

Report of the Congregation Beth Am Hebrew Working Group August 2005/Av 5765

Members:

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History:

Over the years, a number of parents have requested that Beth Am consider moving to a one-day midweek Hebrew program. In 2002, we launched the Tzavta program as an alternative model of Hebrew in the 6th grade, in part to respond to some of this feedback. With the start of this unique model of Hebrew learning, parent education, and participation in Shabbat services, momentum was generated among parents and congregants alike to think more broadly about the goals and structure of our Hebrew program.

The early success of Tzavta was an important catalyst for this process because it demonstrated that it was possible to maintain contact hours and respond to hectic extra-curricular schedules at the same time. An additional factor nurturing this process was the awareness that the Hebrew program was our only youth education program that had not yet been “Beth Amed” through our reflective, lay-professional process. When our Family Learning and Hebrew Coordinator joined our team in 2003, we were positioned to begin the process of rethinking our Hebrew program.

As the Tzavta program grew to encompass the entire 6th grade of Hebrew program in the fall of 2004, parents began to approach us with requests for the expansion of Tzavta to 5th grade. In the spring of 2004, a small group of parents also began to lobby for Beth Am to move to a one-day midweek Hebrew program. Beth Am is the last remaining congregation on the peninsula to have a two-day a week Hebrew program. Our 4th and 5th grade students who participate in both our Judaica and Hebrew programs, attend classes at Beth Am three-days-a-week. In the fall of 2005, the Education Steering Committee decided to discuss the vision of Hebrew and draft a charter for a Hebrew working group. The lay leaders, congregants and professional team were ready to launch a process for re-envisioning Hebrew at Beth Am.

The Hebrew working group was co-chaired by the Family Learning and Hebrew coordinator and a lay chair, Frieda Haidt. We met seven times over the course of five months. Early on in the process, we decided to focus our efforts on the youth Hebrew program but did make some broader recommendations for how Hebrew is approached throughout the congregation. As outlined in our vision of Hebrew at Beth Am, we aspire that Hebrew be a fundamental component of everything we do at Beth Am. We hope that this Hebrew working group process is just the beginning of a congregational wide effort to bring Hebrew into the center of Jewish learning and living at Congregation Beth Am.

Education Steering Committee's Vision, Aims, and Goals for the Hebrew Program as affirmed on 12/16/04:

Vision of Hebrew at Beth Am:

Congregants will see Hebrew as a fundamental component of Jewish learning and living and value it as the “mother tongue of the Jewish people,” the language that binds Jews together throughout time and space. A Committed Knowledgeable Participating Reform Jew will, at a minimum, achieve prayer book literacy (can decode prayers, has basic prayer book vocabulary, understands structure of the *siddur*, and the meaning of key prayers). However, prayer book Hebrew is only one component of the Hebrew language. Modern Hebrew is the language of the State of Israel (home to over 40% of world Jewry) and the shared vehicle for communication among all Jews. The study of Hebrew engenders connection with Jewish culture and the Jewish people everywhere. **For all of these reasons, we aspire to a program that introduces Hebrew as a spoken, living language.** We want our students to experience the excitement of reading a poem or story in Hebrew and knowing what it means, having short dialogues in Hebrew, and mastering the most basic modern Hebrew vocabulary and grammar. This will, in the words of HUC-JIR professor Isa Aron, “plant seeds of excitement and a love for the Hebrew language” that we hope will lead to lifelong Hebrew study.

Aims:

- For our parents and students to identify Hebrew as a critical and valuable part of Jewish education and identity formation.
- To provide a fully integrated Jewish education program with a qualified staff, sound pedagogy, and full congregational support.

Goals for Hebrew Education:

- To build a connection with the land and people of Israel.
- To plant seeds of excitement and a love for the Hebrew language.
- To develop a Hebrew literacy connected with Jewish values, traditions, rituals, and life cycle events shared by Jews around the world.
- To introduce Hebrew as a living language—basic vocabulary, grammar.
- To motivate students to continue learning Hebrew in high school and college
- To enable students to achieve prayer book literacy

Hebrew Working Group Charter:

Guided by our overarching congregational vision and the Hebrew Education goals agreed upon by ESC, the Hebrew Education Working Group will meet to draft a recommendation to the ESC about how we should approach Hebrew education at Beth Am going forward. Specific recommendations about ways we can enhance our Youth Hebrew Program and deepen our congregation's commitment to Hebrew are welcome. In order to complete its task, we recommend that the working group explore “best practices” in other synagogues and look to scholarly research on the subject.

Hebrew Working Group Recommendations for Congregation Beth Am:

- ❖ We recommend that the ESC consider the creation of a *Va'ad Lashon Ivrit*, that focuses on how to deepen the congregation's support for Hebrew learning.

- ❖ Beth Am should develop a lifelong learning curriculum for Hebrew education that takes into account other avenues for Hebrew education in the broader community. There are many programs both at Beth Am and in the broader community that have significant modern Hebrew language components, beginning with our youngest learners: i.e. *Shabbat LaTaf, Yeladudes*, the Hebrew immersion program at T’enna pre-school, and the day school. Therefore, there is a growing need to think about reaching families whose children are being exposed to Hebrew at an early age. We should think about how we can build on these experiences and better integrate them into our program.
- ❖ The Education Team should work together with key lay-leaders to articulate the steps which will need to be taken in order to make our vision of Hebrew education a reality. This might include:
 - Articulating the expectation that all of our teachers achieve basic Hebrew literacy and be proficient in the decoding of Hebrew.
 - Exploring ways to infuse more Hebrew into the daily life of the congregation (signage, communications, etc.)
- ❖ The ESC and/or the Education Team explore ways in which we can partner with existing organizations to improve Hebrew at Beth Am (i.e. the Israel Center, etc.).

Overall Recommendations for the Hebrew Program:

- Develop clear goals and objectives (learning outcomes) for each grade of the Hebrew program.
- Develop a fully realized curriculum for each grade including assessment metrics.
- Provide on-going professional development for Hebrew program teachers.
- Insure regular parent-teacher communication (i.e. newsletter, e-mail, etc.).
- Encourage on-going parent-student engagement in Hebrew learning.
- Provide ongoing “homeplay” opportunities (reinforcement at home).
- Create opportunities for Shabbat Service participation in each grade level – (i.e. active Junior Congregation program, attendance at community services, etc.).
- Form Hebrew Program Advisory Group (small sub-committee that reports to YEAC—responsible for evaluating how the program is meeting its goals).
- Integrate Hebrew language acquisition into our Judaic programs beginning with our youngest learners.
- Focus more energy on the quality of community that is built in the Hebrew Program.

Ideas that we considered but did not recommend:

- Hebrew tutoring model. [See appendix for pros/cons chart of Hebrew models reviewed.]
- We discussed a model that provided a one-day midweek minimum for students and then an optional day for students who are highly motivated. We did not reach consensus on this model because we were concerned that the motivated students would immediately feel less motivated when they were only students coming an additional day.

VISION FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:

Pre-K – Gr.1

- Hear basic Hebrew vocabulary related to Judaica curriculum.
- Begin development of Hebrew literacy by hearing Hebrew spoken, learning Hebrew songs, participating in Tefillah.

GRADE	Midweek (one day for 2hours)	Sunday/Shabbaton	Tzavta Shabbat	Topic
2	_____	Add specific time for Hebrew learning	_____	Introduction to the Alef-Bet
3	Yes	Time for Hebrew	_____	Learn to decode/primer year
4	Yes	Time for Hebrew	_____	Modern Hebrew/ Tefillah checklist
5	Yes	Time for Hebrew	About 5 times a year – services and meal only	Modern Hebrew/ Tefillah checklist
6	Yes	Possible TNP elective? (per semester)	Continue current model	Modern Hebrew/ Tefillah checklist and Family B'nei Mitzvah
7	Yes (optional)	Possible TNP elective?	_____	Modern Hebrew

Narrative:

Beginning in 2nd grade, students work on letter recognition.

In 3rd grade, students begin to attend one day midweek and learn to decode Hebrew.

- During the 2 hour, midweek class – students will have an opportunity to choose from various Hebrew *chugim* (electives) for the final 30 minutes of class. Art, music, movement/games to reinforce their decoding skills.

4th – 7th grade - Modern Hebrew curriculum and *Tefillah* checklist.

- Children are responsible for certain *tefillot* each year of their Hebrew education, beginning in 4th grade. Use a check-off system for those *tefillot*. Students learn the *tefillot* at their own pace. Students can use a variety of materials/resources to learn the *tefillot* – CD, computer, siddur, books, etc. Teachers/Tutors/Volunteers will assess each student's reading fluency of those *tefillot* throughout the year. We will continue to have *tefillah* during Hebrew program as well as Junior Congregation for each grade.

For Modern Hebrew curriculum:

- Begin to teach *Ivrit b'ivrit* (Hebrew in Hebrew). Work on immersion using language acquisition techniques.
- Use *Shalom Ivrit* modern Hebrew curriculum.

For Tefillah Checklist:

- *Mitkadem* – URJ Tefillah curriculum that is self-paced.

- Provide a variety of multi-media resources to families – online materials, computer games, books, etc.
- Students will be assessed of their progress regularly during Hebrew program.

Resources:

- Judaica teachers who know Hebrew and/or Hebrew specialist to work with each of the grade levels learning Hebrew during Shabbaton and Sunday program.
 - a. Two Hebrew specialists for Sunday program.
 - b. One Hebrew specialist for Shabbaton.
- Need to lengthen the time of Sunday program and Shabbaton in order to have enough time for Judaica curriculum and Hebrew learning.
- Tutors and volunteers to help with continuous assessment of the *tefillot*.
- Administrator for *Tzavta Shabbatot* to coordinate potluck meals, communicate with parents, keep track of attendance, etc.
- 4 years of Judaica/Hebrew would be required for Bar/Bat Mitzvah

TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

There are two possible options under consideration for the implementation of this program:

OPTION I: Phase in the program over a two year period.

For the upcoming year 2006-07/5767 we phase in 3rd grade only. Students attend:

1. One day midweek for Hebrew: Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday from 4 – 6pm.
2. Sunday or Shabbaton program that includes 20 minutes of Hebrew learning.

In 2007-08/5768 we phase in our 4-5th grades. Students will attend:

1. One day midweek for Hebrew: Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday from 4 – 6pm.
2. Sunday or Shabbaton program that includes 20 minutes of Hebrew learning.

6th Grade (Tzavta) and Dalet Hebrew will continue as is.

OPTION II: Phase in grades 3-5 over one year period.

1. All 3-6 graders have 2 hours of mid-week Hebrew. Dalet students meet for 1.5 hours.
2. 3-5th graders study an additional 20 minutes of Hebrew in their Sunday Program or Shabbaton classes.
3. 3rd/4th graders participate in a primer year 2006-07; 5th grade does Shalom Ivrit Aleph; 6th grade does Shalom Ivrit Bet;
4. In 2007-08, 3rd graders do primer year; 4th graders do Shalom Ivrit Aleph; 5th graders do Shalom Ivrit Aleph; 6th graders do Bet
5. In 2008-09; same as above except 5th graders do Shalom Ivrit Bet; 6th graders do Bet as well
6. 2009-10; same as above except 6th graders do Shalom Ivrit Gimmel (new Dalet curriculum must be developed)