



PROGRAM GUIDE
2024-2025 / 5785



BE A PART OF IT!



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A Note from Our Head of School

Dear Merkaz Students and Families,

The faculty and I welcome all new and returning students to Merkaz as we begin our **46th** year of serving the Jewish community. Time and again, Merkaz has been referred to as the *jewel of our community*. It is the clear reflection of everyone who has joined together and contributed to its growth and development – our congregations, families, faculty, students, and professional and lay leadership. As one community, we have committed our time and efforts to create a program that meets the needs and diverse interests of Jewish teens throughout our region. The success of Merkaz may best be measured by the students who look forward to coming each Tuesday evening and are totally engaged in renewing old friendships, meeting new people, and learning in an atmosphere that is truly rewarding and fun! This year, 5785, we will continue to offer not just the Tuesday-night Classic Track but also a Flexible Track for those students whose lives and commitments make a Tuesday night challenging yet want to be a part of the Merkaz community. We have a vast and robust calendar of programmatic learning for those joining Merkaz on the Flex Track and many exciting classes to choose from for those joining us on the Tuesday-night Classic Track. So, if you are new to Merkaz, join the many students in this unique opportunity to meet teens from different schools, cities and towns, synagogues, and our visiting Israeli Shaliach, Amit Swisa.

Merkaz is the Hebrew word for “center.” Get involved and it will quickly become your center for socializing and growing as you explore your interests, beliefs, and ties to Judaism. Participate in social action, community service, text study, Holocaust education, music, and more. Engage in learning about Israel, contemporary issues, leadership, and ethical dilemmas. Prepare for and strengthen your college-admissions process, engage in real-life experiences, and get ready as you enter a new phase of life. Through films, activities, lively discussions, debates, projects, cooking, meditation, guest speakers, community interaction, field trips, and more, your experience at Merkaz, no matter which Track you choose, will be both meaningful and relevant!

Check out all the incredible opportunities available to you in this Course Catalog that will meet your individual interests and scheduling needs.

Merkaz is an extraordinary experience that you will not want to miss!

Toda and a wonderful Shana Tova to all,



Lisa Becker
Merkaz Head of School

About Merkaz

Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies provides a meaningful and relevant Jewish education that fosters a strong Jewish identity; builds character, leadership and positive values; and creates a sense of unity with the Jewish people. Merkaz has been the **center** (מרכז) of Jewish educational life for teens throughout Greater Fairfield County for 46 years now.

At Merkaz:

- We explore our Jewish values and connect them to our daily lives.
- We create a bridge between the history of our people and the world today.
- We use the arts, STEM, and Judaic texts as a springboard to understanding our Judaism.
- We partner with the community to do *Tikkun Olam* (repair the world.)
- We grow to become confident Jewish adults that our *bubbes/savtas* would be proud to know.
- We encourage, cultivate, and set forth future Jewish leaders.

Introducing

TWO WAYS TO MERKAZ

CLASSIC

Tuesdays 7-9 PM

Our semester-based program—now referred to as the Classic Track—will continue to provide community, vibrancy, and high-caliber Jewish education as it has for the past 46 years.

| Fall 2024 | Spring 2025 |
|--|---|
| Congregation Or Hadash 1200 Fairfield Woods Road Fairfield, CT 06825 | Congregation B'nai Israel 2710 Park Ave. Bridgeport, CT 06604 |

Tuesday night on the Classic Track:

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 7:00 PM | First Period |
| 7:50 PM | Nosh & Shmooze |
| 8:10 PM | Second Period |
| 9:00 PM | Dismissal |

FLEX

Locations throughout Greater Fairfield County Various Dates and Times

Merkaz Flex Track uses a flexible programmatic model to provide enriching Jewish learning that works for all our busy, geographically diverse community of Jewish teens. We know how important Merkaz is to you. We hear how happy you are to have a community of Jewish teens just like you.

We have also heard how hard it is to make weekly classes work!

That's why we've strategically placed our programs across Greater Fairfield County to create accessibility for students throughout our catchment area to engage in the enriching Jewish learning we provide.

Course Requirements and Merkaz Graduation

Every student—regardless of the track they choose—must accrue **4 course credits** over the 2024-2025 school year.

1 class at Merkaz = 1 course credit per semester

Classic Track requirements:

- Two (2 credits) courses per semester. Four (4 credits) per year
- Any additional required orientation and special programming

Flex Track requirements:

- 4 credits total over the course of the 2024-2025 school year
- All required orientations and events
- Credits vary per program. See the Flex Track schedule for more information.

Transcripts, Certificates, and Diplomas

Upon Graduation:

- Merkaz students who successfully meet all requirements will receive a Merkaz Diploma. Each course meets for one semester and is worth one credit, unless otherwise indicated. You must successfully complete a total of **16 credits** by graduation to obtain a Merkaz diploma.

For College Applications:

- All students may request a transcript to submit to colleges. Students are also encouraged to ask faculty members for Letters of Recommendation.

Advanced Standing:

- Go above and beyond at Merkaz! Students who obtain more than 16 credits in a given school year will be recognized on their transcript and diploma at graduation as a **Graduate in Advanced Standing**.

Merkaz Graduation Ceremony is an extraordinarily unique opportunity for the community to recognize and celebrate Jewish education. All students are encouraged to participate in the ceremony through readings, reflections, music, or prayer.

Graduation will take place on Sunday, June 8, 2025, at Mozaic Senior Life.



Classic Track
2024-2025 / 5785

COURSE CATALOGUE

Classic Track Calendar

Tuesdays 7-9 PM

Fall 2024

Spring 2025

Congregation Or Hadash

Congregation B'nai Israel

SEPTEMBER

10 First Day of Fall Classes
 17 Class
 24 Class

OCTOBER

1 No Class
 8 Class
 15 Class
 22 Class
 29* Class

NOVEMBER

5 No Class
 12 Class – Violins of Hope
 19 Class
 26 No Class

DECEMBER

3 Class
 10 Class
 17 Last Day of Fall Classes
 & Special Program
 (Hanukkah)

WINTER BREAK (Dec 22-Jan 13)

***Programming Tentative**

JANUARY

14 First Day of Spring Classes
 21 Class
 28 Class

FEBRUARY

4 Class
 11 Class
 18 No Class
 25 Class

MARCH

4 Class
 11 Special Program (Purim)
 18 Class
 25 Class

APRIL

1 No Class
 8 Class
 15 No Class
 22 ***Special Program (Yom HaShoah)**
 29 No Class

SPRING BREAK (Apr 13-April 20)

MAY

*6 **Special Program (Yom HaAtzmaut)**
 13 Last Day of Spring Classes

GRADUATION

JUNE 8, 2025

Fall Semester: *At a Glance...*

| 7:00 PM | 8:00 PM |
|---|--|
| Required | Required |
| <p><u>Kulam 8th Grade Seminar</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Allie Burger and Julie Sacks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required for all 8th-graders | <p><u>College Bound</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Noah Nemitoff-Bresler <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required for all 11th-graders |
| <p><u>Confirmation Class</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Evan Schultz/Cantor Scott Harris <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required for B'nai Israel 10th-graders only | Electives |
| Electives | <p><u>Cooking</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Laura Elson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 12th grade only - Double-period course |
| <p><u>Better Together</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Ricka Breiner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Embodied Judaism: Yoga and Meditation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Lou Haber <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-12th grade |
| <p><u>Cooking</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Laura Elson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 12th grade only - Double-period course | <p><u>Headlines</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Ricka Breiner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-12th grade |
| <p><u>Igniting the Soul: Applied Jewish Spirituality for a Meaningful Life</u> Faculty: Justin Beck</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10th-12th grade | <p><u>Israel: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Julie Sacks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade |
| <p><u>The Jewish Rainbow</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Baba Lou Haber <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Jewish Jam Band</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Evan Schultz <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-12th grade |
| <p><u>Mahjong</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Susan Roth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10th-12th grade | <p><u>Mahjong</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Susan Roth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-9th grade |
| <p><u>Shuk Scenes & Startup Dreams: The Many Faces of Israel</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Amit Swisa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Photography and Art: Through a Jewish Lens</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Allie Burger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-12th grade |
| <p><u>Superheros and the Jewish Connection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Shuk Scenes & Startup Dreams: The Many Faces of Israel</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Amit Swisa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-9th grade |
| | <p><u>The Twilight Zone</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade |

Fall Semester 7:00 PM Courses

Required Courses

*8th Grade

*Kulam

Faculty: Allie Burger and Julie Sacks

Credits: 1 Credit

Kulam - EVERYONE - promotes *shleimut* (individual wellbeing), *hesed* (connection), and *tzedek* (just action). Kulam equips Jewish teens to engage in dynamic and authentic relationships to think reflectively, act courageously, and develop healthy and caring communities including a love for Israel and our local community. In this program, you will ask big questions about where, why and how you belong while exploring issues of identity, equity, and justice with Jewish wisdom as a guide.

*10th Grade (B'nai Israel members ONLY)

*Confirmation Class

Faculty: Rabbi Evan Schultz

Credits: 1 Credit

Required for and open to Congregation B'nai Israel 10th-grade students only. Confirmation Class meets both semesters. During the Confirmation year, students spend part of each night at Merkaz learning with one another. They spend their time with Rabbi Schultz exploring a variety of issues — many of their own choosing. Click [here](#) to learn more.



Fall Semester 7:00 PM Courses

Electives

**** Please pay careful attention to the grades eligible for each class. ****
Some courses are delineated into sections by grade.

Better Together (This is a yearlong program and consistent attendance is required)

Faculty: Ricka Breiner

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 2 Credits

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old. It is easy to love children. Even tyrants and dictators make a point of being fond of children. But the affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture." In this award-winning, intergenerational program, **students will visit Mozaic Senior Life in Bridgeport** and develop awareness of and sensitivity towards the aging through hands-on learning with the Residents, as well as learn important lessons about the Jewish pillar of *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation. *Students are required to attend and participate in the 3 Friday Shabbat Oneg services (December – Chanukah, March – Purim Oneg, May – Israel Oneg) and participate in the Centenarian Program, which includes interviewing Residents who are 100+ and attend the celebratory brunch in March.

Cooking

Faculty: Laura Elson

Grades: 12th grade only

Credits: 2 Credits – *Double Period

The way to any heart is through the stomach! Get to the heart of Jewish culture, traditions, and customs through cooking delicious, inventive Jewish foods. *This is a double-period course.

Igniting the Soul: Applied Jewish Spirituality for a Meaningful Life

Faculty: Justin Beck

Grades: 10th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

For centuries, the Jewish mystical tradition was a highly guarded, orally transmitted body of knowledge. Today, Kabbalah/Jewish spirituality is everywhere, from the internet to Hollywood to popular charms and amulets. In this course we will explore meaningful questions: Why do bad things happen to good people? What is the meaning of life? How do I overcome circumstances? What does it mean to be "Jewish?" How can I make my life more meaningful and fulfilled? What happens after death? This course will provide a Jewish perspective on spirituality and will guide how you perceive and experience the world with greater meaning, fulfillment, and well-being.

The Jewish Rainbow

Faculty: Baba Lou Haber

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

The Rainbow Flag with its vibrant, beaming colors serves as a symbol of hope and pride for millions of LGBTQ+ individuals across the world. It also calls on our communities and our societies to be inclusive, respectful, and safe for all. In this course we will study and discuss how the rainbow of sexual orientation and gender identity is reflected in the Hebrew bible as well as Jewish liturgy, literature, thought, and culture. We also will explore opportunities to make Jewish institutions and communities more inclusive and supportive.

Mahjong

Faculty: Susan Roth

Grades: 10th-12th *Capped at 6 students*

Credits: 1 Credit

Through hands-on gameplay, this class offers students a unique opportunity to learn and engage in the ancient Chinese tile game while exploring its cultural significance within the Jewish community. This class fosters camaraderie, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation among students.

Shuk Scenes & Startup Dreams: The Many Faces of Israel

Faculty: Amit Swisa

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

Yalla! Get to know about all that Israel has to offer in this expansive, immersive course led by our enthusiastic Israel Emissary, Amit Swisa. From food to film to flora and fauna, this class will paint a clearer picture of a country that is simultaneously home to one of the oldest places in the world and the biggest start-up nation in the Middle East. Includes interactive cooking classes, opportunities to ask meaningful and exploratory questions about Israel, and lots of fun. Sababa!

Superheroes and the Jewish Connection

Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

Superhero movies continue to dominate Hollywood. Join Rabbi Rubin to explore inspirational, ethical, and spiritual material from a variety of storylines, and the Jewish influence on these heroes. Revenge vs. Justice, Society and Vigilantism, Repairing the World are just a few of the themes to be debated and highlighted with film clips from various films such as *Iron Man*, *Batman Begins*, *Wonder Woman*, and more.

Fall Semester 8:00 PM Courses

Required Courses

***11th Grade**

***College Bound**

Faculty: Noah Nemitoff-Bresler

Credits: 1 Credit

Join your friends from Merkaz to explore, discuss, and challenge your preconceived notions about college before embarking on the application process. The next steps after high school can be stressful and daunting to figure out. Whether you've been planning for years, this is the first time you've thought about college, or even if you're not sure that going straight to college out of high school is right for you, this course will provide information and resources to ensure you'll be making an informed decision. We'll cover topics including the college search, application essays, extracurricular activities, internships, gap years, and more. And of course we'll explore the connection to Judaism, including how to determine what you want out of a Jewish community in college.



Fall Semester 8:00 PM Courses

Electives

**** Please pay careful attention to the grades eligible for each class. ****
Some courses are delineated into sections by grade.

Cooking

Faculty: Laura Elson

Grades: 12th grade only

Credits: 2 Credits Total - *Double Period Class

The way to any heart is through the stomach! Get to the heart of Jewish culture, traditions, and customs through cooking delicious, inventive Jewish foods. *This is a double period course.

Embodied Judaism: Yoga and Meditation

Faculty: Baba Lou Haber

Grades: 8th-12th

Credit: 1 Credit

Yoga means union. It helps us to unite body, mind, and soul as well as to recognize the divinity in one another and connect to God. In this class, students will explore various aspects of Yoga, including poses, breathing practices, meditation, behaviors such as nonviolence, and mindsets such as gratitude. Along the way we will gain an understanding of how the practice of Yoga enables us to embody Judaism and enrich our lives.

Baba Lou Haber is a certified Yoga teacher who teaches at Kaia Yoga.

Headlines

Faculty: Ricka Breiner

Grades: 8th-12th grade

Credits: 1 Credit

Election, Israel, Hamas, Palestine – news, news, news! Print, social media, TV all influence and impact our lives as Jews. Let's dig in together and discuss the many issues that affect us all, even the controversial. Let's challenge ourselves, raise our awareness, and increase our knowledge of the people and events that impact our society and daily lives today and for the future.



Israel: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Faculty: Julie Sacks

Grades: 9th-12th grade

Credits: 1 Credit

Students take a deep dive into the history of Israel, exploring its ancient roots and the evolution of Zionism, while also addressing the significant events of October 7, 2023, and their impact on Israel and the Jewish world. Students will begin by studying the Jewish connection to the land of Israel, key historical milestones, and the rise of the Zionist movement, leading to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The class will also include contemporary Israel, examining the challenges and complexities Zionism faces today, particularly in the context of the events before and after October 7. Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of Israel's enduring significance in Jewish life and the evolving role of Zionism in the modern world. This course encourages students to reflect on the impact of recent events on their personal and communal Jewish identity, and on the broader global stage.

Jewish Jam Band

Faculty: Rabbi Evan Schultz

Grades: 8th-12th grade

Credits: 1 Credit

Using Joey Weisenberg's book *The Torah of Music* as a guide, join Rabbi Evan for an hour of learning about Judaism through music. Play an instrument? Bring it to Merkaz and join Rabbi Evan in creating a rockin' Jewish Jam Band! Open to anyone regardless of skill. Some instruments may be available to borrow.

Mahjong

Faculty: Susan Roth

Grades: 8th-9th grade *Capped at 6 students*

Credits: 1 Credit

Through hands-on gameplay, this class offers students a unique opportunity to learn and engage in the ancient Chinese tile game while exploring its cultural significance within the Jewish community. This class fosters camaraderie, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation among students.

Photography and Art: Through a Jewish Lens

Fall and Spring: 8:00 PM

Grades: 8th-12th

Look at Jewish ritual objects, Jewish communal life and education, and Jewish food in like never before. Using a camera and other mediums, get up close and personal with your culture. We'll be using many modalities of art as a tool to explore the Jewish world as we know it, and to imagine the one we hope to see in our future.

Shuk Scenes & Startup Dreams: The Many Faces of Israel

Faculty: Amit Swisa

Grades: 8th-9th

Credits: 1 Credit

Yalla! Get to know about all that Israel has to offer in this expansive, immersive course led by our enthusiastic Israeli Emissary, Amit. From food to film to flora and fauna, this class will paint a clearer picture of a country that is simultaneously home to one of the oldest places in the world and the biggest start-up nation in the Middle East. Includes interactive cooking classes, opportunities to ask meaningful and exploratory questions about Israel, and lots of fun. Sababa!

The Twilight Zone

Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

In this class, students will delve into *The Twilight Zone's* unique blend of science fiction, fantasy, and moral dilemma, all while exploring the Jewish values and ethics that underlie many of its episodes. By exploring episodes including "To Serve Man," "Time Enough at Last," "Changing of the Guard," "In the Nick of Time," and "Eyes of the Beholder," students will tackle themes of identity, justice, and ethical decision-making, offering valuable opportunities for reflection and discussion within a Jewish context.

Spring Semester: *At a Glance...*

| 7:00 PM | 8:00 PM |
|--|--|
| Required | Required |
| <p><u>Kulam 8th-Grade Seminar</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Allie Burger – Beth Tepper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required for all 8th-graders | <p><u>Confirmation Class</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Evan Schultz <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required for B'nai Israel 10th graders only |
| Electives | Electives |
| <p><u>Better Together</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Ricka Breiner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Crafting Israel's Story: From Desert Roots to Start-Up Nation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Amit Swisa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-9th grade |
| <p><u>Crafting Israel's Story: From Desert Roots to Start-Up Nation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Amit Swisa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10th-12th grade | <p><u>Embodied Judaism: Yoga and Meditation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Lou Haber <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-9th grade |
| <p><u>Empowering Mindset: Personal Growth and Positive Attitude</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Justin Beck <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Headlines</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Ricka Breiner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-11th grade |
| <p><u>Israel: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Julie Sacks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Life on the Line</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Shlame Landa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade |
| <p><u>Jewish Geography</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Laura Elson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | <p><u>Mahjong</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Susan Roth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-9th grade |
| <p><u>Mahjong</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Susan Roth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade ○ | <p><u>Photography and Art: Through a Jewish Lens</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Allie Burger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-12th grade |
| <p><u>Real Talk with Rabbi Sarah Marion: Q & A on Abortion</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Sarah Marion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10th-12th grade | <p><u>Superheroes and the Jewish Connection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8th-12th grade |
| <p><u>The Twilight Zone</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | |
| <p><u>Unlocking the Secrets of the Hebrew Bible</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty: Baba Lou Haber <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9th-12th grade | |

Spring Semester 7:00 PM Courses

Required Courses

*8th Grade

*Kulam

Faculty: Allie Burger

Credits: 1 Credit

Kulam is a Hebrew High School curriculum that promotes *shleimut* (individual wellbeing), *hesed* (connection), and *tzedek* (just action). Kulam equips Jewish teens to engage in dynamic and authentic relationships in order to think reflectively, act courageously, and develop healthy and caring communities. In this program, you will ask big questions about where, why and how you belong while exploring issues of identity, equity, and justice with Jewish wisdom as a guide.



Spring Semester 7:00 PM Courses

Electives

**** Please pay careful attention to the grades eligible for each class. ****
Some courses are delineated into sections by grade.

Better Together

Faculty: Ricka Breiner

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old. It is easy to love children. Even tyrants and dictators make a point of being fond of children. But the affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture." In this award-winning, intergenerational program, students will visit Mozaic Senior Life in Bridgeport and develop awareness of and sensitivity towards the aging through hands on learning with the residents, as well as learn important lessons about the Jewish pillar of *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation.

Crafting Israel's Story: From Desert Roots to Start-Up Nation

Faculty: Amit Swisa

Grades: 10th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

Discover Israel's journey from ancient history to modern innovation in this hands-on course. Work alongside our Israeli emissary to plan and execute impactful Israel-centered events, including Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom HaZikaron. Learn how to bring Israel's rich culture and heritage to life in our community, creating meaningful experiences that connect the past, present, and future. *Additional evenings and weekends may be required for extra credit. *

Empowering Mindset: Personal Growth and Positive Attitude

Faculty: Justin Beck

Grades: 9th-12th

Proven strategies for personal growth, self-improvement and success in life. Boost your confidence and self-worth, learn how to uncover self-limiting beliefs, and practice building your newfound outlook on life. Unlock your imagination, explore endless possibilities, and embrace life-affirming practices that will propel you forward on your journey. Practical methods and applications. Leave each session feeling uplifted and inspired.

Israel: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Faculty: Julie Sacks

Grades: 9th-12th grade

Credits: 1 Credit

Students take a deep dive into the history of Israel, exploring its ancient roots and the evolution of Zionism, while also addressing the significant events of October 7, 2023, and their impact on Israel and the Jewish world. Students will begin by studying the Jewish connection to the land of Israel, key historical milestones, and the rise of the Zionist movement, leading to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The class will also include contemporary Israel, examining the challenges and complexities Zionism faces today, particularly in the context of the events before and after October 7. Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of Israel's enduring significance in Jewish life and the evolving role of Zionism in the modern world. This course encourages students to reflect on the impact of recent events on their personal and communal Jewish identity, and on the broader global stage.

Mahjong

Faculty: Susan Roth

Grades: 10th-12th *Capped at 6 students*

Credits: 1 Credit

Through hands-on gameplay, this class offers students a unique opportunity to learn and engage in the ancient Chinese tile game while exploring its cultural significance within the Jewish community. This class fosters camaraderie, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation among students.

Real Talk with Rabbi Sarah Marion: Questions and Answers on Abortion

Faculty: Rabbi Sarah Marion

Grades: 10th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion. Since then, abortion has emerged as one of the biggest issues of our time. But what is an "abortion," exactly? What does it mean to be "pro-choice" or "anti-abortion?" When, and why, might an abortion be necessary, and how does the procedure actually work? What guidance does Jewish tradition provide on this issue, compared with other faiths? Who is harmed the most when access to abortion becomes limited or banned? How does reproductive justice support racial justice, LGBTQI rights, and other important Jewish values? In this class, we will examine the many layers and complexities around access to abortion and reproductive healthcare. In addition to learning from the course instructor and fellow classmates, we will explore this issue from a medical and legal perspective through films, articles, and visits from experts and guest speakers. This course offers an opportunity to explore, discuss, and debate the many layers and complexities around abortion and reproductive healthcare in a safe, open, and respectful environment.

***Students of all identities and backgrounds are welcome and encouraged to join.**

The Twilight Zone

Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

In this class, students will delve into *The Twilight Zone's* unique blend of science fiction, fantasy, and moral dilemma, all while exploring the Jewish values and ethics that underlie many of its episodes. By exploring episodes including "To Serve Man," "Time Enough at Last," "Changing of the Guard," "In the Nick of Time," and "Eyes of the Beholder," students will tackle themes of identity, justice, and ethical decision-making, offering valuable opportunities for reflection and discussion within a Jewish context.

Unlocking the Secrets of the Hebrew Bible

Faculty: Baba Lou Haber

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

Did you ever read something in the Hebrew Bible that seems completely irrelevant to your life today? Or it makes you wonder why it was important enough to be included in the Bible in first place? As modern Jews, we can get stuck on the direct, apparent meaning of Biblical text and miss deeper, more secret, and more mystical interpretations. In this class we will probe deeper meanings of Biblical stories in order to understand them more fully and find greater relevance to our lives.



Spring Semester 8:00 PM Courses

Required Courses

***10th Grade (B'nai Israel members ONLY)**

***Confirmation Class**

Faculty: Rabbi Evan Schultz

Credits: 12 Credits

***Required for and open to Congregation B'nai Israel 10th-grade students only.** Confirmation Class meets both semesters. During the Confirmation year, students spend part of each night at Merkaz learning with one another. They spend their time with Rabbi Schultz exploring a variety of issues — many of their own choosing. Click [here](#) to learn more.



***12th grade only**

***Choices on the College Campus**

Faculty: Noah Nemitoff-Bresler

Credits: 1 Credit

With the college-application process in the rear-view mirror, it's time to start thinking about what life will be like when you actually step foot on that college campus or wherever life takes you as a newly independent(ish) adult. This is a time of transformation, and you'll be faced with many choices, from how to observe Judaism in a meaningful way to what major and career path to pursue. We'll hear from guest speakers who are experts in their fields, including about how to respond to antisemitism on college campuses, and we'll discuss the important topics that aren't usually talked about openly, all with a Jewish twist. Join your friends from Merkaz in making your transition into the next chapter of your life more meaningful and impactful.

Spring Semester 8:00 PM Courses

Electives

**** Please pay careful attention to the grades eligible for each class. ****
Some courses are delineated into sections by grade.

Crafting Israel's Story: From Desert Roots to Start-Up Nation

Faculty: Amit Swisa

Grades: 8th-11th

Credits: 1 Credit

Discover Israel's journey from ancient history to modern innovation in this hands-on course. Work alongside our Israel Emissary to plan and execute impactful Israel-centered events, including Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Yom HaZikaron. Learn how to bring Israel's rich culture and heritage to life in our community, creating meaningful experiences that connect the past, present, and future. *Additional evenings and weekends may be required for extra credit.*

Embodied Judaism: Yoga and Meditation

Faculty: Baba Lou Haber

Grades: 8th-11th

Credit: 1 Credit

Yoga means union. It helps us to unite body, mind, and soul as well as to recognize the divinity in one another and connect to God. In this class, students will explore various aspects of Yoga, including poses, breathing practices, meditation, behaviors such as nonviolence, and mindsets such as gratitude. Along the way we will gain an understanding of how the practice of Yoga enables us to embody Judaism and enrich our lives.

Baba Lou Haber is a certified Yoga teacher who teaches at Kaia Yoga.

Headlines

Faculty: Ricka Breiner

Grades: 8th-11th

Credits: 1 Credit

Daily events influence and shape our lives as Jews. Magazine and newspaper articles help us focus on and discuss the current events that affect us here, in Israel, and in the world. Many issues are controversial, even among Jews, and are worth considering from all sides. Raise your awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the people and events impacting our society and your daily lives while you share your views and editorial comments.



Life on the Line

Faculty: Rabbi Shlame Landa

Grades: 9th-12th

Credits: 1 Credit

You make the call! Debate real-life news stories such as rescuing strangers, euthanasia, and attempted suicide. The course invites each student to share their views and opinions on each case, "render judgement" on these life-and-death scenarios and then consider what ancient Jewish wisdom says about these modern-day dilemmas. Students will discover a new approach to navigating life's tough decisions.

Mahjong

Faculty: Susan Roth

Grades: 8th-9th *Capped at 6 students*

Credits: 1 Credit

Through hands-on gameplay, this class offers students a unique opportunity to learn and engage in the ancient Chinese tile game while exploring its cultural significance within the Jewish community. This class fosters camaraderie, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation among students.

Photography and Art: Through a Jewish Lens

Fall and Spring: 8:00 PM

Grades: 8th-12th

Look at Jewish ritual objects, Jewish communal life and education, and Jewish food like never before. Using a camera and other mediums, get up close and personal with your culture. We'll be using many modalities of art as a tool to explore the Jewish world as we know it, and to imagine the one we hope to see in our future.

Superheroes and the Jewish Connection

Faculty: Rabbi Chagie Rubin

Grades: 8th-11th

Credits: 1 Credit

Superhero movies continue to dominate Hollywood. Join Rabbi Rubin to explore inspirational, ethical, and spiritual material from a variety of storylines, and the Jewish influence on these heroes. Revenge vs. Justice, Society and Vigilantism, Repairing the World are just a few of the themes to be debated and highlighted with film clips from various films such as *Iron Man*, *Batman Begins*, *Wonder Woman*, and more.





Flex Track

2024-2025 / 5785

CALENDAR OF PROGRAMS

Flex Track: *At a Glance...*

Below you will find a preliminary calendar of programs and events available in the Flex Track program. **These events are subject to change, and new programs will be announced and updated below throughout the school year.**

- If you are interested in suggesting a Flex Track program for this year, please email merkaz@shalomct.org.

In order to remain on track to graduate, **students are expected to earn 4 Merkaz credits per school year.** Credits for each Flex Track program are listed in its description.

- If you have any questions about earning credits on the Flex Track, please email merkaz@shalomct.org.

Important things to note about the Flex Track:

- Some programs may necessitate participation fees.
- Placement is contingent on available space. Students will know their Flex Track program placements by the start of the school year.
- New programs will be added throughout the school year. Once registered, you will get ongoing updates about new programs!
- Extenuating circumstances may cause other programs to be cancelled. In the event of a cancellation, we will aim to give as much advanced notice as possible.

September 2024

Setting the Table: A Conversation Between Naama Shefi and Liz Rueven

Date: Tues 9/12 @ 7 PM

Location: The Westport Library

Credits: 1 Credit

Enjoy an evening and conversation with cookbook author Naama Shefi and local food blogger extraordinaire, Liz Rueven. Hear Naama's stories of how her heritage from Iraq and Morocco excite her culinary senses in the kitchen.



October 2024

Federation 101 & Super Sunday

Date: Sun TBD @ 10 AM – 2 PM

Location: Federation Offices

Credits: 1 Credits

Learn what it takes to make our Jewish non-profit run with experiential learning. Through this campaign phone-a-thon, students will get valuable work experience in the fields of development at marketing and walk away with a rich understanding of what our Federation does and how a Jewish non-profit works. Educational info session with Acting Head of Federation, Shelley Kreiger, to precede phone-a-thon.

November 2024

The Daffodil Project at Mozaic Senior Life

Date: Sun TBD @ 10 PM – 2 PM

Location: Mozaic Senior Life

Credits: 1 Credits

Come plant daffodils with seniors at Mozaic Senior Life through the Holocaust Resource Center. The Daffodil Project aspires to build a worldwide Living Holocaust Memorial by planting 1.5 million Daffodils in memory of the children who perished in the Holocaust and in support for children suffering in humanitarian crises in the world today.

Violins of Hope

Date: Tue 11/12 @TBA

Location: Merkaz

Credits: 1 Credit

Date: Sun 11/17 @TBA

Location: SHU Discovery Science Center and Planetarium

Credit: 1 Credit

During World War 2, the Nazis used music – and especially violins – to humiliate and degrade Jews in ghettos and camps. They confiscated many thousands of instruments belonging to Jews all over Europe. Violins of Hope founders have restored violins, violas, and celli that survived the Shoah. This program of concerts is not only a memorial to a lost culture and people, it is also an educational tool that reaches young students and adults alike.

December 2024

Volunteer at St. John's Church

Date: Tues TBA @ 3:30 – 6 PM

Location: St. John's Church in Bridgeport

Credits: 1 Credits

Join Merkaz faculty, Susan Roth, to prepare a meal for those in need at St. John's Church. Limited to 6 students.

January 2025

MLK Day – Jews and the Civil Rights Movement

Date: TBA

Location: TBA

Credits: 1 Credits

Event description coming soon.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

Date: TBA

Location: TBA

Event description coming soon.



February 2025

Night at Night at the Planetarium

Date: Sat TBA @ 7 PM

Location: SHU Discovery Science Center and Planetarium

Credits: 2 Credits

Meet us at the Sacred Heart University Discovery Science Center and Planetarium for Havdalah and a night under the stars. We'll read Elie Wiesel's *Night* out loud from start to finish. Commentary and discussion from Holocaust Resource Center Founding Educator Shelley Kreiger and Planetarium staff to follow.

March 2025

Volunteer at Homes for the Brave

Date: Mon or Tue TBA @ 3:30 - 5:30 PM

Location: Homes for the Brave in Bridgeport, CT

Credits: 1 Credits

Join Merkaz faculty, Susan Roth, to prepare a meal for those in need at Homes for the Brave. Homes for the Brave provides housing and services to individuals experiencing homelessness, especially Veterans. Capped at 6 students.

April 2025

Spring of Service

Dates: Throughout April

Location: TBA

Credits: Vary by event

Use your Spring Break to give back to the community! More information on dates and events coming soon.



May 2025

Yom HaZikaron Program

Date: TBA @ 7 – 9 PM

Location: TBA

Credits: 1 Credits

Commemorate Israel's Memorial Day with Merkaz. Event details coming soon.

This is a required ALL-SCHOOL program for all registered students.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut Celebration

Date: TBA @ 7 – 9 PM

Location: TBA

Credits: 1 Credits

Celebrate Israel's Independence with Merkaz! Event details coming soon.

This is a required ALL-SCHOOL program for all registered students.

End of School Party: Lag B'Omer Field Day

Date: Sun TBA@ 11 AM – 2PM

Location: TBA

Credits: 1 Credits

Event description coming soon.

Recurring Flex Programs

- **Dignity Grows**

- Dignity Grows provides menstrual-hygiene essentials to women, girls and individuals assigned female at birth who cannot afford them. At Dignity Grows events, volunteers learn about period poverty in our community and pack totes for people experiencing this challenge.
- Students can also have the opportunity to be on a Dignity Grows fundraising committee.

- **Reproductive Justice Committee**

- Learn about reproductive justice in Jewish culture. This committee, helmed by Rabbi Sarah Marion of Congregation B'nai Israel, will meet on an as-needed basis to discuss current events and venture out into the community in pursuit of reproductive justice!

- **PJ Library Teen Fellowship**

- Are you interested in early childhood education? PJ Library events for young children and their families occur one Sunday a month throughout the year. Consider being a PJ Teen Partner. You will work with the Federation's PJ Professional, Sara Beitman, to help facilitate PJ events. Dates to be announced on a rolling basis.

- **Israel Film Series**

- Our Israel Emissary (*shaliach*), Amit Swisa, is creating an array of enriching, entertaining, and educational events surrounding Israel. Dates and programs TBA.

Tuition & Fees

Tuition Information

First student per family: \$900

Additional students per family: \$815 per student

If you are registering a graduating senior (12th Grade), there is an additional **Senior Fee:** \$100

Subsidy Information

Participating synagogues contribute a tuition subsidy for each of their students.

Synagogue Subsidy: \$100 per student | | Enter discount code **SYN100**

Participating synagogues include:

- Chabad of Fairfield
- Congregation Beth El – Norwalk
- Congregation B'nai Israel
- Or Hadash
- Congregation Rodeph Sholom
- Temple Shalom
- TCS

Merkaz Faculty: 25% discount per student

Jewish Agency Employees: Employees of local Jewish agencies working 15 hours or more per week will receive a \$100 discount per student.

Please email merkaz@shalomct.org for a custom discount code if you qualify for more than one discount.

Payment Options:

1. Pay Tuition in full.
2. Set up a Payment Plan:
 - a. Merkaz offers two payment plan options to be billed monthly:
 - i. \$150 Deposit with 2 Installments
 - ii. \$150 Deposit with 4 Installments
3. Pay by check.
 - a. Please email merkaz@shalomct.org to pay by check.

Tuition Assistance

Please do not let cost be a barrier to participation. Tuition assistance is available.

Contact merkaz@shalomct.org with questions or to request a tuition assistance application.

FAQs

My child is registering for the Classic Track, but would love to attend some of the programs on the Flex Track calendar. Can they attend a Flex Track program?

- YES! Classic Track students are **welcome and encouraged** to attend Merkaz Flex Track programs and will be eligible to receive extra credit, excused absences, or even special honors for doing so.

My child has an extra-curricular that goes until 7:30 pm on Tuesday nights, but would like to take an 8 pm course. Can they?

- Yes! In this case, the student would register for the Classic Track, and would be expected to make up the 2 course credits per semester they would miss by attending Flex Track programs amounting to 2 credits a semester, or 4 credits for the year.

My child wants to attend the Classic Track, but we live far away with loads of traffic in between.

- On our registration form, there is a place to indicate if you would like to be connected with other families looking to carpool. Please fill this out and we will connect families from similar locations to help facilitate carpooling. Alternatively, you can email merkaz@shalomct.org directly to be put on the list.

My child is registering for the Flex Track, but is interested in some of the classes on the Classic Track. Can they drop-in?

- Many of the classes on the Classic Track are cumulative, but some are not! Students on the Flex Track interested in dropping in are welcome to audit a class pending faculty and Head of School approval.

How can attending Merkaz benefit my child's college-application process?

- In addition to the college-prep courses we offer on either track, students who graduate from either the Classic Track or the Flex Track will be eligible to receive a transcript with grades from all their classes, as well as a Merkaz diploma. Graduating high school with two diplomas is a guaranteed way to make your child's college application stand out!

What happens if my child isn't able to accrue enough credits due to extenuating circumstances?

- If students are not able to accrue a total of 4 credits per year — either by failing to attend all of their Classic Track classes, enough of their Flex Track programs, or a combination of the two — students will be offered an independent-study make-up assignment. If a student is unable to complete the assignment, they will receive partial credit for that school year.

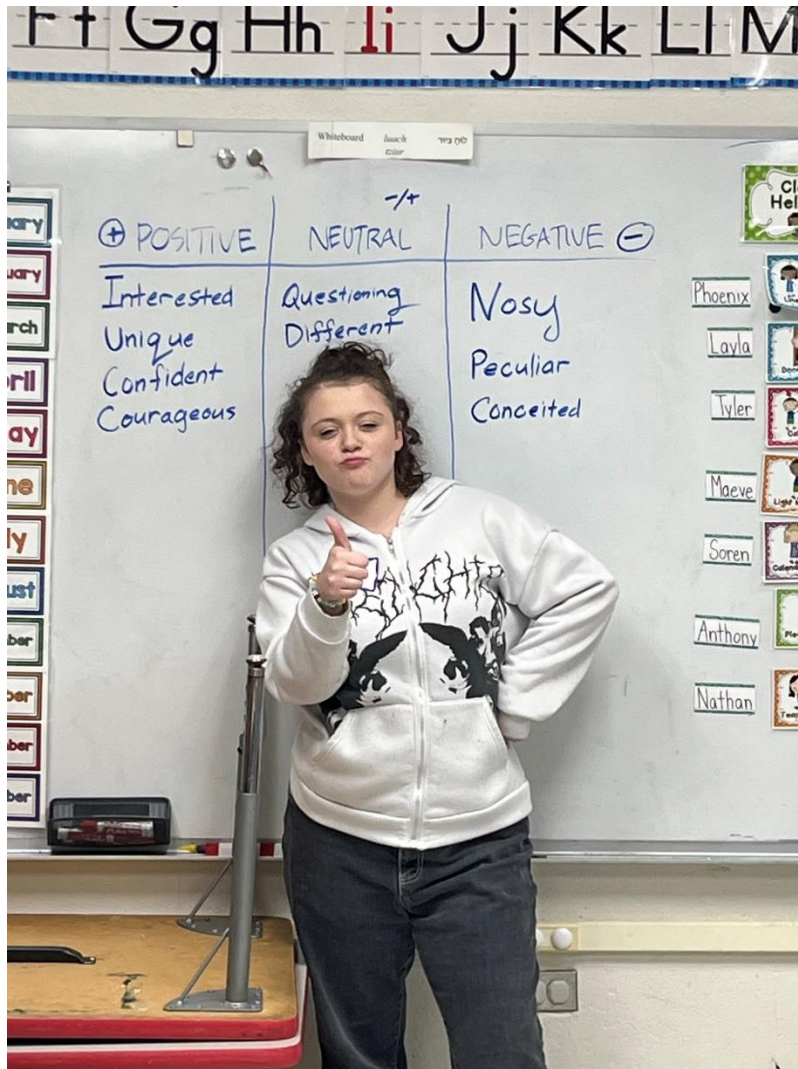
Do you offer à la carte options for the Flex Track programs?

- No. Merkaz prides itself on being a program that fosters community. All students—Classic and Flex Tracks—will be required to attend all school events, including orientations and holiday celebrations in order to foster school-wide relationships and comraderie.

Can I suggest a class or program?

- Absolutely! Our Classic Track Classes are all set for this year, but we are open to adding and rearranging Flex Track programs as the year progresses.

Have more questions? Email merkaz@shalomct.org.



School Policies and Procedures

Student Conduct and Expectations

At Merkaz, we strive to create a learning community that encourages mutual respect and collective safety. Students are expected to behave appropriately, in a manner that is respectful of administrators, teachers, guests, other students, and property. In addition, students participating in any Flex programming or Merkaz Trips will abide by the rules/policies particular to the premises.

The following behaviors are prohibited at Merkaz:

- **Food or drinks in the classroom without prior permission from the Head of School. (All food brought to Merkaz must be kosher and nut-free.)**
- **Vandalism. (Students and/or parents will be held financially liable for the cost of repair or replacement of any property damaged or defaced.)**
- **Use of drugs or alcohol by any student on school property.**
- **Smoking or vaping on school premises.**
- **Use of cellphones and all electronic devices, unless approved by the course instructor. All must be turned off while in class. Unapproved use of electronic equipment will result in the removal of the equipment for the evening.**
- **Inappropriate attire, including dress and grooming that are offensive, distracting, or disruptive to the educational process.**
- **Leaving the building without permission.**

Violation of the above policies will be addressed by the Head of School, and parents will be notified when necessary.

Serious violations may constitute grounds for dismissal at the discretion of the Head of School.

Attendance

Regular and punctual attendance is essential for a successful experience at Merkaz. A student must accrue 4 credits over the course 2024-2025 school year to receive credit. If a student is unable to attain those credits due to unforeseen circumstances, students will be offered an Independent Study make-up assignment. If a student is unable to complete the assignment, they will not receive credit for that school year.

Students or parents MUST email merkaz@shalomct.org if they are unable to attend a session, with as much advanced notice as possible. In that email, it is best practice if the student or parent indicates which make-up Flex Track program the student will attend to earn missed credits. This applies to both Classic and Flex Track students.

Lateness

Lateness disturbs your fellow students and faculty and should be avoided at all costs. That being said, we understand that sometimes it is unavoidable. Whenever possible, please email merkaz@shalomct.org if you know you will be arriving late. Any students arriving more than 15 minutes late to a class or program may be required to attend a make-up program.

Habitual lateness will be addressed at the discretion of the Head of School.

Early Dismissal

For the safety and security of our students, students may not leave the premises while Merkaz is in session.

Students leaving early must have permission from a parent or guardian. If a student must leave early, parents must email merkaz@shalomct.org with the time of dismissal and the name of the person picking them up, if applicable. Students will not be dismissed unless we receive explicit permission from a guardian.

Occasionally, students may be dismissed early. If parents are unable to pick up their child, a Merkaz staff member will stay with them until retrieved.

Student Driving and Traffic Guidelines

Students must operate vehicles in a safe and appropriate manner and must abide by the established parking lot traffic flow.

The Head of School has the authority to prohibit a student who violates safe driving practices from using the school parking facility.

Student drivers and parents must observe designated entrances and exits to and from the parking lot.

Security

Security will be present at each of our Classic Track campuses.

Where possible, we will have security present at Flex Track programs and events.

To inquire about the security of a specific program or event, please email merkaz@shalomct.org.