Nº20 / SPRING 2017

THINK

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

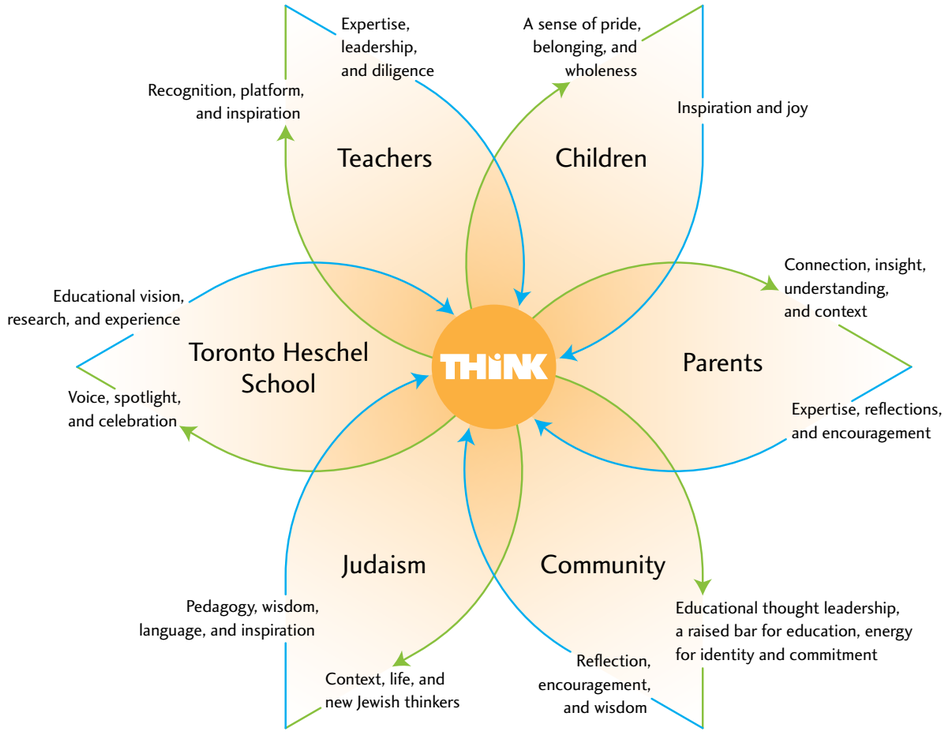
Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children

Cultivate Justice

THE PRIZE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE: SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION THROUGH HERITAGE, CULTURE, AND RELIGION / WHY NAME A SCHOOL FOR AJ HESCHEL / HUMAN RIGHTS IN JUNIOR HIGH / ART IN THE WORLD / SOCIAL CONSCIENCE MIRRORS THE PARENT

The THINK Ecosystem

This flower names what **THINK gives** to parents, the community, Judaism, The Toronto Heschel School, teachers, and children, and what **THINK receives** from them in return.



THINK THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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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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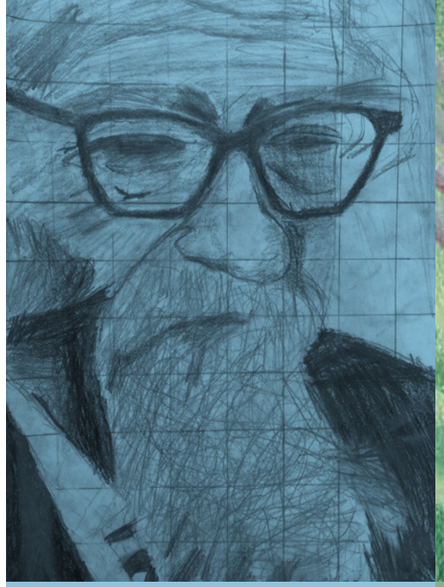

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Our writers look inside and outside the classroom and contemplate how to nurture a child's sensibility for fairness, ethics, and honesty.

Teach the Children Well

Let's raise our voices. This is an extraordinary time for social justice education. Children learn what they see and hear, and today, they hear a lot about democracy, minority rights, majority rule, empathy, and fear. They hear about refugees and sanctuaries, acts of righteousness and crimes. Kids pick up the buzz, and—from parents, teachers, and mass media talking heads—the buzz today is about what is fair and right and important. Welcome to the social justice issue of THINK!

Society's values reveal themselves in its habits and laws; do our children understand democratic protocols? Do they have authentic respect for rights and freedoms? Do they notice what their own community is doing? Are they maturing as individuals who stand for their convictions? With the integrity of citizens and gatekeepers now front and centre, it is a great time to "teach our children well."

In order to develop a moral compass, psychologists seem to say that children must experience personally what social justice feels like; this is a foundational task for educators and parents. Our writers consider how our children might cultivate a strong sense of themselves and a reasoned voice to communicate with their brothers and sisters, friends, and strangers. We learn that we must take our children beyond platitudes and grandiose overtures that can only deliver superficial understandings. Do we really believe that young people can absorb what justice feels like if they explore it primarily in boisterous crowds or send cash somewhere far away?

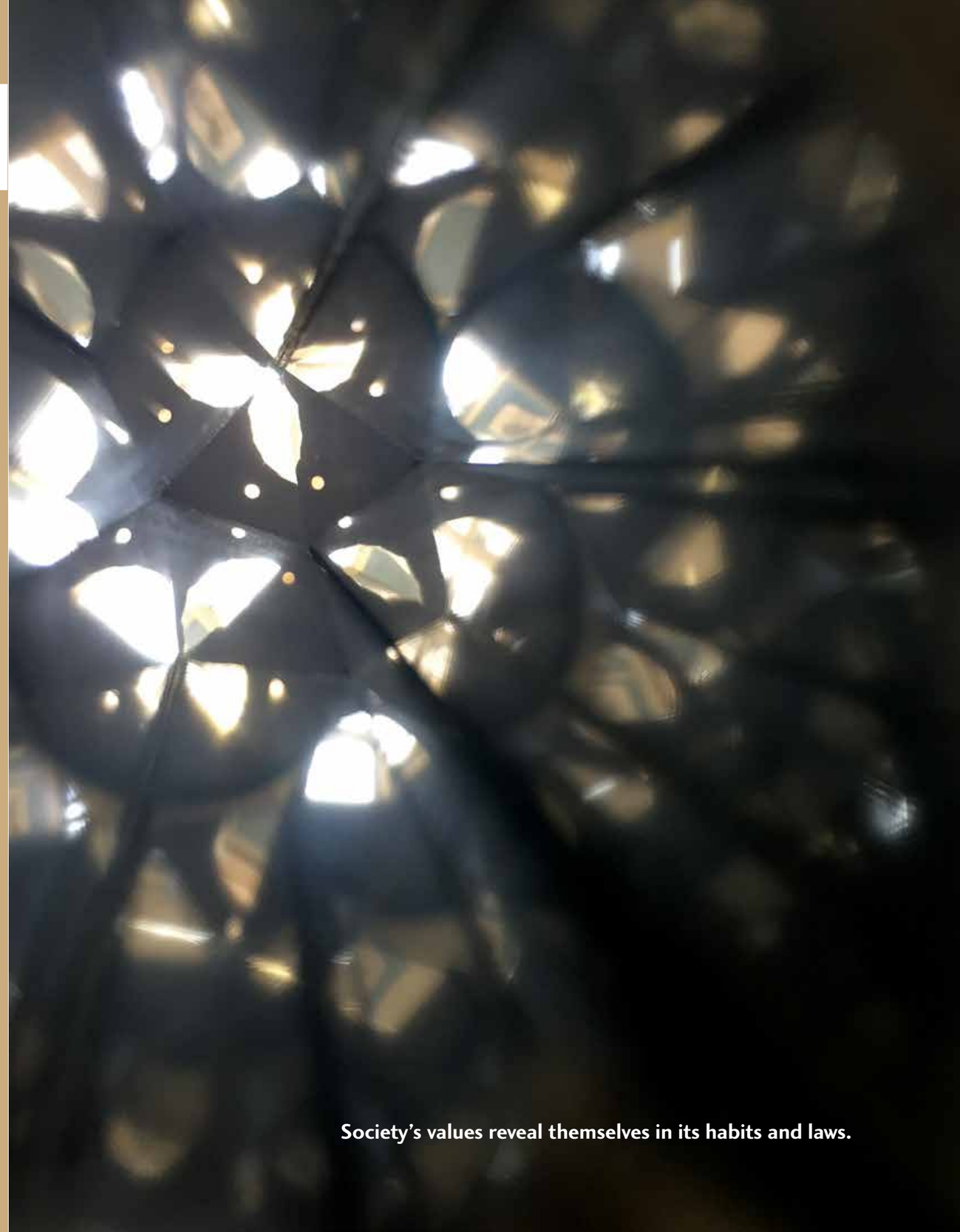
How do we foster and then transform personal convictions into social action? Eighteen months ago, THINK and The Toronto Heschel School launched a social justice education contest for educators worldwide; this issue of our journal presents the Prize for Teaching Excellence 2016 contest winners in a Special Feature report by Ruth Burnstein. We are delighted to celebrate these ingenious professionals who take seriously the translation of values into action and who teach their students in creatively powerful ways. They understand that social justice education, rooted in their students' heritage, offers the strongest start in a life-long moral journey.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously described that he felt his "legs were praying" when he walked across the bridge in Selma, Alabama, alongside Martin Luther King Jr. and other religious leaders in the American Civil Rights Movement. When we pursue justice, we reach towards God. Greg Beiles explains why Rabbi Heschel is the right namesake—politically and spiritually—for The Toronto Heschel School.

Our writers look inside and outside the classroom and contemplate how to nurture a child's sensibility for fairness, ethics, and honesty. Dvora Goodman, Andrea Schaffer, and Dana Ezer share the educational approach to empathy, conflict resolution, and human rights that The Toronto Heschel School has meticulously developed over 20 years. Gail Baker suggests books that start readers thinking about compassion, both individually and in community. Adam Sol discusses the role that art—painting, poetry, film, literature—plays in fostering new perspectives and reflections, key ingredients in productive resilient lives, and Jasmine Eliav reminds parents that our children embody our values; how we each live every day is what our sons and daughters internalize most of all.

There is a lot to think about in cultivating social justice. Welcome to our world.

Pam



Society's values reveal themselves in its habits and laws.

The Toronto Heschel School: A Good Name

BY GREG BEILES

Rabbi Shimon said, "There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. And the crown of a good name is superior to them all."[1] In 1996, the founders of a new Jewish day school in Toronto sought "a good name" for their school, a name to symbolize the special kind of Jewish education they envisioned for their children. The school would offer a values-driven education, rooted in the teachings of Judaism, and aspire to graduate responsible caring citizens.

The crown of Torah stands for learning; the crown of priesthood stands for ritual and prayer; the crown of kingship stands for justice and fair rule. A good name refers to a person who integrates all of these virtues. The school founders chose to name the school after Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Rabbi Heschel was an innovative Jewish thinker and courageous Jewish leader. His life exemplified the integration of Jewish learning, Jewish ritual, and social justice. Steeped in the Hassidic traditions of Eastern European Jewry, while masterful in modern scholarship and philosophy, Heschel was simultaneously a traditional, observant, learned teacher and an outspoken, ground-breaking political and social activist.

Heschel lost most of his extended family during the Shoah, barely escaping himself. In America, he involved himself in the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and the struggle to free Soviet Jewry. He advocated for Jewish pluralism, while holding fast to his own traditional practice. He wrote numerous books of theology in eloquent, inspiring prose.

As a member of The Toronto Heschel School community for over 20 years, I have been incredibly inspired by Rabbi Heschel's spiritual teachings and social activism. The big question for me, after all these years, is how these two aspects of Heschel's work relate to one another. How, for Heschel, do Jewish spirituality and religion connect to social justice and responsible citizenship? And, most critically, what does this mean for teaching Jewish children?

From an educational perspective, Heschel's most important teaching on knowledge is his notion of wonder, radical amazement and awe. Heschel writes:

> Wonder, not doubt, is the beginning of knowledge… Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement… [We should] get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.[2]

Heschel's insight that wonder is the doorway to knowledge is a powerful invitation for educators to embrace theories of learning that encourage curiosity, discovery, and imagination. When Heschel says, "To be spiritual is to be amazed," he reminds us that we experience God when we appreciate how every aspect of the world is amazing, even our own minds. Amazement is not a naive, pre-rational condition; rather, it is the highest form of perception. Amazement and wonder allow us to be aware of the "ineffable," that which we cannot grasp by rational thought alone. Wonder is not just the beginning of Jewish knowledge, but of all knowledge. Maurice Friedman, an eminent Heschel scholar, observes that for Heschel, "insights into the ineffable are 'the root of man's creative activities in art, thought, and noble living,'"[3] a profound meta-cognitive worldview that educators should encourage and refine in their students.

Heschel's concept of wonder reveals an alignment between ancient Jewish sources and progressive educational theories today. Multiple intelligence theory, arts-based learning, and constructivism regard children as dynamic, creative thinkers and encourage these proclivities. Heschel also shows us how Judaism has its own ways of teaching that awaken wonder and nurture amazement.

The most powerful of these may be prayer, which Heschel emphasizes as a vehicle to identify, acknowledge, and appreciate the wonder of our very existence—in it all its joys and sorrows. Prayers are songs that express our passion and amazement: "The primary purpose of prayer is not to make requests. The primary purpose of prayer is to praise, to sing, to chant. Because the essence of prayer is a song, and man cannot live without a song."[4] While wonder and radical amazement are essential as the "beginning of knowledge," and prayer serves them well, for Heschel they are not the only, or even the most important way a Jewish person relates to God. Later in life, Heschel delved into the prophetic tradition of Judaism, for which a relationship with God depends urgently on acts of social justice. From the prophets Heschel learned that, "Whatever I do to man, I do to God. When I hurt a human being, I injure God… The secret of our legacy," he wrote, is "that God is implied in the human situation and that man must be involved in it."[5]

Through the lens of awe and wonder, we see how amazing the world is, how incredible, complex, and unique is each human being.

Studying the prophets of Israel led Heschel to become increasingly active in the Civil Rights Movement, in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and in the struggle for Soviet Jewry. After marching from Selma to Montgomery with Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and other religious leaders, Heschel declared, "I felt my legs were praying."

One of the most valuable gifts Heschel offers Jewish educators is to show how Judaism and Jewish sources speak to relevant social issues in each generation. In his opening address to the National Conference of Christians and Jews in January 1963, Heschel drew a stark parallel between the Exodus narrative of the Torah and the Civil Rights Movement:

> At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses. Moses's words were, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to me." While Pharaoh retorted: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed this voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go." The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The Exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses.[6]

At The Toronto Heschel School, we follow Heschel's model and continuously draw our students' attention to how Jewish sources speak to relevant social responsibility and social justice concerns. One Grade 5 integrated project asks students to match text from Exodus with passages from the novel *Underground to Canada*. A year-long Grade 8 human rights curriculum looks at text from *Sefer Devarim* (Deuteronomy) and the Talmud to address discrimination, child labour, and gender inequality today.

Every year I come to understand the connection between these two key aspects of Heschel's thinking, between perceiving awe and wonder in the world and engaging in acts of social justice. Every year I feel that I understand a little more why awe and wonder matter for social justice.

Through the lens of awe and wonder, we see how amazing

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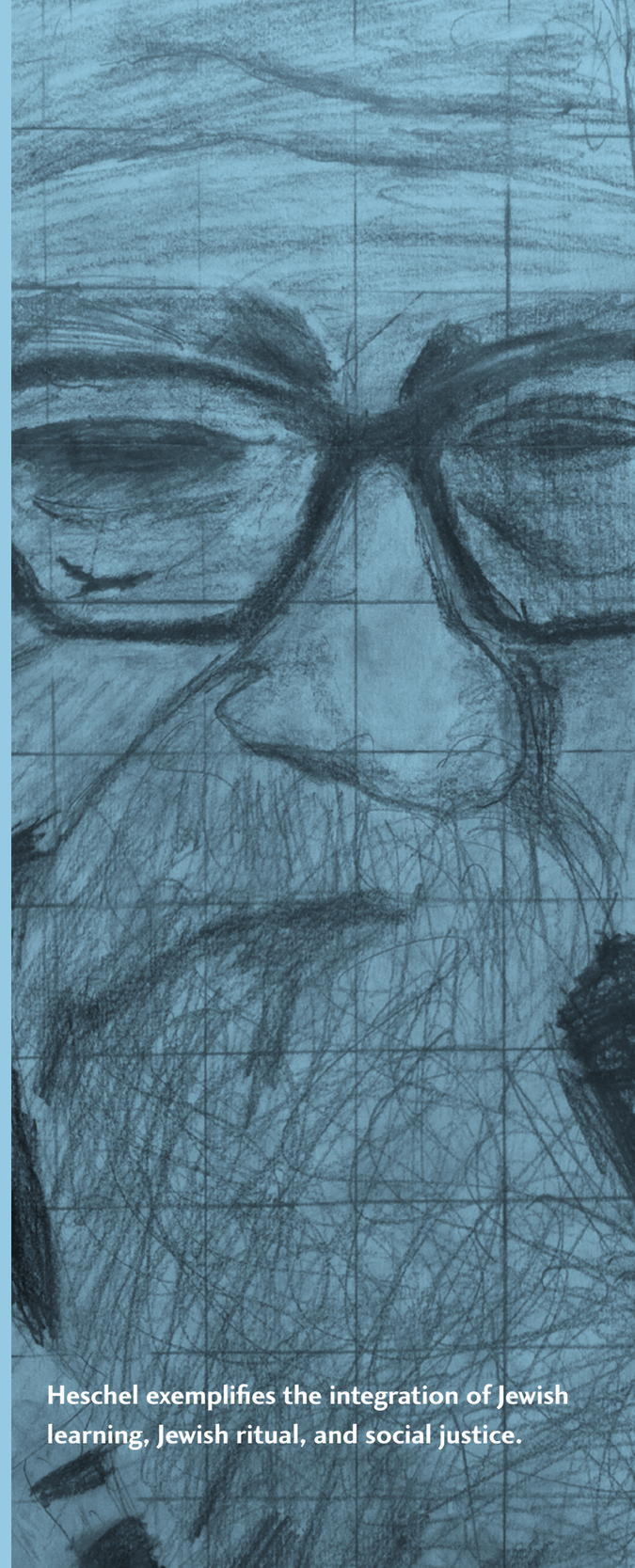


Heschel exemplifies the integration of Jewish learning, Jewish ritual, and social justice.

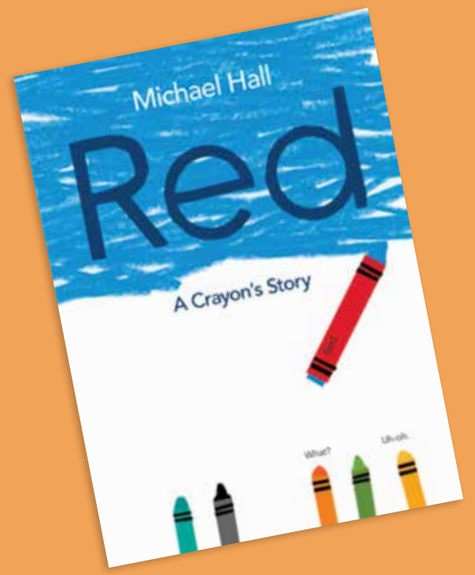
Good Books by Gail Baker

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

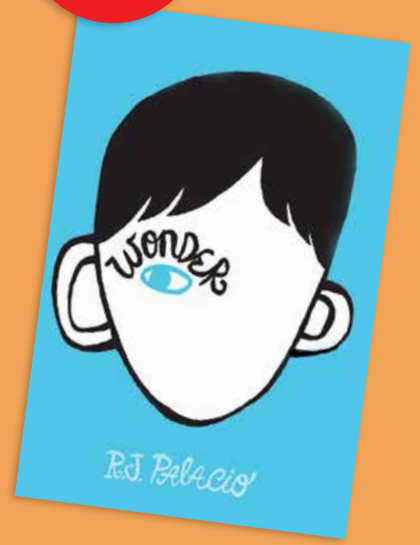
We hope that our children grow up to live in caring, compassionate communities. Their part is first to accept themselves for who they are and learn to be a supportive friend.

Gail Baker is a renowned educator, mother, and grandmother. In 1996 she co-founded The Toronto Heschel School and retired as Head of School in 2014.

2 GOOD BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

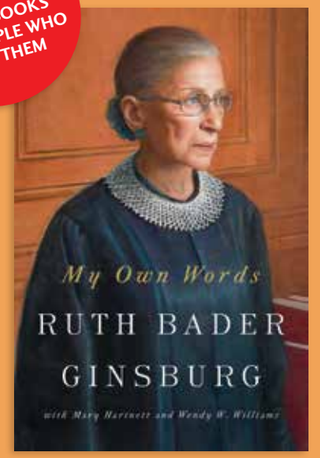


Red: A Crayon's Story by Michael Hall (Greenwillow Books, 2015)
If you are red, you are not blue. This wonderful story can be read on many levels; it speaks about staying true to yourself, no matter what obstacles come your way. Sometimes, even the wishes of well-meaning people must be respectfully declined.

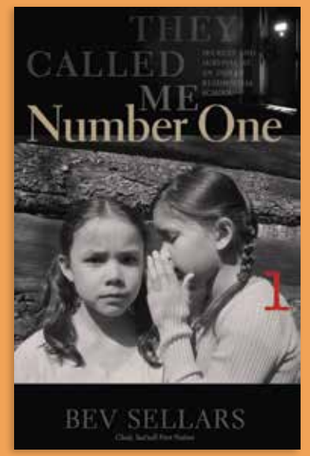


Wonder by R.J. Palacio (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2012)
At long last, Auggie Pullman, is medically able to attend school; he is starting in Grade 5. He has interests typical of his age and was born with a significant facial difference. Told from the viewpoints of the people in Auggie's life, the story is emotional and engaging; we wonder how we relate to those who are different. A valuable story for all ages, Palacio calls it "a meditation on kindness."

2 GOOD BOOKS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM



My Own Words by Ruth Bader Ginsburg, with Mary Hartnett and Wendy W. Williams (Simon and Schuster, 2016)
This biography of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the United States Supreme Court is curated through her writings and speeches. Engaged in the pursuit of social justice since girlhood, Ginsburg shares her thoughts on gender equality, being Jewish, and how it is to be a judge, even now in her 80s as she continues to make her mark.



They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Reservation School by Bev Sellars (Talonbooks, 2012)
In her autobiography, which includes the story of her mother and grandmother, Chief Bev Sellars exposes cultural genocide in British Columbia and the psychological and physical abuse that transpired in its residential schools. She lays bare the damage done and its continuing impact on the First Nations of Canada. The history is an unforgettable read.

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the world is, how incredible, complex, and unique each human being is. We are driven to notice and feel concern for life and for the quality of each person's life. We realize that everyone should experience the fullness of the world's wonders, that no child should be deprived of meaningful education, that no human life should be wasted through war and poverty, and that no one should have to live with shame or fear. A state of awe and wonder leaves us realizing what really matters. We focus on the essential and disdain the trivial.

The lesson for educators is this: If children habituate to learning by rote—whether in math class, Torah class, or elsewhere—they meet life as rote and set. Their moral imaginations narrow and their sense of the possible remains limited to what already is. Conversely, when children habituate to learning through awe and wonder—whether in math class, Torah class, or elsewhere—they meet life as full of surprise and possibility. Their moral imaginations are more open to embrace what they value as feeling and searching individuals, and as Jews. Their sense of the possible expands to see that social injustice—discrimination, prejudice, and poverty—is not inevitable but entrenched by narrow, spiritless thinking. Awe and wonder inspire in students the desire to expand the awe and wonder in the world, for themselves and for others.

Teaching through awe and wonder creates the habits of heart and mind that inspire the work of social justice. Prayer not only reveals and expresses our amazement at the world. Prayer, writes Heschel, also "clarifies our hopes and intentions. It helps us discover our true aspirations, the pangs we ignore, the longings we forget…words of prayer are commitments, We stand for what we utter...prayer teaches us what to aspire to...the idea becomes a concern, something to be longed for, a goal to be reached, when we pray."[7]

The ancient rabbis debated whether learning or action is more important; they concluded that learning comes first, because it leads to action. Linking Rabbi Heschel's concept of awe and wonder to social action, we see how the rabbinic equation works. Learning, which inspires awe and wonder and clarifies our aspirations, leads us to actions that can help us redeem the world from pettiness and selfishness.

Rabbi Heschel's life was a model of this integration. His is a "good name" for an inspired vision of Jewish education. His is the good name that we, at The Toronto Heschel School, strive to emulate.

1 Mishna, *Pirkei Avot* 4:17.
2 A.J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951).
3 M. Friedman, *Abraham Joshua Heschel and Eli Wiesel: You Are My Witness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), p. 44.
4 S. Heschel, ed., *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), p. 397.
5 A.J. Heschel, "The Plight of Russian Jews," *United Synagogue Review* (1964).
6 A.J. Heschel, Opening Address to the National Conference of Christians and Jews, "Religion and Race," January 1963.
7 A.J. Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2006).

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

Learning to Solve Real Problems at Ages 4 and 5

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Consider this scenario: Noah and Rachel play side by side with blocks on the carpet of the Junior Kindergarten classroom. Accidentally, Noah knocks down Rachel's structure and she starts to cry. In return, she hides the unused blocks so Noah can't build anymore. What happens next is fascinating.

Noah tells Rachel that they need to go to the "conflict centre," and the two walk to the corner of the room where they proceed to use a set of conflict resolution tools to end their squabble. The tools consist of cards depicting emotions that the children select to show how the clash has made them feel, as well as a board that offers various options to resolve their disagreement, such as to apologize, talk it out, or to simply breathe deeply and relax.

Noah explains to Rachel that he is upset because she is hiding the blocks, and she responds that she got angry when he ruined her creation. They each apologize and decide to share the blocks but sit farther from one another to avoid more collisions. Then they return to the carpet and resume their activity.

This glimpse into how four-year-old children resolve problematic social interactions is not an isolated occurrence in the JK classrooms at The Toronto Heschel School, nor is it something that happens spontaneously. It's part of a highly intentional and detailed social and emotional learning curriculum for the Early Years; it also reflects the school's overall approach to social justice education.

Last year THINK launched a contest to discover and celebrate how teachers in other schools use their heritage, culture, or religion to inspire social justice values in their students. We were surprised not to receive any entries relating to students younger than Grades 7 or 8. I went into the Learning Centre to ask Heidi Friedman, Toronto Heschel's Director of Early Years (JK–Grade 1), when and how social justice learning begins for young children at The Toronto Heschel School.

Simply put, she explained that the way in which young children relate to one another and to the adults in their early lives grounds how they embrace the pursuit of social justice later in life. First, her students are helped to develop a positive sense of self and an awareness of their personal feelings. Next, they focus on compassion and building good relationships with their peers. And finally, they shift this awareness outside the classroom to the rest of the school.

Once the children can articulate their feelings, they consider what it means to act on them in a responsible way.

When I heard Heidi describe this approach, I understood how important it is for this social and emotional focus to be part of the conversation about social justice education; it is the cement for the building blocks of everything to come. Core behaviours and values that are important for sophisticated social justice projects in higher grades are seeded and nurtured very early in the children's schooling.

Heidi described a few samples from the JK and SK programs. In early autumn, the Junior Kindergarten children study the Torah's description of the seven days of creation. They learn that on the second day, God separates light from darkness and gives each a name. The children apply this notion of distinctions to differentiating and identifying their feelings in different situations. They use emotion cards to name their feelings. Teachers maintain continual focus on each child's progress, pointing out when each seems to be expressing various emotions.

Once the children can articulate their feelings, they consider what it means to act on them in a responsible way. In mid-winter, a new JK overarching theme is introduced: "When we know our feelings, we can act responsibly." The theme works with the Jewish holiday of Purim that celebrates how a wise Mordechai and a courageous Esther saved the Persian Jewish community from the evil Haman who sought to destroy them. Reading the Purim Megillah, the ancient text of the holiday, and using it as a springboard, the teachers reinvoke the autumn learning and the children now identify the feelings of the characters in the Purim story. They have been practising all year!

They evaluate the actions of each Purim story character as a response to feelings, and they reflect on whether each was acting responsibly or not. For example, perhaps Vashti felt angry when King Achashverosh ordered her to come to his party, and perhaps this is why she did what she did. They discuss what she might have done and what might have happened next. The children draw up their own Megillah highlighting the Purim characters' feelings and actions as the narrative evolves.

The integration of social and emotional learning with Jewish studies continues in Senior Kindergarten. An integrated SK theme for Chanukah—the holiday that celebrates the Jewish resistance to attempts by the Syrian-Greeks to end their practice of Judaism—is that "Jewish practices and learning give strength to our *neshamah* (our soul)." Teachers describe the *neshamah* as a flame that is fed the oxygen it needs through acts of kindness and *mitzvot* (the commandments). The children consider what was happening to the *neshamah* of the Jewish people during the Greek occupation of Judaea at the time of the Maccabees. Did oppression nurture or dampen the flames of their souls? They reflect on how and when their own *neshamot* expand or contract.

In SK, when a child is sick and misses school, the class takes the time to call him/her on the phone with wishes to "get well soon." When the student returns to school, the teacher asks: "How did your *neshamah* feel when we called you?" Teachers ask their students how they might make a classmate's *neshamah* feel better if he/she seems upset. Through ongoing one-on-one conversations, teachers discuss with each child what he/she might do to make a difference in how someone feels.

Talking to Heidi Friedman reminded me of the awe that I always feel for the mastery of teaching kindergarten. Her curriculum shows how social justice learning—in its purest Jewish sense—gets a solid start when it begins early and is rooted tenderly and simultaneously in social-emotional and Jewish foundations. Esther saved her world through mindfulness and courage. Judah Maccabee won his day by caring for the souls of his community. And classmates feel better when they know they are missed. So begins the social conscience of the responsible thinkers and young activists who are nurtured at Toronto Heschel.

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 a Toronto Heschel School parent.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Social Justice Education

With this feeling of connectedness comes compassion and the inspiration to create a just society for all.

Finding the Familiar in Grade 2

WHAT DO WE HAVE IN COMMON?

BY ANDREA SCHAFFER

I love teaching Grade 2. There is something amazing to me about the heart and mind of a seven year-old. By seven, children have a developed sense of empathy and understand what it means to be a part of a community. They have learned, in albeit simpler terms, that social justice is about being kind and thoughtful, about giving and sharing. By spring my students are eagerly starting to grasp the vastness of the world and to see the pursuit of social justice as an act of *Tikkun Olam*, the rabbinic term for repairing the world; each child is learning how individual actions can make the world a better place.

By Passover, my students are ready to explore their connection to the world beyond their immediate surroundings. Suddenly, the atlas—displayed on the shelf all year—becomes the most popular book in the class. With anticipation, the children discuss what country they want to study for their final research project on lives of children around the world. I love the energy when my students converse about the beauty of diversity and their desire to do something good through their bond with children around the globe.

The research project takes its title from the Book of Genesis: *Etzem Mi'eztmi*—Bone of My Bone: "And the Adam said: This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (2:23).

From their Chumash lessons over the years, the children know that in the text God takes a bone from the Adam and with it forms the Woman. They can now go deeper into the story. We ask, "What does it mean to you to think about the fact that the man and the woman were created from the same bone?" Their responses vary, but all agree that, while boys and girls are different, deep down we are very connected.

We revisit the Genesis text during social science lessons as we introduce concepts of race and ethnicity. We read a book about race and look at images of people of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and we discover that people from different parts of the world look different. One group of students define race as something God gives to us to make us special and to make the world more "colourful."

The students literally feel the bones under their own skin, and—after asking nicely—under the skin of their friends. They conclude that beneath our skin we all feel the same; we are made of the same bone. "If we take off our skin," I suggest (to a classroom full of "ewwws"), "would we not all look exactly the same?"

The next question is crucial, "What else do we share with children around the world?" To answer, we immerse ourselves for the next month in stories about children from Kenya, Malawi, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere. We explore their lives, their games, and the subjects they learn at school. We even make a soccer ball from plastic bags, guided by a video of a Kenyan boy doing the same.

The second graders then undertake individual research, choosing one country to study in detail. They notice that, while life in each place appears inherently different, the interests and dreams of children who live faraway are not so very different from their own here in Toronto. Through direct focus on what they have in common with other children, my students begin to sense a connection to people from different walks of life. This is my key to teaching social justice to young children. I help them find the familiar among the unfamiliar. With this feeling of connectedness comes compassion and the inspiration to create a just society for all.

Grade 2 students crave fairness and their research introduces the hard lesson that life is not always fair. They discover that a child who wants to attend school, just as they do, might be prevented if her family needs her help at home; children with dreams similar to theirs may not have equally similar privileges or the resources to make their dreams a reality.

We extend the lesson to our math classes and consider the concept of value; we discuss how value can be determined by a situation. We read *Beatrice's Goat*, a picture book that tells the true story of a Ugandan girl who dreams of attending school, but whose family cannot afford to have her spend her days learning. When her family receives a donated goat, all this changes; they have milk to sell and at last her parents can afford to enroll her in school. After reading the story, we discuss how valuable a goat can be to a child, who, like them, wants to learn. One group of second graders used the $60.00 they raised for their class *tzedakah* (charity) box to buy and donate a goat through the Save the Children Foundation.

Similarly, another Grade 2 class was inspired to act after seeing photos of Jewish day school students in Uganda. They saw torn mosquito nets dangling over the beds where the children, who were boarding, slept. By selling popsicles, our students raised enough to send new nets to the community. The nets cost $5.00 apiece but have lifesaving value as protection from mosquitoes that carry the deadly disease of malaria. Months later, the Heschel class received a photo of the nets arriving and had a Skype conversation with Rabbi Gershom of the Abayudaya community and his seven-year-old daughter, who thanked the students personally for their contributions. The pride that the students felt was heart warming.

A seven year-old craves and appreciates meaningful relationships, wants the world to be fair, yet can learn how this is not always the case. With pleasure and gusto, seven year-olds want to offer a helping hand to someone in need. At The Toronto Heschel School, Grade 2 students comprehend that the world is decorated with people who look and act differently. They also know that it is our responsibility to respect these differences and to celebrate and acknowledge the values, the hopes, and the dreams that we all share.

Andrea Schaffer teaches Grade 2 at The Toronto Heschel School.

The Jewish Foundations of a Junior High Human Rights Curriculum

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANA EZER

BY PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

Dana Ezer finds junior high students to be particularly egocentric and ripe for a "me versus you" conversation; they are preoccupied with thinking about how they fit into the social scene, and who they are in the universe. Dana has been teaching junior high for twelve years; she tells her students to keep it up but also to compare their circumstances to those of others. She asks them not just to look at the "other," but to consider all human relationships. Juxtaposing "us and them" exposes truths that bring students to reflect on humanity and on human rights.

The junior high human rights program at The Toronto Heschel School was developed by a team of educators committed to revealing the Jewish foundations of what is now known as the study of human rights. This senior Jewish day school program uncovers new learning beneath old themes, as students reconsider what perhaps they took for granted in earlier grades. Using traditional modalities of Jewish study, which by now are very familiar to them, the human rights curriculum links social justice learning to the students' Jewish identity. Dana begins her explanations citing the Jewish proverb, "Know from where you came and to where you are going" (*Pirkei Avot* 3:1).

Jewish pedagogy #1: By Grade 6, the students are comfortable with multi-layered meaning. They have learned Rashi, the medieval French commentator, who interpreted ancient Jewish text. Rashi questions what he finds and generates his answers by looking back into the text and referencing *midrashim*, the rabbinic commentaries. With Rashi as their model, the students learn that asking questions, and being unsettled with what they are reading, is a Jewish tradition. Early Rashi training has taught them to investigate text for meaning and to begin unravelling disparate relationships and references.

Jewish pedagogy #2: Also by Grade 6, the students' learning process has become their identity; they are people who listen, converse, question. Their formula is to sit and study with a peer in the time-tested tradition of *chevruta*, understanding that a second perspective brings deeper learning.

Dana emphasizes how this bit of Torah or Talmud, "this artifact," has served hundreds of generations, and how a single unifying language, spoken through thousands of years, still speaks for and to all Jews everywhere. Saying "every Jew can do this," she invites her students to ask, "What can I find for myself, right here, in these words, as opposed to other places?" The wisdom is there and is theirs.

Dana teaches that "Judaism is a religion that asks you to be an active participant… We don't take things in passively, we are active." In Jewish text, her students find themes that relate to their own life experiences and they apply the layered meanings to the plight and power of humanity; the process renders them active participants in their tradition.

Two Projects

The following two examples were posted as models for the Prize for Teaching Excellence 2016 and are described more fully online.
www.lolastein.ca/teaching-excellence-contest.html

Pay It Forward Purim

Dana tells me, "Our project is on the highest level. We want to foster their love for *tzedakah*. The students love it. We set them up to understand that doing *tzedakah* is not easy, but also, being Jewish is not easy. It is a huge responsibility, but it is also the best gift." *Tzedakah* is Hebrew for righteousness and charity. On the holiday of Purim, the *mitzvah* (commandment) is *Matanot L'Evyonim* (to give gifts to the poor).

Dana explains that Purim asks us to look inwards and give something to others that we know will have value to them because we have seen it has value to us. The holiday celebrates a Jewish woman in Diaspora who is pressured into action by a cousin, yet makes her own choices. Although assimilated, Esther first fasts, a Jewish modality, to help her focus inwards and strategize a brilliant plan. She uses the gift she has, her sexuality and beauty, and saves the Jewish people.

The story is one of chaos and chance. The Persian King draws lots; fate falls against the Jews and he agrees to annihilate them. Dana's students go to an unsettling place, into the winter night to meet the homeless, who live and die by chance. They deliver something of value to the men and women they come upon and also offer dignity; first, a food package and clothes, then a second package for each recipient to give to someone else. Each recipient becomes a benefactor.

Mordechai had warned Esther, that, queen or not, she would fall too: Don't think you will be excluded. You are a Jew because it's in your blood. Esther wrought an edict from the King giving Jews the right to protect themselves; salvation through self-defence. The message is: You can fight for your lives. The students share what they have and rekindle dignity in the Toronto cold.

Human Rights Speeches

Being the voice is difficult—it is easier to stay quiet. Dana says that "especially junior high girls like to be invisible at this age; it is easier not to put yourself out there. But that is anti-Jewish."

To embrace the personal challenge is a lesson itself. There are always choices; students can sit back and let someone be bullied, or not. "Challenge is to know who you are and to follow that; to trust your instincts because you are educated."

The students again use a familiar Jewish study process. The rabbinic method is to look at text, ask questions, read commentators, go back to text, and understand it differently. Students bring rabbinic analysis into daily life. In Judaic studies class, they collect articles about current events, reviewing a wide variety of sources. They pick a topic that they connect to personally; perhaps it is education, which they might narrow down to focus on education in Afghanistan and the activism of Malala Yousafzai.

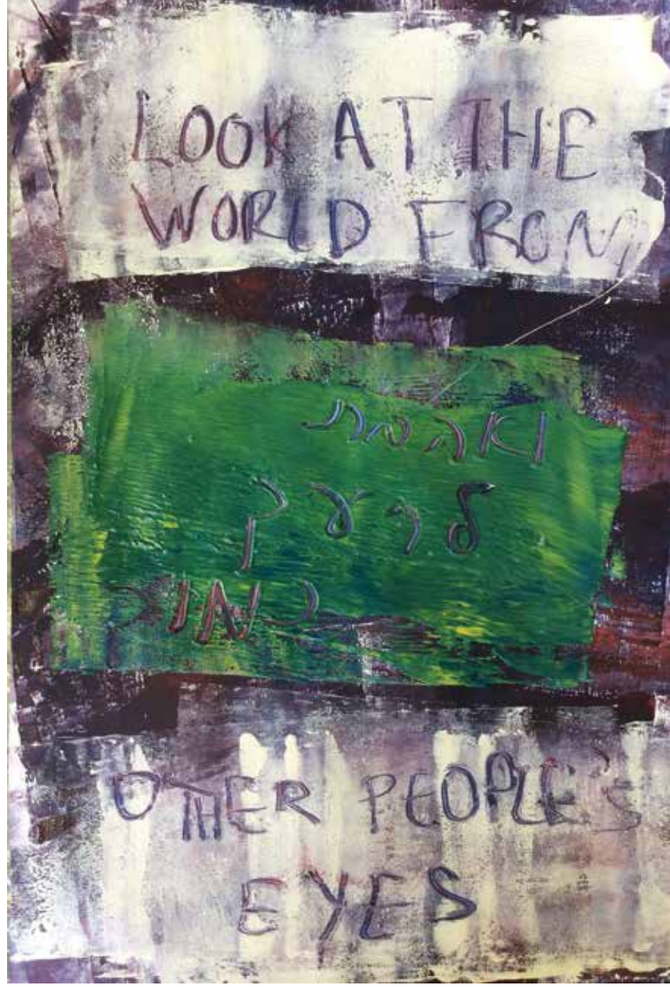
Reviewing their collected articles critically in the rabbinic tradition, students ask who is the author, what is the story about, who else has written, how does it connect to other topics? They learn not to get caught up with taglines, but to read media carefully, and work to understand the subject thoroughly.

Lifting out pieces of text and applying their meaning to real life experiences is also rabbinic process. Students ask what Judaism says about their topic and look to ancient text. For example, in the Talmud, causing embarrassment is described as akin to murder; the redness on a person's face is red like blood.

In the *Book of Isaiah* (c.58), the people are fasting while their workers work and all proceeds as usual. On God's behalf, the prophet cries out,

> Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies?… No, this is the fast I desire: Unlock the fetters of wickedness… Share your bread with the hungry and take the wretched poor into your home…do not ignore your own kin.

In "The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement," Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes,



> For many years I lived by the conviction that my destiny is to serve in the realm of privacy… Three events changed my attitude. One was the countless onslaughts upon my inner life, depriving me of the ability to sustain inner stillness. The second event was the discovery that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself… The third…was my study of the prophets of ancient Israel… There is immense silent agony in the world, and the task of man is to be a voice for the plundered poor, to prevent the desecration of the soul and the violation of our dream of honesty.[1]

Dana Ezer says, "Getting up and speaking is Jewish. Using their voice for good is Jewish."

1 From *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), p. 225.

Pam Medjuck Stein is the Editor of *THINK: The Lola Stein Institute Journal*.

The Prize for Teaching Excellence 2016

A REPORT BY RUTH BURNSTEIN

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

Runners-Up

Randy Clark

"Jackie Robinson"

Field Kindley High School

Coffeyville, KS, USA

Avivit Mualem

"In the Paths of the Sages"

Tichonet

Tel Aviv, Israel

Jennifer Staysniak

"Voices of Activism"

Mount Alvernia High School

Newton, MA, USA

THINK is delighted to present the winners of the Prize for Teaching Excellence 2016, sponsored by THINK and The Toronto Heschel School.

Employing heritage, culture, and religion to inspire social responsibility among their students, these two winning initiatives and three runners-up demonstrate the values The Toronto Heschel School seeks to impart to its students: to create world citizens committed to the cause of social justice.

The Toronto Heschel School has been teaching social justice for over 21 years to students in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 8. The school's integrated approach to teaching features social responsibility and pluralism in its core curriculum at all grade levels and is woven into many academic subjects. The school's social justice program is grounded in the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

The school's educators noticed the effectiveness of rooting the teaching of social justice within the students' heritage as a means to deepen the learning; students warmed to the idea of improving the world bit by bit, not only as something that felt right and good, but as something that was their own. The Jewish virtue *Tikkun Olam* speaks to repairing their world and healing fractures in society around them; students at Toronto Heschel come to understand that social justice is integral to their background, their traditions, their community, their futures.

At THINK and The Toronto Heschel School, we got to wondering about what projects and curricula based in culture, heritage, or religion other teachers are creating in their schools. The responses we received were magnificent. THINK congratulates these extraordinary teachers and their students and will invite submissions again for the Prize for Teaching Excellence 2018 in the autumn of 2017.

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

1st Place, Erin Buchmann

2nd Place, Todd Clauer, far right

FIRST PRIZE

Erin Buchmann: Indigenous Awareness

First prize went to Erin Buchmann of Kirkland Lake Composite District School in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, Canada. The school where Buchmann teaches is a public high school where approximately 25% of the students in Grades 9 through 12 self-identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. The project was called Indigenous Awareness.

Close to half of the students in the Kirkland Lake school are at risk of not graduating. Buchmann identified several reasons for these low rates, including the town's socio-economic status, the school's large catchment area (some students travel for 70 minutes each way by bus), the lack of connection between the school and the community, and an underappreciation of the importance of education.

Incorporated into a course on Aboriginal Studies, this exciting project aimed to raise student awareness of social issues facing Indigenous peoples in Canada, including mental health challenges and the abuse, disappearance, and murder of Aboriginal women. The thinking behind the project was that if the school created opportunities for Indigenous students to celebrate their heritage, and the school were a more culturally welcoming space, students would be more likely to succeed, both in school and in their communities. With the ultimate goal of leading students towards reconciliation and social action, the Indigenous Awareness project engaged students through art, performance, community initiatives, social media, and civic advocacy.

The result: a 100% pass rate in the course and so much demand for a spot in the Aboriginal Studies class that a second section has been created for the next academic year. The extraordinary effort of this teacher and her students resulted in a sense of pride and belonging for the Indigenous students in the school and a palpable increase in awareness of Indigenous issues within the school and the community.

Canada's Aboriginal History

The Indigenous Awareness project was well timed as, in recent years, non-Indigenous Canadians have become more aware of their past and present relationship with Indigenous communities. This awareness focuses primarily on the legacy of residential schools and treaty rights, as well as the current challenges First Nations communities face, such as access to clean water, health care, and mental health resources.

In this project, students examined how historical events, legislation such as the Indian Act, and residential schools where Indigenous children were forced to live have impacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Students investigated how these historical events continue to pose a range of challenges for Indigenous people in Canada today.

Indigenous Values

The foundation of the project was the exploration of a core of traditional Indigenous values called the Seven Grandfather Teachings:

1. **Wisdom:** To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom (Beaver)
2. **Love:** To know love is to know peace (Eagle)
3. **Respect:** To honour all of Creation is to have respect (Buffalo)
4. **Courage/Bravery:** Bravery is to face the foe with integrity (Bear)
5. **Honesty:** Honesty in facing a situation is to be brave (Sabe)
6. **Truth:** Truth is to know all of these things (Turtle), and
7. **Humility:** Humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation (Wolf).

The goal in using the teachings is to create an atmosphere of acceptance and cohesion between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through a better understanding of Indigenous culture and belief. To this end, the project sought to explain how Indigenous identity is linked to the physical environment and to identify contemporary issues related to this connection. It explored the historical basis for the contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and explained the need to promote dialogue and reconciliation to improve this relationship. It identified social, political, and economic issues currently being addressed by Indigenous peoples and communities in Canada with a particular focus on Indigenous youth. It described the varying perspectives on the Indigenous right to self-determination. And, finally, it provided opportunities to celebrate Indigenous culture within the school.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings were presented to the class through a number of vehicles: story, song, video, theatre, guest speakers, and traditional crafts, among others. Readings included current news stories about the ongoing inquiry in Canada into murdered and missing Aboriginal women, the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the lack of mental health support in many Indigenous communities.

What They Did

The teacher, Erin Buchmann, began the project by working with a group of students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to examine areas of need in the school. The first step to make Indigenous culture more visible and present in the school was accomplished by painting a classroom and adding couches to create a welcoming environment. As well, a large mural in the school's main foyer was painted by students to showcase the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

Next, an installation of 40 red dresses was created as part of a campaign called The Red Dress Campaign. The dresses were hung inside and outside of the school, each with a plaque about a murdered or missing Aboriginal woman. This presentation was promoted locally and many community members, including local Elders, politicians, media, and trustees of the school board attended. In honour of the work that was done to draw attention to this issue, the students were presented with a painting commissioned by a member of the school's support team.

The students also produced and performed a play called *Wooly's Umbrella*, by Elizabeth Hill, to much acclaim. The play examines the relationship between an Indigenous woman and a doctor who wishes to prescribe her medication for her perceived schizophrenia. This play focuses on the legacy of residential schools, the suicide crisis plaguing remote Indigenous communities, and the disconnect between what support is needed and what is actually offered in these communities. As a part of the research and preparation for the performance, students made their own moccasins, attended workshops, invited guests in to the class, and learned traditional practices such as smudging and tobacco offerings.

Students performed this play for the community and as a part of the Sears Drama Festival where they were commended for their artistic, vocal, and performance abilities. Students also received the prestigious Adjudicator's Award for courage for tackling such a sensitive issue with dignity and compassion. They performed the play six times.

For their work on Indigenous issues and mental health, they were named as ambassadors for the Paul Hansell Foundation's ConvoPlate #205 by the region's Member of Parliament, Charlie Angus. These plates are intended to start a conversation about mental health and are to be passed on from one person to another in an attempt to GET LOUD about mental health.

In an effort to elevate the conversation to the national level, students started a Twitter campaign encouraging Rick Mercer to accept the ConvoPlate. They even created a Rick Mercer–style "rant" about mental health and the lack of support in remote Indigenous communities. While they did not receive confirmation from Rick Mercer himself, their tweets were noticed by several prominent Canadians.

The multi-faceted nature of the Indigenous Awareness project clearly inspired the students, engaged the community, and achieved its lofty goals. THINK congratulates Erin Buchmann and her Aboriginal Studies class of 2016 for their dedication and downright awesomeness.

SECOND PRIZE

Todd Clauer: Upper School Social Justice Project

THINK congratulates second prize winner Todd Clauer of the Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy in Kansas City, Missouri, in the United States. This private Jewish day school implemented its social justice project in Grades 9 through 12.

The school engages each year in a new social justice initiative and this project was chosen by the students in the senior class in partnership with students at University Academy, a charter school with a 90% African American student body based in a high-poverty neighbourhood.

This remarkable project sought to have the students understand and address some of the repercussions of the pervasive history of racial inequality in Kansas City and the United States. It focused on three areas over a three-year period: inequity in access to health care, voter engagement, and early childhood education.

The Jewish Value of Pursuing Justice

The core value that Todd Clauer aims to teach his students is to embrace the pursuit of justice through living every day as an advocate for the dignity of all peoples and all faiths. Informing the project was the school's "Profile of a Graduate," which articulates the values the school aims to instill in its graduates. Two of these are "Characteristics of a Mensch in Everyday Living" and "Actions that Embody Respect for the Dignity of all People and all Faiths."

The sources used in the project included Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech and Jewish sources that included the Talmud, the Passover Hagaddah, *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of Our Fathers), and the *midrash* (rabbinic interpretations).

The students analyzed Dr. King Jr.'s speech and related its themes, images, and metaphors to Jewish sources that embody the values of his Civil Rights project. Given their high regard for the analysis, the students created a faux Talmud page of Dr. King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech with the speech serving as the Gemara, with biblical, Talmudic, and *midrashic* sources surrounding the page as "Rashi" and "Tosaphot." In a small, interactive group lesson, the class discussed the Jewish value of pursuing justice.

Poverty and Health Care

The students, in collaboration with the students at University Academy, began their community action by developing a relationship with Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO) whose representatives introduced the students to the uphill efforts against injustices in public policy.

With the focus on access to health care in year one of the project, the students were exposed to the realities of the situation in their community. To this end, Reverend Deth Im of CCO conducted a "poverty simulation" in which students had to pay bills, get loans, and provide for their families, giving the students a sense of the hardships faced by those who live in poverty.

They were also shown statistics on income and mortality rates, specifically data on local health care disparity and life expectancy by zip code. For many students, it was the first time they had considered the grave implications of economic privations such as homelessness, incarceration, and true hunger.

The students' understanding was further expanded through an eye-opening guided tour of Kansas City with a special emphasis on its religious and racially segregated past in housing, jobs, and education.

Armed with an understanding of the potential to address the problem of access to health care, CCO helped to mobilize the students who fanned out in the neighbourhoods with some of the lowest rates of health insurance in the state, knocking on doors and supplying residents with critical information about the upcoming sign-up for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. The students also canvassed households to raise awareness about the possible Medicaid expansion in Missouri.

Future Votes KC

In year two of the project, Hyman Brand students focused on the issue of voter engagement. On the eve of the United States congressional mid-term elections, and with the help of the expertise of CCO, the students mobilized to mount a Get-Out-The-Vote initiative prior to and on Election Day. Students called registered voters and reminded them about the importance of voting, and, in some cases, directly assisted disabled voters to get to the polls.

Enthused by the excitement in that effort, the students initiated and ran a city council candidate forum. Students created a logo for the initiative, which they called Future Votes KC, established a social media presence, invited the candidates by phone, email, and Twitter, crafted compelling questions for the forum, and ran the entire event as both moderators and questioners. The students asked the candidates about their perspectives on local politics, tweeted at them, took selfies with them, and emerged savvy future voters and informed participants in democracy and civil society. The event was open to the public and attendance exceeded many other candidate forums that took place during that election cycle.

The Early Childhood Education Challenge

The third and final year of this incredible social justice initiative continued the partnership with University Academy with the goal of achieving lifelong action-oriented citizenship. The students focused their efforts on a possible ballot measure to fund free, universal early childhood education in Kansas City. Students conducted multiple site visits to early childhood education centres in order to learn about the topic first-hand. They researched the impact of other similar ballot measures in the U.S. and had the opportunity to engage with the president of the Kansas City Early Learning Commission Board.

Finally, students brought this matter before the city council. They prepared a PowerPoint presentation, practised their speeches to the council members, put on their most professional outfits, and went down to city hall to testify on behalf of the issue. Students were commended by the council members for their knowledge and passion, and the presentation spread the word about the importance of early childhood education and the challenges it faces, a situation unfamiliar to many at the time.

The Trip of a Lifetime: Civil Rights in the South

Year three of the project culminated with an initiative aimed at informing the thinking of 47 high school students through the lens of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. This was done by taking the students directly to the

battleground of the movement with a 10-day bus trip across the American South.

Underlying the plan was a dream that these students would come to understand, on a personal and profound level, the history of racism and discrimination in the United States, how it impacted the country, and how it continues to shape the nation.

The students were taken on a journey not only across the South, but back in time to the cultural moment in American history when they shared roots—Black and Jewish roots—that extended into one of the most profound expressions of *Tikkun Olam* of the 20th century: the Civil Rights struggle. The tour included interactions with the Jewish communities of the South, some of which played an active role in supporting the Civil Rights Movement through direct action.

In addition to visiting historical sites of the Civil Rights Movement, the students connected to modern-day advocacy through three stops along the way. First, they attended a workshop at the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, where they learned about efforts to provide legal representation for death row inmates and for juveniles sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, in a system that is biased towards poor defendants who are disproportionately people of colour. Next, students worked in Birmingham, Alabama, in a community that is deeply affected by poverty by planting a community garden, painting the home of an elderly resident, and cleaning a free, after-school program site. Finally, the students attended a workshop at the University of Mississippi's Winter Institute on Race and Reconciliation that explored how biases on race and class continue to create gaps in opportunity, and how students can face and utilize their own privilege as they seek to improve their community and the world.

A Vision Fulfilled

This extraordinary Civil Rights tour brought deep learning and meaning to an ongoing social justice partnership with University Academy. And the entire three-year journey taken by Todd Clauer and his students fulfilled the vision of the Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy as a place where students become adults who will seek to make a positive difference in their communities and the world, thereby securing its commitment to the Jewish value of justice for all people.

RUNNERS-UP

An Abundance of Excellence

Among the top submissions, three other teachers and their social justice projects are especially noteworthy: Randy Clark of Field Kindley High School in Coffeyville, Kansas; Avivit Mualem of Tichonet in Tel Aviv, Israel; and Jennifer Staysniak of Mount Alvernia High School in Newton, Massachusetts.

A Hero of the Civil Rights Movement

The impressive submission of teacher Randy Clark of Field Kindley High School, located in Coffeyville, Kansas, focused on famed baseball player and Civil Rights leader Jackie Robinson. This Grade 12 project sought to have the students understand how to model their own advocacy on the courage and leadership that this American hero showed in fighting for Civil Rights throughout his career.

By researching the original letters of Jackie Robinson, sent to and received from Civil Rights leaders, politicians, and U.S. Presidents, the students identified the values of liberty and equality for which Robinson fought so hard and so long. The students studied and analyzed the original letters and prepared banners demonstrating the struggles faced and the sacrifices made by Robinson, and many other Americans, in their fight for equality in America, a battle that continues today.

Lessons of the Past

The project submitted by Avivit Mualem of Tichonet in Tel Aviv was undertaken at a public school with a diverse community of secular and observant Jewish students.

The goal of this fascinating initiative, called In the Paths of the Sages, was to lead Grade 8 students to an understanding of how ancient texts can contain social and ethical questions that are relevant to their own lives today. The values studied included human dignity, respect for elders, a passion for knowledge and wisdom, and helping others. The sources were from Tractate Avot in the Talmud, modern poetry, medieval exegesis of the Mishnah (the written compilation of oral Jewish law), and modern philosophic texts.

The project comprised three phases. In phase one, students selected one passage from Tractate Avot and analyzed it. After identifying the core idea of the selected passage, student groups created online presentations, formulated questions for class discussions, and taught one another. In phase two, students once again selected a passage to focus on, along with other satellite texts, and wrote research papers comparing the texts and formulating their own opinions. Finally, students contributed their own family lore to a new and contemporary version of Tractate Avot. Their contributions were printed on magnets, which they could stick on their fridges at home.

Community Activists Heard

The fifth and final winning submission came from Jennifer Staysniak of Mount Alvernia High School in Newton, Massachusetts. This private all-girls Catholic school is based in the Franciscan tradition and the project, called Voices of Activism, was part of a Grades 11 and 12 course entitled "Catholic Social Teaching in Action." This remarkable course explores historic injustices and how the Catholic Church did, or did not, respond to them. With the primary focus on human dignity, the course looks at the international refugee crises, the Holocaust, Latin American dictatorships of the 1900s, prison systems in the United States, and homelessness and food insecurity today. Voices of Activism grew out of this course as a way in which to build empathy for "bystanders and upstanders, perpetrators and victims, 'saints' and 'sinners.'" The course grounds itself in the Catholic social teachings of various theologians and papal encyclicals and sources its values in the Old and New Testaments as well as in motivational non-fiction writing.

Aiming to inspire activism and a call to action in standing up to social injustice, the students went into their community to interview current and former activists from women's assistance programs, children's support services, an orphanage, prison and re-entry services, and urban farms. All of the audio from the interviews collected were posted on the Voices of Activism website, and parts of the interviews were transcribed by the students to highlight specific moments in the conversations that really stood out to them.

With the goal of imparting empathy and inspiring the students through local stories of activism, the project enabled the development of interview skills and reflection through writing. Most notably, the project sought to have the students understand that their voices do matter and their actions can make a difference in standing up against racism, discrimination, and social injustice.

Publisher's Note: This article is a synopsis of the five winning submissions for the Prize for Teaching Excellence 2016 and includes excerpts from components of them.

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A student from Mount Alvernia High School in Newton, Massachusetts, volunteers at Boston's ReVision Urban Farm.

Our Sages Tell Us

What role might art play in the pursuit of social justice?

Art in the World

BY ADAM SOL

In the wake of recent political events, there's an active side discussion of the role art has to play in public discourse. Quips have been made about how Brexit and a Trump presidency will revive protest literature and punk. *Saturday Night Live*'s satire seems not just topical but important, and thinkers from various platforms are telling those of us who make and consume art that our endeavours are more necessary than ever.

On the other hand, various pundits warn us not to expect too much. As David Berry recently wrote in *The National Post*, "Art cannot and will not save us. At its absolute best, it can only show us that there are things worth saving."[1] Art has always responded to its current moment, but as a tool for political activism and social engagement, it has had mixed success, producing as much propagandistic dreck as transcendent masterpieces. Jason Guriel, a devoted bubble-burster, suggested in *The Walrus* that artists "would do well to resist overestimating the power their art possesses."[2]

How do we teach our children to cherish art in this context? While we obsessively recheck our social media feeds for the latest troubling update, how do we remind our children to pursue nuance and complexity? In a world that seems to value sloganeering over science, speed over depth, and clicks over community, how do we emphasize that the longer, slower burn of serious artistic engagement matters? If a painting or a poem can't be monetized or marketed, how can we measure its impact? What role might art play in the pursuit of social justice?

First, we are reminded that art is more ubiquitous than we are sometimes aware. Art will not tie your shoe for you. But you probably learned it with a rhyme, a song can put that lesson into a funny but instructive context, and a painting can evoke the exhaustion implicit in a worn pair of untied shoes. Art shapes our encounter with the world, whether it's in the architecture of our buildings or the metaphors we summon to raise the tone of ceremonies and occasions.

Second, we are reminded that works of art—from the poetry of Langston Hughes to Shalom Aleichem's Tevye stories, from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* to the music of A Tribe Called Red—have always served as rallying points for communities, especially communities under stress, and have helped us to better understand each other. It's worth remembering that, despite the fact that journalists had been reporting the harrowing facts for months, it was a photograph of a drowned boy that really ignited the movement in Canada to help Syrian refugees.

And we have plenty of examples when art has galvanized a movement, exposed political hypocrisy, or demanded change. Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel *The Jungle* did more to regulate the meat-packing industry than any newspaper article. *Invisible Man* and *Roots* are still touchstones in the battle for racial equality. Tom Hanks's and Denzel Washington's performances in *Philadelphia* helped change public attitudes towards those who suffer from AIDS. And popular songs have been a force for social justice for centuries, from "Let My People Go" to "Hatikvah" to "John Brown's Body" to "Strange Fruit" to "We Shall Overcome" to "Respect" to "The Times They Are A-Changin'" to "A Change Is Gonna Come" to "Coal Miner's Daughter" to "Big Yellow Taxi" to "Fight the Power" to "Same Love."

Art is not just a form of escape from the facts of the world, it can also be a way to see the world with fresh eyes, a new perspective, an attention to detail, mystery, and beauty. And this is all the more true when we *make* art as it is when we "consume" it. The satisfactions we experience when we create or encounter art, like spiritual fulfillment or wisdom or love, are valuable whether or not they can be accurately measured.

Artistic endeavours often suffer in comparison to disciplines like math or science or business that seem to emphasize "the facts." Public discourse emphasizes practical skills because they seem more useful in "the real world." (As if the real world functions without emotion, spirituality, psychology, or mystery, all of which are better understood in art than in science.) In comparison, artistic pursuits may seem frivolous or at best a pleasant addendum to the "core curriculum."

A far more useful metaphor is of athletics. There are very few of us who can hope to be José Bautista or Serena Williams or Lionel Messi. But we all benefit from playing basketball or jogging or yoga (whether or not we do it as often as we should). If physical activity is crucial to the health of our bodies, then art is crucial to the health of our empathy and imagination. The pursuit of social justice depends absolutely on our empathy to identify problems and our imagination to see a way out of them. They are muscles, and we let them atrophy at our peril. They thrive only when exercised.

1 D. Berry, "Art Can Be a Beacon of Hope or an Explanation of the World …" *The National Post*, December 2, 2016, http://news.nationalpost.com/arts/art-can-be-a-beacon-of-hope-or-explanation-of-the-world-but-whether-it-can-shape-it-in-dark-times-is-uncertain

2 J. Guriel, "Making Art in the Face of Trump," *The Walrus*, December 6, 2016, https://thewalrus.ca/making-art-in-the-face-of-trump/

Image credit: Vincent van Gogh, *Shoes*, oil on canvas, 1888. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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The Social Conscience of Our Children

A MIRROR REFLECTION OF US

BY JASMINE ELIAV

A recent trend encourages our children to engage in a "give back" project on the occasion of their bar or bat mitzvah, an act of *tzedakah* (righteousness). The projects support initiatives in the Jewish and wider community. Through the lens of child development, the timing of these projects is significant; our young adults are learning to take initiative, to choose what causes move them and why, and to contemplate the dilemmas that face the world and how they might personally affect change.

It is fascinating to try to understand what motivates a desire for social justice and whether one's reason for engaging matters. Do we reflect on whether our kids undertake these projects because of social pressure, parental expectation, or the positive regard of others, in addition to a personal desire to contribute to change? Much has been written about where the ego comes into play with social justice, or, otherwise put, the tension between self-interest and altruism. Some conclude that there is always an ego component; that it's natural and perhaps necessary.

A key question is how to lay the foundation for social justice in our children at a young age, so that, instead of functioning in isolated projects, a social conscience becomes integrated into who they are. What are the nuances of developing this awareness? How do we help children understand the difference between doing something for someone and doing something with someone?

As parents we teach our children to construct their moral code through our own personal interpretations, explanations, and emotional reactions, but also, and most tellingly, through our actions. We have to take note of the way in which we model how to manage experiences that relate to justice. In his much-revered book, *The Nature of Prejudice* (first published in 1954),[1] American psychologist and educator Gordon Allport highlights the importance of what children learn at home. He writes that what they observe at home and learn over time, they come to believe. He teaches that, over the course of their development, children internalize these learned beliefs until the beliefs are very difficult to shift.

Studies suggest that children, as early as 15 months of age, begin to recognize fairness.[2] New York University professor and psychologist Martin Hoffman explains that these early experiences "provide the raw material from which children can construct an increasingly complex empathy-based sense of fairness and concern for others."[3] Furthermore, it is important to understand that very young children (preschool age) have been shown to hold prejudices and to be very interested in learning about the differences between people.[4] The psychology literature that discusses greater attachment further indicates that if a child's own empathic needs are not met, his/her own needs will always seem more pressing.

As parents we need to recognize what biases we present to our children. Do we somehow suggest that our needs are greater than others' needs? Are we messaging that our needs are more imperative than our children's needs? Do we subscribe to beliefs that suggest that others who are suffering deserve their fate? Especially today, we must listen to how we react to the news while we are with our children, and how we respond to events when in social situations. Are we emitting an unedited personal impression with or without expletives? Are we acting with an appreciation that young eyes and ears are tuned in to our every move?

Do we think we can shame our children into empathy? At times many parents become overwhelmed by behaviours they feel show their children as being "spoiled" or "ungrateful," and they react in a disproportionate way. Shame is even part of the ever-present and seemingly innocuous dinner scenario: "You had better eat your food. Do you know how many kids have nothing to eat?"

With an emotional intensity that is bewildering to children, parents communicate that it is shameful to be so unaware of the needs of others in the world. This approach contributes to a "doing for" sentiment, which is neither constructive from a social justice perspective nor educational from a child's point of view.

My experience is that children cannot be shamed into feeling empathy. Negative approaches to consciousness-raising are counterproductive. To our children, the all important factors in nurturing a sense for justice in society are the affective, motivational, and cognitive aspects of modelling empathy.

Ours is described as a very self-focused society, and parents often ask me how they can resensitize their seemingly desensitized children. I answer that we have to evolve our perception of social consciousness; we have to develop our children's self-esteem and self-worth; and we must not turn social justice into another item on our "to-do" list or into a badge of a "great kid."

Social justice education is greater than platitudes. A large body of literature on the development of prejudice supports that when children feel good about themselves, they are less likely to be drawn to discriminatory views.[5] In developing social conscience and empathy in your child and for your child, you are, in truth, developing social and emotional intelligence in your child.

We need to find quiet spaces starting when our children are very young. We must model how to self-reflect, how to understand, how to actively listen. We have to be role models who are seen to consider different perspectives and are open to learning and hearing with thoughtful intention. With our own empathy and compassion, we can activate our children and inspire a social consciousness that is deeply rooted and meaningful.

As a society we tend to focus too much on the grand gestures of social activism; digging wells across a continent, responding emotionally and financially to crisis and bloodshed. Instead of beginning a child's sense of social responsibility with grand examples and then filtering down, we might do better to begin with the smallest most personal moments and build up. For example, how do our children see us speak about or treat people who are different than us, those who look different, practise different religions, or make more or less money than us? Are we modelling openness or teaching judgment? Are we lending credence to a hierarchical approach to power, money, and status?

Cultivating empathy and inspiring social consciousness is not a one-project deal; it is something we commit to and consider throughout our lives. Our social conscience is a mirror reflection of who we are and how we act with ourselves and our loved ones at home and every day.

1 *The Nature of Prejudice: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

2 M.F.H. Schmidt and J.A. Sommerville, "Fairness Expectations and Altruistic Sharing in 15-Month-Old Human Infants," PLOS ONE [online journal], October 7, 2011, http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0023223

3 M.L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 17.

4 P.A. Katz and J.A. Kofkin, "Race, Gender, and Young Children," in S.S. Luthar, J.A. Burack, D. Cicchetti, and J. Weisz, eds., *Developmental Psychopathology: Perspectives on Adjustment, Risk, and Disorder* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 51–74.

5 S. Fein and S.J. Spencer, "Prejudice as Self-image Maintenance: Affirming the Self through Derogating Others," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (July 1997), pp. 31–44.

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