Course Overview

The objective of this course is to teach and empower individuals of all backgrounds with new life skills based on traditional Torah thought, thereby enabling them to transform the way they view their daily lives. The course offers an antidote to the monotony and grind of unchanging routines. It provides newfound energy and exhilaration in taking on challenges. And it offers practical strategies for developing a deeper sense of joy and satisfaction.

Although the course utilizes the relevant approach and easy personal style that made the book *Toward a Meaningful Life* so popular, it is totally free-standing and no prior familiarity with the book is assumed. The course covers the spectrum of life, considering personal growth, relationships, home, work, special challenges, and the role of G-d and faith. We will reframe these universal and familiar issues in a compelling way in light of the Torah’s perspective, inviting students to challenge their current views and consider a more meaningful approach to the topic. Each lesson concludes with a toolbox of exercises and guidelines to help students make full use of the ideas and strategies discussed.
Course Syllabus

Lesson 1: Discovering Your Personal Mission Statement

No business can function without a mission statement. Neither can you. This lesson will establish the foundation for a meaningful life—revealing and understanding why you are here.

Your birth is G-d’s statement that you matter. You are indispensable, and your soul was deliberately chosen to descend into your body at a particular time and space in order to fulfill a unique objective. Literally every one of your life experiences is driven by this mission—the hub that connects all the spokes of your activities.

This lesson will show you how to graph the coordinates in your life, so that you can discern patterns of meaning that can assist you in identifying your unique purpose.

Toolbox Exercise: Writing Your Personal Mission Statement

Lesson 2: Marriage, Love, and Intimacy

What lies at the foundation of a successful relationship? Physical attraction, emotional connection, and intellectual parity are all important kinds of compatibility. In this lesson, we will also explore the importance of spiritual compatibility: the power of shared vision and shared commitment to building something together that is greater than the sum of its parts. While the first three factors vary and fluctuate in importance over time, only the fourth is unwavering and eternal, and it serves as the foundation of all the other gifts of a successful marriage.

Toolbox Exercise: What Is Love?
Lesson 3: Home and Family

The home is the most important institution of society, shaping lives and futures, and yet often, it is taken for granted. A home is not merely a shelter, a place where you can be “yourself.” The home is a microcosm of the mishkan, G-d’s abode in this earth.

How can you build a healthy home for yourself and for your family? The comfort of home can bring out the best and the worst in us. It is vital not to take one’s family for granted, and to balance love and caring with order and structure. In this lesson, we will examine the components of a warm, nurturing, and sacred environment. Our attitudes, activities, and home furnishings that reflect our Jewish values all contribute to building a home of Torah, avodah, and gemilut chasadim.

Toolbox Exercise: Planning Your Home Makeover

Lesson 4: Work, Charity, and Wealth

Why must we work? The purpose of life is to become a giver, not a taker. We are invited to be a producer, a creator, and a partner with G-d, by transforming the resources we were given into divine energy that illuminates and warms our environment.

As we age, our work changes, but we should never retire. The Jewish attitude is that we always remain producers and givers, though we may reframe the focus of our efforts. At the same time, there are principles of spiritual time management that can keep us from being consumed by work. By distinguishing between ends and means, we can keep from losing sight of our underlying objectives.

We also look closely at money and why it holds so much power. Money is “soul energy”—embodying our time, energy, and ingenuity—and is a reflection of our investment in this world. This is why we find it so difficult to give away our money. In effect, it is like giving away a piece of our life. However, it is precisely
this aspect that gives *tsedakah* its great power, freeing us from the powerful tentacles of materialism which often threaten to hold us hostage in their clutch.

*Toolbox Exercise: What’s Your Real Job?*

**Lesson 5: Pain, Loss, and Anxiety**

Only live, healthy, and sensitive people feel pain. Any form of pain, physical or psychological, signifies that something is misaligned. Pain is the first step in the natural process of healing. Pain is all-consuming, commanding our attention, demanding we shift our perspective on life. In the process, it helps us define our priorities and our commitments, by testing our strength and resilience. Thus, pain often pushes us to access deeper resources. Pain need not be denied. It is a natural and important part of life.

In this lesson, we will look at meaningful ways of coping with pain. We can draw on our trust in G-d, on positive thinking, and on our capacity to find joy. We’ll learn to find a balance of grief and building, so we can translate pain into action and tears into growth. Finally, we’ll discuss ways of supporting others in their pain, providing hope as well as a listening ear.

*Toolbox Exercise: Rx for Pain*

**Lesson 6: Religion and Faith**

Why is it that so many of us struggle with the role of G-d within our lives? Perhaps it is because we are working with the wrong definition. The Berditchever Rebbe once said, “The G-d that you don’t believe in, I don’t believe in either.” We’ll begin by reframing G-d, identifying the conventional images we have of G-d from school, home, and comic books, and then challenging our premises and probing beyond the platitudes.

Why is it important to try to “know G-d?” Because how we see G-d dictates how we will relate to Him. If our view of Him is immature, then our relationship with G-d is driven by guilt, nostalgia, family upbringing, and social programming. It is a mechanical relationship governed by rote. But
as we develop a more mature and introspective understanding of G-d, our relationship becomes richer and more personal, relevant, dynamic, and passionate.

The primary modes of interacting with G-d are through love and awe, and it is critical to keep these in balance. We will also discover that faith and reason are not antithetical. Faith is not the absence of reason. It is an independent faculty which complements and enhances reason. Reason leads us to a door; faith takes us through that door.

**Toolbox Exercise: What Does G-d Mean to You?**