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## **Midreshet AMIT Learning Guide 5782/2021-2022**

**First Trimester Elul / Fall Zman 5782**

This guide is organized by Areas of Study and not by days of the week. The Areas of Study are: Tanach, Gemara & Chazal, Halacha, Jewish Philosophy, Mussar & Self Help, and Jewish History.

Find the classes you want, and match them to the weekly schedule by class block. For example, a class numbered "Block 4" meets first thing Monday and Thursday morning. A class numbered "Block 21" meets at the last class of Night Seder on Thursday. You cannot take two classes in the same block.

Make good and interesting choices that will make you good and interesting Jews.

# Areas of Study

## TANACH

### FAQs

#### **What is TaNaCh?**

Tanach is an acronym for Torah, (the five books) Nevi'im (the prophets, like Yehoshua) and Ketuvim (holy writings, like Tehilim). All the books in Tanach are holy, but they range in holy-intensity from the Torah which is Hashem's direct word to Ketuvim which were written with *ruach hakodesh*.

#### **Is TaNaCh relevant?**

"Why learn Tanach?" you ask. How can such old books be relevant today? Well, let's start by asking ourselves this question: If God sent you a text, would you read it? Tanach is the very word of Hashem to us. Therefore, understanding Hashem's message to us the most relevant thing in the whole world!

#### **I learned it already in High School. Shouldn't I take something new?**

Tanach is like your favorite book or T.V. series, every time you read it/watch it you find new meaning, especially when you learn with a new teacher in a new environment.

### Class listings for Tanach

#### **[Block 1] Tanach's Greatest Hits**

The Tanach has so many incredible messages to teach us through the myriad of stories and lives it describes, and so many of those ethics and morals are recounted in Pirkei Avot. Together, in this unique course which combines Pirkei Avot with Tanach, we will learn about different parts of Tanach and see how each story can so eloquently teach us by example the lessons of the Mishna and the ideals by which we should shape our own personal lives today.

#### **[ Block 2] Between the Lines**

The Torah reveals very few relatable details of the lives of the men and women who shaped Jewish heritage, and we are used to viewing Torah characters as purely symbolic and instrumental figures. In this course, we explore these well-known characters from a unique, more humanistic perspective—delving into their emotional complexities and psychological nuances. We will dig deeper and try to better understand the personal struggles, triumphs and idiosyncrasies of these integral Biblical personalities.

#### **[Block 4] Yona (& other Angry Prophets)**

The book of Yona tackles the fascinating issue of a Navi who didn't want to be a Navi! What was he thinking? What pushed him to run? Where did he think he was going? Why didn't he listen to Hashem. Through this book, we will discover issues that deal with the way we as individuals and a nation relate to Hashem.

#### **[Block 4] Best Supporting Actors**

In every story or narrative, there are the main characters and the secondary characters. The secondary characters or the supporting actors are not only interesting, but they are also often the key to understanding an entire biblical story. In this class, we will delve into the stories in Tanach, focusing on the development and personalities of the “supporting actors” and discovering who they really were.

#### **[Block 4] Iyov: Perspectives on Suffering**

Iyov is known to be one of the most challenging books of Tanach. Known for intricate language and deep philosophical questions, it is much more than a book about ‘why bad things happen to good people.’ This course will allow the student the opportunity to explore the depth and beauty of this complex book. Learning Sefer Iyov is a way to learn about the bigger picture of life. What is the purpose of this story? Is there meaning to life's challenging events? How do we cope when life doesn't go as planned?

#### **[Block 4] The Soul of Tanach**

The world of the Tanach is full of stories that have inspired the Jewish people throughout history. The goal of this course is twofold. One: To give a person an overview of the main stories throughout the Tanach. Two: To help a person uncover the soul of these stories and how they relate to our own lives.

#### **[Block 6] The Book of Mishlei**

Of all the books of Tanach, Mishlei is one of the most esoteric. What did Shlomo Hamelech have in mind when he said "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Mishlei 3,6)"? Or, "He who scorns a word will cause himself injury, but he who reveres a commandment will be rewarded"? If you ever wanted to understand these sayings and more, then this class is for you. We will try to uncover the depth and wisdom of Shlomo Hamelech in a way that we can take practical lessons that will impact our lives.

#### **[Block 6] Be Holy!**

Relationship guidelines in society, fascinating business ethics, sexual morality, how to relate to ourselves, the world around us and most importantly G-d; Parshat Kedoshim has it all! We will look at these topics in depth from the Torah's perspective as we learn parshat Kedoshim. This course will show us what it actually means to be a ‘holy’ Jew living in today's world and appreciating the Torah mitzvot that create that framework for us and just how relevant they are for us today.

#### **[Block 7] Exploring Sefer Tehillim**

Sefer Tehillim is a timeless work full of spiritual guidance and essential wisdom. In this class will study and analyze selected chapters, discover their meaning and message and their relevance to our lives. We will cover the psalms which are well known (including those that appear in our daily *tefillot*) as well as those less known which contain treasures waiting to be discovered. The insights of Tehillim will help us comprehend the ways of Hashem and develop our own potential as a Jew.

### **[Block 9] Survey of 613 Mitzvot**

We are familiar with the idea that there are 613 mitzvot, but have you ever wondered where that number came from? And why are there so many mitzvot? Can't we just have a few that we perfect instead? Is living in Israel a mitzvah? How about davening? Where does the mitzvah of chesed come from? How much Torah does one need to learn every day? In this class, we will look at what the Rishonim (Rambam, Ramban, Smag, etc) considered as part of the 613 mitzvot and we will try to learn more about a selection of those mitzvot (what to do, when to do them, who needs to do them...)

### **[Block 13] Rashi and Ramban: Introduction to Parshanut**

We have all heard the expression “there are 70 faces to the Torah.” The beauty of the Torah is the possibility of multiple perspectives it allows. In fact, almost everything we learn is based on the premise that people see things in different ways. Two of the most famous Parshanim (commentators) on the Torah were Rashi and Ramban. Join this class and see how two opposite perspectives can be formed out of the same words, and see the beauty in both.

### **[Block 14] Sefer HaChinuch**

The 613 mitzvot may seem overwhelming, yet they are tremendous opportunities. In this course, we will delve deeper into the mitzvot through the lens of the Sefer Hachinuch. Written in the 13th century by an unknown author, the Sefer Hachinuch dissects each of the 613 mitzvot in order of the weekly parsha. It explains the source, a suggested reason, and the lessons contained in each mitzvah. This class will hopefully provide both greater meaning and practical ways to implement the mitzvot into our daily lives.

### **[Block 19] The Significance of Clothing in Torah and Halacha**

The clothing we wear has become a widespread topic of conversation, particularly for women today. The goal of this course is to gain a sense of a Torah perspective on this conversation- starting from texts about clothing in Tanach and extending to the basics of practical הלכות צניעות. We will work together to develop an authentic outlook on the significance of clothing in our own lives through the analysis of various texts and discussions.

### **[Block 20] Parsha Insights**

The goal of this class is to glean moral instruction and personal inspiration from the weekly Parsha. We will discuss some central ideas of the weekly Parsha with the intention of better understanding who we are, what we believe, and how we practice.

### **[Block 21] Sparks in Time: The Parsha**

If you want to travel fast—travel alone, but if you want to travel far—travel together. This is a dynamic-chavruta based class where together, we will delve creatively into the meanings of the weekly portion. This is a class that will help you develop learning skills and deepen your connection to Torah and with Judaism in your everyday life.

# GEMARA & CHAZAL

## FAQs

### **What is Chazal?**

Chazal isn't a what—it's a who. Chazal is an acronym for the Hebrew "Hakhameinu Zikhronam Liv'rakha", "Our Sages, may their memory be blessed". The term refers to all Jewish sages of the Mishna and Talmud eras --spanning from the times of the final 300 years of the Second Temple of Jerusalem until the 6th century CE. Whenever you hear someone say "Chazal say...", they are referring to a statement in the Medrash, Mishna or Gemara. (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi—Chazal. Rabi Yochanan—Chazal. The Rambam—not Chazal. Rav Kook—not Chazal.)

### **What is Gemara all about?**

Talmud, or Gemara, is the ultimate source of everything Jewish. The Judaism that you practice is based on the Gemara. Virtually everything you will learn in almost any class is rooted in the Gemara.

### **Why Should I take Gemara? Is it relevant to me?**

Well, if you want to understand where things come from in Judaism, you are going want to learn Gemara! You won't be able to finish it in one trimester, or even in a year, but getting a big gulp of Gemara will bring you closer to our Jewish world.

### **What is the Gemara's style?**

The Gemara is written in a unique style--it reads like a fast moving conversation, moving between people and topics at a breakneck speed. The challenge of this style is what makes learning Gemara so rewarding!

### **Is all Gemara about Halacha?**

No. There are two main areas of interest in the Gemara. The classic area of study is indeed Halacha, but there are large portions of Gemara devoted to Aggada, which includes stories, lessons, and insights into the world of Jewish thought. At Midreshet AMIT, we offer different classes covering both Halacha and Aggada.

### **What types of topics are offered in a Gemara & Chazal class?**

Well, obviously, there is Gemara. In Gemara, you might find classes that cover lots of ground or go slowly but in-depth. There are also Chazal classes that explore Aggada, Pirkei Avot and Midrashim.

## **Class listings for Gemara & Chazal**

### **[Block 1] Avot & Banot**

“If I am only for myself, who am I?” “Say little and do much!” You are probably familiar with Pirkei Avot. It is one of the best known and most cited of Jewish texts. This beloved mesechet serves as one of the central pillars of Jewish values and thought. In this course, go on a journey through this profound work. Pirkei Avot—Ethics of our Fathers is a book of morals, guiding us on how to live a true meaningful life. We will use the text and explain with stories and parables to bring it to life.

### **[Blocks 2] The Mysterious Tales of the Talmud**

Choni drew himself in a circle and refused to leave until Hashem listened to him, Raban Gamliel was driven from power in a Beit Medrash uprising. The Gemara is filled with fanciful tales and mysterious stories. In this class, we will be diving into the depths of these stories. Using the Gemara and other Torah teachings, we will learn to understand the deeper meanings behind these stories, and along the way, understand their relevance to our daily lives

### **[Block 5] Witches, Wenches and Wise Women: Women in the eyes of Chazal**

In this course we will explore how women were viewed by the Rabbis in the time of the Talmud. We will study the topics of Women and Talmud Torah with a spotlight on Bruria, Women and Mitzvot with a spotlight on Yalta, Women and Magic-Witches in the Talmud, Women and Leadership, Creation of Women and the story of Lilith, Women and Kfira with a spotlight on conversations with the Matrona (a very interesting woman you'll want to hear about.) This course will be texted based using various gemaras and articles but will also include movie clips.

### **[Block 9] Topics in Gemara**

FACT: The Gemara is the central work of Judaism. Everything you'll ever learn has a source in the Gemara. The purpose of this course is to provide the student with an understanding of the Gemara as that central text. Students will be able to understand specific concepts and see how the Gemara develops ideas, differentiates between different Halachos and comes to a conclusion (sometimes.) The topics (sugyot) that have been selected that are relevant, timely and exciting. Classroom discussion, leading to expansion of the sugya, will be an important part of the course.

### **[Block 19] And Rachel Was His Wife**

This class will be a book club of sorts, studying, meditating and celebrating the unparalleled lives of Rachel and her dear beloved husband (Rebbe) Akiva.

Set during the period of the Roman occupation of Judea (Israel) in the beginning of the first millennium CE, this tremendous book gives us a glimpse into Jewish life prior, during and after the terrible destruction of Yerushalayim by the Romans. Throughout the entire story we are inspired and educated by Rachel and Akiva about the meaning of love and dedication to one's spouse, one's people, one's Tradition and one's God.

We will be introduced to the Beit Hamikdash, many of the great Tannaim, Rebbe Akiva and his unique and incredible life story. We will read the tales and teachings in the fantastic novel, but also learn the primary sources in their original texts well.

We hope and pray that as a result of the learning we will do together in this class will deepen our own love of our people, our tradition and our God and hopefully prepare ourselves to love our spouse one day as well!

### **[Block 19 and Block 21] The Gemara Challenge**

Are you up for a challenge? The focus of this class is to finish an entire masechet of Gemara together. Heavily text based and requires motivation and focus, although no prior experience to Gemara is necessary. Go for it! **{Note: You can take Gemara in Block 19 or Block 20 or in both blocks, meaning you can take Gemara on Sunday and Tuesday only, OR on Thursday only, OR on all three nights.}**

## **HALACHA**

### **FAQs**

#### **What is Halacha?**

Halacha is the framework of Jewish law that guides our life. It is based on the Torah and, on the halachic parts of the gemara and has continued its development throughout time up until today!

#### **Why should I take Halacha?**

If you want to understand what we do as Jews, how Jewish law has developed and how halacha continues to be relevant to our every experience you should take Halacha.

#### **Is Halacha old fashioned?**

Halacha is hands on and practical and incredibly relevant to your life. Remember, Jews have been keeping halacha for thousands of years. It is what binds us together and what binds all generations together, so give it a pass if it can sound old--it is old! The exciting part is trying to find the meaning behind the halachot while living an authentically Jewish life.

## **Class listings for Halacha**

### **[Block 1] Life Cycles**

From Birth to Death, Jewish life is full of rituals and customs. Ever wonder why people put all their jewelry around the baby at a פדיון הבן? Do you say “ברוך שפטרני” on a Bat Mitzvah? Wonder why a Kallah walks around the Chatan 7 times? In this class we will explore the reasons, halachot and minhagim of all the major lifecycle events so that when they happen to you – you know what and why we Jews do what we do!

### **[Block 1] Kashrut on Campus (and at Home, too.)**

Keeping kosher is one of the pillars of Jewish observance, and understanding the principles of Kashrut and knowing how to apply them is paramount to living a full Jewish life. The college dormitory presents particular challenges in this regard. This course will provide an overview of the principles of kashrut, with special emphasis on issues that are likely to arise and emphasize the practical laws and issues pertaining to the maintenance of a kosher home

Topic will cover the basics of the laws of milk and meat, keeping a kosher kitchen, and common applications

### **[Block 2 or Block 10] Women in Jewish Law**

As Jewish women, it is essential for us to study and gain insight into the mitzvot that we observe. In this course, we will develop a deep conceptual understanding of a woman's performance of mitzvot. We will trace the unique set of laws applying to the Jewish woman from Tanach through contemporary poskim. The challenges and opportunities facing the Jewish woman in today's society will be discussed, debated and analyzed throughout the year. Objectives for this course are to provide the student with a broad knowledge of the mitzvot that relate to women, and to understand their values and inner logic.

Topics we will include:

Introduction: The differences between men and women in the eyes of Jewish Law.

Talmud Torah, How does the law differ for men and women, What are women obligated in as teachers/ students, Tefillin, BirkatHamazon, Tzniut, Hashkafa -why do we have so many rules in this area?

Halacha - what are some of the halachot about clothing, kolisha, behavior etc.?

ShomerNegia- What is the basis for this area of Halacha? What exactly is and is not allowed?

Laws of Yichud, Marriage/ Divorce, Relationships, Hair covering, the Aguna problem

This is a text-based class, in which we will delve into primary sources, ask questions, develop analytical and textual skills, and use our own life experiences to connect with the texts.

### **[Block 3 or Block 10] Hilchot Shabbat**

From the perspective that "תלמוד מביא לידי מעשה" ("study fosters observance"), Hilchot Shabbat is an essential aspect of any curriculum. Such a central aspect of Jewish life demands not only a knowledge of what to do, but an understanding of why we do it. We will study some of the most commonly encountered areas of Hilchot Shabbat with emphasis on their practical application. As a double period class, we will have plenty of time for chavruta, skill building, and individual growth as part a central aspect of our class.

The goal of this course is for students to be knowledgeable of the 39 Melachot from biblical sources through modern day tshuvot. Students should be able to design common scenarios that arise on Shabbat and be able to research the answers.

Major topics to be covered include positive Mitzvot of Shabbat, such as kiddush, hadlakat neirot, oneg shabbat, Bishul Muktzah, Borer, Kotevetc Most of the 39 Melachot will be covered

### **[Block 5] Shutim: Questions in a Modern World**

This course will focus on שאלות ותשובות (known as שו"ת) and the integral role they have played for the last 1000 plus years. We will see how the *Gemara*, the *rishonim*, the שולחן ערוך, and the *achronim* are used to answer questions that arise in all areas of our ever changing world.



This course's objectives are to expand the student's halachic knowledge, to give them an appreciation for the way in which halacha develops, and to show the wide scope of halachic concerns.

Major topics to be covered include magic, dreams, entering a church, tattoos, gambling, issues relating to Eretz Yisrael, lifnei iver, electricity, many more

This is a text-based class, in which we will delve into primary sources, ask questions, develop analytical and textual skills, and use our own life experiences to connect with the texts.

### **[Block10] A Day in the Life (Laws of Everyday Life)**

The life of a Jew is filled with ritual from the time we wake up until we go to sleep. This halachah class will trace the cycle of the day using classic and modern halachic sources with the goal of understanding and bringing meaning to our day. Halacha, is based on the root "Holech", to walk or to go. Together, we will explore how to be personally engaged in guiding all aspects of your daily life, through the lens of Halacha, and discover the beauty of Halacha and the true "way to walk". Our journey through a Jewish person's Halachic day will include the following everything from waking up, netilat yadayim, going to sleep and everything in between relating to family and friends, home and work, travel and leisure, and all the different scenarios of a normal day in your life.

### **[Block 12] Around the Year**

The Jewish calendar is a living, breathing, and vibrant guide which lead us through the various emotions and experiences of our Jewish existence. From the exulted freedom of Passover to the bitter tears of Tisha B'Av, the Jewish calendar helps shape the character of the Jewish experience. However, too often we are caught off guard and find ourselves unprepared to properly absorb the power of each month and the flavor of each holiday as they seem to suddenly arrive unexpectedly. In this course, we will travel through the entire Jewish year- from start to finish- and make stops along the way to learn about the laws and lessons of each special day. Obviously, the course will not be able to cover every holiday in full detail, but will at least give a taste of each one. The course will cover at least basic laws related to each significant day, as well as provide an understanding of the morals and values that each day is meant to introduce.

### **[Block 14] Laws of Kiruv**

What is kiruv? Most of us may associate kiruv either with certain segments of Chabad or an NCSY shabbaton we were once forced on. What we may not have figured out yet is that most of us will be involved in kiruv in one way or another, whether as a roommate in college, a classmate and most importantly, a parent. This class will focus on how to be involved in kiruv on an individual level as well as on a global level in a very practical way.

## **Jewish Philosophy**

### **FAQs**

#### **Before I ask about Jewish philosophy, what is philosophy at all?**

Philosophy is a way of thinking about the world, the universe, and society. It works by asking very basic questions about the nature of human thought, the nature of the universe, and

the connections between them. In other words, it takes information about the universe and wraps it up into a relatable package.

### **What makes Jewish philosophy particularly Jewish?**

Jewish philosophy does what general philosophy does, but for Jewish ideas. It provides a way of thinking about the issues that Jewish issues that concern you.

### **Why should I take Jewish philosophy?**

Jewish life is more than rules and regulations. Jews have always asked questions and searched for answers. If you have ever wondered if Hashem exists, when moshiach is coming, or why bad things happen to good people, how can we best connect to hashem? What is teshuva?  
then these classes are for you.

### **Why should I care about other people's philosophy? Why can't I form my own Jewish philosophy?**

By all means you can! However, like any art or discipline, it needs to be grounded in the classics. Studying the great ideas of the past will enable you to be a great thinker in the future. Who knows? Maybe AMIT 2219 will offer a course in you!

## **Class listings for Jewish Philosophy (Cross listings in parentheses)**

### **[Block 2] Tanya (The Secret of Chabad)**

Following on from discovering Hashem in our lives through the Chovos Halevavos, Tanya, a Classic writing from Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi is a way of helping understand who we are. We will learn about our soul, what is a Mitzvah, what is Holiness, what do the concept of Tzadik and Rasha mean. What is true happiness and how it can be attained. It is an extremely deep but meaningful book which is a tool for life in this extremely challenging world.

### **[Block 3] A Matter of Trust: Studies in Chovot Halevavos (Duties of the Heart)**

Rabbeinu Bechaya's Chovos Halevavos is a timeless classic of Jewish philosophy. In it, he tackles one of the most important topic facing every Jew—bitachon: faith and trust in Hashem. This course will expose the student to this staple of Jewish philosophy and analyze and flesh out the issue of Bitachon—faith in Hashem. Topics included are: What is bitachom? What good does it do us? How does it change us? How do you learn to have it?

### **[Blocks 5] Uncovering the Spiritual Meaning of Shabbat (Soul of Shabbat)**

For many, Shabbat is a day of restrictions. Yet according to Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah, all the laws of Shabbat are spiritual tools that help a person experience the power of God, family, inner peace and the ability to focus on the present moment. It is not a day of restrictions, but a day of celebration. In this course, we will study many Jewish sources that explain the meaning behind the laws and customs of Shabbat. This course will focus less on analyzing the laws, and more on uncovering the meaning of the laws. Examples of the laws and customs that we will study include: challah, kiddush, candles, three meals, muktzah, pikuach nefesh, Shabbat clothes, Shabbat prayers vs. weekday prayers, havdala, refraining from using electricity/phone.

### **[Block 5] Rav Soloveitchik on the Family**

Have you always wanted to improve your relationships with your siblings, parents or grandparents? Family relationships define, shape and influence us throughout our entire lives. These relationships can be very loving and positive and at the same time complex and stressful. The Jewish family has always been the backbone of our nation. Learn how Rav Soloveitchik's philosophy on the Jewish family can ultimately help improve the dynamics within our own families. We will study and discuss Rav Soloveitchik's writings on the relationships with grandparents, siblings, parents, children and spouses.

### **[Block 6] Spiritual Writings of Rav Kook**

Unfortunately, for most of the English-speaking world, Rav Kook (1865-1935) has become one of those cliché thinkers that many people talk about, but very few have actually learnt and become inspired from the inside out. This course is an in-depth study of Rav Kook's writings, who spearheaded religious Zionism. We will study his spiritual philosophy of individuality, teshuva (spiritual growth), Torah, Zionism, atheism vs. faith, vegetarianism, and geulah (universal redemption).

### **[Block 7] Rebbe Nachman's Soul**

Rebbe Nachman left behind a legacy of love, devotion, and endless positivity in a world which is often devoid of such things. In this Shiur we will go through the text and draw from the wellsprings of light and spirituality that are found in the book Sichot Haran, Rebbe Nachman's lectures.

### **[Block 8] Holy Fire (Aish Kodesh)**

During the Holocaust there lived a Tzaddik who taught Jews how to live a life infused with longing, feeling, and a hopeful heart, even in the darkest of times. He buried his teachings along with his personal diary in the ghetto. The Tzaddik was murdered by the Nazis, but his teachings were found after the war and live on. We will study his teachings and attempt to learn how to feel real emotions and presence in our service of G-d and in our everyday life.

### **[Block 8] Issues in Modern Orthodoxy**

In this class we will attempt to anticipate some of the challenges that will occur when the student is no longer in their supportive Jewish environment. We will be discussing issues such as: What to do when we start to doubt? How to react and interact with other religions and with other denominations of Judaism? Is evolution anti-Torah? What is Biblical criticism, and the like.

### **[Block 9] What Must a Jew Believe (If Anything)?**

In this course we will explore the world of Jewish faith. Is Judaism an action-based religion or a belief-based one? What must a Jew believe? What does imposing a system of faith mean? And if a Jew must believe, what are the core principles of faith required? We will be drawing on the Rambam's 13 principles of faith to answer these questions.

### **[Block 11] Science Meets Torah**

We will explore some of the major issues and conflicts between Torah and science. We will begin with the classic "hot" topics such as Age of the Universe, Dinosaurs, Fossils,

Creation/Evolution and move on to conflicts of the modern age Brain Death, Euthanasia, Stem Cell Research, Organ donation, cloning as well as other topics. This is a text-based class using classic commentators as well as views of leading scientists. The aim of the class is to enable students to feel confident in their knowledge of the issues and to be exposed to various resolutions.

### **[Block 13] Derech Mitzvosecha: A Kabbalistic Approach to Mitzvos**

We will study different Mitzvos and their meanings through the Kabbalistic lens of Chasidut. We will study things such as oneness and belief in God, Mitzvat Ahavat Yisrael, Tefila and more. It was written by the Third Rebbe of Chabad and is a very in-depth kabbalistic work on the meaning of Mitzvot

### **[Block 14] Hashem Where are You, and What are You Doing? (HWAY)**

Hashem is mysterious and hidden. Jews have always tried to seek Him and understand His ways. This class will discuss the issues relating to our understanding of God in the world and our place in that world. Topics include: Is everything in our world good? Are there coincidences? How does providence affect free will? Our exploration will focus on classic and contemporary sources.

### **[Block 18] Fundamental Teachings of Chassidut**

In the early 1700's when revolutions were happening in many corners of the world, there was one happening within the hearts and souls of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Started by the great revolutionary, Rav Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the Chassidic movement awakened, warmed and inspired masses of broken and tired Jews and ignited emotion and passion and feeling that had not been seen in the Jewish world since the days of the prophets. In this class we will learn together some of the fundamental ideas and teachings of Chassidic thought such as living with God in our consciousness, hope in the face of despair, the value of Jewish community and camaraderie, prayer with passion, positivity, song, value of the study of mystical areas of Torah and much more. As we study we will also get to introduce ourselves to some of the great Chassidic leaders from the last 250 years. We will also be sure to share and prepare chassidic insights on the weekly Torah Portion as well as the holidays.

## **Mussar & Self Help**

### **FAQs**

#### **What is the difference between Mussar & Self Help and Jewish Philosophy?**

While Jewish Philosophy deals with creating a framework around theoretical issues, Mussar devotes itself to the practical goal of self-improvement. For example, a Jewish philosophy class might deal with a chassidic outlook on life, while a Mussar class will help you with anger management.

#### **Why should I take Mussar & Self Help classes?**

Part of what makes your year in Israel so special is the opportunity to spend time thinking about who you are and working towards who you want to be. This is exactly where Mussar & Self Help come in.

#### **What does a Mussar & Self Help class look like?**

There is a big range in what classes may look like. Some might be focused on a classic Mussar text, like Mesilat Yesharim, and some might be experiential and discussion based. The common denominator is that they are goal oriented--to make you a better you.

### **Class listings for Mussar and Self Help / Discovery**

#### **[Block 3] Living a Life of Simcha and Emunah**

In the 1980s the secular world started trying to study what makes people happy. The Baal Shem Tov and his followers knew these secrets and taught us them 250 years ago. This class will discuss the different methods and approaches on how to reach happiness, meaning, and faith in our daily lives. We will delve into the teachings and stories of the Baal Shem Tov, as well as secular psychology texts and studies, exploring the nature of this pursuit which is desired by all.

#### **[Block 3] Seven Habits of Highly Effective Jews**

We are all creatures of habit. Many of us procrastinate work, errands, and phone calls. We know we will do them eventually we just "aren't in the mood" to do them right now...Others always say "yes" when a friend asks us for a favor even if we really don't want to do what was being asked. Does saying "no" make you a "bad person?" Can giving be a bad thing? And some people get five hours of sleep and can function really well during the day, does that mean that's all the sleep you need? Steven Covey, author of Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, discusses the habits he believes help us develop into our best selves. For example, how to best listen to people, how to prioritize our time, when its best to work alone or best to work as a team, etc...In this class we will learn these habits in detail while incorporating Jewish philosophy, and specific mitzvot. Combining these ideas will help us appreciate how the Torah is truly a guidebook of maximizing our lives. Exercise, sleep, being more assertive, and so many "good habits" are positive mitzvot as well. Together we will learn how to develop these positive habits into our everyday lives.

#### **[Blocks 6] Living Practically (Mesilat Yesharim)**

Mesilat Yesharim is truly a must learn sefarim for any shtark sem student. The Mesilat Yesharim was written by Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato in the eighteenth century and has become the most renowned of all mussar sefarim. It describes a step by step approach towards development of one's character traits and growth in service of G-d. For anyone who is truly interested in improving as a human being and becoming a true oved Hashem: this course is highly recommended.

#### **[Blocks 11] Navigating the Siddur**

Becoming familiar with the Siddur, allowing it to be a focal point of your day, truly defines its place as the vehicle through which one can realize one's closeness to Hashem. However, some of us find it hard to navigating the Siddur itself. This class will focus on the Siddur, helping us understand what is what, and where is where in so that we can connect to and enhance our experience of Tefila. Topics to be covered include the history, background and framework of the Siddur. We will also learn to navigate the Siddur, with special emphasis on identifying the various prayers and their places within the Siddur, whether daily, Shabbat or festival prayers.

### **[Blocks 11] Michtav M'Eliyahu**

Rav Eliyahu Dessler was one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century. R' Dessler was born in the late 1800s in Lithuania where he learned under some of the leaders of European Jewry. R' Dessler went on to spread his teachings to England before finally settling in Israel and teaching there until the end of his life. This course looks closely at Rav Dessler's magnum opus, Michtav M'Eliyahu. We will base the course on Michtav M'Eliyahu but we will examine how other Jewish thinkers dealt with the issues raised in the book.

### **[Block 12] Middot Workshop**

Our goal in this course is to improve our relationship with Hashem, ourselves, and those around us by exploring different aspects of spirituality and character development. We will use texts and media to analyze the importance of certain character traits. We will also address the challenges of and strategies towards self-improvement. Ultimately, we'll discover how certain middot can facilitate happiness, success and meaning in life.

### **[Block 12] The Story of our Lives**

The story of our lives is a wide-ranging guide to weathering the ups and downs of a passionate journey toward inspired living. A veritable textbook on the theological revolution of Chassidus and its relevance to the challenges of the modern era, this groundbreaking work presents a compelling argument for the need to dig deeper in our individual and communal engagement with avodas Hashem.

### **[Block 13] Zemirot: The Shabbos Spice**

There are many ways you can enhance your Shabbos. One of those is through singing zemirot. This course will take an in-depth look at the many zemirot recited on Shabbos. We will learn about who composed them, understand the lyrics, and deeper meanings. This class will also explore the unique Shabbos tefillot and help us understand what we are saying each week. Although this class will be taught on a Tuesday, it will definitely help elevate the coming Shabbat!

### **[Block 18] Life Hacks**

Ever wanted to do life...better? Life Hacks will take a deeper look into life lessons from the wisest of our teachers, and bring those teachings down into our day to day. Using games, discussions, stories and more, this class will get you thinking and sharing and reflecting and hopefully dreaming big. Course objectives include: Develop an awareness and love of seeking wisdom and incorporating it into our daily living Discover ways and systems to help prioritize the important from the not. Learn effective tools for building and maintaining relationships

### **[Block 20] How Awesome am I?**

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" Pirkei Avot, 1:14. Whether you are middle of developing your basic "I" – your true inner self - or moving beyond that and sharing yourself with others, each of us has a natural holiness. At our core is a sacred, transcendent self—and it glows like an eternal light! Why then can we feel at times so unholy, so mundane, so dark? This is a dynamic, fun, safe space, where we will work together and support each other as we work to become the best versions of ourselves through writing, discussion and meditation.

### **[Block 20] The Art of Reflection**

What did I learn this week? What did I accomplish this week? What do I want to take with me? The Art of Reflection is a class for any student who wants to bring their week to a close by reflecting and exploring their inner world. Time to review, time to share, time to write and even time to sing. All of these will be the vehicles by which we process the week that was and look forward to the week ahead.

### **[Block 21] A Torah Philosophy of Self Improvement**

The discussions around תיקון המדות and character development can at times feel esoteric and impractical. The goal of this class is to concretize and personalize these conversations, gaining insight from different Jewish thinkers and texts. We will focus on both the inherent importance and broader ramifications of refining one's character.

## **Jewish History**

### **FAQs**

#### **Why is Jewish History relevant today?**

Let's start with this: The Judaism we live today wasn't made up yesterday. Our Jewish life is an accumulation of thousands of years. So to understand what we are requires that we understand where we came from.

#### **Why should I spend one (or more) of my year-in-Israel classes on history?**

Actually, this is the best time to take a history class! For the first time in your life, you are devoting your whole day learning about Judaism. Now is the best time to gain the perspective that only a history class can offer.

### **[Block 7] The Shoah**

In today's world of Holocaust deniers and with the disappearance of survivors, it is crucial to know precisely what happened during the time period of the Shoah. We must be resolute in our commitment to the phrase "Never Again!" and pay homage to the memories of the 6 million lost.

The purpose of this class is to:

Develop an understanding of the world of East-European Jewry

Understand what Nazism was and how/why the ideology spread among the masses.

Learn about life in the Ghetto

Learn the extent of the Nazi atrocities

Understand the history of Christian Anti-Semitism

Explore physical and spiritual resistance of the Jews.

### **[Block 8] 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zionsim**

This course provides an in-depth understanding of the Zionist narrative and how it conflicts with the Palestinian narrative. Topics covered throughout the course include Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, settlements, border disputes, security concerns and the struggle for peace. By addressing these complex issues head on, students will gain the knowledge to effectively articulate an informed position regarding one of the longest running post WW2 conflicts.

Course Objectives:

The goals of this course are threefold: To provide the students with greater context and comprehension of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict, to encourage each student to develop his/her own understanding regarding the conflict, and to develop the skills necessary to articulate their understanding to others.

**[Block 18] Patterns in History: Understanding the Context and Relevance of the Second Temple Period**

In this class, we will first work to understand the broader Religious value of the study of Jewish History, studying both Biblical and Academic perspectives. We will then focus on one of the most formative periods in our history, the Second Temple Period. Our learning will begin with the devastation of חורבן בית ראשון and continue on to גלות בבל, including the historical background of the stories of both Purim and Chanukah. We will focus on patterns in our history and discuss our own religious identities in גלות, seeking personal guidance from our predecessors who lived in different, yet familiar times.

