



עברית במרכז
HEBREW AT THE CENTER

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Hebrew Gains Traction as a Covid Pastime *Classes, Programs, and Books Are Engaging Eager Participants*

December 29, 2020; Framingham, MA -- In early March 2020 who knew that we would be in shut-down long enough to study the ins and outs of a whole language?

With time on our hands, the pandemic has driven an enthusiastic market towards programming in the field of Hebrew language education--including teaching, learning, historical study, literature, and inquiry around "Why Hebrew?" In fact, hundreds attended *Hebrew at the Center's* past spring's four part series, *Sicha: Conversations about Hebrew and the Jewish Experience*. And on January 13th, 2021 *Sicha* picks up again, kicking off with Isaac Herzog, Chairman of The Jewish Agency for Israel, and David Koshitzky, CEO of IKO, discussing Hebrew as a Connector of the Global Community. Interested audiences are already signing up for these conversations which are being produced by *Hebrew at the Center* with help from a committee of leaders in the field.

"Covid has reminded us that we are part of a global community," said Rabbi Andrew Ergas, CEO of Hebrew at the Center. "A silver lining of this dark time has been the opportunity to use digital platforms to engage in Hebrew learning--connecting the Jewish people to one another and to the amazing Hebrew culture being produced in the Jewish state."

Learning Hebrew online has become more and more accessible. Several months into the pandemic, the *American Zionist Movement*, in partnership with the *World Zionist Organization*, engaged hundreds of adults from across the country in its weekly Hebrew conversation class called *Tachles*. More formal Ulpan courses followed, with waiting lists for registration. *Hebrew College's* Ulpan, an immersion program that brings Hebrew to life through discussions while teaching grammar and writing skills, has also seen an uptick in registrations.

Children in front of zoom cameras are engaging in Hebrew in new ways. *Jewish Interactive (JI)* recently rolled out an online platform to teach Hebrew to young children. The site's Hebrew interactive learning games have become the most popular activities and are easy enough for any COVID homeschooling parent to use. This past summer,

the *Areivim Hebrew at Camp/Kayitz Kef* program, in partnership with the *Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC)* and *Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI)*, successfully delivered new online and in-person Hebrew programs to over 2,000 camp children. The impact continues as *Kayitz Kef* is partnering with 21 Jewish day and overnight camps to create Hebrew programs that will be part of the summer of 2021 camp experience in North America. Seizing upon the increased interest in Hebrew at camp, *Hebrew at the Center*, in partnership with *FJC, Jewish Agency, JAFI and Kayitz Kef*, convened 70 professionals, academics, and community leaders to think expansively about how to strengthen the role of Hebrew in the camp experience.

In the midst of the pandemic, educational professionals made the time for professional development designed to support the teaching of Hebrew in the online classroom setting. *Hebrew at the Center* engaged close to 700 teachers through webinars and online coaching that directly benefited over 15,000 students.

“It’s uplifting to see that during these trying times, the community is turning to Hebrew study as a source of inspiration and an opportunity for growth. I have always believed that Hebrew can be a vehicle for bringing our global Jewish community together and that increased proficiency opens a door for deepening Jewish learning and connection to Israel and its culture,” said Arnee Winshall, *Hebrew at the Center’s* founder and Board president.

For those who like to read an historical overview of modern Hebrew language literature, Nancy E. Berg and Naomi B. Sokoloff, just published *Since 1948: Israeli Literature in the Making* which features a dozen essays that explore shifting linguistic, geographical, cultural, and artistic boundaries of Israeli writing. The contributors analyze texts composed in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Arabic, by Jews and non-Jews, by Israelis abroad as well as writers in Israel, by canonical and non-canonical authors.

With *Yom Ivrit*--Israel’s Hebrew Language Day--fast approaching on January 5, 2021, let’s take this opportunity to recognize the growth of interest in the Hebrew language and celebrate the modern miracle of *Ivrit*.

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