



The Ira and Diana Riklis Seminary
Midreshet Torat Chessed

MTC Course Descriptions
Fall 2024

Chumash/Nach

Between The Lines- Midrashic Journeys

Rav Tuvia Aronson

Our Torah invites us to dialogue with the text. With the guidance of Chazal, through close textual analysis, and enhanced with our unique perspectives, we discover deeper understandings and meanings in Biblical narratives. At the same time, the Torah inspires new discovery and growth within ourselves. In class we explore various kinds and styles of Midrash, and explore how Chazal found deeply relevant messages in Torah pertaining to: human nature, family dynamics, leadership, our relationship with non-Jewish culture, etc. Students will help choose some of our topics and themes.

Bringing the Torah to life

Lauren Freedman

A lot of the time in life we turn to the modern world to see what love means, faith means, friendship, forgiveness, relationships, what it is to be a strong person and so on. More than often we forget to turn to the Torah to delve into the true answers of what it is to have a loving relationship, be a person of strength, and so on. In this class we will focus on a number of topics but through a Torah lens! One that will help us "Bring the Torah to life" in our lives! When taking a Torah approach it has the ability to give us a clearer answer in this confusing world. We will learn from Yaakov and Rachel what it is to have true love. We will learn from Moshe Rabbanu what it is to have true humility and good character. We will take many Poskin and commentaries to understand further concepts. The same way you would watch Tiktok to learn a new style, we will be delving into the Torah to get our answers!!!

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.

Megillot

Rav Tuvia Aronson

In this course we will examine in great depth, the seasonal selections of scrolls we read on our holidays. Through classic parshanut along with literary-theological analysis, we will engage in a two-way dialogue with the text. When we rigorously analyze the depths of Tanakh, it becomes a powerful mirror into ourselves. We will learn Kohelet exploring the meaning of life, wisdom, friendship, happiness etc. In Esther, we reveal the hidden about peer pressure, stepping up, parallels with Yosef, Amalek and Antisemitism, the role of women etc. In Shir HaShirim we find the epic of the Neshama and/or Am Yisrael searching for HaShem with passionate love. In Rut we learn of kindness, choice, responsibility, transformation, and redemption.

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.

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!

Roots of Identity

Rav Yonaton Hirschhorn

Roots of identity is an exploration of the story of a slave nation with no identity, and no further. But through a journey of self-realization, and constant growth becomes an unwavering voice on every platform, whose immortality is desired by all.

Come explore the four basic roots of self-exploration, and the journey of full realization to an unwavering identity that will give you everything you need in your life journey

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.

The Chassidic Parsha (Night Seder)

Rav Yehoshua Felberg

This course will focus on chassidic teachings about the parsha of the week through the lens of Rav Steinsaltz's essays on the weekly Torah portion. The course explores morality, enhancing day to day life with the light of Torah, and how to make the weekly Torah portion relevant to our lives.

The Power of Tehillim

Rav Tuvia Aronson

What is the secret? How is Tehillim so evocative? We may at times find ourselves overwhelmed, confused, anxious or distraught. In other moments we are profoundly reflective, grateful, renewed, and happy. For millennia, Jews (and a large part of humankind) have turned to Tehillim to express the wide range of communal and personal experiences. We will explore the awesome power of Tehillim as an authentic journey from despair to self-esteem and growth; The Five books of Tehillim (is there a thematic structure?); The Ten modes of praise; Nature in Tehillim etc.

We will also learn in depth select chapters relating to the holidays, tefillot, holiday celebrations, distress, war, thanksgiving, recovery from illness, morality, Beit Hamikdash etc.

Women in Tanach

Estee Lightstone

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.

Hilchot Kashrut

Rav Michael Sunshine

In this class we will be delving into the laws of kashrut. We will be learning their origins and how to implement them into our everyday lives so we can be halachic abiding Jews.

Hilchot Shabbat

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 Brachot

Rav Avram Block

The course will look at brachot (blessings) in the various contexts of Jewish Law in which they apply. There will be a focus on ways in which all blessings are related to one another and share common themes as well as the ways in which the different categories, and, the different applications within those categories reflect the differences between various brachot.

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.

The Secret of Shabbat – Raza D'Shabbaos

Rav Michael Sunshine

Shabbos is the day that bridges Heaven and Earth, human temporal time with Hashem's infinite time. In Raza d'Shabbos, we will enter into the profound depths of Shabbos through the creative, original, and illuminating writings of two of the great modern Jewish thinkers: Rav Yitzchak Hutner/The Pachad Yitzchak and The Slonimer Rebbe/Nesivos Shalom.

Meaning in Mitzvot

Rav Tuvia Aronson

In this course we will explore how we can find delicious meaning in Mitzvot in general and specific particular mitzvot. We will explore the psycho-spiritual ideas related to daily Jewish life (including relevant Holidays) based on both classical sources (Aggada and Midrash), Medieval (e.g. Rambam, Sefer HaChinukh, Maharal), Chassidic sources (e.g. Likutei Halachot, Bnei Yisaschar, Lubavitcher Rebbe and Slonimer Rebbe amongst many others obm), and modern thinkers (e.g. HaRav Kook, Rav Soloveitchik, plus a plethora of contemporary). We will explore the ideas that make keeping Halakha more than a list of "must do's and do-nots", but rather a living expression of our faith and values.

Netiv HaTzniut - Maharal

Rav Yonaton Hirschhorn

Tzniut has the negative connotation to it, what not to do, what not to wear. But tzniut is all about who to be! And why that's the attribute HaShem crowns himself with. come explore what modesty is in a way that will make you rethink modestly from the core. You'll no long

feel tzniut is something in forced upon you. Gain the knowledge of who to be! Light years before the conversation of what or what not to wear.

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 Petalled Rose - Rav Steinsaltz on Spirituality

Rav Yehoshua Felberg

Rav Adin Even Yisrael (Steinsaltz) DBM was a giant of Jewish thought in the 20th and 21st century. His classic work on Jewish mysticism, the Thirteen Petalled Rose, is an essential study for anyone who wishes to understand the importance of Kaballah and Jewish mysticism in our lives and in this world. In this course we will study the original text together. We will use it as a tool to better understand the secret world of spirituality that sits just beyond the veil of physicality. We will explore how best to tap into it, connect with it, and, please G-d, use it to enhance our own growth and connection with our Creator.

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.

Enter the Gates of Teshuva (Night Seder)

Rav Michael Sunshine

For some of us Teshuva is word that doesn't mean much and for others it's misunderstood. For Rabbeinu Yonah, he lived and breathed Teshuva. In this chaburah we will go on a life-changing ride in learning how to learn from our mistakes, leave the past behind us, and enter through the gates into the Palace of Avodat Hashem. Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona, Spain, like many others, rejected the Guide of the Perplexed by the Rambam, claiming it was heretical. Their opposition led to the church burning copies of it in 1233. When 24 wagons of the Talmud were burned just 9 years later, Rabbeinu Yonah realized his folly and regretted what his opposition of the Guide led to. He travelled to the kever of the Rambam to ask for forgiveness and wrote Sha'arei Teshuva as an atonement.

Getting to Know Your Soul- Bilvavi

Lauren Freedman

In this class we will be learning the book "Getting to know your soul (yourself)" by the Bilvavi. This book is the book that influenced me the most during my year in MTC as a student and I feel it is so important to learn! Before even thinking about how you want to present yourself on the outside you must work on the inside! You are a soul, your body is just the clothes. First in order to grow as a person, Torah Jew - you need to develop yourself internally as a soul, because this is the true essence of who you are. Your entire goodness. The goal is by doing this you truly will be growing in the direction you want to, but in a way that will stick, because it comes from the true you. This class will be a Chabruah (group) based class, everyone should have a book and we will be learning together BH. May we all gain a deeper understanding of who we are.

In His Image

Rav Michael Sunshine

We often start our search for Avodat Hashem at the destination - Hashem - and looking for ways, true paths, to find Him. Any search, though, needs to begin with the questions of where am I now, or even more poignantly, who am I? In "In His Image" we will learn the Alter of Slabodka's idea of gadlus ha'adam (the greatness of man), in searching out the part of us that is hewn from Hashem, Himself, and to use it to understand your own unique G-dly identity that will enable you to create your personalized derech of Avodat Hashem.

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.

Modren Jewfluencers

Rav Effie Kleinberg

This class will present some of the leading movers and shakers of the Jewish world whose ideas have shaped and defined the way in which the Jewish community looks, feels, thinks and exists today. We will spend a few weeks with each personality delving into their writings and interactions, the challenges they faced and how they reacted, and how their legacy and teachings reverberate until this very day. On the list are: Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Rav Ovadia Yosef, Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Kook among many others.

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!

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 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 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: 13 Attributed of G-d

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 & Sara Dinershtain

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)

Sara Dinershtain

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.

Lunchtime Classes

Happiness Chabura

Rav Ross - Sunday

How can I boost the happiness I experience each day? If I feel desensitized, are there techniques for enhancing appreciation? What are the Jewish formulas for living with greater joy? This year is about growing in Torah, thriving in character, and also flourishing in happiness! Join the happiness chabura for a weekly work-out of uplifting discussion plus useful & practical ideas. As Rabbi Zelig Pliskin insists, "Happiness is a skill that can be learned."

Introduction to Kabbalah

Rav Yonatan - Monday

When someone hears the word kabbalah, they usually have one of two reactions. "Cool! Tell me more" or "Kabbalah... Meh, I'm not in to that stuff". The mystical unknown, is both intriguing and scary at the same time. Which reaction comes more natural to you? Regardless of the answer kabbalah is something someone needs to be ready to learn. But to learn kabbalah is, that one should do regardless of their initial reaction. Do you want to know why that was your reaction? Do you want to know why people are afraid of kabbalah? Do you want to know why people are drawn to the mysticism of it? Come to this class!

There's a whole world within the world of Torah that is hidden from the naked eye. Come peek through the looking glass.

Something to Chew On

Sophie - Tuesday

Come take a journey with me of self-development, empowerment and tool building for life. How to know yourself before becoming another half of a whole. How to develop skills to set you up for success in dating and how to sustain a successful marriage. Relationships are not always smooth, and things don't always go as planned, so come along on a search for what the Torah has to say regarding relationships, marriage, and family purity to PG building a Bayit Neeman!

Brachot - Before, After and In Between

Shira – Wednesday

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.

Treasures of the Talmud

Rav Sunshine - Thursday

Come dig for the treasures in the Talmud. Enlighten your mind, brighten your thinking, and illuminate your life. Whether you've learned Talmud, or not, or have had a love-hate relationship with Talmud, this is different. We will reveal transformative ideas and find applicable take-away lessons.