

## THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE *JEWISH OBSERVER* OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

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### "National center to Encourage Judaism Funds Hebrew Language courses"

Article published February 16, 2022

## National Center to Encourage Judaism Funds Hebrew Language Courses

Hebrew lies at the foundation of Jewish learning and Jewish life. Without a basic knowledge of Hebrew, a person cannot fully and meaningfully participate in Jewish life. It is a major source of religious identity and pride. Having Hebrew words on art and objects in a home - that can be read in that language - makes a powerful statement about the home being Jewish.

To enable people who are interested in exploring Judaism find a place in their local Jewish community, the Jewish Federation of Central New York in partnership with two of the community's synagogues is offering free beginning and advanced Hebrew language courses. By offering the program under the auspices of the Federation, the barrier of synagogue membership is removed and the classes are open to the wider community with no strings attached. Temple Concord and Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas have been collaborating for more than ten years to teach Hebrew to adults and older teens. This year, for the first time, Federation is underwriting the classes, which are open to all in the community, with a grant from the National Center to Encourage Judaism.

Many adults are hesitant to sign up for beginning Hebrew classes for various reasons: they may be embarrassed that they never learned to read Hebrew when they were young, they converted to Judaism but never learned Hebrew, they're planning to convert to Judaism and want to learn Hebrew, they want to refresh their knowledge of Hebrew because they want to participate more actively, their child is becoming bar or bat mitzvah and they want an *aliyah* or they want to have an adult bar or bat mitzvah because they never had one. All are welcome in the Beginning Hebrew classes for adults.

The classes are taught by Ruth Federman Stein and Jessie Kerr-Whitt. Ruth taught English on both the high school and college level for many years and has a Ph.D. in instructional design from Syracuse University. Her father, Simon Friedeman, was the rabbi in Rome, NY, during the 1940s. When Ruth was asked to teach Beginning Hebrew, she was excited by the opportunity to teach a different subject. Jessie Kerr-Whitt has her master's degree in curriculum development and taught at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School for 35 years. She also taught Hebrew in Temple

Concord's religious school for twenty years and tutored students in preparation for their b'nai mitzvah ceremony. Teaching Adult Hebrew was a natural choice. After retirement, both Ruth and Jessie were very happy to continue teaching from a new perspective.

Lin Fields, Temple Concord's chair of the Congregational Learning Committee, is an enthusiastic proponent of the classes. She said, "As a newer member of Temple Concord, I was thrilled to take not only Ruth's beginning class, but also Jessie's Advanced Hebrew class. I had never learned Hebrew as a younger person, and studying with both of these wonderful women was a joy. Taking the classes on Zoom made it so much easier for me, since I live in Watertown. I highly recommend these classes to anyone, beginner or not. I have learned so much, and you will, too."

This year, Temple Concord and Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas will again be collaborating to offer Beginning and Advanced Hebrew classes to adult and teen learners. The classes will be subsidized by a grant from the National Center to Encourage Judaism, are open to all in the community at no charge and will be held on Zoom. "Beginning Adult Hebrew," taught by Ruth Stein, will start on October 5 from 7-8:00 pm for 12 sessions. This class introduces the Hebrew alphabet and progresses to simple reading and basic vocabulary. This is the class to take to start from the beginning or review the basics. *L'Shon ha-Kodesh, A Beginning Hebrew Book for Adults* is the text. For more information, email [Stein.Ruth@gmail.com](mailto:Stein.Ruth@gmail.com) or call 315-751-5377.

The other class, "*Tav is for Torah*," will also begin on October 5, but from 6-7 pm. This class will emphasize basic grammar and prayer book and Hebrew vocabulary. There will be opportunities to practice reading skills and review Hebrew word roots and other basic concepts. Jessie Kerr-Whitt will teach the class. For more information, contact Jessie at [KerrWhitt@gmail.com](mailto:KerrWhitt@gmail.com). Students will need a copy of *Tav is for Torah* and should have it for the first class.

Both classes have a minimum required enrollment. There is no charge for either of the classes or the textbooks. To register, contact the CBS-CS office at [office@CBSCS.org](mailto:office@CBSCS.org). Those enrolled will have to pick up their textbooks from the CBS-CS office.