

What We Ask of Ourselves and of Each Other: Guiding Principles for Admission and Ordination at Hebrew College

INTRODUCTION

Reimagining Jewish learning and leadership for an interconnected world—making our lives more meaningful, our communities more vibrant, and our world more whole.

Hebrew College Mission Statement

At Hebrew College, we view rabbis and cantors as both learners and leaders. We are committed to a vision of Jewish spiritual leadership that is rooted in a life of Torah, and to learning that is animated by a sense of responsibility to the world.

Throughout their years of study in our program, our students learn to ground themselves in the faithful creativity of the *beit midrash*, to deepen their relationship with the Divine, and to walk in the ways of Torah, as they prepare for a life of service to the Jewish people.

We expect our students to take upon themselves the following commitments as they walk this path. We ask the same of ourselves as teachers, as we too are lifelong learners and leaders.

שמע

TO LISTEN

Our relationships—with Torah, with each other, and with God—begin with listening. Our *beit midrash* is where we expect students to develop their capacity to listen—to the voices on the pages of our sacred texts, to the voices of the people around the table, and to the eternal within and between us. This process of learning to listen deeply and well is essential to our understanding of what it means to become a responsible Jewish spiritual and communal leader.

Our commitment to listening to the voices on the pages of our sacred texts flows from an abiding awareness that we are blessed to stand within a vast, multi-vocal interpretive tradition that has been carried on across generations for millennia. We expect our students to become full, active, and passionate participants in this conversation, making decisions about their own lives in serious and sustained dialogue with our inherited tradition.

Our commitment to listening to one another across difference flows from our conviction that every human soul is a unique reflection of the divine image. This foundation gives rise to another core value of our *beit midrash*—the belief that every human being has something meaningful to contribute. We seek to elicit the contributions of everyone in the room—not only as an act of hospitality, but because each person's voice is needed for the fullness of the community and of Torah to emerge.

These commitments also lead to our embrace of *mahloket le-shem shamayim*—the encounter with differing and even challenging perspectives, for the sake of heaven. We expect each other to listen with an open heart, to assume good intentions, to remember that the views we reject may include wisdom we need. We strive to address interpersonal conflict respectfully and responsibly, and to make these encounters locations for personal and communal growth.

בכל-לבבך

WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

We see the cultivation of *middot* as essential to walking in the ways of Torah. These personal qualities are fundamental to building the capacity for ethical and skillful leadership. It is incumbent upon each of us to strive to develop them *be-khol halev*—in all domains of one's life, and over the course of a lifetime.

These *middot* include:

התחיבות / Obligation

חישبون נפש / Self-awareness and Accountability

יושר / Honesty and Integrity

כבוד / Honor

נדיבות לב / Generosity

סקרנות / Curiosity

ענווה / Humility

רַחֲמִים / Compassion

בָּשְׁבַתְּךָ בַּבָּיִתְךָ וּבַלְכַתְךָ בַּדָּרָךְ IN YOUR HOME AND ON YOUR WAY

We see the performance of *mitzvot* as another essential expression of walking in the ways of Torah. *Mitzvot* are the embodied actions through which we translate Torah's words into our own lives.

Through the study of *sifrei kodesh* (our sacred Jewish texts), the creation of a Jewish home, and engagement in Jewish communal life, our students are expected to build a meaningful practice of *mitzvot*. We welcome diverse expressions of this commitment and understand that the specific contours of personal practice will look different for each student, depending on their own relationship with our tradition and their search for the transcendent within it.

The process of forming a life shaped by *mitzvot* is an ongoing endeavor. We expect our students to pursue a life of *mitzvot* that finds expression both in the public sphere and in their own homes—the more intimate, inhabited spaces that define and inscribe our deepest social, cultural, and religious commitments.

These *mitzvot* include:

- הַכְּנִסָּת אֶזְרָחִים / Welcoming Guests
- גְּמִילוֹת חֲסִידִים / Acts of Lovingkindness
- כָּשָׁרוֹת / Kashrut
- צְדָקָה / Justice
- שְׁבָת וַיּוֹם טוֹב / Shabbat and Holidays
- תַּלְמִיד תּוֹרָה / Torah Study
- תְּפִלָּה / Prayer
- תְּשׁוּבָה / Repentance

This list is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to offer concrete examples of what we mean by forming a life shaped by *mitzvot*. Students in our program will regularly be expected to articulate and reflect on these and other aspects of their personal practice with teachers, mentors, and peers. As faculty members, we will support and participate in this process both inside and outside of the classroom, including by modeling honest and reflective conversation with students about how our own lives of *mitzvot* are unfolding.

שעריה

COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

Walking in the ways of Torah also calls us to acts of communal responsibility, outside the bounds of our own homes, within the gates of our cities and beyond.

We expect our students to cultivate a particular sense of responsibility to and for the Jewish people. As an expression of this commitment, we expect our students to spend a year of study in Israel, and to cultivate a connection to Israel that is rooted in a love of the Jewish people, a deep understanding of Jewish history and contemporary Israeli society, and a commitment to democracy, pluralism, and human rights.

We expect our students to cultivate a sense of responsibility to and for the dignity and wellbeing of all human beings as reflections of the divine image.

As spiritual leaders in a time of environmental crisis, we expect our students to cultivate a sense of reverence for all of God's creation and a sense of responsibility for the future of our planet.

למען תזקרו

GROWTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Walking in the ways of Torah requires a lifelong process of learning and growth. As a school, we are committed to ongoing reflection upon and refinement of our educational efforts. We will continually seek to strengthen structures of support and accountability, as we build a beloved and diverse community and prepare our students for a life of leadership and sacred service.

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