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THiNK

THE
LOLA
STEIN
INSTITUTE
JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children



Imagination
lives here

THE EDUCATED IMAGINATION IS BACK / THE ART OF JEWISH IMAGINATION / ELIE WIESEL'S
LITERARY IMAGINATION / THE INVENTOR'S MINDSET / THE FANTASY OF SOCIAL MEDIA /
AND STORIES FROM MATH CLASS, GYM CLASS, AND GRADE 8 HUMAN RIGHTS



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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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I imagine,
therefore I create.

Before Creation

BY PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

Creativity is now a buzzword. In schools it's becoming a synonym for arts and crafts and other productive activities. Sir Ken Robinson and his colleagues have made tremendous headway in redirecting parents and educators towards learning by inquiry and exploration and away from the industrial model of schooling. It looks like creative thinking is receiving its due. Unfortunately, it's not.

So, before we again routinize education—this time into what we create, how we create, and why we create—THINK wonders what comes before creation.

In a Jewish day school the idea of creativity comes with religious underpinnings: God created the world. This awesome beginning situates creativity atop a hierarchy of value and confirms a pre-eminence for productivity that is hard to elude. But before creativity—before God created the world—God had to envision what was about to happen.

First comes the imagining, then the creation. René Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” We add, “I imagine, therefore I create.”

In 1962 at the University of Toronto, Northrop Frye inaugurated the now-celebrated Massey Lectures with six speeches entitled “The Educated Imagination.”¹ He separates the imaginary from the imaginative. The former relates to fantasy, the latter to inventive thinking, and both are invaluable to students. Frye says, “In the world of the imagination, anything goes that's imaginatively possible, but nothing really happens.” When it does happen, “it moves out of the world of imagination into the world of action.” We want our children to understand both worlds; we want them to dream and then we want them to do.

The lectures (archived as podcasts) are wonderful and whimsical. Professor Frye's message is prescient: “Understanding illusion is self-protection.” In 2016, on our digitized planet with its virtual realities, what keeps us grounded is the ability to distinguish what's real from what's not.

In this issue, THINK contributors wonder about vision and how people come up with new ideas, on ambition, ingenuity, improvisation, and flexibility. These are the skills that will see children first think for themselves when left to their own devices (pun noted); technology can supplement their wits, but not usurp them.

THINK presents teachers who use visualization in gym class to mentor self-management and storytelling to enrich mathematics. Kieran Murphy, an inventor and physician, describes how a mindset can alter medical facts on the ground; and conversely, Joe Kanofsky, a rabbi and literary critic, describes how, through Elie Wiesel's imagination, facts on the ground change our minds. Jasmine Eliav, our contributing clinical psychologist, recommends skills in literary interpretation to manage social media; while, in return, Greg Beiles, Head of School and our Director, recommends the psychology of accepted fiction to explain morality and faith. The imaginative and the imaginary are in constant dialogue.

The popularity of technology, neuroscience, and our expanding understanding of the physical universe places a weight on our shoulders. Sometimes the load destabilizes us and we forget that inspiration, human sensibility and aesthetics are also essential. Someone had to dream up going to the moon. Someone had to envision talking across the sea, first through a Morse code, then a computer code.

Northrop Frye says that some people see a beautiful landscape and others see the painting it might become. Albert Einstein says, “Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.” This issue of THINK sees children and teachers contemplating possibilities, envisioning their potential, and discovering themselves. We can only imagine.

¹ Podcasts for the 1962 CBC Massey Lectures, “The Educated Imagination” by Northrop Frye, available at <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-1962-cbc-massey-lectures-the-educated-imagination-1.2946799>

Northrop Frye's message is prescient: “Understanding illusion is self-protection.”

The Art of Jewish Imagination

BY GREG BEILES

This issue of THINK arrives between the Jewish festivals of Sukkot and Chanukah. Both illuminate the art of Jewish imagination.

During Sukkot, Jewish people around the world observe the mitzvah *leshev basukkah*, to reside in a temporary dwelling. The ritual recalls the ancient Israelite experience: fleeing slavery to wander for 40 years in makeshift huts. The week that we spend in a sukkah stimulates our thoughts to roam from our backyards and balconies to another place and time in our people's journey; it rekindles sensitivity to the experience of vulnerability and transition. Many refugees today live in temporary shelters.

An old folk story tells of a person who built a sukkah and carried in household belongings to use during the festival. There wasn't enough material to enclose the sukkah

completely but this didn't matter because Jewish law permits one wall to be built with *tzurat hapetach*—two posts covered with a beam that can be imagined as a full wall.

The day before Sukkot, the builder found that the family possessions had been stolen from the sukkah. Evidently, the thief entered through the open wall space and snatched the dishes, table cloth, and other items. Incredulous, the builder exclaimed, "How could a thief get into my sukkah? Didn't the ignoramus know that there was a wall there?!"

The laws of Sukkot exemplify three dimensions of imagination that are prominent in Jewish tradition, consciousness, and practice. The first is the kind of thinking that produces compassion by leading us to imagine the experience of others. In the sukkah we sense a familiar fragility and impermanence; we remember that freedom is tenuous and that

insecurity feels uncomfortable; we remember what it means to wander.

We recall a similar idea in the Passover Haggadah, which obligates one to see oneself as if having personally left Egypt. The idea of "seeing oneself" in a place and circumstance other than where we are, especially when this circumstance is one of suffering, is a central act of imagination that produces compassion, solidarity, and a sense of concern for others.

A second kind of imagination central to Judaism is the conception of law. The sukkah builder in our tale was affronted by a lapse in imagination on the part of the thief who crossed a boundary that was invisible yet configured conceptually by Jewish law.

There is nothing tangible or physically real about law; in truth, the notion of "legal fiction" applies to the very idea of law itself. Laws are ideas created in and by our imagination. When accepted, they help society function coherently.

But Jewish law is not merely functional, like a traffic code; it is primarily ethical. In Judaism, Revelation, the gift of law, epitomized by the Ten Commandments, is God's gift to our imagination. Jewish law is not merely a functional law—traffic lights and such—but an ethical law: law that raises us above the less admirable impulses of human nature.

Whereas the laws of physics describe how things "are" (or how they are observed to behave), moral law describes how we imagine the world should be. The moral philosopher Emmanuel Kant refers to moral law as the principle that describes how we "ought" to act. As moral law, Jewish law imagines how we ought to live our lives; it is an act of moral imagination.

Ruminating on Sukkot and Jewish imagination, Rabbi Norman Lamm observes that we live our regular lives by certain illusions—not only in the intellectual disciplines, such as law and science, but in the deepest recesses of our individual and ethnic consciousness. Without the proper illusions, life can become meaningless and a drudgery.

One of the most recognizable "illusions" is the presumption of innocence in common law today. Rabbinic law imagines that "man is basically good...created but little lower than the angels; in other words, that man has a *neshamah*, a soul." Lamm describes *hezkat kashrut* as a "presumption of being decent and honest" without which "there can be no trust, no loyalty, no faith. And, therefore, there can be no transactions, no marriage, and no happiness."

We place our glowing Chanukiah in the window to demonstrate our faith in miracles—faith in the ability to imagine that which seems unlikely, improbable, but nevertheless, worth striving for.

A third dimension of Jewish imagination relates to envisioning the future. One of the most powerful aspects of Jewish imagination is that it must not remain in our heads; we must bring it to life. We are not meant merely to imagine a better, more just world. Explicit laws—such as the *mitzvot* of *tzedakah*, *tikkun olam*, *bikkur cholim*—proscribe that we are meant to live it. We must act righteously, repair the world, and care for the sick.

The most ardent expression of the passion of the Jewish imagination is daily prayer, a personal declaration of the desire for the world to become as we imagine it should be. Each of the *bakashot*—the requests within the central Amidah prayer—calls for something which we imagine and want for ourselves, our community, and the world: healing, peace, justice, unity, integrity.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel identifies the imaginative power of prayer: "Prayer clarifies our hopes and intentions. It helps us discover our true aspirations, the pangs we ignore, the longings we forget... It teaches us what to aspire to... So often we do not know what to cling to. Prayer implants in us the ideals we ought to cherish." When we pray for the coming of the Messiah, we imagine an ultimate time of peace, justice, and unity among peoples, the ultimate horizon of the Jewish imagination.

In Canada, after Sukkot, we re-enter our homes of brick and mortar and find shelter for the coming winter. We value permanence and appreciate our solid houses. Soon enough we will celebrate another festival that situates our imagination at our windowsills. At Chanukah we light candles or oil lamps to recall the miracles that occurred during the time of the Maccabees. In the glow of the flickering flames, we imagine how a small amount of a precious resource—sanctified oil—lasted much longer than expected; we imagine how people preserved their unique identities in the midst of overwhelming pressure to assimilate. We place our glowing Chanukiah in the windows of our homes to demonstrate our faith in miracles: which is to say, our faith in the ability to imagine that which seems unlikely, improbable, but nevertheless, worth striving for. Long life to Jewish imagination! L'chaim! Happy Chanukah!

Greg Beiles is Head of School at The Toronto Heschel School and Director of The Lola Stein Institute.





What kind of people do we hope our children
will be in five years, 10 years, 20 years?

Imagining a Future for Our Kids

BY LISA RICHLER

I recently discovered that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an avid *Star Trek* fan. What was it about the sci-fi television show, set in the Milky Way Galaxy in the 23rd century, that made it the only program that Dr. King and his wife, Coretta, allowed their young children to stay up late to watch? The answer speaks volumes about the power of imagination. From 1966 to 1969 and in the movies that followed, *Star Trek* was groundbreaking in casting an African American woman—Nichelle Nichols who played Lieutenant Uhura—in a starring role as a powerful leader. At a time when African Americans were fighting for their equality—when they weren’t allowed to sit at the front of the bus or use the same water fountain as their neighbours—they could turn on the television and experience an imagined future in which race and gender were no longer barriers to success.

Nichelle Nichols almost quit her role on *Star Trek* after the first season, as other work opportunities presented themselves, but in a chance meeting with Dr. King, the Civil Rights leader convinced Nichols that she had a duty to remain on the show. In an interview on NPR, Nichols recalled that Dr. King told her, “You are marching. You are reflecting what we are fighting for... For the first time, we are being seen the world over as we should be seen.”¹

According to author Margot Lee, who writes about Nichelle Nichols’s encounter with Dr. King in her book *Hidden Figures*,² imagining a future of equality was an important part of the Civil Rights Movement. “Having the clarity of mind to see the world as it is and then to see it as it might be... That’s what *Star Trek* was,” said Lee in an interview with *The New York Times Magazine*. “Without imagination,” she continued, “I don’t think there’s any progress.”³

As the father of the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther

King Jr. had to imagine the world as it should be in order to drive change. As parents, we similarly have to imagine a future for our children in order to make decisions about how to raise them. What kind of people do we hope our children will be in five years, 10 years, 20 years? What kind of world do we hope they will inhabit?

In my work at The Toronto Heschel School, I meet many parents of young children who are in the process of making the important decision of where to send their child to school. For most parents, factors such as location, school hours, and cost understandably play a role in the decision. I encourage parents to also take some time to imagine the kind of person they hope their child will become. I encourage them to think about the kinds of people they imagine would best serve as their children’s role models, as their teachers, and as their friends. I encourage parents to keep in mind that school is where children spend most of their waking hours. School is so much more than a place in which students master academic skills: it is also where they develop their sense of selves and the world.

Some parents who visit Toronto Heschel to determine whether it will be the right fit for their young children are only interested in seeing the early years classrooms. They feel that because junior high is years away, it is less relevant to their decision-making. I believe it is important for parents of young children to visit the older grades, so that they might imagine their child as a young adult. Just as a television show can offer a glimpse of what is possible in the future, so too can a tour of junior high! I encourage parents to observe older students and ask themselves what they hope for their own child. Do they imagine their child as someone who will feel confident in their ability and responsibility to

make ethical choices? Do they imagine someone who will think critically and creatively? Do they imagine someone who will be able to work well with others? Do they imagine someone who will see the world through a Jewish lens? Do they imagine someone who will stand up against injustice? If these are the qualities that parents imagine in their children, then I encourage them to partner with an intentional, vision-driven school like Toronto Heschel.

When The Toronto Heschel School first opened in 1996, its founders referred to it as “The Dream School.” They imagined a school with high academic standards that would honour and cultivate children’s individual strengths and allow them to flourish. They imagined children experiencing learning with a sense of awe and wonder, asking questions, making connections. They imagined children learning to live a Jewish life in an inspiring and supportive way.

They imagined a school where children would learn to pray with their legs and feet, that is, to apply Jewish teachings to action. In order to create something new, Heschel founders imagined a school as it could be. Twenty years later, their dream is a vibrant reality. Heschel graduates are making their mark in the world as successful and compassionate people. Without imagination, there is no progress.

¹ “*Star Trek’s Uhura Reflects On MLK Encounter*”. Interview by Michel Martin. *Tell Me More* on National Public Radio. January 17, 2011.

² Lee, Margot. *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. New York: HarperCollins. 2016.

³ “Margot Lee Shetterly Wants to Tell More Black Stories”. Interview by Ana Marie Cox. *The New York Times Magazine*. September 18, 2016.

Lisa Richler is the parent of three Toronto Heschel School students. Formerly a teacher and writer, she is now the school’s Director of Admissions.

Good Books by Gail Baker

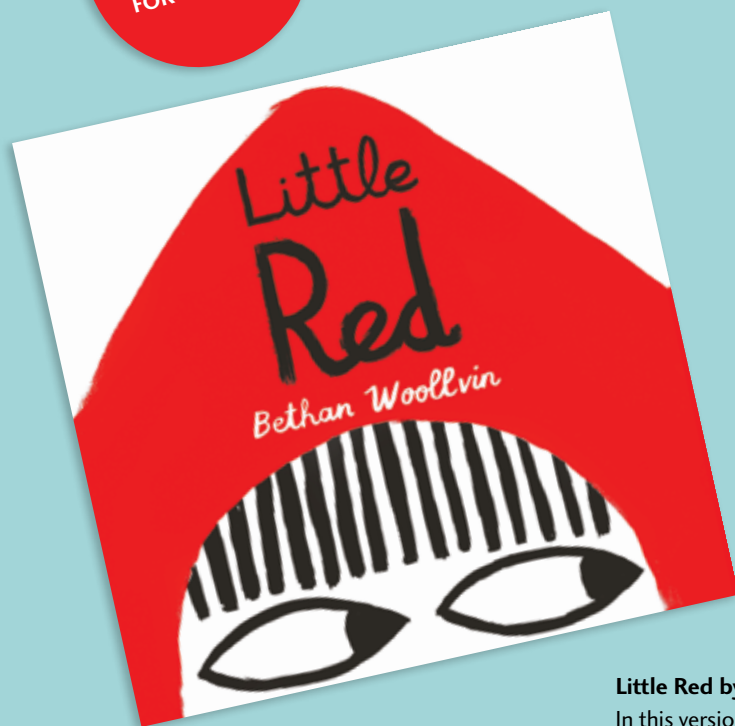
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

BY GAIL BAKER

As a teacher, mother, and grandmother, it is extremely important to me that my children and students engage in imaginative play. In fact, it's good for all of us.

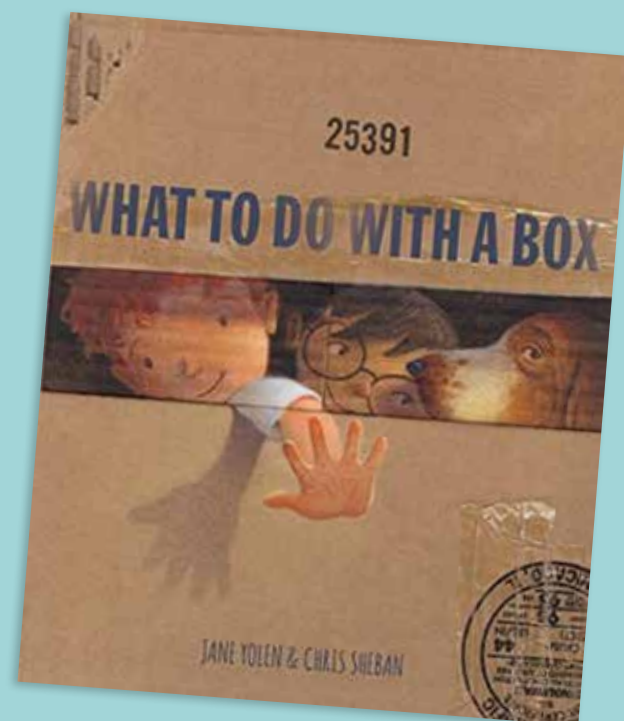
Gail Baker has spent her career teaching and reaching children in Toronto. In 1996 she co-founded The Toronto Heschel School and retired as Head of School in 2004.

2
GOOD BOOKS
FOR CHILDREN



Little Red by Bethan Woollvin (Pan Macmillan, 2016)

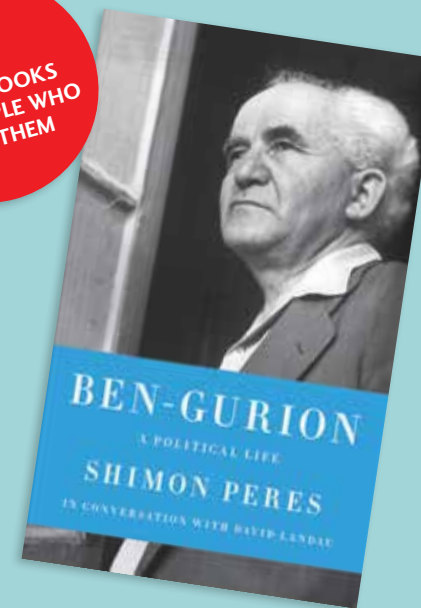
In this version of the classic tale, Little Red Riding Hood understands exactly what the wolf wants and outwits him by imagining a different scenario. I have often used this strategy to help children cope with anxiety—whether it's fear to join a game at recess or to move on to high school. Children do well to imagine themselves in a certain situation and try it out in their heads.



What To Do With A Box by Jane Yolen & Chris Sheban (Creative Editions, 2016)

Imaginations soar when children wonder about all they can do with a box. Yolen offers lots of good examples with simple wistful illustrations as she skilfully leads young readers to discover their own ideas. It's concrete encouragement for great free play.

2
GOOD BOOKS
FOR PEOPLE WHO
LOVE THEM



Ben-Gurion: A Political Life by Shimon Peres (Shocken, 2011)

Peres was a protégé of David Ben-Gurion and writes a fascinating account of Israel's first prime minister and Zionist icon. Peres presents Ben-Gurion as a complex original thinker who blended ingenuity with pragmatism. Ben-Gurion imagined a country where Jews could be farmers and scientists; he was secular but respectful of the religious, he envisioned peace with Arab neighbours, yet kept alert to "facts on the ground." Peres delves into Ben-Gurion's visionary leadership in pursuit of a new kind of country.



Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art by Stephen Nachmanovitch (TarcherPerigee, 1991)

This is an older publication but a great one. It is an exciting book for those who wish to release creative energy and experience the power of flow. Nachmanovitch writes about spontaneous creation and the boundless possibilities that arise when we set our imaginations free. We all possess creative strength, and it's worthwhile to read how we often block imagination and ingenuity.



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The Well-Framed Open Space

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Jewish tradition tells us that the Torah was given to Moses along with an oral tradition, both of which have been handed down from generation to generation. For centuries Jewish scholars cherished keeping the tradition oral in order to preserve creative discourse as the laws were taught from teacher to student. However, after the Bar Kokhba revolt, 132–135 CE, when many of the rabbis and scholars were killed, Rabbi Judah HaNasi, in 200 CE, feared the oral law would be forgotten if it were not recorded. He and other scholars assembled what is known as the Mishnah, a collection of oral teachings codified and organized into topics, thus forever changing the nature of Jewish law.

The same thing has happened at The Toronto Heschel School, where, over the past 20 years, dynamic debate surged back and forth as original curriculum was developed, implemented, and then developed some more. The question of codifying the school's curriculum was frequently examined; the fear of stifling teachers' creativity and limiting future adaptation was at the forefront of the conversation. The decision that was finally made respected our educators' appreciation for a well-described course of study, with predictable skill progressions from grade to grade, and consistency year to year. Therefore, two years ago, the Learning Centre rekindled a project that has been known internally at Heschel as "Project Mishnah," whose goal is to document The Toronto Heschel School curriculum and best practices across all grades.

Researching the project, I remembered a metaphor for curriculum that a former Brandeis colleague, Joshua Yarden, described as "well-framed open spaces." Evoking a picture frame surrounding a work of art on canvas, the analogy contemplates definitive goals set around opportunities for initiative and inventiveness. At Heschel the metaphorical frame is thick and elaborate; it holds the possibilities for learning.

Three pre-set core elements comprise the design of the Toronto Heschel curricular framework. First, the school adheres to the curriculum expectations set by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Second, the calendar flow of Torah and Jewish holidays carries the design of Jewish learning over the year. Third, the writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel inform school commitment to pluralism, social justice, environmental stewardship, and wonder. Through the coordination of thematic ideas—called "Generative Topics"—that function as the "matting" inside the frame, the three core elements hold the curriculum of interdisciplinary study that is the school's specialty. The matting enables the school to coordinate and integrate discrete lessons within a wider spectrum of ideas. The canvas stands open for the artistry of each teacher as a "well-framed open space."

Talking to different staff members of the Learning Centre, I discovered two different approaches to how teachers might work within the curricular frame. Rachely Tal, a senior educator and early years mentor, describes the Generative Topic as a jumping off point for her own ingenuity. She unites the lessons by incorporating the notions and language of the Generative Topic in an original theme song for each unit.

By way of example, *Rav Hanistar Al Hagalui* (There is as much in the hidden as there is in the revealed) is a Generative Topic in Grade 1. In the weeks before Purim, a holiday that involves hiding identity and the playful tradition of dressing in costume, the children reflect on ways to distinguish between how people may look and how they may feel inside. In language arts, they read the Purim story from the Megillah and identify the characters' emotions through their actions. In Hebrew class, they learn vocabulary for different feelings and behaviours. They consider how God is both hidden and revealed in our lives. In social and environmental studies class, they learn the different phases of the moon, which conceal some parts some times and other parts other times.

A master of her method, Rachely's happy and excited pace told me that her ideas and energy could go on and on. When I said so, she smiled and explained that the Generative Topic also contains her. It makes her craft her lesson carefully and choose what and how to teach these particular children given the finite time set for each unit.

Lesley Cohen is a Learning Center expert for junior high. "Striving for Control and Self-Critique" is the Generative Topic surrounding her Grade 6 ancient civilizations course. While it may exclude things sometimes included in Grade 6 history, such as trade routes or local chronologies, Lesley finds that focus on the ancient world through the lens of the Generative Topic leads the class along a solid thread of historical inquiry. The thesis for the unit argues that to thrive, society must balance ambition with respect for limitations: innovation, technology, aesthetics do well with humility, respect, and common sense. The history lesson is that some civilizations protected this equilibrium from hubris and vulnerability and some didn't. Lesley's students examine Minoan artifacts and observe the tension between zealous striving and self-critique in two different stories: Theseus and the Minotaur seek perfection, while the tale of Icarus and Daedalus warns of extreme ambition.

Lesley's work highlights the value that Project Mishnah holds for replication. Another teacher will be able to teach ancient civilizations using her documented framework, even though each may use it in an individual way. To bring home the lesson that stories reveal ethics and values, for

The question of codifying the school's curriculum was frequently examined; the fear of stifling teachers' creativity and limiting future adaptation was at the forefront of the conversation.

example, Lesley brought in two younger children's books for her junior high students to consider: the fairy tale, *Snow White*, and *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch. She asked the class to reflect on how the contrasting ethics and behaviours illustrate dilemmas and options in our own civilization. The messy boisterous Paper Bag Princess achieved personal satisfaction one way, while Snow White's was quite different.

Working on Project Mishnah, Learning Centre teachers also have a rare professional opportunity to examine their own techniques in depth. I see that Rachely Tal appreciates how the structure of a Generative Topic refines her expertise in engaging six-year-olds, and, conversely, that Lesley Cohen's contagious passion for history is spirited by the curiosity and whimsy of 12-year-olds.

On an even bigger scale, I see that teachers delivering curriculum to students as "well-framed open spaces" mirrors at school what I as a parent desire for my family at home. Children thrive with the kind of structure that thoughtfully guides their way; yet they need enough free space to investigate and make sense of things for themselves. We parents know this challenge well.

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

Imagination



Our three teachers knew that the logic of math served many masters.

Once Upon a Time There Lived an Equation

STORIES HELP MATH AND MATH HELPS STORIES

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Once upon a time, three teachers worked in a brown brick schoolhouse near a large green field. The three spoke the same language, lived together in a culture of inquiry, and taught mathematics. They told their young folk stories that connected numbers to logic and analysis. The educators wanted to do this because sometimes numbers seemed disconnected and abstract.

"Math isn't only about numbers, it's about life," said Danya Mintz, the Grade 3 teacher. During a semester-long theme, entitled "First Canadians, New Canadians: Cooperation and Conflict," Danya's students explored the mathematical patterns on artefacts made by First Canadians; the beaded sheaf of a hunting knife offered intricate markings and a sense of mystery as students wondered why early First Canadians created the elaborate object. They noticed small irregularities in the beading and appreciated how human errors appeared more regularly when objects were more handmade than now.

To reinforce their appreciation of mathematics in design, Danya's students made jewelry and narrated stories through pattern. For example, A was a blue bead representing water, BBB were green beads for a forest, and C was a beaver making her home there. The students discovered that a simple pattern, AB, was boring—visually and as a narrative—and they diversified the designs and complicated the math for more interest. Danya could eventually evaluate their learning through the sophistication of the plotlines they crafted.

"The students use their imaginations to visualize concepts," explained Marissa Unruh, the Grade 5 teacher. She would conjure up wide-ranging scenarios to teach multiplication and division. Considering equivalent fractions for halves, quarters, and eighths, Marissa described two friends happily dividing half a delicious cake equally; it was so easy to see that each could enjoy a quarter (half of the half). But then she asked what would happen if six new guests suddenly

arrived. How would they subdivide half a cake to serve eight people fairly? The students looked around to see where else complex fractions popped up in daily life.

You see, our teachers had a strategy. They knew that if students got used to setting up math scenarios in elementary school, the mindset would serve them well in junior high. When they encountered complex problems, they would know to find meaning first, and then assess for a grounded best estimate. The teachers saw that, once accustomed to thinking logically and analytically, the kids wouldn't even realize they were doing it.

In Grade 6, the link between math and other topics rose to a new level. Studying ancient civilizations, students encountered the numerical systems that were used by other cultures in other times. The ancient Mayans did not count in tens and they shaped their digits like stones, sticks, and eyes. Wondering why different numbering systems evolved as they did, students reflected that perhaps counting in 10s related to having 10 fingers and 10 toes. But Daphne reminded them that she believed that Mayans also had 10 fingers and 10 toes. The students had to look for another impetus.

Contemplating different possibilities and histories, the Grade 6 students began to feel an affinity for the mathematics of long ago; this fostered a more personal connection both to numeracy and ancient civilizations. Daphne was pleased to see this and explained how, in teaching, "a sense of intimacy and a feeling of relevance are especially advantageous as both are enduring substructures of understanding."

In the end, we see that our math story has three teachers and two plotlines. One tells of the wide application of numerical thinking to different topics in daily life: to history, culture, commerce, cooking, sharing—endless links to forge. The second explores channels of learning.

Mathematical intelligence lies deep within the brain; a



cognitive capacity as much about order and logic as it is about numbers. A great teacher knows how to reach it, stimulate it, and enhance it.

Our three teachers knew that the logic of math served many masters. For some students, dramatic narratives brought numbers and estimations imaginatively to life. For other students, who took naturally to abstraction, creative math scenarios served as models of order and detail, inspiring them,

in language arts class, to conjure more complex compositions than they might otherwise allow themselves to consider.

And so, inside the brown brick schoolhouse by the large green field, our three math masters concentrated intently on the teaching of math. They told stories, and deepened learning. They instilled habits that would serve the children well. They knew that the complexity of the puzzles their students would face, would only grow with them.

Beyond Imagination

BREAKING BREAD AND BUILDING BRIDGES

BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI

It's almost a guarantee that at some point during children's Jewish school years they will bake challah for Shabbat. How many, though, will make that bread with students from a nearby Islamic school? Likely not many, yet that's exactly what the Grade 8 students at The Toronto Heschel School did last spring.

Eleven Toronto Heschel students joined 30 students from Thornhill's As-Sadiq Islamic School to knead, braid, and bake bread together, creating one of the more memorable moments in many of these students' school experiences. "Everyone got their hands dirty together and talked," says Dana Cohen, a Grade 8 teacher at Toronto Heschel. "It was amazing to see the walls come down and the smiles on their faces."

But this wasn't a home economics class. The activity was part of a larger study unit on cultural diversity—a core Grade 8 theme at Toronto Heschel. The students came together to learn about one another; they found out that 13- and 14-year-old Jews and Muslims have a lot in common.

Discussing Diversity

At Toronto Heschel, Grade 8 is more than geometry and Shakespeare. Students tackle heady themes: independence, empathy, and the importance of the individual. They explore human rights, learn about First Nation Canadians, and study other religions and cultures.

While all these topics can relate to diversity, diversity itself is a specific focus for part of the Grade 8 year at Heschel. Understanding people who seem different is an important element to becoming an engaged global citizen, which is what The Toronto Heschel School wants its students to ultimately become. The teachers wanted to go past imagining others and host an honest encounter instead. Exploring diversity helps students understand that openness is better than fear.

"We teach our students that when a society is open, people learn from each other and good things can happen," says Cohen. "If people fear one another, they end up

destroying things. I love teaching the Golden Age of Spain when Spanish society was open to many cultures and peoples. Spain embraced diversity and blossomed."

The Grade 8 diversity curriculum isn't new. For the last few years, Cohen's students have visited public schools and tried to learn from a wide mix of their peers. The engagement generated a melting-pot feeling more than a clear grasp of diversity; it was not the cross-cultural learning that the Heschel unit required. So, last year, Cohen and her colleagues reconsidered what mix would drive the diversity message home. For a Jewish day school, having the students meet up with Muslim students was an obvious choice.

Staff did not want the Jewish-Muslim get-together to simply parade different cultures and religions; they thought students would find it meaningful to meet peers in a school similar to their own. Cohen explains, "We chose As-Sadiq because, like our school, it's a monotheistic, parochial, visibly religious school, not funded by the government." Fortunately, the As-Sadiq Imam also thought it was a great idea, and commonalities jump started the engagement.

Cohen tells how the students were surprised by the parallels. Both schools aim for pluralism. Toronto Heschel has Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox *minyanim* (prayer groups); As-Sadiq is a Sunni school with Shia students.

The Meet Up

The two schools met twice, once at each school. Day one took place at Heschel and began with a workshop in diversity training led by staff of Harmony Movement. Harmony staff talked about what diversity, stereotype, race, nation, and religion mean and how they relate to culture. "Kids can confuse race with religion, and religion with ethnicity," says Cohen, "and the workshop helped them learn the right terms. Of course the day began with a sense of division, then someone from As-Sadiq spoke up, and like dominoes, all the kids began to talk."

Heschel students invited their guests to join them for a lunch of Israeli food—falafel, mostly—and it was the first time that the students realized the two cultures were not as different as they had thought. "Half of them were laughing because we all eat Middle Eastern food," says Cohen. "Falafel wasn't news to anyone."

Both student groups were familiar with the idea that practice and tradition foster a holy state. Students from both schools follow rules around prayer and around food: kashrut and halal. As-Sadiq students wash their hands in ritual before prayer, and the Heschel group began the shared meal with *netilat yadayim* (washing hands with a blessing). Cohen explains, "When we wash our hands and say a blessing, it's not just about cleanliness; it's a ritual from the time of the Temple to make us slow down and take pause. We bless bread and remember that our food comes from the earth."

Another "we-can-relate" moment happened during the As-Sadiq's students' afternoon prayers. Everyone went to the music room and, while the Muslim students prayed, the Jewish students watched and thought about their morning prayers (*tefillah*) in the gym. "We saw that when the Muslim students placed a piece of paper on the floor to lay their foreheads on in prayer, they were making the same connection to earth as we do—dust to dust," says Cohen. "It was revealing on several levels. Not only did they watch and listen and understand another religion's call to prayer and connection to the earth, but students saw they were on the same playing field. Some Muslim students were really into their prayers and others, who were less so, were whispering in the background. Our kids saw themselves in the Muslim students."

The entire day was filled with these kinds of revelations. Seeing girls their age wearing a hijab was eye-opening for the Heschel students. They discovered that, just as some Jewish-Canadian kids at day schools don't cover their heads all day long, many Muslim-Canadian students don't wear the hijab at home. "It surprised our girls," Cohen says. "The hijab is part of the school dress code, just like the head covering at Heschel. We work hard to teach our kids to ask critical questions, so when they question the dress code, we say it's a good thing."

When it came time to bake challah, the two groups were well on their way to a new mutual understanding. While the Muslim students did learn about the Jewish Sabbath and why Jewish people eat challah on Friday nights, for most of the time, the teens talked, laughed, and got to know one another better. "When the dough is in your hands and you are all sitting there braiding, fences come down," Cohen says. "Working the dough, they bonded." The As-Sadiq students took challah home to share with their families.

Two months later, The Toronto Heschel students went to As-Sadiq for day two and observed a math class. The game plan was to collect and analyze data and give students another chance to learn about one another as individuals. The questions flew back and forth—what kind of music do you like? How do you celebrate holidays? The kids plotted the data on a graph and discussed their results.

When it was all over, the students had indeed learned something about diversity. "They learned, on the one hand, that people aren't nearly as different as we might have thought; and, on the other hand, they learned that there is a diversity of individuals in every group of people," says Cohen. She hopes her students grasped that acceptance and openness really do make the world a better place. "We don't open ourselves up nearly enough," she says. "Yet great things happen when people are inspired by one another."

Bryan Borzykowski has written for many publications, including *The New York Times* and CNBC. He is a Toronto Heschel School parent.



When the dough is in your hands and you are all sitting there braiding, fences come down.... Working the dough, they bonded.

Life Coach

VISUALIZATION
IN SPORT

BY PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

When I make wishes for children, beyond wishing them the experience of world peace, I wish that they will find self-motivation. I wish that their dreams will be fulfilled by their own boundless enthusiasm and that they will have the capacity to take themselves wherever they want to go. The wisdom is, “Don’t prepare the road for the child. Prepare the child for the road.”

From a young age, if we let them, children can learn to galvanize their aspirations through the obstacle course of implementation and into the winner’s circle of desired results. Self-motivation implies knowing what you want to do and how to get it going. It can begin with the physical and move to the intellectual—an operating system for purposeful living.

In David Rouimy’s gym class at The Toronto Heschel School, very small children learn the rudiments of self-regulation. Girls and boys, aged five, stand in the centre of hula hoops with eyes closed and follow David’s instructions. Comfortable that no one is watching (but David) and feeling safe in their protected circles, the children pretend they are animals—leopards, monkeys, lemurs. Leaping, balancing, pouncing, they enact the imagined animals in full-out performance, each in his or her unique natural way, and unconstrained by self-consciousness or competitiveness.

They are using their imaginations to frame an intention and improvise its realization. David says the very young take well to visualization, and he sharpens their capacity early. These are lessons #1 and #2 in self-motivation: naming a target and enjoying the bull’s-eye. “Today I am a leopard lunging and I like it.”

Lesson #3 introduces interference. Roads do come with bumps, and travellers have varying talents and baggage. Just as Olympic coaches zero in on the mental game, David introduces the self-directed mindset to his students at a very young age. For example, if a child is too excited to stand still and talk, David might ask him or her to jump and jump until the energy dissipates and the child can speak calmly. The excitement that was interfering with the participation disappears, along with any feelings of frustration or humiliation, which usually a child dislikes and regrets. David reinforces his students’ appreciation of the achievement; he is introducing self-aware self-regulation when it is manageable and

when its benefits are simple and clear. It’s a life skill named and explained.

With students aged nine and 10, David also cleans up “head space” to improve athletic performance. A child’s attentiveness can be consumed by wanting to please, hating to make mistakes, and fearing embarrassment. The emotions can interfere with physical performance.

David’s students practise closing their eyes when they feel stressed and visualizing their “comfort zones.” If a child plays tennis, David may recommend, “Just pretend you are on the tennis court shuffling side to side. Then open your eyes, see that you are playing basketball, and guard your man.” If a child is panicky, David suggests, “Take a breath. Imagine that you are doing it well and how it feels.” Or when pitching softball, “Close your eyes, visualize, get yourself into the zone. Focus. You understand your task, you understand what you are capable of and what you are doing. No fear. Find your centre of gravity. Remember...you believe in yourself.”

One mother remembers how her daughter was very reluctant to run onto the soccer field, how she clung to the bench and did so no matter the sport. After a few years with David, this student became an assertive competitive basketball player and general sports enthusiast. Now she centres herself and plays.

Sport psychology is not news for high school or professional players. “Mental fitness refers to an athlete’s ability to optimally regulate thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and act in a purposeful and consistent manner while coping with the many demands placed on him or her.”¹ But David’s athletes are elementary school children and their physical education is taught in languages other than English.

From Grades 2 to 5, David Roumy teaches gym in Hebrew. From Grades 6 to 8, he teaches in French. He intentionally brings complicating mental challenges into the mix of physical skills in his classes. It’s a kind of interference that he calls desirable: it adds value as it adds layers to the learning.

When David’s students dribble soccer balls down the gym floor, practising accuracy and speed, their focus on the ball heightens as David calls out Hebrew instructions that make immediate sense in the context. This concentration doubles the learning; vocabulary is internalized and athletic skills polished. Children who are shy to speak French in language

class, shout out French instructions to one another during a game. While it seems counterintuitive, David finds that the kinesthetic and linguistic instincts thrive together. Just as infants absorb language through repetitive and identified usage, and their cognition is developed through crawling (which we now know is developmentally important for cognitive functions), David’s young students absorb second languages as they practise physical skills, and vice versa.

In junior high, David assigns a major gymnastics project. Each Grade 6 student must create, choreograph, document, and perform a floor routine of 12 or more gymnastic elements. Students memorize the routine and hand in notations that might include 1 handstand, 3 steps, a somersault, tuck jump turning into a cat jump, and so on. On performance day, if the student cannot remember the routine, David has a detailed support system for success; he asks the student to map out the routine as a numbered geometric diagram, then close his or her eyes and visualize the diagram according to steps number 1 – 2 – 3, right through to the end. Next he or she must review it quietly, repeating the sequence and envisaging the performance. Finally, the student opens his or her eyes and performs. David says it never fails. There is success all round.

David guides his students from little children who have yet to learn focus to junior high gymnasts. Seeing for themselves how self-regulation connects to achievement, the children acclimatize to acting skilfully with purpose. They recognize and remove bad interference, such as anxiety or frustration, and strategize to resolve complications. Whether they are balancing or bounding, competing in sports or conversing in a second language, the children learn to stay on course and pursue their intentions.

This is the infrastructure of self-motivation. One challenge might be to manipulate a soccer ball through a cluster of opponents, another to read a long cumbersome paragraph. To manage what ever they are up against and to reach whatever they dream of doing, children must know how to self-regulate and engage body and mind on the road of life. It’s great to see it begin in gym class.

1. Karen MacNeil et al., “Mental Fitness for Long-Term Athletic Development” (Ottawa: Canadian Sport Institute, 2014), 4; http://canadiansportforlife.ca/sites/default/files/resources/Mental%20Fitness_Feb2_2014_ENG_web.pdf

**Trophies should go to the winners. Self-esteem does not lead to success in life.
Self-discipline and self-control do, and sports can help teach those.
Roy Baumeister, author of *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength***

Our
Sages
Tell
Us





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“We do not leave the shore of the known in search of adventure or suspense or because of the failure of reason to answer our questions. We sail because our mind is like a fantastic seashell, and when applying our ear to its lips we hear a perpetual murmur from the waves beyond the shore.”

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Through a dynamic combination of world-class scholars, original text and forum discussion, the Shalom Hartman Senior Educators Forum at The Lola Stein Institute again probes Jewish tradition. During eight lunch hours, visiting faculty from the Shalom Hartman Institute join Toronto Jewish educators, including heads of day and congregational schools, directors of Jewish studies departments and other senior educators, in study, conversation, and inspiration.

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THE PRIZE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE 2016

THINK and The Toronto Heschel School Announce Winners of
The World's First-Ever Prize for Teaching Social Justice through Heritage

“The opposite of good is not evil, the opposite of good is indifference.”
A.J. Heschel

1st PLACE

Erin Buchmann, “Indigenous Awareness”
Kirkland Lake District Composite School
Kirkland Lake, ON, Canada

2nd PLACE

Todd Clauer, “Upper School Social Justice Project”
Hyman Brand Academy
Overland Park, KS, USA

THINK and The Toronto Heschel School launched the PRIZE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE to celebrate teachers who use their students' identity and cultural values to integrate social justice learning into the daily school experience. The call was issued last November across the Web, on blogs, teacher postings, and in the pages of THINK. Wonderful entries arrived from across Canada, the US, and Israel, sharing inspirational stories of teachers and students working for positive change in the world.

The Toronto Heschel School has been teaching social justice for over 20 years, rooted in the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma for civil rights. THINK and The Toronto Heschel School thank teachers and schools near and far for sharing their wisdom and inspiration.

www.thinkcontest.ca

THINK issue #20 / Winter 2017 will present the Winning Social Justice Projects and selected submissions



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

The Inventor's Mindset

BY KIERAN P.J. MURPHY

I am a new Canadian and I love this country. I am Irish and come here by way of America. My hope is to repay this nation for its kindness and its welcome to our family by helping it become more inventive. As a father, a culture of exploration and inventiveness is dear to my heart. As a scientist and physician, it is essential.

We moved here in 2008, after 20 years in the United States, 10 of which I spent at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. With over 4,000 shootings and 500 murders a year, in a population of 600,000, Baltimore is one of the most violent cities in the world. After a decade of treating gunshot wounds and seeing disturbing things, I needed a change and came with my family to Toronto.

Despite existing in a violent environment, Johns Hopkins is one of the most inventive and driven academic health science centres in the world. Even though it pays the lowest salaries in America and even Canada—35–40% of those paid at the University Health Network in Toronto—the staff choose to be there based on a desire to make a difference. I asked myself time and again, “Why is this? What drives this desire to invent—not just do your job, but change how the job is done?”

Johns Hopkins maintains its inventive creativity by relentlessly recruiting people from around the world who have an internal, irrepressible drive to excel. Now in Toronto, I wonder, “Can that inventive culture be replicated here without the violence?” Does inventiveness really need endless medical urgency? Is wellness not compelling? Does inventiveness generate from a place or from the people, or is it a combination?

We might compare Canada to places that have had a disproportionate creative impact on humanity. Eric Weiner does this in his excellent book *The Geography of Genius*. He identifies Athens, Hangzhou, Florence, Edinburgh, Calcutta, Vienna, and Silicon Valley as locations where moments of incandescent creativity have occurred. There are common themes: high population density, competition, the clustering of like minds, cross pollination from adjacent fields, limited job security, acceptance that failure is possible and not shameful, recruitment of talent from outside. These

locations became magnets for the brightest and the best. All of these ingredients for great inventive creativity exist in Canada, yet we underachieve in patent filings and inventorship. Why is this?

Russel W. Rogers and Andrew H. Van de Ven were pioneers in developing an understanding of innovation diffusion and the spread of change. They suggest that innovators possess characteristics of risk tolerance, a fascination with novelty, a venturesomeness, and a willingness to step outside of their metaphorical village to learn. This group is not large; Rogers and Van de Ven postulate that when individuals are placed on a normal bell curve, the innovators represent the first 2.5% of individuals. Rogers also noted that, typically, innovators are members of networks that expand beyond geographic boundaries and that they invest heavily in these connections.

I am thinking we should look straight at the personality of the inventor. The stereotypical inventor physicians in the United States seem to have three categorizable traits: they immigrated there, are found at one of the key 20 medical centres, and share one key personality trait—each is fundamentally divergent.

Immigrants represent 13% of the American population but hold 33% of the patents and receive 25% of the Nobel Prizes. We have to wonder why immigration has such an impact on inventiveness: Is it the immigrant's risk tolerance? Is risk tolerance cultivated by personal exposure to threat or change? Are outliers born or made? Are their imaginations set free by leaving past patterns? Margaret Meade has said that one can't see or evaluate one's own culture but only that of another; does this lead inventors to see in new ways when they are far from past habits and conventions?

Many risk-tolerant immigrants who are responsible for the inventions and creativity that support modern medicine qualify as “divergent” individuals. Divergent individuals think in a spontaneous, free-flowing, lateral-thinking, and “non-linear” manner. They problem solve by generating many ideas in an emergent cognitive fashion. Many possible solutions are explored in a short amount of time, and unexpected connections are drawn.

This skill is common to all the great inventors that I have met and known. The ability to allow the brain to problem solve without constraint allows inventors to randomly search through their prior experience to find unexpected associations and solutions. When confronted by a complex medical problem, their natural skill is to unleash their talent and find a solution by pilfering widely from all fields of medical experience to find the needed solution. Techniques or tools from adjacent medical specialties are assessed, embraced, or abandoned in the problem-solving process.

The skill is not common. Most people follow well-mapped paths in problem solving, retreating to what they know rather than exploring things they don't know or partially know. The result is similar to musical variations on a theme like those written by Niccolò Paganini, rather than creation of a new and original composition; it is iterative innovation, not invention.

Of course, inventors are not always easy to manage. They are not fond of the status quo. People who are the source of major medical breakthroughs challenge clinical dogma, sometimes at great personal risk. In 1929, German physician Werner Forssmann performed the first human cardiac catheterization on himself. He was fired for “not meeting scientific expectations,” yet received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1952. In Australia, Dr. Barry Marshall was so convinced that infection with *H. pylori* caused gastric ulcers and so frustrated by the lack of an animal model that he drank a flask of the bacteria, developed massive gastric erosions over 24 hours, and studied them by performing endoscopies on himself. He was ridiculed by colleagues, but received the Noble Prize in 2005.

Inventors cannot be kept down. Ada Lovelace Babbage (1815–1852) was forced to spend long periods of time lying completely still. The only legitimate child of Lord Byron, her mother's plan was to save Ada from developing her father's dreamy moods. Ada was forced to learn mathematics, something highly unusual for aristocratic young ladies. Dreamy thoughts prevailed. Ada was the first to consider that a machine could manipulate symbols in accordance with rules, and that numbers could represent entities other than quantity. This was the fundamental transition from calculation to computation; Ada is now seen as the inventor of the computer and the “prophet of the computer age.”

In summary, risk tolerance, lack of inhibition, an inability to tolerate unreasonable authority, and an irrepressible drive are characteristics of great inventors. Curiosity, fascination, and imagination fill their minds. There are no weekends and no work-life balance. Work and play are inseparable. The future is created by unreasonable men, to quote George Bernard Shaw. We need to support these iconic individuals as they work to our advantage. For the sake of the world that our sons and daughters will inherit, we must encourage them to explore, improvise, and engage in the mysteries and wonders of their childhood.

Dr. Kieran Murphy, MD FRCPC, is a Fellow of the Society of Interventional Radiology. He received the 2015 Innovator of the Year Award from the Society of Interventional Radiology and was a Nominee for the 2016 Manning Innovation Award. He works in Toronto at the University Health Network, holds over 62 patents, and is a competitive race car driver.

Are outliers born or made?
Are their imaginations set free
by leaving past patterns?

In the face of irretrievable loss, sometimes all we can do is tell the tale.

Telling the Tale

THE LITERARY IMAGINATION OF ELIE WIESEL

BY RABBI JOE KANOFSKY

When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go to a certain part of the forest to meditate.

There, he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Maggid of Mezeritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go the same place in the forest and say, “Master of the Universe! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer.” And again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: “I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.” It was sufficient, and the miracle was accomplished.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to G-d: “I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient.

G-d made man because he loves stories.



Elie Wiesel’s retelling of this classic Chassidic tale in *The Gates of the Forest* encapsulates a literary imagination which is at once completely Jewish and uniquely his.

Wiesel’s renown came first as a spokesman for holocaust survivors and the vanished world of European Jewry, and later as a Nobel Peace Laureate and human rights activist. And yet, Wiesel wished to be remembered for his writings and his teachings. He wielded a wide palette of styles and genres to convey his message: he wrote memoirs, novels, cantatas, plays, poems, and essays. His literary imagination resonates at many frequencies along the Jewish literary spectrum: he is a witness giving testimony; he engages G-d with the most challenging of questions, and believes ultimately in the redemptive power of the word. Wiesel’s writing is fraught with ambiguity at many levels, which perhaps may be the most accurate way to portray a Jewish condition, a human condition itself fraught with ambiguity.

From *Night*, his first published work, until *Open Heart*, his last, Wiesel’s primary motivation is to testify. While his first work bears witness directly to the Holocaust, there is an element of Holocaust testimony in each of his works. Characters may be children of survivors, or they may encounter survivors. Each word from a survivor or their surrogate belies their utter bewilderment at a world where the order and values of civilization elided such that evil gained the upper hand. Cruelty, inhumanity, and indifference are the princes of this inverted world, which its witnesses still can hardly believe, much less comprehend.

Wiesel’s Chassidic tale quoted here suggests what can be done in the face of irretrievable loss: sometimes all we can do is tell the tale. We can recount the story, even if we fail to comprehend the magnitude or even the meaning of the events. In his own life, Wiesel tried several approaches to the burden of survivorship: he sought out the company of others (Primo Levi, David Weiss Halivni, among others); he tried to join the nascent movement in Palestine to fight for a Jewish state; he became a journalist. Ultimately, he returned to the word as the medium of response, publishing a memoir, first in Yiddish as *And the World Was Silent*, later in English as *Night*.

In Jewish thought, Creation originates in Divine Speech (Genesis: “Let there be light...and there was light”). Words create worlds and destroy worlds; they can restore them and even redeem them. The power of rabbinic imagination to neutralize a severe judgment, to suspend a troubling point of law, or to reframe and redeem a jarring scriptural passage are the essence of that literary tradition. So, when Wiesel turned to words, he knew he would access the same theurgic power, the same redemptive possibilities.

A preference for ambiguity and multivalence are hallmarks of the Jewish literary imagination, whose origins in rabbinic literature claim “70 faces to the Torah” (Bamidbar Rabbah 13) and liken the Midrashic process of problematizing texts

and revealing a panoply of meanings to a “hammer that shatters on a rock” (TB Sanhedrin 34a, explaining Jeremiah 23:29) and yields many pieces.

The ambiguity of the last line of the Chassidic tale is occasionally represented in a “politically correct” rendering as “G-d created man because G-d loves stories.” The well-intentioned hope of this version was to degender the Deity; however, it resolves another ambiguity much more importantly left open. Why exactly did G-d create man? Because he loves stories. Who loves stories? G-d or man? Wiesel once recounted that he had intended both, which are captured perfectly by the original ambiguity of the tale’s closing line.

Wiesel’s protagonists experience death as life, life as death, victimhood and perpetration in the same act, silence and speech, love and repulsion, memory and forgetfulness, humanity and inhumanity in the same act, the same moment. The moral ambiguity and multivalence that Wiesel witnessed in the Shoah and its aftermath is so deftly and forcefully conveyed in his novels. This eternal present mirrors the eternal present that dominates Jewish literature. The rabbinic tradition of commentary and supercommentary across two millennia engenders an eternal present in rabbinic discourse. Wiesel marshals this eternal present in his characters: Elisha in *Dawn* inhabits pre-1948 Palestine as well as the universe of the concentration camp. His family, teachers, fellow camp inmates, and compatriots from the underground surround him to see his transition from victim to executioner. In Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav’s formulation, which is so often cited by Wiesel, “A man asks a question to which there is no answer. Centuries later, another man asks a question with no answer, yet his question is an answer to the first.”

On a visit to Toronto 10 years ago, Wiesel restated one of his essential apothegms: “One can be a Jew with G-d, or one can be a Jew against G-d. One cannot be a Jew without G-d.” Confrontation with G-d was one of the first University seminars of Wiesel’s in which I took part; and everything he wrote carries the seed of this encounter in it. From the harsh indictment of G-d in *Night*, which is engraved on the walls of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, to the last sentence of his last book: “I go on breathing from minute to minute, from prayer to prayer.”

Until his passing this year at the age of 87, Wiesel never paused in the ongoing conversation, confrontation, and communion with G-d. In this, he continued the work of the Baal Shem Tov, the holy Rizhyner, and all the *maggidim*, preachers, and storytellers throughout Jewish history and literature. He ensures that telling the tale will continue.

Rabbi Joe Kanofsky, PhD, earned a Doctorate in Comparative Literature from Boston University. He was ordained at the Rabbinical College of America where he was a Wexner Fellow. From 2001 to 2004 he was Director of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Poland and currently serves as Rabbi of Kehillat Shaarei Torah in Toronto.

The Fantasy of Social Media

BY JASMINE ELIAV

Psychologists are coming to understand that, beyond the addictiveness of technology in general, social media has a critical influence on the development of children's identity and emotional well-being. It's not the end of the world; it's the new world, and our children are not as prepared as they could be.

As social networking emerged, society attended to the physical safety of kids online. Experts and parents alerted children to the risk of online predators and warned against posting personal contact details: "My address is..." Over time, research found the risk to be less in the transmission of personal contact information and more in the communication of personal emotional and social information: "I am so lonely."¹ Focus shifted to teach children about cyberbullying and the explicit hateful images and comments that are made online.²

I wonder if we missed the forest for the trees. Emphasizing safety, we neglected to teach children how to interpret social media in general. We forgot to mention that Internet messaging—like any other form of expression—is a mode of communication to be constructed and interpreted in the fullness of context and imagination. Messages can be truthful or filled with fantasy.

It's time to teach children the language of social media. They must understand the creativity that underlies the messages they send and receive. Authorship works in the way that it creates television, film, literature and fine art, except that social media hides it cleverly. Some films are documentaries and some are fiction; they can look the same on television. Distinguishing between them requires critical thinking.

For centuries, literature and art have invited us to interpret meaning made by words and visual stimuli. In both, the reader or viewer holds the reins and selects the time and place to perceive and interpret the artistic information delivered. Not so in social media where most of us have relinquished any space between ourselves and our devices and, where sites, such as Instagram and Snapchat, ask us to make meaning from split-second captures. Images come minute to minute from multiple sources affording recipients neither time to contemplate the greater context of each message nor control over what they see and when. Social media is an art form that is absent of reflection.

The line between reality and fantasy is blurring. Social media transfuses the accepted fiction of "celebrity gazing" onto our families, colleagues, and friends. We used to glimpse the rich and famous and idealize in the public eye; now we grab peeks at people we know: neighbours, family, and friends. The glaring difference is that when we look at famous people, follow their up and downs, and revere their lives, we do it from a distance. The psychological space between us and "them" is vast; star gazing across a night sky. We may compare ourselves to the ideals that celebrities set for wealth, beauty, and power, but—for most of us—the impact doesn't infiltrate our lives or make us feel less than we are. Our evolved understanding of celebrity fiction—with its Hollywood PR spinners and "Photoshop" experts—affords us leeway to remember reality.

Social media is a form of voyeurism looking into a skewed reality. A relentless barrage of images tells an intentionally constructed story. The mock up permeates our perception of how our friends, family, and colleagues interact, socialize, and market themselves. It becomes difficult to discern what is real and true. We wonder whether or not a joyous scene can become true for us too if we stage the right shot.

What to share on social media has become a fixation, not for the sake of an event, but for the perception of it by others. There are a few problems with this. Social media users miss the moment that they are trying to immortalize as they negotiate with their devices to "be in the moment," "capture the moment," and more. An easy example happened to me one hot summer day. In the parking lot of my grocery store, I smiled and watched two teenaged girls about to eat ice cream. Out came their phones. Instead of enjoying the moment, they staged and reviewed photos over many minutes as the ice creams melted away in the intense heat. Cultivating the online story pre-empted the lived experience—sadly, not an unusual occurrence in our times.

As a primary mode of communication used by adolescents today, we have to respect social networking as pivotal to teen self-presentation. Given that one of the main tasks of adolescence is identity formation,³ that is, the process of working to establish a sense of who you are, we have to ask how this emerging reliance on devices—with its ever-changing peer feedback loop—is influencing adolescent self-identity, social comparison, and social connectivity?

The first consideration has to be imagination or confabulation. Do kids factor it in? Social media lets users fashion a "digital identity." Teenagers (and their parents) can project specifically crafted images of themselves online in order to convey who they want to be, who they want to be seen to be loving, how they want to be seen to be loved. They concoct attributes as well as varying personas for different social spheres.

The fabricated and self-selected images exacerbate

insecurities, overinflate egos, and create shallow waters for adolescent development. For example, when a teenage boy receives 500 likes for posting a "hook-up video," the feedback he receives informs others who wish to be equally well "liked." Whether or not the hook-up video was altered or inaccurate, it pressures these others to post similar videos without regard for privacy, consent, or long-term impact.

The capacity to create perfectionistic images has created a youth culture in constant need of unrealistic and essentially meaningless online validation. Teens fantasize a "perfect" life. Like pictures of movie stars on celebrity blogs, their photographs are thoughtfully staged and manipulated. Adolescents use apps to enhance their physical appearance, similar to those used by celebrities. Using "filters" to alter images is so popular that adolescents use the term #NoFilter to identify when a picture has not been altered.

Creative filters are so pervasive that many adolescents struggle offline, clinging to perfectionistic standards that they posted online. When a teen couple post photos of carefully draped designer clothes, sunglasses, trendy food, and romantic settings, they are painting precision fiction about their style, status, and relationship. Sensationalizing their image, they deal blows to their friends and themselves; peer jealousies heighten, while their own self-esteem deflates in the self-aware deception. All are left yearning for something they know they are not.

Creating a variety of online identities infiltrates the psyche and self-esteem and is as addictive as the technology itself. Parents might notice how their children become fascinated and then obsessed with refining their digital identities. They might also take stock that the values embedded in media and social circles heavily influence their children's personal narratives and fantasies online. The repercussions are not yet clear.

Our children need an empowerment that is not yet daily fare. Like a literary critic or an art enthusiast, they must assume the prerogative to reflect on what is before them and ask: Why do I think that was posted? Why does that picture make me feel this way? Did the sender want that? What does it tell me about the sender? Parents can help kids master social media and should do so sooner than later. #NoFilter.

1 Wolak, J., et al. "Online 'Predators' and Their Victims: Myths, Realities, and Implications for Prevention and Treatment." *American Psychologist* (March 2008), 111–128.

2 Mishna, F., et al. "Risk Factors for Involvement in Cyber Bullying: Victims, Bullies and Bully-victims." *Children and Youth Services Review* (September 2012), 63–70.

3 Erikson, H. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

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