



LaHaV Learning Executive Summary

We're changing how Jewish high school students connect to their heritage. The LaHaV curriculum takes a bold departure from traditional modes of Talmud and Tanakh instruction, and has pioneered an approach to communicate the richness and relevance of our tradition by weaving together a rich tapestry of rabbinic texts and ideas.

Yet we're not just transforming Judaic studies for our own students. We've created a groundbreaking digital curriculum app that serves as the basis of a fully connected network of Jewish educators who share training, resources and methodologies in order to improve Jewish education across the world. We've developed this curriculum from the ground up, tested it in all grades and levels at Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles, CA, and are currently working with schools across the US, Israel, and Australia to implement it across a wide range of classrooms and student demographics.

Jewish tradition is not ancient – it's living, breathing and responding to the world, and our curricular methodology conveys that vitality. The curriculum itself is built upon a spiraled, integrated, and repeatable methodology that spans the entire high school experience. We begin with thorough introductions, focusing on the principles, development, values and procedures of the *halakhic* process, asking essential questions that inform understanding of *halakhic* decision-making: Is Jewish law human or Divine? Rigid or flexible? What is the source and scope of Rabbinic authority? Is *halakha* a democracy? Should we follow earlier or later authorities? What checks and balances exist within *halakhic* decision-making process? How does *halakha* balance between diversity and unity, or between innovation and continuity? Guided by these questions, our students explore hundreds of sources from the Talmud, commentaries, and legal codes to discover the sources and nature of rabbinic authority and the mechanisms by which *halakhic* decisions are made, including *sevara*, *minhag*, majority rule, judicial independence, diversity, unity, leniency, and the role of precedent Jewish law.

Armed with these introductions, LaHaV students put theory to practice by analyzing modern halakhic issues that Orthodox Judaism has dealt with, including the changing role of women in *halakha*, the State of Israel, and the observance of Shabbat. On any number of contemporary issues - from the status of women in communal prayer, to the ordination of female Orthodox rabbis, the *aguna* crisis, the establishment of *Yom Ha'azmaut*, negotiating land for peace and observance of *shemita* in Israel today, to the use of the electricity on Shabbat – contemporary *halakhic* disputes often revolve around questions of *halakhic* process and rabbinic authority and questions of how – and whether – change *halakhic* change can occur in our communities. By weaving together textual skills and enduring understandings about

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the nature of rabbinic authority in Jewish law, the mechanisms and modes of halakhic decision making, as well as the basic - and often competing - values that define those decisions, LaHaV is preparing our students to engage with and apply their learning to the contemporary and communal issues of the world around us.

The digitization of this project allows us to harness educational technology to transform the way Jewish ideas are shared in the classroom. Our digitized curriculum app opens the door to vast educational opportunities in two separate ways. The first is through the student experience. Web resources, dictionaries, rabbinic biographies, annotation tools and related media and materials are now literally at the students' fingertips, interwoven into the digital fabric of our core curriculum texts. At an entirely separate level, however, the digitization of this project allows for an unprecedented level of teacher support and collaboration. A teacher in Chicago can upload a lesson plan that is immediately accessible to a practitioner in Los Angeles; a new unit authored in New York can be viewed and adapted by other educators throughout the country. At the center of this network lay professional development, training seminars, networking and shared innovation for educators across the world. By providing a structure for educators to share and adapt multiple approaches and pedagogies, and then empowering them to create and then share their own curriculum materials through our digitized platform, we hope to foster collaboration that will help communicate and celebrate the vibrancy of Jewish tradition in a modern world.

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