

Tefillah (Prayer) and Ivrit (Hebrew) at CEEBJ's Romemu: Youth Learning for Ages 4-13

Ivrit (Hebrew) is the common language of *Am Yisrael* (the Jewish People), is *lashon hakodesh* (the sacred language) of *Am Yisrael*, and is the primary language of *Medinat Yisrael* (the modern country of Israel). For centuries, *Ivrit* was only used during *tefillah* (prayer) and reading/studying the *TaNACH* (the Jewish Bible) and other sacred texts. Approximately 140 years ago, Eliezer Ben Yehuda combined that language with the ideas and technology of the modern age to revive it as a living, spoken language.

Our main focus in *Romemu* is *Ivrit* as it appears in our *siddur* (prayerbook) – as the language of prayer and in observing a variety of Jewish practices and rituals. Learning *siddur Ivrit* and praying regularly enables our learners to chant core Jewish liturgy and participate in Jewish life. It helps our learners gain competence and confidence with synagogue *Ivrit*.

We do believe, as Ben Yehuda did, that spoken, modern *Ivrit* is an important skill for a Jewishly literate adult. Our *T'nuah* (our Hebrew through Movement) program will lay the groundwork for later learning in Modern *Ivrit*.

The goals are as follows. Learners will be able to:

- Engage with *tefillah* intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually
- Experience *tefillah* through multiple modalities (music, movement, art, digital learning, and mindfulness)
- Find meaning in *tefillah* as a *kehillah kedoshah* (a holy community)
- Recite the *brachot* (blessings) in the *siddur* with the choreography associated with each *brachah* (blessing). By mastering these skills, our learners will feel comfortable participating in *tefillah* at our synagogue or at other Jewish congregations around the world.
- Know the overall meaning, *seder* (order), and general context of the *brachot* in *tefillah* and home observances.
- Understand key *Ivrit* vocabulary, core concepts, and themes so they may balance *keva* (the fixity of our *siddur*) and *kavanah* (the spontaneity of our heart).

- Identify *middot* (Jewish values) associated with various *brachot*, which may help them in their pursuit of being their best selves.
- Strengthen their *kesher* (connection) to themselves, to others, to the Jewish people, to the world, to the Torah, and to God through *tefillah*.
- Develop the capacity to grapple with and express their experiences that occur along the spiritual journey.
- Explore God through the lens of *tefillah*.

These are the concrete outcomes; in the long run we hope:

- They develop *ahavah* (a love of), *kesher* (connection to), and *zekah* (affinity for) *Ivrit*. They value *Ivrit* as a *lashon kodesh* (holy and sacred language).
- They visit and/or study in *Medinat Yisrael*.
- They find *tefillah* meaningful, create settings for personal worship, and develop ownership over their prayer life.
- They see *middot* and Jewish concepts shaping their own theology and ethical decision making as they find their own spiritual path.
- They see themselves in the narrative of *Am Yisrael* as expressed through prayer.

In addition to our core *tefillah Ivrit* curriculum, our goals for introducing Modern *Ivrit* are:

1. To create phonemic awareness:

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds (Yopp, 1992). It is essential to learning to read in an alphabetic writing system, because letters represent sounds or phonemes. Without phonemic awareness, phonics makes little sense. Just as our learners as young children learn to speak English before reading and writing English, so we will start our *Ivrit* development with phonemic awareness. We will build the sound of *Ivrit* in our learners' *roshim* (heads) and *leebot* (hearts) before tackling print. We will do that in four ways:

- Creating a foundation of *Ivrit*
 - Learning of *brachot* by participating in regularly scheduled *tefillah*
 - *Morashah* (Building Jewish life Vocabulary):

E. D. Hirsch in Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know coins the term “cultural literacy” as referring to the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. For Jews our cultural literacy centers around key words and phrases in *Ivrit* that are part of contemporary Jewish life. In fact, some words and phrases in *Ivrit* are almost untranslatable – conveying values and ideas that are difficult to express fully with a word or phrase in English. By frequently exploring these terms in *Ivrit*, our learners will experience the world through *middot* and “Jewish eyes” and will appreciate *Ivrit* as a Jewish *lashon kodesh*.

- Waiting to teach decoding skills until the sounds of *Ivrit* are deeply embedded in our learners.
2. To enhance our learners’ connections to *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel).
 3. To raise the importance of *Ivrit* in our learners’ Jewish identities.
 4. To provide motivation for learning *Ivrit*.
 5. To increase the joy and *kef* (fun) of learning *Ivrit*.

We are pleased to announce that due to our goals and pedagogy of *tefillah* and *Ivrit*, we are listed on

#OnwardHebrew’s list of educational programs On-The-Way. To learn more about this honor, please go to

<https://www.onwardhebrew.org>