

Our Summer Courses as Jewish Mentorship

There is a lot going on at Shaaray Tefila this summer! We are running several different kinds of classes. I hope that you will take part in one or more of them. This summer, we will be running four classes:

Hebrew of the Siddur (i.e. the Jewish Prayer Book)
(Wednesdays 6 PM)

Jewish Peace of Mind
(Wednesdays 7 PM)

Jewish Cuisine from Around the World: A Cooking Class
(Thursday 6 PM on July 13, 27, August 10, 24)

Introduction to Judaism
(Thursday at 7 PM)

Before we jump in, I want to start with the question, “Why are we running a bunch of classes?” Is it just in order to look like we’re up to something? No. I would far prefer - like you - to go find a lake or river and put my feet in it. *And, we will* do that too. I hope that you are planning on coming to the Jewish Community Cookouts that we are planning for July 9th and August 6th at Havilland’s Cove on the Hudson.

We are teaching all these classes because the heart of Judaism is learning. These classes are our invitation for you to enter the world of Jewish learning. Throughout this summer, the big theme of my sermons will be mentorship. In Rabbinic literature it is known as the *Rav - Talmid* or Master - Disciple relationship. At the beginning of the Rabbinic tradition, the men of the Great Assembly taught “raise up many disciples.” (Pirkei Avot 1:1) Discipleship, or more commonly called Mentorship today, is the deep, relationship based work through which we Jews engage in the world of Torah.

This July we are reading the book of *Bamidbar*, meaning “in the wilderness.” The central plot development of the book is the decision by the Israelites to not go into the land following the bad report that the spies gave when they said, ‘we cannot go in, the people are too big and strong for us.’ But why does Moses take the gigantic risk of sending the leaders of the tribes ahead of him at all? If what he wanted was a map of the land, he could have sent a map maker? If Moses’s whole purpose is to not only take the people out of the land of Egypt but into the land of Israel why is this step necessary?

I want to suggest that Moses takes this enormous risk because he understands his work to be that of *making disciples*. The reason that Moses did not simply lead the people straight into the land of Israel is that they had to choose to go in of their own accord. The Hasidic commentator the *Sefat Emet*, says that the land of Israel is the land of the Oral Torah, i.e. the place where we impress the Torah on our hearts and minds. The land of Israel becomes for the Hasidic imagination, the state of mind that we are in when we are immersed in Jewish learning. That is what I want to do together with you this summer. Let’s enter the promised land of rich study. I really look forward to your probing questions. I look forward to the give and take about big ideas, and the practical applications of those ideas to life. Most of all, I look forward to just spending time with each of you through meaningful study. Come be a part of our journey to the promised land, the land of Jewish learning.

I hope that you’ll enjoy the summer together with us.

Yours,
Stephen Slater