

## **The Gan FAQ**

### **Why is there a whole new program?**

As part of the Strategic Plan passed three years ago by our Board of Directors and community, our goal is to become more mission-aligned in all aspects of our synagogue community. With student enrollment declining steadily over the past decade, we realized that perhaps we need to look at new approaches to Jewish education for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Utilizing current and widely used pedagogical approaches and techniques, as well as the feedback and guidance from many families within our Temple Beth Am community, we re-designed youth learning to be more relevant, engaging, and appropriate for teaching our future Jewish leaders.

### **Why is it called Youth Learning and Engagement? Gan HaLimud? The Gan?**

The notion of Religious School came out of the 20<sup>th</sup> century model, which sought to expand learning from secular school. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we know that Jewish learning is a holistic and integrated part of Jewish living. We know that our students have three thousand years of Jewish information at their fingertips through any of their devices. Yet, even with all of this information, it is easy to feel isolated and alone. We want to focus on building community, and offer Jewish learning with an emphasis on values and not just content, on community both in and out of the synagogue building. Our primary goal is for all of our youth to be inspired to joyfully deepen their relationships to Judaism and the community by engaging their souls, hearts and minds.

The name Gan HaLimud, colloquially called The Gan, which means “Garden of Learning.” This term connects to Temple Beth Am in numerous ways. It is an extension from our SEED Early Childhood School, it speaks to how we help our learners bloom and blossom, and it certainly connects to our Pacific Northwest landscape. Sometimes the word Gan refers to the Hebrew term for “kindergarten,” which comes from the German word for a garden of children. Sometimes the word “HaGan” refers to the Garden of Eden. Here at Temple Beth Am, we use the term in our own distinct and particular way—as a way to remind ourselves we are all responsible for cultivate the garden of learning.

### **What is the difference between Shmita (seven week structured learning period) and Informal & Immersive?**

Jewish learning and community building does not only occur in “class,” a formal time a few days a week. In fact, many of our strongest and most meaningful Jewish memories take place in more informal settings, such as camp, youth groups, or trips. Our schedule is set up to directly intertwine both a more structured learning environment and more informal periods.

Over the course of the year, we will have three, seven week structured learning periods. Each seven week period is called a Shmita. A Shmita is the biblical term for the seven year agricultural cycle. Every Shmita will end with a Siyum, or culminating celebration. During each Shmita, PreK-7<sup>th</sup> Grade will formally meet on Sundays, as well as those in 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> who chose to work as Madrichim. 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade students will also formally meet once Midweek.



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Four informal & immersive periods throughout the year continue the curriculum, values, and community connection, but with a less structured schedule. By design, there are no times specifically set for programs and events during these periods, but specific information on events, programs and opportunities that will be offered during informal & immersive periods will be sent out well in advance so that all who are interested have time to plan and participate. In non-pandemic times, in-person retreats, trips, and youth group-style events will be a primary focus during these periods.

### **Why did the days, times, and locations change?**

The changes in days of the weeks and times reflect considerations due to the pandemic, requests from parents, as well as pedagogical and curriculum goals. Health safety guidelines limit how many people can be in a room at any given time, and appropriate cleaning protocols dictate when rooms can be used for more than one purpose or event.

During the week, rooms used by our SEED Early Childhood School are used by them exclusively, and we are not using any rooms in University Prep for similar reasons. This limits us to only 5 rooms that can be used. On Sundays, we have access to the SEED rooms. Limitation in space and number of individuals present dictated how many small groups would be allowed in the synagogue at any time.

We also took into account best practices which recognize balancing student engagement times with their appropriate developmental stages. In addition, we know that learning, especially Jewish learning, does not and should not only occur when we are in a synagogue. Additionally, we endeavor to utilize numerous spaces throughout our community to help further Jewish learning, as soon as it is safe to do so.

### **What is a Midweek Track?**

Students can be successful learning with peers of a similar age, and they can find success in mixed age groups when engaged in learning through the lens of a personal area of interest. We want to embrace an interest-based approach to learning through the creation of Tracks, which are a lens through which we approach Judaism. Each student registers for a Track, one during each Shmita (seven week structured learning period), in which they will engage with similar Jewish content, but in small groups based around shared interests rather than just age. Students will register for a new Track during each Shmita, but as the content will change, they are welcome to register for the same Track each time. By focusing on student's voice and choice, we embrace and support their preference in how they learn best. Tracks will be blended grades (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) to allow for more interaction and friendship building. It is important for young people's long-term connection to Judaism that they create social connections through interests, not just age. Remember, Tracks are the lens through we view Judaism, not the content taught by a teacher.



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### **What is Center-Based Learning?**

Center-based learning, also called student-centered learning, is an educational approach that is based upon student's voice and choice, rather than a singular approach of content delivery to students. This creates relevance and engages students directly in deciding how and who they learn with best. Students are not broken into individual classrooms. Instead, teacher teams construct various "centers," which help teach the same content from multiple modalities. The students pick which centers to experience, based upon what best fits their learning approach. Center-based learning small group approach also allows students to get more one-on-one attention from both teachers and Madrichim.

### **What is The Gan's curriculum?**

Relevancy is essential to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, and is a key focus of The Gan's curriculum. The Gan's curriculum flips the traditional model of Jewish learning. Rather than teaching values through content (for example, learning about Joshua teaches us about courage), we will teach content through a focus on values (such as starting with an essential question like "when did you need courage" then teaching students about Joshua's story.) Our Curriculum Team created a structure of 13 values that build on each other as students grow. The values, taught at the developmentally appropriate level, are the vehicle through we weave and teach essential Jewish content, such as holidays, history, life cycles, prayers, and more. The Gan will also utilize project-based learning which will incorporate Jewish values and material into a multi-week relevant projects, as well as social-emotional learning that focuses on the students' growth as a person, not just the mastery of content and information.

### **What is the tuition cost for this year?**

Registration only covers 60% of The Gan's costs. Our largest expense is the phenomenal teachers and mentors working with our children, which does not change regardless of whether we are virtual or in-person. As a result, tuition has not increased but will not be reduced for the upcoming year. Scholarships are available upon request as we want all young people to have access to Jewish learning and community.

### **Will we be virtual all year?**

We are committed to being virtual only through the first Shmita (seven week structured learning period), which ends on November 15. Based on the guidance of public health and science experts, we will regularly reassess, and as soon as it is safe to gather in small groups, we will provide options to meet in person. Regardless, we will have virtual options available all year so no family feels pressured to be in groups where they may not be comfortable or at risk.

### **If we are virtual, why change dates and times for the first part of the year?**

As mentioned above we are hopeful that we will be able to gather in small groups at some point during the 2020-2021 / 5781 year. We felt it was prudent to adjust to these changes now, as opposed to mid-year when family and student schedule are often harder to shift.



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### **What support will exist for my student?**

Supporting every student's learning is still and always will be a priority at Temple Beth Am. We will be working closely with our new Youth Learning and Engagement Manager Reyna Abraham, who has passion and experience in this area, to create a successful approach. This is particularly true as we wrestle with the additional complexities of virtual learning. We welcome an open dialogue with any parent who has guidance, concerns or recommendations.

### **How will Hebrew be taught?**

We are very excited to be designing the Hebrew program with our new Youth Learning and Engagement Manager, Reyna Abraham. Reyna has a lot of expertise on this topic. One intention is to explore more Hebrew integration, including modern Hebrew terms and concepts. We seek to utilize new and different tools than we have in the past to create a more holistic and dynamic approach to learning the Hebrew language.

### **What is the role of Madrichim in The Gan?**

The primary role of a Madrich/Madrichah/Madricheh (non-binary) is to inspire youth to joyfully deepen relationships to Judaism and our community by engaging the soul, heart, and mind. The job of Madrichim is focused on mentorship, relationship building, guiding individual students' Jewish learning, and group facilitation. During each Shmita (seven week structured learning period), the specific day-to-day tasks will differ for each age level, although most Madrichim will be engaged in center and small group work (whether we are virtual or in-person.) Madrichim will also play a crucial relationship building and mentorship role during our Informal & Immersive Periods. We welcome all potential Madrichim to apply and read the information and expectations for this upcoming year.

### **What will Youth Group look like this year?**

As our entire learning program is built on joyful engagement, our youth groups are essential to this work. We will be working with Reyna Abraham, our new Youth Learning and Engagement Manager, to move forward this important work. More details of how we can support our youth groups, even virtually, will be coming soon.

### **This is all so new. Will it work?**

As it is our first year piloting this program, and it is a distinctively unusual year all around, this year should be looked at as part of the journey of learning rather than the destination. We are experimenting and innovating, and we will gain more knowledge with each passing week. We are looking to *you* our families to be our partners—we are eager to hear from you what has been great, what has been challenging, and what can we try! We will problem solve and work together when obstacles arise. We always want feedback as we partner with you for this journey ahead. We will use this feedback and reflection to help us make changes, improve together, and help our youth make long-lasting connections to Judaism and our Temple Beth Am community!



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