



How to Use Hebrew Most Effectively

PRINCIPLES & BEST PRACTICES

Don't Forget to Ask "Why" Hebrew!

It is critical for educational institutions and educators to challenge themselves to consider why they want their students to learn Hebrew. Methodology for teaching Hebrew can only be determined after this critical step.

After all, study of Hebrew for the purpose of decoding a Biblical text for a bar mitzvah ceremony will look very different than studying Hebrew for the purpose of traveling to Israel and connecting with Israelis. *For best results, have the learners themselves help clarify their reasons for learning Hebrew.

Learning Even a Small Amount of Hebrew Tears Down Cultural and Interpersonal Barriers

Being familiar and comfortable in a Hebrew-speaking environment, such as in Israel or in a Hebrew-speaking religious service, helps to prevent feelings of alienation that often define one's experi-

ence when one is not fluent in a language. Knowing a few words, being familiar with the alphabet, etc. can help students feel more connected and provides them with a base for continued learning.

Focus on Motivation

The key to successfully learning even a small amount of a foreign language is motivation. Channel the possible motivations your students might have, and focus on helping them acquire the level or type of Hebrew that meets their interests. Having real Israelis to speak to is the best motivation of all, so focus on teaching the words and phrases that will aid communication.

But in the absence of people to talk to, consider what your students will be most interested in and choose the appropriate Hebrew words and content. If their motivation is to have a bar/bat mitzvah and read from the Torah, focus on the words and phrases that suit these interests. If they are interested in learning more Israeli culture (music and movies, for example), bring Israeli songs

into the learning situation. If the focus is on Jewish history, look for texts that tell historical stories and can shed light on key historical documents.

Hebrew Should be a Significant Part of a Holistic Jewish Education

Teaching and learning Hebrew is rarely linked to the process of Jewish identity development and therefore many students do not understand the relevance of Hebrew in their lives.

Reframing the acquisition of Hebrew as critical in developing one's identity and as a tool to connect to other Jews and Jewish communities will transform Hebrew language teaching and learning. It is important to integrate Hebrew studies into different realms of Jewish education.

Don't be "Afraid" to Teach Hebrew

To teach Hebrew requires a love and appreciation of the language. Jewish educators DO NOT have to be fluent in order to instill a desire to connect with and learn the Hebrew language. Modeling a sense of comfort and pride in one's own level of Hebrew proficiency allows for students to identify with the challenges of learning a foreign language and exemplifies that it is acceptable not to be fluent and to make mistakes.

Even minimal exposure to and experimentation with Hebrew will instill in students an affinity for the language, promoting a connection to this tool which they can choose to further develop in their future studies.