

Dear Beit Binah Family,

It's now September and school has started for most of our children. Beit Binah will resume its classes this year on **Sunday October 18**.

These are trying times. Everything is complicated and exhausting in the isolation and uncertainty. Moreover, no one has all of the answers, including me. I anticipate the plan below will change here and there over time. We will arrive at dead ends and veer into confusing alley ways. But, like generations of Jews before us, we will not give up.

This year at Kol Shofar and Beit Binah, ***there will still be friendships and laughter and learning and fun and shared experiences that will form the foundation of character and values.*** There is no taking a year off from that. If a child – or yes, you parents, too – lose momentum in Jewish learning and connection, it is exponentially harder to reclaim it. Additionally, it is harder for the synagogue itself to rebound and reclaim those same connections.

We will get through this and will meet in person at the moment we can do so safely. In the meantime, I do not want to lose a single soul, a single precious child or parent or loved one in the process. We have built such an incredible spirit in the past couple of years on Sunday mornings and throughout our synagogue, and we must keep it alive today and for next year. ***What we choose today will surely set the course for next year.***

Zoom Beit Binah Is Better Now

In the spring, we quickly flipped our program from in-person to Zoom, as we were reacting to an indefinite crisis. In fact, many of us didn't even fully know how to use Zoom in March and April.

Over the last weeks of August, however, our Beit Binah staff underwent a two-week intensive staff development program with ***Mindy Gold (a nationally renowned expert in hybrid and blended learning)***, training them to engage students in both digital and non-digital learning. We have shifted from being “reactive to proactive.” Furthermore, we are committed to invest in whatever more training and coaching with Mindy as needed in order to offer you the best of Beit Binah. We are proud of this work and look forward to implementing it.

Safe Outdoor Classrooms and Minimum Zoom (but there'll be some)

Many of us are Zoomed out – I can't even tell you! Well, we are one of the unique programs in the Bay Area that is also offering concurrent outdoor classrooms. We have a beautiful, large property, so why not! Of course, we will follow county guidelines for safety, including masks, contact tracing, and social distancing, looking to neither put our students nor teachers at any additional risk.

We will open 4 outdoor classrooms on Sundays and Wednesdays. Kindergarten through 3rd grade will meet Sunday mornings from 9 AM to 12 PM, with a whole school service, stories,

and music with Asaf. There will be a Zoom-in option for students who will not be able to attend in person.

On Wednesdays, those outdoor classrooms will be open for 4th – 7th graders from 4PM – 5:45PM, again with the Zoom-in option. We will have a whole school service, as we normally do on Wednesdays, and there will be staggered recess times.

Additionally, our 3rd-7th graders, who typically meet twice per week, will have a second day of Zoom supplement. This may be Hebrew language intensive for approximately 20 minutes in small groups or some other kind of non-traditional class engagement, such as “Beit Binah in a Box” (keep an eye out for more info).

Also, please note that each teacher’s approach to teaching in this blended learning platform will look different from grade level to grade level. We will be working according to the needs of each individual class, so please keep up to date with your teacher’s communications.

Final Thoughts

This is Jewish life. Yes, it’s messy, frustrating, and unpredictable, and yet it is always life-affirming, inspiring, meaningful, and creative. You know why? We made it that way. Today, we get to make it all over again and we need you to lend your voice and spirit to this work in which our incredible teachers, Family Engagement Committee, staff, and clergy are engaged. Come for a few sessions and check it out. Just come and be with us – we need you – we are not turning anyone away due to finances.

When the pandemic ends – and it will end – we will be stronger, wiser, and more intimately bound to each other stories and the story of our people, and for that, there is nothing more valuable.

We look forward to seeing you and thank you for being an invaluable part of Kol Shofar.

B’virkot Shalom v’Kavod,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Steinberg", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rabbi Paul Steinberg