



think

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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**EDUCATION
FOR THE NEXT
GENERATION:
THINKING IN THE
DISCIPLINES**

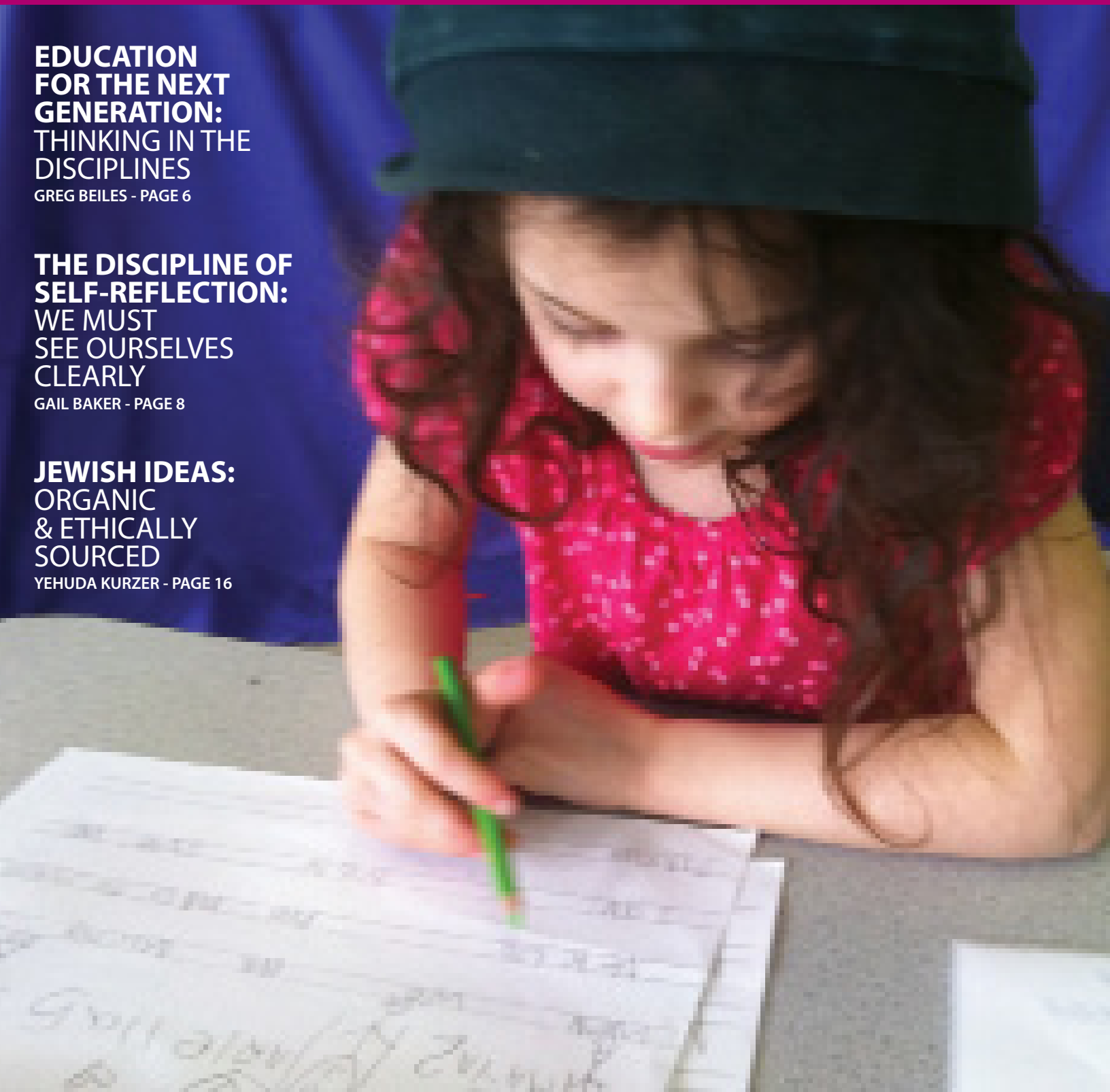
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THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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The integrated Jewish education espoused by The Lola Stein Institute is delivered at The Toronto Heschel School, a pluralistic Jewish community day school in Toronto, Canada.

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Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her very special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family

and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. One friend chooses to honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many.

The Lola Stein Institute reaches teachers close to home and afar. The Institute began within The Toronto Heschel School in 2003 and has expanded its educational leadership more broadly, thanks to international recognition of its excellence in teacher training and curriculum development. It now offers workshops locally and internationally, customizing the delivery of its attention and expertise uniquely to each school.

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Greg Beiles, M.A., is Director of The Lola Stein Institute and Curriculum Consultant at The Toronto Heschel School. Greg believes children are active builders of knowledge and empathy, and that a child's perspective is shaped more by how learning is structured than by the content at hand. Greg is now completing his doctorate in the Philosophy of Religion.

Pam Medjuck Stein, LL.M., is the Editor of *think: The Lola Stein Institute Journal*. She co-founded The Lola Stein Institute in 2003 and serves as its Chair. A founding board member of The Toronto Heschel School, Pam has collaborated on Toronto Heschel's team since 1996.

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Jasmine Eliav, Ph.D., practices clinical psychology with children, adolescents and families, in private practice and as a staff psychologist at the Hospital for Sick Children, where she also completed her postdoctoral fellowship. Her Master and Doctoral Degrees are from the University of Toronto.

Heidi Friedman, M.Sc.(Ed.), views education holistically, with goals to teach academic skills, foster critical thinking and inquiry, and help children navigate their social world. With expertise in leadership as well as teaching, Heidi believes in the infinite potential of children. She is a Literacy and Learning Specialist at The Toronto Heschel School.

Dan Goldberg holds a B.A. in Jewish History from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology. He has served as Director of Education and Youth at Beth Tzedec Congregation in Toronto and as Head of Judaics at Krieger Schechter Middle School in Baltimore. He is currently Tefilah Coordinator and a Grade 5 and Grade 7 teacher at The Toronto Heschel School.

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think considers both kinds of of academic discipline: fields of study & personal habits that enrich education

By Pam Medjuck Stein

We live in an age of distracted living. Superficial descriptions and buzzwords send us sailing in crazy directions. Eat this. Don't eat that. Exercise for half an hour. Never sit down. In the school world, trendiness sees the phrase "critical thinking" bounce around like a new age technique, computers are touted as essential learning tools, and ecology is a fashion.

This issue of think looks behind the hype. We find that, in truth, critical thinking is a habit of mind cultivated through thoughtful analytic practice; the computer is merely an appliance managed by a keyboard user; and environmental intelligence is an integration of science, ethics, and civics. These academic truths are not easily heard in the barrage of surface noise in education today.

Our writers consider academic disciplines as they once were and as they are now. They recommend that schools neither continue routinely in the ways of old nor be swept up in popular culture. Education can protect these important sources even as it moves forward.

Greg Beiles describes how each of the academic disciplines frames a particular way of thinking that evolved for highly specific reasons; math teaches relationship; history evaluates evidence; and literature nurtures expression. He advocates for continued attention on cognitive strategies as education advances. Following suit, Heidi Friedman shares her technique for masterful literacy in young children; her five-year-olds have important stories to tell. Rabbi Akiva Danziger presents the very Jewish discipline of abstract thinking; the study of Talmud acclimatizes students to analyze for deeper meaning and hidden truth.

Gail Baker contemplates reflection as a mindful practice; when teachers and students carefully consider their personal development, they engender the self-awareness and self-actualization that predicate success. Dan Goldberg appreciates the integration of academic disciplines as a dynamic educational direction and grounds the essential synthesis in the interpersonal, with the teacher as role model. Rabbi Jay Kelman, a student of celebrated teacher Nechama Leibowitz z"l, describes the personal commitment and discipline that Nechama modelled.

Three writers invite us to look at ourselves and our relationships with *klal yisrael*, our community and our families. Mitch Parker reminds us to love all children equally; he points out that some children are excluded from the full embrace of our community, especially those with characteristics less common than others. Yehuda Kurzer examines how we understand ourselves and lay claim to who we are; he suggests that we ethically source Jewish values to strengthen Jewish identity in these distracted politicized times. Jasmine Eliav also highlights the extra onus of focus that our times demand; parents become mesmerized in the fast pace of life and sometimes overlook the effort it takes to protect consistent family time. Jasmine brings the sacredness of *Shabbat* to the question.

Let's teach children to think in the disciplines and to think across the disciplines. Let's take the time to connect with the people and values we cherish. We hope you enjoy this collection of thinking.

RESPONSA

Letter from Leonard Levy
February 2, 2012

...The 'THINK JOURNALS' are a library unto themselves and contain words of awe, wonder and wisdom. 'MISSION CONTROL' is a responsive learning course unto itself. As a fourth generation Canadian and Life Member of Holy Blossom Synagogue, I am indeed fortunate that every day is an opportunity to expand my learning process. The THINK JOURNAL is my daily project.

Greg Beiles, Director of The Lola Stein Institute, will present his paper "Jewish Education, Democracy, and Pluralism" at the Network for Research in Jewish Education Conference, Hebrew College, Boston in June.

SPOTLIGHT highlights his discussion of religious education in a pluralistic society.

Pluralism – the presence of diverse cultural, political, and religious groups within society – is generally accepted as an important value of a healthy liberal democracy. Paradoxically, groups within a pluralistic society can sometimes pose a threat to this very society, if they promote values that are antithetical to democratic citizenship and pluralism. In his book *For Goodness Sake: Religious Schools and Education for Democratic Citizenry* (Routledge, 2006), Walter Feinberg examines whether religious schooling contributes to, or erodes, the values that are necessary to sustain a liberal democracy.

Greg Beiles' paper examines school practices which seek to provide a rich Jewish education while cultivating the values of an engaged, ethical citizenship and a commitment to pluralism. He assesses The Toronto Heschel School's original and integrated curriculum to this end.

The school nurtures democratic habits of mind through specific correlations made between Canadian democratic processes and democratic impulses and sources found in the Jewish religious tradition. The school's civics curriculum interweaves Jewish sources with experiential learning about democracy.

Students learn that the rights we enjoy as individuals depend on the responsibilities we accept as citizens. As an enrichment of the Ontario educational curriculum on government, Grade 5 students first study democracy through a unit on rights and responsibilities. They examine "human rights" articulated in rights-based documents, such as the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in conjunction with "responsibilities" found in Jewish texts, such as the Ten Commandments.

The Grade 5 course sees students spend the year-long civics course learning the systems and protocols that underlie democratic decision making and they generate their own classroom Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. Thereafter, in Grades 6 to 8, they employ the democratic protocols in weekly class meetings where they deliberate, select, and implement social justice projects.

The link between democratic process and *Tikkun Olam* is inspired in part by the moral development research of psychologist



Lawrence Kohlberg, who, with colleagues, discovered that progress towards higher stages of moral development accelerates in democratic societies. This idea that democratic processes enhance social justice is also galvanized by the traditional Jewish notion that we are responsible for moral action, and not simply for thinking about moral process. The biblical idea of *na'aseh venishma* (first we do, then we understand) underscores this cognition, suggesting that action shapes ethical development.

Respect for freedom of choice and unique experience lies at the centre of Western liberal democracy. When students examine Jewish history through diverse primary sources they see how various ancient Jewish communities responded differently to the same historical challenges, and they begin to understand how identity evolves from specific choices made in consequence to historical forces. On studying the Jewish exile to Babylon in 586 B.C.E., students find an array of response to a singular situation. They read the lamentations of Amos (5:16–24), Isaiah (58:1–3), and Psalm 137, mourning the loss of the Judean homeland, and compare this tragic view to the pragmatism of the prophet Jeremiah, who tells the exiles to "build houses, dwell in them, plant gardens, and eat of them," to settle in the land of exile, and rebuild their lives there (29:5–7). This simple compare and contrast method awakens students to the reality that many cultures may also develop a variety of views and identities within their own communities over time, which is a consciousness that is essential to the mutual respect inherent in democracy.

Young learners in a religious Jewish day school can absorb the values and nuanced cognitive skills that ground ethical decisions in a democratic, pluralistic society. They can study Jewish sources that reinforce democratic values, they can use the democratic process to implement *mitzvot*, and they can learn that Jewish history reflects the universal process of becoming.

Greg Beiles' paper will be published in the forthcoming book, *Discipline, Devotion and Dissent: Perspectives on Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic Education in Canada* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press).



EDUCATION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION: THINKING IN THE DISCIPLINES

By Greg Beiles

Sir Ken Robinson asserts that as a society we are no longer certain what our children will need to know to be successful in the future.¹ Robinson is an internationally recognized leader in education, creativity, and innovation who works with government, business, and educational leaders. He has boldly articulated that we don't know what "stuff" or what "information" students need to know because the rate of change in our society is so rapid that what they learn today might not be useful tomorrow. This makes it very difficult to craft a content-based curriculum that will accurately match future needs.

What we can anticipate is that our children will have to be good thinkers and, especially, good learners. They will need to be capable of analyzing problems and new situations. Their generation will be required to develop well-considered innovative solutions they can apply to the many changing situations they will encounter. We don't know what "stuff" they'll need to know, but we do know they'll need to be smart, mentally agile, and creative.

Our children will need well-considered innovative solutions for the changing situations they will encounter.

But wait! If a content-based curriculum is inadequate, what happens to math, science, language arts, history – all the courses and subjects that we associate with a good education? Should we resolve to

replace them with a "critical thinking class" or a "creativity class"? This, I believe, would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It would mean losing excellent educational practices developed over the centuries even as we endeavour to refresh our educational vision.

Rather than jettisoning traditional school subjects, I suggest we reconceive their role. We should value them, not as a means of conveying specific and certain information but as vehicles for developing specific ways of thinking, for honing cognitive abilities, for nurturing habits of mind. Instead of math or science or language or music being a matter of "stuff" deposited in the minds of our children, we can appreciate these classes as "disciplines," as ways of training our minds towards particular ends. Since we don't know what specific information our children will need, our best recourse is to teach them what we do know in ways that sharpen their minds for the future. Indeed, this is exactly what academic disciplines were originally all about.

The Scientific Revolution (1550–1700) was primarily a revolution in thinking, not in information. Galileo and Newton advocated a process of looking at the world through observation, experimentation, and analysis; a new intellectual approach that challenged traditional doctrine offered up by the church and its scholars. Ironically, under pressure in education today to ensure students "know" certain bodies of knowledge, science class has become the very thing

science originally opposed: a passive acceptance of what is already thought to be known. We see this in elementary school education where learning science becomes finding facts in a book or on the Internet. Looking up known facts, even under the glorified name of "research," is not science.

The discipline of science involves asking authentic questions, developing hypotheses, designing and conducting experiments, and reaching provisional conclusions that lead to more questions. The scientific method imbues students with curiosity and confidence, and it gives them abundant practise in analyzing dilemmas they are surely to encounter as they grow.

We should value traditional school subjects, not as means to convey information, but as vehicles for developing specific ways of thinking, for honing cognitive abilities, for nurturing habits of mind.

Mathematics is a way of thinking that involves representing quantities and processes in symbols that can be manipulated in efficient and logical ways. Therefore, it is critical that students appreciate the relationship between symbols and the processes they represent. A student may be able, through rote memorization, to answer that $42 \div 6 = 7$. But if she cannot explain that the "42" might be 42 marbles, and the "6" might be the six friends who divide up the marbles among themselves, we have good reason to believe that she neither understands division nor – and this is much more important – how mathematical symbols relate to reality.

If a student chooses to multiply 399×4 by lining up the 4 under the 9 and adding the products of 4×9 and 4×9 and 3×9 , shifting zeros as he goes, we also have cause to worry. This student has turned mathematical thinking into an automated procedure, rather than assessing the problem to find the most efficient strategy for a solution. With efficiency as the goal of mathematical thinking, we must train students to notice that a problem like 399×4 is simply $400 \times 4 - 4$.

Similarly, language arts must engage students in thinking like real writers. Teachers can activate their students' imaginations and encourage ideas to flow. Thereafter, students can learn to organize ideas in ways that allow them to communicate their thoughts to a reader. This discipline includes teaching children grammar in a functional way, where commas, periods, and quotation marks are not seen as "conventions" but as tools for making expressions clear.

In social science and history classes, students should examine primary sources and discover how historical knowledge is constructed. When they approach their study as "historians" and "archaeologists," they learn to ask critical questions, link their ideas to other knowledge, and ground their conjectures with evidence.

The arts – visual art, dance, music, drama – are key disciplines that train students in flexible and creative ways of thinking. As research continues to show, when we practise an art, we strengthen our mind's executive function, which is the ability to self-regulate and stay focused on a task.² Whether working with modelling clay or their own bodies and voices, the arts facilitate how students experience the physical materials of existence. Indeed, the arts

offer us ways to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas that might otherwise remain buried. Innovation depends largely on the arts.

The Judaic "subjects" must also be understood as "disciplines" and ways of thinking, and not only as "Jewish content" that we can use to teach children how to be "good Jews" or how to perform at *b'nei mitzvah* ceremonies. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that Judaism is not just a way of living but also a way of thinking; and that the mitzvot are not done for one particular reason, they are "sources of emergent meaning."

If there is one essential Jewish way of thinking, it is the ability to look at a text or at a situation from many points of view, to look beyond the obvious, to interpret, and to seek and find deeper meaning. A serious Jewish reader will not read the text only for its literal value. For instance, no one actually thinks the world was created in six precise 24-hour days. But neither is Jewish interpretation entirely freewheeling. It follows literary rules of play, returning to the Hebrew text through inferences, metaphors, and analogies, each of which gets easily lost in translation.

Knowledge of the Hebrew language is the gateway to any Jewish learning that takes us beyond the superficial. Learning Hebrew, as any language, is good exercise for thinking. Hebrew uses a distinct alphabet, has a unique "root" and "banyan" structure, and is read from right to left, all of which makes it particularly effective mental training. Moving between languages creates cognitive flexibility, and it keeps the mind "supple" by restimulating our capacity to learn, which is strongest when we are very young and can atrophy as we grow older if not exercised.

It is no accident that in the 19th and early 20th century, Jewish students who were deeply trained in *Torah* and Talmud took so easily to the study of law, medicine, and science. Jewish disciplines, such as Chumash and Talmud, engender excellent memory skills and cognitive training. The intellectual skill achieved by Jewish scholars is inherent in textual analysis as well as in decoding strands of an argument, distinguishing competing commentaries, and correlating sources.

As we move through the 21st century, we see "ways of thinking" or "habits of heart and mind" becoming the central goals of education.

As we move through the 21st century, we see that "ways of thinking" or "habits of heart and mind" are becoming the central goals of education. Some of these "ways of thinking" are best nurtured through the traditional disciplines: thinking like a scientist, like a mathematician, like a historian, like a writer, and so on. Other "habits of heart and mind" are nurtured through the cognitively rigorous and ethically essential Jewish ways of thinking and being. We want our children to discern what is happening in the world around them. We hope they seek to meet the challenge of rapid societal change with their hearts and minds wide open. Academic disciplines – both universal and Jewish – offer the most reliable framework for this important pursuit.

¹ See Ken Robinson, "Changing Education Paradigms," retrieved March 12, 2012, from http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms.html

² For examples of this research, see the Dana Foundation website which has links to numerous peer-reviewed articles. <http://www.dana.org/artseducation.aspx>



THE DISCIPLINE OF SELF-REFLECTION: WE MUST SEE OURSELVES CLEARLY

By Gail Baker

mindfulness that students and teachers require to build a dynamic learning community.

For students and teachers to identify as collaborators in a school community that reflects their ideals and commitments, each should feel, heart and soul, that he/she is helping to create the envisioned school culture, that his/her participation truly counts. God created the world for us and we follow the example in the spirit of *Tikkun Olam*. This sense of partnership is key to the high ethical standards we intend to foster.

Appreciation of this co-responsibility and collegiality requires a habit of mind, a *modus vivendi*, of self-awareness that sees teachers and students give thought to who they are and understand what they are doing. Mindful education, like Judaism, grounds learning in self-awareness and self-regulation. We want to see ourselves clearly. We want teachers to look at themselves as they work and students to mature into self-aware and thoughtful young people.

Good values enhance academic excellence; self-discipline, motivation, and hard work breed success.

The reflective process begins with a school vision that articulates its particular ideals and strategies dynamically. All stakeholders must become familiar with the overarching philosophy. They must share well-defined collective goals, at age-appropriate levels, of course.

TEACHERS To achieve deep holistic learning, the teachers' planning has to be deliberate, meticulous, and thoughtful. Even as they teach for excellence in academic skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic), teachers are cognizant that they are mentoring children to think and behave in ethically Jewish ways, preparing them to become participating citizens of the world. If the teacher cannot keep this composite mission in mind, then professional development in this very direction becomes a priority.

Too often schools and businesses continue to function within institutional environments that are based on assumptions

generated in years past but that are no longer relevant.² Successful teachers continually re-evaluate their working assumptions. They work with a mentor or a team, and reflect on their work without fear of ridicule or destructive critique. This is how teachers grow to become master teachers.

Whatever a school's values may be, if the teachers are not deeply immersed in them, their teaching will have little influence on the student body. We bring teachers consistently to group discussions that are focused on the school's vision and that explore our Jewish and educational values and mission. This on-going practice helps teachers align their delivery of the curriculum in accordance with our collective plan and purpose. Our strategy sees that the school's core values and ethics guide daily behaviours and attitudes as much in religious studies classes as in math classes, as much in the hallways as out in the field.

The innovative work of the late Dr. Donald Schon, a philosopher and a professor at MIT, informs our understanding of reflective practice. Schon's theories of learning developed the ideas of "reflection in action" and "reflections on action."³ "Reflection in action" implies "thinking on one's feet." Whether delivering a lesson to a whole class, a small group, or an individual student, the teacher discerns what is going on in the environment and makes immediate decisions based on what he/she is experiencing. Are the students engaged? Are all following the lesson? What adjustments are required? The teacher cultivates an awareness to inform his/her immediate next steps.

Even as they teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, teachers mentor children to think and behave in ethically Jewish ways, to become citizens of the world.

Often, puzzling questions and new ideas about the learning process will emerge as a teacher leads a class. These dilemmas and insights engender what Schon calls "reflections on action." We afford teachers time to ponder these questions, to confer with colleagues and mentors. The practice of thoughtful self-examination helps teachers prepare their progress through the curriculum, mindful of the demands of their particular students and the exigencies of the school's educational vision and standards. Clarity and direction emerge.

STUDENTS Reflective practice is an opportunity for students and teachers alike to grow. It fosters a richer student experience through all grades, and it nurtures thoughtful and effective teachers. Rabbi Heschel's advice resonates as we strive to appreciate the everyday wonders around us.

Our younger students learn that God created the world and we must take care of it. They begin student life understanding themselves as workers and helpers. They happily spend hours in their organic garden, planting seeds, tilling the earth, admiring and harvesting the fruit of their labours. The young gardeners' attention is directed to the very tiny seed that goes into the earth and over the year they witness the miracle of growth. They taste the fruits and vegetables and learn how a portion is delivered to those who lack

such abundance. The children actively and mindfully participate in creation and in community as they carry out their myriad chores and responsibilities.

Reflections continue through our students' years. As the children mature and move into Junior High, they study the Holocaust. They encounter the horrible details, meet survivors and their families. Additionally, the students turn to look through this very Jewish lens to view other genocides and inequities in history and modern times. They find that the very ethics and values that they have been living and learning in Jewish day school also frame their experience of the wider world.

The graduating class purposefully works to digest and express their feelings about human rights and human suffering through the creation of an art installation. Through personal expression they reflect on what they see around them and begin to appreciate how they personally can be the instigators of today's attitudes and tomorrow's politics. As young teenagers, they see how their sensitivities and their voices can resound in social conscience and activism.

VISION, MISSION, AND METHODOLOGY LINK

We don't always instinctually understand that high standards in skills and in values can be achieved at the same time. Teaching good values enhances academic excellence; self-discipline, motivation, and hard work are the cornerstones of success. This cohesion of values and skills demands reflection beyond the typical rumination that teachers engage in when they assess their lessons and that children mull as they go through their days. We foster deep reflection and contemplation. We make time for this most precious skill. Our way is to make sure the "bigger picture" becomes the conscious backdrop to daily practice.

1 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1955), p. 49 / 2 Lois J. Zachary, *Building a Mentoring Culture: The Organization's Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005) / 3 Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 129–132.



STUDENTS OF THE BOOK: JUNIOR HIGH MEETS THE TALMUD

By Rabbi Akiva Danzinger

I once heard of a boy who asked his father to sign a form so he could get his driver's license.

The father refused, saying, "When you finally get a haircut, I'll sign the form."

The son protested, "But Dad! Abraham and Moses had long hair!"

After some thought, the father replied, "And they walked where they wanted to go."

What makes certain values "Jewish"? Is a value Jewish because it was voiced by a Jewish celebrity? Must a Jewish value be based on tradition? If Moses had long hair and wore a gown, would that be the Jewish way to dress?

"Jews don't hunt." "Jews should give charity." Are these specifically "Jewish" values? Are they explicitly mentioned in the *Torah*? Must all our values be written in ancient texts to be authentically Jewish? These questions are integral for educators who bear daily responsibility to instill a strong moral code within each child he/she teaches.

While our understanding of right and wrong helps us teach our students how to face the challenges of their generation, how do we teach them to face the challenges of their children's generation? How do we provide them with the moral compass they need to confront new issues that will arise over time?

Moses was never faced with issues of freedom of speech or bullying and, for that matter, he never had to deal with the *Kashrut* questions of a microwave! How are we to know what Moses would say regarding any of these issues? To even begin to answer this question, we would need to know his very way of thinking.

This is the beauty of the Talmud. The rabbis were unique in their development of the Talmud. They produced not only a code of laws but managed also to preserve the very thought processes that brought them to these laws.

The Talmud is famous for its arguments. The minutia of every opinion was carefully included in its pages, along with those interpretations that opposed the final ruling, no matter how irrelevant they were to seem to future generations.

It is not uncommon for the Talmud to conclude a lengthy argument with the word "*Taiku*," which translates loosely as "Let the question stand." Yet how can this unresolved statement conclude a legal discussion?



These very unresolved conclusions illustrate that the Talmud is far more than just an ancient legal system. The Talmud is a preservation of a philosophy and a way of thinking that the rabbis considered fundamental to Jewish life. It seems as if they were concerned more with the development of a law than with the result.

Some two thousand years ago, a group of rabbis had a discussion about ovens. How can ovens be used on *Shabbat* without violating the *Shabbat*? After the law had been finally settled, it might have been more straightforward had the rabbis included only their conclusions in the text. But such was not to be.

The Talmud enables the *Torah* to evolve to accommodate changes in the world and in the development of humankind.

The rabbis took great care to write down each question and every response that was taken until a decision emerged on the points. Today, we benefit from this painstaking work. The reasoning and values apparent in these lengthy, meticulous writings enable us to develop new laws for the microwave, the toaster, and the George Foreman Grill.

Unfortunately, committing the Talmud to writing froze some Jewish teachings in time, making them enigmatic and less accessible to people today. For example, the Talmud states, "Anyone who follows

the advice of his wife will go to hell." The Talmud itself questions this statement and finds that it refers only to one who asks his wife questions he knows she certainly can never answer, in this particular case, advice about business matters.

How do we provide our students with the moral compass they need to confront new issues that will arise over time?

We might take offense to this and decide that it reveals how the Talmud is not applicable today. It is, however, important to note that two thousand years ago when this statement was made, women were not usually exposed to commerce and would not have reliable business savvy. The Talmudic intention is to admonish that one who follows the advice of a non-expert will end up in trouble. The inherent teaching remains relevant, even though the written illustration is not.

One can easily lose sight of the Talmudic message, given the offensive example used in the text. It is the role of a teacher to distinguish for the student between the message and the example, and to place the moral lesson into a contemporary context. The example was simply an illustration selected at the time to capture the "Jewish thought process."

Studying Talmud this way trains students to search for the meaning and application of a teaching, rather than merely memorizing statements with no current value.

The Talmud enables lessons to endure forever. It ensures that when a person voices modern values that are based on a thorough understanding of the Talmud, these are "Jewish values," which are no less "Jewish" than the values of Moses himself.

This is why teaching Talmud in junior high is so important, for at this age students really start to analyze the world around them and begin to want to make a difference. It becomes crucial for young adults to have the right tools on hand for analyzing and determining values and morals.

We have seen a very strong and consistent moral code maintained throughout Jewish history. We have found that, as Jews, we have been able to adapt to every new society in every era. Even with the advancement of technology and the many social changes in the world today, Jews know how to keep up with the times while staying true to ourselves and our values.

The famous reference to Jews as a "people of the Book" is true, and most people believe that the phrase is a reference to the *Torah*. In point of fact, the "Book" refers to the Talmud.

The Talmud enables the *Torah* to evolve so that it can accommodate changes in the world and in the development of humankind. Our "Book" offers us the very same tools that Moses used to maintain the highest standards of humanity and righteousness.

The Talmud enables us to pass on to our children not only the teachings of what was right for yesterday or today but also what is right forever.



THINKING LIKE AN AUTHOR IN S.K.: LITERACY & IDENTITY

By Heidi Friedman

One cold November morning, Johnny, a Senior Kindergarten student at The Toronto Heschel School, was getting dressed when he turned to his mother and asked her: "What does an author wear to a publishing party where he will read his story?" At dinner that very same night, another young boy, Peter,* announced proudly to his family: "Today I published my first fiction story!" How do five-year-old students, only two months into Senior Kindergarten, come to see themselves as writers who have published a story?

Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist and the founder of the cultural-historical psychology movement, believes that a young child's writing is rooted in the gestures he/she makes as an infant. "Gestures are writing in air, and written signs frequently are simply gestures that have been fixed."¹ When a baby moves his arm, we

smile and say: "He is waving." When a baby bangs on his highchair and says, "Maw Maw," we exclaim excitedly that the baby is asking for more food and we quickly run to bring more food.

Lucy Calkins, the founding director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, describes how we interpret these behaviours: "Because we attach meaning to what could be called meaningless gestures, the gestures assume meaning. Babies learn the power of their gestures by the response to them... In a similar way babies learn the power of language because they are surrounded by people who use language for real reasons and expect children to do so as well."²

How do five-year-old students come to see themselves as published writers?

Calkins believes that we can invite children into the world of written language in the same way that we can invite them into the world of spoken language. She argues that we wouldn't "think of dissecting oral language into component parts" and rank them from simplest to most complex, teaching them to children one at a time.

Why, then, do so many people still think it is helpful to drill young children on all the sounds of the alphabet before inviting them to use the sound-symbol correspondence they know to make meaning on the page? ... The baby says "Dadadada" and we wouldn't think of responding, "Oh no! He is saying Daddy incorrectly. He isn't ready for whole words yet, he needs drill on the da sound."³

At The Toronto Heschel School we, too, believe that children learn written language the same way they learn to communicate verbally: first through gesture and then through spoken language. This is accomplished in conjunction with the firm belief that all children have stories to tell. Our image of children is that they are capable

of communicating in print from a very young age. We send this message to our students from the very beginning of the year.

As soon as children see themselves as writers, their potential for growth and learning increases dramatically; they are no longer afraid to write, they are no longer limited or constrained by self-doubt.

During the first week of school in Senior Kindergarten, all of the children are asked to write a story. The teacher models how she writes a story about herself and then asks the students to do the same. They may choose to tell their stories through a variety of modalities. One student may draw an incredibly detailed picture that tells a complex story. Another may tell a story through pictures and alphabet letters. A third may tell a story using words.

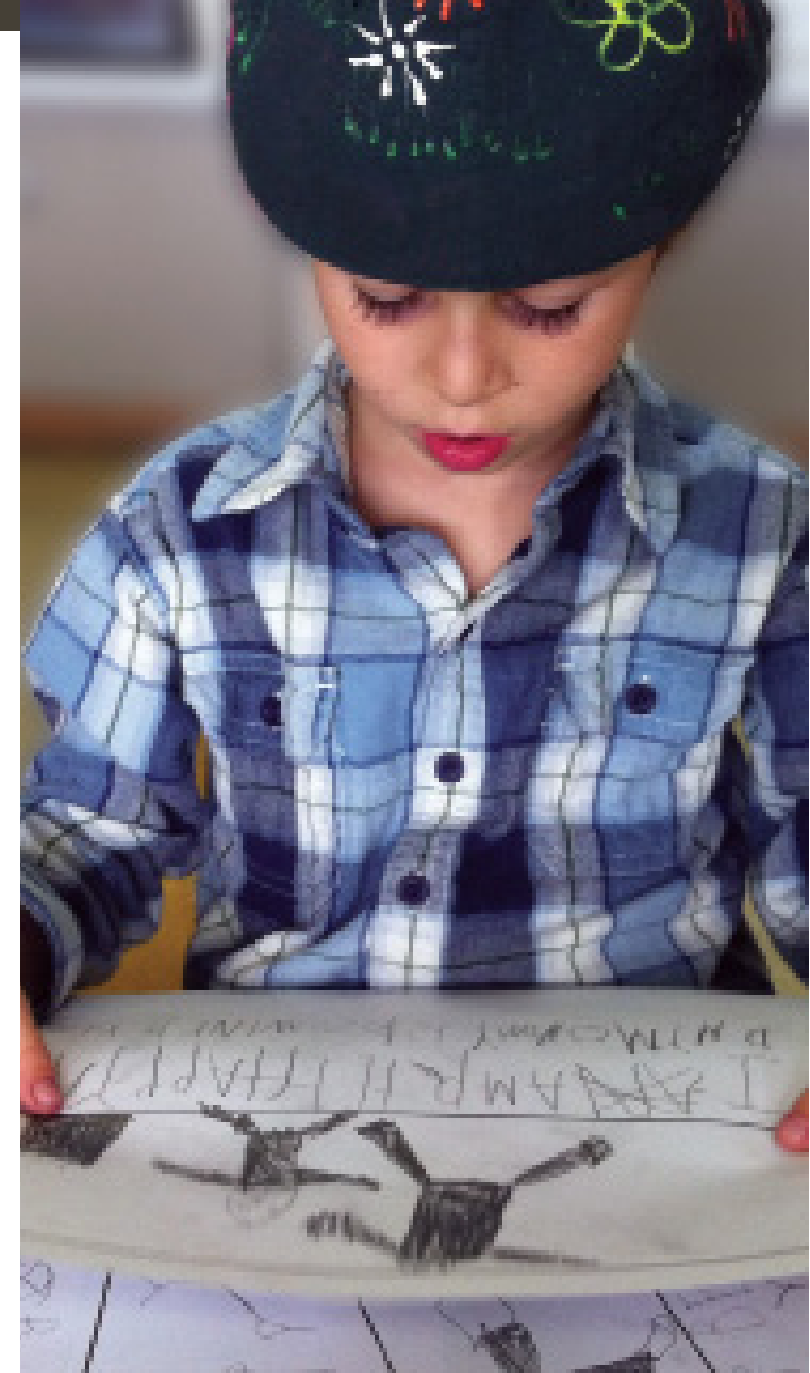
All of these children are telling stories of their lives. We encourage them to draw detailed pictures as a way to tell their stories; we want them to make markings on a page. When this happens, we see it as an indicator of success because this is how children come to see themselves as writers; this is how we believe children can learn to write. When we learn to speak, we don't need to know all of the sounds to say a word; so, too, when we learn to write, we don't need to know all of the letters of the alphabet to communicate a message.

All that a child needs is to be able, in some form, to tell his/her story on paper. As soon as children see themselves as writers, their potential for growth and learning increases dramatically; they are no longer afraid to write, they are no longer limited or constrained by self-doubt. The key is to value and positively reinforce each student's attempt at writing as soon as school begins in September. The goals we set for writing lessons are twofold: we want students to work independently as writers, and we want them to see themselves as individuals who have stories to tell.

A teacher in these precious early days selects her writing lessons intentionally; she cleverly models skills all children in her class can easily learn. Then when students are asked to write independently, they all feel that they can do so. She will not focus on having students learn their letters and sounds at the beginning of the year because she does not want to pressure children at this stage to feel that in order to write they need to write conventionally. This will mean that during the first few days of school some children may not do much actual writing, but this is okay. Once children can independently tell their stories on a page, the teacher can begin to focus on teaching the conventional writing skills.

Children are receptive and able to experiment, but they need to personally engage with the writing process, they need the foundations for confidence in the writing process. Lucy Calkins identifies this in *Launching the Writing Workshop*:

Too many five-and six-year olds watch people read and write, and they think, "That stuff is for someone else. I'm not even close to being the kind of person who can read and write," and so they mentally stand back from reading and writing. If a child has decided that writing is for



other kids, not for him, then the child can be immersed in demonstrations of writing that barely enter his consciousness. The issue of identity, then, has everything to do with engagement.⁴

Literacy skills are synonymous with communication skills. To be a successful member of society, our students need to be able to communicate effectively, and this begins with children developing their identity as communicators. So when a child in Senior Kindergarten comes to see himself as a writer who has published a story, it is not a miracle but a result of intentional and thoughtful teaching.

*All names in this article have been changed.

1 Lucy Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Writing* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), p. 59. / 2 Ibid., pp. 59-60. / 3 Ibid., p. 60. / 4 Lucy McCormick Calkins and Leah Mermelstein, *Launching the Writing Workshop* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), p. 7.

THE POWER OF INTEGRATED LEARNING

By Dan Goldberg

It is said that the best way to learn something is to teach it. Integration is one of the pillars of a Toronto Heschel School education. Having taught in settings where integration was not emphasized, my early encounters with the Heschel approach felt a bit like that moment in the movie *The Wizard of Oz* when the monochromatic sepia tones suddenly shift into vivid technicolour. With integration as an organizing principle, lessons came alive in new and often unexpected ways. Witnessing firsthand the creativity and enthusiasm with which Heschel students approached learning was both moving and inspiring. Now in my fourth year as a teacher at Heschel, I appreciate this opportunity to share what I have learned about integrated education.

Within the field of education, integration takes many forms and is understood in a variety of ways. At Heschel, there are three well-established forms of integration that guide the faculty and that shape the experiences of our students: the integration of Jewish and general studies, the integration of the arts, and interdisciplinary integration. I have also identified a fourth form of integration, which I call process integration.

Years ago, in Los Angeles, I had a professor who had decided to speak only Hebrew to his children. Their mother and everyone else in their lives spoke English. When I asked the four-year-old daughter what language her father spoke to her, she answered, “Hebrew.” When I asked her what language her mother spoke, she responded, “Normal.”

Heschel was the first school in Toronto to emphasize the integration of Jewish and general studies. Where most Jewish day schools have separate Jewish and general studies departments, many Heschel teachers teach on “both sides of the curriculum.” In addition, in

each grade, central curricular themes span multiple Jewish and general subjects. For example, in Grade 5, the theme “From Slavery to Freedom” is echoed throughout the curriculum. In Bible studies, the students study the Exodus from Egypt. In language arts, they read *Underground to Canada* by Barbara Smucker and explore the journey of young American slaves escaping to Canada via the Underground Railroad.

By linking one subject to another, integration maximizes both efficiency and relevance.

At Heschel, our integration of Jewish and general studies and faculty sends the message that Judaism has relevance and meaning in our everyday lives. Jewish values and practices are more than a supplement that adds spice to our lives; they guide the way we live and shape who we are as human beings.

Integration of the arts is central to a Heschel education. A hallmark of arts integration at Heschel is the Artist Statement in which students explore their artistic objectives and choices and express them in a carefully developed written statement. The journey our students make between art and other disciplines is often a roundtrip or even offers multiple destinations.

With the Grade 7 novel study, the journey begins and ends with written language. Artistic expression is the middle step and enables the students to dig deep into the text itself and to explore how the text is affecting them. Reading *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton is a profound experience for a Grade 7 student. The characters are intensely real and, for some students, reading this novel represents the first time they have ever fallen in love with a book.

The final project calls upon the students to translate their feelings and insights about their favourite character into words, images, and symbols on a “Graffiti Wall,” a canvas board 45 by 60 cm in size. The rich content of the Graffiti Wall is then explained in an accompanying Artist Statement. This back-and-forth journey between written words and visual art, between the intellect and levels of experience that precede and transcend rational thought, enables the students to enter the world of the novel in a life-altering way, and it allows the messages and lessons of the novel to take root deep within their consciousness.

At The Toronto Heschel School our emphasis on interdisciplinary integration is based on the understanding that the subjects we teach are artificial constructs that do not reflect the interrelated nature of reality. The “big ideas” and “essential questions” upon which curriculum is built are rarely limited to a single subject. For example, the theme “From Slavery to Freedom” mentioned above is echoed throughout the Grade 5 curriculum. In social studies and civics, the students explore the rights and responsibilities that come with living in a free society. By linking one subject to another and by reinforcing learning in multiple classes, interdisciplinary integration maximizes both efficiency and relevance.

Relevance is a key ingredient to success in any educational setting and it is an essential component of effective integration. Integrated education is not only about finding overarching themes and matching content across different disciplines. Integration is about offering a web of interrelated experiences that support and reinforce a child’s efforts as a growing human being to master essential developmental tasks. True integration goes beyond what we as educators write on a curriculum document. It is what takes place within the consciousness of our students.

The idea of relevance leads me to the fourth form of integration, one that I call process integration as it encompasses the whole of the child’s experience at school. The concepts we teach must be integrated into the process through which they are taught, modelled in the way teachers relate to students, and encouraged in the relationships that students have with one another. Process integration means that the values we teach permeate the life and culture of the classroom and, ultimately, of the school.

In Grade 5, *Underground to Canada*, the Book of Exodus, and the overarching theme “From Slavery to Freedom” are rooted in the emphasis Jewish tradition places on human dignity and our obligation as Jews to use our capacity for empathy as a guide in our treatment of other human beings. These values can only take root in a classroom where the teacher goes out of his/her way to respect the dignity and feelings of his/her students.

At the heart of process integration are authenticity and an integrity that integrates the values one teaches. At the same time, as

important as these values are, authenticity and integrity represent demanding standards that teachers are not always able to meet. At one point or another, even the most caring teachers let their students down in some way – by inadvertently teaching a boring lesson, by responding with impatience, or by failing to keep a promise. Teachers are human and the job of teaching is too complex and challenging for anyone to do it perfectly.

All teachers make mistakes, and I know of only one antidote – the one taught by Jewish tradition: *Teshuvah* (i.e., making amends). Although *Teshuvah* is generally associated with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is a practice that has year-round relevance because mistakes are made in all seasons. *Teshuvah* is a three-step process: acknowledging that one has made a mistake, apologizing and doing one’s best to repair the damage, and taking care not to make the same mistake again.

Integration of Jewish and general studies sends the message that Jewish values and practices are more than a supplement that adds spice to our lives; they guide the way we live and shape who we are as human beings.

Process integration represents every teacher’s biggest and most important challenge. It involves putting aside our role and authority as teachers and standing before our students as fellow human beings who are worth no more and no less than they are. When a teacher performs *Teshuvah*, offering a student or a class a sincere and heartfelt apology, everything that teacher teaches is afforded a special kind of relevance in the minds and hearts of his/her students. As a result, integration occurs on a deep level.

In nearly four years at The Toronto Heschel School, I have already collected what feels like a lifetime of meaningful memories. One particularly poignant memory relates to the end of my first year. There are no bells at Heschel, so on the last day, in the final minute, students watched the clock and counted down as the hands came together to signify noon. “Three – Two – One – Zero!” Suddenly, there was an eruption of hugs and tears.

I was moved and also shocked. Looking back to my own childhood, I recall feeling nothing but unbridled elation and relief at the end of every school year. Of course, students at Heschel look forward to summer vacation. At the same time, their connection with the school and with one another goes very deep – deep enough that even a temporary separation packs an emotional punch.

I am convinced that the connection Heschel students feel with the school, with their teachers, and with their classmates is, in no small part, due to a philosophy of education that permeates the school. This philosophy not only recognizes but also embraces the wholeness and sacredness of each child and views him/her as an essential part of an interrelated and integrated world where school, family, community, Judaism, art, nature, God, and humanity interact. At The Toronto Heschel School, the locus of integration is deeper than any overarching theme, deeper than the curriculum itself. The ultimate integrating factor is the journey that we as teachers and students take together. It is a journey that encompasses the whole of our shared humanity.



JEWISH IDEAS: ORGANIC & ETHICALLY SOURCED

By Yehuda Kurzer

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about the language of "ethical sourcing," which is becoming ubiquitous in consumer contexts. As we become more aware of the increasing complexities of our role as consumers in a global economy, we begin to search for new ways of situating ourselves. This phrasing describes our attempt to trace the paths our consumer goods take before reaching us; helping us to make sure we are not implicitly creating or supporting unethical decisions or processes. I am equally concerned that we embody the same mindfulness when it comes to our Jewish life and leadership.

Most of the tests that North American Jews face can only be called good challenges, or at least, challenges created by good conditions. The boundaries between Jews and non-Jews – long the product of physical separation as well as ethnic stereotyping – have disintegrated to the point of non-existence. North American Jews face periodic flares of anti-Semitism, but no systemic existential threat; and the barriers blocking Jewish social, cultural, and economic mobility are completely gone. If anything, Jewishness has emerged as a source of cache and commodity, rather than as a badge of disgrace, distance, and difference.

These favourable conditions, however, create an enormous challenge of meaning: when Jewishness is no longer self-evident, it needs to be compelling in an entirely new way. Judaism as an ideology has to compete in a climate distrustful of comprehensive ideologies, and Jewish ideas – long venerated for being ancient and thus valuable – are now contested in a landscape that prizes innovation, creativity, and originality.

Much of the attention of the Jewish community and its institutions focuses on the behavioural consequences of this problem, and on the results of what we call Jewish identity. Without the real or metaphorical fences that hold Jews in, how we do keep Jews Jewish? How do we preserve the set of commitments that define Jewish life and retain the Jewish attention span?

Fears of assimilation, intermarriage, and disengagement from Israel tend to focus on behavioural outcomes – what Jews will do if they are disaffected, or equally, what they will not do that we want them to do. As a result, these fears produce certain kinds of programmatic initiatives that encourage us to do this, that, or the other; to go here or there. The path has been to create frameworks for normalizing activities that we hope produce similar behavioural outcomes in the future.

While these initiatives are important – and in many ways continue to sustain the framework of vibrant Jewish communities – they are not comprehensive and, ironically, may be actually making the core problem worse by not addressing the heart of the issues. For if we are attempting to dodge modernity by creating schools, programs, and behaviours that enable us to survive its challenges, are we not in essence accepting that the core intellectual critique of modernity is essentially more powerful than us?

At the Hartman Institute, we create the parameters and content for a different discourse in contemporary Jewish life.

It reminds me of a great Talmudic text that first states that a Jew who lives in Israel is regarded as living in a place where there is God, and a Jew who lives outside the land of Israel is regarded as living in a place where there is no God – an explicit polemic against the Diaspora conditions where the text was being studied. But this teaching is then followed by a story about Rabbi Zeira, who was evading his teacher because he wished to leave Israel for Babylon.

Rabbi Zeira was a real person who, because of present circumstances and his reasonable desire to live wherever he wanted to live, could not abide by the doctrine of the tradition. But his evasion bespoke a

kind of guilty admission that he could not face up to the severity of the doctrine itself. He was, in essence, acknowledging that he could not escape the seriousness of his choices, like the slave who wished to extend his servitude but who had to bear the humiliating and painful mark in his ear in exchange for forfeiting the freedom that civil society expected he take more seriously for himself.

The realities of modern Jewish life present deep philosophical, moral, and existential challenges to every axiom and idea that have defined our tradition up until the present. In addition to programming a way around these hurdles and finding a way to get through them, we have to find a way to confront them head-on. If Judaism truly cannot create a sufficiently compelling intellectual platform for the contemporary world, then our attempt to stay connected to it seems to stem from the need to cling to a thin ethnic particularism.

Recently, Hebrew University researchers released the results of a study of Jewish high school students who overwhelmingly felt that when their school taught them about Israel it was not being authentic. It came across to the students that they were being sold a "bill of goods."

Do we believe there is no deep and authentic *Torah* of Israel that we can teach our kids that will reverberate with both intellectual sophistication and intellectual honesty? Of course not. It is just that sometimes we err on the side of dictating behaviours around a hollowness of meaning; we sometimes focus too much on giving our teachers curricula before studying with them the ideas that are meant to be foundational to their lessons; and we encourage the production of "talking points" about Israel for others to learn (or memorize) without asking the hard questions we sometimes are afraid to ask. There is little provision for ethical sourcing as a general rule.

We see our work at the Hartman Institute as a step in a different direction – as an attempt to create the parameters and content

for a different discourse in contemporary Jewish life. At the heart of what we do is our Bet Midrash – house of study – but in our case it is modular and mobile, with windows open to present-day realities, constructed not only by classical texts but also by modern ideas, and heated by the hopes, anxieties, and real questions of its participants.

How can we we animate a meaningful conversation about faith in the age of skepticism?

We think of this type of study less in behaviourally programmatic terms – designed to answer the question of what we want you to do afterwards – and more in terms of a site that welcomes creativity and seeking. Our Bet Midrash is a place for the kind of exercise that reinforces and confronts the core commitments that underlie everything that we ultimately do. In most cases, the big questions in this type of study are more substantial than the answers we can provide; and the best outcomes are an elevated discourse and a deeper sophistication of thought that teach us to be confident when facing big challenges. It is important that we know there is a tradition at the disposal of Jews in the present that can help us deal with the challenges of the future.

How do we approach the critique of collectivity in an age of individualism? How can we animate a meaningful conversation about faith in the age of skepticism? How can a Jewishness born in the Diaspora adapt itself so it can be vibrant and still authentic under the aegis of sovereignty? These are all questions that exceed what the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America can achieve in an extended series, much less a short study session. But the exercise itself grants us the confidence to believe that we are actually up for the challenge and reinforces our conviction that we can do so mindfully, thoughtfully, and ethically.



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BEYOND DIFFERENCE: IN OUR COMMUNITY CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ARE STILL SEEN AS “THE OTHER”

By Dr. Mitch Parker

“We would love to have the students from Zareinu come visit our class, but please only send the normal looking ones, so they do not frighten our first grade children.”

“We are interested in sending our child to your integrated class, but we do not want him placed with any retarded students. We are not ready for that.”

“I want to go swimming at the other school, but a lot of my friends will be there & I do not want them to identify me as a Zareinu student because they will make fun of me.”

“Good luck with your attempt to open up a Yeshiva for students with learning challenges, but we cannot give you space for them in our school, because they do not fit the profile of students our board has approved.”

“Please do not let anyone know that I have a child in Zareinu so that I will not have trouble with *shidduchim* for my other sons and daughters.”

We have made great strides in the care, treatment, and understanding of people with developmental and physical disabilities over the past forty years. Children are guaranteed an appropriate education, buildings must be accessible, inclusion is promoted in our institutions, and state-of-the art programs for both children and adults are available and funded by the community. However, as the comments opposite appear to attest, the latent perception of an individual with disability as “other” (אחר) persists among parents, children, and professionals. Clearly, we still have a way to go before people with learning, developmental, and physical challenges are fully accepted and embraced as complete members of *klal yisrael*, the Jewish community.

We must actively accept and embrace people with learning, behavioural, and developmental differences. They should be a “part of” and not “separate from.”

Why do some people and institutions in the Toronto Jewish community shy away from people who appear to be less able than or different from them? I believe it is because of a strong sense inculcated within our culture that every parent must push his/her child to be superior and that every educational agency needs to position itself as one that cultivates outstanding achievement. Our sons and daughters and our schools must all be superlative; if not, they are somehow not worthy of consideration. Average is not good; below average is not acceptable. There appears to be a communal concern that having a relationship with or to admit that one’s child or student population has anything to do with the developmentally challenged boy or girl down the street will somehow result in negative consequences.

Why do some people and institutions in the Toronto Jewish community shy away from people who appear to be less able than or different from them?

This attitude must change if we are to consider ourselves to be an *am kadosh*, a holy community, and if we are to embrace all of our brethren as part of *klal yisrael*. There are some signs of optimism. In the Zareinu world alone several schools have taken significant steps in the right direction. One and a half years ago, Rabbi Pliner, head of Eitz Chaim Schools, invited Zareinu to open a class at its Patricia campus. We now have ten students who consider themselves to be as much part of Eitz Chaim as of Zareinu; ten students with learning challenges who participate every day in gym, lunch, recess, and davening with their typical peers. Rabbi Pliner readily admits that as much as this arrangement has benefited the students of Zareinu, these benefits are far outweighed by those gained by the students of Eitz Chaim.

For the past two years Zareinu students have participated in the annual community Zimriyah choral festival, an important accomplishment on its own. In addition, our students sing their songs proudly with a group of volunteer boys and girls from Associated who learn the songs and sing with our students. Zareinu students also march proudly alongside students from Associated Hebrew Day School, Netivot HaTorah, and Bialik Hebrew Day School in the annual Yom Ha’Atzmaut parade on Atkinson Road in Thornhill.

What needs to be done to further improve the situation? I believe that we must actively work at both accepting and embracing people with learning, behavioural, and developmental differences. We must make sure that they are active participants in our activities and programs. They should be a “part of” and not “separate from.” Most importantly, we must internalize the *Torah* values that each and every one of us is a child of God, everyone has a place in the world, and no individual is any better or worse than any other. We need to celebrate our diversity. Every person has his/her own unique role to play in God’s plan for life on this earth.

We must internalize the *Torah* values that each and every one of us is a child of God, everyone has a place in the world, and no individual is better or worse than any other.

I learned many years ago at Camp Ramah that the most successful counsellors, and the happiest, were those who could see beyond the limitations and the differences of their campers with special needs. They effortlessly and unconsciously perceived the special-needs children as trying to enjoy their camping experience just like anyone else. It is time for us to replace *acher* (they are other) with *echad* (we are one).





MINDFUL PARENTING: MOMENTS OF TOGETHERNESS ARE JUST THE BEGINNING

By Dr. Jasmine Eliav

Look around. Whether we're standing in a line for coffee, waiting at a stop sign, or walking the school hallways, as parents we are tirelessly trying to fit everything in. We have become professional multi-taskers. With almost complete dependency on mobile technology, we juggle to-do lists and multiple e-vites and emails, which we read but forget to respond to, distracted by prioritizing a flooded inbox. There is not even true reprieve at bedtime because, for many of us, our iPhones or BlackBerrys put us to sleep at night and wake us up in the morning.

Many parents feel as though we are racing through life trying to balance families, work, relationships, and schedules. It is becoming more difficult to find time to simply be with our children, not actively doing something for them but just connecting, relaxing, and enjoying being with them. Where are the quiet moments? As a clinical child psychologist and a parent I recognize the increasing effort it requires to slow life down, to truly calm our mind and body, to be mindful of each moment.

The concept of "mindful parenting" elucidates the value of being present in our parenting, of noticing "the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment."¹ Mindful parents cultivate the self-awareness necessary to shift from doing to being, to temporarily letting go of all the expectations and needs we carry.

Mindful parenting relies on our ability to hear our children with thoughtful intention. For example, reflect on how many times your child asks you the same question, consider the quality of your response; are you truly paying attention? Thoughtful intention

implies listening to the content of what the child is saying, while considering his/her facial expression, body movement, and emotional state.

Mindful parents questions their role and reflect on the impact of their emotions, behaviours and words.

Furthermore, a mindful approach examines our capacity as parents for self-reflection. So much of our parenting culture encourages "changing" behavioural problems in the child without careful consideration of our role or the context. A mindful parent has the ability to question her own role and reflect on how her emotions, non-verbal behaviours and words affect a given situation. Many parents discipline while on autopilot, automatically reacting to our children's behaviours. A mindful approach involves recognizing and challenging the specific habitual patterns that we develop when relating to our children. For example, how do our behaviours as multi-tasking parents, our stressors, moods, work schedules, and our BlackBerrys affect our children?

Finally, mindful parenting involves spontaneity in play, where the focus is on letting the child take the lead while playing rather than following our directions. Our culture supports the notion that early instruction is of paramount importance, and so many of us learn to juggle prescribed enrichment activities that focus on our children. The hope is that, in addition to vigorous schooling, these extracurricular classes will help them become skilled, well-rounded, successful, and cultured individuals.

However, with an average of three activities a week, have we lost

the family balance? I would like to promote the importance of unstructured play as an essential aspect of healthy development. Pretend play provides children with the opportunity to transform objects and actions symbolically. It also provides them with the space to process and integrate all that they have absorbed during the day. Spontaneous play encourages creativity, perspective-taking, empathy, interpersonal communication, and cognitive strategies, such as negotiation, planning, problem-solving, goal seeking, language development, and reasoning. If you listen closely enough and truly let your child lead, his/her play often contains perceptions of you and how he/she is experiencing your behaviours.

As I was thinking about the concept of finding time and elevating its importance in our relationships with our children, I began to think about the Sabbath and the Jewish laws designed to protect time each week. My dear friend Dana Cohen, who is the Junior High Division Head at The Toronto Heschel School, introduced me to Rabbi Abraham Heschel's book *The Sabbath*.

The Sabbath provokes thoughtful reflection about the virtues of designating and appreciating time. Although Rabbi Heschel's words were written about the Sabbath, for me they resonate beautifully with the struggle of parents to protect time. He poignantly describes that "a special consciousness is required to recognize the ultimate significance of time."²

Heschel further describes the responsibilities that individuals shoulder throughout the week. He writes, "All week we may ponder and worry whether we are rich or poor, whether we succeed or fail in our occupations; whether we accomplish or fall short of our goals."³ He refers to these pressures as our attempt to gain power in the world of space, to do things with the intention of reaching greater professional, financial, and intellectual heights.

As parents and members of society, these aspirations help ensure our individual success and shape the comfort and opportunity we provide for our children. However, Heschel warns, "The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own, but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord."⁴

Rabbi Heschel reminds us of the determination it takes to set aside time and the risks of racing through life.

Rabbi Heschel's homage to time reminds us of the determination it takes to set aside time in our busy world and the potential risks of racing through life. The Sabbath is a weekly preservation of time despite all other competing interests. I believe that the specific, deliberate preservation of family-based time is also essential.

In my practice, I hear parents tell me that their children are easily bored and need constant stimulation. I believe this is a direct result of the way our society has overstructured parenting and childhood. Along with teaching our children through direct instruction, we need to model how to stand still, how to embrace time, and how

to be present, mindful, and reflective in our personal relationships.

Heschel poignantly suggests that "the Sabbath is the inspirer, the other days the inspired."⁵ This statement reminds parents that the precious moments of togetherness will inspire us to integrate this renewed consciousness into our day-to-day lives.

We need to model how to stand still, embrace time, and be present, mindful, and reflective in our personal relationships.

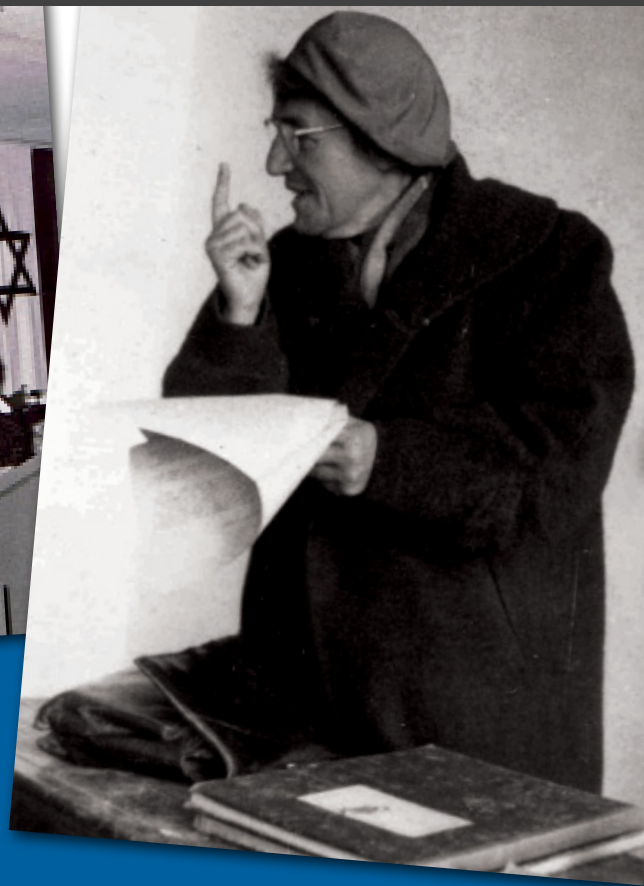
It is incumbent upon us as parents to continuously discover and enjoy who our children are, not just who we wish them to be. Our challenge is to construct time in the midst of our busy weeks to guiltlessly refrain from direction and to learn, in a restful state of heightened awareness, how to celebrate our children while we watch and wonder.

1 John Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness-Based Intervention in Context: Past, Present and Future," *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, 2 (2003), p. 145. / 2 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Macmillan, 2005), p. 96. / 3 Ibid., p. 30. / 4 Ibid., p. 3. / 5 Ibid., p. 22.





MEMORIES OF NECHAMA LEIBOWITZ ז"ל



Nechama Leibowitz speaks at the 1983 award ceremony for the Bialik Prize, an important Israeli award granted by the Tel Aviv municipality for significant accomplishments in Hebrew literature, both fiction and Jewish thought. Nechama was awarded the prize that year, and spoke on behalf of the winners.

Always one to connect our Monday class to the *Torah* portion of the week, she would inquire what we had been doing while the *Torah* was being read in shul on *Shabbat*? The implication was that we would certainly be able to answer her questions in class if we had been paying close attention during the *Sabbath* service. She connected it all. And she taught us to see all the learning as one.

Nechama believed that one had to experience *Torah*, not just listen to it.

Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, none of Nechama's classes were ever recorded. This was no accident. She loved to remind us that there were no tape recorders at Mount Sinai: "*B'Har Sinai lo hayu* tape recorders." The learning was in the moment.

Nechama believed that one had to experience *Torah*, not just listen to it. Sometimes I wonder what she would think of the communication explosion of the computer age today, when many people listen to downloaded *Torah* lessons as they drive to work or answer email. My guess is that she would assess this multi-tasking as both good and bad. I think she might find it sad how people think they can achieve serious learning in such an incidental manner, and yet she would most surely think it's wonderful that so many people have such a thirst for *Torah* learning.

Nechama's work was everywhere. She taught in every educational setting imaginable, both religious and secular; she gave classes in universities, *yeshivot*, high schools, kibbutzim, teacher seminaries, and everywhere in between. Her reach extended beyond the State of Israel as dedicated students corresponded with her by mail from the four corners of the world.

In 1942 she began issuing her now famous study sheets, her *gilyonot*, and she pursued this Herculean task with love for 30 years. Each week she would select a section of the *parsha*, the *Torah* portion of the week, together with explanations of the text and the insights of several commentators. She would also create and pose a new series of questions that could help students to better understand the *Torah* and its commentaries. For Nechama, it was never enough to understand what the commentators were saying; her students had to understand why they were saying it.

Those questions that she felt were challenging, she marked with an x, the extremely challenging received a double x: What difficulty in the text led to Rashi's comment? What nuance in the wording forced Nachmanides to disagree with Rashi and why did Rashi maintain his explanation nonetheless? What support can be brought from a given Psalm to the approach of the Abarbanel? Nechama's questions guided us and prodded us to dig for deeper and deeper meaning.

Students mailed in their answers to Nechama on half-filled pages, folding the answer sheet in two to allow her the space to write

her comments back on the half page left empty. She meticulously read and corrected each of the tens of thousands of *gilyanot* sent by her "virtual" community of learners, who came from all walks of life and lived all around the world. Nechama never published answers to her questions, because she believed that students should not be spoon-fed.

She loved to describe how the *Torah* never spells out the lessons of its narrative and how the reader of the passage must search for it. She sought truth wherever she could find it and cited non-traditional and non-Jewish sources as appropriate. One of the most salient features of her enduring legacies was how she taught her students to appreciate the value in searching.

Nechama's focus was to elucidate the moral messages that are contained within the *Torah*. She pursued this overarching goal despite, or perhaps thanks to, her focus on the intricacies of the original biblical text. She showed us how the *Torah* presents only the facts of its narrative thereby urging the reader to undertake a close and careful analysis of the text to derive the moral message.

Nechama influenced the course of *Torah* study like no other in our times.

We learned to see that the *Torah* may be purposefully ambiguous with multiple, even contradictory, interpretations, that such tensions are an integral part of *Torah* learning, enriching us with multiple messages. Yet every *Torah* lesson must serve to make each individual a better person and society a more moral place to live.

Sadly, Nechama never had biological children, although our rabbis do teach that our children are our students. In this respect, Nechama was mother to many. Her love of *Torah*, love of all Jews, and love of the land of Israel are legacies that continue to live on through her thousands of "children," whose approach to *Torah* learning and living she nurtured. May her children continue to teach *Torah* for generations to come.

Photos courtesy of the family of Nechama Leibowitz, with thanks to Judah Harris www.judahsharris.com/visit



By Rabbi Jay Kelman

During my rabbinic training I studied for a year in Jerusalem with a humble unassuming woman. She was Nechama Leibowitz ז"ל, the foremost Bible scholar of the 20th century; she influenced the course of *Torah* study like no other in our times. She believed *Torah* was a guide to living. Her teaching inspires me still today.

Nechama – as she insisted her students call her – was, very simply, a teacher par excellence. Aside from her name and dates of birth and death, her tombstone bears just one word: *Morah*, teacher.

During that year in Jerusalem, Nechama pleaded with us to make Israel our home. I remember her saying, "I don't understand why you want to live in exile. We have been persecuted, hated and killed, and yet, despite the opportunity you have to return home, you choose to live in a non-Jewish environment!" She wanted us all to come to Israel.

When she was 25, Nechama did just that. Born in Riga in 1905, she received her doctorate from the University of Marburg and in 1930 emigrated to Israel. She left Israel only once thereafter, for a short visit to her aging parents.

Despite the numerous invitations to teach in the Diaspora that Nechama received, she insisted that whoever wanted to study with her could do so in Israel. And hundreds did. She felt insulted when

her refusals to travel abroad were met with enhanced financial incentives; she wondered how people could possibly think she would compromise on her values for money. Nechama walked the talk.

Let me describe a typical class. We met every Monday for 90 minutes. And I stress "every"! Nechama made it very clear that her students would come to her every week or not come at all! Her classes were not some lecture series or university course where students could attend or not as they pleased.

The *Torah* never spells out the lessons... Nechama taught her students to appreciate the value in searching.

And pity the student who did not bring a *Tanach*, the complete set of the 24 biblical books. Nechama taught us to remember that the entire Bible was an integrated entity and so, while on one day we may have been learning Genesis, to be fully prepared for class she required us to have all the biblical texts available, ready and at hand. For each methodological point she taught, she would show us its recurrence in many different contexts throughout the biblical canon. We learned the *Torah* as a whole.

We answered her questions not by raising our hands but by writing our answers on a piece of paper. Nechama would walk around the room and make such comments as "*Lo ra*" (Not bad) or "*Lo nachon*" (Wrong.) If we were deserving of it, she would simply say, "*Nachon*" (Correct).

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