



## Middle School Newsletter

Fall 2018

As you know, every child is not in every class, but are in the classes that are relevant to them, based on the initial survey at the beginning of the year. If you'd like more information, let us know.

### Contact us:

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### Middle School Thursdays:

**4:00-5:00 pm**

#### Ancient Bible Heroes:

In Molly's class we spend time studying Ancient Bible Heroes. We began by getting to know Noah, how old he was, why he took so long to build the ark, and why he was considered a righteous hero. Some questions we considered were:

- If he lived during a different time would he have been considered righteous?
- How was he able to resist the majority, and do the right thing?
- What did he endure?
- Can we relate to how he must have felt?
- What was it like for Noah to build the ark, separating himself from the rest of society and keeping his faith in God?
- What can we learn from Noah?

We then studied Abraham, who was also a very heroic, holy man. He too set himself apart in his generation and he was also extremely strong in his faith. We focused on one of his favorite mitzvahs of "Hachnasat Orchim", welcoming guests into our home. We decided to bring that mitzvah to life in the classroom by decorating our classroom using nice tablecloths, making welcome signs, preparing napkin holders, enhancing our tasty challah with chocolate chips and welcoming the other middle school class into our room for a Shabbat party. Ask your children how it made them feel either to welcome others into their classroom or to be welcomed in this way? We hope this helps us continue to think more deeply about what we do in our lives that makes us feel connected on a deeper level.

We also studied Sarah and Rachel, two of our matriarchs who were givers in their own ways. There are so many ways to study our Ancient Bible Heroes and hopefully we can learn from them how to perform acts of kindness and respect into our own lives. We are excited to move into Modern Jewish Prophets next semester and see how people in more current times can connect us both back to our Biblical heroes and to our lives today as well.

**Biblical Bad Choices:**

In Rabbi Sitkin's class we explored the weekly Torah portion, and how the parsha is a commentary on the human decision making process in particular. Each week we discuss specific narratives that illustrate challenging emotions/contextual problems, which lead to "bad choices", and we delve into deeper psycho-emotional ethical behavior. The narratives we discussed included: Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden (trusting one's ethical instincts), Cain's murder of his brother Abel (being honest), God's decision to destroy the world with the flood in Noah (pausing before acting/becoming aware of one's emotions), how Noah's sons respond to his drunkenness (preserving human dignity), Abraham's conflict with his nephew Lot (resolving conflict not avoiding conflict), and God's choice to destroy S'dom and Gomorrah (speaking truth to power).

A large portion of the class is thinking through and articulating how these narratives translate to middle school and some of the social problems our students might experience in school. In January, we will move on to focusing on some more of these character traits and the stories involved instead of just the characters themselves.

**5:00-6:00 pm Electives**

Based on conversations with our middle schoolers themselves, they are interested in having an elective time during their weekly Religious School experience. In this hour, the program varies between Art, time with Yuval (our Shinshinit, or Israeli emissary), cooking, and other one-off experiences that interest the kids. The class had a really fun and meaningful experience making challah at the beginning of November, learning about the process of making challah, why it is important, and of course, what makes it so tasty! We hope to do more of this in 2019 as we know cooking and finding connection to Jewish food in particular is something that interests this population tremendously.

**Middle School Sundays:****9:00-10:00 am Judaism 101**

- We have been studying the parsha of the week, starting with Bereshit. Each week, we discuss certain values connected to the parsha. We have touched on why we have rules, having the courage to do something new, and whether or not it is okay to lie. Focusing on components of the parsha that have the potential to relate to the kids' lives helps create meaningful conversation among us.
- We have also been delving into tefillah, from the perspective of understanding specific prayers' meanings and what it might mean to us in our daily lives. We studied some tefillah quotes and wrote about what they meant and what they mean personally to us. Then we wrote our own tefillah quotes that we put up in our room to refer back to when needed.
- More recently, we studied Six Word Stories. We looked at examples of some six word stories that other people have written about their lives. Then, we actually practiced writing our own six word stories about our day, a favorite thing, or hopes and dreams for the future. We were able to connect our six word stories to the 'six word story' of the Shema and noticed that, of the six words, two of the words are the same and three have a similar meaning. Through our conversation, we explored the themes of love and of God and of the world, which are very evident in prayers around the Shema. We plan on ending the semester with the Shema after the Hanukiyada in order to come up with our own Six Word Story for the Shema for each of us, connecting us back to the Shema, love, God, and the world.

### **10:00 am-11:00 am Hebrew**

- During this time on Sundays, we divide into two groups. One group works in various workbooks from our Hebrew curriculum, focusing more on phonetic Hebrew with Morah Ann, in addition to a focus on different Hebrew reading skills to help everyone continue to feel more confident in their Hebrew ability. Everyone is practicing identifying Hebrew letters, reading skills, and writing skills, doing so individually, in small groups, and of course with the assistance of educators and our Hebrew specialists.
- With Morah Sigal, the class gives the students whose Hebrew reading has passed that of our workbooks a chance to continue to not only improve their reading and comprehension skills, but their Hebrew speaking skills as well. In this class, the kids look at Hebrew script letters, focus on building simple sentences, and have short conversations. Every week, we try to build on what we learned the week before by expanding our simple sentences into longer ones. We are most recently focusing on feelings words, such as “I feel good,” “I feel so-so,” “I am angry,” “I am happy,” etc. We have also learned names of countries, continents, occupations, parts of the body and we look forward to diving into different topics beginning in January.

### **11:00 am-12:00 pm Holidays, Israel Education, & Torah Highlights**

- **Holidays:** At the beginning of the year, we focused on the holiday of Sukkot. Our discussions began around the Sukkah itself – what makes a Sukkah kosher and why we sit in a Sukkah, specifically. We also learned about the four species and the blessings connected to Sukkot in Hebrew. Of course, we then tied Sukkot into Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah, focusing on new beginnings, as we were currently in the new beginning of the Middle School Religious School Program at Beth El.
- **Israel Education:** With Morah Sigal so far, we have focused on the various symbols associated with Israel like the Israeli Flag, the Magen David Israel seal, the olive branches on the seal, and more. We learned about how powerful Israel is, despite its small size. We also studied Hatikvah, Israel’s national anthem, which means the Hope, learning about what it means, where it comes from, and how to sing it.
- **Torah Highlights:** With Morah Ann so far, we focused on a few Torah highlights, like Parshat Ha’azinu and Shirat HaYam. We noticed how in the Torah itself, these are written very differently and discussed that both of these sections are actually poems – one is a reminder from Moshe about how God took care of the Israelite people and the other is an expression of gratitude to God after crossing the Red Sea. We found it interesting to see how often poetry is used in the Torah as a form of expression and thought about the different ways we can express ourselves and our gratitude in our lives.

### **Trip:**

We were fortunate to be able to join a few other Westcheser-area synagogues at the Hebrew Institute of White Plains to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. There, we heard a Holocaust survivor, Helga Luden share her story of survival. We also joined the community in walking to the Garden of Remembrance for a short memorial service. This experience brought our cohort together and was meaningful for all who joined. We hope to share more experiences like this in 2019.

**December:** This month, Chanukah and the bi-annual Hanukiyada are our main focuses, enhancing our skills when it comes to leadership, teamwork, and treating others as we want to be treated.

Join us on Sunday, December 9, 10:30 am-12:00 pm to see us in action!