

# Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy

## Middle School CONNECTIONS

When asked about the use of a new innovative curriculum for the teaching of Torah and whether it went against our mesorah or tradition, Rav Shlomo Wolbe זצ"ל, the great mashgiach, commented that “our mesorah is to take every educational tool at our disposal to teach another child Torah. **Our mesorah is to make children love Torah.**” Whether through the use of classical commentators or through more innovative approaches like Bloom’s taxonomy, Chumash Vocabulary League, and SmartBoards, JKHA Middle School Chumash teachers are dedicated to doing whatever it takes to connect their students to the study of Torah. We hope that this edition of *Connections* gives you a glimpse into what makes our Chumash department so special.



*Rabbi Yaacov Feit, Connections Editor*



# חומש CHUMASH

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“My favorite part of learning Chumash is when we use *mefarshim* because they help us understand and answer our questions.” —Asa  
“I love when we learn all the stories about Moshe’s leadership.” —Alyssa Bloomberg “Chumash teaches you how to live your life and learn

## A Conversation Spanning the Generations

by Ms. Danielle Goldstein

**T**he JKHA Middle School Chumash curriculum focuses on many areas of learning. One very important facet of Chumash study is the use of *mefarshim* (commentators). The *mefarshim* that we learn together enhance our learning and understanding of the *parshiot* that we study. Oftentimes, the commentaries ask the same questions that we ask as we read the *pesukim* before us. In fact, many times we are able to come up with similar or identical answers to those of the *mefarshim* based on the class discussions we have. One of the most exciting aspects of learning various *mefarshim* is that we are able to see how the different commentators address the same question or prob-

lem within the text, each with their own approach. Each commentator, depending on when he lived and where he was from, has his own unique style of commentary to offer.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik once beautifully described the use of *mefarshim* in his classroom. He describes the scene of teaching a room full of young students. As he starts a shiur, the door opens quietly and an old man walks in and sits down. It is his grandfather, Rav Chaim of Brisk. Then the door opens quietly again and another old man walks in and sits down. Then more visitors show up—from the eleventh, twelfth or thirteenth century. Among them are Rashi, Rabeinu Tam, the Rabad and the

Rashba. More and more keep coming in. He goes on to ask, “What do I do? I introduce them to my pupils and the dialogue commences. The Rambam states a halachah, and the Rabad disagrees sharply. A student jumps up to defend the Rambam... Another student jumps up with a new idea. The Rashba smiles gently. I try to analyze what the young boy meant... Suddenly a symposium of generations comes into existence. Young students debate earlier generations with an air of daring familiarity and a crescendo of discussion ensues.”<sup>1</sup>

This scene painted so eloquently by Rav Soloveitchik describes the amazing connection our students are creating with

“Learning Chumash is like reading a good book. We’re disappointed when the class is over and we’re excited to come back every day.”

—Avi Bendory



## CVL: A League of True

By Rabbi Dovid Sukenik

**O**ne exciting aspect of the Chumash department this year is the focus on building a strong foundation of vocabulary words. According to Torah education experts Rabbis Yaakov Aichenbaum and Dovid Freeman, 544 words comprise 80% of all words that appear in Chumash. Mastering these foundational words is a necessity to becoming proficient in Chumash study.

Because students can sometimes find rote memorization tedious, after a tremendously successful pilot program last year, the seventh and eighth grades are participating in an innovative and exciting program: the Chumash Vocabulary League (CVL). CVL teaches students team spirit, responsibility towards their team, and of course, vocabulary words. Each class is its own league, and each league has a specific theme for team names. On a given week the Super Salamis can face off against the Pittsburgh Pastramis and the Tel Aviv Turnips can go against the Petach Tikvah Potatoes. The teams play weekly “games” (otherwise known as quizzes) which are cumulative, and the stakes get higher as the season progresses.

“You can never go wrong with Torah.” —Olivia Butler “Learning Torah is more addicting than texting.” —Naomi Kestler “I love Ch  
“I love Chumash class because it puts me into a world of learning.” —Yonatan Raskin “I enjoy Rabbi Feit’s class

## From Sinai to SmartBoards

By Rabbi Yaacov Feit

**W**ith the fire, thunder and lightning that accompanied the giving of the Torah, the Sinai experience certainly had its share of fireworks. But how would Moshe have felt about the use of SmartBoards? Can the tradition of classical Torah study that has lasted for thousands of years be enhanced by this technological innovation? Can the People of the Book really benefit by studying from a screen? If the SmartBoard is used to help master the text rather than replace it, then the answer is a resounding yes.

On a simple level, the use of a SmartBoard for Chumash study allows a teacher to easily display the page of Chumash being studied. The student who once could

not find the *passuk* or Rashi being studied can now look at the screen and see exactly where on the page the class is up to.

But use of the SmartBoard can do much more than locate an area of the text. It can bring an area of the text alive by allowing students to see an insight that they might not have seen otherwise. Highlighting a word that repeats itself unnecessarily allows students to visualize the problem rather than just hear it. With a tap of the screen a key word can enlarge, allowing students to notice a nuance in a *passuk* that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Manipulating the text by replacing one word with another can allow students to see what was really bothering Rashi. Stu-

dents can see the conjugation of a root word with its suffixes and prefixes taking place before their eyes, allowing for a better understanding of the skill being taught.

Comparing two similar texts has never been more effective. Students can simultaneously view two chapters side by side and look for similarities and differences. They can notice themselves what the *Mi-drash* might have noticed.

Maps can be attached to the *pesukim* being studied so students can understand where Bnei Yisrael traveled, and students can visualize parts of the *Mishkan* as they are learning about them. If a picture is worth a thousand words, imagine how

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## Champions

The students are competing as teams for the title of League Champion, but also as individuals for the title of League Leader/MVP. These titles are awarded after the regular season culminates in the playoff and championship games, which are played before the entire class using real live buzzers. Aside from the innate satisfaction of learning, accomplishing and succeeding, champions are awarded prizes, which last year included lunch from Dougie's and Jerusalem Pizza, books, and other exciting prizes.

The spring semester (after winter break) begins a new season of CVL with new teams and another chance at being declared CVL Champion. By the end of this school year the students will have developed a sense of responsibility to their teammates, between 130 and 200 new vocabulary words and a strong foundation for Chumash learning that will support their learning for the rest of their lives.

Good luck to all the teams! ■

“Every day we are excited to come to Chumash and learn with Morah Goldstein because it's our favorite subject!”

—Rachel Mendelson and Ariella Savitz



**“A new workbook: \$7.00. A new Chumash: \$20.00. Learning Chumash in JKHA: Priceless.” –Koby Stadtmauer**  
**“Chumash is an amazing way to connect to the roots of Judaism and our past.” –Yoni Laub**

## **Bloom’s Taxonomy** “Raising the Bar” for Chumash Study

By Mrs. Debbie Finkelstein, Associate Principal

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom created Bloom’s Taxonomy to categorize and classify levels of intellectual learning that commonly occur in the classroom setting. During the 1990s, a new group of cognitive psychologists, led by Bloom’s former student Lorin Anderson, updated the taxonomy to reflect relevance to 21st century work. The six levels of intellectual learning in Bloom’s Taxonomy, from lowest to highest, are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

These different levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy have become an extremely useful guide for teachers in planning classroom objectives. Namely, the continuum itself provides a springboard from which teachers can create more focused lesson plans as students advance towards higher-level thinking skills. Our talented Middle School Judaic faculty is able to incorporate Bloom’s Taxonomy into their daily lessons, and our teachers nurture the students as they move up the taxonomy as they progress in their knowledge. The faculty understands that when students are able to apply higher-order thinking skills to the lessons being taught, the students understand the meaning and purpose of what they are learning. Formal and informal assessments are frequent, and the learners

see for themselves that understanding is constantly changing and dynamic.

In Chumash, students engage in all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. For example, in the remembering level, students recall or recognize information in the approximate form in which it was learned. How many days did it take Hashem to create the world? What was created on each day? Responses to these types of questions reflect a student’s ability to absorb information on a factual level.

In the understanding domain, the key defining words are interpreting, translating, describing in one’s own words and organizing and selecting facts and ideas. For example, what happened when Moshe went to Pharaoh and asked him to free the Jewish slaves? Interpret the words “Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.” Responses to comprehension questions indicate that the students are able to apply what they have learned on a factual basis by reorganizing the material.

As students move to higher domains, the level of thinking advances. The evaluating domain is defined as making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing. Some questions that fall into this category are: Do you agree? What is

the most important? At the evaluation level students begin to make decisions based on the material studied. For example, if you were Jacob, what do you think you would do if you were asked to trick your brother? How would you make your decision? Does Rashi or Ramban’s interpretation better fit the words of the *passuk*? When students are evaluating and judging, they are more likely to retain information, perform better on tests, and most importantly, achieve the ultimate goal of becoming lifelong learners.

By utilizing Bloom’s Taxonomy, students begin with the remembering level, where they learn by rote and repeat basic facts, and continue through the evaluation level, where they must understand the Chumash well enough to form and support opinions. Each level requires greater understanding of concepts and increasingly abstract thought. Because of their variance in developmental rate, Middle School students are in a particular position to benefit from lessons based on Bloom’s Taxonomy. The JKHA Middle School Chumash teachers are extremely gifted in creating lessons that bring the Chumash to life, enabling the students to identify with the material with lessons from their own life experiences. ■

## **A Conversation Spanning the Generations**

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the text as well as with the *mefarshim* we learn. It is so incredible to see the passion and excitement in our classes as we analyze the opinions of commentaries so many centuries earlier. The active learning that goes on inside the classrooms is something that is truly unique to their learning and enriches their study of Chumash. ■

<sup>1</sup> Aaron Rakefet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Volume 2, pp. 187-188.

## **From Sinai to SmartBoards**

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valuable sound can be. Students can record their own voices reading or translating a *passuk* and then attach it to the *pesukim* on the screen. The student who was once not interested in looking inside now has another incentive to do so.

If the SmartBoard is used to bring the Chumash to life, rather than replace the Chumash, the SmartBoard brings with it an arsenal of tools that can allow our students to understand Torah like never before. ■

**“Chumash: Just learn it!” –Sara Dardik & Nina Kahn** **“Time flies by when you’re having fun learning Chumash.” –Cynthia Lando**  
**“Chumash challenges me in a way that lets me learn new things and have a lot of fun.” –Jonah Bash**