

***Mitkadem* Implementation Guide**

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INTRODUCTION

“Some of our students took to it like ducks to water, working on their Hebrew every chance they got, even outside the classroom. We are working to keep up with their pace!” said Rabbi Louis Rieser of Etz Hayim Synagogue in Derry, New Hampshire. Another benefit Rabbi Rieser has found is the involvement of the *madrichim* who are working with the students—their exposure to *Mitkadem* has motivated them to relearn Hebrew as well.

“Teacher 2: It is the joy of watching the student be self-taught, discovering things on their own” (from JESNA’s study of *Mitkadem*, July 2007).

“The Hebrew program is great, and she [my daughter] enjoys seeing her own progress as she is tested and moves on to a new lesson” (parent from Temple Sinai in Sarasota, Florida).

“‘When teaching kids for their *b’nai mitzvah*, it used to be transliteration. A few years ago, the kids began learning Hebrew,’ she said. ‘Now, the students do the whole service in Hebrew. They read from the Torah. We’ve gone from minimum to maximum’” (from “Big Changes in Reform Hebrew School,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 14, 2007).

Mitkadem is a siddur-based Hebrew curriculum developed for the Union of Reform Judaism that reflects Reform theology, ideology, and philosophy.

Mitkadem is the Hebrew word for “moving forward.” The unique character of this program is its independent-learning model, which allows students to work at their own pace and is a flexible program for congregational schools to implement. This guide will assist you in implementation of the *Mitkadem* program by providing you with wisdom from those who have been using the program, offering alternatives for implementation, and providing necessary information for both the administrator and teachers of the program.

The *Mitkadem* program consists of twenty-three *ramot* (levels) that introduce letters and vowels, prayers from the liturgy, Jewish concepts, basic grammar, and vocabulary. The first two *ramot* develop reading skills and ritual vocabulary, the third *ramah* teaches the students how to use the *Mitkadem* system, and each of the remaining *ramot* covers a particular prayer or family of prayers that share a theme.

Using the *Mitkadem* curriculum will require a cultural shift for the school, including the education director, teachers, students, and parents. When making decisions about *Mitkadem*, keep in mind all of your stakeholders to ensure that you make them a part of the process, guiding them along the way, letting them know it will take time for everyone to become adjusted to using this new curriculum. The administrator will need to think differently about the structure of the Hebrew program and pay close attention to each student’s progress, the teachers will need to learn how to be facilita-

tors rather than imparters of knowledge from the front of the class, students will need to learn how to work independently and be more responsible for their own learning, and parents will need to understand a new system for which assessment of progress will be very different. While this may sound daunting at first, it can be an exciting change for everyone. Throughout this guide you will find suggestions of how to make the transition easier.

Elements of this guide are from the *Mitkadem* Teacher's Guide for *Ramot* 3–6, written by Cheri Ellowitz Silver, and other sections have been created with input from education directors in the field who have used this program. We are indebted to all who have contributed to this implementation guide.

Additional information about the curriculum, including the contents of each ramah, additional tips for teachers, and many of the classroom and curriculum management tools mentioned in this guide can be found on the Mitkadem website at urj.org/learning/teacheducate/hebrew/mitkadem.

PART I: THE PHILOSOPHY OF MITKADEM

A Rationale for *Mitkadem*

The reality of the structure, schedule, and ancillary quality of religious schools brings many educational disadvantages with it: high absenteeism, late enrollment, varied motivation, diverse experiences of Jewish practice, limited hours and bad timing.

Given the realities of American Jewish education, a Hebrew program for a synagogue supplementary school should:

- Plan for students to progress each at his/her own pace. Allowance for different levels of competence in each classroom must be designed into an individuated program.
- Group children according to grade level rather than proficiency level during study.
- Use the limited time effectively by actively engaging each child with the material at hand as much as possible.
- Present guidelines and support for teachers (with different Hebrew and teaching skills) to manage a classroom working at various levels.
- Concentrate on prayer and ritual Hebrew within the context of the centrality of *avodah* in Jewish living.
- Offer opportunities, not requirements, for parental involvement, homework, and application of material learned (for example, participation in services and holiday

ritual) outside of the classroom. Those not participating should not be penalized on the classroom level.

- Help develop a context for Jewish practice by presenting occasions for actual observance of ritual and prayer during and outside of school hours.

Enduring Understandings for *Mitkadem*

A synagogue Hebrew program that emphasizes prayer and ritual should repeatedly present and reinforce these *enduring understandings*:

- Prayer and ceremony are essential behaviors in living a Jewish life.
- Hebrew is the authentic language of Jewish prayer and ritual, and it is one element that binds the diverse Jewish people one to the other.
- Many concepts and ideals of Judaism and God are best expressed in Hebrew, and translation can be flawed.
- Knowing something of the structure of the Hebrew language can assist in our understanding of familiar prayers and blessings, even if we cannot proficiently translate.
- Our appreciation of and comfort with (Hebrew) prayer and ritual change throughout our lives.
- The prayer service has altered over time, in content, structure, and leadership, in order to address changed perspectives in the world.

Benefits of Independent Learning

“Students learn best when they are actively involved in the process,” notes Dr. Barbara Gross Davis of the University of California at Berkeley. “Researchers report that, regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. Students who work in collaborative groups also appear more satisfied with their classes” (“Collaborative Learning: Group Work and Study Teams,” www.teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/collaborative.html).

The self-paced nature of *Mitkadem* allows each student to be involved and engaged with the material at his or her own level. This approach provides numerous benefits:

- There is no longer any need for a teacher to go back and cover material a second or third time because some students missed a lesson or because some students have not yet grasped the material.
- Motivated and knowledgeable students can proceed quickly through the material. They will feel a sense of accomplishment and understand that Jewish study can be challenging and stimulating.

- Students who have more difficulty with Hebrew and/or are absent frequently can pick up wherever they left off. They may not cover as much material as more proficient students, but they too will feel good about and grounded in what they do accomplish. They need not feel “left behind” or self-conscious when compared with their classmates.
- Shyer students who may be reluctant to speak up in class are more likely to communicate their thoughts to others in a smaller group, and when the group leader reports back to the whole class, the shyer student receives a benefit from hearing his or her ideas articulated.
- With all students occupied at their own level, behavior problems in the classroom diminish significantly.
- If a few students fall behind or want to progress more quickly, they can do work at home with no disadvantage to those students who do not do work at home.
- With constant monitoring of work, it is clear if a student is falling behind, doesn’t understand material, or is reading below grade level. Students cannot “fall through the cracks.”

PART II: THE PROGRAM

What Is *Mitkadem*?

The *Mitkadem* program consists of twenty-three *ramot* (levels) that introduce letters and vowels, prayers from the worship service, Jewish concepts, basic grammar, and vocabulary. The first two *ramot* develop reading skills and ritual vocabulary. *Ramah* 1 is a pre-primer, focusing on Hebrew reading readiness through letter recognition. *Ramah* 2 is a primer, teaching Hebrew letters, vowels, and the blending of letters and vowels to form syllables and words. *Ramot* 1 and 2 are teacher-directed, with a combination of independent study and group work, and can be completed in one or two years, depending on the school and the progress of each student. *Ramot* 1 and 2 are designed for students in grades 2–4 who are beginning Hebrew study. They are unique in that they begin to teach independent learning, the foundation of the upper *ramot*.

Beginning with *Ramah* 3, *Mitkadem* becomes a self-paced, self-directed Hebrew learning program. *Ramah* 3 is the *m’chinah* or preparatory *ramah* that introduces students to the *Mitkadem* system. Each subsequent *ramah* covers a particular prayer or family of prayers that share a theme. As students successfully complete a *ramah* (and pass both an oral and written assessment), they advance to the next *ramah*. Unlike traditional textbooks, each *ramah* is composed of a number of four-page booklets with activities divided into five sections.

What Is in Each *Ramah*?

Ramah 3 is an introduction to the *ramah* format. It teaches the students how to navigate the next twenty *ramot* and introduces the essential grammatical structures of roots, prefixes, and suffixes. In *Ramot* 4–23, each *ramah* presents a single prayer or group of prayers and continues to develop the students' abilities to read and understand the Hebrew language of prayer. Each *ramah* is structured in the same way so that students will become familiar with the system very quickly. Before beginning the work of the *ramah*, student receives a *b'rit*/contract outlining the requirements to pass the *ramah*. The *b'rit* explains to students what activities are required and which activities they have the options to choose (identified as "review"). As the student completes each of the five components of the *ramah*, the teacher or aide signs the contract, showing that the student successfully completed the work. After completing the required work for the *ramah*, the student completes a written assessment and a reading assessment before advancing to the next *ramah*.

There are five sections to each *ramah*:

- *Hakdamah*—Introduction
- *K'riah*—Reading
- *Otzar Milim*—Vocabulary
- *Dikduk*—Grammar
- *Divrei T'filah*—Words about Prayer

Each section is a different color to assist the students in determining which section the activity is from.

Hakdamah/Introduction (blue)

Students always begin with this component, which introduces the prayer or group of prayers. After completing this introductory section, the student works on the next four components in any order he or she chooses. (It is possible that some students will need direction from the teacher in completing work each session. Later in the guide there are suggestions for those students who have difficulty working completely independently.)

K'riah/Reading (orange/red)

In the reading component, students are guided to read or chant alone or to a partner. There are MP3 files on the URJ website that can be downloaded for use in the classroom and at home (<http://urj.org/learning/techeducate/hebrew/mitkadem/ramot/audio/>). Alternatively, you can have your cantor chant the prayers using the *nusach* used by your congregation to create CDs and MP3 files. Classes need listening devices to allow students to complete this section of the *ramah*. One way to do this is to have two or more listening centers. Having a listening center device allows several students who are on the same *ramah* to listen together to the recording, and with multiple devices two (or more) groups can work on two different *ramot* simultaneously. Personal CD players and MP3 players are suitable options.

Otzar Milim/Vocabulary (purple)

The vocabulary component teaches essential vocabulary and phrases associated with the prayer or group of prayers. It includes written and creative activities as well as flashcards to reinforce the meaning and definitions. (The students, an assistant or the teacher, will need to cut out these cards and have a place to keep them so that they do not get lost. Suggestions include ziplock bags, large manila envelopes, “O” rings after punching holes in the cards, or individual file boxes. (Some schools make a number of classroom sets and keep them in the classroom for students to use as necessary; in this case, the cards that come with the *ramah* can be sent home for the students to use there.)

Dikduk/Grammar (green)

The grammar component teaches roots, prefixes, and suffixes by examining the structure and meaning of the prayer words. It includes written activities to reinforce the concepts.

Divrei T'filah/Words about Prayer (olive green)

This component helps to make prayer relevant and meaningful to our children. In this section, students have a chance to investigate central themes of the prayer book and Jewish thought. It includes interesting questions and activities that encourage our students to participate in the prayers of Jewish holidays, ritual, life cycles, and traditions. Often there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that are asked.

Average Number of *Ramot* Covered in a Year

In a setting that allows two hours of Hebrew study per week, the average student should complete three to five *ramot* per school year. *Ramot* are different lengths—some prayers are longer, some *ramot* include more than one prayer, some schools spend more time on certain *ramot*. Highly motivated students may complete more than the average. For students with learning disabilities or who struggle with Hebrew, you may choose to make accommodations or alternative assessment objectives to pass a *ramah* (see “Nine Types of Adaptations” and “Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities When Using *Mitkadem*” later in this guide).

PART III: ADMINISTRATORS’ GUIDE TO ADOPTING MITKADEM FOR YOUR SCHOOL

How to Use *Mitkadem*

In recognition that schools vary widely in the amount of time allocated for Hebrew study, *Mitkadem* is structured to provide great flexibility in how it can be implemented. A school can choose to use the program in a number of ways:

- Follow the program in its entirety, progressing from one *ramah* to the next.
- Pick and choose which *ramot* are essential to your particular institution, and skip those that are not as important. (You should be aware that *ramot* progress in difficulty and depth. Proficient students can always go back and complete *ramot* previously skipped.)
- Limit the number of *ramot* or the number of activities within a particular *ramah* for students who move more slowly. Choose the prayers or activities that are essential for them to cover.
- For special-needs students, carefully select *ramot* and activities, or modify activities.

How to Move into the *Mitkadem* Program

You can introduce *Mitkadem* to your school in one of two ways: either start with one or two grades and build it into the educational program over a two- to four-year period, or adopt the entire program into all of the grades in a single year. As you will see below, there are advantages and disadvantages to doing it either way. Only you can decide which is best for you given your teaching staff, your support, and your resources. You may want to solicit some staff and/or parent input before you make a decision.

Introducing the Program over Multiple Years

- This approach allows the director and administrator of the program to gradually introduce *Mitkadem* into the school without feeling that the cultural shift needs to take place among all of the students and teachers in the same year.
- Often students who have begun their Hebrew studies in a different *t'filah* based program find it takes them a little longer to transition into the *Mitkadem* independent-study model.
- The longer introduction period allows the director, administrator, and teachers to learn the best implementation strategies for their community.
- The teachers from the first-year cohort can serve as mentors as new teachers undertake the implementation of the program within their classrooms.
- The difficulty in this format is that you will need to transition a group of teachers each year into the program rather than having all of the staff working on the changeover simultaneously.
- You will need to be conscious of how you talk about the Hebrew program, particularly when you have a mixed audience of parents. Some parents might believe that their child is part of this new curriculum, when in fact they are not because their child is in a grade in which *Mitkadem* has not yet or might never be implemented.

*Introducing *Mitkadem* to the Entire School in One Year*

- By introducing the program to the entire school simultaneously, all of your teachers

and all of your students are working together to learn how to utilize *Mitkadem* in the best possible way.

- There is a natural excitement when everyone shares simultaneously in a new venture.
- Your teachers can work to problem solve throughout the year and be supporters for one another during the transition.
- Parents will have all of their children learning in the same model and lesson structure.
- The challenge this poses is that it can be overwhelming with all of the students, teachers, and administrators working to understand and implement *Mitkadem* simultaneously.
- It does take time to learn the *Mitkadem* system, which can cause a slowdown in learning for students who have already begun in a different *t'filah* curriculum.

People Involved in the Program and Their Roles

Teacher

The teacher of *Mitkadem* is a facilitator. Teachers will need:

- Continued training and support
- Regular meetings to share ideas and build teamwork
- Flexibility in their teaching styles

Education Director/Hebrew Coordinator

The education director/Hebrew coordinator is mainly a resource to help the classroom teacher feel confident and supported. This person may also be the test giver and record keeper, depending on how large the school is and how the *Mitkadem* program is structured.

Co-teacher

The co-teacher helps the teacher attend to the many students and might provide help for the slower students.

Madrichim/Adult Volunteers/Tutors

Madrichim / adult volunteers / tutors can provide special attention to students who are not catching on as quickly. Teenagers make terrific tutors.

Rabbi and Cantor

The rabbi and cantor can be special visitors. They can also teach a special class to advanced students, even on a monthly basis.

It is critical that the educator and/or administrator schedule time to meet with the clergy of the congregation to orient them to *Mitkadem*, how the program works, and what kinds of outcomes can be expected. Decisions about which *ramot* to cover and how will be largely determined by how the clergy have set the *minhagim*/customs for each of the prayers. The rabbi and/or cantor should look through a sample packet to become acquainted with the nature of the learning process and to be certain that what is taught matches how your congregation worships. Pay close attention to what is read versus what is chanted, the choreography of prayer, whether the underlying concepts are consistent with how your clergy talk about prayer, and if your congregation is not a Reform congregation, possible differences in the Hebrew in your *siddur*. There are a few *ramot* for which students are directed to find out their congregation's custom—you can ask clergy whether they would like to be available for students to talk to during school hours. You might also ask your cantor or cantorial soloist (if you have one) to check the website recordings to ensure the *nusach* is the same. If not, she/he might want to record a CD or upload MP3 files onto your congregational website with the appropriate congregational *nusach*. Ask your clergy to help determine which *ramot*, if any, to skip and which to teach. Be sure to explain that, as with any curricular change that impacts the learning process, students who are becoming bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah in the near future may have fewer or different prayers and blessings mastered than they have been accustomed to seeing.

If your rabbi and/or cantor lead *t'filah* in your school, be sure to share with them the vocabulary and themes used in *Mitkadem* so they can reinforce the learning.

Preparing Parents and Students for *Mitkadem*

Parents

Just like the teachers and students, parents will need assistance with understanding and supporting *Mitkadem*. Their children will not, in most cases, have been involved in a self-paced program elsewhere. You might want to consider having an introductory parent session. The following are suggestions of what you might want to do or cover in this session:

- Play the *Mitkadem* DVD (available upon request from URJ Books and Music or URJ education specialists).
- Explain the philosophy of *Mitkadem*.
- Have materials available for parents to see and to try using.
- Describe how you will be assisting the teachers and students with the transition.
- Let them know what to expect to hear from the school and see from their children.
- Explain that the true results of the *Mitkadem* program will take two to three years. Emphasize the importance of patience and working together to make this program positive.
- Allow parents to ask questions to alleviate their concerns.

Students

Although *Ramah 3* is considered an introductory *ramah* to the system, the students will still need an overarching introduction to *Mitkadem*. Either the education director or teacher can do the introduction. The following are some areas you might want to cover with the students:

- Why make a change in the Hebrew program?
- What makes *Mitkadem* unique?
- What will it mean to work “independently”?
- What will a typical class session be like?
- What are the expectations of the students, the class, and the teacher?
- How will the students be assessed at the end of a *ramah*?

Answer all questions and alleviate concerns.

Managing *Mitkadem*

Mitkadem works best when the school administration takes a central role in the program’s management. A setup that allows for efficiency and tracking of students includes the following:

1. STAFFING: The program requires a certain amount of planned support. Depending upon the size of your school and available resources, administrators should consider how to cover these prospective positions:

- **Trained teachers:** Most teachers will require training to comfortably run a *Mitkadem* classroom. You may decide to have a trained education director or teacher train your remaining staff members. A URJ education specialist can direct you to the possibilities available for training.
- **Assistants in the classroom:** Teachers will need assistance during class sessions to help keep students on track, answer questions, and mark contracts as students complete activities. Teen aides, parents, older students, and/or capable congregants can fill these positions.
- **Tutors:** There will always be some students who need one-on-one help for extended periods of time.
- **Tester:** Depending on the size of the classes and the available space, the tester could be the teacher, the education director, a Hebrew supervisor, or a staff person appropriate to your school.

2. RECORD KEEPING: Keeping up with each student’s progress and recording it can include the following:

- Cumulative folders on each student (see page 16 for more details).
- Cumulative Class Record Form (see page 15 for more details).

3. LISTENING CENTERS: Each classroom requires a listening center.

4. TESTING

- Decide who will manage the testing.
 - a. A teacher:** If every class is conducting the *Mitkadem* program at the same time, one teacher's job for that hour could be to administer testing and keep the records up to date. Since there may not be students taking quizzes every class day, this teacher could be extra help for tutoring as well.
 - b. A Hebrew supervisor:** If your school is large enough to allow for this position, the person will be able to manage the running of the program, supervise and guide the tutors, help teachers efficiently run their classrooms, and oversee the testing.
 - c. The education director:** Being the tester allows the education director to be central in the administration of the program, keep track of the flow of the program, and get to know each student and how they are doing. There should be backup help for days when the education director has other obligations.
 - d. An aide:** An older teen who is responsible and knowledgeable can work under the direct supervision of the education director or Hebrew supervisor to administer the tests and direct students.
- Choose a testing area (for more about testing and assessment, see page 20).

5. LEAD REGULAR STAFF MEETINGS: It is very helpful to have regular debriefing sessions, especially when a school is new to the *Mitkadem* program. Teachers can support each other with ideas and advice on ways to handle management or content issues. Systems that need improvement can be discussed, with creative outcomes. As the year progresses, you will find that meetings can be less frequent.

School Administration of *Mitkadem*

There are three main physical requirements for a *Mitkadem* school and classroom: a space for learning, a space for testing, and a space to keep administrative records. Each school will have to decide based on its size, facility, and staff where tests will be given and where students' records will be kept.

- The *Mitkadem* Cumulative Class Record (available on the *Mitkadem* website) allows the administrator or teacher to track a student's progress as she/he advances through the grades. There should be one card for each student in the program.
- It is desirable but not required to have a tutoring center and also a testing center. By having these two areas separate from the classroom, students are able to focus on

their work with fewer distractions. Consider using your library, youth lounge, or extra classroom, as long as they are not too far from other classrooms. If you do not have the alternative space available, the *mivchan* (test) can be taken in the classroom.

Questions to consider:

- How many students will be in each classroom, and how much help will the teacher have?
- Who is the right person to keep track of student progress throughout the school?
- Where is the right place to keep the *ramah* packets? (One system is to have the person who administers the test give the student the *b'rit* and *Hakdamah* for the new *ramah* and then give the remaining activities to the teacher to give to the student once the introductory packet is completed.)
- Who is the right person and what is the right place to give the test?
- What is done with the packet when a student completes a *ramah*?

Once a student completes a *ramah*, the tester should send the student worksheets from that *ramah* home in a large manila envelope. You can add a card that describes what has been learned and what's next (you can even place a *mazal tov* sticker on the postcard or packet) and keep the test in the cumulative folder. A postcard for communicating with parents is available on the *Mitkadem* website. In some schools, students keep the *b'rit* for each completed *ramah* in their folders or three-ring binders and use them to refer to as they work through the other *ramot*.

School Administration of Student Progress

The independent-learning classroom allows students to work at their own pace. This means that some students will move more quickly than others, some will move more slowly, and students who might struggle with the Hebrew but could hide within the normal classroom setting can be identified more easily. There are several tools available to help with these situations on the *Mitkadem* website:

- *Mitkadem* Daily Journal—form for students to complete letting the teacher know what they accomplished and how well during the class period.
- My Goals for You—form for the teacher to complete prior to class that allows the teacher to be more directive about what needs to be accomplished in class for any student who needs more structure.
- *Mitkadem Ramah* Record Form—spreadsheet that allows the teacher to keep track of the activities that each student has completed in a particular *ramah*.
- Cumulative Class Record Form—form that allows staff to see quickly which *ramah* each student in a particular class is working on (it might be kept with other records of the class but is not meant to be out for public viewing, which could create a sense of competition).

- Classroom Update Form (see also page 34).

All of these tools (spreadsheets or other sheet created) can then either be given to the administrator or used by the teacher in meeting with the administrator about the class progress. Whoever is overseeing *Mitkadem* needs to meet with the teachers on an ongoing and regular basis to check on each student's progress. If a student is moving rapidly through the *ramot*, the administrator and teacher can make decisions about the order of the *ramot* the student should follow. If a student is going more slowly than expected, the administrator and teacher will have the opportunity to determine why that student is going at that pace and make decisions about how to move forward with that student. Ultimately, the administrator (with teacher input) needs to be the one to determine any changes or accommodations that will be made for an individual student.

Class Records

The program administrator should maintain a cumulative folder for each student, containing a record of his or her progress through the *Mitkadem* program. Cumulative folders can be kept in alphabetical order by class and stored in a file cabinet in the education director's or program administrator's office. In the appendix of the *Mitkadem* Teacher's Guide for *Ramot* 3–6 is a template for a cumulative record that can be copied onto card stock and placed into each student's cumulative folder (pages 24–25). When students pass a test, the accomplishment is recorded in their cumulative file, and the completed test is filed. Any test that has been attempted should be dated and filed, along with the tester's comments as well. Once a student has completed a *ramah*, the materials other than the *mivchan* (and possibly the *b'rit*) can be sent home.

You might want to have matching color-coded folders for each grade. If your fourth graders have yellow folders/binders, then their cumulative records file folder will also be yellow. The color of a student's cumulative folder can correspond to the color of his or her class folder, helping identify students by grade.

Curriculum Mapping Guide

Several schools have created a *Mitkadem* mapping guide for each grade. This map informs teachers about which *ramot* the students are expected to learn in a given year, thus providing benchmarks for student progress. If a student is moving quickly through the curriculum, the teacher and administrator of the program can determine which additional *ramot* that student will learn that year. If a student is going more slowly than expected, adaptations can be made to the *ramot*, the curriculum map, or both for that student.

Setting Up *Mitkadem* Classrooms

There are a variety of ways to set up a classroom or classrooms to run the *Mitkadem* program. Here are a few suggestions:

“Regular” Classroom Setup

- Have all the desks set up individually with the teacher in one part of the room. Students can come to the teacher for assistance, or the teacher can move around the room.
- Create a reading lab learning center in the room. This is the area where students can read and/or listen to the prayers. Set up a listening center with headphones so that more than one student can listen, or let students use individual portable CD or MP3 players.
- Set up the classroom in groups of desks or tables so students working on the same *ramah* are able to work together if they would like. Be sure to allow for individual space for those who want to work independently.
- Allow students to move desks to work with whomever they would like.
- You will still need to determine where and with whom the testing will take place.

Multiple Classroom Setup

In this model, multiple classrooms are used that allow the students to move from one to another.

- Have certain *ramot* being taught in a particular classroom. That means that every student, regardless of grade, who is working on that particular *ramah* (or those particular *ramot*) will be working in that specific classroom.

For example: *Ramot* 4 and 7 are in classroom 205 and *Ramot* 5 and 10 are in classroom 207.

- Have certain sections of a *ramah* in particular classrooms.

For example: *Hakdamah*/Introduction is in room 205, and *Otzar Milim*/Vocabulary is in room 207.

This model allows teachers with particular strengths to focus on those areas and promotes a larger “all-school” sense of community. It does, however, result in much more movement by students from classroom to classroom and requires teachers to deal with a larger number of individual students. An article describing how one synagogue has adapted *Mitkadem* in this way can be found in volume 9, no. 2 (Summer 2006, the Hebrew issue) of *Torah at the Center*, a publication of the URJ Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning (<http://urj.org/learning/teacheducate/publications/tatc/>).

One-Room Schoolhouse

In this model, all of the students and all of the teachers are in one (generally large) room. The students sit at desks or tables set up in the center of the room, and all the teachers are also in the room with the students.

- Teachers can be stationed around the room.

- Students can go to any free teacher.
- Teachers can be assigned a particular section of the *ramot*, and students will go to them for assistance in that section regardless of the *ramah* the student is working in.
- Teachers can move around the room and assist anyone who might need help.

Instructions for Beginning the School Year

To successfully run a *Mitkadem* classroom, consider these steps:

1. Train Teachers: Whether at a regional workshop, training session you facilitate, a national conference, or a local training session, teachers new to the *Mitkadem* approach should be educated. Having time to become familiar with the materials and sharing ideas about how to run a functional classroom are essential to the ease of running the program. For more assistance with teacher training; contact a URJ education specialist.

2. Choose a Target Date for Beginning: Teachers may need a few weeks for review and beginning of the year activities. Administrators may need time to train teachers and aides and to set up the student folders. By the middle to end of October, *Mitkadem* should be in full swing.

3. Set up the Student Folders: All students, whether it is their first year in the program or not, will need new folders. Mark each folder with the student's name and fill them with the appropriate items. See "Student Materials," on page 12 of the *Mitkadem* Teacher's Guide for *Ramot* 3–6, for contents. Students can decorate the folders.

4. Train Aides: Teen aides, teacher assistants, and parents alike need to be trained if they are to be helpful in the classroom. Learning about the approach, the materials, and their roles will ensure their ability to be effective.

5. Identify Students Needing Tutoring: During the beginning of the year review, teachers should begin to have an idea of which students will require tutoring. A schedule and system for giving assistance should be organized.

6. Orient New Students: The new class of students beginning *Ramah* 3 will have to be oriented to the program. New students in subsequent grades must also be oriented. Take them through their folders, introducing them to the Prayer Map and setting up the way they will create their own *milon* (see page 30). Outline the way the *b'rit* will guide them through the required and review activities, and explain the five content areas and the color-coding system. Each teacher will describe the way their class will be managed.

7. Send Home the Flier to Parents: See the flier "Hebrew Materials for Home" in the appendix of the *Mitkadem* Teacher's Guide for *Ramot* 3–6. The flier should be sent home and a system set up for

ensuring that those who purchased duplicate materials receive them each time their child begins a new *ramah*.

Using *Madrichim* (Student Aides) and/or Adult Volunteers in the *Mitkadem* Classroom

Student aides and/or adult volunteers can play an important role in the administration of the *Mitkadem* program. Teachers can always use assistance during class sessions to keep students on track, answer questions, and mark *b'ritot* as students complete activities. Parents, seniors, or teen aides who are knowledgeable in Hebrew can help students with activities, tutor reading, and even serve as testers. Inviting parents into the classroom increases their involvement in the school, allows them to see firsthand what's happening in the school, and helps build a sense of community. Teen aides can serve as mentors for younger students, and the interaction between age groups can add to the sense of community in the school. The administrator should provide training and guidance for all assistants, and develop and communicate guidelines for what sections of the *b'rit* should be reserved for a teacher's signature only. The optimal student-teacher ratio will vary from classroom to classroom, depending on the skill of the teacher, the personalities and learning styles of the individual students, and the level of motivation of the students. In general, however, no teacher should be expected to handle more than ten students unassisted.

Homework and the *Mitkadem* Program

There is currently no formal homework component built into the *Mitkadem* program, but some students may want or need to have home reinforcement of the work they are doing in the classroom. While homework is not required for the *Mitkadem* program, it is difficult to learn any foreign language when seeing, hearing, and interacting with it only once or twice a week, so we do recommend that students practice their reading at home (approximately ten minutes) every evening to further enhance and solidify their learning. The school can send home a copy of the reading assessment from the Teacher's Guide, or students can practice reading directly from a prayer book that can be kept at home.

Parents can choose to purchase a duplicate of each *ramah* for use at home. This duplicate packet should include all the pamphlets and answer sheets, plus a copy of the audio recording, for additional home study. Having a copy of this material at home also allows parents to see what their child is learning and provides an opportunity for parents to learn from the material themselves. A sample letter to parents about the possibility of purchasing a second copy of a *ramah* can be found on page 27 of the *Mitkadem* Teacher's Guide for *Ramot* 3–6.

How to Prepare Teachers to Teach *Mitakdem*

Every teacher who implements *Mitkadem* needs to have training in the program. During this training teachers need to be exposed to the rationale and system for *Mitkadem*. There also needs to be training in what it means to teach in an independent/student-directed classroom. A sample

teacher training will soon be available for download on the *Mitkadem* website.

It is imperative that teachers meet regularly to discuss the progress of the students and the entire *Mitkadem* curriculum. You do not want any students falling through the cracks, and you want your teachers to feel confident in implementing a system that will need adjustments as you better learn what works for your school.

You could create a training binder for the teacher in which they would find the following:

- The rationale
- Your school's curriculum map for *Mitkadem* (the order of *ramot* students are expected to learn)
- One complete *ramah* (other than *Ramah 3*) that they can use to work through themselves so they can better understand the system
- The Prayer Map
- Student Cumulative Record
- *Mitkadem Ramah* Record Forms
- Articles and descriptions about independent learning and running a class using this model
- A chart to be used in conjunction with adapting the program for individual students
- Any paperwork that your school will be using to assist in the administration and education of students in the curriculum
- Ideas for bringing the class together
- Ideas for setting up the classroom

Teachers will need support in the implementation of this program. It is a dramatic change for most teachers, which will possibly make them feel off balance. Ongoing teacher meetings and support will be necessary for successful implementation of *Mitkadem*.

Assessment

- While many religious schools are not accustomed to administering written assessments, they are an important component of the *Mitkadem* program. They let students and parents know that the school is serious about students' learning and school accountability, and the assessment gives students something to work toward. The written assessments are found in the Teacher's Guide and are copied for students as needed. The oral assessment is accomplished by a tester listening to each student read and/or chant individually. Objectives in each Teacher's Guide (and on the front of each *b'rit*) suggest a minimum

level of reading fluency, but these guidelines can be adjusted or amended by each school to suit their own needs. *One of the advantages of this program is that both the written and oral assessment can be adapted to the needs of each individual student. You are the ones who will determine what is considered “passing” for each student. You can allow students to take an “open-book test” if necessary for that student, retake only one section if that is all the student has failed, or give a modified written or oral assessment.*

- After the students complete all five components of a *ramah*, they must take a *mivchan*, an assessment. First, they should take time to study for the assessment by reviewing the materials. They can do the review exercises on the *b’rit*. Another good aid is a graphic organizer, the All Purpose *Mitkadem Ramah* Review sheet available on the *Mitkadem* website. When students are ready to take the assessment, they go to the designated person, often the education director or Hebrew supervisor. The *ramah* assessment involves both a written and oral portion. The written portion assesses knowledge of the Hebrew principles and prayer content. The reading portion is an assessment of the reading and/or chanting of the prayer; if accommodations have been made, the material the student reads is determined by the administrator of the program and the teacher (which will need to be communicated to the “tester”). Once a student passes the assessment, the tester gives him/her the introductory section for the next *ramah*. If a student does not pass all of the assessment on the first attempt, the student is given more time to review and then asked to take those sections again. The tester must pass the student for the student to advance to the next *ramah*.
- Part of the responsibility of the tester is to guide the student through successful completion of the *mivchan*. (Remember: the goal of the program is Hebrew literacy as well as a sense of accomplishment on the part of the student.) This may require helping the student to understand the directions and/or questions in the assessment. It could also mean allowing the student to go back and study one particular section only, without having to retake the entire assessment. It might require recommending to the student or the classroom teacher a mini-lesson back in the classroom on how to find a root or prefix, for example.
- Students who are deficient in one or more areas go back to the classroom to study or to work with the teacher on the areas of weakness. Of course, every student passes eventually, or they would not progress in the program. For those students with learning issues, the written and oral assessments can be adjusted to include only specific items, or the way in which the test is administered can be adapted to suit any student’s specific needs.
- The “passing grade” is determined by the administrator of the program and can be different for each student. This allows greater flexibility within the program to allow all students to be successful. Remember that if accommodations are made in what a student needs to complete a *ramah*, the *mivchan* should reflect only the material learned. (See “Part V: Tips for Adapting the *Mitkadem* Curriculum for Students with Learning Disabilities” for

more details.)

- More detail on the testing procedure and suggested criteria for “passing” scores can be found in the *Mitkadem Teacher’s Guide for Ramot 3–6*.

Testing Procedure

When finished with the pamphlet activities, each student completes written and reading assessments before moving on to the next *ramah*. Ideally, the *mivchan* should be administered in a quiet place with other students taking quizzes. There should be a staff member available to help with questions and to give immediate feedback on the student’s work and reading/chanting.

Guiding each student through the assessment procedure is more than just handing out tests and correcting them. The person administering the evaluations should:

1. Prepare the Quizzes: This involves making copies of the *mivchan* supplied in the Teacher’s Guide and creating an efficient method of storage.

2. Administer the Testing: This includes giving each student the appropriate quiz, monitoring the students completing the written assessment, listening to the reading/chanting of each student, and determining when the test is passed.

3. Determine that the Student has Passed the Written Assessment: It is up to each school to determine standards for passing and whether or not you even want to assign grades for the written assessment.

- In the case of students with special needs or those who are extremely reluctant to take tests, allow for an aide to guide the student through the quiz. In some cases you might allow children to take the *mivchan* using their folder of worksheets. Whatever method (or combination of methods) you decide to employ, the written assessment should be administered. It lets the students and parents know that you are serious about students’ learning and school accountability. It also gives the students something to work toward.

4. Determine that the Student has Passed the Oral Assessment: The objectives in each Teacher’s Guide suggest a minimum level of fluency in reading. These are guidelines that may be accepted or amended by each school. As they are working on each *ramah*, it should be made clear to the students what minimum level of competence is required. Each student should be heard reading individually. Regarding the chanting of certain prayers, it is fun for the students to chant with a friend. This might be left up to them. As with the written assessment, if the tester determines that the reading is not fluent or too many mistakes are made, students should be sent back to class to practice with the recording, with an aide, or on their own. Any intervention necessary for students with special needs is up to each administration. In a busy school, one person may not be able to

manage giving both the written and oral assessments. Listening to students read and chant prayers is a good job for a competent assistant or teen. It is best to have the same few people doing this job, so that you will know that the standard for passing is consistent.

Testing Anxiety

The *Mitkadem* program includes assessments or quizzes at the end of each *ramah*. Testing is not something that most children are accustomed to in religious school settings. Many students are reluctant to take the quiz, especially for their first time. They may even delay completing their work in order to avoid taking the test. Assure the students that everyone passes the quizzes eventually and they are not expected to be perfect. The quiz (*mivchan*, literally “test”) is one way that the teachers can determine where students need assistance in order to help them learn. Usually, once they complete the first quiz, students are more comfortable and move through the *ramot* with ease. Let them know that all of the quizzes follow the same structure, with questions about the vocabulary words and grammatical structures in their *milon*, and questions about the ideas and Jewish beliefs within the prayer. If they do the review activities and learn the information in their *milon*, they will likely have little trouble with the quiz. Your school might decide to relieve anxiety over the first test by allowing students to take the first quiz at a scheduled time together, use some of their worksheets or *milon* during the test, or just ease them through with a little more help from a teacher or aide.

Communication with Parents

Parents desire to be part of their children’s education on different levels. Some simply want to be informed, some would like to help and guide their children’s learning, and some would even like to learn themselves. It might be beneficial to have a meeting with the parents prior to the implementation of the *Mitkadem* program so they understand the changes taking place in the Hebrew curriculum. The *Mitkadem* structure offers opportunities for parent involvement in all these ways:

Keep Parents Informed

Each time students complete a *ramah*, teachers should send home the completed booklets. This will inform the parents that their child has moved on to a new level and show them what has been accomplished. Suggestions for congratulatory postcards can be found on the *Mitkadem* website.

Offer Option for Homework

See page 19 in this guide for details.

Parents as Aides

Parents can volunteer to assist in the classroom. Those who are knowledgeable can help students, tutor reading, and even serve as testers. Others can help students understand directions and perhaps check work against the answer sheets. The more help for the teacher, the better. The admin-

istrator should make decisions about whether parents should or should not be allowed to help in their own child's classroom.

Parents as Learners

The *Mitkadem* material is perfectly suited for intergenerational learning. Parents and children can learn alongside each other in the classroom, as well as at home.

What You Can Expect in the First Year

The first year is an adjustment for everyone. Have patience. Most likely students will complete fewer *ramot* during the first year the program is in place than in subsequent years. After the first year the teachers and students understand the system and can better navigate the program.

Teachers

- The teachers are making a change from being the center of the learning to becoming the facilitator, shifting from “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side.” Often teachers will say that they feel like they are not teaching because they are not the imparters of knowledge.
- The director, administrator, and anyone else who is involved in the implementation of the program need to be supportive of the teachers. They will need to be gently nurtured into understanding how to run a self-directed classroom.
- Each teacher will need to become comfortable with a constant din of noise throughout the room as the students are learning.
- Setting up the classroom, physically taking into consideration how the teacher (and aides) will assist the students, will take some trial and error.
- Although teachers will not need to create lesson plans in the traditional sense, they will need to check student progress prior to class to determine who will need assistance and a gentle (or not so gentle) push for the next session. There are teacher tools on the *Mitkadem* website that can assist in this management.
- There will be times when you or the teacher will want the class to come together for a particular lesson or activity. If there are students in multiple *ramot* in the classroom, the activities need to be relevant to all students no matter where they are in the program. See “When and How to Bring the Class Together as a Group” on page 33.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of change and allow the teachers to support one another by sharing their successes and working together to overcome challenges. It will often take a teacher and the faculty as a whole an entire year to be comfortable in this new system. Remind them that it will take two to three years to see the true results of the change in the program.

Students

- Most students have not experienced an independent-learning classroom environment. Teachers will need to actually teach or guide the students in how to spend their time.
- Many students struggle with the *Divrei T'filah*/Words about Prayer section. They are used to finding the one correct answer and find it frustrating to know that there are multiple correct answers.
- Their success is measured differently, and until they take the written and oral assessment, they may not feel that they have grasped the material well enough.
- Students will most likely complete fewer *ramot* during their first year using the program.

Parents

- Students will not be bringing their packets home until they have completed that *ramah*, so parents may not feel that they are able to see their child's progress each week. You will need to create an ongoing form of communication with parents to let them know how their children are progressing through the program. As referenced earlier in the guide, there are postcards available on the *Mitkadem* website that you can use when a student has completed a *ramah*.
- Since students may be frustrated during the first year of the program, they might go home and complain to their parents ("The teacher isn't teaching anything," "I can't follow the class," "I don't understand what I should be doing each class," etc.). Be reassuring and calm when parents call. Remind them that this is a different type of learning environment than what their child is used to, and get them to give you very specific feedback about the concern. With that information you can either allay their concerns or seek to address the situation.
- Encourage parents to have their children read aloud to them the Hebrew prayer(s) in the *ramah* the student is working on in the classroom. If a student has a *siddur* at home, provide the page numbers on which the prayer can be found, or send home a copy of the oral assessment from the Teacher's Guide.

Administrators

- The success of this program rests on the creation and maintenance of organizational systems by the administrator. The first year requires the most organizational work. Color-code each grade, and purchase work folders/binders as well as hanging files for each student's record in coordinated colors. Create grade-level or class charts to monitor progress. Copy student record charts for every student. Copy prayer charts for each student. Make copies of written assessments from the Teacher's Guide. Copy oral assessments (usually the back page of the written assessment in the Teacher's Guide) for students to read from and for the tester to make notes on. Create an answer key for the testers from the Teacher's Guide.

- Communication is a key component of the *Mitkadem* program. With the constant checking of student progress in class, as well as the periodic testing of students' knowledge and skills, it should be hard for students to fall through the cracks. However, this can happen if teachers, testers, and administrators don't communicate frequently enough. Students may also begin an assessment and not complete it, or not pass part or all of it. How will you communicate back with the teacher what the student needs to do before trying again? Students who are having difficulty making progress on assessments or in the classroom should be identified quickly and modifications put in place by the end of the first year of independent work.
- Training is critical for teachers, as well as aides, tutors, assistants, and testers. Pre-service as well as in-service training should be provided.
- *Mitkadem* is more than a curriculum or program. Consider this a change process. Commit to three years for best success.

PART IV: IMPLEMENTING MITKADEM FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

The *Mitkadem* Classroom

Imagine a classroom filled with motivated students eager to delve into their work. As students enter the classroom, each retrieves his or her own folder, which contains the *ramah* on which he or she is currently working, and picks up where he or she left off at the end of the previous session. There is a buzz of activity as students work individually or in small groups, sitting at tables or on the floor. Students choose which of the five different types of activities they wish to work on at any given time but must complete them all before progressing to the next *ramah*. Students may be writing, reading, listening to an audio recording, playing a game, or studying with a teen aide. Each is engaged with material that is appropriate for him or her. A sense of accomplishment and purpose directs their efforts. The teacher moves around the classroom, guiding and supporting, free to assist each child individually. As each student completes all of the activities in a particular *ramah*, written and oral assessments are administered, and upon successful completion of the tests, the student progresses to the next *ramah*. During the last several minutes of each class, the teacher may choose to gather the students for a large-group closing activity, which may be a discussion, a game, group singing, or the recitation of a particular prayer. This could be your *Mitkadem* classroom; imagine it and make it happen.

The Role of the Teacher in a *Mitkadem* Classroom

With the *Mitkadem* program, the role of the teacher is not a traditional one. While frontal, whole-group lessons can close a session or occasionally replace a *Mitkadem* session, this approach is not the norm. The self-paced nature of the program enables the teacher to be a resource, facilitator,

and coach for students' individual, self-directed Hebrew learning. Rather than directly presenting material in a lecture-style format, a *Mitkadem* teacher will move around the classroom, monitoring, guiding, and assisting students as they work individually or in groups. The teacher is the nucleus of the classroom, managing students as they work at a variety of different paces and levels. The teacher's primary role is to maintain a functional system for working, keeping students on track, assessing student progress, and addressing individual needs.

Teacher Classroom Preparation

The teacher needs to prepare the classroom just like a teacher-directed class. All materials that any student might need to complete the work should be in the classroom. These includes writing utensils, listening centers (or other audio devices you will be using), CDs or MP3 files for the *ramot* covered in the classroom, scissors, hole punchers, markers or colored pencils, folders for students materials, and copies of *ramot* for distribution (though these might be stored at a central location within the school).

Teacher preparation for an independent-learning classroom differs from a teacher-directed lesson. Here are some things for a teacher to consider prior to teaching class:

- Does the class need to come together as a single community for part of the class time?
If yes: What is to be accomplished/experienced? For how long? What will be the topic/activity?
- Are all of the students working up to their potential?
If no: What do I need to do to help the students who are struggling? Why are they struggling?
- What do I need to do to keep the students motivated to complete their work?
- Do I have everything I need for class to run smoothly?
- How can I maintain clear communication back and forth with the administrator, testing staff, and/or tutors about student progress, modifications, and support mechanisms?
- Which students need my attention immediately when they walk into class?
- What do I need to do to continue to strengthen my students' decoding and reading skills?

Introducing the Students to *Mitkadem*

Just as the teacher needs to be guided through the *Mitkadem* program at the outset, so too do the students. It would be helpful to give each student their first packet and explain the idea of an independent-learning classroom as well as the structure of a *ramah*, including the *b'rit* and each section. Students who are not used to learning in an independent classroom will need guidance on how to structure their time.

Remind them that after completing the *Hakdamah*, the activities can be completed in any order. For instance, it is better for reinforcement to spread out the reading activities, rather than completing them in one or two consecutive days. Some schools have found it successful to mandate that all students must spend at least ten minutes of every class period practicing reading.

Explain that if a student does not pass all sections of the assessment (*mivchan*), then he or she can go back and do more of the optional activities to better learn what he or she did not understand, or can review the work already completed and then retake only the sections of the assessment that he or she did not pass. The *mivchan* remains the same, so students know what material they are required to master. The explicit purpose of the assessment is to help the teacher assess where the student needs help, and it should be used accordingly. Prior to a student taking the *mivchan*, you might want to determine if the student has really grasped the material and has a good possibility of passing before allowing him or her to take the assessment. (For more about testing, see page 20 in this guide.)

It is worth noting that each student transferring into the *Mitkadem* program from another school using a different curriculum begins with *Ramah 3*, assuming the student can already decode Hebrew, and then moves on as determined by the administrator. *Ramah 3* orients students to the structure of the program.

The chart “Steps in the *Mitkadem* Program” is a visual aid to assist you, the teacher, and the student to better understand the flow of how a student will work through each *ramah*. The chart also provides insight as to what a teacher might need or want to do to assist students to be most successful during class.

Keeping the Students’ Materials Together

Establishing a good working system for keeping track of all the materials used in *Mitkadem* is very important. The program works best when one person is designated as the program administrator and assumes the primary responsibility for organizing and managing the program. This person can be the education director/principal, the Hebrew coordinator, or a lead Hebrew teacher.

Each student should have his or her own pocket folder or three-ring binder to hold the booklets of the *ramah* in progress and other work materials. It is helpful for each class to have a uniform-color folder or binder, which remains “their” color throughout their years in *Mitkadem*. For example, when the fourth grade begins *Ramah 3*, all students receive a yellow folder/binder. When they move into fifth grade, they retain the color yellow (though they will likely need new folders each year, because they wear out), and the new fourth graders each get a green folder/binder. Though the program is designed to give students control over the order of their learning activities, and thus a pocket folder is suggested for storing materials, some students have organizational challenges and are more successful with a binder. In the case of binders, a three-hole punch should be provided for each classroom. While both the folder and binder are options, many congregations have found that the binders are better for keeping materials together. The program administrator

STEPS IN THE MITKADEM PROGRAM

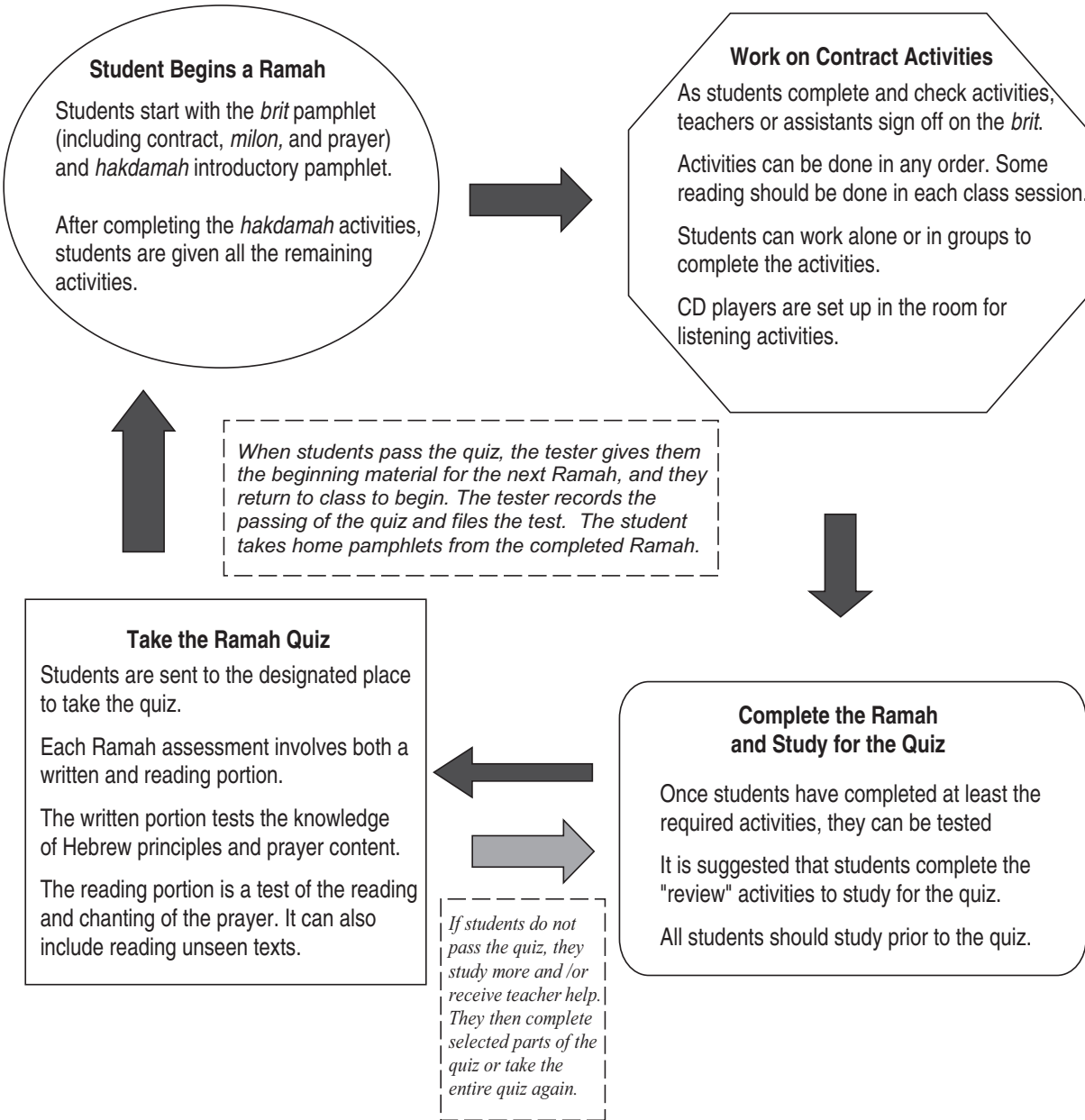


Chart created by Nina Price

should decide whether one or the other is preferred for their program, or whether to give teachers or students a choice of storage systems.

Student folders/binders will contain three items:

- The booklets of the *ramah* currently in progress. *Students should put their names on each booklet prior to inserting them into their binder or folder.*
- The Prayer Map, a graphic representation of all of the *ramot* in the order of the service. Located in the appendix of the *Mitkadem Teacher's Guide for Ramot 3–6*, the Prayer Map should be copied on card stock and kept in each student's folder/binder throughout the program. The Prayer Map designates evening and morning as well as Shabbat and weekday prayers. It can be a tool for students to keep track of what they have accomplished—when the student finishes a *ramah*, the teacher can indicate its completion on the Prayer Map with a check mark or a sticker.
- *Milon* (dictionary): In the *b'rit* booklet at the start of each new *ramah* is a vocabulary list particular to that *ramah*, called *Milon Sheli* (My Dictionary). One of the activities in each *ramah* has students add those vocabulary words to their personal dictionaries, so their *milon* grows as they progress through the program. More information about options for how students can create their own *milon* can be found on page 12 in the *Mitkadem Teacher's Guide for Ramot 3–6*.

Student folders should not leave the classroom but should be kept in a location that is easily accessible so that students can retrieve their own folders and begin working independently or in a small group as soon as they enter the classroom. If homework is necessary or desirable, parents can purchase a duplicate of each *ramah* for their child to work on at home. A sample letter to send parents, giving them the opportunity to purchase duplicate copies of each *ramah*, can be found on page 27 in the *Mitkadem Teacher's Guide for Ramot 3–6*.

As you become familiar with the design of the student packets, you'll notice that the last several booklets in each *ramah* contain answer sheets for some or all of the activities. One school of thought is that some students learn best by seeing the written answers and that however the students learn the information is acceptable. In addition, having access to these answer sheets allows the students to get immediate feedback to their work and will eliminate a lot of the time it would take the teacher to check each worksheet for correct answers. However, not all schools are comfortable with students having easy access to the answer sheets.

- **Option 1:** include the answer sheets with the material given to students at the start of a *ramah*.
- **Option 2:** give the answer sheets to students only when the teacher verifies that the student has completed the worksheet and is ready to self-check.

- **Option 3:** have an answer sheet corner or center where students can go to check their work as they complete it.
- **Option 4:** do not give the students access to the answer sheets and make teachers solely responsible for correcting student work.

Whichever method you choose, students will quickly learn that “cheating” doesn’t help—if they have not legitimately completed all the work, they won’t be able to pass the *mivchan* at the end. Self-checking is an important component of the *Mitkadem* methodology.

After the student passes the *mivchan*, be sure to send that *ramah’s* materials home with the student.

Ways to Facilitate Learning in a *Mitkadem* Classroom—Options

Grouping Students Together

Match pairs or organize small groups in such a way that capabilities are balanced. Students should have different strengths and challenge one another so that their group or partner does not hold students back who are excelling. Explicitly state the learning expectations, and be sure that each individual understands what is expected of him or her within the group.

Monitoring Needs and Providing Learning Support

- Have the students write their names on the board when they need help, and go around to the students based on the list.
- Go around the room in a repeated order and see if anyone needs help.
- Have a teaching assistant walk around and try to help students while you stay at one place in the room to assist the ones the teaching assistant is unable to help.
- Have parent volunteers present to assist students.
- Give each student a red card and a green card. If they need help, they put the red card out for the teacher to stop by to assist. If not, a green card is placed by them so the teacher knows they are good to go on their own.
- On the *Mitkadem* website you will find a sheet called “I’ve Got a Question.” This worksheet enables students to focus and articulate their questions without interrupting the teacher’s engagement with other children. The student will turn it in, and the teacher will either answer the student during class or write a response and return the sheet to the student at the beginning of the next class.

Tracking and Supporting Student Progress

- Rather than checking papers on the spot, teachers can collect papers and correct students’

written work between class sessions. This, however, has the potential to be time-consuming for the teacher outside the classroom.

- Enabling students to move at their own pace can create a climate conducive to deeper reflection and models respect for their independence. Here are some suggestions for making the time spent studying independently most meaningful:

Be aware of the need some students have for stricter routines. Try matching these students with an aide who can help them manage their time. Or meet with them at the beginning of class and create a daily plan, with times if necessary. You might also want them to check in with you or an aide after completing each activity and before going on to the next one. The *Mitkadem* website also has forms to help guide students who need more direction.

Use the *Mitkadem* Daily Journal for students to report their progress at the end of each class. You can download one for free to use in your class from the *Mitkadem* website.

Assessment

If you do testing in your classroom (as opposed to having a testing room), you can have a teaching assistant or parent volunteer administer tests. The teacher and the education director or Hebrew coordinator will need to determine if the teaching assistant or parent volunteer has the ability to do oral testing.

Issues to Consider

Competition

The intent of the *Mitkadem* program is to allow each student to learn and feel accomplished to the best of their ability. It is imperative that teachers, aides, and administrative staff communicate this attitude in every manner. The truth of the matter, however, is that in a program where students move at different paces, there is inherent competition. Students measure themselves against others in many things they do. This is a natural phenomenon. With the structure of *Mitkadem*, students keep track of where they are in comparison to others, and some students will work hard just to keep ahead. Therefore, it is important that staff be especially sensitive to issues of competition in order to downplay it as much as possible.

Copying

Another recurrent issue is that of one student copying another's work when they are working together on pamphlets. While each school must develop its own policy on this topic, it is the opinion of the creator of *Mitkadem* that copying can be a legitimate method of learning. We know that students learn in different ways, so talking together and copying each other's work may serve one child's style of learning very well. Ultimately each student will be assessed individually through the written and reading quizzes, where working with another student is not an option. At that

point students and teachers will know whether or not copying was helpful.

Memorization

It becomes clear during reading assessments that students partially memorize prayers that they are studying. They have heard them many times in services, and learning the chanting often results in memorizing. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Most knowledgeable adults chant the service without looking in the *siddur* and reading. This is, in fact, an appropriate skill to be developed for the enjoyment of prayer. The problem, of course, is that in class we need to make sure that the students are decoding correctly and have the skills to read new texts. Three suggestions for addressing this are as follows:

1. The *K'riah* activities in each *ramah* include reading activities to practice decoding unseen material. Make sure that a teacher or aide listens to students reading at least part of these activities before just signing off on them.
2. Teachers can work with small groups of students to give them reading practice.
3. During the oral assessment, the tester can have students read unseen material. This will assure that the student can, in fact, decode.

When and How to Bring the Class Together as a Group

In recognition of the importance of building community in the Hebrew school classroom, many schools use the middle or last fifteen minutes or so of class time, or even an entire session every so often, to bring the students together for an all-class activity. Keep in mind, however, that students are working on different *ramot*. The all-class activity might be:

- A discussion of the theological issues or the theme of one of the prayers that students are currently studying. The *Divrei T'filah* section of each *ramah* has lots of wonderful material for teacher-led discussions.
- A game that reinforces vocabulary, grammar, or reading skills.
- Group singing or chanting in Hebrew.
- A way for a school using the *CHAI Curriculum Core* to incorporate material from the *Avodah* strand into Hebrew time as a way of connecting the learning.
- A discussion or activity about a specific prayer that all or most of the students have completed or are currently working on.
- A discussion or activity about content or grammar that many students seem to be struggling with.
- A discussion about a theme found in the liturgy. Themes that run throughout the

Mitkadem program can be found in the Teacher's Guide.

- Teaching about the structure of the prayer service.
- Teaching general grammar.
- An activity for *shoresh* review and development.
- An art activity to further students' understanding of prayers.
- An activity for reviewing reading skills.
- Introducing simple conversational Hebrew, like by playing "Shimon Omer" (Simon Says), or by having students say "hello" and introduce themselves using Hebrew words and Hebrew names (as shown on the *Mitkadem* DVD).

However they are used, these sessions are opportunities for teachers to contribute their personal creativity and knowledge to the classroom experience and provide the students with a sense of community with their classmates.

Classroom Administration of Student Progress

At any given time, most teachers will have students working on different *ramot*. A number of tools for tracking student progress and facilitating student-teacher communication are posted on the *Mitkadem* website. Many of these tools are explained in greater detail in a free, fifteen-minute how-to DVD, *Mitkadem in the Classroom*, also available on the website or by contacting URJ Books and Music.

- *Mitkadem Ramah* Record Forms are spreadsheets for each *ramah* that allow you and the teacher to keep track of each student's progress through the *ramot*. Teachers need to have a separate spreadsheet for each *ramah* being used in the classroom.
- Since some teachers will arrive at a situation where they have students in different *ramot*, instead of using the spreadsheets, you can use the following format as a classroom update form on a weekly basis:

Student Name	Ramah	Hakdamah	Kri'ah	Otzar Milim	Dikduk	Divrei T'filah	Estimated date of Mivchan
Rachel Cohen	5	Completed	1 activity left to do	Completed	2 activities left to do	All activities left to do	March 9

Student Name	Ramah	Hakdamah	Kri'ah	Otzar Milim	Dikduk	Divrei T'filah	Estimated date of Mivchan
Joshua Schwartz	7	Completed	2 activities left to do	1 activity left to do	Completed	2 activities left to do	March 1

- A Hebrew progress report can be used once a month to help teachers reflect on the progress of each student. Since lesson plans are not necessary with the *Mitkadem* program, this form helps the education director/principal or program administrator stay informed of class advancement. A template is provided on page 26 of the *Mitkadem Teacher's Guide for Ramot 3–6*.
- A cumulative class chart provides an instant view of how a class as a whole is progressing. List the students down the left side and the *ramot* numbers along the top. When a student completes a *ramah*, mark the date in the appropriate square. This chart is for teacher and administrative purposes only and should not be displayed for students. Everything possible should be done to avoid a sense of competition among students.
- The *Mitkadem* Daily Journal is a way for students to analyze their own learning style and to report their daily progress to the teacher, who can then add comments and notes about work that needs to be done. The journal pages can be kept in the student's working folder and, at the completion of each *ramah*, can be discarded or filed in the student's cumulative folder.
- Some students may struggle to complete work and to maximize the advantages of the independent-learning model. For those students you might employ the "My Goals for You" worksheet, which allows the teacher to be more structured with the student about the work that she/he needs to complete by the end of the class.

How to Teach *Ramah 3*

Ramah 3 is designed to teach the students how to use the *Mitkadem* system. *Mitkadem* vocabulary is introduced, along with the grammatical concepts of prefixes, suffixes, and *shorashim*. Many educators have found that they need to use a combined frontal and facilitative approach to teach this *ramah* to ensure that the students do not spend too much time on it and that they fully understand how to proceed with the self-paced approach. Sample lesson plans will soon be available for download on the *Mitkadem* website.

Some educators have also found that the material in *Ramah 3* does not have enough context and so

would like to use *Ramah 4* as an introductory *ramah*, since it is based on blessings, many of which the students may already know. For those educators a series of lesson plans will soon be available on the *Mitkadem* website that integrate the principles that are taught in *Ramah 3* into the context of *Ramah 4*.

Key Tips for Teachers

- **Be prepared:** Make sure all of the materials students will need are available, including supplies for students to show what they know using different modalities (listening devices, art supplies, pencils and paper).
- **Create a routine** so that your class is not confusing, and introduce routines on the first day. Establish where materials are kept and how students can access them. Other important routines address how students enter the class and begin work, how they get the teacher's attention, what they do when they've completed a task and are ready to be signed off, and how you will signal that students need to finish up their work and reconvene.
- **Designate spaces:** Children will be working alone, together, with teachers, and with aides. Think about where they can best get written work accomplished.
- **Beginning and ending:** One of the advantages of the *Mitkadem* program is that teachers don't have to wait for late students to appear before beginning a lesson. Have students' folders out as they arrive, and they will start working as soon as they enter the room. You can create a ritual ending to your sessions by taking five minutes for a formal closing.
- **Storage of materials:** Think about where you will store the folders and personal dictionaries.
- **Assisting students during class:** The biggest challenge in the *Mitkadem* classroom is how to address the needs and questions of students all busy at different work. In time students will become accustomed to getting help from each other, from the material in their folders, and by thinking on their own. Consistency and reliability on the teacher's part will help keep the classroom running smoothly.

PART V: TIPS FOR ADAPTING THE MITKADEM CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

NINE TYPES OF ADAPTATIONS

<p style="text-align: center;">Enlarging Font Size</p> <p>Enlarge the letters on the page; each page can be made into 2, 3, or 4 pages. Too much information causes confusion and clutter, and the child cannot focus.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Extending Time</p> <p>Already built into <i>Mitkadem</i>; each child is able to progress at his/her own rate. If a teacher is putting a time limit on students to complete an activity, the time limit should be increased or removed altogether, depending on the needs of the child.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Providing Additional Support</p> <p>The child can work with a teacher, aide, or other student if unable to work independently.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Modifying the Input of Materials</p> <p>Change the quantity of material the child needs to look at. Pages can be cut in half, thirds, or even quarters if necessary. If a child is listening to a recording of a prayer, it is not necessary to listen to the prayer in its entirety. It can be broken down into one, two, or more lines. A child will have an easier time mastering smaller pieces of information.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Adjusting Difficulty</p> <p>Because <i>Mitkadem</i> allows the child to work at his/her own pace, the child is not being pressured to move into more difficult work before he or she is ready. The teacher also has the ability to delete some tasks on a page or an entire page if it is too difficult for the child.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Amending the Output</p> <p>By working with the pages, the teacher has the ability to eliminate some tasks. This is especially true of repetitive tasks, which might take too long and frustrate the child. A page can also be divided into work to be done at school and work to be done at home.</p>

Realistic Participation Expectations	Alternate Goals	Curriculum Modifications
<p>Because the <i>Mitkadem</i> program is self-paced, each child participates at a level that is comfortable for him/her. Children can work on many different levels in one classroom, and a child's success is not measured by what others are doing. The child participates at his/her own level at his/her own pace.</p>	<p>The teacher and the child have the ability to work on a contract and eliminate or alter assignments to make them more appropriate for the child's needs. This is not a program where everyone must be on the same page at the same time. It lends itself to the individualization of the program to accommodate to the child's needs.</p>	<p>Because of the nature of the <i>Mitkadem</i> program, it usually will not be necessary to substitute curriculum. Adaptations to the pages can be made to suit the child's needs. The number of <i>ramot</i> a learning disabled child is required to complete could be modified. A child can only be expected to accomplish or complete what is realistic for the child. The child can continue to work on <i>ramot</i> during summers, at home, or even after the formal Hebrew program is taught in the school. There is also a possibility the child will be unable to complete what everyone else completes. The important thing is that the child be competent in what he or she does complete.</p>

Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities When Using *Mitkadem*

Classroom Accommodations

- Make sure the student is sitting close to the teacher, board, or work area so that there are few distractions.
- Make sure the student's desk is cleared except for material being used for the lesson.
- Consistently place directions in the same location on the board or chart.
- Establish a procedure for changing activities.

- Establish a routine.
- Set up a reward system.

Material Accommodations

- Use only the clearest print possible.
- Cover material on the page that is not being focused on, or make several copies of a page showing only one section on a page.
- Allow students to use index cards to keep their place. Cut the card for appropriate usage (cut out rectangle shapes to expose one word, phrase, or sentence at a time).
- Give students one page at a time.
- Highlight material to be worked on.
- Color-code vowels and letters.
- Allow extra time to finish assignments.
- Use a three-ring binder for complete assignments in each *ramah*.

Teacher Strategies

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Keep oral directions short and simple.
- Have students repeat or paraphrase directions.
- Review frequently.
- Use visual aids frequently.
- Write clearly.
- Have students copy from a paper on their desk, rather than the board. Once the student is able to copy successfully from the paper, then assign copying from the board.
- Allow time for the child to ask and answer questions.

Homework and Test Procedures

- Modify workload.
- Set up tests for success: review material, discuss the test format, read the test with the student, allow for untimed testing, allow for the student to complete the test orally.
- Make certain the student understands the way the test is worded.

(Based on Paula Goldman's, *Teaching Hebrew Reading to Students with Learning Disabilities*, published by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, 4928 Wyaconda Road, Rockville, MD 20852)

Tutors

While *Mitkadem* is a self-paced program that allows for various adaptations to student needs, it does not remove the necessity of one-on-one or small-group tutoring for students with learning disabilities. These students will still require a teacher who can work more intensively to help them understand and learn the material.

PART VI: UNIQUE CHALLENGES THAT MITKADEM PRESENTS

How to Motivate the Unmotivated

Not all students excel in the independent-learning model. There are a variety of reasons: they may need greater structure, are unsure of how to work independently, have difficulty deciding what to do next, struggle with the Hebrew, or have a learning disability. Once a teacher has determined that a student is “unmotivated,” the teacher needs to spend time working and meeting with the student to determine what is the underlying cause. Adjustments can and should be made depending on the circumstances. The following are some suggestions:

- Need greater structure/unsure of how to work independently/have difficulty deciding what to do next: “My Goals for You” is a tool that a teacher can use to give students more direction as to what they need to accomplish in a given lesson session.
- Struggle with the Hebrew/have a learning disability: There are suggestions for accommodations for students with learning disabilities in this guide (see page 38); however, these students would also benefit from more one-on-one learning either with a tutor within the school system, an aide (either a teen *madrich* or other adult volunteer), or greater attention from the teacher.
- Some students complete the work in class but have a hard time starting (or completing a test). A teacher with good record keeping who checks in with each student often will catch this before too much time goes by. See the section “Testing Anxiety” on page 23, and see the following section, “Moving Kids Off a *Ramah*,” for ideas about helping students over this hurdle.

Moving Kids Off a *Ramah*

Some students work quickly through a *ramah*, take the assessment, and pass with no problems. Others will need more assistance in completing a *ramah*.

- If a student is not motivated, you will want to implement suggestions from the “How to Motivate the Unmotivated” section of this guide.
- At the beginning, some students become almost paralyzed at the fear of “failure” on a

mivchan. Assure these students that passing does not require 100 percent correct answers and that the *mivchan* just identifies areas that need more work.

- If a student does not pass the test on the first try, the teacher or classroom aide can work with that student to go over the material that she/he did not understand to assist the student in mastering the material prior to attempting the test for a second time.
- If a student has learning issues, you might want to modify the requirements for that particular student. This can include adjusting the reading requirement and removing certain required activities within the various sections of the *ramah* or allowing students to complete the *mivchan* as an “open-book” assessment.
- If the parents have purchased a second copy of the *ramah* for home study, the teacher could assign homework for the student to complete between classes and have that work brought for the teacher to check in the classroom.

Breaking for the Summer/Returning in the Fall

Ideally, as the end of the school year is approaching, students should be completing their last *ramah* for the year. When students work at their own pace, the teacher is much less in control of the roll-out of new material and the pacing of the learning during the year. As a result, individual students will end the school year at different places in the *Mitkadem* program, which means that classroom teachers need to be prepared for where each individual student will pick up in the fall. Here are some ways you might want to plan to end the year, sustain learning over the summer, and start up again in the fall:

- In the ideal world, a student wouldn't end the year in the middle of a *ramah*, but you can't always control for this. For students who pass tests during the last month of school, you may decide not to start them in the next *ramah*. Instead, they could help other students or work on other Hebrew-related projects for the classroom or school.
- Students who do end the year in the middle of a *ramah* could be sent home with their materials and a CD and encouraged within the first month of the summer to finish and come in for testing with the educator or administrator. Support can be provided over the phone or in person, if possible. In the spirit of *Mitkadem*, students and families should be aware that this is being offered, but they should own the responsibility to pursue it or not.
- Similarly, you might want to discuss with your educator the possibility of offering to any of the school's interested students the option of moving ahead on their own over the summer. Adequate support and testing arrangements would be required.
- In the fall, students resuming work in the lower *ramot* can benefit from a “*Mitkadem* Boot Camp” that would review the names of the sections, early vocabulary, and grammatical concepts (e.g., roots, prefixes). This short-term intensive review can serve to gear them up for where they left off before the summer break.

- Students resuming work in a *ramah* in the fall can be required to redo the work in that *ramah* they completed in the spring. It should not take too long but will serve as a helpful review.
- Undoubtedly, when students return in the fall, they will need several weeks to review and to get their reading acumen up to the level it had been before the break. If students need a review of letters, vowels, and basic decoding, a review booklet entitled *Mitkadem Plus: Welcome Back!* is available from URJ Press.

Implementing *Mitkadem* in a Non-Reform Synagogue

Although the Reform Movement is not unilateral in worship, there are philosophical differences in the way in which other movements approach certain prayers. There are times within the *ramot* when these differences are acknowledged and taught. *Mitkadem* has been implemented with great success in many Conservative and Reconstructionist congregations. Notes for those who are implementing *Mitkadem* in a Reconstructionist synagogue follow, contributed by a *Mitkadem* user. As similar tips for Conservative congregations become available, they will be added to the implementation guide. Support is always available for all congregations from URJ Press. Call 212-650-4120 or e-mail press@urj.org for more information.

Reconstructionist Notes for Teaching Mitkadem

In some of the *ramot* the difference between Reconstructionist prayer and Reform prayer is reflected. In these *ramot* we need to show our students the different versions. Use the table below before students start a new *ramah* to be prepared. The table shows the *ramot* in which there is a difference, the subject of the difference, and where you can find it in *Mitkadem* and in the Reconstructionist *siddur*:

<i>Ramah</i>	The Difference	In <i>Mitkadem</i> Text	In the <i>Siddur</i>
<i>Ramah</i> 5: Shabbat Kiddush	The chosenness	Line 9	<i>Shabbatot v'Chagim</i> , p. 119
<i>Ramah</i> 6: Torah Blessings	The chosenness	Line 5	<i>Shabbatot v'Chagim</i> , p. 399
<i>Ramah</i> 8: <i>Ahavah Rabbah</i>	The chosenness	Lines 18 and 21	<i>Shabbatot v'Chagim</i> , p. 275
<i>Ramah</i> 11: <i>Avot V'Imahot</i>	The <i>Avot V'Imahot</i> versions—add Reconstructionist	<i>Divrei T'filah</i> activity 3	No need—listed in <i>ramah</i> as “Modern Reform version”

<i>Ramah 16: Aleinu</i>	The chosenness	Lines 3–6	<i>Shabbatot v'Chagim</i> , p. 445
<i>Ramah 23: Birkat HaMazon</i>	The chosenness		<i>Shirim v'Brachot</i> , p. 39

If you find that your students are indeed starting a *ramah* in which this happens, plan to have a short discussion about it. Show your students the different versions of the *t'filah in Mitkadem* and in the Reconstructionist *siddur*. You can use the following questions for a discussion:

- What is the main difference between the Reconstructionist version and the other version(s)?
- Why do you think that the Reconstructionist scholars made these changes?
- Some people think that even though times change we do not have the right to change prayers that have been part of our tradition for generations. Others think that changing the prayers in order to fit new times is a good thing because it keeps the prayer alive, close, and connected to us. What do you think?

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You are embarking on an incredibly exciting journey that will help students gain a greater understanding of *t'filah* in general and specific knowledge about particular *t'filot*. This curriculum allows the students to work at their own pace and own their learning. If you need support beyond this guide, please contact your Union for Reform Judaism congregational representative, a URJ education specialist, or URJ Books and Music. *B'hatzlachah!*