

In the Classroom:

The Self-Paced Hebrew Learner: Serving the Needs of All Students

Ways to effectively implement an independent Hebrew learning program for individual students or an entire class

By Lisa J. Goldstein

Jenny, a fifth-grade religious school student, wants to be an actress. So imagine her excitement when she is picked to play the lead in *Bye Bye Birdie*. But after-school rehearsals mean that Jenny's attendance at religious school is spotty. The teacher, Jenny's classmates, and Jenny herself, never know whether she'll be in class the next lesson or not. And so Jenny begins to fall behind.

Do you have students like Jenny with conflicting after-school or Sunday morning activities? Or students who learn more quickly or slowly than their classmates? Students who enrolled late in the year or in later grades? Students who work with a tutor outside of class?

If any of these scenarios sound familiar, **your students may benefit from a Hebrew program that allows them to study independently and progress at their own pace.** Self-paced study enables students to learn at a rate appropriate for their own circumstances. They can set their own personal goals rather than having to meet the whole class's objectives. And it allows teachers to personalize study rather than having to play "catch up" for students who fall behind the rest of the class, or to slow down students who could progress more quickly.



Students studying independently require four important tools:

1. **Materials** that are *strong* and *structured* so that students can easily use them on their own.
2. **Answer keys** that allow students to correct their own work.
3. **Assessment** procedures that give clear and ongoing feedback of student progress.
4. A **facilitator** to provide guidance and to ensure that students are meeting their learning goals.



1. Materials

Hebrew materials for self-paced and independent study need to be especially clear and easily manageable, since there is much less teacher direction. Instructions should be concise and easy to understand, activities limited and meaningful, and pages laid out logically with a limited amount of text on a page. In addition, since different instructors and madrichim may work with an individual student at different times, materials need to be easy to administer and require minimal or no training for students or facilitators. Finally, materials should be easy to keep track of and to store.

2. Answer keys

In order to study independently and at their own pace, students need the tools to correct their own work, thereby receiving immediate feedback. This allows students to take responsibility for their own learning, and to progress without having to wait for a teacher to check their work.

3. Assessment

Assessment tools provide teacher *and* student with ongoing feedback about progress. These tools should gauge whether the student has achieved his or her educational goals and objectives . For example, if an objective is for the student to recognize a common root in several different Hebrew words, then the assessment tool might check for that understanding by having students circle the three root letters in words from different places in the prayer book.

4. Facilitator

Depending on the situation and the reason your students are studying independently, the facilitator may be the classroom teacher, an adult or teen assistant, a tutor, or even a parent. Again, depending upon the situation, the role of the facilitator may differ. In some cases, the facilitator may do some frontal teaching, for example, leading discussions on the theme of a prayer and its placement in the service. In other cases, the facilitator may photocopy answer keys, administer assessments, provide remediation or enrichment when needed, listen to students reading, or record progress on a prayer mastery chart. Whatever specific activities are assigned, the facilitator's overall role is to guide the students through the program, keeping them on track, and cheering them on.



Recommended Materials, Answer Keys, and Assessment

If you are seeking to provide an independently paced option in your Hebrew program, the *Hineni Prayer Booklets* may be right for you. They present twenty key prayers from the Shabbat morning service in individual 8- or 12-page booklet form. The material is presented logically—for example, a motivational introduction precedes each new prayer and links it to students' modern lives; targeted activities succinctly teach the key prayer vocabulary and concepts; and directions are self-explanatory.

The *Self-Guided Hineni* manual contains answer keys for all of the activities contained in the *Hineni Prayer Booklets*, and can be photocopied for use by students, teachers, *madrichim* and/or tutors. The manual also includes review sheets, with answer keys, for each prayer booklet. In addition, it includes black-line masters of the prayers that may be photocopied and used to gauge students' reading proficiency. A Prayer Mastery Chart enables student and teacher to keep track of the student's progress.

IMPLEMENTING AN INDEPENDENT, SELF-PACED LEARNING PROGRAM

You may choose to set up a self-paced learning program (1) for one or more individual students, or (2) for an entire class. Below are some suggestions for the Director of Education and the teacher for effectively implementing an independent learning program:

1. Independent Learning with Individual Students:

1. Establish goals for the student. Identify whether the student should focus on reading, vocabulary, grammatical constructs, and/or prayer concepts, or some combination of those skills.
2. Encourage the student to set aside fixed times each week to study. This is much easier if the student is working with a tutor. You can also suggest that parents supervise the child when he or she is studying Hebrew at home.
3. For students working one-on-one with a *madrich* or *madrichah* or a tutor, check in periodically to monitor progress and to determine proficiency before the student progresses to the next level.

The following techniques are appropriate for individual students using the *Hineni Prayer Booklets* for self-paced study:

- Provide students with a three-ring binder and set of three-hole-punched plastic sheet protectors in which to store the Prayer Booklets. Print out the full-color label from http://www.behrmanhouse.com/cat/featured/hinpb/label_lg.pdf or allow students to decorate their folders, making sure their names are part of the decoration. As the student completes each Prayer Booklet and the review sheet with satisfactory results, and demonstrates proficiency in reading or chanting (according to the goals of your school), slide all materials for that prayer into a plastic sheet protector and insert it in the binder.



- Give the facilitator—whether teacher, aide, tutor, or parent—a complete set of answer keys and review sheets for each unit and ask the facilitator to provide them to the students as needed. You may also encourage parents to help their children by listening to them read at home using the Student Pages from the *Hineni Family Companion*. Parents can follow along using the Parent Pages with Hebrew and transliteration.
- Assign the *Hineni Interactive* CDs to help motivate and assist students working independently. In addition to playing the computer games and completing the reinforcement activities, because of the sound component on the CDs students will receive immediate feedback on Hebrew pronunciation. The facilitator can also use the assessment features of the CDs to monitor student progress. For more information about using the CDs for assessment, click on http://www.behrmanhouse.com/fortheed/itc/hebrew_assessment.shtml.



2. Independent Learning With an Entire Class:

Some schools group their Hebrew classes by chronological grade, others by ability and/or achievement. If you have a small school with multiple grades in one class, or varying levels within one grade, or students with special learning needs, your educational program may be strengthened by a school-wide independent learning program.

1. Determine the goals for each student according to ability or pace of learning. For example, for some students the goal may be to read the prayers with minimal errors. They should focus on the reading exercises in the booklets. Another group might seek to learn Hebrew grammar and vocabulary; these students should emphasize the exercises covering roots and grammar constructs. A third group may need greater challenges, such as doing research on the Internet, presenting short lessons to the class, or creating games and quizzes.
2. Meet with each student and agree on a contract identifying the individualized goals for that student based on ability, expected attendance, learning differences, and other factors. For example, you may determine that in the first year a particular student will be able to recite Sh'ma, Bar'chu, Ma'ariv Aravim, Yotzer Or, and Mi Chamocho fluently, to recognize key words from those prayers, to explain the theme of each prayer, to identify that these prayers appear early in the service, and to stand and/or bow when appropriate.
3. Post a calendar or schedule indicating times when students can sign up for the teacher or facilitator to listen to them read, recite, or chant the prayer at the end of the unit of study.



The following techniques are appropriate for a whole class using the *Hineni Prayer Booklets* for self-paced study:

- Set up a binder for each student, as suggested in "Independent Learning with Individual Students" above.
- Identify core prayers in your curriculum for those students who progress more slowly; add additional booklets for students who progress more quickly.
- Keep a master notebook or folder containing a copy of the Prayer Mastery Charts for each student in the class. As the chart in a student's own folder is updated, the facilitator should update the master file as well.
- Keep a file box with multiple copies of all answer keys, review sheets and accompanying answer keys, and prayers in separate file folders. Check file folders and replenish on a regular basis. That way, when a student is ready for one of these items, it is readily available.
- Consider introducing a prayer with the whole class, then break students up into smaller groups, perhaps with madrichim supervising, or have students work in pairs or individually in different parts of the room.
- Using the answer keys from the *Self-Guided Hineni*, small groups or pairs of students who are progressing at the same pace or who are learning the same prayer can study together and then correct each other's work. This helps promote a sense of community and mutual accountability.
- Send home the current Prayer Booklet so students can study at home when they cannot be in class.
- Store the binders in school over the summer so they are not lost or misplaced during those months. For summer reading practice, send home copies of the prayers students mastered during the past year, along with one or two from the upcoming year's curriculum. Don't forget to send home the appropriate Parent Pages from the Family Companions as well!



Students can also practice their decoding and prayer recitation by visiting www.behrmanhouse.com and clicking on the orange button, "Click and Read Hebrew at Home," or the pink button, "Click and Learn Prayer at Home." The interactive CDs are also ideal for summer review—and you'll be able to check online which students have been practicing over the summer. The results will show!

An independent Hebrew learning program can provide flexible and creative solutions to the challenges of irregular attendance, and varying student ability and achievement, whether for a few individual students or for your entire Hebrew program.



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