) track is for investigating the student’s own Jewish “roots,” the “roots” of Jews around the world, and how diversity enriches our Jewish identity as individuals and as a community. Together we will have fun by “traveling” around the world to explore a wide range of cultural experiences from the present and past - through hands-on activities like cooking, art, writing, and other creative outlets. As we embark on this journey, we will seek opportunities to partner with our families and community members who come from a variety of different cultural backgrounds and learn firsthand from their experiences.

Gates Quest 7th Grade Program

Seventh Grade **GATES QUEST** classes are devoted to examining what it means to be a young Jew in today's world. We do this through study of our collective past including the Holocaust, a study of comparative religion, examining Judaism in relation to other world religions, and a study of modern Israel. In preparation for becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah, students also participate in a weekly prayer service.

Once a month the class will go off site to give students the opportunity to engage in social action projects throughout the Capital Region. The week before going on a community service project, students study the specific mitzvah that they will be fulfilling with that project.

The Seventh Grade Fund is an exciting new program that will help Gates of Heaven's students actively learn about philanthropy and take part in tikkun olam through tzedakah. Approximately 7 years ago families chose to make a single donation of \$180 in lieu of gifts for each child. This program would continue that tradition but instead of the money being donated to a charity or organization based on an individual's social action project it would become part of a **Seventh Grade Fund** which would become a charitable foundation run by the students and interested parents of Seventh Grade class of Gates of Heaven.

The goals of the program are:

- To educate students in philanthropy and to teach about the power of educated charitable giving.
- To emphasize the value of Tzedakah as an integral part of adult Jewish life.
- To provide a meaningful alternative to the materialism that is often a large part of the B'nai Mitzvah experience in contemporary America.
- To relieve some pressure on families by agreeing voluntarily and collectively that donations to the Seventh Grade Fund will replace customary gifts to B'nai Mitzvah.
- To provide targeted financial gifts to advance the cause of one or more charitable service organizations.
- To foster a sense of responsibility and effectiveness within the Seventh Grade Community by giving them the power to make positive change in the world.

Objectives

- We will invite a staff person from a local foundation to make a presentation on the principles of targeted philanthropic giving. In addition, we will invite local charitable service organizations to make presentations to the class on two Sundays during the year. The presentations and discussions that follow will provide valuable education on the practice of philanthropy.
- We will educate the members of the class on the imperative of Tzedakah as a Jewish obligation
- The fund will act as a vehicle for channeling financial resources away from consumer spending and toward social action causes. It does not represent an additional expense, but instead a redirection of family resources that might otherwise go toward the purchase of gifts.

- A \$180 suggested contribution (or whatever amount you feel you can contribute) from each family will be used to form the Seventh Grade Fund, whose mission will be to provide financial support for one or more local community service organizations.

How will the goals be accomplished?

- A study unit on the history and practice of philanthropy and the Mitzvah of Tzedakah will be incorporated into the Seventh-Grade curriculum. In addition, the students will prepare and distribute an application to potential grant recipients, review the submitted applications, and invite selected organizations to follow-up their applications with presentations before the class.
- The Fund will act as a vehicle for channeling financial resources away from consumption and towards social justice. It does not represent an additional expense, but instead, a redirection of family resources that would otherwise go toward the purchase of gifts.
- Distribution of money from the Seventh Grade Fund will benefit one or more charitable service organizations.
- The Board of Directors of the Seventh Grade Fund is comprised of all members of the Seventh Grade Class (regardless of their families' financial participation in the program) and is advised by the Seventh-Grade teachers and Madrikhim and interested parents. All decisions of the Board are made by simple majority, with a practical system of point-awarding to make the final decision.
- During its first meeting, the Seventh Grade Fund Board of Directors selects an issue or cause on which it will focus its grant-giving activities. Each Board member takes responsibility for identifying several potential grant recipients to which Request for Proposal and Applications will be sent.
- Every student in the class will have a role in raising money and deciding how that money will be distributed to organizations that foster positive change in our community.

Hebrew

In *Gate Quest*, our goal is for children and families to be challenged, inspired, and energized by the power of Jewish ideas and traditions. We seek to provide our students with a living experience of the Jewish tradition and to enable all members of our community to be part of contemporary Jewish life. Our goals for Hebrew and prayer learning therefore fit into that framework. Our educational program aims to enable our children to cherish and use Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people, and to value and engage in Tefillah (prayer) as two significant ways to connect to contemporary Jewish life. Our multi-faceted approach to learning Hebrew and prayer is designed to touch the whole person: body, heart, mind, and soul.

To Know

- Describe the structure and flow of a service.
- Explain the themes of key prayers.
- Know important Jewish words and phrases in Hebrew ("Jewish life vocabulary")
- Understand (and retain) key words in Jewish rituals and prayer.
- Recognize the letters and vowels of the Hebrew alphabet.

To Do

- Recite key prayers at synagogue speed with no more than a few mistakes (For example: Sh'ma, V'ahavta, Avot, etc.)
- Participate in a Jewish service and in Jewish rituals (i.e., know when to sit, stand, sing along, wait while the leader leads, follow along in the siddur, etc.)
- Recite / sing blessings and other Hebrew songs / prayers in the home (For example: Ha'motzi, 4 questions, etc.)
- Locate "support materials" to be able to recite / sing blessings / songs at home.
- Respond to commands in Hebrew.
- Decode and read simple Hebrew.

To Feel

- Develop a love of / connection to / affinity for Hebrew.
- Develop a connection to Jewish community through Hebrew / prayer / Jewish rituals.
- Value Hebrew as holy / sacred language
- Value the experience of Jewish prayer
- Develop ownership over his/her prayer life.
- See him/herself in the narrative of the Jewish people as expressed through prayer.
- Feel confident with his/her Hebrew skills and knowledge.

Overall Philosophy

- Mimics natural language acquisition – hearing and speaking Hebrew for several years before needing to read and write it
- Socially constructed – learners have opportunities to use Hebrew comfortably with peers in a non-pressured environment
- Joyful – learners encounter Hebrew in ways that help them develop a positive association with the language of our people

Hebrew Through Movement

- Almost entirely immersive Hebrew environment
- Designed to help learners become comfortable and familiar with the sounds of the language and the meaning of key vocabulary words
- Kinesthetic, so learners are literally getting Hebrew "into their bones"
- Fun, active curriculum that truly brings Hebrew to life!

Hebrew-rich Tefillah

- Learners are exposed to Hebrew within the natural environment of a prayer service
- In environments with a mix of Hebrew and English melodies, learners get a sense of what the prayers mean and start to make connections with Hebrew vocabulary
- Where appropriate, the Hebrew text can be introduced via a handheld prayer book or a projection on the screen, allowing learners to see the written Hebrew, even if they cannot yet read it

Jewish Life Vocabulary

- Hebrew words and phrases that are good to know as part of our Jewish heritage
- Low-stress learning as Hebrew words and phrases are contextually infused into English sentences (i.e., “*Yashar ko-ach* for leading that so beautifully!”)
- Integrated into curriculum so that Hebrew becomes a natural part of the learning environment

Hebrew Decoding

- Starts after several years of foundational exposure via hearing and speaking/singing Hebrew
- Process of learning to decode is easier because learners have already ingrained the sounds in their heads (and ears)
- Learners are more motivated to engage with decoding when they have the maturity to have a better sense of its purpose
- Established positive association with the Hebrew language makes the experience of learning to read Hebrew one of enjoyment and success!

LEADING UP TO THE BAR/BAT/B MITZVAH CEREMONY

Starting the Journey

In 5th or 6th grade families will attend with at least two parent programs designed to provide a general overview of the B’nai Mitzvah program using the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah program from Moving Traditions, as well as to help provide context for the meaning of the ceremony. The objective of this program is to foster communication between parent and child.

Pre-B’nai Mitzvah Ceremony

On a Sunday afternoon approximately a year before the Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah, the family and the Rabbi meet on the bimah for a pre-B’nai Mitzvah ritual that marks the beginning of the preparation process. The ritual adds framing to the preparation process by addressing the values of B’nai Mitzvah and what it means to take on the obligations associated with preparing for it. The rabbi and the student engage in dialogue, families are given space to ask questions, parents bless their child, and the child blesses his or her parents. This ritual responds to families’ need to feel valued by the congregation, moving the B’nai Mitzvah preparation beyond the mundane tasks and instead into the realm of sacred ritual. It brings each family together as they begin this part of the B’nai Mitzvah journey. During this program, we pick the Torah verses the child will chant on the day of their ceremony.

TRAINING FOR THE BAR/BAT/B MITZVAH

HEBREW INSTRUCTION

We will offer 40 minutes group classes during Gates Quest on Sunday mornings for the sixth and seventh graders. Fifth graders will begin their decoding lessons one on one online using “*Let’s Learn Hebrew Side by Side*” facilitated once a week with one of our Hebrew teachers. There will be an additional class on Wednesday afternoons from 4:30-5:45 for those wishing for extra class time or to make up any Sundays missed. The classes will include learning the prayers essential for

all B'nai Mitzvah students to be able to read or chant taught using Sound-To-Print Decoding strategies. *A copy of these prayers is attached to this document.*

During this class the students will be introduced to the process of writing a D'var Torah (sermon). Toward the middle of the sixth and seventh grade lessons, the students come together to share their sermons with each other. The Rabbi and/or Educator attends this class where students will be able to hear each other's work and provide feedback.

As part of the seventh-grade lessons, we will assign dates to students to practice leading the Friday night Kiddush or Shema from the Bima at least once during the year.

Hebrew and Prayer Syllabus

Preschool-2:

Jewish Life Vocabulary
Hebrew through Movement
Tefillah
Exposure to Aleph-Bet

Grades 3-4:

Jewish Life Vocabulary
Hebrew through Movement
Tefillah

Grade 5:

Jewish Life Vocabulary
Tefillah
Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah Family Programs
Begin decoding & learning Friday evening prayers
"Let's Learn Hebrew Side by Side" online

Grade 6

Jewish Life Vocabulary
Tefillah
Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah Family Programs
Reviewing Friday evening prayers; learning Shabbat morning prayers
Begin learning how to write a D'var Torah.

Grade 7

Jewish Life Vocabulary
Tefillah
Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah Family Programs
Reviewing Friday and Shabbat morning prayers
Learn Torah & Haftorah blessings
Learn Shabbat morning concluding prayers
Bar/Bat/B Mitzvah Tutoring – 6 months before B'nai Mitzvah

INDIVIDUAL TUTORING

The individual tutoring program begins **six months before the ceremony**. These sessions could be in-person or virtual, based on discussions with the family, tutor, and Educator. In these sessions, the students will learn the essential skills needed to effectively chant their Torah portion, Haftarah, and prayers. Students will work on the prayers and blessings they will lead during their ceremonies.

Finally, for the **last three months of tutoring**, the student will have weekly 15-minute check ins with the Rabbi or Educator. This time is set aside to finish any learning and develop fluency for all the Hebrew chanting. Of course, this is also a great opportunity for the Rabbi to get to know the student and for the student to get to know the Rabbi.

Six weeks prior to the ceremony culminates with sessions in the sanctuary with Rabbi and tutor. During these sessions, the student, family, and Rabbi will talk through all the elements of the service, practice their chanting and reading, and develop a sense of comfort on the bimah.

List of prayers central for all B'nai Mitzvah students to be able to read or chant.
Page numbers are from the large blue *Mishkan T'filah*, parentheses indicate the navy version of *Mishkan T'filah*.

5th Grade: Friday Evening Service

Kiddush-Page 123 (5)
Ma'ariv Aravim-Page 148 (30)
Ahavat Olam-Page 150 (32)
Shema-Page 152 (34)

6th Grade: Saturday Morning Service

Yotzer-Page 228 (110)
Ahavah Rabah-Page 230 (112)
Shema-Page 232 (114)

7th Grade: Torah Service & Concluding Service

Torah Blessings-Page 368 (250)
Haftarah Blessings-Page 372 (254)
Aleinu-Page 586 (282)

Schedule

All classes will meet on Sunday mornings from 9:30-12:00. See the calendar for dates.

Wednesdays: An Optional Day

If your child is seeking additional Hebrew or Judaic classes, whether it's for decoding (beginning Hebrew reading), learning various prayer chants, understanding the meaning behind liturgical texts, or delving deeper into the Torah, this opportunity is tailored for you. Join us on Wednesdays from 4:30-5:45 for small group sessions. Attendance can be flexible, allowing you to attend weekly, once or twice a month, or even a few times throughout the year. The only requirement is to inform us of your attendance by contacting Arnie at arotenberg@cgoth.org, calling/texting 203-521-4591, or reaching out to the synagogue office at 518-374-8173.

Kesher Mishpacha -- The Family Connection

On three occasions during this coming year, we invite families to come and learn about the Friday evening and Saturday morning services to build familiarity with the service.

- Familiarity leads to increased efficiency. When we are familiar with a process or task, we can navigate it more effectively.
- Familiarity creates a sense of comfort and ease. When we are familiar with something, we feel more relaxed and at ease.
- Familiarity also fosters collaboration and teamwork. When individuals are familiar with each other's strengths, they can coordinate more effectively and help each other to achieve common goals.