Leo Baeck SpiriTeam – Youth Leadership Course

Leo Baeck Education Center

The Leo Baeck Education Center is a beacon of pluralistic Jewish values and coexistence in Haifa. Founded in 1938, it has grown into one of Israel's foremost educational institutions and the country's largest center for Liberal Judaism. Situated in a diverse neighborhood, the Center serves Jews and non-Jews from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds.

From early childhood through 12th grade, Leo Baeck provides inclusive education for all students – including gifted learners and children on the autism spectrum.

More than just a school, Leo Baeck is a dynamic community hub, home to a vibrant synagogue, rich cultural programming, and extensive sports and wellness facilities. Rooted in the principles of *Tikkun Olam* (social responsibility) and Progressive Jewish thought, we actively foster multiculturalism and shared society.

The Need

Israeli youth are growing up in a complex, diverse society where the connection to Jewish heritage, holidays, and cultural values is gradually eroding, particularly within the public education system. Many young people yearn for meaning, belonging, and a value-based framework that enables them to express their Jewish and Israeli identity in an open, relevant, and inclusive way.

At the same time, there is a growing shortage of young leaders who can create and lead spiritual-communal experiences, develop a contemporary Jewish-Israeli language, and make Jewish tradition and holidays accessible to diverse communities, including students, individuals with special needs, seniors, Holocaust survivors, and residents across Haifa.

The Leo Baeck SpiriTeam

To meet this need, the Leo Baeck Education Center has developed the **Leo Baeck SpiriTeam** – a youth leadership program designed to train middle and high school students to lead spiritual and cultural ceremonies for Jewish holidays, Israeli-style Shabbat gatherings (*Kabbalot Shabbat*), and *Maamadim*. Through this program, a new generation of young community leaders will emerge – knowledgeable, compassionate, and deeply rooted in their Jewish identity – capable of creating meaningful experiences that bridge tradition and modern life, spirituality and social action. The course will engage 50 students from Leo Baeck's Junior High and High School divisions, under the guidance of Rabbi Oshrat Morag, Senior Rabbi of the Leo Baeck Education Center. To ensure active participation, students will be divided into subcommittees and take on key leadership roles. In addition, we plan to establish a youth leadership framework similar to that of a youth movement, based on the Reform Movement's *Noar Telem*, in which course participants will mentor younger children and teach the values of pluralistic and open Judaism. This initiative offers a powerful opportunity to strengthen and expand the Leo Baeck ethos, inspired by our students' genuine search for meaningful, values-driven Jewish experiences.

Course Structure and Content

The year-long program includes weekly one-hour sessions held after school throughout the academic year (excluding holidays and summer vacation). Special occasions may increase the number of meetings during the week.

Core topics include prayer, leadership, facilitation skills, Jewish holidays and festivals, Torah study, and a weekend of an Israeli Shabbat experience.

Additionally, five workshops will be led by guest lecturers on subjects such as music, leadership, public speaking, and rhetoric.

The course will culminate in a shared Shabbat weekend in Haifa, during which students will prepare and lead a Kabbalat Shabbat service, facilitate an alternative *Shacharit* with personal *Divrei Torah*, and explore the personal and communal meaning of Shabbat. The weekend will also include a learning session and an educational excursion.

Additional events throughout the year include:

- A *Selichot* tour in Safed
- *"Lighting Up the Heart of the City"* – a public Hanukkah celebration held annually in a nearby community square
- A *Passover Seder* for Holocaust survivors at the Leo Baeck campus
- A *Tu Bishvat Seder* for individuals with special needs at the Leo Baeck campus
- *Kabbalot Shabbat* gatherings at Leo Baeck and throughout Haifa – in senior homes, community centers, women's shelters, and other venues

Course Objectives

- To train young leaders who embody Leo Baeck's core values: Zionism, Jewish identity, pluralism, and equality
- To cultivate knowledge, leadership, and facilitation skills rooted in social awareness and inclusion
- To empower youth as agents of social change who advance Jewish renewal, foster inclusive public discourse, and strengthen their connection to evolving Jewish life and values

Expected Impact

Graduates of the program will become ambassadors for Jewish renewal in Haifa and beyond, bridging identities, generations, and communities.

Through experiential learning, value-based dialogue, and hands-on leadership practice, participants will gain the tools to strengthen the social and spiritual fabric of their communities, creating shared experiences of belonging, mutual responsibility, and meaning.

In the short term, the course will directly impact approximately 50 students.

In the long term, it will reach their families, the Leo Baeck community, and hundreds of Haifa residents who will take part in the ceremonies and events led by the students.

Ultimately, the Leo Baeck SpiriTeam program will cultivate a young, values-driven network of community leaders committed to building a more united, inclusive, and compassionate Israeli society.