

Orayta Course Descriptions

Course Objectives:

The Orayta curriculum, which offers intellectually rigorous yet personalized objectives in learning, is designed to challenge, inspire, and empower students to:

- **Discover themselves in the classic texts**
- **Internalize Judaism's profound message and methodology**
- **Acquire skills to communicate the depth of Torah in modern terms.**

Ample time is reserved for independent preparation for classes, interactive workshops, as well as, opportunities to publicly present material under professional supervision and feedback.

Tackling Torah and Navigating Navi

The Jewish people are known as "*the people of the Book*", but how many students are comfortable navigating the stories and intricacies of traditional *Tanach* (*Chumash* and *Navi*) study?

The Torah is the foundational Text of Judaism, complexly woven into the fabric of Jewish history and culture. Thus, a good working knowledge of *Chumash* and *Navi* is of value in every area of Jewish Studies. Thus, a good working knowledge of these underpinnings of Judaism is critical for any true Jewish leader.

This course is an intensive survey of the Biblical stories, from the Garden of Eden and the binding of Isaac, to the conquest of *Yehoshua*, stories of Eliahu and return of Ezra.

Students will become familiar with the major philosophical and theological questions raised by these biblical narratives, as well as learning how to prepare their own classes and topics for discussions based on these stories.

Attention will also be given to the study of some of the traditional biblical commentaries including in-depth analysis of the goals and methodologies of these commentaries, and the skill set in utilizing them to prepare material in the future, as well as the use of *Midrash* in exploring biblical themes.

Additionally, students will have the opportunity to explore these topics on site with biblical landscape tours....

Topics include:

- **The Garden of Eden**
(Freedom of choice; Determinism and predestination)
- **Cain and Abel**
(The power of change)
- **Noah and The Flood**
(Jewish perspectives on human suffering and Holocaust theology)
- **Patriarchs and Matriarchs**
(Perspectives on purpose; exploring the human experience; understanding sacrifice, Moses: the development of leadership)

- **Joshua: The Challenge of Conquest**
(Understanding the need for a land; issues of conquest)
- **Judges and the Patterns of Jewish History**
- **Kings and Prophets**
(The need for a Monarchy in Judaism; the David Story; checks and balances in Judaism; Destruction and redemption; understanding the prophetic allegory; Moral codes)
- **Nechemia & Ezra: The Return**

Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism

This course probes the philosophical and mystical foundations of Judaism through rigorous analysis of select writings from both classical and contemporary thinkers.

Course material includes passages from the Talmudic and Midrashic literature, Zohar, Maimonides [*Sefer Ha-Mada* of Mishneh Torah, the Eight Chapters, the Guide for the Perplexed], the Kabbalistic works of the Arizal, the Chasidic exegesis of the Baal Shem Tov, R. Shnuer Zalman of Liadi [Tanya], R. Nahman of Brazlav, R. Hayyim of Volozhin [*Nefesh Hachaim*], Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, R. Eliyahu Dessler and R. J.B. Soloveitchik.

Topics include:

- **Who is G-d?**
- **Why Live the Mitzvot?**
- **What Happened at Sinai and The Definition of Revelation**
- **The Chosen People**
- **The Philosophy of Halacha**
- **Faith and Reason, Free Will and Providence**
- **If G-d is Good, Why is the World So Bad?**
- **Torah im Derekh Eretz**
- **The Pre-eminence of the Land of Israel**

Making Prayer Meaningful

Too many of us find prayer uninspiring, lifeless and often a burdensome bore. We, therefore, speed through our prayers and then chatter with those around us in Shul so as not to waste our valuable time on a mindless and meaningless routine. The solution is simple. We need to understand the meaning, personal relevance and power of prayer.

This course addresses these essential issues:

- Why pray at all?
- How can tefillah bring resolve to our very real problems, inspire us daily to greater heights and give us spiritual fulfillment?
- What are we actually saying? What is the personal meaning and modern relevance of the age-old formal liturgy recorded in our Siddur?

Course material probes the depths of prayer and elucidates its' structure and transformational workings. It puts to rest disturbing misconceptions associated with prayer, offers techniques to enhance prayer and clarifies the soul-meaning of major text selection from the Siddur.

Tackling Talmud

Two thousand years ago, as the might of the Roman Empire sought to put an end to Jewish continuity, the leadership of the Jewish people in Israel and later in Babylon transformed the once oral tradition into a written masterpiece of Jewish legal tradition (halacha) and theological underpinnings (*aggadah*).

Today, most Jews cannot even find their way around a page of Talmud, much less unlock its secrets for Jewish continuity and understanding. It is time to rediscover the passion and the power offered in the Talmudic page.

This course of study combines traditional Talmud study with an innovative approach to exploring Talmudic ideas via topics (*sugyot*), rather than tractates.

Those students choosing to take this course will learn to navigate the Talmudic page, acquire skills in analytical thought and discover the logical thought patterns of Jewish tradition, as well as becoming familiar with Talmudic skills and concepts while uncovering Jewish responses to major issues in Jewish tradition and understanding.

The course includes traditional *chavruta* (partner) study and lecture formats as well as focus on particular issues in the Talmud, empowering students to undertake the critical study of selected Talmudic texts.

The course focuses on texts in the Mishnah, Tosefta and the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, and introduces the student to the tools necessary for the study of these texts as well as guiding the student in the explanation and analysis of selected sections. Additionally, students will gain skills enabling them to prepare their own discussions based on Talmudic texts. (Each student will be assigned specific texts from the tractate and prepare both an explanation of the selection as well as an outline of how best to utilize the text in pursuit of the issues it raises. This will be done in conjunction with the instructor.)

Topics include:

- **Mastering Mishna**
An analysis of selected sections of the Mishna to reveal the conceptual categories and legal reasoning of the pre-Talmudic Sages.
- **The Structure and Dialectic of Talmudic Debate**
Students will learn to recognize significant patterns of Talmudic thought as well as the art of inculcating these ideas in everyday living.
- **Honing in on Halacha**
A journey into the Talmud's role in current Jewish practice, and an understanding of the rules in Talmudic debate as they relate to the unfolding of Jewish tradition.
- **Timely Talmudic Topics**
Students will study texts in all six of the major sections of the Talmud: relationships between man and G-d (blessings and prayer), Shabbat and the festivals and the concept of time in Judaism, women's issues including marriage and divorce, love and relationships, and parenting, damages and torts including business ethics, and issues of the Temple and ritual purity specifically geared to relate ancient ritual to modern messages....

Midrash and Aggadah Loving the Lore and Living the Legends

Too many of those who study Talmud, miss out on the deepest questions in Jewish philosophy and mysticism and the distinctive ideas and values formulated and encoded in the Talmud, because they are often hidden in the form of allegories and stories. This course involves an in-depth study in the non-legal sections of the Talmud. The student will be introduced to the "Aggadic" sections of the Talmud in an attempt to explore the deepest secrets of Jewish thought.

Texts will include *Aggadic* and *Midrashic* texts and commentaries as well as Traditional Talmudic pieces from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, *Midrash Rabbah*, *Ein Yaakov*, *Tzemach Tzedek*, *Tsidkat Hatsaddik*, works of Professor Yonah Frankel, Explaining the Oral Tradition, and history of *Smicha* (Rabbinic Authority) as well as concepts of G-d, the Torah, sin and repentance, Jewish peoplehood and messianism.

Topics include:

- **Defining Terms:** Midrash, Aggadah, Mishna, Gemara, Halacha;
- **Understanding the Story as a Vehicle**
(Exploring the Key code of the Talmudic story: learning how to unlock the secrets of the Aggadah)
- **Major Jewish Issues in the Talmud**
G-d and human suffering, prayer, Mitzvoth, man's role in the world, love and relationships and more.

Mitzvot: Making it Meaningful The Commandments and Their Rationale

Ever wonder why we do the things we do? In the larger scope of things, why is saying a particular prayer or wearing a pair of tefillin so important? Students will have the chance to explore the deeper meanings of the mitzvot, as well as how they form the framework for making the world a better place.

Topics include:

- **Understanding Shabbat as a Palace in Time**
- **Kosher Animals as a Vehicle to Kosher Lives**
- **The Magic of Mezuzah**
- **The Jewish Calendar**
- **Understanding the Jewish Fascination With Sacred Space**
(*Thoughts on the Temple*)
- **Transforming Tefillin**

In this inquiry into the meaning of the mitzvot (commandments), students will become familiar with basic sources, including the *Sefer Hachinuch*, as well as Maimonides' *Sefer Hamitzvot*, and develop the skills to independently master the meaning of the mitzvot

Additionally, students will have the chance to define for themselves what it means to be Jewish and how an understanding of mitzvot instructs who we are, and how we fit into the larger Jewish community.

Weekly Wisdom Explorations in the Weekly Portion (*Parshat HaShavua*)

Once a week, on Thursday evenings, the entire yeshiva comes together to explore the life's lessons hidden in the weekly parsha. Through stories and allegories, traditional commentaries and current events, this course shares transformational insights designed to motivate and inspire students to explore life's deepest questions.

This course consists of both a traditional weekly lecture format using textual analysis and midrashic exegesis, as well as student workshops, where students are trained to develop their own classes, discussion groups and seminars in a variety of formats, overseen by the course instructor. Students will also learn to understand the cycle and theory of the Shabbat Torah reading and its connection to the calendar; study specific stories and legal portions, dealing with issues of exegesis, theology and ethics in an attempt to apply Biblical challenges to modern situations.

Hebrew Ulpan

This course, currently under construction, will offer the interested student the opportunity to become familiar with both spoken and written Hebrew on a variety of levels, including Elementary and Intermediate Hebrew as recognized by the *Misrad Hachinuch* (Israeli Dept. of Education). Interested students will gain proficiency in speaking, writing, listening to and reading Modern Hebrew. A Language Lab with an emphasis on speaking will also be offered.

Oryata believes that the study of Modern Hebrew allows students greater future independence in Jewish studies, as well as the chance to develop meaningful and lasting relationships with the land of Israel and its people.

Middot Studies in Jewish Character Development

“Derech Eretz kadmah la’Torah” (*Ethical behavior precedes even the Torah*)

The evolution of a Torah scholar and a Jewish leader is incomplete without the study of Jewish ethics. More than just the study of Jewish *“menstchlechkeit”*, the goal of this course is that Orayta students learn what traditional Jewish sources have to say about **being** a mensch.

It is not accidental that the second set of laws (*halachot*) in Maimonides' *Yad- haChazakah* (Rambam's magnum opus on Jewish law) is *Hilchot Deot*, the laws of character development. In short, a yeshiva that produces a Torah scholar who is not an exemplar of sterling character, has failed. This course, through the study of Maimonides' *Hilchot Deot*, Rav Kook's *Middot Ha'Rea'yah*, Ethics of the Fathers (*Pirkei Avot*) and selected texts from across the traditional Jewish Library aims to share with the students the Jewish recipe for ethical behavior, and see their development as role models of Jewish behavioral ethics.

Jewish History

This goal of this course will be both an overview of Jewish History (from the end of the First Commonwealth (Babylonian exile, circa 586 B.C.E.) until modern times) as well as inspiring students to fall in love with the historical journey of Jewish History and its intricate details.

Offered in a traditional lecture format, this course will also involve a series of on-site archeological field trips to explore and experience the studied material first hand.

Selected Lecturers will include Rabbi Berel Wein who will offer two four-part mini-series.

Rabbi Wein, the founder and director of The Destiny Foundation since 1996, has for over 25 years been identified with the popularization of Jewish history through world-wide lectures, his more than 1,000 audiotapes, books, seminars, educational tours and, most recently, dramatic and documentary films.

Rabbi Wein is a graduate of the Hebrew Theological College and Roosevelt College in Chicago. He received his Juris Doctor Degree from De Paul University Law School and a Doctor of Hebrew Letters from Hebrew Theological College.

A former Executive Vice President of the Union of Orthodox Congregations as well as founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Sharei Torah in New York, Rabbi Wein is a master educator and world renowned lecturer.

Teaching Methodology & Leadership Development

This course, offered weekly, aims to develop the natural leadership skills of selected participants through three platforms:

1. **Lecture series on educational methodology, behavioral psychology and teaching dynamics**

Topics include:

- **Classroom Dynamics**
- **Use of Discipline (informal and formal settings)**
- **Storytelling as an Effective Tool**
- **Enhancing Organizational Capabilities**
- **Public Speaking Skills**
- **Relationship Building Skills**
- **Environmental Sensitivity**
- **Outreach vs. Education**
- **Finding Your Leadership Style**
- **Communications Skills**
- **Conflict Resolution**
- **Understanding Group Dynamics**
- **Valuing Evaluation**
- **Games and Humor**

2. **Burning Questions**

A series of presentations and discussions on Judaism's most pressing and controversial topics, along with issues such as peer pressure, leadership, temptation, individualism, self-esteem, and femininity this series gives students a chance to learn how to deal with these issues on campuses and in Jewish communities.

Topics include:

- **The Existence of G-d (Convincing vs. Sharing)**
- **Is G-d Ethical? (Human suffering)**
- **Who is a Jew?**
- **Intermarriage and Assimilation**
- **Homosexuality and Alternative Lifestyles**
- **Women in Judaism**
- **Relating to the Nations of the World**
- **Issues in Modern Zionism**
- **The Divinity of Torah**
- **Science and Faith**
- **The Holocaust**
- **Love and Relationships**
- **Issues in Dating**
- **Cults and Missionaries**
- **Understanding Christianity**
- **Understanding Islam**
- **Labels and Denominations**

3. **Teacher Training:**

A series of workshops allowing participants to prepare classes, activities and seminars including a chance to present publicly with on-hands Instructor review and critique. This series is designed to prepare students for future teaching and programmatic success, and offers a chance to learn first-hand the 'tricks of the trade' from some of the Jewish world's most experienced presenters and educators.