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THINK

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

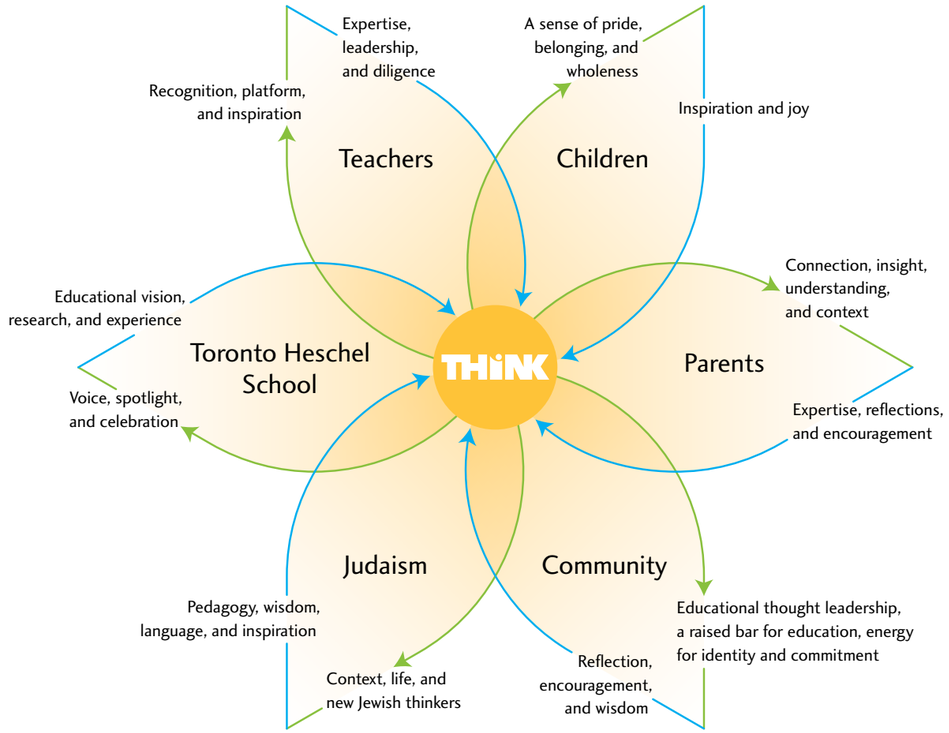
Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children

HOW WE TALK

THE SPIRIT OF THE WORD / SPEAKING IN THE JEWISH TRADITION / WALLS THAT TALK / DONNIEL HARTMAN WRITES TO HIS GRANDCHILDREN / ADAM SOL SPEAKS POEMS / CLAIRE MERBAUM EAVESDROPS ON THINKING / JASMINE ELIAV REMEMBERS CHICKEN LITTLE

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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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.

Integrated Jewish Studies espoused by The Lola Stein Institute are delivered at The Toronto Heschel School, a Jewish day school in Toronto, Canada.

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LSI PUBLICATIONS

How will our tunes linger in our child's heart?

The Spirit of the Word

Whether ancient or recent, words that are meticulously hand-inked on Torah parchment flow across the scroll from beginning to end without vowels, punctuation, or paragraphs. Rewritten in books, they become accessorized with black dots and squiggles: some markings are vowels, others are musical notes. Without this code of supportive instructions, the words of Torah would remain indecipherable to most people.

In Yiddish the code is called *trop*, from the Greek and Latin for "manner" or "way."[1] In Hebrew, it's called *ta'amim*, meaning "taste." The code tells us which words collect as phrases and sentences and which demand emphasis or beg a lighter voice. It directs where chanting should pause for breath and where effort must labour through. The code deciphers whether a particular Torah moment is melancholy or joyous, strident or fearful, resounding or ephemeral. Our tradition understands that how words are expressed shapes what they mean.

This formulation for messaging began with Moses. Essayist Rabbi Baruch Davidson summarizes: "The trop is an integral part of reading Torah and has historical, mystical, as well as practical relevance.... Chassidic masters write that much of the insight provided by the tunes affects aspects of our souls that are beyond our understanding and conscious perception."[2]

In this issue of *THINK* we discuss how we talk. If punctuation, timing, and emotion distill layered implications of Torah text over thousands of years, what's their effect on our daily conversations? Are we mindful about message delivery? Do we "punctuate" our children's experiences by raising them in environments that make meaning an important aspect of their lives? Do we pace our narrative, remembering that childhood is swift and finite? Do we speak in ways that help our particular child understand what's happening? How will our tunes linger in our child's heart? Sad or sweet?

In Awe and Wonder, Greg Beiles describes Jewish tradition as self-consciously self-aware of communication. Claire Merbaum explains self-awareness and self-talk as strategies for higher-level thinking. Ava Kwinter detects classroom habits and speech modes that resonate with Rabbi A.J. Heschel's dream educators. Lisa Rendely evokes metacognition in 3D in school hallways that communicate with focus split between message, messenger, and recipient.

Children catch wider meaning than we sometimes expect. Dvora Goodman shares how this works in second-language immersion. Rabbi Donniel Hartman gently advises his young grandchildren about combat duty in the war of words. Jasmine Eliav highlights fearmongering and the resolve needed to raise children with a positive outlook.

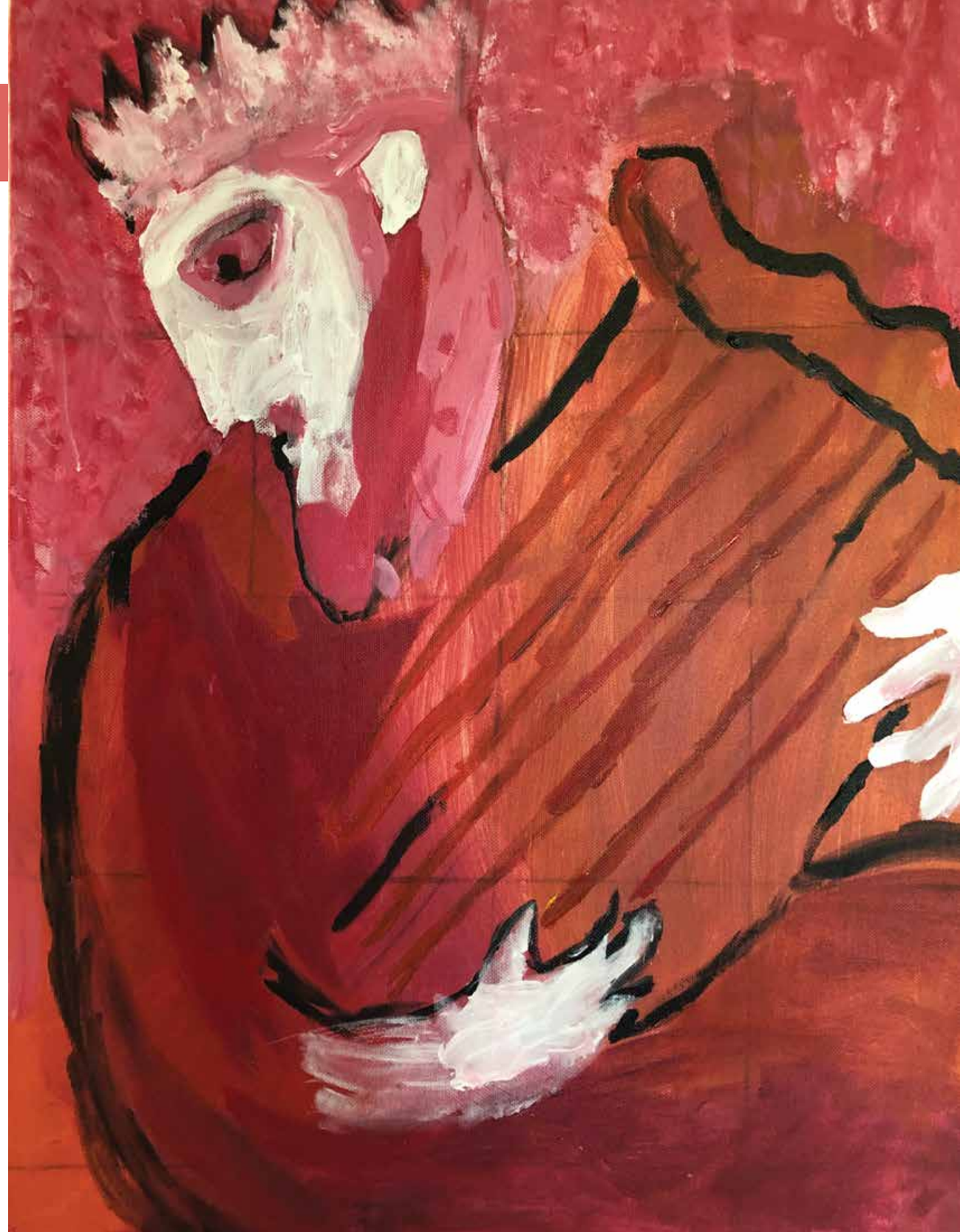
We send messages to children with words, deeds, and numbers. Adam Sol shows poetry as experiential learning and David Newman shows experience as poetry. Yoni Goldstein looks at Hans Rosling's analysis of misinformation and its potential vaccine in a THINK Book Report on *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We Are Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*.

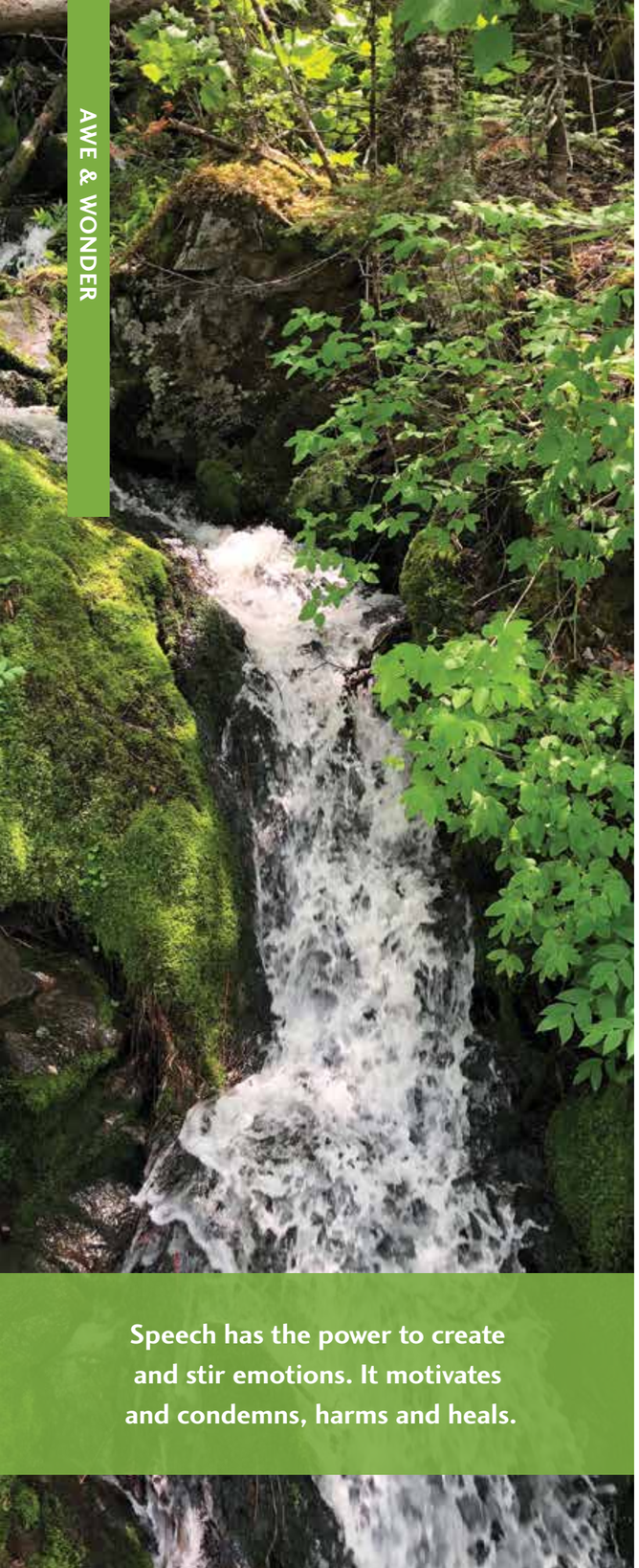
There's a lot to say about how we talk. Enjoy the conversation!

Pam

1 "Etymology of the Word 'Trope,'" mi yodeya, retrieved August 22, 2019, from https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/43468/etymology-of-the-word-trope

2 Rabbi Baruch S. Davidson, "Who Made Up the Way We Sing the Torah?" Chabad.org, retrieved August 22, 2019, from https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/817346/jewish/Who-Made-Up-the-Way-We-Sing-the-Torah.htm





Speech has the power to create and stir emotions. It motivates and condemns, harms and heals.

Speaking in the Jewish Tradition

THE ORIGINAL SPEECH TO TEXT

BY GREG BEILES

Speech lies at the origin of Jewish teaching and learning. Nothing could be more Jewish than writing about speaking. Tradition teaches that Torah is conveyed at Mount Sinai to the people of Israel *al pi hashem, beyad Moshe*—according to the *word* (literally "mouth") of God, by the hand of Moshe. In what may be the first recorded instance of *speech to text*, Moshe scribes what God says.

When the Israelites stood at Mount Sinai as a free people, the Torah was revealed to them through speech. The term *aseret hadibrot*—generally translated as the "ten commandments"—literally means "the ten sayings" from the Hebrew verb *diber*—"to say." The commandments were not ideas implanted in the minds of human beings; they were words communicated to the ears of people who were free to hear, discuss, interpret, debate, and, ultimately, choose whether or not to obey. Describing Revelation—God's teaching—as sayings implores us to remember the importance of "speech" as a vehicle for teaching and learning.

Lesson one is that speech has the power to create. We recite daily: "Blessed is the One who spoke and created the universe." Speech is the first specific act ascribed to God in the creation text: "And God said, let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). The notion that speech creates is not hocus pocus. The invocation *"abracadabra"*—thought to derive from the Aramaic *"I created according to my words"*—has more truth than meets the ears. Whatever we think, once we speak, our thoughts enter the world with tangible effects. Leaders use speech to launch movements and organize societies. Speech stirs emotions. It motivates and condemns, harms, and heals.

The central prayer, the *Amidah*, begins, "Adonai, please open my lips." Whether in a loud or quiet voice, Jewish prayer is always vocalized with lips moving. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel states that "a word uttered in prayer is a promise, and earnest commitment" to play our part in creating a holy world.[1] The moving of lips, the vibration of the vocal cords, the ear hearing our pledge—all bind our commitments through a physical and communal accountability to action.

Lesson two comes from the second narrative of creation (Genesis 2): conversation is what distinguishes human consciousness. The First Human—Ha'adam—was created as a single being and was lonely, and so animals were created as companions. Ha'adam named each animal (Genesis 2:19), but they could offer no word in return. Language went only in one direction. The Human could not converse with them. A second human being was required to be a suitable conversation partner, which in Hebrew is called the *ezer kenegdo*—literally, "a helper who speaks"—from the Hebrew root *n.g.d.*, meaning "to speak or tell." Only when in a dyad of speaking partners do humans encounter, for better or worse, the tree of knowledge through which they become conscious. Human speech and consciousness are revealed as inextricably linked.

The partnership between thought and speech intuited by Torah is affirmed by psychology. The Jewish-Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky demonstrated how speech patterns between a child and parent are essential in children's cognitive development; a child's ideas are not fully conceived, but wait to be expressed once linguistic abilities catch up. The back-and-forth play between a child's babble and a parent's verbal responses help consolidate the child's conceptions of the world.[2] A teacher, like a parent, should be an *ezer kenegdo*—a speech partner—who models and challenges students to use more sophisticated and accurate language. Articulate speech sharpens the mind.

Understanding teaching and learning through the lens of speech sees educators frame their lessons as conversations rather than one-way transmissions. The philosopher Franz Rosenzweig differentiates between "grammatical thought," in which ideas are fully formed in one's imagination, and "speech-thought," in which ideas develop through dialogue.[3]

Typically a teacher (or video, slideshow, or app) delivers information for students to copy down, remember, or otherwise internalize. To be sure, words are used; "the difference," says Rosenzweig, "does not lie in sound and silence" but whether there is real conversation. Someone who is solely a listener cannot interject, question, or contribute. Speech-thinking happens when students and teachers engage in true dialogue that generates insight and understanding.

Rosenzweig calls speech-thinking a "new" way to understand thought. But there is little doubt in my mind that the ancient Jewish form of learning called *chaveruta* (study partnership) and *makhloket* (debate) inspired his notion of speech-thinking. In the classroom, *chaveruta* and *makhloket* are forms of speech-thought, which students use to develop ideas and relationships with dialogical partners. The ethical quality of learning is enhanced when wisdom emerges through sitting in proximity to a learning buddy, someone who is seen, felt, and appreciated as a living source of knowledge.

We also read in the Bible that speech is the primary tool of justice and activism. The great prophets spoke eloquently on behalf of the beleaguered, the poor, the orphan, and the widow. Abraham returns again and again to God, arguing aloud for the sake of even the smallest number of righteous people. Abraham's speaking out designates him as the leader of a new people and an ethical worldview.

Moshe grows up keenly aware of the importance of speech and identifies his stutter as an impediment to leadership. God reassures him, not by promising him strength or courage, but by affirming the role of speech saying, "I will be with your mouth…and I will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:12). The centrality of speech for leadership is emphasized by the incident that ultimately prevents Moshe from entering the land of Israel. Towards their journey's end, the people again bewail the lack of water. God instructs Moshe to raise his staff and "speak to the rock" that it will bring forth water (Numbers 20:8), but Moshe, exhausted and finally at a loss for words, allows frustration to overtake him. Instead of "speaking" to the rock, he strikes it with his staff. Water pours out, but Moshe is told that because of his loss of faith, he cannot enter the land of Israel. His failure with words terminates his leadership.

Moshe hands over leadership—how else?—through words to the whole people. He reminds them that "Torah is in your mouth and in your heart to do it" (Deuteronomy 30:14). Moshe reminds them—and us—that teaching and learning involves an integration of contemplation (heart), articulation (mouth), and action.

1 Abraham J. Heschel, "On Prayer" (1969), retrieved August 22, 2019, from https://opensiddur.org/miscellanea/pedagogy/on-prayer-by-abraham-joshua-heschel-1969/

2 James V. Werstsch, *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

3 Franz Rosenzweig, *The "New Thinking,"* ed. and trans. from the German by Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 87.

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

Greg Beiles Wins 2019 Covenant Award!

Greg Beiles, Head of The Toronto Heschel School and Director of The Lola Stein Institute, has been selected to receive the 2019 Covenant Award, the highest honour in the field of North American Jewish education.

The Covenant Foundation, an internationally renowned organization based in New York, annually honours three educators who make an exceptional impact on Jewish life through innovative educational practices and models. The Covenant Award is a wonderful endorsement of Greg's educational vision.

Announcing! The Tamid Fund

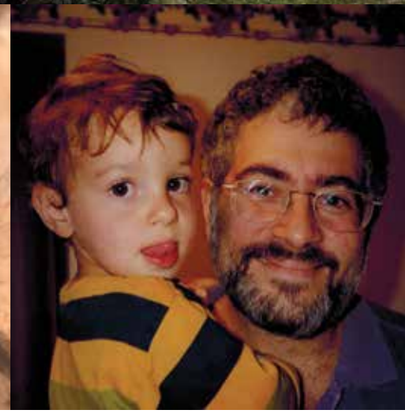
The Toronto Heschel School is thrilled to announce the establishment of the Tamid Fund,

an endowment for tuition assistance.

Murray Goldman launches the Tamid Fund with a visionary $2-million gift. As the father of two Toronto Heschel alumni, Goldman is pleased to provide this gift to help others access a Toronto Heschel education.

The Tamid Fund widens the doorway that welcomes Jewish families who seek a Toronto Heschel School education. The Tamid Fund provides bursaries to supplement the generous support received from the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and the Julia and Henry Koschitsky Centre for Jewish Education.

To donate to the Tamid Fund, contact Greg Beiles at gbeiles@torontoheschel.org or call 416-635-1876.



Top, from left: David and Yoni Newman; Yoni, aged 22, with Israeli Army in Germany, 2019.

Bottom, from left: Herman Newman and grandson, Yoni; Herman, aged 22, official Displaced Person identity card, Germany, 1945; David and Yoni.

"As a parent between these two generational extremes, I can only feel like a bridge between two different worlds."

On the Nature of Circles

ONE FAMILY MEETS HISTORY

BY DAVID NEWMAN

Now we must protect ourselves for those who only could have dreamt of that opportunity.
—journal of Yoni Newman (March 27, 2019)

There are different schools of thought about the nature of human progress, one of which is a progressive view of continuous expansion to human betterment. The Jewish view suggests that history has a direction. As a belief-oriented people, we feel that we are agents in a divinely planned direction towards a future redemption. We constantly hope to glimpse the vague outlines of this future. Lately, I have been thinking of these issues, particularly with respect to three young men, aged 19 to 21, in three different moments in time, and what their stories say about individual lives and Jewish history's grand direction. The three protagonists in my thoughts are my father Herman, myself, and my son Yoni, the third of our family's five wonderful young adult children.

Herman was born in 1928 in an area of Europe where the borders had morphed in the early 20th century. One of five children, and with a widowed mother, the horrors of 1940s Europe entered Herman's life at a young age. As the youngest, he went with her and other refugees wandering in western Ukraine, only to return to the place of their expulsion after a year. Not long after, Herman and his mother were forever separated when they arrived at Birkenau. Of his four siblings, Herman was the only child to survive. He was sent from Auschwitz to a Warsaw labour camp, and in 1944 partook in the infamous "death marches" of Western Europe, eventually arriving at Dachau, where he was transferred to a slave labour camp nearby. His liberation occurred in the same vicinity in the south of Germany. Post-starvation and still very ill, he was flown on a Red Cross flight to England and, at the age of 21, arrived in Halifax, where he chose to stay. In Halifax, he got married, raised three sons, and ultimately constructed a new life. In my own childhood, he spoke relatively little about his past.

The next protagonist in this narrative is myself. I spent a year in Israel on a post–high school gap year program and then returned to Dalhousie University. I attended an undergraduate seminar course with a class of 12 students. I was in this class with two alumni of my gap year program, as well as two students who were also children of Holocaust survivors. Our professor was intrigued by these students who knew so much about modern German studies. He arranged a visit from the great scholar of Holocaust studies, Raoul Hillberg. Hillberg, ever the social historian, sought out the few survivors in Halifax and encouraged them to record their narratives. I asked Professor Stokes' permission to accept Hillberg's exhortation. The resulting paper, as painful as it is to read a paper by a 19 year-old trying to sound learned, helped provide my father with a sense of narrative cohesion that allowed him to speak publicly and often throughout the Maritime provinces. It also produced a family legacy document read by Yoni, the third protagonist of this story.

Later, married with family in Toronto, we went searching for community. We became founding parents at the nascent Toronto Heschel School. Our children thrived there. As part of his curriculum, Yoni wrote a biography of Herman's life and presented it to his class. Yoni spent many of his summers at a summer camp in Israel and decided to move to Israel; initially, in his mind in Grade 11, and in reality, a week after high school graduation. He was keen to receive his official residency card before turning 18. This allowed his successful completion of the many try-outs to reach the special forces he wanted to join: the Paratroop Commando unit. Non-Israelis cannot appreciate the raised eyebrows that his entry into such a unit has provoked. Nor is it easy for us to appreciate the remarkably hard work Yoni and his squad of special forces soldiers accomplished in the following three years.

Three people of the same age and three epochs. History has circles that move in a direction. Right after Purim in 2019, Yoni and his unit flew to the largest U.S. military base in south Germany. This was the first time Israeli ground forces participated in a large exercise designed to test NATO command and control structures with soldiers from different countries under one command. The Israeli contribution was a small group of special forces soldiers working with similar units from other countries. The irony was profound. The base was built on the site of a former Nazi military base and POW camp. Yoni, with Israeli boots on the ground, was only a few kilometres from Dachau, where Herman had once stood—the same age as Yoni—at a different time.

One young man experienced the epitome of Jewish powerlessness. Another, two generations later, was participating as an equal in advanced wargaming exercises on the same ground. Yoni considered one of the remarkable events of the unusual trip to be his opportunity to vote in the Israeli national elections while on German soil, an extreme mark of Jewish agency and autonomy opposite to his grandfather's experience at the same locale.

When the Israeli forces returned, the embedded reporters from Israeli media streams broke the news and stories of their trip. In one article, a commander was asked if the German and Israeli special forces talked a lot about the mirror image of their shared past. The commander said there was no need for discussion as they were all very professional and they all recognized that the entire enterprise "breathes history." I was reminded of the first volume of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* which is entitled "My Father Bleeds History."

As a parent between these two generational extremes, I can only feel like a bridge between two different worlds. History may be unidirectional and its circles change. Like all parents, I can only hope for the future success of Yoni and all his colleagues and friends. When wrapping tefillin on one's finger, one says "*v'erestich li ba Emuna*" (and I will be wed to you in faith). The Jewish view of history is both optimistic and resolute as time continues to unfold.

Dr. David Newman is a physician living and working in Toronto. He is on the board of governors of the Toronto Heschel School and was a co-chair of the board in the early years of the school.

100 Hebrew Words a Lesson

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Colourful paper cutouts stick to the door of the Senior Kindergarten (SK) classroom. Shaped like hands, each bears a short English word such as "AND" or "IN" or "THE." As they enter, the children slap the words with a "High five," saying "Hi, AND" and "Hi, THE."

My son followed the routine for weeks and I watched the small words change and rotate. Then one day he raised his hand and paused. When he resumed his routine, he was happily greeting letters of the Hebrew alphabet, "Hi, ALEPH, Hi, BET." Then, again a pause as something twigged. He switched to "Shalom, ALEPH. Shalom, BET" and scampered inside. I love this moment because it demonstrates a five-year-old's capacity to feel the natural flow of a second language; he could not say hello to an aleph. It warrants "Shalom."

Learning to speak a second language is not easy. Literature about language acquisition describes "understanding" as a passive skill that is more easily mastered than the active skill of speaking. In school environments, while many students can understand a second language, it is a great feat to get the children to speak and speak well. As such, The Toronto Heschel School issued a challenge to its teachers—all of them, from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 8: Have your students speak 100 Hebrew words every lesson!

I interviewed my son's SK Hebrew teacher, Morah Maya Lazovski, and watched her tackle the challenge. She follows the basic rule to never speak to her students in English and creates a completely immersive Hebrew environment. Morah Maya is intentional and explicit about her goals with her young students. She imbues the sense that second language learning is not only about mastering a language, it's about self-challenge. Some of the children can say single Hebrew words, some can speak in two-word statements, and some can string more words together. No matter how many words they are comfortable using, they have to commit to adding one more. That's her challenge to them.

Second language learning is not only about mastering a language, it's about self-challenge.

She is open and articulate about the risk-taking that is involved in students' assumption of this challenge, and removes any fear of shame that may come with making mistakes. For example, when a student hesitated to speak, Morah Maya, who is Israeli, said to her in front of the class in Hebrew, "Do you laugh at me when I say something wrong in English? We won't laugh at you. It is okay to make mistakes, but you need to try." The disarming statement was all this little girl needed to hear to help her make the effort and attempt to speak in Hebrew. Morah Maya is the kind of teacher that children want to please. She jokes, laughs, and plays with her students. However, she is also strict and demanding. I saw that, when she praised this little girl by saying *Kol hakavod* (an expression meaning "good job"), it meant the world to her.

One hundred words a day requires careful thought. Morah Maya is a master of the mnemonic; she has teaching systems, patterns, and associations that foster speaking Hebrew. Her students experience, experiment with, and exude each new word she gives them. First they articulate it clearly, then they shout it, whisper it, clap the syllables, say it to a friend on the right, then to a friend on the left, always with a hand motion, gesticulating the meaning of the word.

Another tactic is repetition through play. The children become familiar with a game, that is, what you say when you're rolling the dice, landing on a certain square, or running across a field (for example, *Ani zoreket kubiah kechulah*, meaning "I am throwing a blue die," and *Ani roeh shtayim*, meaning "I see the number two"). When games learned in September are played in May, with new vocabulary slotted in, the kids play boisterously, fully in Hebrew.

The repetition of Hebrew phrases is also useful for storytelling about the Jewish holidays and Torah. My son came home at Purim time in March relaying to me parts of the Purim Megillah completely in Hebrew. I asked Morah Maya how he was able to do this, and she explained how she used scripts repeatedly in differing ways. The repetition let my boy feel comfortable to tell me the story in Hebrew. A simple SK script might be: *Ani Achashverosh. Yesh li keter al harosh* ("I am Achashverosh. I have a crown on my head"). The class had practised this statement in many ways, such as going around a circle with each child repeating the sentences; conversing in pairs; and finally, in costume, performing the Megillah scenes.

Music also works magic for memory. The class sings at least three Hebrew songs daily; some are built into routines, such as singing "*Shalom, ma nishma*?" ("Hello, what's new?") while others connect to the learning unit. Studies have uncovered that language acquisition is strengthened by moving your body while learning a language, and Morah Maya's songs have corresponding movements.

I saw the class play a quick movement game where each child in the circle would stand and say the letters in the aleph-bet sequentially—almost in a wave. The letters were displayed on the wall for them to reference. The exercise took three minutes and then they sat down, fresh and ready. Another fun movement occurs when children do a good job of something; Morah Maya has them pat themselves on both shoulders and say aloud "*Kol hakavod*—good job."

Morah Maya wants her students to be conscious of the techniques and reminders that can help them speak their Hebrew. For example, when I was in the class visiting, she was explaining that earlier someone had asked how to say "tree trunk" and she reminded them that they knew because it was in their song about trees. The children immediately started singing and doing the corresponding hand motions, and in the lyrics I heard all the parts of the tree. There are also cues on the classroom walls, such as words and pictures. If all these are not enough, the children know how to ask for help. A boy stumbled when trying to speak, and Morah Maya offered, "*Ata tzarich ezra? Az tagid, 'Ani tzarich ezra'*" ("Do you need help? Then say to me, 'I need help.'") The help sometimes comes from her and sometimes from his friends.

Morah Maya, with her colleagues at Toronto Heschel, are launching JK and SK children into the rigorous language training they continue to receive as they grow up grade to grade. Have you been counting—did they say 100 words?

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

SPECIAL FEATURE

HOW WE TALK

The hallways are simultaneously a curated gallery, learning space and communication zone.

These Walls Can Talk

BY LISA RENDELY

The hallways of our school echo its sensibilities. It's a moment of revelation to notice why. The subtlety, morality, and insight that comprise The Toronto Heschel School recipe resound in its corridor displays. Yes, the walls manifest how the student artwork is created. Yes, they detail the media, artists-in-residence, and cross-curricular connections. But more than that, the walls articulate the student experience. Each display shares a multi-dimensional microcosm of the layered learning behind each work of art, artifact, or photograph. The hallways reverberate with dynamism. These walls can talk.

The classrooms themselves burst with creative energy; student artwork, art posters, and signage create a deliberate aesthetic environment that is geared towards learning. But what's fascinating to notice is how the classroom atmosphere flows into the hallways which become simultaneously a curated gallery, learning space, and communication zone. All areas of the building—entrances, corridors, gathering spaces—contain revolving and well-documented exhibitions of student productivity. The walls show projects—finished and work in progress—that consumed days or months of intense effort.

The presentation compels a continual dialogue between the pedagogy that is Toronto Heschel and its students, teachers, and parents. Onlookers have a chance to appreciate the educational strategy patently at work. Like a gallery, each artwork is labelled and presented with signage that articulates the intentions, media, and precedents behind each display. The presentation exposes what Toronto Heschel educators have in mind when devising the projects that are in effect performances of student understanding; it explains how they have woven together particular subject areas to create one holistic, inquiry-based, and challenging learning experience. The goal is that all viewers understand the artistry in context.

For Grade 7, for example, a teacher team collaborates to integrate and celebrate the High Holy Days artfully. The class studies the text of the *Unetana Tokef*, a *piyyut* (poem) of the Yom Kippur liturgy. In Language Arts class, the students analyze the prayer and the symmetry and balance of each phrase: "Who shall live and who shall die / Who shall perish by water and who by fire." In Mishnah class, they study the meaning and Judaic significance of these questions. Then they enter the art room, where the third step is to illustrate selected phrases with Mark Rothko's colour-block canvasses as inspiration. Assessing colours and proportions to reflect, for example, "who by fire," brings deeper thinking; some see flame as red, while others interpret it as blue, black, or grey. A *shofar* might be added, again with scale, proportion, colour, and directionality in mind, interpreting Mishnaic thought. The result is a room washed in dramatic shades and perspectives, each graphically and personally expressed. Then their learning pervades the school. Their powerful interpretive works grace the hallways, multi-purpose area, classrooms, and gathering places.

Another sharing comes with the beautifully painted silk *tallitot* (prayer shawls) that hang in the second-floor windows, creating a stained-glass effect as light streams through. For this project, students delved into Jewish liturgy. They chose a word or phrase from a *bracha* (a blessing) that reflected their personal *kavannah l'tefillah* (commitment to prayer) and they painted the selected words onto the *tallitot*. The project blends the students' years of artistic expression with their years of text study. Having become practised artists in manipulating form and design, they can now use them to convey deep meaning. The final product is a visual symphony of colour, pattern, and texture. Like the Rothko-inspired Yom Kippur ideations above, the process of painting the *tallitot* enable each student to reach for and then share personal statements that derive from their own text study. The variety of visible expression is as wondrous to younger students as it is to the artists. The room glows with diverse personalities, real textual knowledge, and the connection that these students feel to their Jewish identities.

The displays are a function of intentional stewardship. The idea is to demonstrate respect and reverence for the work and the artist and to underscore that this artwork and these artists warrant attention. Insight into process helps. Parents who see their child's learning in action know what to talk about in school hallways and at home with respect to what's going on in their classes. The casual line "Tell me about your artwork" releases the floodgates of important conversations.

Earned respect is significant to child development and sense of self. A curated exhibition of artistic accomplishment delivers real approbation to an artist, whether in Junior Kindergarten or Grade 8. It is a public acknowledgement of the demanding journey which the children have travelled. Conversely, knowing that their work will be visible, it also nurtures in them a sense of diligence and accountability. Knowing the transparent end, they persist through their projects with time, care, and precision, whether in ceramics, paintings, drawings, prints, or 3D sculptures.

Validating and valuing student learning is a core principle of The Toronto Heschel School. Naming the model artists whom the children have studied—Mark Rothko, who inspires Grade 7 painting, or Wassily Kandinsky, who is artist-in-residence for Senior Kindergarten—venerates those who inspire us and contextualizes student art. By treating each grade with equal sincerity—the same standard of signage, wall space, and rigour—the school shows that it prioritizes and treasures all student work. This is an important reflection back to the students who see that their work means something to their community, understand that it is valued, and acclimatize to the notion that their ideas matter. Seeing one's art on display stirs complex emotions that contribute to anyone's sense of self.

Students' daily viewing of projects and artwork made by students in other grades is part of the plan. Just passing by on their way to French, math, or gym ignites a spark of learning. The visual cues in the hallways trigger excitement for projects they will get to create one day as well as memories of past learning. The older students understand the various displays well and reconnect familiar ideas to their current studies albeit with a more developed understanding. The students causally come to notice how their learning spirals upwards, and their expressions spiral up right along with it. They sense how learning to use a grid to copy a work of art in Grade 4 becomes a useful skill when reproducing a Marc Chagall painting in Grade 6, and later when drawing a self-portrait in Grade 8. They appreciate how their ability to draw a line learned in JK repeats as a series of basic shapes in Grade 3 and complex still-life drawings in Grade 4. They accumulate the intrinsic understanding that learning accumulates.

"Next year we get to do that!" a Grade 1 student said excitedly as he walked past ceramic artwork made by Grade 2 students, a new exhibit freshly installed. The anticipation was palpable and his sentiment rippled through the class as they walked single file, down the hallway to music class. A new display! Fresh artwork! What joy!

Lisa Rendely teaches Grade 5 and visual art at The Toronto Heschel School. She studied and practised architecture before pursuing a career in education, and integrates art and design in her daily classroom teaching.

Eavesdropping on the Language of Thinking

THE METACOGNITIVE ADVANTAGE

BY CLAIRE MERBAUM

Sarah is six. Playing with Lego, she says to herself aloud, "This next piece goes...here. Perfect!" Like many young children, she is using self-talk to guide herself.

Self-talk is a form of "sharing" out loud with oneself what one is doing at any given time; it is a way of noticing what is being performed. As children grow, the process becomes internalized. At the age of six, Sarah is still saying the same things "to herself" in addition to the words she uses to communicate with others. That is to say, her oral language externalizes the internal processes with which she plans, monitors, and reflects on her experiences.

Sam talks to himself as he works on a puzzle, "If I can get this ring over the end of the long piece, I'll be halfway there." He proceeds, sees his plan is working and says quietly to himself, "Next, I'll get the square piece that's blocking me out of the way."

Sam is showing an awareness of what he knows, where he is in relation to his own goal. Psychologists call this *metacognition*, the awareness of our own thinking. It is the ability to reflect upon tasks and select appropriate strategies. It involves controlling one's thinking process through techniques such as organizing, monitoring, and adapting.[1]

Metacognition can be considered a language of its own—a language of thinking and self-regulated learning that is expressed in any tongue. When we ask ourselves, "What must I do next to solve this problem?" it is an example of the self-directed speech most of us engage in without even realizing it. As Rae Jacobson from the Child Mind Institute explains, it's "the running conversation we have in our heads, while we are mentally sounding ourselves out and making plans."[2] We may find ourselves most aware of our metacognition when we are observing, managing, and adapting to new experiences, challenges, and setbacks.

Metacognitive processes can, in fact, be taught—and with excellent results. Indeed, these processes should be taught because today's students need more than banked knowledge to manage the demands of our fast-paced digital age. Educational research evidence reveals it is effective to teach students to use metacognitive strategies as techniques to overcome challenges. Professor John Hattie, author of *Visible Learning*, concludes that "implementing metacognition in the classroom is one of the most impactful strategies teachers can undertake to help the progress of their students."[3]

Toronto Heschel School students also learn about "self-talk." Their teachers guide them very intentionally to reflect on the process of learning by asking *how* they will approach a task; on the meaning of the learning by asking *why* it is beneficial to approach the task in a certain manner; and on the transfer of the process to other areas of the students' lives by asking *where else* will this be helpful to them. The goal is that the students graduate well versed, well informed, but, most importantly, as independent problem-solvers who ask themselves these questions. It will help them make a difference in their world.

To infuse the language of metacognition into student learning is a process that begins with teachers. Toronto Heschel School teachers have to "up their game" and increase their professional understanding by learning advanced skills that let them go "above" the curriculum. They learn, for example, to help students personally understand how each learns best, what specific steps are needed to reach a set goal, how to achieve deeper analysis or reflection on a specific topic. And, in this way, the school culture of deeper thinking continues to blossom.

Let's look at a Grade 5 classroom where teachers are using a metacognitive strategy called "*break it down*" in a variety of contexts. This strategy is introduced for an assignment that has an extended deadline, one that is longer than usual. To teach students how to "break it down," they are given interim due dates, which help them focus on smaller aspects of the overall task. They manage their time to suit these more limited and finite objectives and they ensure the goals are met. While interim due dates are a well-known best practice for teachers, what is different here is that students are being guided to appreciate why the practice is in place; what these stepping stones will help them do; and where else the "break it down" strategy can be helpful in their lives. Indeed, it can work for homework, a *perek* in the *chumash*, studying for a quiz, or really for anything in life where the size or complexity of a task seems overwhelming. As the teachers repeatedly use and label the "break it down" strategy across contexts, students begin to incorporate the mindset into their problem-solving habits.

The teachers also model a "think-aloud" approach, which is another technique that expert learners use to engage in complex tasks. For example, reading a novel aloud to the class, teachers will verbalize descriptions of how they monitor their own comprehension of the story. A teacher might say, "*Hmmm, I am not sure how this new character relates to the main character, so I'll go back a few pages and reread.*" A teacher modelling this type of thinking encourages students to develop their own self-talk as a way to incorporate this strategy. The metacognitive awareness helps them be proactive and solution-focused.

Professor Reuven Feuerstein (z"l) has been recognized for decades in Israel and across the world as a leading cognitive psychologist. He worked intensively to help children Holocaust survivors and North African youth settle in Israel by ensuring they were placed in the educational system properly. On returning from studies with Jean Piaget at the Sorbonne, Feuerstein developed the proposition that the level of an individual's cognitive functioning has the potential to be dramatically altered. He also emphasized the important role that developing and guiding student use of higher-level thinking skills has in educating flexible independent learners.[4]

A cornerstone of the Feuerstein method is mediated learning, a method by which an intentioned adult (for example, a parent or teacher) can help a child develop new thinking patterns. The adult must first ensure that the child's processes of perception and thinking are clear. Then, he or she can teach the child systematically, modelling and imbuing strategic thinking in different learning contexts, and, in this way, developing new thinking patterns, also called cognitive structures, in the brain. Once a very radical notion, Feuerstein's theorizing is now supported by the discoveries of neuroscience.

If we don't know how to reflect on our experiences, how do we advance our capabilities? Those of us without higher-level thinking strategies, such as metacognitive self-talk, might find ourselves feeling helplessly stuck where our capacities are now. When we make the language of thinking explicit, habitual opportunities abound for individuals of differing cognitive abilities to advance as flexible, adaptable, and resilient human beings.[5]

Just like oral language, metacognition frames how we describe and deliver our ideas and how we respond to challenge. It is an essential skill set for flexibility and lifelong learning in ever-changing multicultural societies.

1 Å. Haukås, C. Bjørke, and M. Dypedahl, *Metacognition in Language Learning and Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

2 R. Jacobson, "Metacognition: How Thinking about Thinking Can Help Kids," Child Mind Institute, retrieved August 26, 2019, from https://childmind.org/article/how-metacognition-can-help-kids/

3 J.A.C. Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

4 R. Feuerstein, L.H. Falik, and R.S. Feuerstein, *Think-Aloud and Talk-Aloud Approach to Building Language: Overcoming Disability, Delay, and Deficiency* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012); R. Feuerstein, R.S. Feuerstein, and L.H. Falik, *Beyond Smarter: Mediated Learning and the Brain's Capacity for Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

5 L.S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. and ed. E. Hanfmann and G. Vakar (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962).

Claire Merbaum, M.A., is Director of Child Study (Grades 4-8) at The Toronto Heschel School and consultant to its Child Studies Department. She is a certified practitioner and Authorized Training Associate with the Feuerstein Institute in Jerusalem. She is a former parent of Toronto Heschel School students and a past Board Member.

Teachers model a "think-aloud" approach, a technique that expert learners use in complex tasks.

How Can We "Speak for the Trees"?

BY KATANIYA MARKUS

"I am the Lorax, I speak for the trees.
I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues.
And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs—"

One of my favourite stories is the Dr. Seuss story about the Lorax, who speaks for the trees.

How can WE speak for the trees?

Speaking is something that comes naturally for most of us. It's something we take for granted. But when you have a voice, you should use it! Use it to speak up, use it to VOICE your opinion. Use it because you can, and because you should. However, if we want to "speak for the trees," this doesn't just mean using your physical voice, it also means using your influential one. Your influential voice is silent, but loud.

Not all of us were born to be activists, but that doesn't mean you can't be one. It doesn't take a podium, speech, and a campaign to make your voice heard. You can just as easily sign a petition, march in protest, or even simply tell someone else your opinion on the issue. These options for making your voice heard are all things we should be doing more often, to raise awareness about things that matter!

So, back to my first question. How can WE speak for the trees? Our earth is in danger, and we all know it. So it's time that we all do something about it! While signing a petition, marching for change, or writing a speech can all be great ways to voice your opinion, sometimes it's the smaller things—our everyday choices—that can make all the difference.

If you have a talent, now's the time to use it! For instance, if you are an amazing cook, try cooking with food from the local farmers' market, or from your garden! You could even try cooking meals with the goal of making as little waste as possible. If you are a talented artist or graphic designer, you can pour your creativity into posters and pamphlets about saving our Earth. You could sell your artwork and donate some of the profits to charities that are focused on helping the environment.

When you do things like this, you are using your influential voice. Your influential voice is the voice you use to spark change. Your influential voice can be your literal speaking voice, or it can be the voice you use by making choices that align with your beliefs. If you are an artist and choose to donate half of what you earn from selling your art, you are using your influential voice. It's the voice you use to *influence* others, and it's the voice we all need to use more often.

At my school, The Toronto Heschel School, I am the Student Council Minister of the Environment. My main job is to help people see the changes that they can make—whether by buying honey from the hives in our garden, helping out in our school garden, recycling waste, or using our school compost—that will help our environment. My committee and I help make sure we meet our responsibilities as a Platinum Certified Eco-School.

So next time you need groceries, go to the farmers' market! Bring reusable bags, containers, and bottles. When you can, walk or ride your bicycle instead of driving. Think like this, and you are on your way to becoming an activist. Use your "influential voice" and be the change you wish to see in the world.

Kataniya Markus was the Grade 7 Minister of the Environment on the Toronto Heschel School Junior High Student Council in 2018–19.

Using Our Voices—Speech and Action

BY JUDAH MAUSBERG AND NOA SINGER

At The Toronto Heschel School, we are taught to "use our voices" to ask questions, to express our opinions, and, most importantly, to not remain silent about important things that we care about. In Grade 8, we study human rights activists from Martin Luther King Jr. to Emma Gonzalez. We then research a specific human right to which we connect and that we feel strongly about, and then we write a human rights speech of our own. Hearing the speeches of our peers is empowering and inspirational.

This year, we had a chance to "use our voices" to respond in real time to a tragic event in our world.

On March 15, 2019, two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, were targeted by extremists. Over 50 people perished in mass shootings, and many more were injured. The first shooting took place at the Al Noor Mosque, in central Christchurch, where 42 people were killed. The second shooting happened a few minutes later only five kilometres away, at the Linwood Mosque. Seven worshippers at the second mosque died on site and another at a hospital. An additional 50 victims were seriously injured.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the namesake of our school and a highly regarded human rights activist, once said, "Few are guilty, but all are responsible." New Zealand is approximately 14,127 kilometres from Toronto, yet our city was still extraordinarily affected. The Toronto Heschel School is neither guilty nor liable for the inhuman acts that occurred that Friday morning. However, we understood that, as global bystanders to this atrocity, we had the responsibility to use our voices and our actions to condemn the horrors that were perpetrated against innocent people. Elie Wiesel famously argued that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. We are taught at Heschel that indifference is not an option. Concern for others compels us to be neither silent nor passive.

On Friday, March 22, The Toronto Heschel School stood shoulder to shoulder outside of the Islamic school, As-Sadiq, in a ring of peace. We took matters into our own hands, with the full support of our school. We strongly believed that we had an obligation to stand with those who were vulnerable and provide our support and strength. It was a very emotional and moving experience to see the gratitude on the faces of the students and teachers at As-Sadiq. It was also especially moving when they had the opportunity to reciprocate the act of solidarity. After the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, representatives from As-Sadiq reached out to us, and visited our school with touching condolences. Powerful connections were made across communities and religions, and we felt united in our common desire for *Tikkun Olam*.

Rabbi Heschel stated, "Remember that there is meaning beyond absurdity. Know that every deed counts, that every word is power." The small act of standing and greeting people in and out of the prayer service made a powerful impact. Inspired by Rabbi Heschel, our school teaches us, from a very young age, that our opinions have power and our actions have an effect on those around us. We are taught to use our power for *Tikkun Olam* and to use our actions to express our thirst for change. From innocent Junior Kindergarten students to mature Grade 8 graduates transitioning into high school, our foundational education in using our voice will stay with us forever.

Judah Mausberg and **Noa Singer** served as Grade 8 Student Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, respectively, on The Toronto Heschel School Junior High Student Council in 2018–19.

Toronto Heschel students meet, greet, and pose with the same tree all year! BFFs – Best Friends For Life!

Writing the Squeegee of Love

BY ADAM SOL

Let's say you find yourself in an art gallery, and you look at a painting that completely baffles you—it feels neither beautiful nor meaningful. You probably don't say to yourself, "I don't get this painting." You probably just shrug your shoulders and move on. Similarly, if you attend a modern dance performance that strikes you as bizarre or even deliberately grotesque, you might leave the hall saying to yourself, "That did nothing for me," but you likely wouldn't say to yourself, "I don't get dance." But people *do* express this sentiment when it comes to poetry. They encounter Gertrude Stein or Dionne Brand, feel overwhelmed or discouraged, and dismiss the whole art form from their lives. "I don't get poetry" is something that adults are allowed to say in polite company, whereas they would never admit to not "getting" sculpture, or architecture, or photography. Why is this? Does it have to be this way for our children?

Across all age groups The Toronto Heschel School includes poetry as an essential component of its Language Arts study, culminating in a Poetry Festival in November. As the regular Parent Mascot of Poetry for the school, I was asked to help with the program this past spring. It's a wonderful opportunity for me to be reminded of the fun that students can have while experimenting with and learning about poetry and its practice.

For me, engagement with any art form should begin with pleasure. So when I led the groups, I didn't call our activities "exercises" or "experiments"—those words sound too much like tasks we'll get graded on. I call them "games." As with most games, we discover that some participants have a natural aptitude that astounds the rest of us. But whatever our skill level, we all can enjoy playing.

Here's one game we played. I reminded the students of the difference between an abstract noun and a concrete noun. We made a list of concrete nouns: mushroom, sock, squeegee, table, teacher. Next we made a list of abstract nouns: love, happiness, pain, sorrow, confusion. There was some interesting discussion of whether or not "God" was an abstract or concrete noun. Then I asked the students to write a poem/paragraph using the following formula for the title: The (concrete) of (abstract). Some of the title combinations: The Mushroom of Love. The Squeegee of Sorrow. The Teacher of Confusion. The Sock of Pain.

An appreciation for the flexibility of our language, an imaginative approach to one's surroundings, and a sense of creative empathy are crucial skills for our kids.

The potential humour of the exercise was its immediate attraction. But most of the students were engaged enough to think beyond the fun of the surprise and the incongruity. What would The Sock of Pain really look like? It's probably alone, without its partner. Is it dirty? Does it have holes in the heel? How did it get them? These kinds of questions drove their writing into a kind of imaginative empathy that gave them a deeper level of pleasure in their inventions.

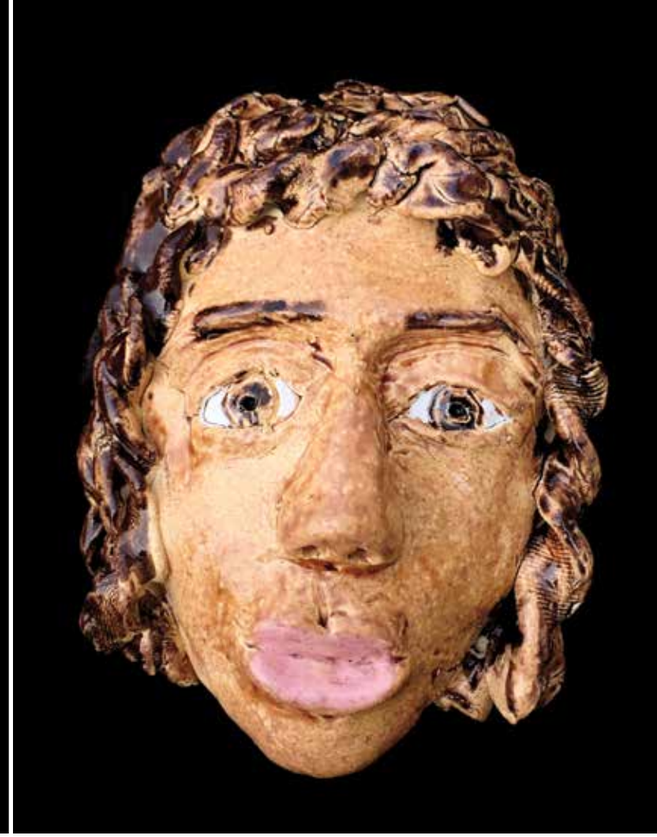
Another activity that the students spent time on in preparation for the Poetry Festival was memorizing a poem. Each child, from Grade 1 up through Grade 8, was asked to memorize a poem of at least three lines. For me, there's no better way to get deep inside a poem's sounds and movements than to memorize it, and the pleasures that arise from a student who stands at her desk and delivers a poem she knows well to her class are hard to replicate. I delighted in watching the students recite their poems, and was not surprised when some of the quieter students delivered the most engaging performances. Something about embodying someone *else's* work allowed these students to take on a more forceful, confident, and dramatic voice.

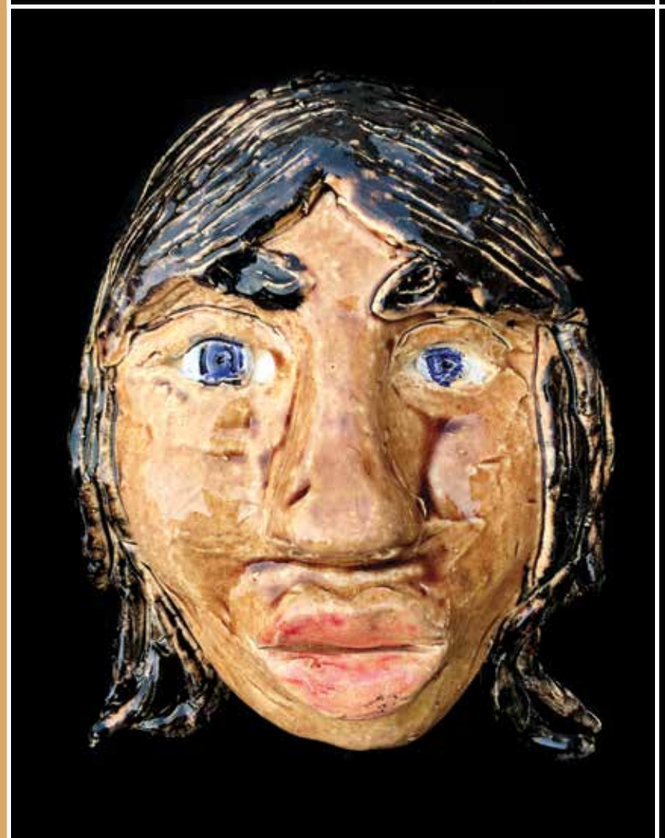
(It's worth mentioning here two competitive recitation contests—Poetry in Voice that takes place in Canada and Poetry Out Loud that takes place in the U.S. Each of these offers students who enjoy this pursuit greater incentive, and offers students and teachers alike greater resources.)

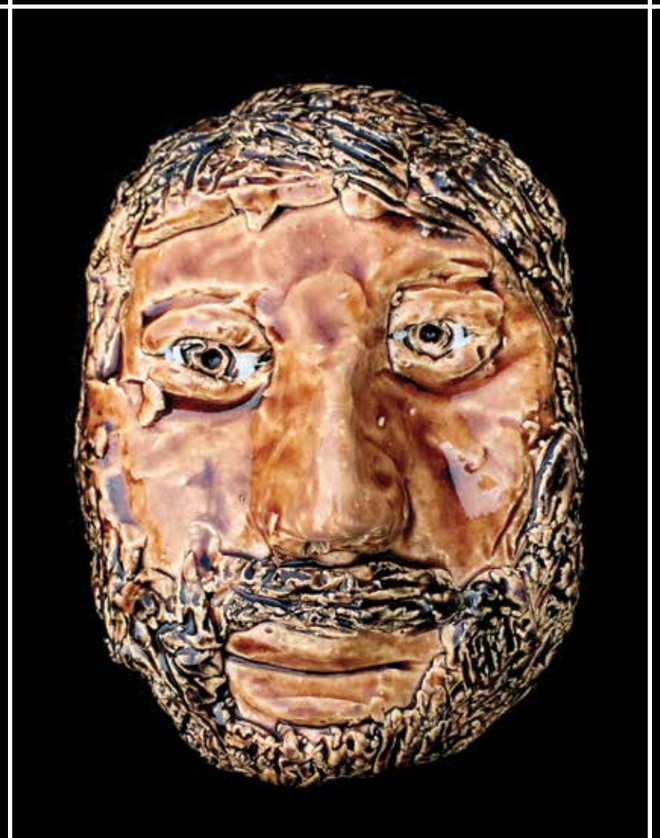
Rumour of the death of the humanities have been greatly exaggerated. An appreciation for the flexibility of our language, an imaginative approach to one's surroundings, and a sense of creative empathy are crucial skills for our kids, and often need to be recharged in adults as well. Getting inside a poem in its most crucial sense—giving breath to the words in your own mouth—is a compelling way to put yourself into the thoughts and feelings of another person. And the ability to understand another's perspective is crucial to making a better world.

Adam Sol, Ph.D., is an award-winning poet, writer, and teacher. His most recent book is *How a Poem Moves*, a collection of essays. He teaches at the University of Toronto's Victoria College and lives in Toronto with his wife, Rabbi Yael Splansky, and their three sons.

OUR SAGES TELL US







Words

BY RABBI DONNIEL HARTMAN

"*Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world, is achieved only when multitudes of people commit to *Tikkun Atzmi*, repairing the self, the neighbourhood, the community, the country."

"It is in your power to choose your words wisely."

To my dearest grandchildren,

As your grandfather, my deepest desire is to protect you and shelter you from as much of life's pain and suffering as I can. I know that, while you now accept and even count on my assistance, as you grow older, you will want your independence. Independence to make your own mistakes. Independence to fall—with all of its consequences. My desire to shelter you will ultimately be rejected and rightfully so, but I pray that you will listen to these words as you chart your own path.

My fantasy, but in many ways also my responsibility, is to leave for you a world that is better than the one into which I was born. We grandparents have much work to do if we are to attain this goal. Global warming, terror, and racism, to name but a few, threaten your world. There is, however, an old-new threat fuelling all of the above, which demands immediate attention—the destructive power of words.

This might seem strange to you, as you and your friends were raised on the nursery rhyme that "sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me." But if you are anything like me, you probably sang the rhyme out loud in response to somebody whose words actually did hurt you. The rhyme was meant as a shield, but was a feeble one at that. In your short lives, you have already come to know that words can harm you. In my life, I have learned that words can harm us all, and undermine our social and even physical existence.

You are growing up in a world that is now engaged in a perpetual war of words. Words are used to incessantly delegitimize, undermine, attack, and "other" people and positions that are different. Social media, which has connected our world and dramatically increased the number of those who we "befriend," has at the same time unleashed a torrent of violent speech. People, who in an interpersonal setting guard their tongue, will morph into arrogant, rude, judgmental, and violent personalities when hidden behind their screens.

With the democratization of access to knowledge, social media has also democratized whose voice is heard. Together with its positive consequences, we are also witnessing the loss of boundaries regarding what is said and how it is said. You are growing up in a world in which fake words, alternate facts, and outright lies abound without shame.

The most dangerous of words out there are those which construct a barrier within society—dividing "us" and "them." As Jews, we have extensive experience with these types of words. While in theory we are one of the three great monotheistic faiths, Christianity and Islam number in the billions, while we are only 14.5 million strong. In a world of unbridled speech, where group identity is fostered by othering and fearing minorities, we are always a susceptible and easy target.

I worry about your world. How will you resolve conflicts if words are no longer conducive in articulating an argument, as we increasingly train ourselves to only listen to those words that echo our own, and discount others as fake and unworthy of consideration?

How will we foster pluralism, respect, and acceptance of the "other," all of which serve as the foundation for all social life, if hateful and hurtful speech is prevalent and dominates much of our discourse? As you know from our family, difference is not a problem, it is a given. It is how you relate to difference that can create problems and undermine the possibility of social cohesion.

Repairing our world, *Tikkun Olam*, is a collective responsibility. It is not the individual superhero, but rather the coalition made up by us all, that will succeed in overcoming the great challenges that stand before you. Coalitions, however, are only possible if we can talk with, listen to, and learn from each other. Without the ability to share words, we have no ability to cooperate and marshal together our forces for good.

Your tradition has taught you from the very beginning to recognize and appreciate the power of words, for it is through words, we are told, that God chose to create our world. In our tradition, we are challenged to emulate God and to be God-like. To be a Jew is to understand that words are the building blocks with which we must take responsibility, and like God, to recreate and improve the world in which we live.

Dearest grandchildren, I don't mean to scare you, even though I am scared. Problems don't disappear; they are overcome, and I hope you will play your role in doing precisely that. While I mentioned *Tikkun Olam*, the truth is I don't find it a very helpful category. It is too big and utopian, and consequently disempowering. I believe that *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world, is achieved only when there are multitudes of people committed to *Tikkun Atzmi*, the repairing of the self, fixing their neighbourhood, their community, and their country.

It is beyond your control to change social media discourse and the words that politicians use to attract your attention and garner your support. It is in your power, however, to choose your words wisely. It is in your power to choose who and what you "like" and "dislike." It is in your power to support a politician whose culture of words mirrors your own. It is in your power to choose to hear and listen to words that are different, and which come from somebody who is different, and to treat that person with respect.

In the beginning, there was only one singular human being to teach us that all human life is valuable and that all human beings are equal. This singularity also teaches that each and every human being has the potential to shape history. My *Bracha* to you is that you be such human beings.

With much love,
Baba

Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman is President of the Shalom Hartman Institute.

The Toronto Heschel curriculum is only complete when realized through the speech and language of its teachers.

Text-People

TORONTO HESCHEL TEACHERS AND INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE

BY AVA KWINTER

"What we need more than anything else is not text-books but text-people."

—A.J. Heschel

It seems to me that teachers at The Toronto Heschel School speak differently than teachers at other schools. At least, that's how I remember it and what I hear from others. For one thing, Heschel teachers pay very close attention to the kinds of words they use.

"The right word definitely makes a difference," Morah Kathy Schwartz (JK General Studies) told me.

I think "recess" to many people means a free-for-all, but that's less what we mean in the early years. When we say "outdoor exploration" instead of "recess" we all understand that yes, we are going outside and yes, the children will be playing and it is usually less structured than what we do indoors. But we also understand what we're doing out there. It's not a free-for-all: we're exploring.

By using a different word, the intent and content of the experience is completely reimagined, and this intentionality of language permeates the experience of Heschel for students and teachers.

We know that the Heschel curriculum is adamantly integrated. Lessons are organized not by academic subject but by topic. Over and over again teachers mention the importance of the "generative topic" to the Heschel pedagogy. There are no lessons called history, geography, or social studies; instead there is SES, a deliberately vague and ambiguous acronym. (It stands for Social and Environmental Studies, by the way. Or Science. Maybe it's Social and Environmental Science?)

"The language we use sets expectations," says Morah Mika Gang (Grade 3 General Studies). "I think our intention with the term SES is to stop compartmentalizing learning. The messaging we send with our words is that everything is connected and there shouldn't be these walls between subjects."

"Language leaks," Morah Dana Ezer (Grade 8 Civilizations) observes. "In Grade 6 when the students start learning Civilizations, their teacher makes an etymology wall with Greek and Latin roots of important words." The students learn classical root words like "mono" and "poly," and explore how they function in religion, geometry, music, and biology. "We really try to speak in patterns," Morah Dana says.

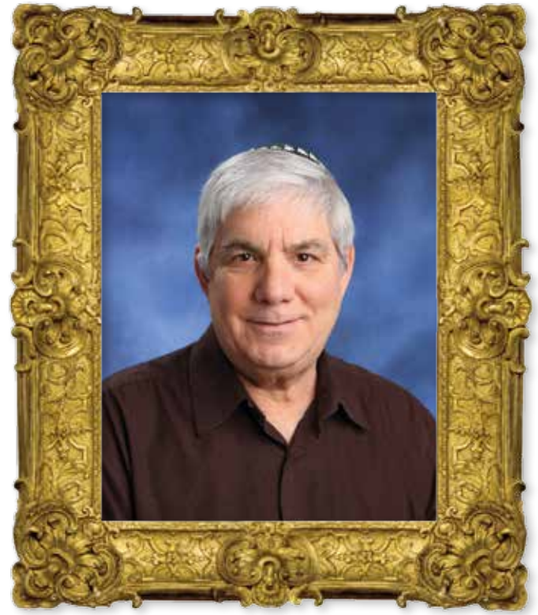
The patterning of language and a pedagogical technique of repetitive, reiterative, recursive use are important to all the teachers. For example, at Toronto Heschel, Hebrew deliberately is never directly translated into English. Instead, like the first readers of the Rosetta Stone, students decipher the meaning of the language by experiencing different forms of repetition: Kindergarten teachers dramatize their Hebrew speech using their bodies, the two teachers performing the language between them so the children associate certain sounds with particular movements; elementary students draw pictures of Hebrew terms on cards for their Chumash (Bible) studies and invent moves that remind them of the meanings; and Junior High students explore both commonalities among languages and the particularities of each. As they mature, the students appreciate how the same thing may appear in surprisingly different contexts, even as ostensibly unique things show up with many similarities.

The reciprocity between ideas and language develops in myriad ways. When speaking with Morah Mika, she made a remarkable connection between her classroom environment and her own use of language. "Something that is particular to Heschel is the way we are instructed to set up our classroom visually with clean lines, and reducing as much visual noise as possible," she explains. "And I've noticed that this practice has affected my own speech; it has encouraged me to be more concise with my words, to be as clear as possible, and not take up unnecessary space with my language."

Toronto Heschel teachers do not act as conduits of information, the way I remember conventional teachers do, but as "text-people," whose actions and speech are essential components of the information that they deliver. The Toronto Heschel curriculum is, in fact, performative; it cannot be wholly understood from books or texts because it is only complete when it is realized through the speech and language of its teachers.

But perhaps the most arresting aspect of the language of Heschel's curriculum is its clarity. Language is like glass: the clearer it is, the less you notice it. When teachers use such a precise and exact vocabulary, the ironic effect is that the words themselves seem to recede, eclipsed by their meanings; that is, when a speaker is able to explain something so perfectly, the listener only perceives the object being described, not the words used to describe it. So perhaps it is towards its own effacement that the language of Heschel's curriculum aspires, and ultimately, this might be what A.J. Heschel was thinking when he wrote that we don't need more text-books. If books obscure and teachers reveal, then text-people urge students to see beyond the teaching and into the knowledge.

Ava Kwinter studied English Literature at McGill, Queens, and Ottawa. She has a daughter and two sons at The Toronto Heschel School.



Much thanks and love to Zippi Zisu and Udi Viner on their recent retirement from full-time teaching at The Toronto Heschel School. They are educators who exemplify the text-people that A.J. Heschel contemplates.

Good Books

by Gail Baker & Tziporah Cohen

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

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

Tziporah Cohen is a psychiatrist with an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults and is a Toronto Heschel mom. Her debut middle-grade novel, *No Vacancy*, will be published by Groundwood Books in the fall of 2020.

AGES 4–8

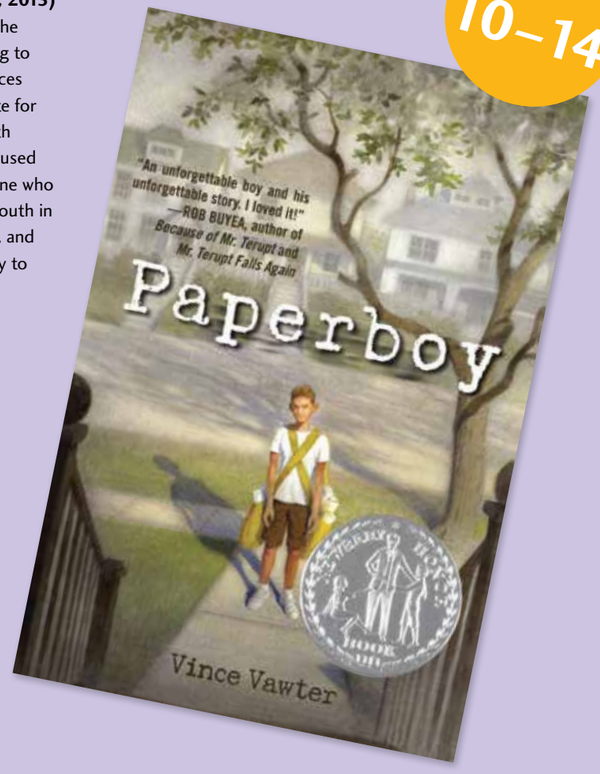
***SAY Something* by Peter Reynolds (Orchard Books, 2019)**
"The world needs your voice" is the opening sentiment of this vibrant picture book, full of scenarios to motivate even the youngest children to use their voices for positive change. Young readers will see how they can say something, not only by speaking, but by painting, writing, and simply being present. The vivid illustrations communicate to pre-readers on a visual level, as bolded text emphasizes the message. This ode to the power of a single voice is an open call to action.

AGES 4–10

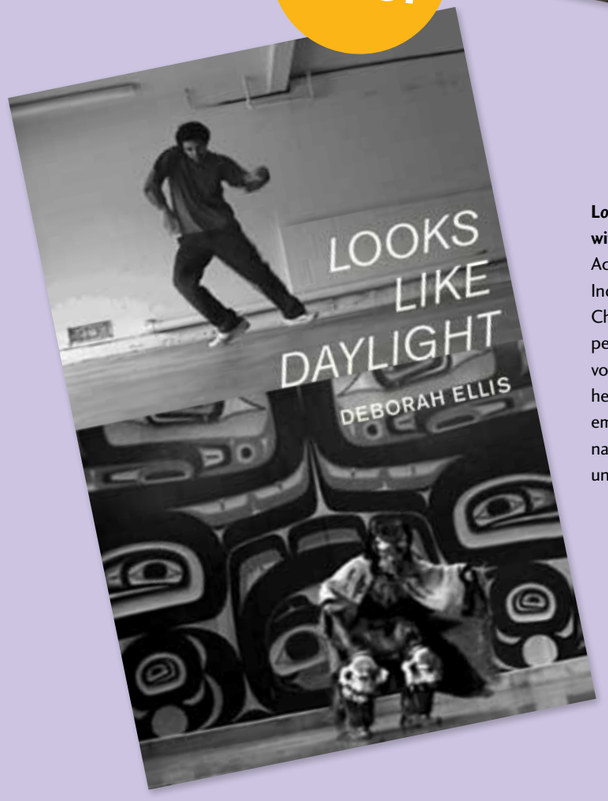
***Du Iz Tak?* by Carson Ellis (Candlewick Press, 2016)**
Language is the star in this unusual picture book. The illustrations reveal a community of insects investigating the growth of a new plant, yet the text sounds like gibberish. With a little effort, the words can be decoded, showing not just the wonder of nature but also the beauty of spoken and written language. *Du Iz Tak?* is a fun read, a challenging puzzle, and a collaborative opportunity for both adult and child.

***Paperboy* by Vince Vawter (Delacorte Press, 2013)**
Eleven-year-old Victor stutters so badly that he cannot even pronounce his own name. Talking to customers is just one of the challenges he faces when he assumes his best friend's paper route for a month. He has eye-opening encounters with grown-ups, including an often-intoxicated abused wife, a bullying peddler, and a merchant marine who becomes a new friend. Set in the American South in 1959, Victor encounters racism and violence, and learns that you don't need to speak perfectly to find your voice.

AGES 10–14



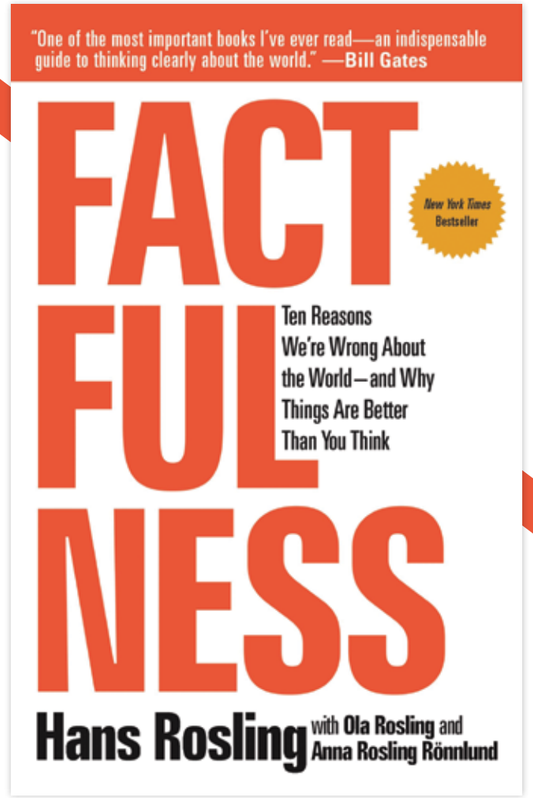
AGES 12&UP



***Looks Like Daylight: Voices of Indigenous Kids* by Deborah Ellis, with a foreword by Loriene Roy (Groundwood Books, 2013)**
Acclaimed Canadian author Deborah Ellis interviewed 45 Canadian Indigenous and Native American youth to tell their stories. Chapters begin with a brief tribal history and continue with the personal reflections of a young person told in his or her own voice. What emerges are moving expressions of pride, resilience, heartbreak, sadness, and optimism, with telling photos that emphasize the harsh reality of these young lives. These first-person narratives break down stereotypes, evoking compassion, new understanding, and the importance of community.

Factfulness by Hans Rosling

BOOK REPORT



BY YONI GOLDSTEIN

"There *are* facts, objective facts, discernible and verifiable," the biographer and journalist Robert Caro writes in his new autobiography, *Working*. "And the more facts you accumulate, the closer you come to whatever truth there is."[1]

Caro, a double Pulitzer Prize winner, has spent an entire career digging for the facts. *The Power Broker*, Caro's biography of Robert Moses, the New York urban planner, and the four volumes of his *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (with a fifth and final volume still to come) are the products of meticulous research, fact-finding, and fact-checking missions, sometimes lasting years, or even decades. "It's as hard to understand someone you're writing about as it is to understand someone in real life," Caro says in *Working*, "but there are a lot of objective facts about their lives and actions, and the more of them you learn, the closer you come to whatever understanding is possible."

You can't get to the truth without knowing the facts—seems fairly obvious, right? But in his 2018 bestseller *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong about the World—and Why Things Are Better than You Think*, Swedish statistician and TED Talk star Hans Rosling insists many, if not most, of us are missing that crucial point.[2] The result is a wide gap between what we think we know about the world around us, and what is actually happening in it.

Rosling, who wrote the book with his son and daughter-in-law (Rosling passed away in 2017, during the editing of *Factfulness*; his work was completed posthumously), begins with a simple quiz, a set of 13 multiple-choice questions that test the reader's knowledge on everything from population dispersion and vaccination rates to endangered species and the frequency of natural disasters. It's a test he presented to thousands of people while lecturing around the world. There are no trick questions.

"Most people," he notes, "do badly."

Take Question 3, for example, which queries how the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has changed in the past 20 years: Has it almost doubled? Remained more or less the same? Or almost halved? On average, according to Rosling, only 7% of respondents get the answer correct (which is that extreme poverty has almost halved in the last two decades). The truth, Rosling says, is that "step-by-step, year-by-year, the world is improving. Not on every single measure every single year, but as a rule. Though the world faces huge challenges, we have made tremendous progress. This is the fact-based worldview."

So what can people possibly be thinking when they contend that the world is getting worse? "My guess is they are *not* thinking. They are feeling," Rosling writes.

The good news is that *Factfulness* presents an antidote, and fortunately it is mostly based on common sense. Rosling examines why we miss the facts so frequently, and how to curb our instinctual focus on the bad while dismissing the good. Each chapter of *Factfulness* focuses on a human instinct that blinds us from the truth. The "Gap Instinct" pushes us to separate the world into binaries—like developed and developing, rich and poor—when the majority is usually somewhere in the middle. The "Straight Line Instinct" induces us to believe that trends are immutable, when many don't follow a straight path or rate. The "Generalization Instinct" propels us to categorize the world, while ignoring similarities across groups and differences within groups. And the "Blame Instinct" directs us to find simple reasons after something bad happens, when it's usually more complicated than that. Rosling also explores "Negativity" and "Fear" instincts, placing significant blame on the press for how they affect us. "Here's the paradox," he writes, "the image of a dangerous world has never been broadcast more effectively than it is now, while the world has never been less violent and more safe."

(Time and again in *Factfulness*, Rosling calls out the media for missing the good news stories. He has a point—and journalists performed just as poorly as everyone else on his quizzes. In fact, Rosling's solution to the "Generalization Instinct"—which includes new mantras such as "assume you are not 'normal' and other people are not 'idiots'" and "beware of the 'majority'"—takes on what are cornerstones of journalistic practice. Ultimately, Rosling doesn't expect the media to change much. Instead, he lays the onus on consumers to improve ways to absorb news media.)

By comparing real, verifiable data with the results of his quizzes, Rosling deduces that the vast majority of us are operating with the wrong facts—"not only devastatingly wrong, but *systematically* wrong," he notes, which is skewing our worldview in highly negative ways.

Reversing this reality in many ways boils down to better education, and towards the conclusion of *Factfulness*, Rosling offers numerous suggestions to bolster critical thinking skills, especially among children. "We should be teaching them how their own country progressed…to get where it is now, and how to use that knowledge to understand what life is like in other countries today," he writes, adding "how to hold two ideas at the same time," and "that the world will keep changing and they will have to update their knowledge and worldview throughout their lives."

And perhaps most crucially, "we should be teaching [children] what life was really like in the past so that they do not mistakenly think that no progress has been made." Or, as Rosling terms it more simply elsewhere in *Factfulness*: "Talk to Grandpa."

In July 2019, a high school principal in Boca Raton, Florida, was fired after *The Palm Beach Post* revealed disturbing comments made about the Holocaust. Prompted by the parent of a student about the school's approach to Holocaust education, the principal responded that such lessons are "not forced upon individuals as we all have the same rights but not all the same beliefs." As an educator, he added, he had "the role to be politically neutral but support all groups in the school."[3]

"I can't say the Holocaust is a factual, historical event because I am not in a position to do so as a school district employee," he concluded.

How could an educator get it so wrong? Readers of *Factfulness* might find it easy to diagnose some of the missteps right there on the page—the fear and negativity at play, the blatant ignorance of the facts, and the descent into a worldview made up of false binaries.

The only remedy any of us can rely on, Rosling explains, is to seek out the facts, and to react to new facts as they inevitably change around us. It is a lifelong journey, but then that's the fun of it. As Caro says in *Working*, "If you ask the right questions, there always is [more]."

1 Robert Caro, *Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing* (New York: Knopf, 2019).

2 Hans Rosling, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong about the World—and Why Things Are Better than You Think* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2018).

3 Andrew Marra, "Spanish River High's Principal Refused to Call the Holocaust a Fact," *The Palm Beach Post*, July 5, 2019, https://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/20190705/spanish-river-highs-principal-refused-to-call-holocaust-fact

Yoni Goldstein is the editor of *The Canadian Jewish News*.

The result [of Roslin's quiz shows there] is a wide gap between what we think we know about the world around us, and what is actually happening in it.

How an adult speaks with a child is foundational to how the child will understand his own thoughts and feelings.

"The Sky Is Falling!"

WHERE IS PEACE OF MIND TODAY? WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

BY JASMINE ELIAV

What lens do children peer through to see the world? Psychologists answer with what they call "theory of mind."[1] Everyone has one of their own, a gradual consciousness that emerges in early childhood as we realize that others do not necessarily share our personal thoughts and feelings, but have their own.

A child's blossoming theory of mind is fertilized by highly effective strategies unwittingly deployed by parents and involved adults—with both negative and positive consequences. Children are perpetually observing their parents, relatives, and other prominent adults in their lives, as well as television, books, other media, family stories, ads, and graffiti. What they take in shapes their mental context. In truth, the words and deeds of others affect almost everything in child development, even though children cannot always discern authenticity or context.

In particular, how an adult speaks with a child is foundational to how the child will understand his own thoughts and feelings, and how he will consider others' points of view. This includes language that adults use, as well as the third-party conversations that are overheard at home and at school—these various and sundry communications influence how children internalize what they see, hear, touch, taste, and think.

Now notice that 24-hour news programs that play and replay everywhere today: in the car, at the doctor's office, coffee shop, airport, mall, hospital. Observe that our cell phones welcome continuous repetitive news updates, replete with images and text. We are acclimatizing to life with near-constant exposure to images and stories that are attention-pulling and alarming regardless of whether their content is valuable or fairly presented. Bob Franklin, a professor of journalism, wrote, "Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgement has succumbed to sensationalism."[2]

This monumental problem is illustrated succinctly in the folktale of Chicken Little. Its universal message can be traced back 25 centuries and across many cultures. Here goes my version:

Chicken Little is walking along when an acorn falls onto her head. She believes this proves the sky is falling and heads for home. Along the way she encounters various other animals and tells them one by one that the sky is falling. They agree that this urgent threat must be brought immediately to the attention of the lion, the king of beasts. The group then meets a fox and when they tell him where they are going and why, he says he knows the best shortcut. But first he leads them to a stopover in his den, and they never come out.

Let's remember Chicken Little and rise to the child development challenge now posed by our culture's acceptance of fear mongering. Mass media, digital media, and cultural industries (film, TV, games) are working very hard to embed their version of the world in our children's hearts and minds, so we must work equally hard to help our children see through the morass and filter out the bad parts.

It's getting harder for adults to discern whether the whole world is unsafe, or if our perception is being distorted by intrusive revolving reports that focus on the most unfortunate parts. Research tells us that the world we live in now is safer overall than in years past. What is scary is how information is being presented.

The moral of the story is so accepted that "chicken little syndrome" is now a recognized term used to reference the effect of fearmongering or unreasonable fear. We know what catastrophizing can do, yet our children hear phrases such as "We live in scary times," "Our safety is compromised," and "The world has gone crazy." Fearmongering functions in insidious ways. Threatening news and anxious conversations teach children that their society, their country, their world, cannot cope. The child doesn't see problem-solving or hope, but rather a world where the adults do not feel in control.

As parents, we must seriously take note and investigate: What are the repercussions at home of continually reinforced fear? What effect does panic have on our children's relationships with people and things around them? Where does peace of mind fit in?

This erosion of peaceful composure is significant to child development. Most parents today grew up able to find space and distance from mass media—news and chatter about crime, politics, war, disease. The gap was protective; it offered reprieve, an opportunity to formulate thoughts and navigate experience of the world away from it all, at least temporarily. This is no longer a given. A child immersed in the current cultural context may easily feel overwhelmed and anxious. In turn, her sense of agency becomes compromised. She feels stuck and is at the mercy of her fears. She loses the confidence to make decisions. Specifically, she is now officially "Chicken Little," and her reality is that the sky is falling. She has lost all context.

(Please note: I'm not fearmongering about fearmongering; I'm trying to explain that, in this case, the innocuous is not harmless.)

Theory of mind develops to varying degrees across a lifespan. Learning to decipher information may allow children the peace of mind they need to engage with the world in open awareness, rather than pervasive fear. I suggest that parents take the time to explain the news to their children, provide context and history, and help with the emotion of the words and images that stream past daily.

Thoughtful supportive translations of the world by parents strengthen children's resilience to problems and crisis. When children's emotional, social, and behavioural perspectives are steadily developed, it fosters very specific skills; they develop the capacity to consciously evaluate information that comes to them. They will connect the dots to see how actions arise from what we think and feel, and how what we think and feel is easily coloured by the information and attitudes that surround us.

According to L.L. Armstrong and colleagues,[3] providing children with a "meaning mindset" supports their capability to:

- believe in their own ability and skills to challenge unhelpful thoughts, problem-solve, and take a healthy, realistic stance toward challenges;
- in the face of difficult feelings, take helpful action to feel less sad, angry, or scared;
- have curiosity, and be open to learning and other new experiences;
- experience meaningful moments (e.g., experience nature, be excited by learning, notice everyday joys);
- express gratitude or appreciation in everyday experiences;
- maintain hope, even in the face of difficulties.

These are all qualities we wish to nurture in our children, no matter how many talking chickens come their way.

1 Stefan G. Hofmann et al., "Training Children's Theory-of-Mind: A Meta-analysis of Controlled Studies," *Cognition*, Vol. 150 (May 2016), pp. 200–212.

2 Bob Franklin, *Newszak and News Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 4.

3 Laura Lynn Armstrong, Stephanie Desson, Elizabeth St. John, and Emmalyne Watt, "The DREAM Program: Developing Resilience through Emotions, Attitudes, & Meaning (Gifted Edition)—A Second Wave Positive Psychology Approach," *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* (December 2018), pp. 1–26.

Dr. Jasmine Eliav is a registered child clinical psychologist. She has a private practice, is a staff psychologist at The Hospital for Sick Children, a clinical consultant to BOOST Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention, and the co-chair of The Toronto Heschel School Board of Directors.

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