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THE
LOLA
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INSTITUTE
JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children

BELONGING AS THE FOUNDATION OF LEARNING / SARA ANGEL TALKS CANADIAN ART /
EVOLUTION OF THE ALEPH / LEARNING POTENTIAL AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT /
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Integrated Jewish Studies espoused by The Lola Stein Institute are delivered at The Toronto Heschel School, a Jewish day school in Toronto, Canada.



Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. We honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many. We lovingly remember Mannie Stein z"l whose enthusiasm and support for our work with children is gratefully acknowledged.



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Feels Good to Be Home

BY PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

Emily Carr is a lifelong favourite. When I chose an Art Canada ebook to accompany Sara Angel's article, it was not surprising that I selected the Emily Carr monograph. So fun to add a touch of Emily to *Think's* reflection on community spirit, belonging, and identity. After all, we are Canadian and Emily is among the greatest visual interpreters of Canada.

What did surprise me was to notice how Emily's writings mirror thoughts that are shared in this issue of our Journal. Invited to reflect on learning and belonging, our contributors aspire to an educational environment that cultivates confidence, insightfulness, and initiative. Emily Carr wrote,

Indian art broadened my seeing, loosened the formal tightness I had learned in England's schools. Its bigness and stark reality baffled my white man's understanding. I was as Canadian-born as the Indian but behind me were Old World heredity and ancestry as well as the Canadian environment... I had been schooled to see outsides only, not struggle to pierce.¹

...school culture both informs and limits what children learn.

Emily understood that background circumstances have tremendous impact on how we understand our surroundings. The social, cultural, psychological, and physical context in which we live frames what we notice and what we don't, just as school culture both informs and limits what children learn. It's a strong message.

How do we educate children to pierce through first impressions and plumb the depths for questions beneath the surface? How can schools set up learning to make this happen? How do we develop students who spend their days at school with a peaceful easy feeling, a sense that all is well, and who are open and ready to learn?

The first dilemma is whether children feel personally welcome at school. We say, "Shalom"; it means peace but also implies wholeness. It corresponds to the Hebrew word *shalem*, which means "complete." Greg Beiles introduces this priority to make children feel welcome and distinguishes what is unique about the Jewish sense of belonging. Greg remembers that the Jewish notion of absolute belonging guarantees balance between the collective and the individual. Hayley Zacks reflects this sensibility for wholeness beautifully in her inspirational remarks to the Grade 8 graduates of June 2015.

As ever, *Think* looks first to see how this thinking crystallizes in the classroom. Grade 1 teacher, Elissa Wolff, fosters her students' comfort at school by cultivating their sense of personal awareness and self-respect. The children learn to know themselves as skilled, compassionate contributors; they carefully nurture caterpillars into butterflies, study the wandering Israelites who transform into a nation, and then, to focus their thinking on personal goal setting and process, the grade ones learn to write instructional handbooks.

Adding universality to the mix of identity and belonging, Andrea Schaffer concentrates on a personal connection with each of her Grade 2 students while teaching them the water cycle of the entire planet Earth. Her individual daily greeting to each child grounds her students' acceptance of their unique sets of strengths and struggles. This solidarity expands into an appreciation for distinct cultures and communities, and opens to the pervasiveness of shared attributes and common experience.

Feeling at home with complex identity is not easy, and yet Ronit Amihude brings junior high students to contemplate and respect their simultaneous membership in the Jewish and Canadian communities. To introduce the notion of layered personal identity, Ronit blends the study of ancient Western history with the Jewish holiday of Chanukah and her class discussions begin to deconstruct preteen sensitivities to diaspora, assimilation, and ancestry.

A sense of ownership and a sense of interconnection seem to matter in education. *Think* asks sages in our own community how they view children's "struggle to pierce" and find what lies within. Child psychologist Dr. Jasmine Eliav suggests that children reach for their optimal learning potential when they feel secure, as if they "own the podium" from which they explore. She highlights the home-school relationship to underline that a child's emotional foundation is affected by the interactions of his or her various caregivers—parents, teachers, et al. Gail Baker's book selections for this issue of *Think* also expose the critical influence of family and social relationships on children.

Judith Leitner illustrates another interplay that buries into children's daily experience and brings them to think deeply. Her students study how the Hebrew letters—so familiar and routine—evolved across time from ancient pictograms. The interdisciplinary coursework ignites their appreciation for the humanity of invention, as well as a proprietary sense for the continuum of Jewish life and world history. Our evolving Jewish culture belongs directly to them, as does the story of Canadian art, which Sara Angel is rendering visible and available on the web, through the Art Canada Institute.

Think also presents the stories and wisdom of two other sages of our time, Dr. Rachael Turkienicz, who is one of our own as a co-founder of The Toronto Heschel School and a long-time parent of Heschel students, and Rabbi Benji Levy, who visited from the Moriah College in Australia and shares his impressions in our pages.

Make yourself at home. We hope you feel welcome on this journey towards learning and belonging. It's the road to Shalom Bayit. Peace at home, all's well.

1 Emily Carr, *Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), p. 257.

Belonging as the Foundation of Learning

ARE OUR CHILDREN INDIVIDUALS THAT MAKE A TEAM
OR ARE WE A TEAM THAT MAKE INDIVIDUALS?

BY GREG BEILES

The desire to belong is a basic desire of all human beings. Intuitively, we all know this, and now a new field, called the “science of relationships,” affirms it. Baumeister and Leary, two leading researchers in the field, state that “human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong.”¹

When it comes to education, we know that children thrive and learn where they feel a sense of belonging. It’s instructive to look at how we imagine belonging is nurtured at school and then explore what the view of belonging, gleaned from Jewish sources, can mean for children and their learning.

At school we can readily notice that students experience a sense of belonging when they are part of a project that involves others, such as a sports team, a drama production, or planting a garden. Children can derive a sense of belonging through shared purpose: winning the game, staging the show, completing the project. This feeling of membership arises not only from the achievement but also from the experience of jointly pursuing the goal. Repeatedly, I witness the remarkable way in which school plays, garden clubs, choirs, and team sports galvanize my students.

While we easily observe the bonding that comes with success and victory, we can also notice social implications that emerge through the shared experience of losing a game. A hard-fought team effort resulting in a narrow loss may generate stronger team cohesion than a decisive win achieved through the talents of one or two team members. Win or lose, camaraderie is heightened when there is a strong feeling of shared effort.

The sense of belonging that derives from a shared goal depends, in part, on the child finding and playing a specific role within the project. On a sports team, it means playing one’s position—forward, defender, goalie—appropriately. In a theatrical production, each cast member must embrace and play

his/her role—leading, supporting, or managing scenes backstage—effectively. There is often a hierarchy of roles, and to some degree, gratifying participation relies on the child’s willingness to accept his/her role. Sometimes a child may subjugate important aspects of his/her individuality in order to play a specific social role. It can go too far and result in bullying, group-think, and other psychologically or even physically harmful behaviours.

Jewish sources, traditions, and practices teach us another way in which the human desire to belong can be expressed. This is a way that does not depend on a common goal, joint project, or well-played role. For lack of a better term, I call it “absolute belonging.”

The idea of absolute belonging, no doubt, originated in the notion of “birthright.” The 20th-century philosopher Franz Rosenzweig identifies this core aspect of Jewish belonging when he writes that each person belongs “already through being born.”² Of course, Judaism has for millennia extended the concept of absolute belonging beyond only those born Jewish. Whether by birth or by choice (conversion), once one is part of the community, one belongs automatically, regardless of what one does, one’s role, or one’s level of Jewish proficiency.

The notion of absolute belonging resonates in ancient Jewish texts and concepts. The mystical rabbinic notion that “we were all at Sinai”³ suggests that every Jewish person, of every generation throughout time, was present at Mount Sinai to hear the revelation of Torah when God spoke to Moses. The mystical aspect presents the very clear idea that each and every Jew is an intrinsic member with a voice in the community of teachers and learners of Torah.

In the even more ancient text of the Book of Leviticus, we read that performance of sacrificial offerings was incumbent on

all members of the community, regardless of gender, social status, or means. This inherent pluralism endures. In contemporary Judaism, the way we pray in our synagogues and schools still exemplifies the double structure of collective membership with individual integrity. We pray in *minyanim*, sharing common words and melodies as a community. At the same time, we respect that individuals experience prayer each in their own way, at their own level of understanding, and that their appreciation is personal. This complexity comprises our Jewish sense of belonging.

At The Toronto Heschel School we are mindful to ensure that all children see themselves as participants and leaders. Each has the opportunity, indeed the obligation, to participate. All assume leadership roles, yet are not assigned duties based on who is perceived to possess talent for a predetermined “best” level. Children learn that all voices belong. We attend to and respect both the mellifluous voice of Miriam and the hesitant voice of Moshe. We ensure universal participation with the pluralistic respect for individual families’ expressions of Jewish observance. The collective duties of Leviticus are carried out remembering that each of us was at Sinai.

A community of absolute belonging promotes individuality and diversity of belief and expression without the threat of ostracization or exclusion. This community also nurtures collective responsibility among participants to fill roles that strengthen the community, even if one does not agree with every aspect of the doctrine of the moment. When a child grows up with a sense of absolute belonging, she/he develops a sense of intrinsic self-worth that is not dependent on success in a particular role or project. She becomes willing to collaborate and explore within her safe haven.

Children thrive in a community of absolute belonging because they are free to take on and try multiple roles. They thrive because they are challenged to take risks and develop themselves in new ways. They thrive because their individuality is respected even as their contribution to the collective is required. They thrive because absolute belonging provides the strongest security for the freedom to learn.

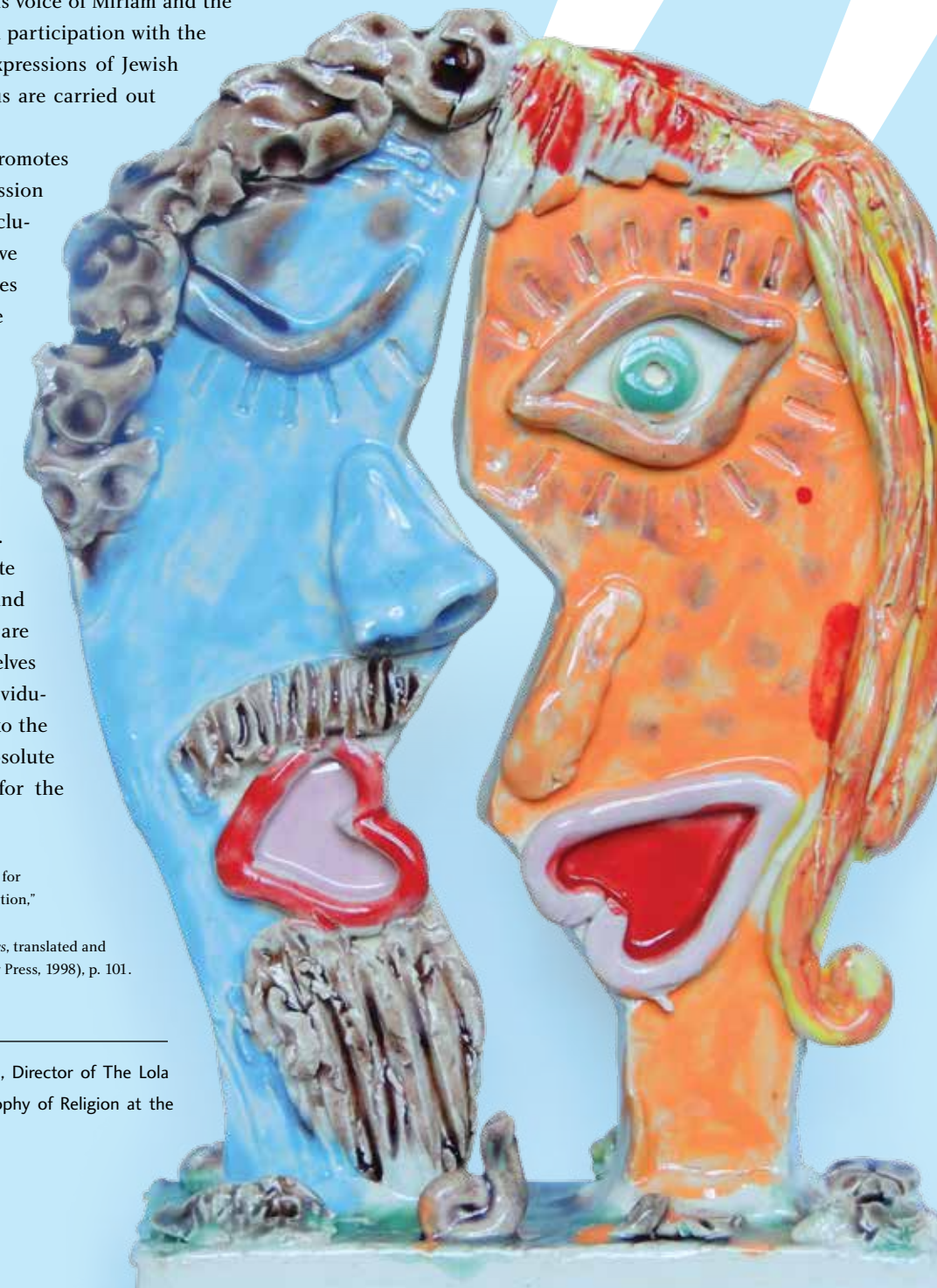
1 R.F. Baumeister and M.R. Leary, “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3) (1995), pp. 497–529.

2 Franz Rosenzweig, *God, Man, and the World: Lectures and Essays*, translated and edited by Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), p. 101.

3 Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 146a.

Greg Beiles is Head of The Toronto Heschel School, Director of The Lola Stein Institute, and a Ph.D. Candidate in the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Toronto.

Children learn that
all voices belong.





Rachael Turkienicz: Scholar, Teacher, Founder

BY MORDECHAI BEN-DAT

Some 19 years ago, a handful of individuals came together to harness the power of a singularly unique educational idea, namely, to educate and help raise children to become outstanding Jews and outstanding human beings, based upon the religious and philosophical inspiration of the remarkable Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

That robustly fresh and innovative idea has since become a source of ever-glowing educational and humanitarian light within the Jewish community of the Greater Toronto Area, and indeed, the wider Jewish world.

Rachael Turkienicz was one of those individuals who helped create The Toronto Heschel School. She had recently returned to Canada from her studies at Brandeis and Harvard Universities. Having previously received an Honours B.A. and a B.Ed. from York University, she now had attained an M.A. from Brandeis University and was finalizing her doctorate in Talmudic and Midrashic literature.

In 1996, Turkienicz was the founding director of Judaic Studies at the nascent Toronto Heschel School, whose 52 students were then housed in the educational wing of the Beth David Synagogue. She is no longer a member of the faculty or

administration of the school but retains her connection with the school as a consultant.

Turkienicz was an educational trailblazer then and remains one today. She is also an exemplar of a born educator: the individual who constantly seeks to share information with or ignite a spark of curiosity in the person sitting or standing nearby.

Think caught up with Turkienicz recently at a coffee house in Thornhill, where she reflected upon her years at The Toronto Heschel School and filled in some of the details of her current educational work.

Almost immediately in conversation, one is struck by how earnest Turkienicz is and by how carefully she chooses her words to ensure she expresses the full and true nuance of her thoughts.

"I am very proud to tell people that I helped to found Heschel," Turkienicz enthused.

"Heschel was an experiment that surprised everybody because we succeeded in ways we hadn't planned. We knew we were sitting on firm ground educationally and Judaically. But we didn't understand then, at the beginning, that we would be building a new sense of community, that the parents and, in some cases, wider families of our students would move along with us."

"The 'Heschel experience,'" Turkienicz elaborated, "is more than an 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. experience. The families' common purpose and togetherness goes beyond their own children's education. This moves Judaism beyond the realm of knowledge alone into that of experience as well."

Turkienicz spoke about the importance of tolerance and mutual respect at Heschel by explaining: "One of the special qualities about the (Heschel) school was its specifically Jewish approach to creating an identity for the students based upon wide dialogue. It was our hope that the Heschel child would eventually become familiar with all the various Jewish 'communities' and make his/ her choices based upon that knowledge."

The primacy of fairness and justice, of inclusion and forbearance were inculcated in Turkienicz at a fairly early age. She recounted how her desire to study Talmud placed her high school (CHAT) in a teaching, administrative, and perhaps even a moral quandary.

In those days, Talmud study was considered the exclusive realm of the male student; some Talmud teachers were reluctant to include women in the classroom. Yet Turkienicz persisted until the school implemented a series of different ways to accommodate her desire to engage in Talmud study.

"I am very proud to tell people that I helped to found Heschel."

After high school, Turkienicz enrolled in the fine arts program at York University. But, she explained, "something was nagging in me and pushing for an expression." It was, of course, her yearning for Jewish studies. In her second year, therefore, she formally entered the Jewish studies program and started to swim in the deeper ocean of Jewish thought, text, history, and tradition.

The pursuit of Jewish studies eventually took Turkienicz to Brandeis and Harvard Universities in Boston. When she returned to Toronto, the young Jewish studies scholar taught at CHAT and at York University. Her return to CHAT was akin to closing an evolutionary circle. She had been the first woman student to study Talmud at CHAT and she returned to become the first woman to teach Talmud at the school.

Think contacted one of Turkienicz's former CHAT students, today herself a teacher at the Bialik Hebrew Day School in Toronto, for a sense of what it was like to be a student in Turkienicz's class.

"What made her class so unique and exciting was the way she challenged her students to think outside of their comfort zone," *Think* was told. "She asked interesting questions that really made us ponder the essence of the topic. Moreover, we had just

entered high school and she treated us as thoughtful, intelligent individuals. She respected our opinions and thoughts and allowed us to form our own perspectives as she guided us with the text and facts and insights of her own.

"Ms. Turkienicz was passionate and excited about the subjects she taught, and that came through in the way she presented the material. Her classroom always felt like a safe environment where people could share their ideas without criticism. She was personable, easy to approach, and helped her students feel connected to her as a human being and as a teacher."

After she completed her work at Heschel, Turkienicz went on to plan and refine different approaches to education. She founded Rachael's Centre for Torah, Mussar and Ethics, a not-for-profit, charitable organization that "focuses on sharing and applying Jewish wisdom from a woman's perspective."

"I take the classically Jewish responsibility of educating one's children very much to heart. To put strong, very positive people into this world..."

Turkienicz is again setting new standards for formal and informal Jewish education. Students from around the world have enrolled in her online programs and courses. Companies and businesses consult her for her unique insights into the world of applied Jewish ethics. And she still teaches in synagogues and private homes and leads study missions to Israel. Her next study mission will focus on the lives of key Jewish couples of the Bible and is planned for the spring of 2016.

Turkienicz summarized her time and her work at Heschel in typically emphatic fashion. "I take the classically Jewish responsibility of educating one's children very much to heart. To put strong, very positive people into this world...there is something mind-boggling and deeply humbling about this." The best way Turkienicz felt she could fulfill that responsibility for her own family was by enrolling her children in Heschel.

"We are partners with God and we are committed to helping heal and bring goodness to others," Turkienicz concluded. It is clearly evident that, for Rachael Turkienicz, helping to establish The Toronto Heschel School, founding Rachael's Centre for Torah, Mussar and Ethics, and being a parent and an educator are all part of this lifelong, holy partnership.

Mordechai Ben-Dat is the former editor of *The Canadian Jewish News*.

Photo credit: Jen Arron Photographs

Recommendations for Children and the People Who Love Them

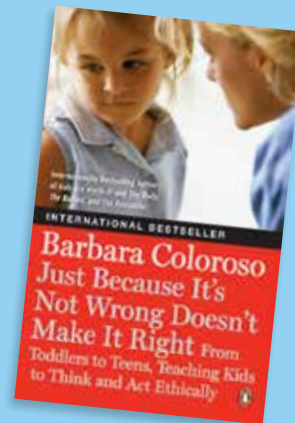
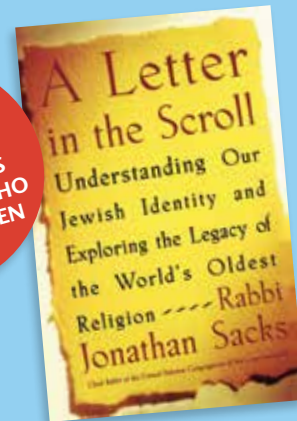
BY GAIL BAKER

Gail Baker—renowned teacher, principal, mother, and grandmother—presents a short list of Good Books for children and the people who love them. Gail has spent her career teaching and reaching children in Toronto since 1977. She co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and retired as Head of School in 2014.

Gail writes, “These books deal with the relationship between individual and community, how the one nurtures the other and vice versa. Sometimes one person has a great impact on others, just by being him/herself. At other times, family and community enable one’s personal uniqueness to flourish.”



2
GOOD BOOKS
FOR PEOPLE WHO
LOVE CHILDREN



***A Letter in the Scroll: Understanding Our Jewish Identity and Exploring the Legacy of the World's Oldest Religion* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (The Free Press, 2000)**

This small book is a “must read.” Sacks presents Judaism from historical and philosophical perspectives. He connects the endurance of the Jewish people to the fact that Judaism cannot separate either from the individual or the community. Our endurance relies on both equally. His metaphor is that each person is like a single letter written into the scroll itself; one does not exist without the other. When an individual is damaged, the effect is community wide, and when the community suffers, so do all its people.

***Just Because It's Not Wrong Doesn't Make It Right: From Toddlers to Teens, Teaching Kids to Think and Act Ethically* by Barbara Coloroso (Penguin Random House Canada, 2012)**

It is not surprising that this was not her bestseller. Coloroso writes that raising ethical children begins in toddlerhood. She puts the onus on each of us immediately, explaining how it is that the values that children see in their homes, schools, and communities are the ethics they will grow up to have; giving them T-shirts with slogans will not make a difference. Coloroso also reminds us that “every child is worth it” and that a truly caring community supports each one of those children.

***The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco (Simon & Schuster, 1988)**

Through the eyes of a child who becomes the adult, this story is full of love and memory. Geared for 5 to 8 year-olds, the story sensitively carries meaning through generations of birth, marriage, and death, made even more meaningful through its poignant illustrations. The author shows that simple traditions, even if modified by time, offer a path to a sense of family closeness and cultural richness.

***Cakes and Miracles: A Purim Tale* by Barbara Diamond Goldin. Illustrated by Jaime Zollars (Two Lions, 2010)**

Suitable for preschoolers to third graders, this tale is about expectations and trusting dreams. Young Hershel is blind and uses his imagination and ability to craft shapes to create extraordinary cookies on the holiday of Purim. Although his family can't see the possibilities, his creativity wins out. His talent and commitment to contribute change how his world sees him.

A Book

BY LIRAN

GRADE 8, TORONTO HESCHEL SCHOOL

To some a book is merely a collection of pages stained with ink that has no meaning to others it is a gateway to the imagination for all it needed was a key from pirates and princesses to the simple flick of a wand in a way all books are essentially the same but the way you change it is entirely your decision words after words streaks of ink across the page ink, dark like shadows that is all you need just a few simple words can get your mind going the rusty gears now whirring and going again a sad depressing story can easily transform into a happy one for it is all up to you to decide To some a book is merely a collection of pages stained with ink that has no meaning to others it is a gateway to the imagination



Justice and Righteousness: Personal Ethics and National Aspirations

What does it mean to be a faith, a people, and a nation that aspire to bring justice and righteousness to the world?

Join the Shalom Hartman Institute and Toronto senior Jewish educators for an inspiring journey of study and discovery.

Beginning November 2015, the Shalom Hartman Senior Educators Forum at The Lola Stein Institute will again probe Jewish tradition through the dynamic combination of world-class scholars, study of original text, and open-forum discussion.

Visiting faculty from the Shalom Hartman Institute will meet with Toronto's Jewish educational leadership over eight lunch hours throughout the academic year. Participating leaders include heads of day and supplementary schools, Jewish studies departments, and other senior educators. 2015-2016 marks the Senior Educators Forum's fifth year of study.

This year the Forum will engage with notions of justice and righteousness as Jewish values and a personal religious path. We will also examine the import of justice and righteousness in the public square in North America and Israel.

We will ask:

What does justice mean? What does righteousness mean?

Do these notions evolve in the Jewish tradition?

What is the human responsibility for a just society?

Do justice and righteousness lose their meaning if claimed at opposing poles of political and religious differences?

Can righteousness blur into self-righteousness?

Is a personal pursuit of justice different than a national pursuit?

Do we in the North American Jewish community speak differently about justice than the Israeli community? If so, what are the implications?

What are the calls for justice in World Jewry today? Are they different in Israel?

The dates of the 2015/16 Senior Educators Forum are (Wednesdays):

November 4	January 6	March 2	May 4
December 2	February 3	April 6	June 1

All sessions will begin with a kosher lunch at 12:00 pm followed by learning from 12:30-2:30 pm.

We will meet at different locations around Toronto. Tuition for the year is \$500.

To register, please go to <http://lolastein.ca/registration.html>

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Do you use heritage, culture or religion at school to inspire social responsibility in your students and reach for universal values in the classroom?

We invite teachers working in schools in North America to submit an example of curriculum, class project or school-wide initiative that uses heritage, culture or religion to inspire social responsibility in children and has been implemented successfully.

The Toronto Heschel School uses the philosophy and social action leadership of Abraham Joshua Heschel, together with Jewish thinking and Jewish text, to teach values of social justice. *Think* wants to know how YOU do it.

For contest details, visit www.lolastein.ca
and click Teaching Excellence Award



www.lolastein.ca

Think magazine is published by The Lola Stein Institute. The LSI creates and promotes education where interdisciplinary learning encourages intellectual and emotional connections across academic disciplines and where Jewish thinking and ethics are integrated throughout the curriculum to deepen learning, enrich school culture and inspire social responsibility.



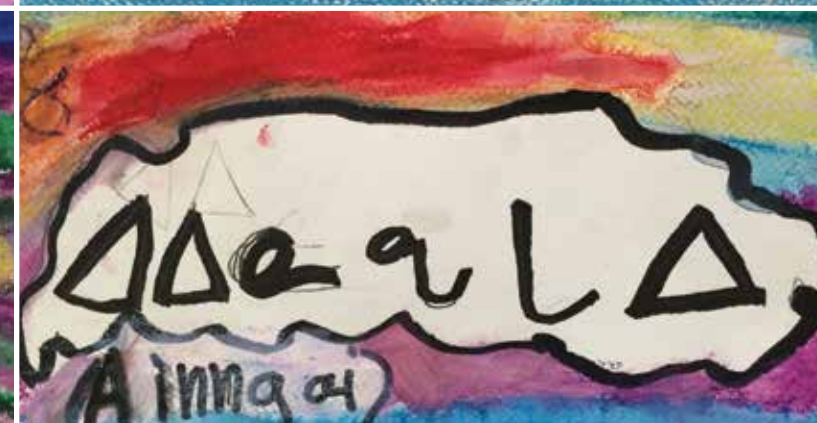
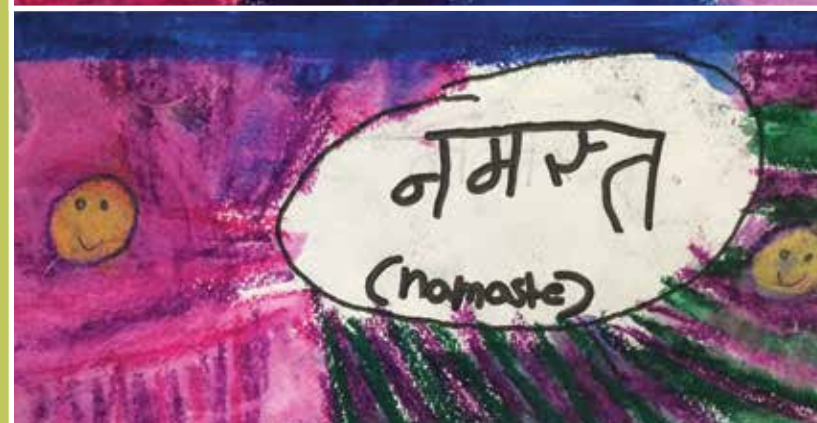
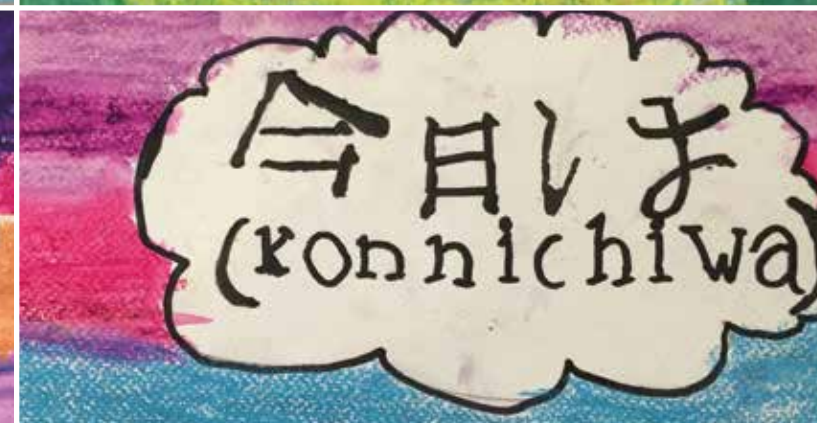
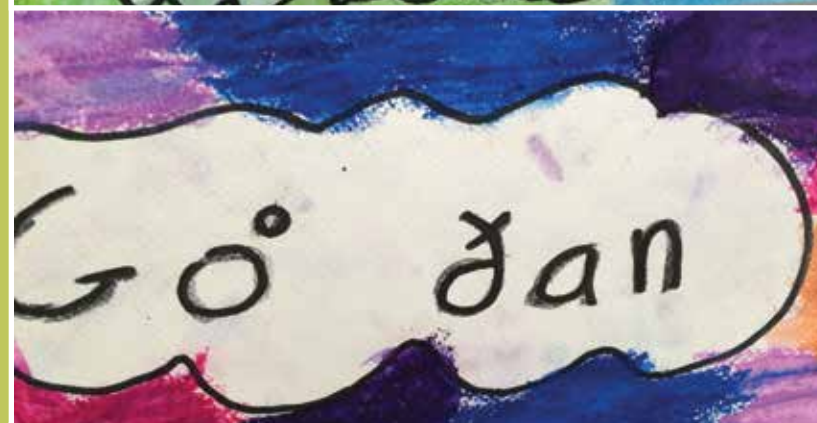
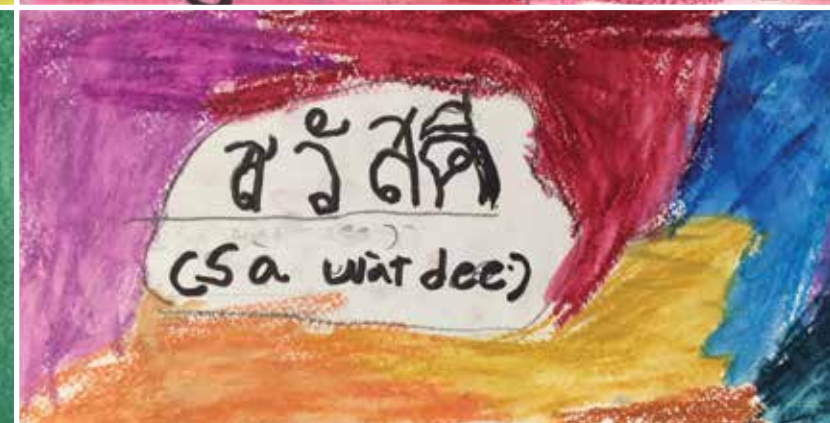
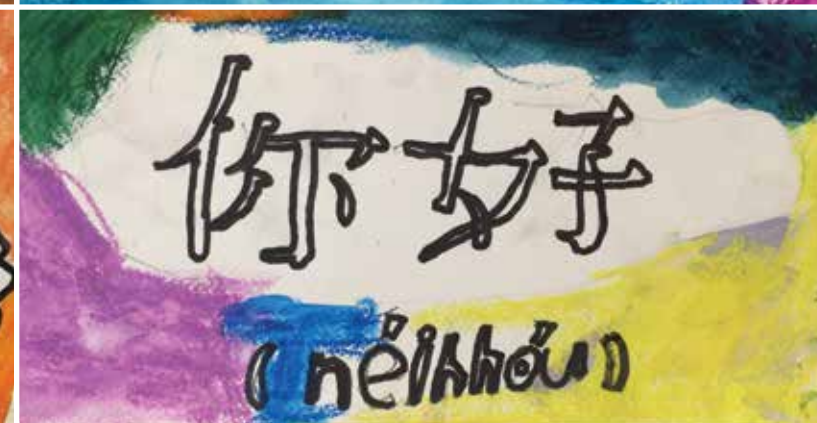
The Toronto Heschel School
בית הספר על שם השל

THiNK
about
individuality,
identity, and
self-awareness.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Learning as Belonging

Inspired teachers,
inspired students



PREVIOUS PAGES: Andrea uses hello to reach each child individually. Her students say hello in many languages, learning that hello reaches many children in many different ways the world over.

You Had Me at Hello

BY ANDREA SCHAFER

It's 8:30 a.m. A quiet buzz comes from the Grade 2 classroom as students enter. On the easel that stands by the door there is a morning message. They contribute their opinions to the question posed in the message and then cooperatively begin their morning work. We wait for our entire community to arrive before we settle down to begin the day with a brief morning meeting and *tefillah* (prayers).

By 8:40 we are sitting side-by-side in our circle, greeting one another in the language chosen for the day. The month that I am writing, our salutations vary from the Hebrew “Boker tov,” to the Thai “Saudikop,” to the Hindu “Namaste.” They switch about this month because we are learning about stories and children from around the world.

Students adapt quickly to the morning routine and sit quietly awaiting their turn to be greeted by a friend. Those who arrive late eagerly find a spot in the circle, not wanting to miss the greeting that welcomes him/her into the community.

Intentionally, I do not greet the class as a whole but rather one by one. By this simple act, students learn that the Grade 2 community is one to which they each belong. I welcome each child by name as a separate and individual person, confirming to each class member that his/her personal presence here is noticed and appreciated, that each belongs in this classroom and this community.

Author Mary Beth Hewitt writes, “Belonging is a key component to a healthy life. When people feel like they belong, they care about what those around them think of them. There is reciprocity to belonging: If you care, I care—if you don’t care, I don’t care.”¹

Children benefit greatly from feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom. Feeling that they belong makes them feel valued; feeling that they are valued lets them thrive. In my experience, if students know that their opinions and ideas are heard and matter, they are more likely to participate, explain their thoughts, make mistakes, and take greater risks in their learning. For just these reasons, as a teacher, I work to instill a sense of belonging within the hearts and minds of all my students.



We all need love, we all want friends, and we all want to feel that we belong.

Because the children know that they each matter as an individual, they understand the personal attention that each student may need and receive. If students are having difficulty with any aspect of their learning, we set up individualized student conferences. This demonstrates to the whole class that we all have strengths and struggles and that different lessons and time frames work best for different skill sets amongst our members. They grow to respect the idea that we should all succeed.

Our students are also members of communities that go beyond their Grade 2 class. We cultivate their sense of belonging to the world outside of our classroom walls and even outside of our cosy Heschel School community. Yes, we take the lesson to the next level. We take pains to explicitly teach the abstract but very true notion that our children are part of the greater Jewish community of Toronto, the larger Canadian community, and even the greater global community.

We do this through teaching how water travels through the water cycle—in a true Toronto Heschel integrated way. As the school year begins, we introduce Grade 2 to the understanding that everything in the physical world is interconnected. We study and see how bodies of water connect to one another, one river to another river, a river to an ocean, and more rivers to more oceans. We also learn that the air we breathe might evaporate and later condense to become the rain that falls into our gardens. Some water that evaporates over Africa might just rain down over Canada.

The young minds of our students absorb the notion that in our world water is not distributed equally. They see how our treatment of Canadian rivers can affect the lives of fish and animals far away. The water cycle reveals that we belong to a world greater than our classroom and The Toronto Heschel School. It becomes evident that what we do in this world matters.

We take the idea of interconnectedness from water to people and learn that we are part of a Jewish community that has a presence on most of the continents around the earth. When Passover approaches, the students pursue an integrated exploration of the various Passover customs practised by Jews in different countries. We notice that, within diverse Jewish practices, we find shared traditions that are common to Jews across the globe: we all celebrate freedom from slavery in ancient Egypt and we eat unleavened bread.

This past year we shared our feelings about Passover in a video and sent it to the Hadassah School of the Abayadaya

Jewish community in Uganda. To produce the video, we began by trading stories with each other about the meaning of Passover in our lives. Our seven year-olds saw how they belong to a community that is diverse and similar, far and near, all at the same time.

In Torah class, our children studied that the first human being, Ha’adam, was lonely, and so God divided Ha’adam in two halves. When the one half, a man, saw the other half, a woman, he declared, “This, at last, is bone of my bones” (Genesis 2:23). Even though the two halves weren’t the same—one was a man and the other was a woman—deep down, at the level of the bones, they recognized that they belonged to one another.

We teach our young Heschel students this same lesson, that, under our skins of different hues and colours, we are all made of the same sturdy bones. Our interests and talents may be similar or different, but deep down there are things that we share; we all need love, we all want friends, and we all want to feel that we belong.

It’s beautiful to see my students integrating notions of interconnectivity and individuality as they study the water cycle, appreciate variations within Jewish practice and recognize sharing uniqueness with children around the world. They begin to grapple with a developing perception of where and how they fit into the larger world. They start to sense a familiarity with children from different cultures and backgrounds, noticing that we have much in common from the white bones beneath our skin to the colourful soccer balls we all use at recess. We are each just one person and yet we all connect. In my Grade 2 class, belonging begins by saying hello to each and every child each and every day.

¹ Mary Beth Hewitt, “Helping Students Feel They Belong,” CYC-ONLINE, Issue 101, June 2007, p. 1. Retrieved 15 June 2015 from <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0706-hewitt.html>

Andrea Schaffer is an alumn of the DeLet program for Jewish Educators at Brandeis University and its Masters of Teaching Program. She taught in Boston at the Jewish Community Day School, lived in Israel, and now is “thrilled” to be at The Toronto Heschel School. Andrea says, “I find that grade two students have the skills they need to dive into school. They are eager to learn and curious about EVERYTHING. My education at Brandeis taught me to be a text person, to present all ideas and concepts through a Jewish lens, and to inspire children to look at the world in awe and wonder.”



Create with a Wise Heart, Share with a Generous Heart

BY ELISSA WOLFF AND DVORA GOODMAN



At The Toronto Heschel School, we use curriculum for interpersonal connection between our students as well as for academic content. Our Grade 1 students are curious, excited, and eager to learn new things, but if we want them to thrive in a learning environment, and to meet their maximum potential, we know that they need to feel comfortable with who they are with and where they are.

What helps them feel at ease is a warm, personal association with the people and the world around them. The bond emerges nicely if they sense that they are part of a community that accepts, sees, and hears them for who they are. At The Toronto Heschel School, we intentionally create a Grade 1 curriculum that simultaneously achieves these two ends: it is designed to meet youngsters' emotional needs so that they flourish at



school, and it is a program of study that delivers important skills and content. Teaching in this manner pairs emotional growth with academic achievement.

One beautiful example that illustrates this double duty is when we teach the children about different kinds of communities and how the role of each individual within the community is integral to its success. Our generative topic, "I Create with a Wise Heart and Share with a Generous Heart," *Chacham lev v'nadiv lev*, is rooted in the Torah (Exodus 35:21–29). The terms, wise heart and generous heart refer to the different characteristics that the Jewish people had to bring forward to create the *mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the desert.

At this time, in the Torah narrative, the people of Israel had not yet received the Torah and so were not yet a Jewish nation.

They were individuals who had been freed from slavery and were in the process of transforming into a nation through their journey in the desert together. To build the *mishkan*, each Israelite was called on to bring their natural skills and talents, meaning their *wise heart*, to the project, and each had to be willing, with their *generous heart*, to contribute their skills to the community. Each skill and each job was important; the community could not be built with only one skill set, nor could the community be built without the generosity of its members. Mastery of skills went hand in hand with camaraderie and collaboration.

Our Grade 1 uses this Torah story as a springboard to emphasize the value of individuals within a community and how each has a responsibility to the group. We first ask the children to reflect on their own wise heart and their generous heart and to sketch out examples of ways that they contribute to those around them. We consider people in our community who help one another and notice how they work together.

We look at parents and their jobs at home and at work. We also look at the Heschel School community and the roles that different people play at school and how their different responsibilities interconnect. Throughout the study, we encourage the children to look to see what they might do, and how they might help their family and community.

We then look beyond home to Israel and Kibbutz Lotan, an eco-Zionist kibbutz in the south that refrains from pesticides, builds natural homes, and fosters an overall eco-friendly ethic. The children consider what they can learn from Kibbutz Lotan to help our Heschel community: last year they made beautiful plaques for our school garden to indicate what is growing in each garden bed.

As we continue thinking about what we can do together to help our community, we choose to help the animals around us. We study the monarch butterfly that is in danger of becoming extinct. Using their wise heart (*chacham lev*), the children explore information, becoming monarch butterfly "experts." Then, using their generous heart (*nadiv lev*), they decide to help butterflies through raising awareness around our school about the urgency to protect the monarchs.

We bring caterpillars into the classroom, watch them grow, and think about how to keep them well fed, safe, and healthy. We design and plant a special butterfly area in the school garden using milkweed and other flowers that butterflies like. When our caterpillars morph into butterflies, we free them into the garden, hoping they will thrive on the plants we nurture for them. We talk about how the transformation of the people of Israel into a nation, like the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into a butterfly, was a process that was successful through shared responsibility, skill, and care.

Meanwhile in language arts we introduce the children to a more abstract notion of process and we learn about procedural

writing. The students are given the task of writing a procedural text (a how-to story) that teaches their readers about something that they, the writers, are good at doing. The children ask: "How can I give? How can I use what I'm good at doing to give and help others?" They think through the challenge of explaining something carefully and then write down the process, the goal, and the rationale.

Teaching in this manner pairs emotional growth with academic achievement.

The *Chacham lev v'nadiv lev* unit culminates with a class ceremony where the first grade students receive a *siddur*; we call it *Kabbalat HaSiddur*. The ceremony is not a performance but an opportunity for the children to sit with their families and personally guide their families through the process of communal prayer. They have spent the year learning to read confidently in Hebrew and follow a prayer service with *kavannah* (intentionality) and meaning. They can now pray together and understand the meaning of the specific prayers. Feeling confident in their learning, they now teach their families to share in the experience of prayer. Equipped with their *siddurim*, they are ready to participate and also to lead. The *siddur* ceremony demonstrates their growth as individuals and as members of a community.

Our journey to create with a wise heart and to share with a generous heart sparks a personal sense of social responsibility and of collective effort, the twin feeling of being unique and part of a community. Through the metamorphosis of the butterflies, the duty to build the *mishkan*, and the effort to write a story, the children learn that nature is complemented by intention, and that the individual and team exist together.

A sense of feeling comfortable while learning and discovering, as well as trying new things as a group of friends and colleagues, begins to emerge. Even as they are busy with understanding Torah, procedural writing, and the spirituality of the *siddur*, we see the class coalesce into a comfortable, warm, and earnest group of collaborators who are ready, able, and excited to meet the demands of Grade 2.

Elissa Wolff is a Grade 1 teacher at The Toronto Heschel School. She has a B.Ed. and an Honours B.A. in Psychology. Elissa first started at Heschel in 2000 as a volunteer and administrative assistant. Being at Toronto Heschel inspired her to go back to school and become a teacher.

Dvora Goodman is the Coordinator of The Lola Stein Institute. She has worked for 20 years in a variety of Jewish educational settings. She is also a parent of two children attending The Toronto Heschel School.

At the Crossroads of Inheritance and Discovery

BALANCING IDENTITY IN GRADE SEVEN

BY RONIT AMIHUDE

[The] struggle to understand the traditions I belong to as mutually enriching rather than mutually exclusive is the story of a generation of young people standing at the crossroads of inheritance and discovery, trying to look both ways at once.

*Professor Carola Suárez-Orozco,
Professor of Applied Psychology and
Co-Director of Immigration Studies,
New York University*

As Jews living in Canada, we experience this struggle as we balance our identities as Jews and as Canadians.

The adolescent years are particularly crucial in the development of personal identity. At The Toronto Heschel School, we help junior high students deal with their layered identity through their study of history. As is our way, we constructed an integrated Grade 7 curriculum for a course in civilizations—Ancient Greece, Mesopotamia, and Egypt—in which we use overarching themes or “generative questions” that let us blend several academic disciplines into the study of history. When they study the lives and choices of people in the long-ago empires of Greece and Egypt, students see that dilemmas of identity have occupied individuals and groups throughout history and will remain a key turning point for generations to come.

We place our students precisely at Professor Suárez-Orozco’s “crossroads of inheritance and discovery.” The students consider how our personal choices shape our identities and then how we activate and empower this sense of who we are through our encounters with others. We ask: How is our identity formed? To

what extent does membership in a particular group or nation define our identity? Should we label ourselves and how are we labelled by others? Are our identities influenced by how we think others see us? Does identity inform our values, ideas, and actions? Do we assume different identities in different contexts? How do we manage multiple identities?

Chanukah is a good example. It recalls the story of being Jewish in a non-Jewish world, a world where Judea could not simply close its borders against an increasingly globalized civilization. The Judeans had to decide, as a community, how to live in the broader Greek culture, yet maintain a Jewish identity. How much could they resist outside influences and how much could they allow themselves to embrace? The dilemmas that Jews faced in the time of the Maccabees more than two thousand years ago continue to be relevant to us.

Like other colonized communities in ancient times, Jews struggled to maintain their identity and culture in the face of prejudice and pressure to conform to external community expectations. And like communities dispersed throughout the globalized world today, Jews still encounter the possibilities of assimilation.

Using the lens of this historical moment, we encourage the Grade 7 students to analyze and discuss how their identities are being formed. They each create a personal Chanukiah, the eight-branched menorah specific to the holiday. The challenge is to incorporate design elements that reflect what energizes their “secular” selves as well as their “Jewish” selves, and to highlight the balance between these two aspects of their identities.

This student’s Artist Statement shows how he lives with the struggle to belong to multiple groups:

My Chanukiah art installation depicts the important components of my life that power both my Jewish and secular identity. The installation has two central themes. The first is a tree metaphor in which I am a tree growing as a Jewish person. The roots, which are seen sprouting through the earth, are the flames that power my Jewish identity. The roots are the foundation of my tree, giving it the support it needs to grow and flourish. The second theme is the interaction between my Jewish and secular identity in which both identities are lenses through which I experience, view, and understand the other. I express this by housing my Jewish identity within a glass planter and placing my secular identity on the outside. The glass that separates the two is the lens through which they see each other.

It states in Song of Songs, Rabbah 1:54: “Pearls. These are the Torah portions, strung together, reflecting brilliance one to the other, adding radiance on the next, forming a circle in their strand.” This quote helps to express how I see my secular and Jewish identities interacting. They are placed parallel to each other, reflecting the light of the other, and forming the complete circle—the circle of my life...

From doing this [assignment], the most important thing that I learned is that in real life none of these components can truly be separated...they all overlap and intersect in a way that is constantly moving and changing. Through this process I was also able to better understand the interaction between my Jewish and secular identities. I found that in the way that I live my life, both the secular and Jewish parts of my identity are always present and shedding light onto each other.

(Toronto Heschel School Grade 7 Student, Chanukah 2014)

Students see that dilemmas of identity have occupied individuals and groups throughout history and will remain a key turning point for generations to come.

The work illustrates how dual identities and memberships in more than one group can be complementary and mutually enhancing. Suárez-Orozco echoes this and argues:

The healthiest path is one in which transcultural youth creatively fuse aspects of two or more cultures—the parental tradition and the new culture or cultures. In so doing, they synthesize an identity that does not require them to choose between cultures—but rather allows them to develop an identity that incorporates traits of both cultures, all the while fusing additive elements.¹

As an educator, my responsibility is to teach my students to think carefully and critically; this includes developing their creative ability to mine lessons from history for guidance in the daily choices that they face. At crossroads in our complex and globalized society, we want them to make thoughtful, educated choices about their actions and where they want to go in life. On the journey, it helps to know where we came from, who we are, and what we value.

¹ Carola Suárez-Orozco, from the Afterword, *Stories of Identity: Religion, Migration, and Belonging in a Changing World* (New York: Facing History and Ourselves, 2008), p. 116.

Ronit Amihude, B.Ed. (University of Winnipeg), M.Ed. (York), has been teaching at the Toronto Heschel School for 16 years in a variety of grade levels. Ronit is passionate about having students think critically and take their learning outside of the classroom context. When not challenging students in the classroom, Ronit enjoys cooking, travelling, reading, and spending time with her husband and two young sons.



Firefly

BY CHARLIE
GRADE 8, TORONTO HESCHEL SCHOOL

He is a firefly,
Leading me through the night.
Telling me where to go, what to do.
“Be careful”, “stay here”.
These words guide me to my destination.
At times of danger, he comes to my aid.
“You can trust me” he reassures me.
As my faith in him brightens, so does his light.
A star that keeps on glistening.
A firefly, one out of millions,
Brightens up my path.
His words encourage me to go forth
And find my way.
As I take charge,
The whole path lights up
Knowing that I have him here
To support me.
A glow and “you can do it!”
Comes from behind,
Encouraging me to go on.
He is a firefly,
A light source of wonder,
A second moon to guide me home.

GRADUATE TO GRADUATE

We Know Who We Are

AN ALUMNA SPEAKS TO JUNIOR HIGH GRADUATES, JUNE, 2015

BY HAYLEY ZACKS, TORONTO HESCHEL SCHOOL, CLASS OF 2010

Studying Western philosophy in first year university, I read the works of over 50 thinkers. The one that stuck with me the most was Hannah Arendt. For me, her philosophy resonated deeply because it connected me back to my roots at Toronto Heschel.

Arendt’s work, *Vita Activa*, looks at the distinctions between individuals. She demonstrates that every one of us is irreplaceable, and that simply because we are in it, the world will never be the same. Arendt emphasizes individuality and uniqueness because she understood that society forces us to conform and become carbon copies of each other.

This reminds me of the most important lesson I learned at The Toronto Heschel School. The lesson was to not only accept but also to embrace my personal uniqueness, and to make my uniqueness the chief inspiration for my creativity. Toronto Heschel provides an environment where individuality can grow and thrive.

**... the most important lesson was to
to embrace my personal uniqueness
and make my uniqueness the chief
inspiration for my creativity.**

Embracing uniqueness, especially at the age of 13 or 14, is not an easy task. Learning to affirm differences, and not to hide them, is not a culture that every school encourages. Our ability to acknowledge how we differ from others and to be confident in that individuality are lessons that stretch beyond the confines of a classroom, even though the roots are in our JK classes.

The school encourages and provides the space for creativity, the exact opposite of forcing kids to conform to a specific mould. At Heschel, there is never a class full of the same essays simply because we received the same instructions; what emerges are diverse artistic depictions of the Babylonian Exile and amazingly different themes for speeches on human rights.

Arendt writes of the merit in individual thought and action, and she hopes to dissuade people from wanting to be the same. In any social situation, it is tempting to try to blend into the crowd and do what others are doing, yet the best advice that I can give this year’s graduating class on how to survive high school is actually to embrace uniqueness. If you remember to understand yourselves in the way that Heschel taught us, and think of yourself as a unique individual, you will be a step removed from the pressures of the crowd and the hustle and bustle of high school.

High school is testing, but owning the skills to affirm yourself in all your individuality will get you through the test. It’s a challenge to switch from a class where you know everyone to a class where you know few to none. When you remember yourself as the creative individual you are, with so much to offer, you will spend less time worrying about the latest trend or what exactly is cool.

Arendt says that the highest category of human activity is acting as an individual; when we take action, the world will never again be as if we weren’t here. Arendt’s reasoning for individual action again connects directly to what we learned at Toronto Heschel. We were taught that we could make a real difference in the world; we can repair its problems, *Tikkun Olam*, and, following the ethical path, *Derech Eretz*, we can make the world a better place than it was before us.

What I am suggesting to you, graduates of 2015, is to hold on to the identities that you cultured at The Toronto Heschel School. Remember that you are an individual, unique and irreplaceable, and precisely because of that, the world is a better place. There will never be anyone else who can change the world in the way that you will. We each know all about creative individuality; we know who our true and beautifully different self is.

Hayley Zacks graduated from The Toronto Heschel School in 2010. She attended Northern Secondary School and then entered the Foundation Year Programme at the University of King’s College in Halifax.

THiNK
about
who we are and
what we do.

Our Sages Tell Us

Wise words from
our community





Evolution of the Aleph

BY JUDITH LEITNER

The alphabet is one of the most fundamental inventions in human communication. It enables the preservation and clear understanding of people's thoughts and allows human experiences to be shared. Through the alphabet's earliest evolution from pictures and shapes to sounds, it integrated ancient oral and visual cultures and propelled the art of listening towards the arts of reading and writing. For many scholars of anthropology and history, entire civilizations were founded upon this astonishing innovation.

The Hebrew alphabet is called the Aleph Bet. It is a codified system of 22 letters that evolved throughout the ancient Near East over a period of about 900 years. One compelling theory alleges that the Aleph Bet began its linguistic journey as Egyptian hieroglyphics, pictograms endowed with symbolic meanings. Gradually the pictures' shapes shifted and changed into written signs or characters, called phonograms, each expressing a specific sound.

By about 1500 B.C.E., Proto-Sinaitic had emerged as a west-Semitic script. It then developed into Proto-Canaanite or Old Hebrew, whose main offshoots were the Phoenecian, Ancient Hebrew, and Aramaic alphabetical systems around 1000 B.C.E. These alphabets eventually became the ancestors of the Roman alphabet we use today.

In a wonderful Grade 5 project, "The Evolution of the Aleph," we render the Hebrew alphabet visible as an abundant linguistic, historical, and Judaic springboard for student learning. We designed this integrative visual arts curriculum asking ourselves the essential Toronto Heschel School question: How can we foster a rich intersection of thinking, knowledge, art, and ethical behaviour in this learning experience?

This visual arts exploration takes place concurrent to the Grade 5 civilizations curriculum, entitled "The Force of Human Innovation." The latter brings students to ponder the questions:

What need did a specific invention address in ancient societies and cultures? What structures were in place that let artful specialists give shape to important novel concepts? What resources were available to the inventors? Who used the inventions? How were they disseminated and adapted throughout time and in distant place? Today, as cutting-edge creations circulate at lightning-speed, we wonder how these ancient inventions and innovations transformed civilizations?

Today, as cutting-edge creations circulate at lightning-speed, we wonder how these ancient inventions and innovations transformed civilizations?

The Aleph Bet study fits in as an ancient innovation that transformed society. We guide our students to become thinkers and to wonder how we can understand the ways that speech can be preserved, noted down, and transmitted. We look into the creative process underlying the art of writing; how did writing evolve from spoken word, to image, to sound, and to an ordered alphabetic system? Our process with the students has two phases: exploration and creation.

1. Exploration

As scholars of the ancient world, our students first investigate the evolution of the different letters of the Aleph Bet from a historical and linguistic perspective. We examine the social, cultural, and religious needs addressed by the invention of the art of writing in ancient Near Eastern civilizations. We analyze the

Aleph Bet's visual vocabulary, the pictures and their symbolism, and its roots in Egyptian hieroglyphs. We study the Hebrew letters' linguistic trajectories and the conventions that propelled them from shapes to sounds, and eventually, to a set of interrelated signs.

As Judaic scholars we wonder how we can imagine and contemplate our biblical ancestors and the complexities of their lives and times. We consider their ongoing relationship with ancient Egypt and correlate the development of the Aleph Bet. We explore the profound impact that the creation of the Aleph Bet had upon modes of communication in the ancient Near East and, ultimately, upon the development of our Judaic heritage.

2. Creation

As artists, we wonder how we can imagine and explore the creative mindset of the innovators who artfully propelled the evolution of writing from shape to sound. To do this we first evaluate the evolution of the Aleph Bet from a design perspective. We study the fundamental elements and principles of design and their application to poster art. Students research the art and craft of the poster and use models made by artists from Cuba. We revisit the art and craft of oil paste/watercolour to add texture to our artwork.

We also take time to think about the art of typography, and the importance of engaging with each letter's formal qualities. We meet the individual persona of the 22 Hebrew letters, treating each as a separate graphic symbol with its own design history and cultural legacy. Each student artist chooses a Hebrew letter whose evolution speaks to his/her heart, and designs a poster that graphically tracks the evolving stages of that specific letter, including an original drawing of the object that became the hieroglyph.

We divide up our canvas into seven sections—one for each stage in a Hebrew letter's development, and we embed design

How can we foster a rich intersection of thinking, knowledge, art, and ethical behaviour in this learning experience?

elements and principles in our creative choices. As a final step, the students each write an Artist's Statement that describes their artwork and creative choices, illuminates their artistic challenges, and contemplates the question: What do I know now that I did not know before, now that I have made art? The collective work is then exhibited in The Toronto Heschel School's hallways, as is our artful practice.

As an artists' collective, we are ever mindful of ethical behaviour in the art room, *Derech Eretz*. We look to the ways that we share our ideas; we respect our learning space (public and private), and our art materials and resources; and we reflect on fellow artists' thinking and working styles.

As we teach and reflect upon what we learn in "The Evolution of the Aleph," we continue to pose the questions that are core to The Toronto Heschel School's way: How can we encourage the connection of knowledge, logic, and beauty? Are we evoking visual delight and conceptual fascination? And, most importantly, are our learners experiencing a sense of awe and wonder as they engage in this lyrical visual interpretation—this *Midrash*?

Turn the page and see the graphics!

Judith Leitner co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and since then has served as the Director of Arts, team-designing and teaching the integrative Judaic arts curriculum. In 1991 she founded the Integrated Arts Programme at She'arim Hebrew Day School. Judith is equally passionate about documentary photography; her recent exhibitions include "Serene Passage: A Traveller's Prayer at Ground Zero, Madrid and Shanghai" (Arta Gallery 2011 and Darchei Noam 2014); "My Voice, Through My Lens" (MaRS Discovery District, June 2014), and "Embedded: Personal Identity through Job:19" (Contact Photography Festival 2015).



Evolution of the Aleph

1

We begin with the Aleph's ancient hieroglyphic graphic: a pictogram of a full-bodied ox. The ox pictogram symbolized strength and power and, read aloud, is thought to have been pronounced as *aluf*. From the point of view of communication, we ask: What is the problem with this picture? We wonder: Does it mean, "I have an ox," "I need an ox," or "I lost my ox."



2

We then explore how the pictogram was reduced to an ox's head and horns, over a period of about 600 years. We note that the image continues to represent the idea of an ox. Again, we consider the problems this ideogram creates as a mode of communication. We imagine its possible references: "My three oxen went over a mountain!" or "I know you stole six oxen from me!"



3

We observe how the ox ideogram was further reduced in the span of 300 years or so to an even leaner version of itself. Only the horns are represented with the head now symbolized by a line. We share thoughts on how this image continues to be problematic for accurate communication.



4

We then investigate the ideogram's development: its graphic twists and turns and gradual evolution from ideogram to phonogram (Proto-Sinaitic). We learn that the reduced head has become associated as a phoneme, with a sound derived from the first sound of the word *aluf*, namely, "Ah."



5

At last we welcome the Aleph's final form, pronunciation, and name. This is how it appears in Proto-Canaanite script.



6

We delight in its artful evolution and in the striking resemblance to its counterpart in modern Hebrew cursive script.



7

We complete this conversation by visiting the connections between the original Egyptian hieroglyphs and their Hebrew linguistic descendants: how a pictogram of a house, *bayit*, evolved into the letter *bet*—ב; how a drawing of water, *mayim*, became the letter *mem*—מ; or how a wide open eye, *ayin*, became the letter *ayin*—ע.



A Sense of Belonging

CONTEXT FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING

BY DR. JASMINE ELIAV, CHILD CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

Parents often wonder how to maximize their children's learning potential. They want to support the learning in school, optimize their children's opportunities, and give them the best advantages as they grow and prepare for a productive life. In discussion about their children's future, parents often focus on the strength of an academic program and the ability of teachers to deliver a curriculum.

There are many more questions to ask. Over the years psychological research has told us that school is so much more to children than a chance to learn curriculum. In fact, if you look at the vision statement for one school in Toronto, The Toronto Heschel School, you can see that change in expectation comes to life. The school envisions:

That every Heschel graduate is empowered with the academic and social skills, curiosity, confidence, passion, and diligence to achieve excellence in all they pursue and that they improve our world with compassion, integrity, and a deep understanding of Jewish studies and values.

The question becomes how to achieve this vision?

Psychologists suggest that the children who are best able to learn and develop are those who attach securely to caregivers in various ways. The attachment offers children a secure base from which to launch. They develop flexibility of mind because they are not focused on physical or emotional safety; their thoughts can be free to develop and engage with the world around them. According to attachment theory researchers, a child becomes securely bonded when a caregiver responds sensitively, appropriately, and thoughtfully to the child's needs.

As much as children need to feel cognitive and social emotional safety at home, they also need it at school. Most schools have policies for the negative safety dilemmas that arise, such as for the physical safety of the school, bullying, and

other possible harm to students. I suggest that in addition to addressing what they do not want to happen, schools should prioritize crafting pro-social policies to inspire children's emotional, social, and intellectual growth. One such policy would be to build a strong and engaged school community where everyone feels that they belong.

The implications of attachment theory extend to children's secure connections to their teachers. Research supports that children who experience positive supportive relationships with their teachers show greater social competence with adults and peers in the school, and demonstrate higher achievement orientation and academic achievement when compared to peers with insecure relationships.¹

A powerful combustion of all this attachment theory happens when we add parents and teachers together. Research evidence now supports the value of composite attachment. Children benefit significantly when the positive secure relationships they have with their parents (caregivers) interrelate with the positive secure relationships they have with their teachers. Yet the interaction between a child's caregivers and teachers is a highly complex function of context and personalities.

Understanding the power of the family–school dynamic changes the game when parents contemplate where to enrol their children.

The contexts in which the child lives and learns, and the people with whom the child interacts in daily life, matter to how the child will grow up. In 1979, developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner theorized that children mature within

interconnected environmental and societal systems that are dynamic and interactive. He argued that enhancing the communication and the relationship between the two systems increases a child's developmental potential. The last four decades of research in child psychology support him.²

Following Bronfenbrenner's lead, child psychologists now respect that the interplay between school and family is material to a child's development. The quality of the connection between family and school can establish or destroy the secure base or sense of belonging that the child needs to launch into optimal learning. Understanding the power of the family–school dynamic changes the game when parents contemplate where to enrol their children. It's not simply how a school will deal with a child that is on the table, but how the school and family will interact one with the other. Where will the family and child feel that they belong?

The quality of the connection between family and school can establish or destroy the sense of belonging that a child needs to launch into optimal learning.

While it is true that a sense of belonging grows over time, there are clues to look for at the outset that can indicate whether a welcoming community is a school priority. Belongingness relies on formal and informal connections between the two social spheres. It's a matter of intention and practice. Parents can check.

A first question might be whether caregivers are invited into the school on a daily basis; are parents and other caregivers serving at lunch programs, going on school trips, or setting up book fairs? A second look might inquire if caregivers are engaged in the school curriculum at both the student and adult level; are there opportunities for parents to go into the classroom and understand the methods and philosophy guiding the education that their children are learning; does the school expand on its philosophy and curriculum for the school community through daytime or evening adult education? A third indicator might be the availability of social activities that connect and mix teachers, school families, and the larger community; do parents host welcoming activities for new families, organize teacher appreciation initiatives, stage social action for the whole school community—students and staff and families—to help out together in the wider community?

When school and family collaborate in a variety of ways they are no longer distant poles that meet briefly at parent–teacher interviews; school and family fuse into a complementary and

mutually supportive arrangement that exists to optimize the child's potential. The more that caregivers feel integrated into the school experience, the more deeply they sense shared responsibility in the child's learning and development. In turn this sense of shared responsibility has a tremendous impact on the interrelationship between parents and teachers and therefore on the children. This is the point of departure that Urie Bronfenbrenner opened for many school communities.

We now see that developing a strong school community is significant to securing the child's attachment to his/her school. But a strong school within the sensitivities that Bronfenbrenner lays out is not a walk in the park. It demands that a school maintains a double focus: on nurturing caregivers' sense of belonging through shared values and collaboration, and on fostering teachers' enthusiastic engagement in the school community beyond the delivery of classroom curriculum. For our children to thrive, not only academically and intellectually, but socially and emotionally as well, our teachers and caregivers must enjoy open communication, mutual respect and understanding, and they must work together. It's a complex and inspiring sight to behold when it works well.

The freedom that comes with a sense of belonging empowers children to be curious, inquisitive, and to dynamically process information at higher levels. We also know that a strong sense of community enhances students' ethical, social, and emotional competencies,³ making them more likely to act ethically and altruistically.⁴ When children feel this sense of belonging they are not only learning a narrative; they are co-creating their world. This becomes the maximized potential that their families envision.

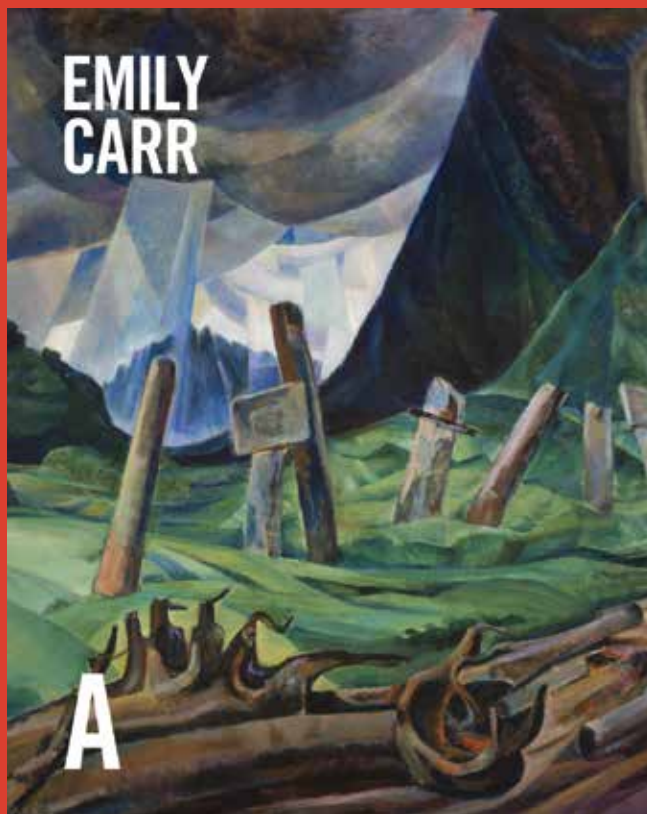
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To not know the stories behind Canada's art is to miss out on what it means to be Canadian.

Art History: A Canadian Conversation

BY SARA ANGEL



Cultural expression is a human need, one so basic that in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly enshrined it in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, as Simon Brault, Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts, argues in *No Culture, No Future* (2010), it is something that—shockingly—only 30% of Canadians are actively “interested in or reached by.”

To not know the stories behind Canada's art is to miss out on what it means to be Canadian. The Art Canada Institute (ACI) is working to prevent this. It was established in 2013 to promote research into and education about this country's art history.

Like playwrights, poets, scholars, and sages, visual artists are interpreters of their times. Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* isn't famous just for her smile alone. Her composition is the epitome of Renaissance humanism. Similarly, while Monet's landscapes are renowned for their beauty, their inclusion of railways, factories, and other signs of industrialization—details considered inappropriate to artists of previous generations—marked them as harbingers of modernity and transformed the culture of their time.

Canadian artists are equally important for their revelations of this country's past. Emily Carr's painting *Vanquished* (1930), featuring tipped totem poles straggled along the bank of Skedans Bay, was conceived as a commentary on colonialism's impact on Aboriginal village life. *Fort Edmonton, Hudson's Bay Company; Plains Cree, Assiniboine* (1849–56) by Paul Kane, may look like a pastoral view of a landscape but its depiction of tented hills and explorers documents the country's settlement of the West. Joyce Wieland's *O Canada* (1970), a lithograph in which the artist's lips form the words to our national anthem, responds to the Government of Canada's 1965 replacement of the British-affiliated Red Ensign with the Maple Leaf flag and the official approval two years later of “O Canada” as the country's official song.

Many Canadians do not know these stories about our cultural heritage, nor do we have sufficient access to what is inside our cultural institutions. Thirteen years ago, I embarked upon a project where I experienced this fact first-hand. It transformed my career and led me to launch an initiative that would change how Canadians understand our nation's art.

In 2004, as the director of my own publishing company, Angel Editions, I created and edited a 700-page book called *The Museum Called Canada: 25 Rooms of Wonder*, whose text was authored by Charlotte Gray. I conceived the volume to explore the nation's past through its material culture and to familiarize readers with how art and artifacts are tangible emblems of history—Inuit carvings of European faces that document the first contact between the Norse and the Tunit people, an intricate beadwork coat that Louis Riel is said to have worn in the Battle of Batoche, and coins designed by artist Alex Colville for Canada's Centennial. I reviewed thousands of artifacts at institutions across the country.

One fact became overwhelmingly clear: while new communication technologies are radically transforming how Canadians make art, the cultural institutions charged with sharing and displaying our artists' expressions are not keeping pace. For the most part, the holdings of major museums and art galleries are not digitized and so are restricted to those able to physically travel to where they are housed. Minor collections are largely unknown and unvisited. Visitors who do arrive on the steps of our museums and galleries are often unsure of why they should care about the artifacts beyond the entryway; insufficient information is provided for audiences to connect with what's before them and to understand what is on display.

What this means is that the stories and symbols of Canada's identity and societal values are not reaching its citizens. This is not because our museums and art galleries lack relevance or talented curators. It's that the game has to change and we need to dramatically improve how we communicate and display the nation's visual culture. If we fail to do this, our collecting institutions will simply become mausoleums and not the forums for civic connection that they should be. The title of the 2011 Canadian Museums Association National Conference was “Evolve or Die.”

Although *The Museum Called Canada* sold over 50,000 copies, it was published in the same year that Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook, making for a limited shelf life. It didn't take long before the meteoric rise of social networking and the explosion of the Internet Age signalled the end of the print publishing industry.

I decided to rethink my strategy about making art accessible and began a Ph.D. in art history. In the process, something unexpected happened. As I sat in lecture halls where 20-somethings passed time on social media, I realized that introducing new audiences to art was never going to happen through bricks and mortar museums, or print media. Just like everything from restaurants to real estate, the reality of engaging in art is all about what's happening online.

And yet, when I looked at the websites of Canada's major museums, galleries, and cultural organizations, I could not find a resource—public or private—that offered a comprehensive account of the country's art history. Why? I asked museum directors. Their answer: Institutions' online emphasis was dedicated to marketing new exhibitions rather than offering accounts of how and why their collections came into existence.

The Art Canada Institute was launched to fill this void; we would give Canadians ownership of their art history. I created a digitally based study centre to make our cultural past a contemporary conversation. The organization's inaugural program, the Canadian Online Art Book Project, is now a steadily growing library of original ebooks on the nation's art and its history.

The Art Canada Institute is about getting people to look at the nation's art. When it comes to our track record, so far, so good. In

less than two years, we have gained an international audience of over one hundred thousand. The ACI has released 12 originally written ebooks available free of charge in English and French, in three formats: desktop, mobile, and PDF. Each has six main sections: Biography, Key Works, Significance & Critical Issues, Style & Technique, Sources & Resources, and Where to See.

The Art Canada Institute was launched to give Canadians ownership of their art history.

Only 15 years ago the mantra of museum directors was “Put up great works and the people will come!” They believed that visitors would arrive at their institutions and there discover our nation's artistic heritage. This wisdom has crumbled. People from around the world have found the ACI and Canadian art through using a variety of search engine terms. For example, “Women + experimental art + sixties” gets them to our book on Joyce Wieland; “Quiet Revolution + Quebec + art” finds our title on Paul-Émile Borduas.

For centuries Canadian artists and thinkers have interpreted the most critical issues of the day—ethnographic, economic, social, and political—through making art. But customs and practices evolve and we have to reconfigure how to connect contemporary audiences with their heritage so that they can learn their own story. If we fail to innovate, not only will our artists' works go underappreciated and under-recognized but also our connection to our citizenship will remain under-realized.

For our sake, and the sake of future generations, we must harness contemporary media to make our Canadian visual culture relevant, engaging, and accessible to the broadest audience possible. Realistically this means taking art into the 21st century to speak to people about it as people speak today. Seeing a digital version of art is the first step to appreciating the real thing, to learning the language of art. Once we embrace this idea, we can walk a collective cultural road, a road that is a fundamental right we share.

Sara Angel is the Founder and Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute based at Massey College at the University of Toronto. She is a recipient of a Trudeau Doctoral Scholarship given “for innovative ideas that will help solve issues of critical importance to Canadians.”

The Art Canada Institute's work has been described as “nothing less than a comprehensive, multi-tiered resource” (*Canadian Art*), content that is “redefining the conversation about Canadian art history in a 21st-century way, using 21st-century media” (*Maclean's*), and “breathing digital life into Canadian art” (*Globe and Mail*).

I have learned a lot about integration, however, what I saw as I toured The Toronto Heschel School was what I envisioned the theory should look like in practice.

An Integrated Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

BY RABBI BENJI LEVY

“If I would have asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.” These words are attributed to Henry Ford, whose critical ability to think beyond the here and now would lead him to develop and manufacture the first affordable automobile for middle-class Americans. This same ability is crucial in Jewish education—now more than ever, educators need to lead our children outside of the box, so that they can learn to think there, themselves, as the guardians of our Jewish future.

Earlier in the year, travelling from Australia, I had the privilege of observing some of the excellent Jewish education that the Toronto Jewish community has to offer. I learned something from every school I visited; yet the integration throughout the disciplines taught at The Toronto Heschel School really stood out. I have learned a lot about the philosophy of integration and heard many a discussion on the topic, however, what I saw as I toured the classes with the Head of School, Greg Beiles, was what I always envisioned the theory should look like in practice.

Most schools are improving their Judaic studies and their general studies, respectively, with better professional development for teachers, coupled with a more rigorous and engaging curriculum. Yet as these two distinct areas expand, so does the gap between the identities that they each produce. As a result, the student that sits at the centre is left divided.

In an increasingly interconnected world, this bifurcation at school creates competing priorities and a psychological or religious dissonance within the individual. When the university

drive becomes a salient focus towards the end of high school, at best, the student feels torn between the two silos. At worst, his/her Jewish identity may assume secondary importance.

The competition contributes towards lower levels of Jewish literacy and engagement, hence higher levels of ignorance and apathy. The common response is to improve the experiential Jewish education and formal learning, but, in my view, this effort will always be disadvantaged when weighed up against academic prestige, a good university degree, a respected job, and a sizable income. It's the “let's have faster horses” approach.

What if one were to use some of these extrinsic motivators to embolden our students' intrinsic *raison d'être*—their Jewish knowledge, skills, and values that define who they are?

This is where integration comes in. While many students “tend to compartmentalize their Jewish and secular existences into distinct and unconnectable parts,”¹ integrated education counters this without confronting it. At its core, it enhances the learning outcomes of general studies by adding cultural significance, interdisciplinary thinking, religious validation and meaning. At the same time, it broadens the Judaic material and creates synchronicity without encroaching on the precious time of Jewish studies in the timetable. The form and method reflect the message to be imparted: that Jewish life and education is a seamless, integrated whole.

When walking through the hallways of The Toronto Heschel School, I saw beautiful displays of the students' work. One item that caught my eye was entitled “Sydney Australia.” Two



colourful clocks were surrounded by several other clocks with similar dials, reflecting times all around the world. There were also clocks for Anchorage, London, and Tokyo. On closer inspection, I noticed artwork on each of the dials, punctuated by Roman numerals reflecting different *halakhically* significant times that delineate the Jewish day, including the time one may begin to pray *Shacharit* and the time one may recite the *Shema*.

The clocks were part of a math activity—a summative assessment to appreciate multiplication and division relating to time. It was simultaneously an activity in art, geography, and a lesson in rabbinics. In creating their clocks students became engaged in the mechanics and significance of *halakhic* time, all in an innovative and meaningful way.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (3:9) states that “one who walks on the road and studies, and interrupts his studying to say, ‘How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this ploughed field!’—scripture considers it as if he has forfeited his life.” Ostensibly, it reads that he should not have stopped learning to marvel in his surroundings; however, what it really seems to be saying is that when one looks at the natural world as disconnected from Torah, one is doing a disservice to the world and a disservice to Torah.

As Ben Bag Bag states in Pirkei Avot (5:26), “Delve in it [the Torah] and delve in it, for everything is in it....” Just like everything can be found in the Torah, the Torah can be found in everything. Students today need to leave the silos and be exposed to this beauty, so they can live the imperative articulated in Proverbs (3:6), “In all your ways know Him....”

Now more than ever, we need to reframe the way we learn and live. To paraphrase Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the words stay the same, but we need to change the tune. We must focus on re-engaging the students with new mediums anchored in Torah values and an active Jewish life. I believe that integration is one of the key techniques and The Toronto Heschel School is an exemplary institution that is leading the way.

Paradigm shifters often fill a void we never knew existed.

Paradigm shifters often fill a void we never knew existed. Phones were not invented for selfies, instant messaging, or listening to music, yet these have become some of their primary uses. The smart phone expresses the idea that the integrated whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. May we continue to reframe our present to guarantee our future through a different vision of our reason for being—a meaningful and engaging, integrated Jewish education.

¹ Barry W. Holtz, “Towards an Integrated Curriculum for the Jewish School,” retrieved June 15, 2015, from <http://www.lookstein.org/integration/holtz.htm>. Originally published in *Religious Education*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1980).

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