Nº26 / SPRING 2020

THINK

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children

ONE IN A MINYAN

ANNOUNCING: *NORTHERN LIGHTS: A CANADIAN JEWISH HISTORY*

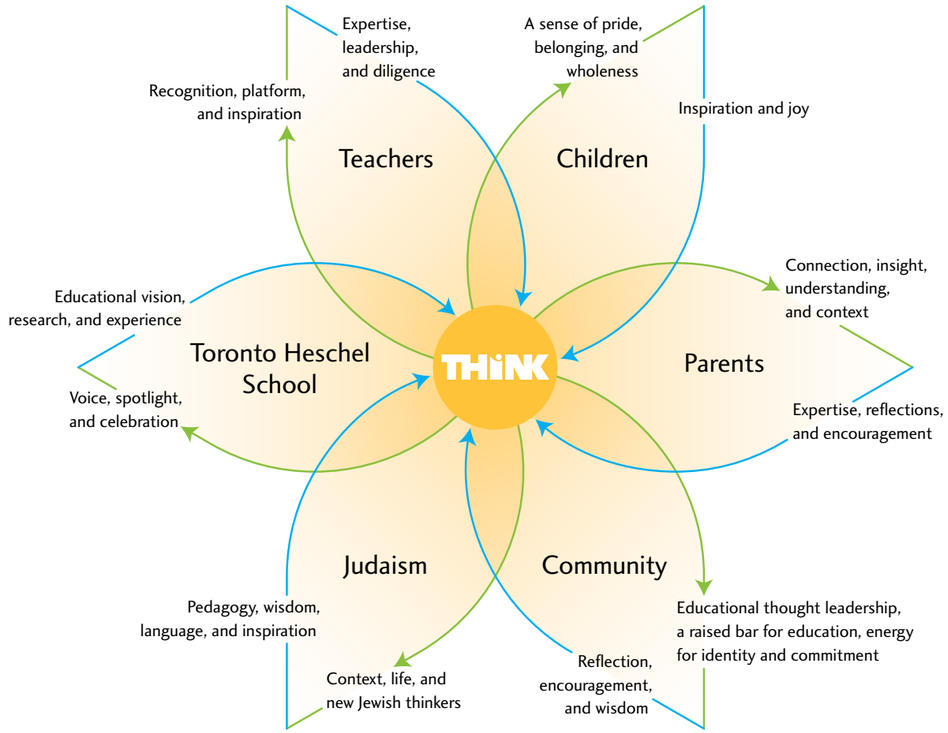
STILL AT SINAI: SHAVUOT 5780 / JEWISH IDENTITY THROUGH DAY SCHOOL IMMERSION

INDEPENDENCE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY / YOGA AND BOOK CLUBS IN JUNIOR HIGH

YACOV FRUCHTER ON KINDNESS / JASMINE ELIAV ON SELF & BELONGING IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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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The Lola Stein Institute is the research and publication arm of The Gesher Abraham Foundation. Under this umbrella, the 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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If you have any questions or comments, or to receive THINK at your school or home, please write us at info@lolastein.ca

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.

COLUMNS

SPECIAL FEATURE: ONE IN A MINYAN

OUR SAGES TELL US

We contemplate the precious individuality of each child and the beauty of community.

One in a *Minyan*

Shavuot is the season of Ten Commandments, one golden calf, many broken pieces, and a second chance. Chag Shavuot Sameach! Our circumstances are dishevelled. Our summer plans are disappearing like a mirage as we encamp temporarily at Sinai. It's very human to lose sight of big ideas and big commitments, the kind that become hidden in the sandstorms of daily life.

After a spring of children at home and classrooms empty, we contemplate the precious individuality of each child and the beauty of community. We consider how a society forms through the roles that individual members play, and how, in turn, we are each shaped by the people around us. We call this issue of THINK, *One in a Minyan*.

Judaism's preeminent concern for human singularity is clear. Human beings are created *b'Tselem Elokim*, in God's image (Genesis 1:27); the Talmud mirrors this, telling us that to save a single life any law of Torah can be disregarded: *Pikuach Nefesh* (Yoma 85b). Indeed, the Talmud says that saving one life is like saving the whole world (Sanhedrin 37a).

Meanwhile, also in Judaism, community matters big time. *Minyan* is the grouping of 10 individuals that are needed to recite certain prayers or read Torah in public. The notion of *minyan* teaches the power of assembly; individuals collecting together generate the most possibility.

The puzzle is how to inspire children to treasure simultaneously their individuality and their shared ownership of Jewish tradition, to identify as fully independent spirits in a fluid global village while loving the bounty that Jewish particularity offers.

As 2020 unfolds, it is positioning new imperatives in Jewish education. How to educate used to be the primary focus but today we must also address why to educate. The dilemma emerges as society at last promotes diversity. The complication that educators face is that this welcome thrust to protect and lift up all sometimes hinders the perspective that distinctive identity is also important. When this happens, individual heritage loses ground to the relative and universal. Jewish schools must embrace an open and diverse community, articulate Judaism in the nuance of our times, and intrigue students to explore how the continuum of Jewish thinking serves their personal futures.

Luckily, it is eminently doable. We call it pluralism, and it means loving the difference. Most Canadians are schooled to understand that every piece of the Canadian cultural mosaic is essential to the whole; our Charter of Rights and Freedoms entrenches equality within distinction and Canadians identify easily as a single multicultural unity. Children can understand a collection of differences from a very early age. Adults have more trouble.

In Awe and Wonder, Greg Beiles remembers that Avraham begins the Jewish story on a journey that intertwines communal responsibility with personal independence. Jasmine Eliav explains that a child's sense of self and of belonging will ebb and flow for many years, and Ava Kwinter, in our newest column, Modern Times, describes her own search to discover what living Jewishly means to her.

Dvora Goodman, in the Learning Centre, buttresses building Jewish identity with immersion techniques akin to second-language learning. Caity Lehman settles Junior High students in small reading groups, letting them use comparative literature to practise how to defend their personal points of view. Yarden Bourlas's students channel Jacob and learn self-regulation in a *minyan* where the ritual works on their internal struggles. Yacov Fruchter highlights kindness as a precious habit for parents to cultivate, and Taya Kotick shares personal reflections on her 10 years as a student at Toronto Heschel.

Reverting to this spring and its many surprises, Greg and Ava contribute second articles. Greg shares thoughts on legacy and leadership for Shavuot and Ava shines her light down a road of frustration and finds surprising insight. THINK advocates for the audacity of parents to pull the pieces together in ways that validate the journeys of their young families. We all work through it. We mine the past for treasures that add value to the future; we believe in the collective strength and beauty of Kol Yisrael, and we cherish each child as one in a *minyan*.

Pam

Reflections as I Graduate

BY TAYA KOTICK

Starting in Junior Kindergarten (JK) all the way through Grade 8 at Heschel, I was taught to write a reflection after each assignment. Whether it was a personal reflection on my Beautiful Triangle project, when I had to explain why I loved and connected to one triangle's angles and shapes more than another's, or my thoughts about my Holocaust memorial artistic representation, when I researched the life of a survivor who was my best friend's grandmother, for every assignment I did I had to reflect.

So now, with tons of practice, I am going to reflect on my 10 years at Heschel. Going back to my first few days at Heschel I remember how intimidating it was starting off and not knowing anyone. I remember being walked into the Chanukah concert by a Grade 8 student. In my earlier years I also remember decorating my *kissui* (head covering) so that it represented me. Every year there were special projects that I looked forward to doing. I couldn't wait to be the one to be in the novel study play (Grade 4), or to make the amazing ceramics that I saw in the hallway displays. So quickly I became the Grade 8 walking in the JKs! I have to tell you about the friendships that I have made (I hope they will be lifelong) not only with classmates in my grade but with kids older and younger than me across the grades, and with the teachers who have brought so much joy into my learning. (They were so patient, as I was so shy that I didn't raise my hand until Grade 5.)

Not only is Heschel a big part of my life but it is a big part of my family's life. My mom and dad have always volunteered, and now my aunt and uncle are involved too. So naturally, I got involved. I ran for Student Council in Junior High and became leader of the school spirit committee, Tarbut. I am so grateful that I got so involved in everything from *rikkudiyah* to choir, to being on the Heschel Hornets sports team, to Waffle Breakfasts and Mitzvah Days. I learned that it's good to get excited and be involved in the school, that it's important to be an active leader and take pride in what you do for your school. I helped out because I really just wanted to be a part of all that was happening.

As I reflect, I recognize that the bigger purpose of my years at Heschel has a few parts. It is made up of the lifelong bonds I have with my classmates, with my many teachers, great family friends. Beyond that, the point is not to just learn but to have the habit of thinking things through carefully, to consider the meaning of what I learn and how it fits into the bigger world and my life.

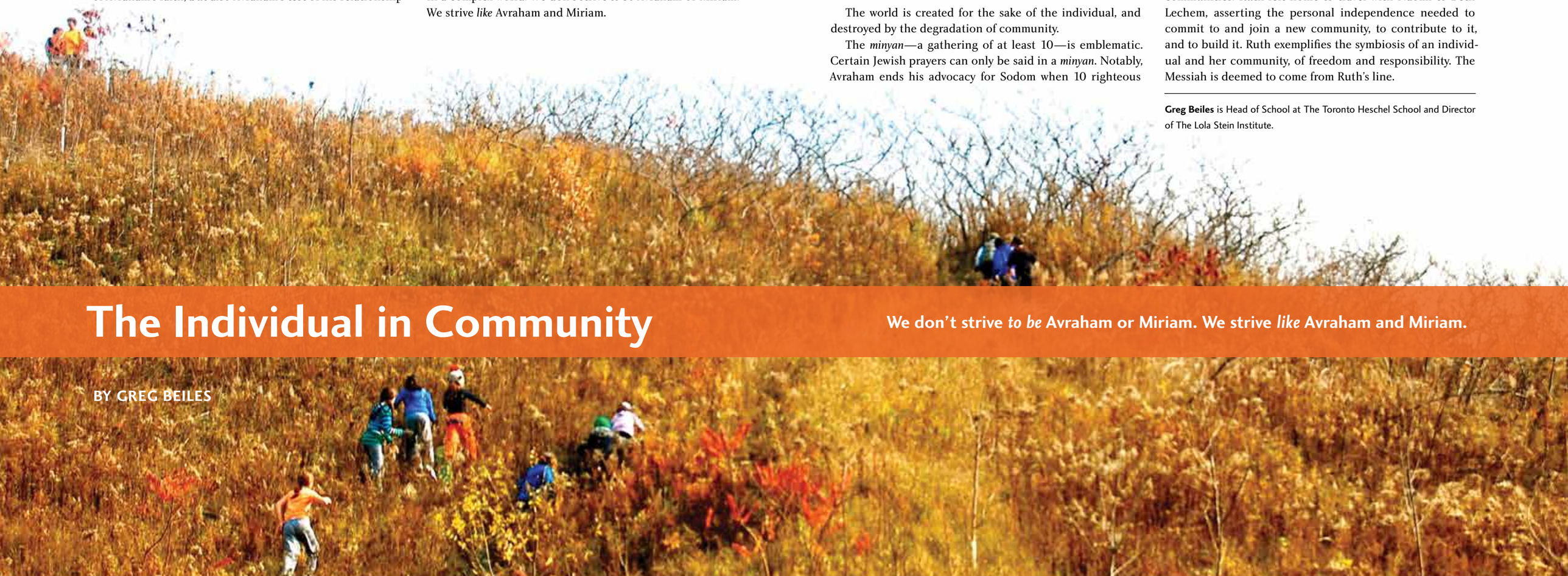
I can't wait for my cousin and my baby brother to begin their journey in JK this September, because I will be an alumni making sure they get the full Heschel experience!

Taya Kotick is a Grade 8 student at The Toronto Heschel School. The Beautiful Triangle is a Grade 7 study unit.

The Individual in Community

We don't strive *to be* Avraham or Miriam. We strive *like* Avraham and Miriam.

BY GREG BEILES



Albert Einstein once said, "The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice and the desire for personal independence—these are the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my stars that I belong to it."

The notion that personal independence and individuality are core to Judaism is less discussed than the more usual Jewish banner of collectivity and community. Nonetheless, Einstein is on point. In the Jewish worldview, individuality and community are both essential.

The founder of the Jewish people, Avraham, hears God's instruction to leave home and set off on a journey towards the unknown. God said, "*Lekh-Lekha*," which means "go for yourself" or "go to yourself" (Genesis 12). Avraham heads out to discover and become his best self and continues to assert his independence even in relation to God. Although he was promised all of Canaan, Avraham offers a choice piece to his nephew, Lot. When God threatens Sodom, Avraham argues to save the righteous who may live there. That blind obedience is out-of-character for Avraham helps explain why the *Akeda* (the binding of Isaac) cannot be merely God's test of Avraham's faith, but also Avraham's test of his relationship with God. The result is a new religion that explicitly rejects child sacrifice and demands strength of character, independent thought, humility, and generosity.

The Abrahamic paradigm is a unique individual; it is someone who is willing to reject social convention, overcome obstacles, and struggle theologically. The model repeats throughout the Bible: Jacob—whose given name means "heel" (follower)—must outwit his elder brother, Esav, negotiate with his uncle, Lavan, flee his home, later make peace with Esav, and be renamed "Israel," which means the one who struggles with God. In the Book of Exodus, the midwives of Egypt—some say they were Miriam and Yocheved—refuse to kill first-born Israelite babies despite Pharaoh's orders, and Moses, who, although raised in Pharaoh's house, hindered by a stutter, and reluctant to lead, perseveres through doubt, struggle, and challenge to guide his people.

Greek myth produces hero-types with enviable powers—speed, strength, wisdom—that draw admiration. The Jewish tradition presents individuals whose flaws mark moments in the development of their characters. Rather than ideals to emulate, they are role models for unique, moral individuals in a complex world. We don't strive *to be* Avraham or Miriam. We strive *like* Avraham and Miriam.

The significance of each individual to the moral progress of the world manifests in the Talmudic dictum *Bishvili nivra ha'olam*—"The world was created for my sake" (Sanhedrin 37a). The notion is not entitlement, but responsibility. Each of us is personally responsible for the world. We are each uniquely valued: "He who saves one person is as if he saved an entire world" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 Yerushalmi Talmud 4:9, Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 37a).

At the same time, in Judaism there is no doubt of the centrality of community. Pirkei Avot (2:5) adjures: *Al tifrosh min hatzibur*. "Do not separate yourself from the community." A midrash teaches that to set oneself apart like a precious offering is tantamount to destroying the world:

> If one makes oneself like *terumah* (a portion of produce held separate for use as offering), set aside in the corner of the house, and says, "Why should I trouble myself for the community? What's in it for me to take part in their disputes? Why should I listen to their voices? I'm fine [without this]," this person destroys the world. (Tanhuma, Mishpatim 2)

The world is created for the sake of the individual, and destroyed by the degradation of community.

The *minyan*—a gathering of at least 10—is emblematic. Certain Jewish prayers can only be said in a *minyan*. Notably, Avraham ends his advocacy for Sodom when 10 righteous souls cannot be found in the city. The assertion of the individual is limited by the moral capacity of the community, yet individuals require community in order to become moral individuals. Maimonides teaches that a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) must live in a city that has communal institutions to provide law, *tzedakah*, a *mikveh*, sanitation facilities, a doctor, a craftsperson, a blood-letter, a butcher, and a teacher (Sanhedrin 17b). Community is a practical necessity, but also a moral, ethical, educational, and religious one.

On creating the first human being, God recognized that "it is not good for the human to be alone" (Genesis 2:8), and so created an "*ezer kenegdo*"—"an opposing helper." Animals were unsuitable for this role because "whatever the Human named them, that was their name" (Gen 2:19); they could not counter the human's speech. "*Neged*," meaning "opposite," contains the Hebrew root of the word "speech"' (*lehagid*). Everyone needs a speech-partner, a *chaveruta*, with whom to converse and debate. Only in relating and responding to others do we develop our own ideas, personality, and individuality.

On the flip side, we remember that individuals form communities. Ruth left home to travel with Naomi to Beth Lechem, asserting the personal independence needed to commit to and join a new community, to contribute to it, and to build it. Ruth exemplifies the symbiosis of an individual and her community, of freedom and responsibility. The Messiah is deemed to come from Ruth's line.

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

Run, Play, Learn

JEWISH IMMERSION AT DAY SCHOOL

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Many parents send their children to French immersion school. The Ontario government website validates their choice saying that learning in an immersive environment helps students to understand Canada's history and develop an appreciation for French culture. The educational strategy submerges children as wholly as possible in the language and culture of French all day long.

In Jewish day schools, we often discuss Hebrew immersion as the best approach to language instruction. I'd like to suggest that day school educators, who understand the benefits of immersion learning, think more broadly about the immersion they have to offer and bring more focus to the whole possibility that day school can be: total Jewish immersion. The case is already articulated by Jewish overnight summer camps which enthusiastically boast the ability to plunge campers into a whole Jewish experience and acculturate them to Jewish ways of acting, ways of thinking, history and tradition. Day schools can be equally explicit, and why not?

From the moment the children step foot inside, day schools are seized of the opportunity to transfer values and culture with Jewish flavour, spirit, and heart. Judaism always intended to guide everyday life. It originated as a journey towards commitment to one God and eventually offered a full slate of habits of mind, heart, and deed. With the passage of five thousand years, many families practice Judaism at home with less attention, and turn to formal religion with less frequency for daily guidance, yet they want their children to carry Jewish identity forward. Jewish education was institutionalized to fill this void and, today, day school is proving to be the most effective way to pass Judaism from generation to generation.

The modalities of Jewish day school in some ways resemble French immersion. Teachers become role models who provide the continuous mentoring needed to transfer skills and ideas; day school learners join an ongoing conversation in Jewish life. Students keep the dialogue rolling, as they experiment with Jewish traditions and ideas and ways. When the children read and interpret ancient Jewish text, or modern Jewish thought, they gain an autonomy in Jewish identity and self-respect that is akin to the conversational confidence that French immersion students develop for chatting easily in a second language, mistakes and all. Jewish day school graduates benefit from this sense of Jewish self as they too become comfortable in their tradition and history. It bodes well for their easy Jewishness in the years ahead.

The immersive experience is also particularly good for the multilayered meanings of many—if not all—Jewish teachings. It facilitates students receiving messages from multiple vantage points which helps deliver their full lesson. For example, there is an important balance in Jewish thought between developing the individual and building the community: *if I am not for myself who will be for me and if I am only for myself what am I?* (Pirkei Avot 1:14). Jewish day schools can mirror this ethos by merging child-centred learning with an intentional community. Through an interweaving of school routine with *middot* drawn from the *parsha* (virtues found in the weekly Torah portion), children get used to their personal responsibility for the ethical behaviours and respectful habits that emerge from our tradition. For example, because the children accept "*nadiv lev*" (the generous heart) as a habit, not an event, they build beyond the immediate act of generosity to the sense of collaborative membership intended. They can learn this through *Parshat Terumah* (Exodus 25:1–27:19) where the generation of former Israelite slaves shared what little they had in order to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the desert together. The dignity of being a teammate and contributor is a profound feeling for children to sense. The *middah* (virtue) is complex: to be generous and feel valued. Fully immersed in community, students appreciate the tradition at work.

Successful French immersion sees students understand, read, write, and speak the new language. They learn grammar and usage. Fluency in Jewish life lets identity blossom like an operating system deep inside the children, replete with habits and morals. Of course, a casual series of conversations cannot generate full French facility. The same goes for success in day school immersion; it depends on the school's level of Jewish fluency. Celebrating holidays is not enough. There is a tipping point. Jewish immersion includes students leaning on Jewish values to make decisions about how to act in a given situation, such as whether or how to give *tzedakah*, how to welcome guests to the classroom or home, and of course, how to seek justice in the world.

Most children acquire language easily and without formal teaching, usually when as babies, they are surrounded by adults speaking the language. Little ones begin to understand words and test out phrases in order to communicate their needs. By the age of four or five years, most have a sophisticated grasp of both understanding and speaking. In Jewish immersion, the children also watch the people around them and test their daily observations: for example, how to speak up for our friend who is being picked on because, as Jews, we protect those who need our help; how to see ourselves as caretakers of the Earth since God gave it to us to keep and protect. Living Jewish becomes who they are and who they want to be.

All told, an immersive Jewish day school can encompass many things: fluency in Hebrew language to connect children with Jewish people, texts, and traditions; religious practice to bring spirituality; knowledge of history to help distill the modern experience; appreciation of the secular and lunar calendars which explain a lot; the tension between personal and community which introduces real life; and Jewish thought which helps with finding purpose in the world. But of course there's so much more.

Living Jewish at school can be a performance of understanding Judaism and Jewish identity. In full Jewish immersion, children learn the "me" and the "we" of being Jewish. They can practise and enjoy at the same time. Jewish education has been lauded over the ages as the key to Jewish continuity and regeneration. Once again, a living day school culture that makes Jewish values come to life might just be the secret key, and the method might just be Jewish immersion.

Addendum

This article was written in February 2020 before our schools closed and the opportunity for everyday Jewish immersion was put on hold. Although Jewish immersion as described in the article certainly cannot happen with the same intensity or impact as it does when students and teachers are together all day at school, a new opportunity has emerged that is equally powerful. Now that we are forced to be at home, the challenge and opportunity becomes how to bring the Jewish experience back *into* the home. If Jewish educators are able to rise to this enormous challenge, I hope that they will have figured out how to immerse the children in Passover in the context of their own home; at the end of this ordeal, perhaps the lasting contribution will have been to relink school and home, making it one Jewish experience.

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.

Fluency in Jewish life lets identity blossom.

THINK welcomes a new column by Ava Kwinter about creating Jewish family life in 2020.

Why I Rush Out on a Dark Winter Night

BY AVA KWINTER

Several times this winter, I'd reluctantly go out at night, in the dark and freezing cold. I'd rush through post-dinner rituals at home with the kids and head back to their school to meet other parents—most of whom I'd only met through the school—to spend the evening discussing openly and honestly who we are now and what kind of people we hope to be. These evenings are not your usual PTA bake-sale meet and greets, nor are we there to work on any specific project for the school or for our kids' education. So why are we there?

To begin to answer this question, let's suppose that there is a forest in Canada that has a very specific and unique ecosystem. Certainly, every plant and tree, animal and insect, is crucial to the health of the forest, and yet it is only within the context of the forest as a whole entity that any single species has a specific meaning. Only in its exact slot in the food chain does one animal make sense. For example, a mouse occupies an essential and specific position in the forest's chain of being: It eats some things and is eaten by other things; it uses forest materials to make its nest, thereby marking and altering its environment in a way that makes sense within the grand scheme of the ecosystem.

So too, in the human community, individuals differentiate themselves, and perhaps even form character, based on their context. It is through connections and relationships with other people that we find and become what means most to us; we'll take things from our environment to make our places, and ideally we'll mark and alter our community in positive ways. We all seek a meaningful life, one with intentionality of purpose and positive consequences, especially as parents. For some of us in the Toronto Jewish community, that search leads us to join synagogues, volunteer at our kids' schools, or help the needy. All of these efforts enmesh us more deeply within various collectives.

But at the same time, we can't forget that one of the most crucial aspirations of a thriving community is the success of each community member as an individual. The community can only go from strength to strength if its component parts are succeeding in themselves, even if it's just that they are being bettered by being there. That is to say, to be the best community we can be, it behooves us to make ourselves the best individuals we can be too. This kind of self-improvement can take many forms and the reason that I rush out at night is one of them.

The Lola Stein School Leaders Forum is one such catalyst for self-discovery. It's a monthly Jewish studies seminar led by scholars from the Shalom Hartman Institute for folks who work hard as volunteers at Jewish day schools. When friends and colleagues make it out on a weeknight to learn together, not only do we share a sense of purpose, we also share a sense of wonder. There are the *aha* moments when you clarify your sense of yourself: How does your core sense of Jewishness emerge activated in daily life?

At the same time, our conversations push the roots of community deeper because we spontaneously discover that we are perplexed by the same things, and that we are equally mystified but in different directions. The very foundations of our *chevra* (society of friends) strengthen when we seek answers together. To be provoked to critical thinking by peers and friends is to embark on a journey to self-knowledge in a profound way.

Just as each element of the forest ecosystem has evolved to be the epitome of its function, the more we examine ourselves Jewishly, the more our daily lives reflect the fullness of who we are: 21st-century Canadian Jewish day school parents.

I suspect that this is what it might mean to be part of a sustainable Jewish community. So although it was difficult to go back to school on those cold winter nights, I'm glad I did.

Ava Kwinter studied English Literature at McGill University, Queen's University, and the University of Ottawa. She has a daughter and two sons at The Toronto Heschel School.

We share a sense of purpose and we share a sense of wonder.

SPECIAL FEATURE

ONE IN A MINYAN

NEWS FLASH!

Why We Published a Book of History

BY MICHELLE SHULMAN

Every few years, we at The Lola Stein Institute and The Toronto Heschel School put our vision to work in the community. In 2008, we brought Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, *z"l"* to speak in Toronto and awarded him the A.J. Heschel Humanitarian Award. In 2015, we celebrated "Social Justice in the Classroom" with an international contest and awarded the Prize for Teaching Excellence to Erin Buchmann at the Kirkland Lake District Composite School in Ontario. In 2017, as Canada celebrated its 150th anniversary, we began a commemorative history project and are thrilled to announce publication of *Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History*.

Creating an Artefact that Celebrates a Milestone

Our way to teach history is to inspire students to think like historians in courses that focus on artefacts made by the people who lived in the times they are exploring. Junior High students study the Spanish Inquisition through drawings of ecclesiastical trials and the Edict of Expulsion, evicting the Jews in 1492. Grade 3 students inquire into the lives of early Canadians by examining the tools and ritual objects that our First Nations and pioneers left behind. To celebrate Canada's 150th birthday, we chose to create an artefact that will endure through generations beyond us and carry with it stories of Jewish history in Canada.

We asked what artefacts reveal Canadian Jewish history? What objects and writings portray the evolution of Canada as it shaped the Jewish experience across the continent and how Jewish Canadians shape our nation and national culture? Can we provide a bird's-eye view of Jewish lawyers developing Canadian labour and constitutional law; Jewish artists and writers expressing Canadian perspectives in sculpture, painting, literature, and song; Jewish architects and builders constructing skyscrapers and homes to shelter families and businesses? How fun is it that Jewish Canadian musicians almost won a Yiddish Grammy and can even claim a role in basketball glory? There are so many artefacts that the Jewish generations of Canada have deposited as they passed through time. How much more clearly do we see the whole Jewish story if these pieces are brought together?

The Process and the Gift

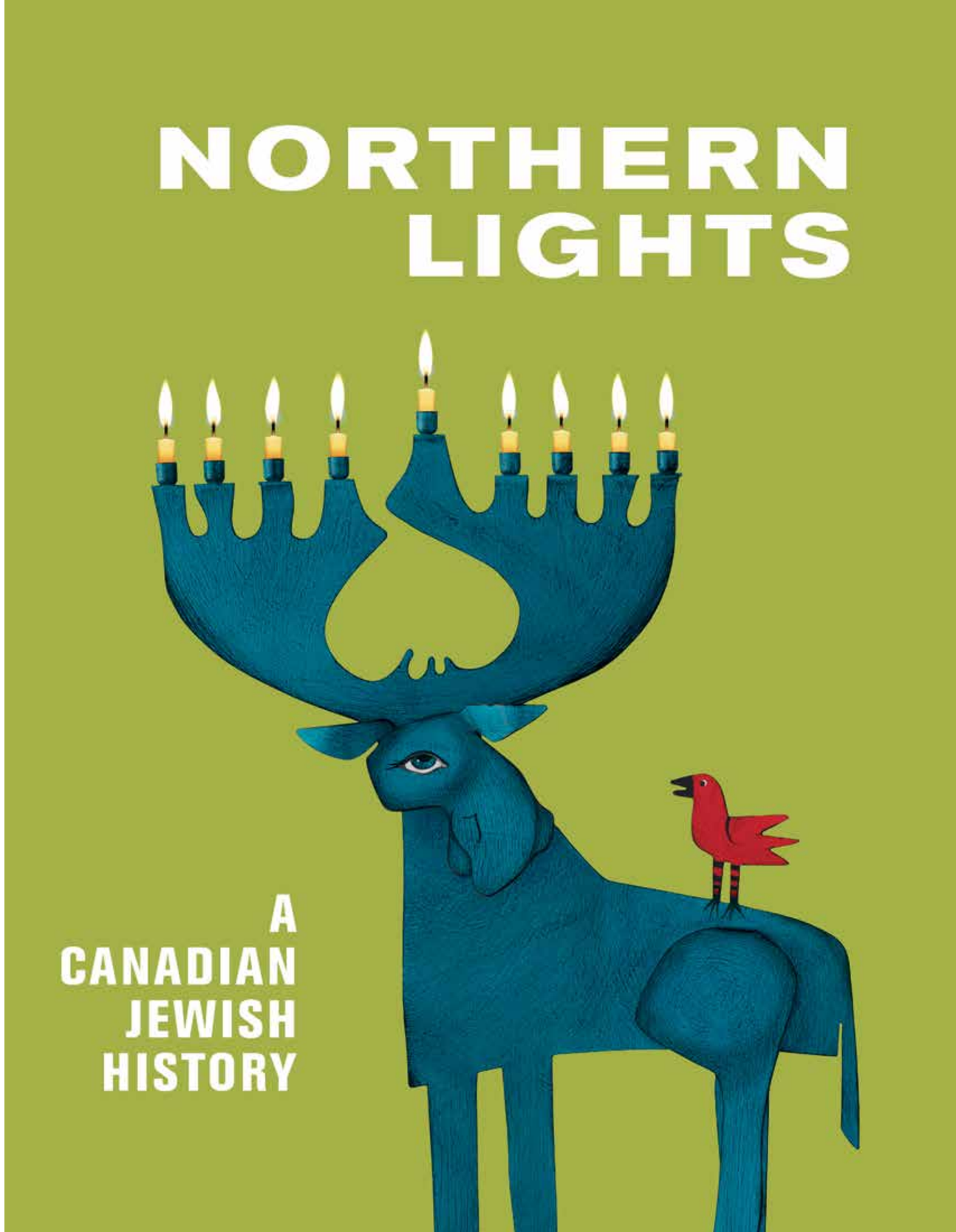
And what better artefact of Jewish Canada to help shape this documentation project than *The Canadian Jewish News*? The paper gathered and reported stories of Jewish Canada in two incarnations for over six decades.

The Lola Stein Institute began a collaboration with *The Canadian Jewish News* in 2017. The goal was to document Canadian history through the prism of its Jewish community, and to combine Jewish stories, testimonies, creations, and achievements in a beautifully illustrated book. The project was driven by Pam Medjuck Stein, the editor of THINK magazine and chair of The Lola Stein Institute, Yoni Goldstein, Editor in Chief of the CJN, and Ira Gluskin, co-chair of the Editorial Committee of the CJN Board of Directors with Pam.

Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History was published as a gift from The Lola Stein Institute and The Toronto Heschel School to its school community, and from *The Canadian Jewish News* to its subscribers. It shows the opportunity and camaraderie that Jews have experienced in this country, some of the hurdles and crises they faced, and the ingenuity with which they rebounded. We trust its stories will intrigue and entertain our community today and help the next generations of Jewish Canadians to navigate the years ahead. May it educate and may it inspire!

NB: Books are being shipped in June.

Michelle Shulman is Vice-Chair of The Lola Stein Institute, and Past Chair of The Toronto Heschel School.



Wrestling with the Invisible Self

A STORY OF STRUGGLE AND TRANSFORMATION

BY YARDEN BOURLAS

Every Wednesday morning, I lead a yoga session with about 20 Junior High students. We call it a *minyan* (the Hebrew designation for a circle of prayer) because our goal is to use three basic yoga skills—stillness, inward attention, and imagination—to explore and deepen our experience of *tefillah* (prayer). We focus on the prayer *Ashrei*.

Whenever I begin a new six-week session with a different set of students, I marvel at how easily and eagerly they pick up the ancient yoga techniques. These teenagers, who are constantly tempted by the escapism of screen time, and who guard vigilantly against doing anything that could be perceived as even remotely embarrassing, are surprisingly compelled by the various challenges that they encounter in the yoga *minyan*. It is as if they instinctively realize that the adventure of their life is underway, and they must reach inward for the *kavanah* (intention) that will help them to transform and triumph.

When Jacob wrestled with the invisible divine on the night before he was to encounter his brother, whom he had betrayed so many years before, the mysterious presence said to him, "Let me go, for the sun has risen." But Jacob answered, "I will not let you go until you bless me" (Genesis 32:27). On the yoga mat, students can grapple with deep and previously hidden parts of themselves. Like Jacob, they hold fast to *kavanah* and persist in their practice and prayer. It is through the process of inward struggle that students become blessed with the resolve, courage, and wisdom needed to meet life's challenges.

We begin our practice with stillness. I challenge the students to assume a yoga pose and to hold it while staying completely and utterly still. At first, this feels like a game, but I'm very serious. I urge them to feel as if they have been changed into a rock or a tree. When they hear the first line of the *Ashrei* prayer, their signal to assume a yoga pose, they move slowly, with focus and devotion, silently lifting their arms so as not to cause even the slightest sound, and eventually plant their feet in a posture of their choice. I watch as each student settles into stillness and I find myself in a silent room surrounded by rocks and trees. I chant, "*Ashrei yoshvei beitecha*." From previous learning, students know that it means "Happy is the one who sits in God's house," and they take that as their cue to move out of their pose and sit with a tall spine. In this way they are enacting the feeling of *Ashrei*—of peace and contentment.

A quotation attributed to Rabbi A.J. Heschel reminds us that "self-respect is the root of discipline: the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself." When students take the stillness challenge and succeed—and all do—they send themselves a profound message of self-respect. Often, people tout mindfulness practice as a panacea for reducing anxiety because they think it is relaxing, but it might be more accurate to say that yoga and other mindfulness practices calm anxiety because they lead the way, through an often convoluted process, of coming to believe in yourself.

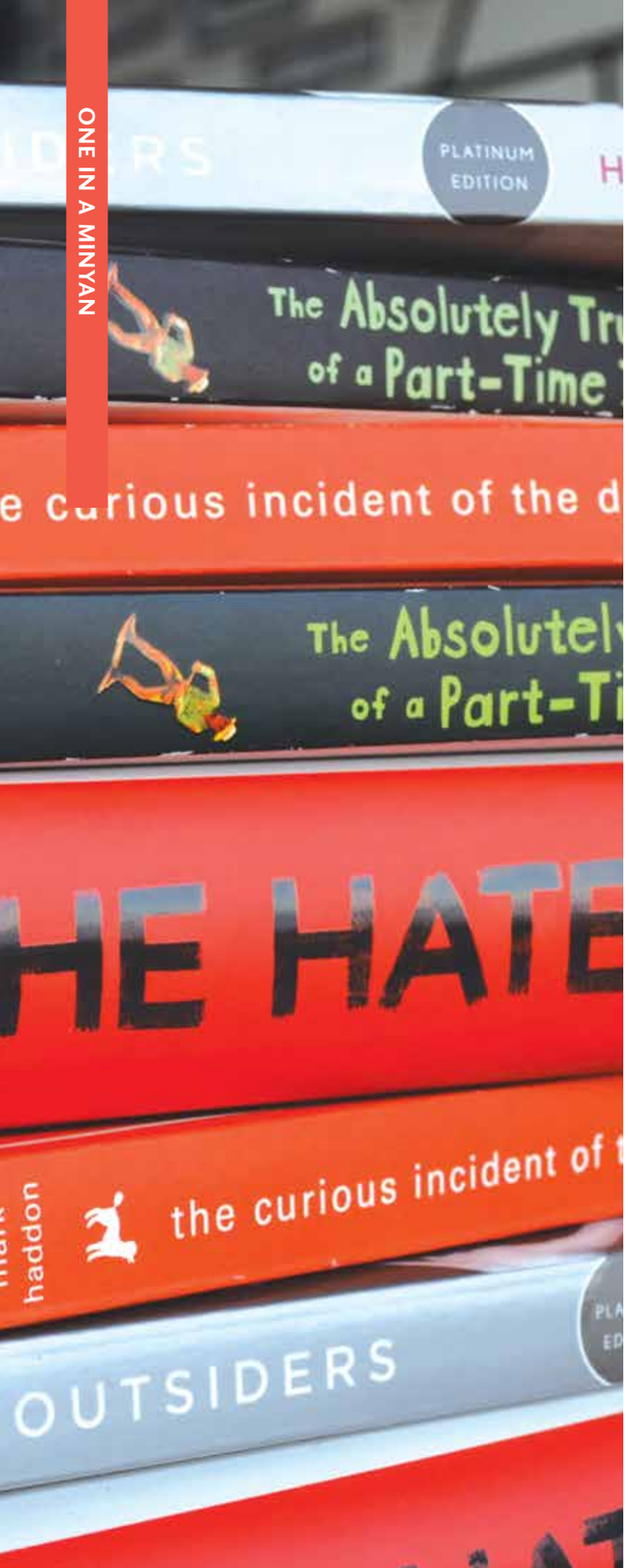
Once the students have mastered stillness, they are ready to practise the second skill: inward attention. I point out that, although silent and still, many students exhibit a tendency to look around the room, which tells me that their minds are wandering. They grin as they recognize themselves in this description. With the next line of the prayer, students assume a new pose with Jedi-like focus, eyes gazing forward calmly, as if they have been practising yoga for a lifetime. Of course, this is not easy. The temptation to look at the clock, to check if the teacher is watching, or to see what their friends are doing is almost unbearable. Like Jacob, they wrestle with an invisible force, battling to subdue the urges that tempt them to break their *kavanah* towards stillness and focus. Despite an outward appearance of composure, I know that the students are engaged in an internal struggle of biblical significance.

It is commonly thought that long, thin, bendable limbs are the key to a successful yoga practice, but true practitioners know that the imagination is the most important faculty for yoga. The initial challenges of stillness and inward attention encourage students to slowly wade into the realms of their inner experience and prepare them to explore the most subtle and complex of the three yoga skills: imagination. As we chant each line of the *Ashrei*, we consider the words differently than we might in traditional prayer. With the word "*Gadol*," students assume a pose that makes them feel enormous, as wide as the world and infinite as the universe. With "*Hadar*," they take a pose that expresses beauty and grace, and when we say "*Tzadik*," they hold a posture showing wisdom. By physically enacting the words of the prayer, students come to a deep understanding of sophisticated Jewish concepts. Each pose is held in stillness, and no two poses are alike. Practising *tefillah* in this way encourages interpretation and stimulates imagination. It nourishes dormant seeds of creativity and can even make way for spiritual insights that were previously obscure.

By developing a relationship with deeper facets of the self through yoga and prayer, students encounter their passions and their fears. They cultivate their talents and refine their dreams. Joseph Campbell, scholar of comparative mythology, is well known for his quotation, "We're not on our journey to save the world but to save ourselves. But in doing that you save the world. The influence of a vital person vitalizes." Before Jacob could become Israel, patriarch of a great nation, he had to wrestle in the darkness and by himself. It is my aspiration that in our yoga *minyan*, students experience struggle, not as something to be avoided, but rather embraced as a crucial element of personal transformation.

Yarden Bourlas teaches Grade 8 science and art and oversees the environmental program at The Toronto Heschel School. While pursuing her master's in education, she specialized in student self-regulation. She has been practising yoga for more than 15 years.

On the yoga mat, students become blessed with the resolve, courage, and wisdom needed to meet life's challenges.



Book Clubs

LAYERS OF LEARNING

BY CAITY LEHMAN

Tough topics do well in a safe book-club format.

A great book leaves a lasting impact, enriching individual minds and bringing people together. I feel an instant connection with an author when I recognize my own thoughts or feelings reflected in a novel's character, plot, or setting. This connection extends to include my friends, because when I finish reading a book I love, my first instinct is to lend it to a friend. The book and its story then form the basis of our inside jokes or reference points. Books inspire curiosity and conversation, and I read to satisfy both.

As a Junior High teacher of language arts, I aim to inspire students to become lifelong readers and to look to literature for themes that are important and relevant to their lives. To cultivate the wonder and excitement that motivate a love of literature, I design learning experiences that balance students' personal responses to a novel with consideration of their classmates' views that are perhaps a bit different.

Book clubs are an excellent model, especially for students who are learning to formulate and transfer meaningful ideas. The format is challenging but also inviting. Book club–style conversations offer participants the chance to build confidence in how they articulate their ideas and develop confidence in their ideas, exploring new concepts while feeling integral to a shared analysis. The book club model also clarifies my role as a teacher. There are two distinct kinds of relationships that I want to foster. First, I introduce a particular text to individuals and help them relate to it personally. Then I bring the individuals to groups and guide them to express themselves amongst peers.

Part of the draw of a book club is to have a say in the book you will read. Choice is empowering, and when students direct their own learning, the level of engagement soars. As such, rather than stipulating a class-wide Grade 7 text, I offer a curated list of *bildungsroman* novels, a genre that explores coming of age and identity formation. Students peruse the texts on offer, discuss preferences, and make personal selections. The protagonist of each novel experiences a journey of self-discovery that mirrors readers' learning as the book club conversations progress.

Higher-order thinking comes into play as students contrast and juxtapose their respective novels with the others. Discussions of facts, skills, and concepts generate what is known as synergistic thinking,[1] which is the "interactive energy between the lower- and higher-order processing centers of the brain."[2] I incite this synergy through my selection of particular books and the structured format that I put into play for their comparison; it's choreography for an "intellectual dance across synaptic divides in the brain."[3]

Students dance this dance of thoughts and feelings by continuously revisiting one essential question: "How do our past experiences influence how we know and express ourselves?" The notion of "influence" makes them take notice of the filter through which they look, think, and act. It's so important for them to learn how personal frames of reference develop. The groups are tasked to answer this essential question using examples from the different texts. They shift from easy generalizations to the particularities of the various narratives and back again, refining and revising their thinking again and again, and it is this process that allows deeper and more transferable understanding.[4]

For example, while discussing racism and how sweeping statements about people can be dangerous, students search the novels for examples and usually uncover a common message. I ask them to apply their new understanding to their own school culture and consider how different kinds of prejudice evolve. As my students become cognizant of the value that lies in transferring messages from fiction to real life, they adjust to using their learning flexibly. In this instance, my hope is that they recognize any prejudice around them and address it.

To increase complexity, I ask students to analyze how an author's literary style affects the attitudes and generalizations in a book—for example, how a message about prejudice can be constructed by language used. A door opens as they see how word choice, plot structure, and figurative language factor into the stories being told, how descriptions of events prompt character development, and how dialogue and narrative voice communicate overt and covert messages. Students discover how the writers' intentions shape their own reading experiences and ignite personal growth. By continually asking themselves how experience informs perspective, they feel the change their own reading produces.

Our novels portray diverse human experiences with universal themes: living amid racism and poverty, rebounding from violence, and finding outlets for personal expression. Such tough topics do well in a safe book-club format, which allows us to discuss the personal experiences that shape our interpretations. The process simultaneously strengthens our sense of community and learned-from messages, such as "Being judged or discriminated [against] can be a challenge that is overcome by making friends" or "You will have stronger relationships if you trust the good in people."[5] Each week animated discussion fills the classroom. But when I hear students still talking in the hallways and recommending their books to others, I really see success.

1 H. Lynn Erickson, Lois A. Lanning, and Rachel French, *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2017), p. 11.

2 H. Lynn Erickson, *Stirring the Head, Heart, and Soul* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008), p. 72.

3 Erickson, Lanning, and French, *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom*, p. 11.

4 Julie Stern, Krista Ferraro, and Juliet Mohnkern, *Tools for Teaching Conceptual Understanding, Secondary* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2017), pp. 56–61.

5 Grade 7 Students at The Toronto Heschel School.

Caity Lehman is a passionate artist and traveller. After teaching for several years in Bogotá, Colombia, Caity is now in her second year at The Toronto Heschel School, teaching language arts and civilizations in Junior High. She studied English literature and film before pursuing a career in education.

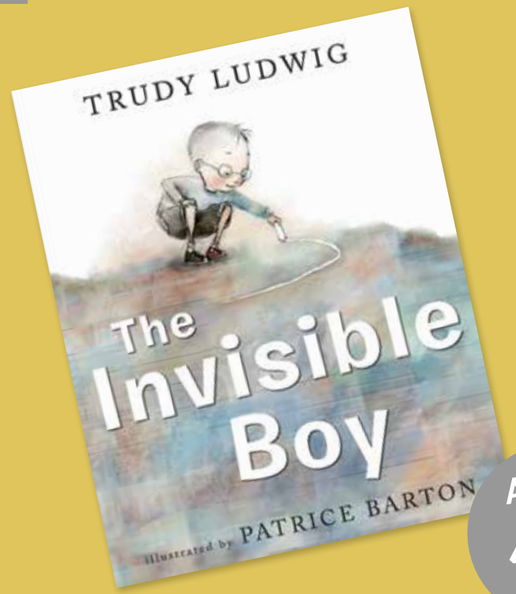
Good Books

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.



AGES 4–8

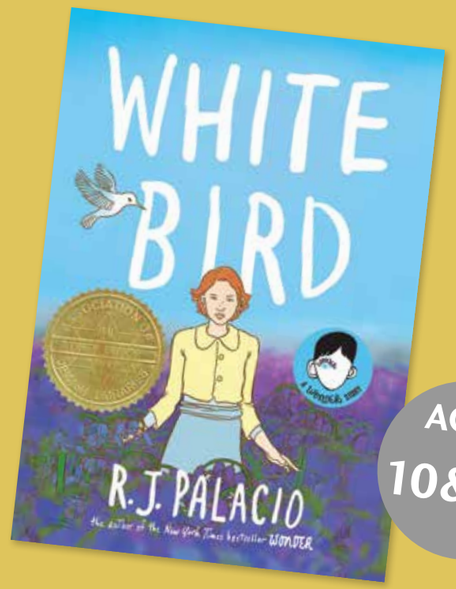
***The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig and illustrated by Patrice Barton (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2013)**
No one notices Brian, neither his busy teacher nor fellow students playing ball and making friends. But when new student Justin arrives, and he too finds it hard to break into the group, Brian reaches out in an act of personal bravery and he and Justin connect. Justin later finds a way to integrate Brian into the class where his talents are finally recognized. Poignant illustrations complement the story. Drawn initially in grey and white when Brian is "invisible," his character gradually gains colour as he interacts with others. The story explores friendship and tackles the challenges posed by peer-group power.

***A Moon for Moe and Mo* by Jane Breskin Zalben and illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini (Charlesbridge, 2018)**
Moses Feldman and Mohammed Hassan (Moe and Mo) both live on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. Shopping at the same market with their mothers, the boys discover that they have the same nickname and dark complexions, and the same appetite for falafel. They hope to see each other again soon, but it isn't until weeks later that they meet again at the park, when their mothers take a break from Rosh Hashanah and Ramadan preparations. When the boys disappear from sight, the mothers search together and another friendship is born. Vibrant collage illustrations and recipes add to this celebration of similarities and differences, discovery and friendship, topped with a wish for peace.

Mazal tov to Tziporah Cohen on her new book for middle-school students!

About *No Vacancy*
Buying and moving into the run-down Jewel Motor Inn in upstate New York wasn't 11-year-old Miriam Brockman's dream, but at least it's an adventure. Miriam befriends Kate, whose grandmother owns the diner next door, and finds comfort in the company of Maria, the motel's housekeeper, and her Uncle Mordy, who comes to help out for the summer. She spends her free time helping Kate's grandmother make her famous grape pies and begins to face her fears by taking swimming lessons in the motel's pool.

But when it becomes clear that only a miracle is going to save the Jewel from bankruptcy, Jewish Miriam and Catholic Kate decide to create their own. Otherwise, the No Vacancy sign will come down for good, and Miriam will lose the life she's worked so hard to build.



***White Bird: A Wonder Story* by R.J. Palacio (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2019)**
This gripping graphic novel, part of the Wonder collection, opens with a FaceTime conversation between contrite class bully Julian and his Jewish grandmother in France. Julian is doing a family history project and Grandmère Sara, previously reluctant to talk about her wartime experiences, decides it's time to share. In a story that flashes back from the present day to Nazi-occupied Europe, we learn how Grandmère Sara was saved as a young girl by a non-Jewish boy who had the courage to break from the crowd despite the danger of doing so. *White Bird* is an inspiring story of kindness, bravery, and survival.

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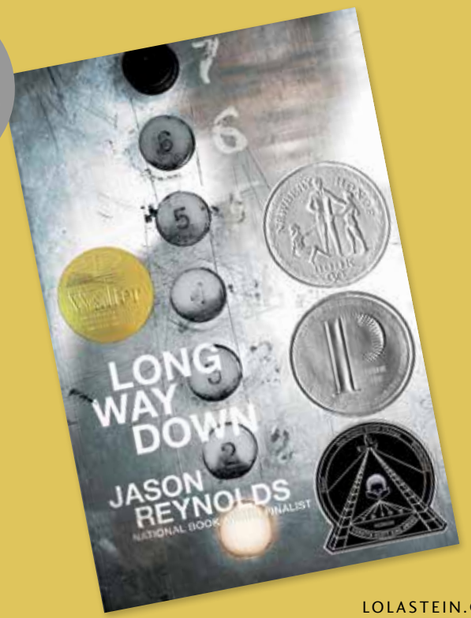
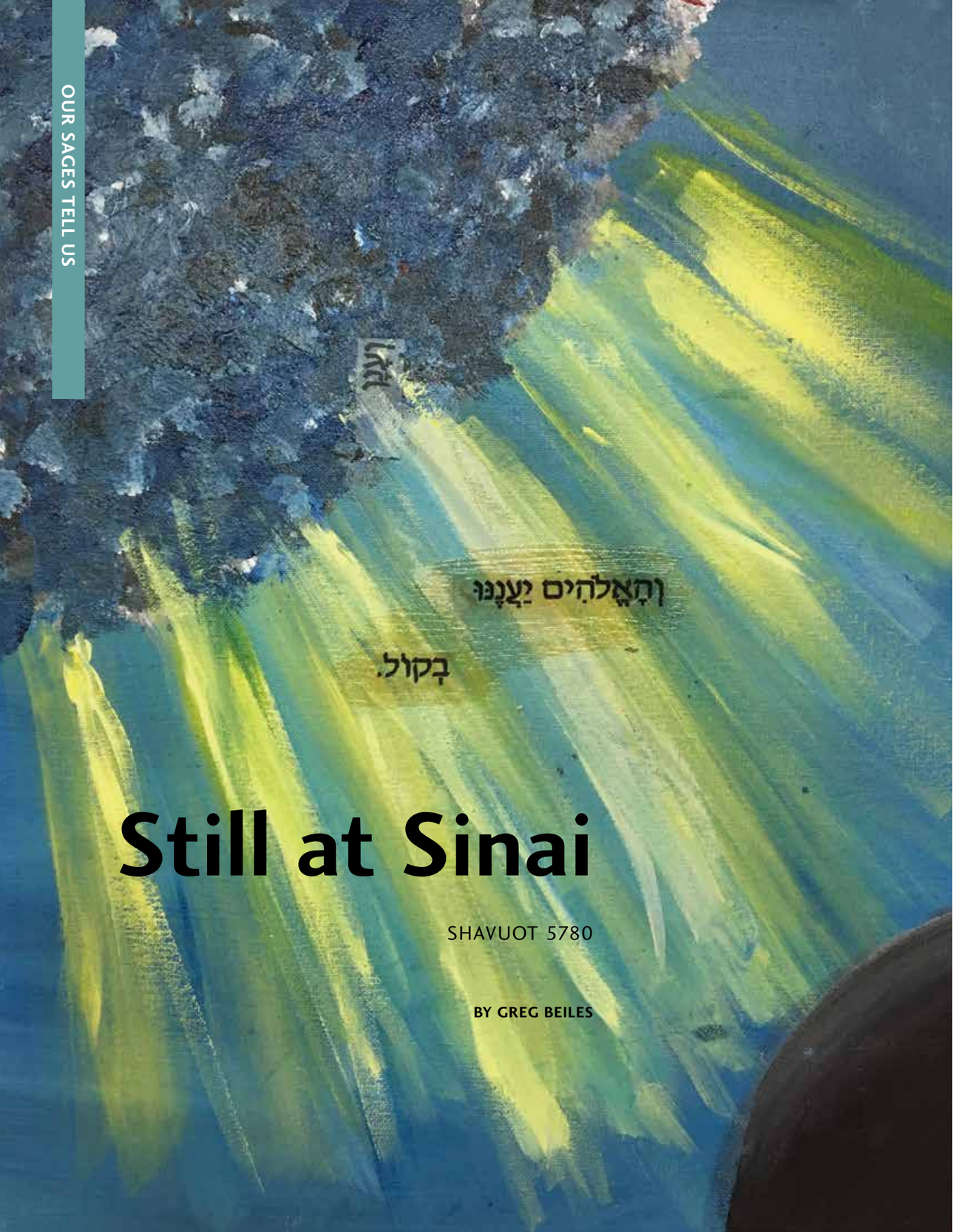


***Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds (Atheneum Books, 2017)**
When 5-year-old Will's big brother is shot and killed, grief-stricken Will knows the rules: Don't Cry. Don't Snitch. Get Revenge. Grabbing his brother's gun, he takes the elevator from his apartment down to the street. At each floor the door opens and Will is joined by someone from his past who was killed by gun violence. As each person shares information and poses hard questions, Will's simplified interpretation of his brother's murder is challenged. In the 60 seconds it takes to reach ground level, Will grapples with the pressure of groupthink versus the courage of individualism, and must decide if he will follow the rules or break the brutal cycle of violence.

OUR SAGES TELL US



Still at Sinai

SHAVUOT 5780

BY GREG BEILES

The moment of intergenerational learning that Shavuot brings annually to our school community will elude us this year as an in-person event.

Luckily, we were all at Sinai.

Shavuot is known as זמן מתן תורתינו (*Zman Matan Torateinu*)—the time of the giving of our Torah, the day that we celebrate receiving the Torah at Har (Mount) Sinai. I write "we" and not "they" because our tradition teaches that when the Torah was given, all of the people of Israel—past, present, and future—were there together at Har Sinai. All generations: Moshe, Miriam, and the Hebrews who had just exited Egypt; historically earlier personages, including Avraham, Sarah, and Jacob; and we of this generation, with our parents and grandparents, our children and grandchildren, cousins and relatives. We were together at that moment of awe and wonder when we received the Torah.

How is this possible? What does it mean? For some, it means that, by a mystery beyond our comprehension, we were actually all physically present at Sinai for the divine revelation. For others, it means that our souls were present, hovering and mingling in the crowd. Still others understand our participation because we are bonded by the chain of learning, tradition, commitment, and memory (מדור לדור) (*Me Dor L'Dor*) to the generation that stood physically at the foot of the mountain.

According to the Book of Exodus, B'nai Israel (the people of Israel) arrived at Har Sinai (בחודש השלישי) (*Bachodesh Hashlishi*) at the start of the third month after the Exodus from Egypt. ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני (*Bayom hazeh baoo midbar Sinai*)—on "this" day they arrived at Sinai. The biblical commentator Rashi asks: Why does the Torah emphasize on "this" day, ביום הזה (*Bayom hazeh*)? He goes on to explain: We identify that the Torah was given on "this" day so that the words of Torah will always be fresh for us—as given this very day—today, here and now. When parents and grandparents learn with their children, grandchildren, family, and friends, it's a re-enactment of every generation of our people receiving Torah together. In "this" moment of learning together, loving and caring for one another (by computer, telephone, or in person), we are living the intergenerational moment of Torah.

But why should we learn more if we all were there?

I see there are two kinds of teaching and learning. One that happens *at* Sinai and one that happens *from* Sinai.

At Sinai, we are all the teachers and all the learners. A very special kind of teaching happens when children and grandchildren are the teachers; when they notice the little details that we, in our busy lives, don't see anymore; when they remember something that was said or done; when they draw a picture of a tree or animal or a person in their own unique way that has never been drawn before; when they teach us how to be better parents and better grandparents, better people.

The other kind of teaching is the kind that can only be passed on from generation to generation; from the older to the younger. That is the teaching that comes from experience: role modelling. As Rav A.J. Heschel says, "To guide a pupil, into the Promised Land, the teacher must have been there herself." Among my strongest childhood memories are of my grandparents leading Shabbat prayers and hosting the Pesach Seder. Those memories and teachings will remain with me forever. The generations of Israel experienced receiving the Torah and accepting the covenant together. The expression מדור לדור (*Me Dor L'Dor*) means that Jewish learning and tradition passes through the generations; each generation teaching the next.

The Torah was given by God to Moshe, and handed down by Moshe to Yehoshua, from Yehoshua to the scholars and the community, and on through the generations for thousands of years. Judaism is an ancient tradition that remains fresh and new every day. It is said to be like a living tree with deep roots and branches that stretch ahead as we study and reach for fresh new insights from the Torah, from our rituals and our holidays. Maybe, yet another way to understand our participation at Sinai—"we were all at Sinai" —is to realize that Mount Sinai is here with us today, ביום הזה (*Bayom hazeh*), every day.

Our students learn that Torah and Jewish heritage matter each and every day. They learn how the study and practice of Judaism helps them develop the habits of heart, mind, body, and soul that will make them smart, compassionate, committed leaders of and contributors to their community and the world. They become *mensches* by observing *middot*—the ethical teachings of the Jewish tradition; they learn to notice and appreciate "awe and wonder" in every aspect of their learning, whether it's in the garden, a math class, an art project, a science experiment, or a Hebrew play.

Shavuot is also about offering.

Shavuot is one of the three pilgrimage festivals (שלושת הרגלים) (*Shloshet Haregalim*), the others being Pesach and Sukkot. It is known as the Festival of Reaping (חג הקציר) (*Chag HaKatzir*) and Day of the First Fruits (יום הבכורים) (*Yom HaBikurim*). On Shavuot in ancient times, the people would journey from all parts of Eretz Israel to the temple in Jerusalem bringing offerings from the first crop of their harvest. Shavuot is a day on which thanks is given not only for the bounty of the fruit we eat but also for the bounty of our spiritual fruit.

Together at Sinai we share the "fruits" of knowledge. We offer our knowledge and experience to our children and grandchildren, and we allow them to offer us their unique take on the world, reminding us of something we hadn't noticed or had forgotten to see. It's the perfect *middah* for Erev Shavuot.

Chag Sameach.

Teaching Kindness

BY YACOV FRUCHTER

The world stands upon three things: Torah, worship and acts of kindness (Pirkei Avot 1:2).

Like all parents, I have many hopes for my children, and often include these in their weekly *bracha* (blessing) on Friday nights. I want them to be healthy, happy, self-confident, successful, honest, and loved. Yet my wife and I feel most proud of them when they act in a way which demonstrates kindness and caring, both to themselves and to others. This desire to have kind children has impacted many aspects of our parenting, including our decisions about their education, our parenting style, what we talk about, which achievements we celebrate, and the experiences we offer them.

In a comment on the first verse of the Torah, Rashi explains that the two first and most common names used for God represent two distinct *midot* (attributes). The use of both *Elohim*, representing the attribute of *din*/justice, and *YHVH* read as *Adonai*, which represents *rahamim*/mercy, are used in telling the story of creation to help us understand that both are fundamental to our world. Being in God's image, *betzelem Elohim*, helps us understand that all humans

My wife and I feel most proud of them when they act in a way which demonstrates kindness and caring, both to themselves and to others.

have a responsibility to act in a godly way: with justice and kindness.

I believe that nurturing our kids to be both pursuers of justice and to act kindly in the world are two separate and crucial tasks for parents and educators.

Our super-sweet and caring five-year-old daughter, like many children, has a strong sense of justice. In an attempt to create an environment of justice wherein kids are nice to each other and follow rules, she would sometimes call out classmates for what she perceived to be an injustice against her or others, and sometimes she would do so in a harsh tone. In addition to her strong sense of justice, she exhibits extreme empathy towards others. She needed to learn how to bridge these two values—justice and empathy—so that she could seek justice for herself and others in a way that is empathetic and kind, just like her. While I felt proud of her for holding her own, I also know that this way of relating with her friends is not consistent with our values. Together with her teachers, we reminded her to use a "kind voice," helped her examine how her tone affects other kids, and lifted up and acknowledged the moments in which she caught herself and chose to speak kindly to her siblings and friends.

So, how do we help raise our kids to be kind and caring, in addition to successful and happy?

Repetition

We recite in the *Shema* prayer: "Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). My friend Dr. Jeremy Rezmovitz, pediatrician and podcast host of *Small Changes, Big Impact*, asks his kids every day for one example of something kind they did for a friend, and one way they were kind to themselves. We must constantly remind them that being kind and caring is core to our family, school, and Jewish values.

Authenticity and Modelling

In December 2019, organizational psychologist, podcast host (*Work Life*), and author (*Option B*, *Originals*) Adam Grant, together with his wife Allison Sweet Grant, published an article in *The Atlantic* titled "Stop Trying to Raise Successful Kids." Based on studies done with parents and kids, they noted a discrepancy between what parents believe they are emphasizing and what kids experience from their parents. "If you survey American parents about what they want for their kids, more than 90 percent say one of their top priorities is that their children be caring…But when you ask *children* what their parents want for them, 81 percent say their parents value achievement and happiness over caring."[1]

Our kids are too smart to believe that something is truly important if we don't ourselves do it. We need to talk and behave kindly, and as families we need to participate in activities that demonstrate care and concern for others. Acts of *chesed* cannot only be something our kids do when mandated by their high schools! When we went to a retirement home to deliver *mishloach manot* on behalf of Beth Tzedec, my kids were beaming as they sang, danced, and conversed with people who were struggling with isolation and illness. They then asked me when we would be doing it again.

Specificity

We need to give our children categories and language for what it means to act with kindness. For example, at The Toronto Heschel School, there is a weekly, positive attribute or "caring action" called the *midat hashavua* that is emphasized and that is connected to the weekly Torah portion. Parents are given resources to reinforce this action at home.

Imperfection

As difficult as it is, we also need to own up to our mistakes and acknowledge to our children that we are not always going to get it right. When we use less-than-kind voices—even when we have been waiting for three hours to talk to a live agent to cancel a flight or when we are negotiating a new contract with Rogers and try to exert our power—we need to fess up, so that when our kids make mistakes, they too will be honest about it and correct their ways.

Celebration

I recently noticed that my eight-year-old, exhausted after a long day, was lying on the couch with her head on her five-year-old sister's lap as the latter caressed her big sister's hair. I took a picture of this super-sweet moment, gave them each a kiss, and told them how much I loved seeing them caring for each other.

May the spring season bring with it a renewed sense of hope and health, and a renewed commitment to engendering communities of care.

1 Adam Grant and Allison Sweet Grant, "Stop Trying to Raise Successful Kids," *The Atlantic*, December 2019, paragraph 1, italics in original, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/stop-trying-to-raise-successful-kids/600751/

Yacov Fruchter is Director of Community Building and Spiritual Engagement at Beth Tzedec Congregation and recently completed a Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS) at Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto. He is a parent at The Toronto Heschel School.

Heschel@Home Speaks to Me about Heschel at School

BY AVA KWINTER

The first few days after the decision came to shut our school, everyone was in crisis management mode. I spoke with Greg Beiles, Head of School, over Zoom on March 31, two and a half weeks into Heschel@Home learning.

Greg told me that the shift to Heschel@Home meant quickly mobilizing staff to upload the curriculum, training teachers how to use Google Classroom, and meeting with team leaders about how best to use online platforms. The situation was especially challenging because Heschel eschews the broad use of screens and digital technology in the classroom before Grade 4, and only uses them sparingly and purposively thereafter. Before Ontario schools closed on March 13, early years and elementary students didn't have an online school identity or address. And this was a good thing.

In the first five days following the shutdown, through a massive effort, Heschel@Home sprang into being. The Heschel teachers jumped into the turnaround. Every classroom was reconstituted as a Google Classroom and each student obtained an online profile. Yet, of course, challenges remained. Some children took to the new format readily, but many children, especially younger ones, did not adjust well. Families recognized the reality of online learning, yet some were frustrated and even bewildered. The usual Heschel experience does not translate easily into digital delivery.

Although many of us had not considered exactly what is in Heschel's "secret sauce" that Greg talks about, it's now clear that so much of what makes up Heschel's curriculum is sensory learning. Under normal conditions, a Heschel education is focused on learning that is transmitted or received through as many of the senses as possible; it is learning that uses the arts as an impetus to sensory experience and sensory experience as a path to knowledge. Many of us never realized how much music, drama, drawing, singing, and movement our children do at school. This is how they learn, at Heschel. Now we know.

Learning happens together. At school the kids are always in various combinations: in *chaveruta*, in pairs, small groups, large groups, the whole class, the whole division, the whole school. Sitting at home in front of a screen is lonely, especially for children who equate learning with community. It was becoming clear that the true Heschelian experience could not be exported to a generic online platform and made to perform as would the delivery of other information. The Heschel curriculum is distinctive.

The generic online tools available for crisis learning—Google Classroom, Zoom, YouTube—are flat and the Heschel curriculum is multidimensional. This is a problem. It seems that it is not yet known how to transmit the elements that are quintessential to the Heschel curriculum via the Internet. Online teaching stretches the curriculum out of shape. Cocooned at home, without the realities of teachers, study groupings, and specially configured classrooms, the educational experience becomes something other than intended by Heschel. The secret sauce dries up.

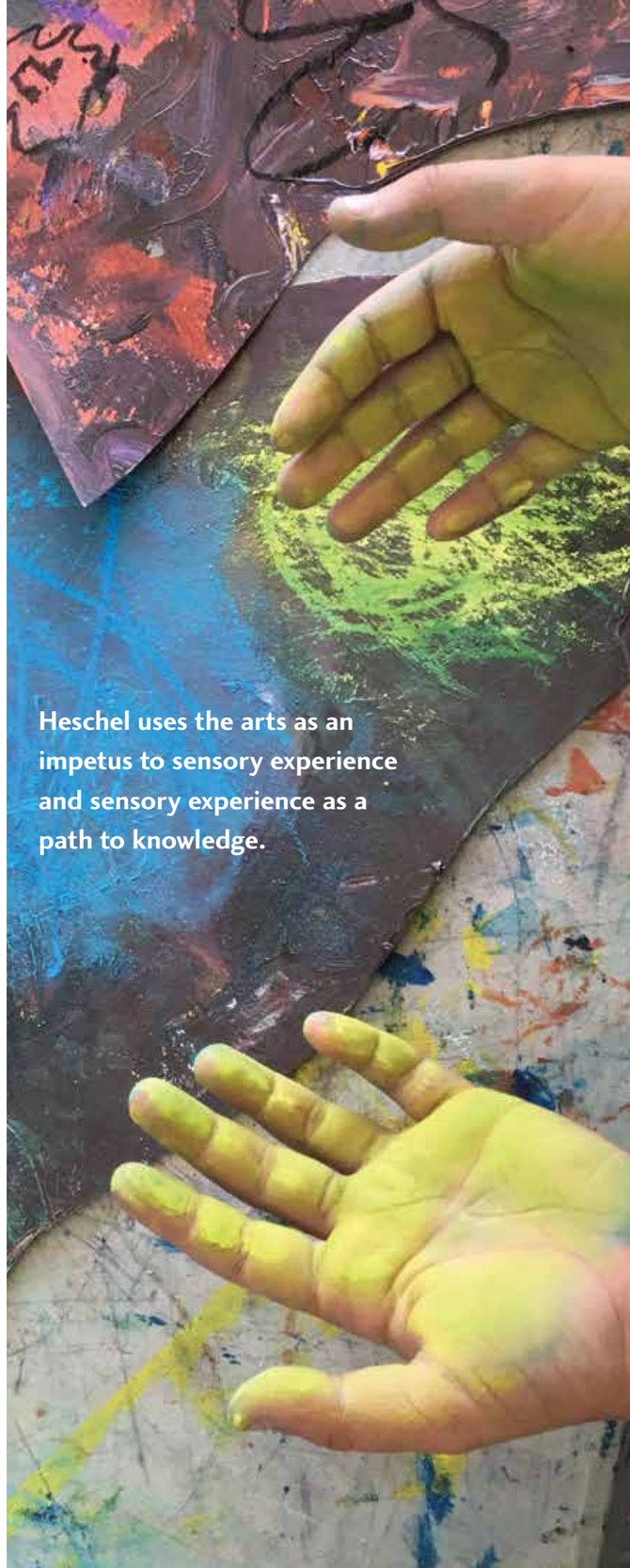
The Internet is what Marshall McLuhan would have called a very "hot" medium: it absorbs your attention to the exclusion of other stimuli and demands very little participation in return. In other words, when you are online you look at things without thinking; the visual stimuli consume your attention so that everything else around you gets tuned out. A hot medium like the Internet spoon-feeds information. The myth of Zoom—that you can recreate a meeting, a classroom, a community, by looking at projections on a screen even when sitting home alone—exemplifies one of the greatest disconnects between appearance and reality that e-learning students have to face.

Zoom purports to facilitate dialogue, but it is actually monologic. A platform like Zoom, with its display of faces in tiles and the promise of a virtual presence, is perhaps one of the most confusing forms of media, not only to children but adults too. Zoom cannot tolerate simultaneous speakers nor can it make sense of the ambient noise that occurs in real life and textures reality. It is not the children's fault that they become zombie-like in front of the screen. That inertia is a function of a hot medium. It falsifies reality, and our children have been training in the authentic.

Generic online tools are not carriers of Heschelian values. The foundational values of Heschel education—the sensory, experiential, and communal—have not yet been translated successfully into online delivery. But the trajectory so far of Heschel@Home is promising. There has been rapid evolution from bare-bones Google classrooms and pre-recorded asynchronous learning videos of the first week to real-time Zoom classrooms, Google Hangout sessions, and collaborative, innovative activities that we have been seeing in recent days. These are signposts that the Heschel team are deep into remediating the paper, paint, and glue curriculum for our children's online learning.

When I spoke with Greg, back in March, I asked him if he thought there would be anything in this experience with online learning that he might keep after we went back to school. It was early days and Greg said, in all honesty, he hoped he would not have to use most of the digital interfaces we've had to adopt. He invoked one of his favourite quotations, "Just because you can do something, doesn't mean that you should."

But I believe this line of thinking continues farther, and just because we have always done things in one way doesn't mean that we always will. Heschel's curriculum is characterized by its innovation that can persevere in any medium, in any environment. Against their will, the Heschel team are feeling their way in the dark and finding the cracks where the light gets in.



Heschel uses the arts as an impetus to sensory experience and sensory experience as a path to knowledge.

The See-Saw

BALANCING SELF AND COMMUNITY

BY JASMINE ELIAV

As we raise our children, many of us wonder who they will be as they grow and how they will contribute to society. These questions reflect two important aspects of a child's identity development that tip and flutter like a see-saw: on one side is the child's sense of uniqueness and on the other lies the capacity to affiliate with a group.

Psychologists Dr. Markus and Dr. Kitayama explain that "culture and selves define and build upon each other in an ongoing cycle of mutual constitution."[1] The child we are raising is an integrated being whose relationship to ideas and behaviours is a continuous interplay of personal values that transcend the individual and affect the social context and group traits that transfer from collective beginnings to become characteristic of a single person.

What qualities do we value in the development of self? Do we lean towards creating individuals, *unique* from their peers, who voice their beliefs and value their independence? Or do we esteem social interdependence and our children's abilty to *assimilate* into a greater whole? Research demonstrates that selves, i.e., individuals, who develop where independence is valued and fostered, tend to view themselves as different from each other, while selves, who grow in contexts with significant dependencies, are prone to see themselves as similar to others. If we take a minute to reflect on this, we might notice where we fit on this continuum.

Without noticing where our personal preferences lie, perhaps we allow our self-image to configure our child's formation. As the child grows, the developmental see-saw tilts back and forth between prioritizing the self and the community, and how it finds its level is a factor of culture, tradition, values, and ethics. Sociocultural psychology is in its third decade and, from very early on, its researchers found certain tendencies in cross-cultural studies. For example, "the nail that sticks out is likely to be hammered down in Japan, whereas the squeaky wheel attracts grease and attention in the United States."[2] New insight reveals that children do not just perceive the world around them, their perception is itself constructed by their context. Culture and self are interactive forces with vital impact on how children generate their identity.

Right from the beginning, we see how infants communicate their needs and shape their social relations based on the interpersonal responses they receive. Toddlers vacillate between wanting to do everything themselves and relying on others. How their caregivers assess this early independence sets the stage for children's expectations of the world and what the world might expect of them. When they enter kindergarten children move naturally from identifying as individuals to recognizing themselves as members of a group. Interestingly, this is also when children learn to communicate more effectively. We aim to help them to be collaborative players but also to have the self-confidence to make personal choices. Reflect on the words that you use with your children at this early stage. What do they hear as valued? Both in the classroom and at home?

Once at school, children transition developmentally to more sophisticated social engagement. They may join group activities, sports, and afterschool programs. They adjust to class rules and to being thoughtful members of a classroom community. Social relationships may become a priority. The particular school community environment in which they find themselves will tell them quickly what is valued and what is not, and their perception of this will significantly affect their decisions to blend in or be outspoken. As such, it's important for us as parents to be sensitive to this dynamic. Yes, we want our children to be comfortable in generating their own ideas and contributing to the group, which is an oft heralded hallmark of a strong individual. However, we also know that they need to acclimate to listening to others peacefully and effortlessly and to learn how to come together cohesively. Both trajectories are important.

Adolescence highlights the tension between independence and interdependence. Teens think about who they are and who they want to be. They are notorious for wanting to fit in but in a countercultural way. The theme of adolescence is to wonder who you are in the crowd and the task of adolescence is identity development. This is the first stage of life that allows a metacognitive contemplation of the self. Adolescents want autonomy, individuality, and their voices heard. At the same time they struggle to be part of a group and to be popular. We warn them about group think, peer pressure, and the risk of following along. As the generation who watched John Hughes' movies—*The Breakfast Club, Sixteen Candles, Ferris Bueller's Day Off*—we know it well.

I am setting out the various dichotomies in order to emphasize that parents should be thoughtful of the words we use, and of how the tapestry that is our social and cultural backdrop looks to our teen: what do our attitudes—family, religious, school, neighbourhood—and perspectives tell them? We have to be mindful of the age we live in. Often today individualism seems to outweigh communal concerns. There is worry in the air that our children are being nurtured in a "me, me, me" generation—selfish, self-centred, entitled, narcissistic. The tipping point is unclear.

The feeling of being at home in a collective emerges where familiarity with community is welcomed as a healthy attribute. It grows from a child's capacity to play nicely with siblings and with friends in the sandbox, to care about others' needs and speak up for the common good. If, however, a child leans too far into the group, he can lose his sense of self which brings other struggles. It's one thing to agree with others, it's quite another to have no opinion of one's own. Absent personal choice, groups become homogenous and all encompassing, and the freedom that is individuality is gone. The poor quality decision-making that results from groupthink is the best warning. What begins as bowing to peer pressure can end in mob mentality.

Some might feel that fear is forcing the balance between our personal needs and society's requirements, but if we dig deeper, it's probably love.

The see-saw tips this way and that: a strong sense of individual self activates choice but perhaps less social cohesion; wholly interrelated groups minimize variation and freedom. How do we raise children who develop a distinct sense of self and commit to a better collective?

Not surprisingly our children's capacity to balance this push and pull rests on our modelling: We will lead them to look for choice even where none is apparent; we will show them how, as part of a community, we take stock, see what is going on, and remember choice.

Since this article was started our lives have changed significantly, creating many new tensions between the collective and individual. We want our children to go back to school, meet up with friends, get out of the house, and we want to get back to our own work. These personal needs are wrestling with the collective requirement to stay home for the sake of health and safety of the community. Emotions are high and the tension comes in waves. Unbelievably, despite all of this, our communities small and large are balancing the needs so sensibly and successfully.

Some might feel that fear is forcing us to achieve this balance between our personal needs and society's requirements, but if we dig deeper, it's probably love: love for our children, our elders, our teachers and our colleagues, ourselves. We do it because we love for our freedom and our love of lives. This unprecedented time feels somewhat biblical in that the entire world is facing this together. Never have we felt so like other individuals who live in vastly different cultures, never has the global community felt so synchronized.

The see-saw tension described in this article reveals both the beauty and that balance that we bring to living. We bring the best of ourselves to our community and remember that why we became our best selves is significantly because of the people around us.

1 H.R. Markus and S. Kitayama, "Cultures and Selves: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2010), pp. 420–430.

2 Ibid.

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