

IN THE JEWISH DISCOVERY COURSE, students will not learn about theoretical, elusive concepts—they will learn about themselves. The Jewish Discovery course explores the founding stories of the Jewish people to illuminate the stories of our own lives. In 10 lessons, the course addresses basic questions of Jewish identity and Jewish life, such as: Who am I? What does it mean that I am Jewish? Why do I sometimes struggle with doing the right thing?

We hope this course inspires and leads to continued and greater Jewish engagement after bar mitzvah.

LESSON 1: AVRAHAM AND THE JEWS: A STORY OF INDEPENDENCE

Lesson One begins with our point of departure: What does it mean to be Jewish? Are you Jewish even if you are not observant? What sort of connection binds Jews to one another?

To answer these questions, the lesson introduces Avraham, the patriarch of the Jewish family, and explores how his staunch independent spirit empowers the Jewish people to survive and thrive throughout years of persecution, and pressure to assimilate.

LESSON 2: AHAVAS YISROEL: UNITED AS ONE

Lesson Two continues on the theme of the connection between all Jews introduced in Lesson One, and discusses the fundamental mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel. Avraham's legendary hospitality is an important paradigm of love and caring.

LESSON 3: THE NESHAMAH: AN ETERNAL CONNECTION

Lesson Three introduces the unique quality of the Jewish soul—the neshamah. The neshamah is the G-dly spark in a Jew. This spark is why every Jew is essentially good and wants to do the right thing.

LESSON 4: A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS: THE INNER STRUGGLE AND BECOMING A BAR MITZVAH

Lesson Four addresses the logical follow-up question to Lesson Three: If every Jew has a neshama and is essentially good, why is it sometimes a struggle to do the right thing?

Using the conflict between Yaakov and Eisav as a model of the struggle between good and bad, this lesson introduces the animal soul and the yetzer hara. Students will understand that their inner struggle with doing the right thing is a product of the tension between their G-dly soul and their animal soul.

Finally, the lesson explains that becoming a bar mitzvah is about “moach shalit al halev” and asserting self-control over ourselves.

LESSON 5: THE TRIALS OF YOSEF: TRYING TIMES AND THE BIGGER PICTURE

In Lesson Five, the course moves on from the struggle within to the struggle without. The story of Yosef Hatzadik is the template for talking about dealing with hard times and darker moments in life. The lesson explores the concept of hashgacha pratit and concludes that everything Hashem does is for a reason and for the good.

LESSON 6: THE JEWS BECOME A PEOPLE: SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

In Lesson Six, students discover that sometimes they can be the biggest obstacle to their own growth. The story of Yetzias Mitzrayim and the famous passage of “bechol dor vador” lead to a discussion of what it means to be inherently free; how to live life for yourself, and not for others; and how to continue growing from strength to strength and to constantly leave one Mitzrayim after another.

LESSON 7: THE TORAH: THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR LIFE

Would it be fair to drop off a child in an unknown, dangerous jungle without a GPS, compass, or any sort of navigation instrument? Lesson Seven introduces the Torah as G-d’s instruction manual for the uncharted journey that is life. The story of Matan Torah encourages students to use the Torah as their personal guide to life.

LESSON 8: THE PURPOSE OF LIFE: A HOME FOR HASHEM

The previous lesson discussed how to live life; Lesson 8 discusses why we are alive. The contrast between the spiritual life in the midbar and the materialistic life in Eretz Yisroel highlights the importance of action and the ultimate goal of dirah bitachtonim.

LESSON 9: MITZVOS: THE POWER OF THE DEED

Lesson Nine builds on the previous discussion: Actions are important, but sort of actions should we focus on? How important are the small details compared to the big gestures? Does G-d really care if there is a piece of cheese in my burger? The lesson notes the importance of working on a relationship with G-d alongside an ethical relationship with other people. Keeping Shabbat is just as important as giving tzedakah. And in the grand scheme of things, the small details can have tremendous impact.

LESSON 10: MOSHIACH: THE END GAME

Where is all this going? What is the end game? What happens after death? In Lesson Ten, students explore the afterlife of Gan Eden, the world of Moshiach, and the ultimate, Olam Haba.

**JEWISH DISCOVERY
PROGRAM**

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