



The Ira and Diana Riklis Seminary
Midreshet Torat Chessed

MTC Course Descriptions
Fall 2023

Chumash/Nach

Nach Bekiyut

Alexis Levy

Whether you have a background in Navi or not this course provides a fun overview of some of the most interesting and exciting stories in Tanach. Over the course of the year, we will cover all of Neviim Rishonim – the books of Yehoshua, Shoftim, Shmuel and Melachim. We will join the Jewish people as they enter the Land of Israel, conquer the land and try to fulfil the national dream. We will experience the euphoria surrounding the building of the Beit HaMikdash and feel the pain of its destruction. As we journey through these books of Tanach, we will experience the hopes, disappointments, dreams and challenges of our nation in its quest to build a homeland of physical and spiritual success. The aim is to cover approximately 5 perakim in each class so, while being fast-paced, the students gain familiarity with the stories, places and personalities of our history.

Jewish Beginnings

Rav Aharon Ross

The more we study the start of a story, the more all of it makes sense. Our collective story as Jews traces its way back 4,000 years to Avraham Avinu and Sara Imenu in the ancient metropolis of Ur Kasdim. After testing them throughout their many journeys, God chose Avraham and Sara to be the foundation of the Jewish People. Their beliefs, values and decisions therefore represent the DNA of who we are. Through studying the Torah's description of the journeys of Avraham and Sarah, the insightfulness of the midrashim, the commentary of Rashi, and our own questions, we will bring the Tanach to life, strengthen our own foundations as Jews in the modern world, and learn how we can be the carriers of the torch that was lit 4,000 years ago.

Parshat Hashavua

Rav Yonatan Hirschhorn

The parsha of the week is NOT a story of the past! It's a story of a relationship man and G-d. We're all in some sort of relationship with G-d. The parsha of the week can give us the guidance we need to build that relationship. There's no better way to end the week or prepare for Shabbat than through a powerful message from the Torah!

Sefer Mishlei

Rav Michael Sunshine

Why is common sense not (always) so common? Mishlei/Proverbs was written by Shlomo Hamelech, blessed by Hashem with wisdom. We will explore the wisdom of the wisest person to ever live through his words, understanding each proverb on its topical level and moving into deeper meanings of each line to see the greatness and potential of the human mind and character.

Tehillim

Rav Michael Sunshine

Throughout the ages, Jews have turned to Tehillim to understand the mysterious essence of Hashem and to reach out to Him in prayer from the depths of our souls-especially at a time when words don't seem like they're able to articulate what our souls yearn to express. David Hamelech wrote Tehillim with ruach hakodesh so we find extensive profundity in how he describes the world, the human spirit, and Hashem. Tehillim expresses the timeless search of the soul to connect and praise Hashem.

Women in Tanach

Ellie Ausaubel

If you are looking to be inspired, there is no greater place to start. You have undoubtedly heard of these heroines before, but have you felt her loneliness? Her triumph? Her faith amidst doubt? In this course we will come face to face with the women who've shaped the Jewish people. For if we want to grow tall and blossom, we must remember that no flower can exist without roots.

Halacha

Be Halachic

Shira Melamed

We will continue our study of Pninei Halacha, written by Rav Eliezer Melamed. Rav Melamed, in his unique style, defines each Halacha in an approachable manner while explaining the depth and meaning behind the mitzvah as well. His sefer is both informative and inspiring. This semester, amongst the topics we will study will be Tzaar Baalei Chaim, Rosh Chodesh, Purim, and Eretz Yisrael.

Bein Adam L'Chavero

Ellie Ausubel

Have you ever met someone who has a sort of inner glow that shines? How do we become more like that? Well, who we are is largely defined by how we talk to and interact with others- those in our inner circle and those in our outer circle. We will explore questions like:

Do I have to get along with everyone?

When should I give the benefit of the doubt?

How do I balance being honest and being sensitive?

How can I forgive if I'm still hurt?

How do I respect my parents and live my own life?

Find out how Halacha and our sources guide us through these questions and many more as we learn about key mitzvot that build character and develop our inner moral compass.

Hilchot Shabbat - Bekiyut

Rav Michael Sunshine

We will understand foundational ideas of Hilchot Shabbat and will learn fundamental halachot of Shabbat observance so that everyone can be ensured of a Shomer Shabbat experience to coincide with their Oneg Shabbat.

Hilchot Shabbat – B'Iyun

Rav Aharon Ross

Shabbat is the gift HaShem gave us! But without knowing what to do, how will we be able to truly experience it? "Hilchot Shabbat", the word 'halacha' comes from the word 'journey' and so 'Hilchot Shabbat' means the "journey through" Shabbat, the guide to the secret of Shabbat! Let's dive into the text, learn the Halacha as it unfolded through the generations and experience what quality time with HaShem looks like today.

Hilchot Shabbat: Peninei Halacha – Advanced

Rav Avram Block

In-depth survey of the laws governing the observance of Shabbat with using the guiding text of Peninei Halacha by R. Eliezer Melamed.

Jewish Lifecycles

Alexis Levy

The aim of the course is to add meaning to the major life-cycle events and ceremonies in Judaism. Why do we perform Brit Milah when a boy is eight-days old? What is Pidyon Haben and why is it only for boys? Why do boys have a Bar Mitzvah at 13 but girls have a Bat Mitzvah at 12? Why does the kalla walk round the chatan seven times? What is actually written in the Ketuba? What are the stages of Jewish mourning? Through an analysis of a wide variety of sources, we will explore the Biblical sources, reasons, halachot and minhagim of the highlights of Jewish life from birth to death. Sources will be handed out for each topic.

Mitzvot for Millennials

Rav Yonatan Hirschhorn

Have you ever asked yourself why there are certain mitzvot we connect to, are excited about and love doing, and then there are other mitzvot we don't always enjoy, feel disconnected from and cannot understand their purpose?

In this class we will learn about the world of mitzvot, and understand that there are different types of mitzvot. Those we naturally connect to and why, those we have a really hard time connecting to and why that is normal. And then those mitzvot that we just don't feel drawn to, we find ourselves pushing them off, and learn how you can grow passion and excitement towards them.

Olam H'Teffila

Rav Yehoshua Felberg

Tefilla is one of the most frequent mitzvot we perform, and yet, it is one of the least understood. In this course students will learn about the halachic basis of tefilla, is it rabbinic or from the Torah? Other topics we will cover will include how many daily prayers must a woman pray, why do we stand still during the amidah, can we write our own prayers or do we have to follow the established nusach, how high does a mechitza need to be, should we say hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim, is it still correct to recite prayers of mourning over Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av and what (if any) are the major differences in the halachot of prayer when comparing Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish communities. Through learning about the halachic foundations of prayer we will add meaning and understanding to our tefillot and nurture our connection to our creator. We will look at a variety of sources from across the breadth of rabbinic literature including the Talmud, Rishonim and Acharonim. Source sheets will be handed out for each topic.

Ripped from the Headlines

Rav Effie Kleinberg

To provide a Torah perspective on current events in the news. Each class will look at an issue unfolding in the media that countries and societies are grappling with today, and through text-based learning, will provide a framework of how Jewish law and Jewish thought help us navigate our lives through the lens of Judaism. A few of the questions that may be explored: Should I give up my privacy (i.e. government tracing programs) for public health? What are the ethics of protesting? What is Judaism's view on racism? Is it a requirement to vote in the election? Should police departments be defunded? Must health workers/teachers risk their own health to go into work? Zoom Ethics: May I join a call without actually participating? How should hospitals structure their triage procedures when resources are running low? How much risk is one allowed to take under Jewish law.

Jewish History

Holocaust to Redemption

Rav Effie Kleinberg

This course will blend together history, Jewish thought, and contemporary perspectives as we attempt to grasp the enormity of the Shoah and its impact on the Jewish people and the world. Some questions that will be grappled with and presented include: Where was God? Where was man? How does the media and the film industry portray the Holocaust today? How is the concept of "Never Again" being challenged in our day and age? What is our responsibility in the 21st century vis-a-vis memory and dwindling eye witness accounts? Through Jewish text, film, poetry, stories, Holocaust writings & Responsa, this course engages students in a deep experiential analysis of the Shoah.

Hashkafa/Jewish Thought

13 Principles of Faith

Alexis Levy

This course will use the Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith as a framework for discussing many fundamental topics in Jewish Philosophy. Some examples of questions we will discuss are: What does it mean that G-d exists? Can I prove G-d's existence? What is the source of faith? If G-d is One, why does He have so many names? Why does the Torah use physical descriptions of G-d if He has no body? How do we serve G-d? How does prayer work? Why do we no longer have prophecy? How do we know the Torah came from G-d? What is the source of the Oral Law? If G-d knows everything, how do we also have free choice? Who is Mashiach? What is Olam Haba? What will happen at the revival of the dead? Students will be encouraged to question and analyse, while practically developing their own religious viewpoint and beliefs.

Derech Hashem

Rav Yehoshua Felberg

Who is God? What is the purpose of creation? Does Man have free will? What exactly is prayer, how can my words affect the Creator? These are just a few of the philosophical questions the Ramchal (Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato) addresses in his book, "Derech HaShem", The Way of God. It has been said that the Ramchal had the most profound understanding of Judaism that any human being could attain. Throughout this class we will have the privilege of learning from his wisdom, enabling us to have a deeper, more profound and holistic understanding of the world we live in, Judaism, and HaShem.

Jewish Love Language

Ellie Ausaubel

How is the Torah's view of sexuality different from the world around us?
In this course we will discuss what has led to the hook up culture, what the research has to say about it and how the Torah guides us to build healthy relationships and a positive outlook on sexuality. We will draw inspiration from midrashic sources, contemporary Jewish scholars as well as modern psychology.

Lasting Inspiration

Lauren Freedman

In this class we will learn about inspirational topics in Judaism, aren't they all though! We will delve into the topic of Rosh Chodesh twice a month to learn about what each Jewish month as a whole. The beauty in it, the strength we receive from it, and how we can implement living a more inspired, clear and joyful life. Through celebrating our life! We will also learn inspirational stories of acts of chessed that helped others and derive what we can from these stories. We will learn about characters in the Torah to help us learn how to deal with certain life struggles and see the beauty in life's sweetness. The goal of this class is to gain a more loving inspired view of Torah, one that can and will heal us in every way needed!

Mastering our World of Thought

Rav Aharon Ross

Practices such as mindfulness and meditation have a central role within Judaism helping to master our internal world of thoughts in an increasingly frantic world. Together, we will learn and discuss a series of rich teachings from across Jewish wisdom including Tanach, Talmud, Tefilla and Philosophy which explore the tools Judaism has offered for thousands of years to help master our world of inner thoughts, towards living a calmer, happier, more fulfilled life. A weekly mindfulness workshop will help students learn these tools first hand.

Mesilat Yesharim

Shira Melamed

In this course we study one of the most well-known writings of the Ramchal, Mesilat Yesharim. A classic in the world of Jewish mussar, Mesilat Yesharim explores the fundamentals of the Jewish personality, with a focus on self-improvement through working on one's middot and character traits in order improve one's relationship with man and G-d. The class is text based with much room for student's perspectives.

Nativ HaChessed

Rav Yonaton Hirschhorn

Chazal teach us the world stands on three pillars, Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Chassidim. Torah and Avodat Hashem make sense, but chessed? This is a pillar? If people won't be kind the world will fall apart? Without direction without the Torah I understand why the world will fall apart. Without a belief in a higher power, the world will probably fall apart. But if I don't smile at my neighbor? If I don't feed the poor? I think the world will be OK, he may not be the world well. There must be something more to chessed than just kindness maybe we don't fully understand. Maybe just maybe we are guilty of understanding chessed in a secular way, but after this class chessed WONT be something you do, it will be WHO YOU ARE.

Philosophy and Ethics of the Rav

Rav Avram Block

In-depth study of the philosophy and ethical prescriptions found in the major works of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) including engagement with many of the primary texts the author uses in advancing his thesis. The course will summarize a number of the major essays written by Rabbi Soloveitchik over a career that spanned nearly fifty years of leadership of American Jewry. The course will look at each selected work section by section, summarizing the ideas and content therein, reviewing the primary sources used by the author when appropriate and engage with the application of the material to a contemporary milieu

Rabbi Nachman – Life Advice

Rav Yonaton Hirschhorn

"That was a-ma-zing!" You just heard an amazing class, and you are feeling so inspired, but as you think further, you realize you don't really know how to apply and bring about this fleeting spark of inspiration into your daily life. If only we could get some practical advice on how to do this, how to turn inspiration into actuality and uplift our life! Sound familiar? Lucky for us, Rav Nachman of Breslov composed a whole sefer of practical advice on how to live an inspired life, how to build those moments of inspiration and connection into our everyday routine! In this class, we will cover focal topics of a Jew's life, including emunah, prayer, fixing our midot, achieving happiness, and much, much more!

Reimagining Tradition

Rav Boruch Boudilovsky

The Jewish calendar profoundly shapes our Jewish lives, culture, faith, and identity. Its recurring nature makes it constantly relevant to our lives. However, its familiar continuous presence and routine nature can lead to emotional fatigue and indifference towards the Jewish calendar's teachings. Yet these very teachings embody some of the most important, relevant, and deepest Jewish ideas. Using a broad range of classical and contemporary texts, this course will revisit themes highlighted by the Jewish calendar thereby revealing new ideas and generating a fresh and exciting intellectual appreciation of the Jewish annual experience.

Tefilah - Talking to our Creator

Esther Farkovits

In this course, we will explore and define parts of Shacharit as a journey, a journey that will hopefully carry us up the "ladder of tefillah" into a state of awe and love for HaShem. We will try to become aware of the gift called tefillah and to understand how to use this gift and to begin appreciating its beauty and meaning. We will also discuss, and try to resolve, some philosophical questions regarding tefillah, such as "why can't I just speak to Hashem in my own words?" or "Why pray when I don't understand what I'm saying...?". Ultimately, this is all for the grand purpose of forming a real and consistent relationship with our Creator through the act of tefillah. We will start with the Modeh Ani and continue on with the brachot. Our goal is then to move on to Shema and finally the Shmona Esrei prayers.

The Future Through the Past

Rav Michael Sunshine

Simple but profound; that's the Torah of Rav Zevin. Rav Zevin brings introduces us to, and clarifies for us new and previously unseen angles and sides to seeing and understanding the human condition and the world we live through brief weekly teachings on Parashat Hashavua. This class is for those who want to learn, think, and have their mind opened to opening and clarifying their future through a connection to our rich, vibrant, and deep tradition. Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin was born in the late 19th century in what is modern-day Belarus. He was a student of both the Litvishe and Chassidic worlds, influencing his thought to harmonize a cognitive philosophical understanding of Torah while being warmth by the flame of the soul.

The Reasons Why

Estee Lightstone

There are so many things in our daily lives that we've been doing for so long but we don't always know why! Let's make our daily routines more meaningful by learning the reasons behind them. Some topics we will explore are- Washing hands, davening, saying brachot, benching, and more!

The Song of Soul – Rav Kook

Rav Michael Sunshine

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook was one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the early and mid-twentieth century. He was a mystical philosopher and revered and respected by the religious, non-religious and anti-religious Jews who dreamed of and forged modern Israel. Rather than seeing dissonance in opposites, Rav Kook exposed the harmony of the world. Rav Kook spoke of the song of soul and the symbiotic interconnection of the individual, the community, Am Yisrael, and of all of humanity. Learning Rav Kook's ideas will take us down the rabbit hole and lift the veil through which we often see the world, enlightening us to newly seen and understood dimensions to our world.

The Ten Paths to Gd - Rabbi Sacks

Estee Lightstone

There is an ever-growing gap between Torah and Science. Science says: Religion is childish. Religion says: Scientists are heretics. Is there another way? What is our belief? Rabbi Sacks, through his book "The Great Partnership" does a phenomenal job in showing how there is no contradiction between the two, rather a partnership between religion and science! If you desire to see the different facets of our world as woven together and complementing each other, this class is for you! We will explore and discuss the beauty of the partnership of religion and science, and understand how this impacts our own lives greatly.

The World of Chasidic Thought

Esther Farkovits

Our class will be exploring the birth and growth of the movement called Chassidut. We will study the history, texts and deep teachings of our Chassidic masters. We will speak about leaders such as the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rabbi Nachman of Bresslov, The Ba'al Hatanya and so many more. The

Chassidic spirit seems to have the power to draw the Jewish soul closer to G-d. I hope we can get there together.

LIVING EMUNAH

Lani Margolias

- Imagine starting every day with a smile.
- Imagine dealing with challenges in school and at home, instead of worrying about them.
- Imagine being happy. Really happy.

It can happen. The secret is Emunah!

Emunah is the belief that Hashem is involved in all aspects of our lives, that He loves us and that He knows what's best for us. This course will teach you how Emunah can change and enrich your life. How you can find the good in everything and everyone-including yourself!

Tomer Devorah

Rav Michael Sunshine

The great Kabbaliat of Tzfat, Rav Moshe Cordovero (The Ramak) saw in the Torah a path to illuminate and sanctify the human soul. There is a simple premise in Judaism that we are commanded to emulate Gd: and you shall walk in Gd's ways. The question arises, then, how do we do that? The first thing, the Tomer Devorah says, is that we need to know something about Gd. By learning about Gd, and understanding His ways, we, as the Tomer Devorah explains will enable us to act Gdly and unleash a greater flow of Gd's energy into the world. The great Kabbaliat of Tzfat, Rav Moshe Cordovero (The Ramak) enlightens us on how to elevate our earthly existence by, none other than, acting like Gd.

Woman to Woman: Creating a new YOU -Today!

Lani Margolias

The course is filled with practical advice, the wisdom of our Sages and classic stories. We will delve into topics such as Communication, Chessed, Prayer, Happiness, the Ideal Home, Keep Growing, Appreciation, Modesty-our Crown, Priorities and Faithfulness. Through our learning we will gain tools to strive for greatness, to develop our inner strengths and create the kind of home that is the goal of every Jewish woman, wife and mother.

Other

Growth Through Kindness (for all students)

Shira Melamed

This course will accompany and provide a framework for the afternoon "Field Work" that our students do each afternoon with the children of Bet Elazraki. Firstly, it will give the students an opportunity to process their work with the children and to share any challenges, frustrations, and highlights- and to think about this work within their own lives and experiences. Secondly, they will learn important foundational concepts in Jewish thought regarding the world of interpersonal relations and understanding themselves - to arm them with the skills and knowledge to excel in their work with the children and grow as Jews in the process.

Ulpan (Hebrew Language)

This course will help our students attain a greater proficiency in the Hebrew language- through work on Hebrew grammar, discussions in Hebrew, and a curriculum geared towards improving their Hebrew within the context of the Children's Home.

In addition to the classroom hours, students will also gain "clinical" experience speaking Hebrew through their volunteer work every afternoon with Israeli children from Bet Elazraki Children's Home. The classroom content and discussions will correspond directly with the volunteer work that the students will be doing and experiencing.

Morning Inspiration

Sundays and Thursdays

Rav Sunshine

Delving and Diving - Pondering the language of Tefillah

Monday

Madrichot

Tuesday

Rav Yonaton

Rebbe Nachman's Advice on Tefillah

Wednesday

Rav Yehoshua

Iggeret HaRamban

Lunchtime Classes

Rebbe Nachman's stories

Rav Yonatan - Sunday

Rebbe Nachman gave amazing advice

He also, gave unbelievable parables. Dive in with me to the world of Rebbe Nachman's parables that help me see what, who, and where I am.

Brachot - Before, After and In Between

Shira - Tuesdays

In this course we will delve into the deeper meaning of Hilchot Brachot.

Using Halachos of Brachos as a guide, we will learn why we say brachot, and how they influence us to be better when they are a part of our daily lives. We will learn the practical halachos as well. We will learn what bracha we say on what, when we say them, how to say them and when we should not.

- Wednesday

Sefer Mada of the Rambam

Rav Sunshine - Thursday

For a thousand years, Jews have understood that when the Rambam says something, we should all pay attention. The Rambam begins his Mishneh Torah with Sefer Mada/The Book of Knowledge that pulls the veil off of our lives, enlightening our minds, hearts, and souls, to lead us to greater depths and heights about the world Hashem created and how to get the most out of it.