

Is Bible Study A Jewish Thing?

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While giving classes on topics directly related to the Bible, I have noticed a hesitancy among Jews to studying this ancient and popular text. Ironically, some Jews think that the Bible is for Christians or others interested in religion. They do not realize how much positive impact its study could have on their worldview (*weltanschauung*). I can empathize with these people because I once felt the same way; but some words of wisdom from my father eventually opened my mind.

I grew up in a fairly typical non-religious home – we found ourselves in synagogue for part of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and not again until the following year. During my junior year at Columbia, my father asked what I would be taking the next semester, and seemingly out of nowhere, he suggested a Bible course. “Dad, why would I do that?” I asked. He said that he had taken a Bible class during college just to learn the stories and history that are a part of literature like any of the Classics. As a philosophy major with enough credits for an English

minor, I resonated with his idea. The great works of literature from ancient Greece to 19th century American poetry were familiar to me, yet I knew virtually nothing about the most printed and influential book in history other than having to research Biblical references, imagery, or illusions when they appeared in the literature. This irony made me pause. I thought, “How odd it is that I am Jewish, yet my knowledge of the Bible and therefore of much of Judaism comes from non-Jewish sources.” I soon found semester-long courses on both the Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible. These were two of the most fascinating courses of my college career.

Many years later as a Rabbi, I began to think about all the educated Jews who lack exposure to our Bible. So I began teaching it in a way that imparts meaningful lessons about practical concerns and challenges such as the following: What qualities do I want in good friends? (The answer can be found in the story of David and Jonathan). Can I change my marriage even if my spouse does not want to, and can I forgive and be

forgiven? (Samson). Why do I procrastinate? (Jonah). What are the criteria for making difficult decisions? (Sara and Hagar). How can I deal with disability? (Moses and Aaron). Does life have meaning? (“the fugitive,” Book of Numbers 35:22) Dealing with life’s vicissitudes (Job). Can I overcome fear? (Isaac, Esther). The Bible covers all these topics and much more.

Another benefit of Bible study is to gain Jewish literacy. Employers, employees, friends, and even strangers sometimes ask Jews about Judaism, and many people can not always answer even the most basic questions. Which of the following questions can you answer correctly?

- (1) Who was Jesus’s mother? Who was Moses’ mother?
- (2) Who wrote Romeo and Juliet and what is it about? Who wrote Ecclesiastes and what is it about?
- (3) How many letters are in the alphabet? How many are in the alef beit (Hebrew alphabet)?
- (4) What is the difference between major league and minor league teams? Name one of each. What is the difference between major prophets and minor prophets? Name one of each.
- (5) Who was the President of the Confederacy? Who was the leader of the secession of the Northern Kingdom from the Southern Kingdom?

We spend so many years becoming educated in college and graduate school, but we do not have the opportunity to get a Jewish education.

Gaining practical life lessons and becoming a literate Jew are

great reasons for learning the Bible. Meet us at any of three weekly sessions to study the most influential book in the history of humanity (call or see our website for details: 704-367-1225 or charlottetorahcenter.com). Newcomers welcome. If you do not see a session that fits your schedule, create

a new class at a time and location that is convenient for you—we are happy to accommodate. For more information, visit our website at www.charlottetorahcenter.com.

Our nation has a precious treasure; it is a tragedy not to access it. ✪



Plans, Plans, Plans ...

The summer months find Havurat Tikvah members planning: planning for High Holidays, for a new Religious School year, and for another year of programs and activities.

High Holiday preparations (our 23rd year!) are well underway. As is our custom, services will be lay-led and participatory. Among the many highlights will be Torah readings on the first day of Rosh Hashanah by our post-Bat mitzvah students – Meara Waxman, Lea LeBaron, Margot LeBaron, and Sydney Feinglass. As always, our goal for the High Holidays and throughout the year is to create an atmosphere that’s welcoming, intimate, and inclusive.

The High Holidays will also find us settling into a new congregational home and introducing some exciting new directions for our Sunday Religious School. To learn more, contact us (see below) or stay tuned for details in the next edition of the CJN.

We’re also looking forward to plans for a new year of stimulating programs. Some of the highlights include return visits from Rabbi Marc Wilson and Rabbi (and Sofer) Kevin Hale, as well as a weekend with poet and UNC Asheville Professor of Jewish Studies Rick Chess.

Still, even as we look ahead (and look forward) to the upcoming year, Havurah summer activities continue:

This summer three of our Havurah children are planning and preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Ethan Alexander is studying with Meara Waxman. Hannah Kobre is being mentored by Barbara Stoner, and Brooke Feinglass is working with Hardin Rubin.

Erev Tisha B’Av services are scheduled for Monday August 8

and participation in mitzvah activities with the Dilworth Soup Kitchen (www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=77134194660) and with “Project Linus” continues throughout the month. Contact us for information about these activities, their times, and locations.

Havurat Tikvah is an affiliate of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, providing a comfortable, family atmosphere where all Jews can feel welcome. Our Sunday School, with its opportunities for B’nai Mitzvah preparation, is open to Havurat Tikvah member families. We invite you to visit, get to know us, and become part of our growing congregation of nearly 60 households.

For an updated calendar or to find out more about Havurat Tikvah, specific event locations, worship services, Sunday School program, and community activities - please visit our website at www.havurattikvah.org or contact new member chair, Brian Feinglass, at bcfein1@gmail.com or at 1-877-203-5848. ✪



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