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THiNK

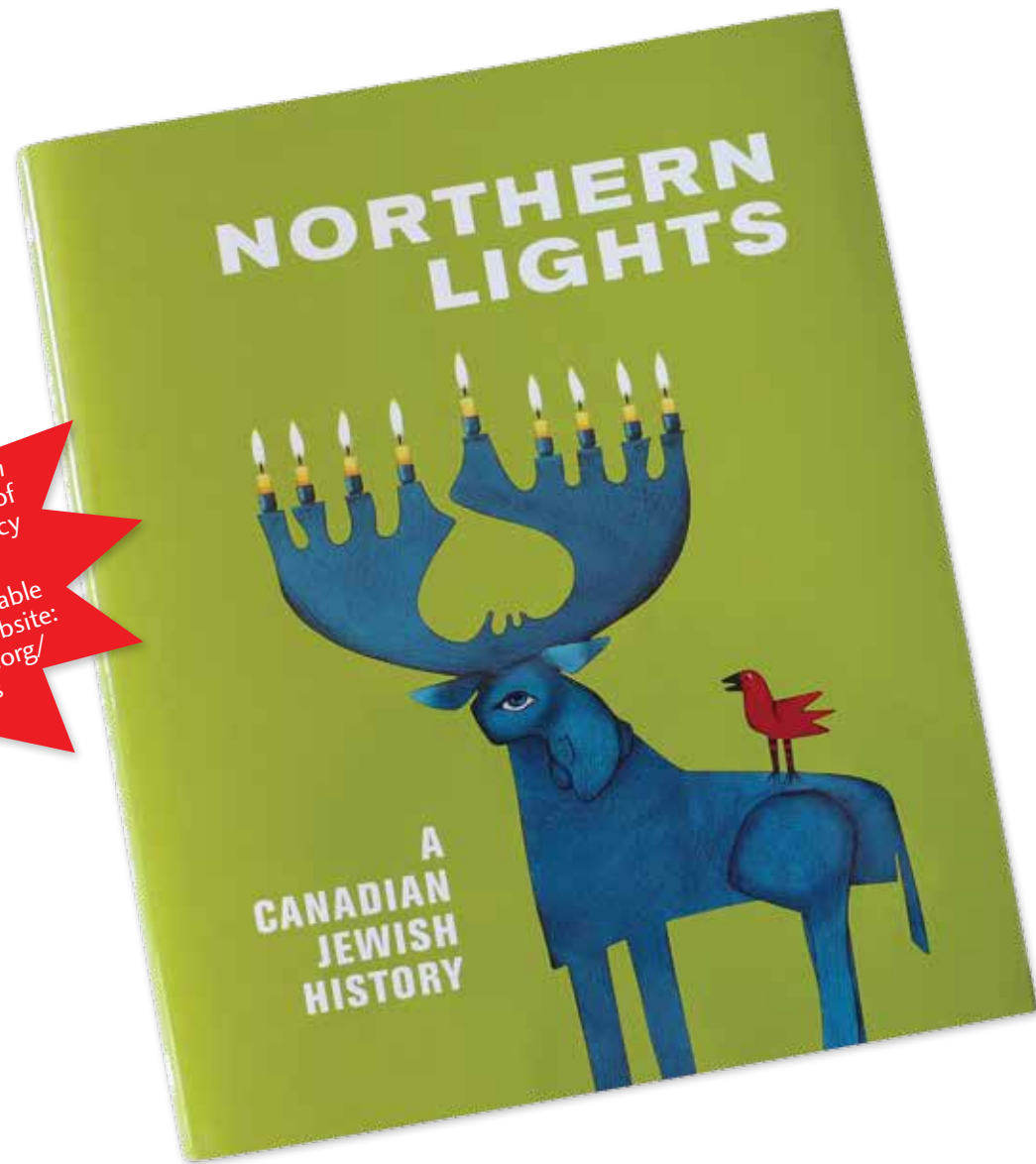
THE
LOLA
STEIN
INSTITUTE
JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children



HIDDEN AND REVEALED

THE MOON IN GRADE 1: LOOKING AT THE UNSEEN / LUNAR AWE: THE CASE FOR NAKED-EYE ASTRONOMY / OBVIOUS & NOT-SO-OBVIOUS REASONS FOR JEWISH DAY SCHOOL / BEHIND THE SCENES IN 2ND LANGUAGE LEARNING / BEST PRACTICES IN THE LEARNING CENTRE / PANDEMIC PIXELATION: COMING APART & COMING TOGETHER AT HOME



Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History tells stories of Canada through the legacy of its Jewish citizens. Limited copies are available for purchase on our website: www.torontoheschel.org/northern-lights

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COMING APART AND COMING TOGETHER AT HOME

Jasmine Eliav



LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL TEAM

- EDITOR**
Pam Medjuck Stein
Chair, Lola Stein Institute
- Greg Beiles
Director
- Michelle Shulman
Vice Chair
- Dvora Goodman
Coordinator
- Ava Kwinter
Associate Editor

COPYEDITING & PROOFREADING
Beth McAuley / The Editing Company

DESIGN AND LAYOUT
Sharon Kish / www.sharonkish.com

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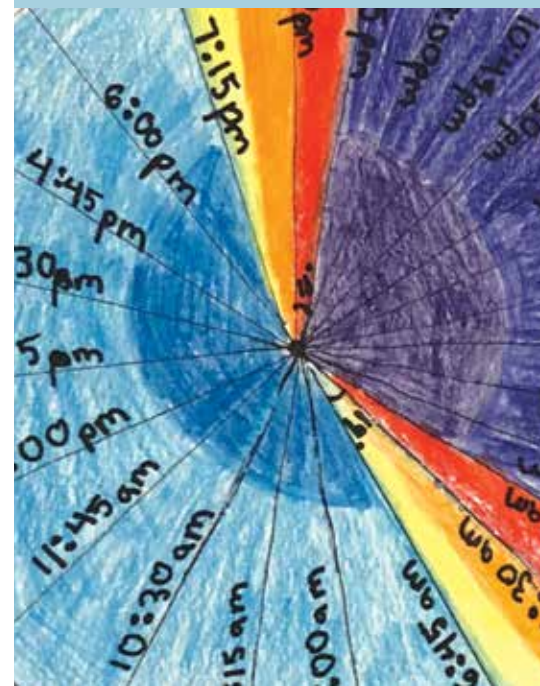
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Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. We honour her memory in a way that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



There's Always More than Meets the Eye

“Now you see it, now you don't!” These are well-known words spoken by magicians performing sleight of hand. The audience is supposed to be mystified by how it all happens and the manoeuvre looks magical. Meanwhile, most of us understand that a secret routine has been practised to perfection for predictable results.

The Torah reads “*Na'aseh v'nishma*,” which means “Do it and then understand.” Parents and teachers appreciate that strong habits are the hidden formula for achievement. Whether our plan is to support loved ones through illness, master academic standards, play piano like a maestro, keep calm in troubled times, or lead a life of justice and *tzedakah*, our patterns of behaviour—our lifestyles—will define how well we manage.

There's a strong case to be made for teaching children as early as possible how to appreciate that more is happening around them than can be understood at a glance. They should take time to look closely and figure things out for themselves: there's the known and the unknown; how fact differs from interpretation; and the critical understanding that consequences will flow from actions taken. In this issue of THINK, we send a mission to the moon to explore what is lit up and what is behind.

The moon offers much to think about: it symbolizes the night; its face and shadows together form a whole; and its cycles are the basis of the Jewish calendar. In *Awe and Wonder*, Greg Beiles reflects on Judaism's relationship with special moments, passages, and experiences. Ava Kwinter finds that the notion of object permanence positions children to navigate paths and trust in themselves as they learn there's much to learn. Yarden Bourlas orients Junior High students

to face and manage quandaries; she presents the mysteries of the night sky as puzzles of evidence confounding intuition. Orly Borovich and Nechama Drookman offer a peek into the shadows of pedagogical strategy, sharing how theatre and the dramatic arts provide effective techniques for second language instruction. Dvora Goodman describes the Learning Centre's pursuit of best practices as teachers revisit roads already travelled to shed light where routines are obscured and fresh focus is due.

Our paradigm of the hidden and the revealed applies to Jewish day school education. Religious tradition will alert some families to immediately press the “register now” button for Jewish day school enrollment, but if we turn our telescope to explore beyond the frontal elements of Jewish education, its more subtle advantages become clear with the magnification. Day schools have an overt Jewish purpose in developing childhood frameworks for ethical living and religious faith, but the less illuminated benefits include self-respect, self-discipline, care for the physical world, and skills for peaceful living. We reread years of THINK magazine, the *Awe and Wonder* columns especially, isolated which strengths are easily apparent and which are less so and came up with “The Why of Jewish Education.” In *Spotlight*, Bailey Daniels shares her own insight into families' efforts as they deliberate over Jewish or non-Jewish schooling for their children.

Our theme reminds us of the joke about the man who lost his keys but searched only within the circle of brightness cast by the streetlight. The moon with its changing shapes and shadows can help him too.

Pam

We send a mission to the moon to explore what is lit up and what is behind.

CONTRIBUTORS

Gail Baker is an educator, mother, and grandmother. She co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and retired in 2014 as Head of School.

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

Tziporah Cohen is a psychiatrist with an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults and a former Toronto Heschel parent. Her novel, *No Vacancy* (Groundwood Books, 2020), was a Sydney Taylor Book Award Honor Book and a National Jewish Book Award finalist in the middle-grade category.

Dvora Goodman is Coordinator of The Lola Stein Institute. She works as a Jewish education consultant in a variety of settings.

Jasmine Eliav is a registered child clinical psychologist. She has a private practice, is a staff psychologist at The Hospital for Sick Children, and co-chair of The Toronto Heschel School Board of Directors.

Ava Kwinter studies English Literature at McGill University, Queen's University, and the University of Ottawa. She's a parent at The Toronto Heschel School.

Michelle Shulman is Vice Chair of The Lola Stein Institute and a Director of the Canadian Friends of the Shalom Hartman Institute.

Pam Medjuck Stein is Chair of The Lola Stein Institute and a Director of the Canadian Friends of the Shalom Hartman Institute.

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

Orly Borovich and Nechama Drookman teach Hebrew and Jewish Studies at The Toronto Heschel School. They were accepted to the Teachers Institute for Innovation through Hebrew University's Legacy Heritage Fund Institute for Jewish Studies Teachers. They are mentoring colleagues to craft and use drama-based learning for Hebrew language curricula.

Yarden Bourlas teaches Grade 8 science and art and oversees The Toronto Heschel School environmental program. Her Master of Education specialization was student self-regulation.

Bailey Daniels has been Director of Admissions at The Toronto Heschel School since June 2020. She hails from the world of graduate business school recruitment and admissions and is enjoying being a part of Heschel's more intimate school community.

Judaism as a Religion of Time

BY DR. GREG BEILES

Living in Jewish time means sanctifying our experiences, of making time “special.”

Every year about the end of August, Jewish families open their calendars to check the dates of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Then comes a conversation about how the “*Chaggim* are so early this year,” or “the *Chaggim* are so late this year.” In truth, we know, of course, that they are at the same time every year—in Jewish time, that is.

One of the greatest, if less discussed, challenges for Jews living in the diaspora is to attend to Jewish time. Yet to do so is of the utmost importance for Jewish identity, Jewish learning, and Jewish consciousness. “Judaism,” writes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “is a religion of time, aimed at the sanctification of time.”

Israeli Jews describe how simply living in *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel) makes one Jewish. They refer to calendar events: When you live in Israel you always know when it is Shabbat, or Chanukkah, or Pesach, Purim, or Lag Ba’Omer—it’s all around you. Israeli society runs on Jewish time and with it Jewish identity comes naturally. For those of us in North America, to live in sync with Jewish time demands continuous conscious effort; we have to maintain a counterweight to the secular calendar with its holiday-based marketing campaigns and mall music playlists at Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day.

Jewish time is the oxygen that lets Jewish identity breathe, and immersing Jewish children in the Jewish calendar is one foundational step in this direction. They should know the Jewish time as naturally and intuitively as they know the so-called secular calendar. A time-immersed Jewish soul anticipates the approach of Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Chanukah, Purim, Pesach, and Shavuot.

Jewish time is not tuned to the hands of a clock but to the movements of celestial bodies: the sun, the moon, the stars. If you want to know the Hebrew date? Just look up. The moon plays a special role as each emergent crescent signals the beginning of a new month. A waning moon lets you know you are headed towards the end of the month, and its full face illuminates mid-month when important festivals take place: Sukkot, Pesach, or Tu B’svhat. Shabbat ends when three stars show in the heavens and the Jewish day begins at sunset. Jews were born as a nation into a new moon with the beginning of the month of Nisan marking a unique moment in the journey from slavery to freedom, and the first instruction the Israelites received as a people was to commemorate this (Shemot/Exodus 12:2). For Jews, the sun tracks the march of seasons but the moon signifies passages that are spiritual and ethical.

The concept of Jewish time differs from secular time. The sages refer to two kinds of hours: “clock hours” (*sha’ot*

sha’oniot) and “time hours” (*sha’ot zemaniot*). The former are designations on a clock. The latter are units that divide time into 12 daytime segments and 12 nighttime segments keeping to the paradigm set by the biblical verse “and there was evening and there was morning—one [complete] day” (Bereishit/Genesis 1:5). While every clock hour is 60 minutes long, the length of an “hour” in Jewish time varies depending on the season and latitude. Day units of time become longer in the summer and shorter in the winter affecting the times at which certain events are scheduled, such as the start of Shabbat or daily prayers. The seasonal elasticity of *sha’ot zemaniot* awakens an attunement to the changing cycles of nature and human experience.

In the Talmudic Clock project in Grade 8, Toronto Heschel students create two colourful circle diagrams to demonstrate how the *sha’ot zemaniot* of summer and those of winter adjust in specific locations around the globe. They track the shifts in prayer schedules on the two juxtaposed diagrams. The result is a beautiful and mathematically fascinating presentation of the experience of Jewish time year-long and around the world.

The students’ explorations with time awakens a sensibility to the profound learning that time is something outside ourselves, as well as—so significantly—an internal experience and what we make of it. In math class students chart the verifiable amounts of time that they specified tasks alongside a record of their personal sense of the time spent. How much “clock” time went into homework, texting, playing outside? How long did that feel? Did time pass quickly or slowly, mindfully or without notice? Do two minutes spent running on the spot and two minutes of meticulous drawing feel the same? Why are the experiences of time and its relentless ticking not the same?

Living in Jewish time is a matter of sanctifying our experiences, of making time “special.” It’s not about “using time well” as if it were a resource to extract and utilize. One of the most perplexing books in the Tanakh (Jewish Bible) is Kohelet (Ecclesiastes). Holding apparently contradictory ideas at once, it tenders insight into mysteries, including questions of time. Kohelet’s world-weary author, proverbially the aged and wise King Solomon, first describes time as relentless and unchanging, while a few verses later he cherishes each and every moment in time as different, purposeful, and full of meaning. He writes:

Futile, futile...all is futile...a generation goes and a generation comes... The sun sets and the sun rises... And there is nothing new under the sun. (Kohelet 1:1–9)



Later he adds,

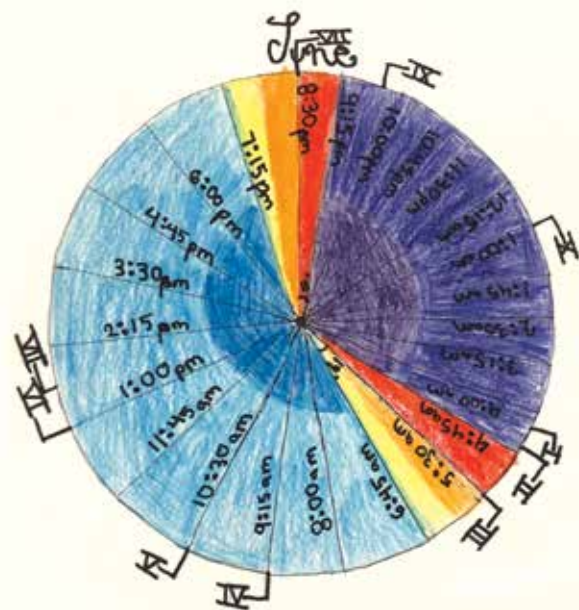
Everything has its time, and there is a time for everything under the sun...a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to weep and a time to laugh. (Kohelet 3:1–8)

How do we understand these different perspectives? What do they mean for educating Jewish children? Rabbi Heschel writes,

To Israel, the unique events of historic time were spiritually more significant than the repetitive processes in the cycle of nature even though physical sustenance depended on the latter... While the deities of other peoples were associated with places or things, the God of Israel was the God of the events: the Redeemer from slavery, the Revealer of Torah manifesting himself in events of history rather than in things or places.¹

Understanding Jewish time provides powerful training for the Jewish mindset; it orientates us to find meaning, joy, and purpose in the unfolding moments of our lives. When we immerse Jewish children in this attitude, we situate them at a vantage point to see who they want themselves to be and offer them that all-important skill set called cognitive flexibility. Living in Jewish time reminds our children to look up in awe at the moon, the stars, and the ever-changing colour of their own horizons.

¹ A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), p. 7.



NEW YORK



The school is an awesome combustion
of the human and the spiritual.

At 819 Sheppard Avenue West sits a school. From the outside, it could be mistaken for any old public school in town. Inside, its hallways of white-painted brick do not reveal the magic hidden within The Toronto Heschel School. Touring the school without students, teachers, or art on the walls, as I did with prospective families last summer, visitors are hard pressed to absorb its essence. Its many layers are hard to encapsulate in a few tidy sentences.

As Director of Admissions, it's my job to reveal the joyful spirit of this place to those lucky enough to investigate. The school is an awesome combustion of the human and the spiritual: it's a place to study Jewish texts, and to create art; a place to learn how to care for the environment, and for each other; a place to learn to stand up for the rights of all humanity; a place that sparks curiosity and awe in the world around us. And weaving these elements together in a cohesive, meaningful curriculum produces a sum that's even greater than its parts.

Prospective parents tell me that people they know with first-hand knowledge of the school love the place—and almost everyone who considers the school hears about it via word of mouth from a happy friend or relative. Occasionally, I hear that someone without intimate knowledge of the school has suggested avoiding it because it's "alternative" or different from the pack. While the school's teaching is progressive as it relates to egalitarianism, the environment, and respect for all people, I find it odd to call this "alternative" as these values are shared by many across the Jewish community. The school may be "different" in that it is successfully able to transmit the principles that make down-to-earth *mentsches* who care about others, are confident of their place in the world, and who succeed academically and professionally in many domains—but who wouldn't desire these outcomes?

Unfortunately, the truth is that Heschel's beautiful essence is hidden from many in Toronto's Jewish community. Celebrating our 25th anniversary, we are no longer the new kid on the block, yet we are not as entrenched in people's

minds as are other Jewish day schools which have been around much longer. Heschel has a more forward looking approach to teaching and learning than many of our fellow Jewish day schools and many parents would love what they see if they would only look. This is why I refer to those who have reached the point of researching Heschel as "lucky." Cutting through the clutter and reaching a target audience is always a challenge; my role is to help people look beyond the obvious and consider something new and remarkable.

Does The Toronto Heschel School sound like every Jewish day school you know? No, it doesn't. Yet many young parents think day schools are all one of a kind. They only see two options: public school or Jewish school, unaware of the diversity that exists across the realm of Toronto Jewish day schools. It's true that in COVID-19 times, most Jewish day schools offer what parents perceive as a safer option, with smaller classes and the ability to pivot on a dime to reliable online learning, if necessary. But what else differentiates public and Jewish schooling, and how do Jewish schools compare one to another? What do parents want to know but are maybe too shy to ask?

Choosing between public and Jewish school, one concern is financial. Although schools and the UJA Federation foster affordability, an unspoken question of value seems to remain: is it worth it to pay for something that they can get for free? Parents must consider if that "something" is equivalent in both places, or if a Jewish education, with its transmission of Jewish values and culture, might be "worth" more. Another concern is diversity within the classroom: parents worry about their children learning in a Jewish bubble and whether there is socio-economic diversity. These days, a Jewish student body is no longer a homogeneous cluster, especially in a pluralistic school such as ours with students from different backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles. In the spirit of our namesake, Rabbi A.J. Heschel, we understand that a good Jew is, first, a good citizen of the world.

Parents who overcome these threshold hurdles have additional questions that sometimes come encrypted. Maybe

A Hidden Gem

THE TORONTO HESCHEL SCHOOL

BY BAILEY DANIELS

some queries are just too uncomfortable to ask. For example, from less observant families: *Question:* How much prayer is there? *Meaning:* Will my child become more religious than our family is now? *Answer:* A.J. Heschel understood religion as the expression of awe and amazement and that is the spiritual focus of our school. *Question:* Is there a uniform? *Meaning:* What are those caps the kids wear? *Answer:* Embracing the widest community, we unite the rule for boys to cover their heads with egalitarian preference for all to wear a cap.

From families more engaged in Jewish observance: *Question:* How does the school practise *tefillah* (prayer)? *Meaning:* Am I risking my family's way of life by exposing my child to a variety of Jewish expressions? *Answer:* Our pluralism activates full respect for differences in family practice; our commitment to individuality encourages each child to feel good about their own expressions. *Question:* Do you really keep kosher at Heschel? *Meaning:* Will my child somehow eat *treif*? *Answer:* The school carefully observes the laws of *kashrut*.

From all: *Question:* What does it mean that you do math differently at Heschel? *Meaning:* Can my child be successful if she doesn't learn in the traditional way? *Answer:* Teaching math for understanding has seen multiple Heschel graduates win STEM-focused awards. *Real question:* If Heschel teaches in ways that are unfamiliar to me, will my child succeed in life? *Meaning:* Is it okay to veer away from the tried and true? *Answer:* If you're looking for achievement, invest in a forward-looking education that teaches your child how to think for himself. *Final question:* Do you have busing? *Answer:* Yes!

Deciding where to send your kids to school can be agonizing. Parents will only feel satisfied that they have made a sound choice when they have taken the time to understand the various options and see how they personally align with each school's different values. Just as our school's soul becomes visible only when we see a child's curiosity sparked by awe and wonder, its treasures are discoverable only by those who seek out hidden gems.



There is always purposeful “Heschelian” intentionality in how we gather.

Invisible Thread

DID YOU KNOW THAT CHEVRA MEANS A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS?

BY AVA KWINTER

Usually we look at schools to see what’s happening with the children. But what do we learn if we look at what is going on among the adults?

We are aware that things happen that aren’t visible to the children. They’re rarely aware of the planning and coordination that support a household or the late-night and early-morning conversations between adults. They don’t see their teachers’ preparations or collaborations or the running dialogue among parents and caregivers about schedules, drop-offs, pick-ups, meals, and supervision. Children are usually oblivious to the myriad of forces that go on behind the scenes.

Meanwhile there are also things about our school that are invisible to parents. Once the kids go through the front doors of the school they are, often for the first time in their lives, navigating life without us. They bring home finished artwork that we haven’t seen them create. They bring home tests for us to sign and poems for us to read that we didn’t watch them write. Suddenly we realize that our children *know* things, they know a lot of new things, but we don’t know

when or how they learned them. But we’re good with that. We’re at this school because we want them learning through the arts in an interdisciplinary, high-achievement curriculum. So whatever is going on in there, we’re glad.

But there’s more. There’s a lot going on at our school that is outside the academics, invisible to most parents, but part and parcel of our children’s experiences. When Toronto Heschel opened 25 years ago, it was imagined as a holistic fusion of high-level learning and a deep acculturation for living Judaism; it was mind and body and soul. It entailed a multidimensional outlook that blurred traditional boundaries between in school and out of school, and the founding educators and parents imagined forging a new kind of dynamic between all the people involved in this new kind of school.

Echoing the interdisciplinary structure of the curriculum, the extracurricular realm would also be intensely integrated. The Heschel parents strove to live their beliefs, or to quote Rabbi Heschel, the school’s namesake and inspiration, “pray with [their] feet.” Rabbi Heschel’s famous description of his

participation with Martin Luther King Jr. in the Civil Rights march from Selma in 1965 as praying with his feet reflected his deep religious conviction in the search for justice; he had to live by his beliefs. The Toronto Heschel School’s founding intention was not just to educate the minds of children but to show them how to walk the walk. This brought in Rabbi Heschel’s preference for “text people” over textbooks. Role models are the best educators, whether faculty or family.

To this end, the Heschel School requires an activated culture and, for this, it relies significantly on the volunteer energy of its families. Enter the Chevra Committee of the Toronto Heschel Board of Directors. It’s important here to note that *chevra* is the Hebrew word for friendship; the word for community is *kehillah*. The school and its Board understand that a community grows where friendships are real. Maybe the envisioned *chevra*—circle of friends—is the school’s feet and maybe it’s the heart; whichever metaphor works, the aspiration is the whole child, the whole school, the whole family.

The Chevra Committee—variously called the “*chevra* elves,” “the lifeblood of Heschel”—is one of the most essential components of the invisible infrastructure that makes Heschel what it is. The direction that the Committee took over the years wasn’t to ramp up the usual home-school dyad but rather to create a sense of home at school. The Committee’s investment in the school’s philosophies and the way it bridges curriculum and extracurricular go far beyond the usual PTA bake sales and carnivals.

As the school got bigger—43 students in 1996 and over 300 today—the Committee’s agenda, of course, became complex. Yet the Committee has not lost its sense of purpose. In fact, with a larger and more diverse community, its mission is even more crucial. It is not a fundraising organ of the school; its eyes are on social currents, Jewish manifestations, and attitudes; it keeps the home fires burning. Just as the values lived at home inform who a child becomes, the way a school departs itself has an impact on how each student develops.

Simply put, the goal of the Committee is to celebrate, activate, and reaffirm outside the classroom the values that animate what’s going on inside the classroom. The cornerstone cultural values of the Heschel School are Jewish inclusivity and pluralism, ethical living, environmental stewardship, and social justice. They are embedded in integrative thinking—call it multitasking—and they are guided by the inspirational compass that is living with awe and a sense of wonder, again inspired by Rabbi Heschel’s philosophies. Practically speaking, it means that whenever the Committee organizes an initiative, the school’s ethics and values shape the event.

This is not to say that families and teachers don’t gather just for fun, the point is there is always a purposeful “Heschelian” intentionality in how we gather. A good example is the waffle breakfast in the school’s Sukka that welcomes newcomers and returning families alike after the summer break in the spirit of hospitality, which is central to the holiday of Sukkot. For years we’ve taken advantage of three stars showing early in the winter sky to celebrate the end of Shabbat together at a skating party called Havdalah on Ice. Because Heschel families practice religious observance differently at home, we ensure everyone feels comfortable when we’re together and maintain the *halakhic* threshold especially for *kashrut*, Shabbat, and holidays. We also flatten financial barriers so all school families can participate fully.

Perhaps the school value that gives Heschel events their most characteristic shape is our steady respect of “awe and wonder.” It is because the Toronto Heschel School believes that each child should authentically experience their surroundings that our events eschew technologies and equipment that tend to obstruct the immediacy of experience. No bouncy castles, for example, or laser-light shows or virtual reality.

Until I began to explore the whys and wherefores of the Chevra Committee, I couldn’t see this thread that weaves through my children’s school experience. I didn’t put it all together. Now I do, and now I see it wherever I look.

THE HIDDEN & THE REVEALED

“I was trained as a child to live a life, or strive to live a life which is compatible with the mystery and marvel of human existence.”
—Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



The Why of Jewish Education

THE OBVIOUS AND THE NOT-SO-OBVIOUS REASONS FOR JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

BY GREG BEILES, DVORA GOODMAN, AVA KWINTER & PAM MEDJUCK STEIN



Introduction

This winter has instigated a lot of self-reflection. We have learned not to take our children's schooling for granted and see that the educational decisions we make for our children matter. It's a good time to rearticulate what Jewish day schools have to offer that can't be found anywhere else. A lot about choosing a school feels self-evident but a lot is also hard to see. This issue of THINK looks at the importance of what's seen and what's hidden. On these few pages we try to uncover what might be obscured by other considerations when decisions about education are being made and add the Jewish day school conversation to support choices that are intentional and informed.

Ethics in Modern Life: Learning Good Values

Daily life is a combination experience of body and mind, and routine seems to run it all. Underlying what we do and what we see are the ethics that factor into our personal decisions. Children who are raised to view real-life situations through an ethical lens learn to make their way in the world with an ingrained moral compass. Judaism provides this moral compass, time tested and enduring.

The Toronto Heschel School teaches its students to be conscious of this ethical lens through a program of mindful thinking about Jewish values. The school's weekly focus on specific universal virtues found in Jewish learning helps students see the ethical relevance of the decisions we make each day.

Jews and Israel: Acknowledging Affinity

Judaism today is of course evolving from Judaism of yesterday. Fostering this creative flow factors in the symbiosis between Israel and Jews living around the world. Jewish day schools offer Jewish children the experience of living fully as modern cosmopolitan Jews. Students connect to ancient sources and traditions as well as to the dynamic energy of modern Zionists and the State of Israel, the political expression of Jews today. Israel bespeaks the wonders of effort and courage, and Jewish children the world over love this special connection. This affinity transcends Yom Ha'atzmaut and falafel to include modern Jewish and Israeli history, post-Holocaust Jewish life, and the full expansion of Jewish experience today. Jewish day schools encourage and strengthen a bond between Canadian Jewish children and Israeli children.

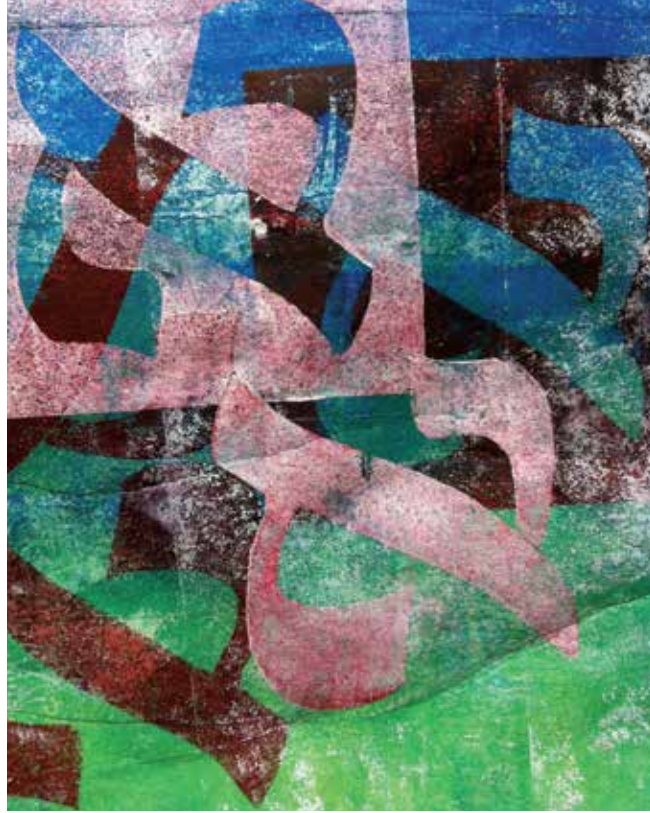
Cultural Literacy: Feeling at Home

Jewish day schools aim to develop what is sometimes called Jewish cultural literacy. We think of being literate as the capacity to read and write. Jewish cultural literacy sometimes show up as the capacity to speak a little Hebrew and feel the rhythm of the Jewish holiday year. Yet beyond that there are many abiding lessons that source their wisdom in Jewish texts and traditions and offer valuable skills that help children to navigate their lives.

It's often hard to see that living Jewishly can provide the solid social and emotional foundation that children need, but it can. The strategy is to forge their sense of personal connection to all that the Jewish experience has to offer and to own it. Jewish day school provides children with a point of view that offers context and orientation to scaffold their development. They take the Ontario Ministry of Education syllabus and fill in the blanks with meaning and personal relevance.

The Toronto Heschel School, in addition to the above, integrates Jewish thinking and learning with what are called general studies. Its students acclimate to being fully Jewish and fully Canadian all day long. The school environment immerses students in deep Jewish thinking and purposefully presents the ethical, historical, and traditional linkages between modern notions and Jewish ideas, such as connecting the school's waste audit to the protection of creation or tracing the ancient roots of civic behaviour all the way from the days of Torah to the modern day.





Hebrew: Our Voice

Second language learning is accepted as being good for the brain. Hebrew has the added benefit in that it is not an arbitrary language but holds intrinsic value as part of our Jewish identity. As a language, culture, and presence, it flows from the text we study, the prayers we sing, the history we remember, and the ritual we practise. It is the rhythm of Judaism and a bridge that connects Jews worldwide. Jewish kids who speak Hebrew value it forever.

Yes, knowing Hebrew lets kids order pizza in Tel Aviv but also, metaphorically speaking, it lets them “stand in a text.” Being able to read, understand, and appreciate Jewish text for themselves, they can take their place and add their voice to the choir of Jewish thinkers into which they’ve been born.



A Place to Belong: Freedom to Explore

Jewish day schools welcome children to feel a part of the ongoing story of the Jewish people and to feel that their voices matter as Jewish tradition goes forward. A stable community of belonging nourishes the development of a child’s individuality and teaches the value of the collective; children thrive when the two mature in tandem. A sense of belonging means a child is secure in their individual differences. Feeling comfortable can foster exploration even as deep connection to heritage can deflect unmoored searches for meaning and the allure of other cultures. Going to school as the member of a minority group may be an education in multicultural living, but experiencing the joy of no barriers, no differentiations, no stress in personal identity at school is another valuable way to grow up. A sense of solidarity at school breeds an appreciation for freedom, which fosters an understanding that all deserve it. At Toronto Heschel, we ensure universal participation through egalitarian religious pluralism and respect for individual family practice.

Jewish Thinking: Argument that Preserves Relationships

Rabbi A.J. Heschel says, “Judaism is a way of thinking, not just a way of living.” We underscore that this means more than thinking about Jewish stuff. Rabbi Heschel emphasizes two key features of Jewish thinking: the capacity for awe, wonder, and radical amazement and the notion that this capacity is something learned and developed through hard work and self-discipline.

Judaism seeks metacognitive thinking: children learn to think flexibly, analytically, critically, complexly, creatively, independently, and contextually. One goal is to develop the ability to make personal connections and find relevance in what they learn. Another is the art and craft of interpretation and debate, which are excellent resources across all life’s challenges. The children learn to search for meaning by examining the different perspectives of ancient and modern commentators. They learn how to seek clues: in the narratives; the root or etymology of words; and through study of historical context. They learn about rules and permissions. All of these offer experience in finding deeper meaning and in how to use their voice in their community.

At Toronto Heschel, we teach how to talk with one another about ideas and interpretations always in the context of *Machloket l’shem shamayim*—argument for the sake of the heavens. It means we engage in debate in a constructive way that preserves our relationships. Learning happens as old texts find new spirit in the heart of each child.



Civic Responsibility: The Onus to Search for Justice

Jewish education is an education in good citizenship. There are three parts to the age-old golden rule taught by our sage, Hillel, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me; if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” (Pirkei Avot). The first reminds us to be resourceful and take responsibility for our own achievements. The second teaches that our identity is bound up with how we think about and respond to others. The third tells us to be proactive. Taken together, these habits of mind and action form core Jewish identity: resourcefulness and responsibility, compassion, and initiative. Meaningful Jewish education develops all three.

The Ten Commandments is first and foremost a “Bill of Responsibilities.” Learning civic responsibility within the context of Judaism prepares students to be active, accountable, and engaged citizens of Canada. Students attending progressive Jewish day schools feel the true advantage of biculturalism: they become Jewish Canadians whose Jewish knowledge broadens their perspectives and enhances their contribution to Canadian society and world culture.

At The Toronto Heschel School students discover sources of universally shared values in Jewish ethics and texts. We take this outside the classroom to child-appropriate social action such as cleaning the ravines and fields, helping the hungry, and practising democratic protocols through student government and community projects.

Conclusion

Some of the advantages of Jewish education may be partially garnered through other means: camp may encourage identity; good secular schools may teach critical thinking; families can role model civic responsibility. But Jewish day school education integrates all of these elements, every day, all day long. Torah means “teaching,” and Judaism is “teaching” par excellence. Jewish education integrates intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social learning to enhance children’s growth and development in beautiful and profound ways.



I Am Like the Moon

LOOKING AT THE UNSEEN IN GRADE 1

BY AVA KWINTER

I don't think I have thought about the difference between hidden and gone since I was two years old. Maybe I should. My kids are doing it now. Sometimes there are things we can't see, but they're there.

One of the most dazzling highlights of the Early Years' program at Toronto Heschel is the Grade 1 study of the hidden and revealed. For several months, nearly everything the children learn is looked at through a paradigm of "there is as much in the hidden as there is in the revealed."

The idea of exploring the hidden and revealed follows from the game of peek-a-boo, in which babies learn the principle of object permanence: "Something is still there even if I can't always see it." Children love hiding and are delighted when they think they can't be seen; they also love searching, finding, and uncovering another person. Beyond peek-a-boo and hide-and-seek, so many children's games and activities are based on the concept of hidden and revealed: jigsaw puzzles, word searches, hangman, scavenger hunts, treasure maps, I Spy, paint-by-number. Popular brands like Where's Waldo and Pokémon are also, at their essence, about discovering something hidden.

The Grade 1 curriculum builds on kids' basic knowledge of hide-and-seek and deepens their understanding that visibility is not the defining aspect of existence; they are learning that just because something is not seen, doesn't mean

The children are learning that just because something can't be seen doesn't mean it's not there.

that it is not there. Heidi Friedman, Director of Early Years, explains that her students think about the meaning and importance of things that we don't see: the dark side of the moon, oxygen, our feelings, our *neshama* (spirit/soul), and even God.

I spoke with Friedman about how the Grade 1 learning unfolds. She told me that the narrative arc of the curriculum is the story of the hidden and revealed. The theme is purposefully elastic in order to encompass all Grade 1 subjects: math, science, social studies, language arts, social-emotional learning, and the Jewish holidays. Friedman explained that the concept also works to help the children visualize new skills that will gradually appear through practise, such as to catch a ball, sit still on the carpet, tie their shoes, or improve their letters.

The existence and significance of something that we can't see might seem like a complicated notion, too theoretical for the first grade. But by anchoring the conversation to the moon, a sight that is familiar and accessible to six year-olds, the concept of the hidden and revealed becomes quite knowable. Even when only a slice of the moon is visible at night, the whole moon is still there, it is just hiding in the shadow; kids get this right away.

The Hidden and Revealed unit begins on Rosh Chodesh, the first of the Hebrew month, the day of a new moon. The

children are given a homework assignment to go outside or look outside every evening before bed and draw the moon. Over the course of the month they discover the moon's cycle and learn the scientific vocabulary for the various shapes and patterns they see: waxing crescent, first quarter, waxing gibbous, full moon, and so on. The children come to understand that the contour of the moon is not arbitrary; rather, it is predictable and scientific and the reasons behind its changing patterns of shadows and light are knowable. The first graders process the idea that there is more to the universe than appears to the naked eye: just because we cannot see something doesn't mean that it isn't there and sometimes what is hidden is truer and more significant than what is revealed.

For example, since their exuberant examinations of seeds, sprouts, and seedlings in Junior Kindergarten, the children have discussed "potential." They learned that potential is something that is currently invisible but will in time become manifest: A seed contains genetic material and with care will become a plant; they are small but will also, in time, grow big. Two years later, in Grade 1, the students refocus on the truth that some things as part of their nature will always remain hidden. This is an important shift towards understanding that seeing is not always key to believing.

Feelings are hidden inside, and even if you can't see them, they are very real. The children appreciate how they may infer someone's feelings from visible clues: slouched posture might indicate sadness, biting nails or twirling hair could hint at nervousness, head down may mean a friend feels shy. Next, the children examine cards illustrated with images of the phases of the moon, and query what feelings the moon's shape may be communicating. They are practising how to search for indications and learning that sometimes external clues help and sometimes they don't. It's a kind of sensory literacy. Contemplating what an emotion might look like on the face of the moon, the children engage with their emotional intelligence through exercises that are like drills

in the evaluation of clues: "Sometimes I feel like a crescent moon because sometimes I am shy." "I am like a full moon because I have a loud voice." "The full moon looks surprised to me because it has an O mouth."

The hidden and revealed integrates beautifully into the Grade 1 study of the holidays of Purim and Pesach. Megillat Esther is a cryptic text even for adults. In class the children talk about the secret plots and hidden identities in the story and they observe the value of the hidden. Sometimes it's not smart to yank the sheet off and bring everything into view; it seems to have worked well that Haman didn't know Esther was Jewish. Sometimes being hidden is crucial and what is unsaid is very important. The first graders learn that while the Megillah is a document about Jewish faith and identity, God is not mentioned by name.

In contrast to Purim's hiddenness, Pesach (Passover) makes explicit what was veiled and only hinted at in the Megillah. The Haggadah is all about revelation. At Pesach, God is performative and clearly visible through miracles and wonder. If readers of the Haggadah crave proof not only of God's existence but also of God's power and investment on the side of the Jews, they have it through the 10 plagues and the parting of the sea. These units on Purim and Pesach are ideal counterpoints to illustrate the concepts of hidden and revealed and the power that comes through each. The children see that both have their place.

By the end of the school year, Grade 1 students have acquired an understanding of the concepts of the hidden and revealed that is impressively nuanced and profound, especially for children their age. The depth of thinking and the habits of mind that they developed during this curriculum provide a solid foundation for the units they will study in subsequent years at the Heschel School but also for their reflections well beyond their school years. The sight of the moon in the night sky, eternal but always changing, will remind them always of the questions they began to explore when they were in Grade 1.





Lunar Awe

THE CASE FOR NAKED-EYE ASTRONOMY
IN A GOOGLE EARTH WORLD

BY YARDEN BOURLAS

Every September, when the air outside becomes crisp and the days shorten, when darkness begins to reclaim its fair share of the diurnal cycle, the Grade 8 class at our school launches into Space and Time, our astronomy unit. I ask students to turn their attention towards that very moon that has been with them each night since the day they were born. They know that at the beginning of the Jewish month, Rosh Chodesh, the moon is obscured completely by shadow, and in the middle of the month, it is a bright glowing orb.

After collecting measurements and making sketches, or writing bits of poetry in their observation journals, students inevitably ask the astronomical question: Why does the moon wax and wane throughout the month? Here is where the difficulty begins because I don't tell them the answer. I encourage them to use the scientific method just as scientists have done since the Enlightenment. Students observe the phenomenon in the sky, quantify their observations in numbers, and create hypotheses and models in order to answer their own questions about what causes their experience of day and night, summer and winter, and the many changing phases of the moon.

In his book *Prelude to Mathematics*, mathematician and educator W.W. Sawyer writes, "To see the clear, logical ideas gradually being disentangled from vagueness and confusion is vastly more instructive than simply starting with the logical ideas."¹ Students sometimes become distressed that I don't simply tell them that the moon revolves around the earth approximately every 28 days which causes the various moon phases. Why don't I save them the confusion and frustration that accompanies solving such complex problems? I don't because I don't want to rob them of the growth that comes from collecting evidence, testing and falsifying hypotheses, and slowly but surely clarifying the understanding on their own. I want them to grapple with questions like: What causes day and night? Why does the sun seem to rise in the east and travel westward across the sky?

You might wonder how such apparently sophisticated answers can be reached by students who have neither been to outer space nor had access to satellite imagery that captures these magnificent spheres in action. In truth, the information is a mere Google search away, but our students know that by our school's standards looking something up does not constitute the practice of science. Instead, the grade

eights participate in naked-eye astronomy. They follow in the tradition of ancient Greek astronomers like Eratosthenes who could confirm that the earth is round and even measure its circumference with remarkable accuracy using only sticks and shadows. My students design experiments and record their observations watching shadows move across their sundial, one they made simply with a pen cap that casts a shadow and a circle marked in 360 degrees and printed on cardstock. This basic tool lets them track the rate at which the shadows move throughout the day, which, in turn, illuminates that what causes the shadows to move is the earth's rotation on its axis and not the sun moving across the sky.

At our annual Grade 8 moon observation party on a clear night in October, we kick off an experiment that reveals the moon's apparent westward journey across the sky. After three nights of collecting observations and data, there is usually quite an uproar when, on examining their data, students discover that each evening the moon begins its journey 12 degrees further to the east. How had they never noticed this before? How can the moon be moving in two directions at once?

If your brow is currently furrowed in an attempt to picture this you might understand how the grade eights feel. Most students find the process more than a little unnerving. Broadly speaking, people don't enjoy the feeling of not understanding, and the Space and Time unit provokes that uneasiness in a powerful way. By doing so, it encourages students to discover and hone skills that they possess inherently for survival in the wilderness of the unknown: What does one do when answers are not immediately available? Again, we can learn from the ancients and look to Abraham who also puzzles over the movement of the heavenly spheres. There is a Midrash, an interpretative tale, that tells the story:

When Abraham was three years old he went out from the cave, and thought to himself: "Who created the heavens and the earth and me?" He prayed the whole day to the sun [because he thought it was the creator]. In the evening, the sun sank in the west and the moon shone in the east. When he saw the moon and the stars all around he said, "This is the creator of the heavens and the earth and me, and the stars are the creators' ministers and servants." In the morning, the moon sank in the west and the sun rose in the east. He said, "These have no

By our school's standards, looking up an answer
does not constitute the practice of science.

power of their own; there is some power over them. To this I will pray and show respect."

Abraham arrives, by trial and error, at his conviction that there is a power beyond the celestial bodies. Through inquiry and observation he realizes the sun and moon are transitory and he develops assurance in his own judgment, which serves him well later when he becomes the first exponent of monotheism in a pagan world.

Similarly, the Space and Time unit encourages students to develop confidence and to trust their own judgment. As they learn the nature of evidence and subject their ideas to scrutiny, they develop their capacity to reason. The practice of developing and revising their ideas and arguments gradually turns confusion into clarity as they muster the courage, discipline, and, yes, faith required to traverse the chasm between confusion and understanding. Like Abraham, they use their wits to reach for understanding rather than passively await divine revelation to unveil what has been obscure. Nor do they wait for a teacher to tell them the answer. The scientific method is the map that charts their path through the murky landscape of complex problems. The furrowed brows of my students—when I ask whether it's the sun or Earth that's moving—tells me that they have embarked on the uphill path towards figuring it out.

In her article "The Necessity of Awe," philosopher Helen De Cruz examines the previously underestimated role that feelings of awe have to play for scientists. She writes, "Awe increases our tolerance for uncertainty and opens our receptivity to new and unusual ideas."² In an age where information is abundant but attention is scarce, practising naked-eye astronomy encourages students to open up their senses, they find within themselves the patience, rigour, and grit required to develop and argue for their ideas. The temptation to give up is strong. But students don't tend to give up. Perhaps they realize that when we do science, it's not merely answers that we seek but rather, like Abraham, we are motivated by awe and wonder to continue contemplating that which is just beyond what we understand.

¹ W.W. Sawyer, *Prelude to Mathematics*, rev. ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 2011), p. 145.

² Helen De Cruz, "The Necessity of Awe," *Aeon*, July 10, 2020, para. 22, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-awe-drives-scientists-to-make-a-leap-into-the-unknown>

Behind the Scenes

DRAMA TECHNIQUES FOR
SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

BY ORLY BOROVICH &
NECHAMA DROOKMAN

Dramatic arts incorporates and emphasizes the very techniques that children use naturally to learn languages: gesture, improvisation, experimentation with voice and sound, repetition, iterative modification, and, of course, dialogue and conversation. Early childhood language development typically requires around five years, during which time children absorb and mirror their caregivers' communication skills to get their basic needs met. They communicate pain, hunger, or discomfort by crying or writhing their bodies; they express pleasure by giggling, smiling, and laughing. Later on, children experiment with newfound vocal chords to create combinations of real and nonsense words. Gradually, they begin producing coherent words and phrases, and eventually full sentences.

In second language learning, it is impossible to relive those original language development stages. Second language acquisition requires an accelerated process, not unlike a theatrical production. At the theatre, intentionally devised scripts, blocking, and acting techniques are employed to engage the audience in a range of human experiences in a concentrated amount of time. Theatre and drama mimic and intensify normal human speech and action. Similarly, effective second language instruction and learning mimics natural language processing in an intensified, intentional way.

Traditionally, second language teaching overly relies on reading, writing, and rote memorization. In fact, language learning is a full-body experience. Professors Giovanni Buccino and Marco Mezzadri, in their work on *embodied language processing*, posit that language acquisition is more effective when both cognitive and sensori-motor brain functions are at play.¹ In our Hebrew language lessons, students combine drama techniques for movement with vocalization in order to internalize new vocabulary and sentence structures. Rather than memorizing lists of vocabulary, students link words and phrases to meaning by reciting and enacting carefully scripted movement sequences called *sidrat tenuot*. The practice preserves vocabulary and its meaning in the muscle memory of the body.

Like theatre, language learning is part of a broader cultural context. Jewish culture, tradition, and pedagogy privileges voice and speech. According to biblical tradition, the world is spoken into existence ("And God said..."). Victoria Hannah, Israeli singer and language researcher, describes how Hebrew letters and vowels hold inherent meaning within their very shapes and sounds. In her talk "Music and Brains: The Surprising Link,"² Hannah states that "in the Jewish tradition, the letters are not divided and are not

separated from the meaning, and the meaning is not separated from the physical existence and from the sound." Inspired by Hannah's work on articulation and meaning, we employ a drama voice warm-up activity that teaches the final sound of Hebrew verbs. This final sound conveys the pronoun declension associated with each verb. Students chant:

Ani ni ni ni ni ni...amarti ti ti ti ti...
Ata ta ta ta ta ta...amarta ta ta ta ta...
Anachnu nu nu nu nu nu...amarnu nu nu nu nu...
Atem em em em em em...artem em em em em...

Which translates as:

I, I, I, I said said said said
You, oo, oo, oo, oo said, said, said, said
We, ee, ee, ee, ee said, said, said, said

Through this exercise sound and meaning converge in an activity that also trains students' articulation and enunciation skills. Rote memorization is replaced with action and satisfying sound play.

The Passover Haggadah teaches that if a child does not know how to ask a question, a parent should "open the mouth for him," implying that we must prompt our children to speak regardless of their abilities. Counter to the notion that speech is just thought put into words, Jewish tradition suggests that often words precede, or at least, help to initiate thought. The psychologist Lev Vygotsky explains how thought and speech interact in complex ways to form meaning. Oftentimes, young children experiment with words and sounds prior to knowing their meaning. Meaning, then, is formed in the response of the caregiver or other contextual feedback to the child's utterance.³

Theatre and drama equip teachers with techniques to construct the meaningful contexts and feedback mechanisms that language learning requires. We have begun to incorporate one such technique called "choral call and response" into our Hebrew classes. In this carefully staged exercise, we prompt students to *act* as if they cannot hear one another, while they converse. One student makes declarative statements, while a second replies with a question, prompting the first student to respond again emphatically.

Student Alef: "I ate an apple yesterday."

Student Bet: "What?"

Student Alef: (somewhat louder) "I ate an apple yesterday."

Student Bet: "What?"

Student Alef: (shouting) "I ate an apple yesterday!"

Student Bet: "Oh! *You* ate an apple yesterday!"

Entire class: (proclaim) "*She/he* ate an apple yesterday!"

The dramatization enables students to practise transitioning between first, second, and third person pronouns and verb declensions as they ask and respond to questions. They learn to shift between pronouns and declensions not by reciting them from a chart but by responding to each other in conversation where the shifts make sense.

The choral call and response exercise is based on the concept of situational language teaching (SLT). SLT was developed by British linguists Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby in order to mitigate the instinct of learners to translate grammar and vocabulary from their language of origin to their second language of study.⁴ The tactic immerses students in an authentic conversation that draws out the grammatical structures under instruction.

As techniques for language learning, theatre and drama are never just about "putting on plays." Nevertheless, staging a performance in a second language is another powerful mechanism to consolidate language learning. As students commit second language scripts to memory and rehearse enthusiastically with others, language becomes deeply ingrained in the body and mind. Practising the mindfulness, relaxation, and breathing techniques used by performers empowers students with techniques to reduce performance anxiety and gain confidence—all in another language! Finally, when the curtain rises and the lights come on and students perform for peers and parents in their second language, the learning receives its ultimate reward: social meaning and relevance.

We don't just learn another language for a test. We learn language to communicate thoughts and emotions, and to receive in return a response—laughter, tears, and appreciative applause. In Hebrew it's called *nachas*.

1 Giovanni Buccino and Marco Mezzadri, "Embodied Language and the Process of Language Learning and Teaching," in *Emotion in Language*, ed. Ulrike Luedtke (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2015), pp. 191–207. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286441243_Embodied_language_and_the_process_of_language_learning_and_teaching

2 Victoria Hanna, "Music and Brains: The Surprising Link: An Interface Between Music, Cognition and Neuroscience," presentation at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, February 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGhOFFUkoQ>

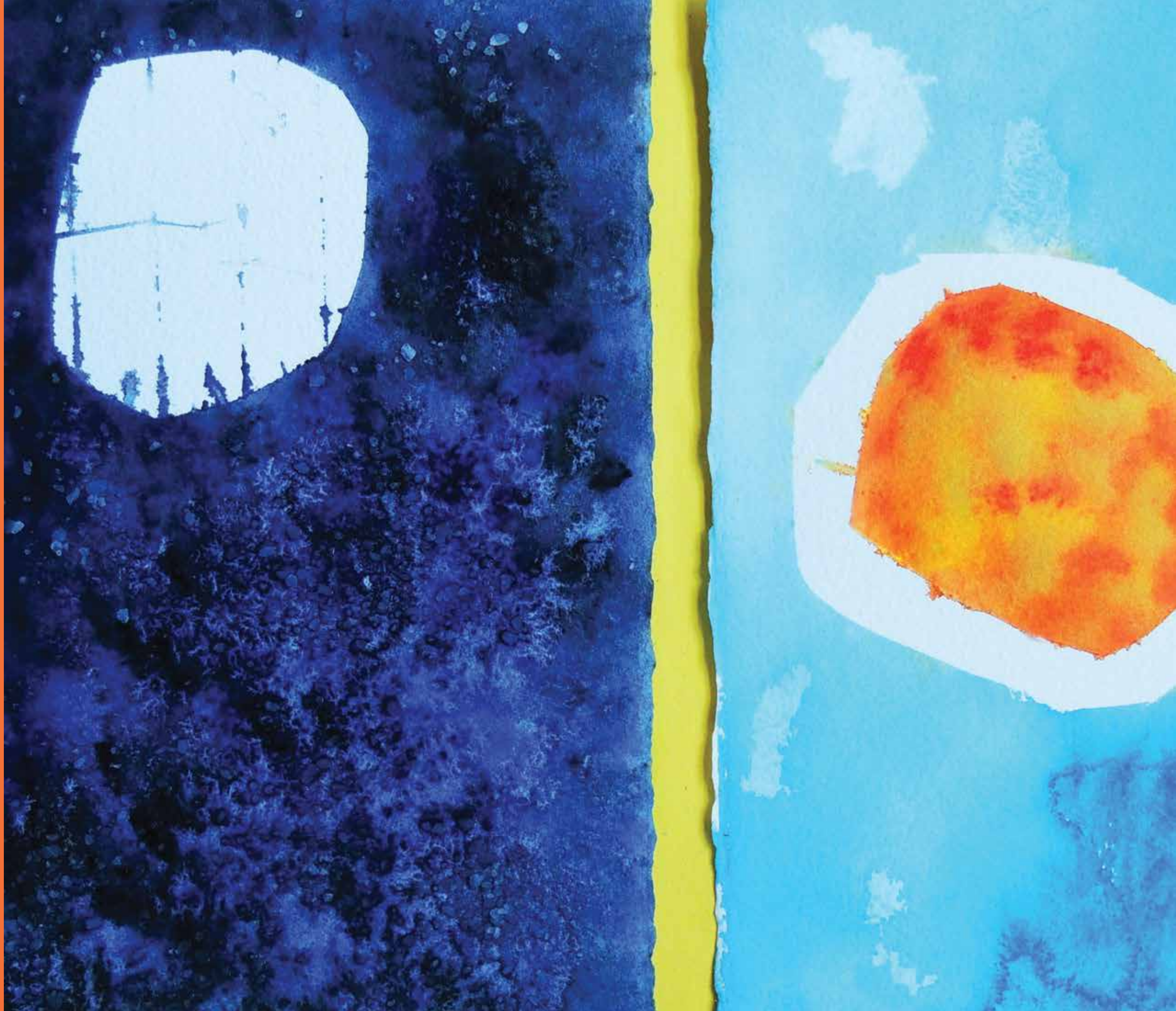
3 Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. Alex Kozulin (Boston: MIT Press, 1986).

4 Shafaat Hussain, "Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching: A Short Review," *PARIPEX: Indian Journal of Research*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (June 2015), pp. 197–199. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314895766_Oral_Approach_and_Situational_Language_Teaching_A_Short_Review

Staging a performance in a second language is a powerful mechanism to consolidate language learning.

LOOK UP!

“Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”
—Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



Headlights On

PROBING THE FAMILIAR FOR EXCELLENCE

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Teachers study which technique is best for each academic discipline.

When schools closed last spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents began to worry that their children might miss out on some important academic skills during months of unproven virtual learning. Questions arose like, “How will my son ever handle more complicated math next year?” and “What will happen if my daughter isn’t reading or writing enough?”

As ever, the Learning Centre lit up like a set of headlights on a car heading down a new highway. To cut through the fog blanketing the pandemic year, Head of School Greg Beiles set the Learning Centre’s 2020-2021 agenda to high-beam mode with the aim of illuminating exactly what the school’s teaching approach in each academic discipline should be, be it mathematics, science, language arts, history, second language learning (Hebrew and French), Chumash, drama, dance, musical and visual arts, or physical education. Instead of its usual holistic approach to the school’s hallmark integrated curriculum, the year was fixed on “thinking in the disciplines,” and a focus on specific techniques to train students on how best to achieve academic proficiency on a subject-by-subject and grade-by-grade basis. The value in this is that when a teacher is fully aware of which skill should be trained for in which subject, the planned activities and assignments can be sharpened and differentiated, and resources needed for the lessons can be assured. This flexibility may sound like second nature but it is not. Year by year, the circumstances change. Children change. Creating meaningful hours requires fresh ideas and attention. Beiles assessed that a probe into the familiar would guide Learning Centre mentors in helping the school’s teaching corps with the reframing work now at hand and empower them to

articulate this year’s road conditions in ways that would alleviate parents’ concerns.

A prevailing principle came first into view: while subject matter may differ, the art of learning remains constant. Toronto Heschel’s coursework for students is structured to engender the ways of thinking that are particular to each field of study. For instance, students learn to think like mathematicians who consider numbers differently than geographers who contemplate topographic details and like historians who do not assess a text as would literary specialists in language arts. Children become aware that each “subject” has its own particular step-by-step method. In much the same way that there is a “scientific method,” there is also “a mathematical method,” “a writing process,” “a Talmudic process,” and so on. Each requires a step-by-step thought process and practice of its very own. Familiarity with perfecting different practices in different subjects trains students to appreciate how procedure and strategy serve increasingly complicated challenges. With method in mind, the Learning Centre set about articulating the “thinking” involved in each subject.

The analysis brought them to a second overarching principle at play: to stay tuned in to exactly what academic skill is being taught and not get lost along the way. For example, the study of science centres on curiosity about the physical world and necessitates skills for inquiry and observation. Reading and transcribing someone else’s research (often referred to as googling) may provide practice in reading comprehension and composition, but the study of science requires investigation and discovery. Science students must examine and test hypotheses, not read and report information.

The approach flows with Rabbi A.J. Heschel’s pursuit of “awe and wonder,” but while wonder may seem like a naturally occurring capability, it is not necessarily so and may need to be instilled. The capacity to experience awe and wonder is a skill that can be learned, and to ensure students look at the world with eyes keen for exploration and experimentation, teachers train them for authentic investigation. The youngest begin learning to observe nature in Junior Kindergarten and, by Grade 1, are primed to watch matter—such as water—transform from solid, to liquid, to gas. Teachers ensure they are conscious of the thought processes and language of the scientist, “How does matter change?” They learn to hypothesize, experiment, observe results, and draw conclusions and, step by step, the scientific approach becomes theirs.

Meanwhile learning to write poetry is a method that combines playfulness with words with the opportunities and constraints of language. Students learn to be comfortable with relaxed open-mindedness as well as techniques in increasingly complex literary devices as they grow. In Grade 2, students receive a paper bag containing a mystery item and use their five senses to write a descriptive poem about its contents, incorporating techniques of repetition and rhyme learned from their books and stories. Grade 4 poems contain vivid images and students work to express the emotions the poems evoke using devices such as alliteration and assonance. By Grade 7, students are examining poetic forms found in Jewish prayer ready to absorb cadence, rhythm, and allusion for their own creations.

In order to document the teaching on a discipline-by-discipline basis, members of the Learning Centre have been working to clarify their reflections on best practices. The goal is to articulate precisely the what, how, and why of a particular approach in a way that allows other teachers to receive the wisdom. To begin, Beiles asked them to draft out a particular approach, let’s say in how a history unit is taught. With thoughts on paper, the team collects sample material from within the school that brings the approach to life: perhaps a lesson, a unit, a project written up in a THINK article, a video of a classroom experience, or a piece of student work. The draft evolves with analytic work and the focus sharpens. The full gathering of sample and research material is later posted on an internal website for teacher learning.

In a year of masks, distancing, and increased teaching hours, the Learning Centre team has been working diligently to articulate the best of the best. Their dedication is surfacing what has always been the undercurrent of teaching practice at Toronto Heschel. The result is a widening of expertise among the teachers and a sharpening of thinking in the disciplines. These are true signs that our children will flourish as scientists, mathematicians, historians, artists, scholars, and more. The Learning Centre’s headlights remain on high beam.

THE TORONTO HESCHEL Learning Centre

The Toronto Heschel Learning Centre is a unique model for teacher-training and quality assurance.

Established in 2014, the Learning Centre comprises a cohort of Toronto Heschel teachers who are school leaders in particular academic disciplines. Team members assume responsibility to clarify, codify, and communicate the school’s program and its approach to teaching and learning.

The team works with faculty to ensure that the school’s curriculum and culture are being delivered to students as effectively as intended, to collaborate on innovation, and to consolidate best practices.

Training teacher-mentors to actively advance student learning and support their faculty peers results in the elevated academic standards and enhanced professional excellence which are the mission of the Learning Centre.

The Toronto Heschel School



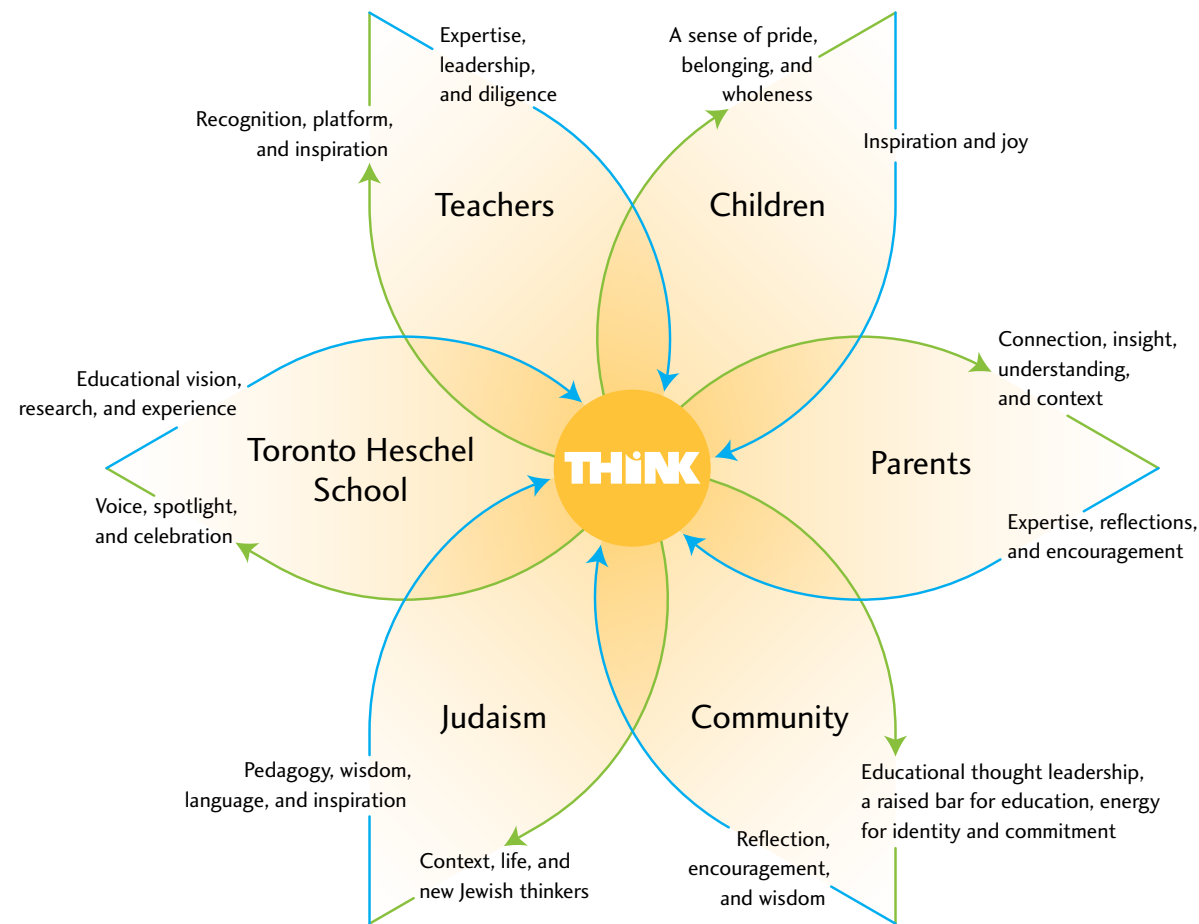
בית הספר
על שם השל

The Lola Stein Institute

BY DVORA GOODMAN, PAM MEDJUCK STEIN & MICHELLE SHULMAN

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.



The Lola Stein Institute is the research and publication arm of The Toronto Heschel School.

The moon theme of this issue of THINK offers a moment to reflect on The Lola Stein Institute. Like the moon, the Lola is a small body constantly orbiting the Toronto Heschel galaxy, sometimes full faced, sometimes behind the light. The Institute publishes a biannual journal—this one—reflecting Jewish educational thought that underlies the school’s curriculum and culture. It hosts professional development for teachers and text-based learning for parents. It initiates community projects to activate and celebrate the values inherent in the school mission. This is all visible. But why this continual profusion of adult engagement matters so much at Toronto Heschel may be trickier to see.

In truth, the work of The Lola Stein Institute is elemental to The Toronto Heschel School’s singular identity. A vision-driven school like ours relies on many factors to generate the breadth of view it imagines and realizes. The thinking and creativity shared through THINK and the Lola Stein seminars draw adult attention to the habits of heart and mind that are fundamental to the education we deliver. While Toronto Heschel students absorb these ideas in their daily lives at the school, their families can better appreciate their unique integrated Jewish day school experience if it is shared with them in adult language and adult terms of reference. The Institute, led by Dr. Greg Beiles, is a learning hub where readers and participants can discover what Judaism can mean today and what The Toronto Heschel School can mean for their children.

The Toronto Heschel School community is an alliance of Jewish families in pursuit of the good, a self-selected cadre motivated by what strengthens and inspires their children, knowing that raising their children well is also good for the Jewish people and the Canadian nation. The school mission arranges itself around *chinuch* and *chevra* (education and friendship). With the professionals responsible for student learning and school culture, The Lola Stein Institute attends to community education.

The school is constituted by principles that entrench Jewish identity, academic excellence, pluralism and egalitarianism, environmental and social responsibility, all within the spirit and philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. These tenets are the beams and girders that hold up the house that is Toronto Heschel, but to stand back and leave them unexamined would not be a healthy maintenance plan. Year by year, new treatments, innovations, and applications refresh how the school’s core principles are transformed for their best educational advantage. Like a window onto the factory floor, sharing the evolving educational engineering that structures the school’s programming reveals to parents the full educational experience that they are providing their children.

The Institute positions itself to walk the talk, to explain and advocate for what we call a Heschelian education. THINK

began as a newsletter for school parents and grew into a full journal that covers integrated Jewish studies, curriculum unique to the Toronto Heschel School, social and emotional family matters, and good books for children. This year, THINK held a Zoom conversation between school parents and the authors of its articles. The Institute also convenes learning that began as a small in-house text-based discussion on *hadracha* (leadership) and the Jewish roots of communal collaboration but evolved into the Lola Stein School Leaders Forum with faculty from the Shalom Hartman Institute and open to volunteer leaders at any Toronto day school.

The Lola Stein Senior Educators Forum has been convening world-class Jewish learning to senior level Jewish educators in Toronto since 2009. Heads of day and supplemental schools, department heads, camp directors, as well as synagogue and Hillel faculty learn with Shalom Hartman Institute scholars monthly over lunch (this year of COVID-19 excepted). The cohort had almost 30 attendees in the academic year 2019-2020.

Additionally, to model the spirit of civic responsibility which we aspire for our children, The Lola Stein Institute undertakes significant community projects. In 2008, THINK and The Toronto Heschel School posthumously awarded the first Abraham Joshua Heschel Humanitarian Award to Elie Wiesel, z”l, who had visited Toronto in 2008 and spoke to 700 guests about humanitarianism, Judaism, and children. In 2009, 500 (mostly) teachers gathered to hear Professor Howard Gardner from the Harvard Graduate School of Education explain the then latest in educational thinking: multiple intelligences. In 2016, we held an international contest for teachers who use heritage, culture, or religion in the classroom to inspire social responsibility and awarded the Prize for Teaching Excellence and two runner-up awards: a northern Canadian public school, an American Jewish high school, and an American private school were the winners. In 2017, to honour Canada’s 150th anniversary, we began a collaboration with the *Canadian Jewish News*, and in 2020 published *Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History* (a few dozen copies are still available through info@lolastein.ca).

Rabbi Heschel’s words, “Take for yourself an hour of learning,” ground our work. The educational responsibility to start children off in the right direction is a huge and important purpose and it begs us, as parents and teachers, to stay in touch with Jewish wisdom. To hold our focus on this expansive shifting challenge, we treat ourselves as the students of life we are. Through THINK and its other learning initiatives, the Institute hopes to highlight how we can lift ourselves—even briefly—out of the maelstrom of distractions and fracas, the human and institutional annoyances and disappointments that populate the journey through the ups and downs of daily life. And to take time to learn.

Remembering Moreh Baruch

BY PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

Moreh Baruch coined the rose bowl theory of parenting: Let sun shine on the children and keep out the wind; their roots will grow deep and strong as they blossom.

I always felt there was a deep pool of story floating the boat that became The Toronto Heschel School. I sensed eddies and currents beneath us. When Otto Baruch Rand, z”l, passed away in January of this year, I asked his son, Micah Rand, for a chronicle of his father’s significant pursuits. There, on the screen of my laptop, the depth of that pool came into view.

I began volunteering with Moreh Baruch (*moreh* meaning teacher in Hebrew) in 1996 before The Toronto Heschel School opened. The multidimensionality of his educational vision for Jewish children was breathtaking, and I see now how it materialized from his personal journey. Once articulated in his prosaic yet inspirational style, his ideas for a new kind of Jewish day school seemed self-evident, almost obvious. His vision was grounded in the distant reaches of antiquity but flew fast towards the Jewish future. I jumped on board thinking that, if our small collection of staff and parents could pull this off, it would be such a gift to my children and to others.

Moreh Baruch was born in Piescany, Czechoslovakia, in May 1932. When he was 10, the Nazis transported his father to a “work camp.” He spent the war hiding with his mother and younger brother. Saved by righteous gentiles, Baruch tells their story in his memoir, *Some Angels Speak French*, published in 2017 and available on Amazon. He faced the fragility of life, the jeopardy of otherness, and the importance of perseverance so early. Perhaps his lifelong commitment to each and every child took root here. It shows up in our school.

After the war in 1949 Moreh Baruch immigrated to Israel and lived on kibbutz. He joined the Israel Defense Forces in 1953, becoming a lieutenant in IDF intelligence and serving in the 1956 Sinai War and the 1967 Six-Day War and the liberation of Jerusalem. Reflecting on his foresight to source expert collaborators and welcome their ingenuity, the imprint of young Israel on a young man becomes apparent: strength in the collective, perseverance, proactive Jewish identity. Again, it materializes in his school.

Although he earned degrees in ancient studies from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, University of Chicago, and University of Toronto, academics were never Moreh Baruch’s ultimate goal: learning was for sharing. At the Israeli Ministry of Education, he edited a newspaper in easy Hebrew and collaborated with Dr. Dov Noy on materials for new immigrants. In 1960 he went as the *Shaliach* (Israeli Emissary) to Quito, Ecuador, to run educational programs. There he met his wife, Jackie, taught at the national university, and was awarded honorary citizenship. He was assistant to the Consulate General of Israel in Chicago, speaking about Israel across the American Midwest, and he worked with the Israeli Department of Foreign Affairs, Latin America Division. As director for Keren Hatarbut, the Jewish Agency Department of Culture in Toronto, he developed Hebrew language courses and Israel-oriented cultural events. He was also director of Camp Massad.



Once Moreh Baruch began reading the writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, z”l, the educator as activist was born. Rabbi Heschel embraced life’s mysteries with radical amazement, awe, and wonder. Heschel felt the legacy of the Shoah as an onus on Jews to act personally in pursuit of justice and to understand this as a religious commitment. Moreh Baruch completed a second master’s degree, this time in education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. He worked to advance Jewish education through his work as a curriculum consultant at Bialik Hebrew Day School; as principal at Temple Emmanuel for supplementary school and adult education; as director of Jewish Education in Toledo, Ohio; and as superintendent of the Board of Jewish Education for Winnipeg, Manitoba. In Winnipeg, his role was to consolidate Jewish schools, improve education, and find new funding. To this end he established the Manitoba Association for Promotion of Ancestral Languages (MAPAL), edited the Manitoba Heritage Review, assisted the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Education with heritage languages, and successfully lobbied the provincial and federal governments to fund Jewish education.

Becoming principal of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in Manhattan in 1988, he implemented Rabbi Heschel’s ideas into the school program, consulting closely with Heschel’s widow, Sylvia. He also developed a curriculum for accelerated learning, inspired by the work of Dr. Georgi Lozanov. While living in New York, Jackie was diagnosed with cancer and they returned to their sons in Toronto and to Ontario’s health care plan (OHIP).

Moreh Baruch envisioned a dream school. Its curriculum would be inspired by the philosophies of Rabbi Heschel; it would incorporate accelerated learning and integrate Jewish and general studies. He sought out a team of specialist educators with whom he would found The Toronto Heschel School: Gail Baker, Judith Leitner, Ellen Kessler, and Rachael Turkienicz brought expertise in arts-based and environmental learning and an egalitarian ethos. Moreh Baruch was the first principal of the new school. His sense for synergy started its heart beating, generating a partnership of teachers and parents who built a vibrant institution.

Judith Leitner, one of the school’s founding educators and long-serving Director of Integrated Arts, just retired in the 2021 semester. She remembers that “Baruch searched us out” and “invited creative thinkers in different disciplines to collaborate on imagining, envisioning, and realizing his dream of a robust vigorous curriculum. He felt his vision would be enhanced through our own disciplines, our own creative minds.” She explains that “Baruch’s big thing was learning styles, that every learner should have a voice and learn from their own strengths. The goal was to embrace a multitude of learning styles and needs and to do it through a Jewish lens.” He taught his team “not to *understand* through the [Jewish] lens, but to *look at the world through this lens*, a rich Judaic springboard. There’s a big difference.”

Dr. Greg Beiles, now Head of The Toronto Heschel School, was hired by Moreh Baruch fresh from undergraduate education in 1997. Beiles remembers, “Baruch Rand introduced me to the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel wrote that Jewish education needs ‘text people’ even more than ‘textbooks.’ Baruch Rand was a ‘text person.’ He emanated a deep love of Jewish learning rooted in experience, but his eyes turned to the horizon. I recall him praying, *Esa einai el heharim* (I will raise my eyes to the mountains). That was Baruch.”

Fluent in Spanish, Moreh Baruch retired to Jalisco, Mexico, in 2002. He brought a Torah scroll with him and taught in the community, in the synagogue on Shabbat, and at the University of Guadalajara. He loved helping several Marrano families discover meaning in their Jewish identity. After a debilitating stroke, he returned to his family in Toronto.

Moreh Baruch leaves a legacy that most certainly surpasses our school but at least we can add to it and say that because of him there are hundreds of children—four of his grandchildren included—graduating from The Toronto Heschel School as confident, compassionate, ethical thinkers who have learned how to learn and how to engage with the world through a Jewish lens. Each carries the spark of Moreh Baruch’s vision of what a Jewish day school could be. May his memory be for a blessing.

Good Books

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

BY TZIPORAH COHEN & GAIL BAKER

AGES
3-7

***The Moon Keeper* by Zosienka (Harper, 2020)**

The night creatures have chosen polar bear Emile as the new moon keeper. While there's not a lot to do, Emile finds the moon "nice to talk to." But is the moon getting smaller? Emile draws a picture of the moon each night and confirms that it is indeed shrinking, until one night, despite Emile's interventions, it simply disappears. A bird reassures him that "things come and go—you'll see," and Emile holds on tightly to this promise until the moon reappears to fill the sky once again. A simple introduction to the concept of the moon's phases and universality and to the philosophy of quietly waiting, with beautiful gouache illustrations full of details for curious readers to discover.



AGES
3-8



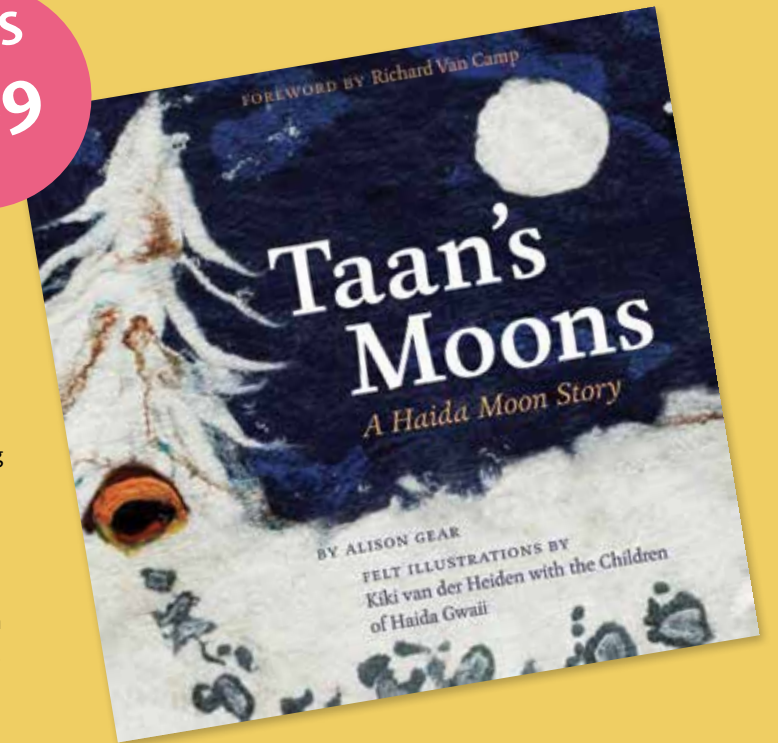
***New Month, New Moon* by Allison Ofanansky, with photographs by Elyahu Halpern (Kar-Ben Publishing, 2014)**

Join the author's family on a special Rosh Chodesh moon hike in Israel's Mahtesh Ramon canyon, told through photographs and simple text. Meet her children as they discover the canyon's wildlife and make paint from the yellow-coloured dirt and, as the sun sets, peer through a powerful telescope at the crescent new moon. Tour guide Ira explains the phases of the moon using a lantern, a blow-up globe, and a model of the moon, all clearly visualized in well-chosen photographs. An author's note at the end includes a papier-mâché moon craft project and information about Rosh Chodesh traditions. A clever blend of religion and science, highlighting one of the most unique places in the Negev Desert.

AGES
4-9

***Taan's Moons: A Haida Moon Story* by Alison Gear, with illustrations by Kiki van der Heiden and the Children of Haida Gwaii (McKellar & Martin Publishing Group, 2014)**

This unique picture book, illustrated with gorgeous felted images, follows Taan (Bear in the Haida language) as she lives throughout the yearly cycle of 13 moons. Each moon is represented by a short poem and a unique felted image illustrating one of Taan's seasonal activities, such as feeding on the salmon that she finds swimming upstream during the Fish Moon, or being awakened by cackling geese during Noisy Geese Moon. As described in the backmatter, Kiki van der Heiden, a local visual and fibre artist, worked with the kindergarten and primary school-aged children of Haida Gwaii to create the magical felted art images. Photos of the children working on their art can also be found in this section. *Taan's Moons* is a wonderful introduction to the Indigenous people of Haida Gwaii, who live off the coast of British Columbia.



AGES
10-14



***The Moon Within* by Aida Salazar (Arthur A. Levine Books, 2019)**

Eleven-year-old Celi is lying in bed, worrying. Her body is physically changing, she has developed feelings for a neighbourhood boy and, most worrisome to her, her mother wants to conduct a reclaimed ancestral Mexican moon ceremony with her circle of women when Celi starts menstruating. The thought of publicly acknowledging her period horrifies Celi and, to add to her confusion, her best friend has just disclosed to her that she is gender fluid. Celi struggles with being an ally to her friend while still remaining a part of a social group that is less accepting of differences. How Celi deals with these many transitions makes this a coming-of-age story that will resonate with young people everywhere.

Pandemic Pixelation

COMING APART AND COMING TOGETHER AT HOME

BY JASMINE ELIAV

We live in extraordinary times. A year into the COVID-19 pandemic, we are past the point of acclimatizing and now inhabit a phase of real adaptation. We are adjusting to the chronic stress that accompanies fear, lockdowns, and revolving regulations. It buzzes perpetually in the background like white noise—the new soundtrack to our lives. Yet, as we make our way through these changes, life continues as if times were normal with births, loss, *simchas*, milestones, illness that is not COVID-19, and deadlines. We deal with it all as we reconstruct what it means to support one another.

I say “reconstruct” because our habitual pre-COVID-19 coping mechanisms are less accessible to us: we have less space, less money, less external distraction; we can’t meet our friends or drop off the kids with grandparents for the night. One of the things that might help with updated coping skills is to notice the invisible new stressors that are plaguing our peace of mind and identify which are mere annoyances to take stock of and set aside in full unavoidable acceptance and which are trickier. For example, are we perhaps annoying ourselves? It’s one thing to live with a spouse or lively kids all day and all night, but are we happy living with ourselves in one house all day and all night? And does this affect our children?

Most of us truly aim to be resilient, in touch with the power of positivity, and grateful for our blessings. We roll with the ups and downs as best we can and find wins as we go. We work to create a sense of containment for our children, reminding them that this too will pass. Meanwhile, the

boundaries of what we used to call “organized living” are blurring. Our own identities as grown adults are changing and this feels strange because we are supposed to know who we are by now.

Pre-COVID-19 we accepted ourselves as many different characters rolled into one: we had an identity as a human being, a work identity, an idea of ourselves as a romantic partner, and of course as a parent. It is not to say we were fragmented but we felt healthily compartmentalized. We were accustomed to multitasking, but that was then. This new blended all-in-one lifestyle—dare we call it integrated or holistic?—is a challenge of an entirely different kind.

Pre-COVID-19 it was usually taboo to be on a work call and hear children in the background. If it happened, there were apologies and a shooing away of the kids. Many of us had kept the parent and the professional as separate as possible, but now our parent identity infiltrates our work headspace as we run between calls or files to settle a family dilemma, make lunch, or throw in a load of laundry. While we meet on Zoom to discuss intensely critical matters or even less important ones, we hear kids arguing, someone crying out that the printer is not working, the dog barking. Being home all together for all of the day, there seems no way to organize life into separate spheres; we consult on work matters as we walk the dog, our older kids go to bed later than us, and some of us hide in the bathroom or laundry area to speak to friends or colleagues for five uninterrupted minutes.

Can we create space for each other during our togetherness, while we nurture meaningful togetherness in our space?

Our contexts are colliding. Our diverse personal roles are showing up at once. We are merging into a unified version of the pieces we once considered separate; we are pixelating into a complex singular self. In many ways life in lockdown is less scattered as we do not run around town as we used to. However, with all facets of our personae operating simultaneously in one physical space, our lived experience feels increasingly more chaotic.

Yes, the second wave is more tiresome than the first, but unless one is personally working on the vaccine, the situation exceeds our control except to follow government directives. Learning to live with the messiness of bumping into our various selves as well as our various children all day long is now part of our evolution. Dichotomies abound. Somehow we need to be separate while together, independent while interdependent, social while isolated, content while stressed, purposeful while uncertain, not to mention calm while chaotic. We have to contemplate how to create space for each other during togetherness, yet nurture meaningful togetherness in our space. How might we maintain a sense of self in the mayhem and foster equanimity for our families?

Our children yearn for the same freedoms we do; their healthy development demands age-related levels of independence. Their personal roles are also collapsing back into the child-at-home persona. If our society were functioning normally, they might be the independent kid, a responsible big sister accustomed to tending siblings free of parental micro-management, a best bud or member of an active friend group, a quizzical interlocutor sharing ideas with his teacher. Our children’s roles are as blurred as ours. Giving

them space to grow free of our watchful eyes and unsolicited opinions allows them to breathe during the lockdown. It also lets us see who they are and witness their competence.

There’s yet another dichotomy in our intense pandemic moment. This might be the ultimate time to put the principles of secure attachment into motion. We might think this is a no-brainer as we are so close we must be attached, but no. Attachment theory offers the general prognosis that children who receive parental support and trust are more likely to become independent with better coping mechanisms and overall preferable outcomes. The theory suggests that parents who can manage their own stress—which could perhaps mean to take a little time to themselves, accept frustration and change as part of the game, appreciate accomplishments—are the ones who better respond to their children’s cues and soothe them when they are upset.

We can foster security and independence in our children even during this pandemic by just doing our best to manage our own stress, understanding that our self-care is the threshold step to meeting our children’s emotional needs. As parents our task is not to manufacture happiness and fun on a daily basis but to live with our families on an honest level, acknowledging the commotion, and going forward with love.

Through this new phase, can we parents somehow model self-compassion? Can we demonstrate willingness to release control over certain aspects of daily life? Might we acknowledge to ourselves and to our children that changes are at hand, some temporary, some maybe not? Can we remain committed to a creative and free-flowing mindset, to regular fresh air and exercise, and to letting our children see how we refresh and reset our relationship to uncertainty every day? And maybe it is okay if we give each other the freedom just to be and be seen.

INSPIRING CURIOSITY



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