



The Gan FAQ

As part of the Strategic Plan passed four 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 21st 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?

In the 21st 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 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 our youth to be inspired to joyfully deepen their relationships to Judaism and the community by engaging their souls, hearts, and minds.

The name of our Youth Learning and Engagement Program is Gan HaLimud, colloquially called The Gan, which means “Garden of Learning.” This term speaks to how we help our learners bloom and blossom, and it certainly connects to our Pacific Northwest landscape. Sometimes the word “HaGan” refers to the Garden of Eden. Here at Temple Beth Am, we use the term in our own distinct way—to remind ourselves we are all responsible for cultivating the garden of learning.

What is the difference between Shmita (seven-week structured learning period) and 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-7th Grade will formally meet on Sundays, as well as those in 8th-12th who chose to work as Madrichim. 4th-12th Grade students will also formally meet once Midweek.

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.

How are days, times, and class locations determined?

The days of the weeks and times reflect considerations due to the pandemic, feedback from parents, and 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.

Currently during the week the rooms used by our SEED Early Childhood School and rooms at University Prep (UPrep) can't be used in the afternoons/evenings by The Gan then ventilated, cleaned, and prepared for students again in the mornings. This limits us to only the rooms and tented outdoor space at Temple Beth Am for mid-week learning. On Sundays, we have access to both the SEED and UPrep rooms. Limitation in space and number of individuals present dictated how many small groups would be allowed in the synagogue at any time.

In addition, we know that learning, especially Jewish learning, does not and should not only occur when we are in a synagogue. 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 and why is this the new focus for Midweek learning?

Learning happens in relationship with others. 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. 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 each student's voice and choice, we embrace and support their preference in how they learn best. Tracks will be blended grades (4th-6th, 7th-9th, 10th-12th) 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.

What is the difference between Midweek and Sundays?

On Sundays, students will engage in peer-to-peer relationship building, establishing long lasting connections through intensive time, project based learning, and experiential education lead by Faculty and Madrichim. These joyful experiences will help our students strengthen their relationships to Judaism and the skills to live Jewishly.

Our Midweek Learning Tracks are opportunities for students to engage in interest-based connections with others. For grades 4-6, tracks will emphasize lifecycle and b'nai mitzvah experiences through a variety of Jewish lenses. The focus of each track will be impacted by student interests. Then, as students continue through our program, Midweek classes are about shared Jewish interests, connecting with a variety of subjects, and building the bonds that last a lifetime.

What is Experiential Education?

Experiential Education can include center-based and project-based learning, but at its core it is a student-centered approach to learning that is based upon student's



voice and choice, and relationship building, rather than a content delivery approach to education. 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. In relationship with trusted mentors, the students pick which centers to experience, based upon what best fits their learning approach. A 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 21st 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 which 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 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?

Tuition 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. Although all members help contribute to the cost of The Gan through their Annual Financial Commitment to Temple Beth Am (dues), tuition is essential to support this program. To better reflect the cost of The Gan, this year we have also included the cost of retreats and youth activities (grades 4-12) in tuition, and we have phased out our B'nai Mitzvah fees starting in June 2021. Any B'nai Mitzvah fees your family has paid before this date will automatically be converted into a tax-deductible contribution to Temple Beth Am. Scholarships are available upon request as we want all young people to have access to Jewish



learning and community. For grades PK-3 the cost has decreased, grades 4-12 have had a slight increase.

PK-3: \$840

4-7: \$1400

8-12: \$1080

Will we be virtual all year?

We are currently planning for in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year. We will be offering a Covid-19 virtual option for Sundays during Shmita Aleph, the first trimester, and will make a determination in November of 2021 whether or not to continue a virtual option for future Shmitot. There will be a virtual track option for our midweek classes on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays during the Shmitot for the entire year.

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 Faculty and Madrichim to create a successful approach to learning, with an emphasis on the social emotional learning needs of our students. As a Jewish Values and relationship-based program, The Gan does not have specific content-based expectations for students. This alleviates the need for many traditional accommodations. We welcome an open dialogue with any parent who has guidance, concerns, or recommendations.

How will Hebrew be taught?

This summer we worked with Debbie Massarano, a veteran educator, SJCS teacher and Beth Am tutor to redesign our Hebrew curriculum for grades 4-7. We seek to utilize new and different tools than we have in the past to create a more holistic and dynamic approach to learning Hebrew. While students will not begin reading and decoding Hebrew until the 4th grade, all our students as early as Pre-Kindergarten will have opportunities to explore Hebrew words and phrases that are an important part of our life-cycle events, community and heritage. Using a combination of singing and music, reading and storytelling, games and more, students will begin to construct and practice their Hebrew vocabulary, developing meaning and understanding that they will build upon each year.



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 our Youth Learning Faculty Team to move forward this important work. More details of how we can support our youth groups and how teens can get involved will be coming soon.

Last year we were virtual, now we are in-person with a new program. How will this new program work in-person?

Last year was our first year piloting this program, and it was a distinctively unusual year all around. We hope that you see each new year of this program as part of your student's Jewish journey of learning rather than the destination. Even when we know change is necessary, it is never easy. However, we are grateful to partner with you in better serving your children. We look forward to your feedback as we improve together and help our youth make long-lasting joyful connections to Judaism and each other!