



# think

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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## ISRAEL'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

YOSSI KLEIN-HALEVI

## LEARNING HEBREW IS GOOD FOR THE BRAIN

LISA RICHLER

## REMEMBERING RABBI WEISS

MARTIN LOCKSHIN





# INTEGRATION:

## STRETCHING CANVAS FOR A BIGGER FRAME

In school settings, the word "integration" perhaps calls to mind the desegregation of American schools during the civil rights movement or departments of interdisciplinary studies at universities. Today integration speaks to reframing ideas by widening their scope, enhancing topics through context and purpose. In this issue of *think*, our contributors fill the canvas with integrated studies.

Greg Beiles highlights how ritual in Jewish law and tradition teaches a culture of self-discipline, respect, and fortitude for behaving ethically. Greg later describes how poetry helps students advance literacy skills. Gail Baker illuminates teachers' inner lives as their essential professional qualification: they must want to learn. Teacher Aliza Millo exemplifies the inquiring mind and shares her own awakening to the power of integrated study.

Lisa Richler describes the double value of learning Hebrew as a second language, empowering cognitive skills while enriching Jewish identity. Dr. Jeff Weissberger discusses a learning culture for integrated thinking: he finds it in medical schools and at Toronto Heschel.

Yossi Klein-Halevi portrays Israel's social and spiritual history through contemporary Israeli pop music. Professor Martin Lockshin, an inspiration to so many students here in Toronto, reminisces about his most inspiring teacher.

*think* features two new books. Joe Kanofsky reviews *Beyond Courage: The Untold Stories of Jewish Resistance* during the Holocaust by Doreen Rappaport. And *think* interviews Baruch Sienna, author of *The Natural Bible*, recently published by Behrman House.

In "The Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel," Brandeis professor Reuven Kimelman glimpses how Heschel understood the integration of ideas, "Where others saw dichotomies, Heschel saw polarities."<sup>1</sup> Stepping back for a wider perspective, we see how things relate to one another, even when up close they appear disconnected or at odds. A bird's-eye view says so much.

Music and lyrics crystallize to show social change. Jewish rituals build culture. Hebrew vocabulary touches mind and soul. Unseen heroism exists. Stand back. *think* will broaden your view of education. Let's stretch the canvas for a bigger frame.

<sup>1</sup> *First Things* (December 2009), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/11/the-theology-of-abraham-joshua-heschel>

### RESPONSA

Dear *think*:

I just read Claire Merbaum's article in *think* (Issue #12). Thanks Claire for putting in words what I have always believed and felt about about the Lola Stein curriculum taught at Heschel. I too have heard Adele Diamond speak and made similar observations about executive functioning skills and Toronto Heschel education. Toronto Heschel students are truly blessed to be the beneficiaries of this educational experience. Claire's contribution to *think* hit the nail on the head. Thank you and mazal tov on a great piece.

Jessica Naves Gladman

**think**  
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The Lola Stein Institute offers consultation in integrated studies and curriculum development, presents workshops for educators, and publishes *think: The Lola Stein Institute Journal*.

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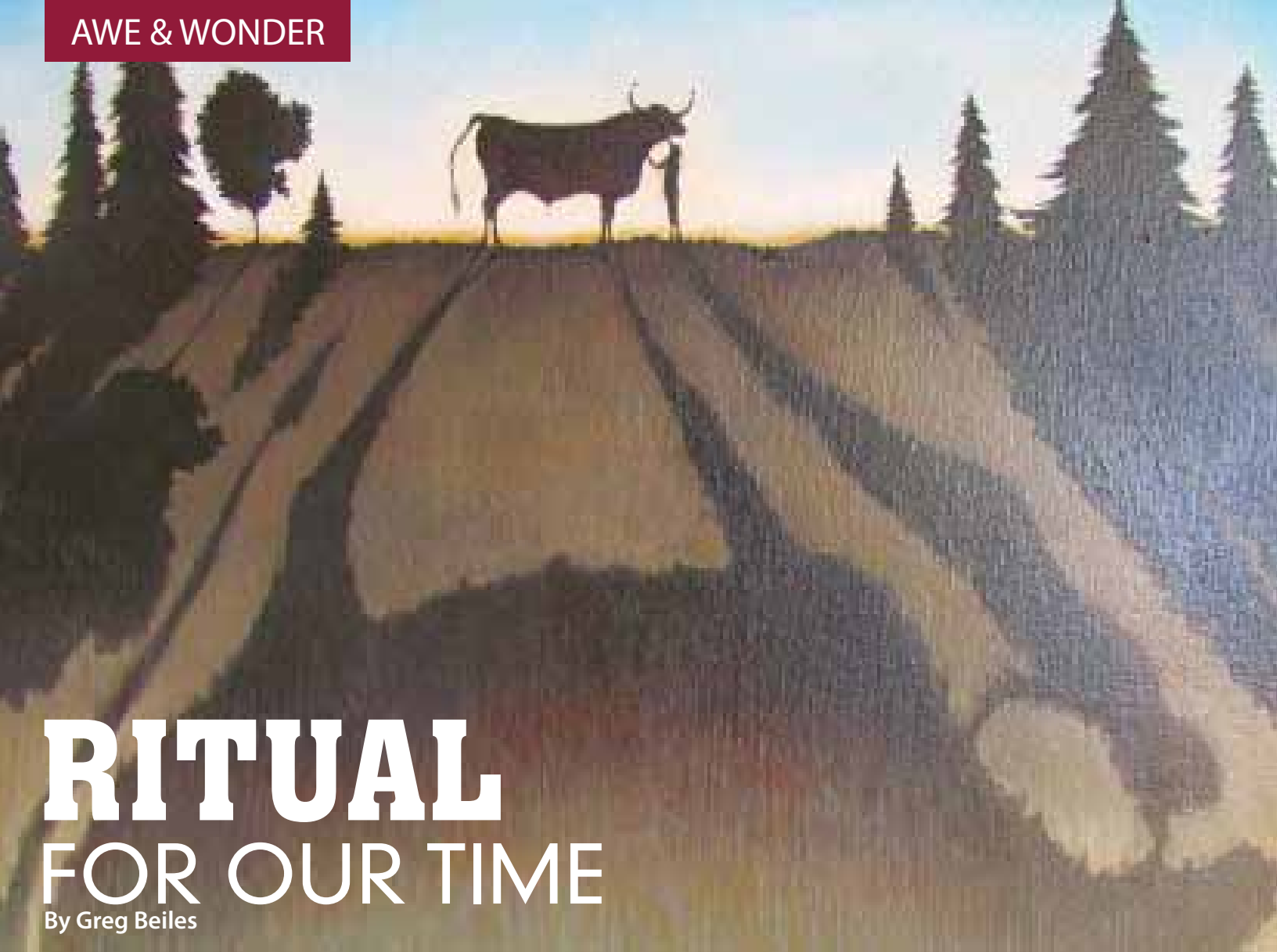
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# RITUAL FOR OUR TIME

By Greg Beiles

Self-Portrait with Pogo by Lindee Climo ©2012 Lindee Climo. Mira Godard Gallery

Jewish tradition recounts a debate among the ancient rabbis over which biblical passage might encapsulate the whole teaching of the Torah.<sup>1</sup> One rabbi states that the verse announcing the unity of God – “Listen, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One” – contains the whole Torah. A second rabbi responds that the ethical verse “You will love your neighbour as yourself” is the preeminent verse. A third rabbi declares “You will sacrifice a lamb in the morning and another after dusk” and claims this as the quintessential verse of the Torah.

**...anyone who reads biblical laws concerning oxen and thinks that an ox is just an ox, is himself an ox.**

To the contemporary ear, the first two positions sound reasonable: the idea of monotheism, of a unifying force in the universe seems like a pretty significant concept, worthy of representing the whole Torah. Likewise, the ethical principle of the Golden Rule resonates with us. But the third position, the suggestion that the whole Torah can be discerned in the principle of daily animal sacrifice, seems outdated and, to some, even ethically offensive. Why, then, does the master of the rabbis conclude that, in fact, the law is in accordance with this third position?

We must first avoid the easy temptation to disregard the ruling as an anachronism and no longer relevant: “Animal sacrifice? We don’t do that anymore. Loving our neighbours as ourselves – well that’s a more modern idea.” Better, would be to regard this ruling as a metaphor. As the Talmudic scholar Adin Steinsaltz wittily remarked, anyone who reads biblical laws concerning oxen and thinks that an ox is just an ox is himself an ox.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the sacrifice of an ox or, in this case, a lamb is a metaphor; but a metaphor for what? And how does this metaphor help us as educators?

At one level, it is a metaphor that speaks to the importance of daily ritual. As educators and parents, we know that children benefit both cognitively and emotionally from daily ritual. Daily ritual provides children, especially young children, with a sense of stability and comfort. It allows them to anticipate the day, and to appreciate patterns in their everyday routines. And this, in turn, aids creativity and insight. It is on the canvas woven by regularity that children feel safe and confident enough to take creative risks. Against a background of patterns, it becomes possible to notice irregularities and to innovate.

And yet, modern people and modern educators are often suspicious of ritual. To be sure, ritual sometimes serves merely as a way of maintaining control. We have all met teachers who insist on certain classroom

routines – sitting a certain way, writing the date a certain way, and so on. Some students thrive in this kind of structure, but others find it oppressive and unnecessary. For some, ritual means certainty, for others it seems to conflict with freedom and authenticity: Why do you have to say please and thank you if you don’t feel grateful? Why would you say blessings over food before and after eating if you’re not sure that you “believe in” God. (As if belief is a matter of being sure!)

There is an aspect to ritual that is not only about structure and regulation. The text concerning the twice-daily sacrifice of a lamb is also a metaphor for something else: it is a metaphor for making an offering. In ancient Israel, animal sacrifice was used to make an offering to God as a sign of gratitude or to seek forgiveness for a misdeed. In other words, ritual sacrifice was a way to strengthen, maintain, or restore a relationship with the Divine.

**Students perform daily chores in the classroom and common lunchroom... As these rituals became an embedded part of daily practice, we noticed a palpable change in lunchroom culture – a quieter, calmer, more respectful environment.**

Today, human beings use rituals in an analogous way. We have set practices, customs, and habits that we hold on to and observe with respect. The ritual of giving gifts on special occasions, of offering kind and polite words, of holding the door for someone to enter, of apologizing for error – all of these are rituals that initiate, maintain, strengthen, or restore relationships.

When the master rabbi affirmed the primacy of the twice-daily sacrifice, his decision acknowledged both dimensions of ritual: its regularity and its power to build relationships. By emphasizing regularity as well as relationship, the rabbi taught that ritual not only expresses the relationships we already have – with people or with God – but also, when done on a regular basis, ritual actually produces these relationships! We hold the door open not only for our friends but also as a gesture that opens up the possibility to engender new friendships.

This becomes much clearer when we look at how the aforementioned debate among the rabbis is structured. The unity of God, which is to say, the recognition of the sanctity of all God’s creation is the ultimate goal. A key way to achieve this goal is to recognize the sanctity of each person – to treat each person as oneself. But the method or way to actually do this practically is through daily rituals of offerings – whether by word or deed. The rabbi established the primacy of ritual as the “law,” because the law, like ritual, teaches us how to act and behave despite how we may feel.

The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas summarizes this understanding of the rabbis’ debate:

The way that leads to God, therefore leads to man [i.e., humanity]; and the way that leads to man draws us back to ritual discipline and self-education. Its greatness lies in its daily regularity.<sup>3</sup>

Several years ago Toronto Heschel School initiated a school-wide ritual practice called *Middat Hashavuah* – the “weekly ethical practice.” Each week, students and staff focus on implementing

a particular ethical action (*middah*), which can be derived from the weekly Torah portion. Students review the *middah* with their teacher each morning and discuss ways to implement it. As part of their Shabbat preparation at week’s end, the students reflect together on how well and in which ways they have practised the *middah* over the course of the week.

**As educators and parents, we know that children benefit from daily ritual.**

The school also guides students in practising other rituals during their day; for example, performing *netillat yadayim* (the ritual handwashing prior to meals) and reciting *birkat hamazon* (the blessing after meals). The school requires that each day the students take time to care and clean their classroom and the common lunchroom.

Despite resistance from some students contending that they “don’t believe” in a particular ritual, and from some parents who argue that they don’t pay tuition to have students wipe down tables, Heschel teachers have worked hard to maintain these rituals, primarily through role-modelling. As these rituals have become an embedded part of our school’s daily practice, we have noticed a palpable change in our lunchroom culture – it has become a quieter, calmer, more respectful environment. Ritual helps to create the culture that effectively builds community.

Ritual is the main theme of the third book of the Torah, *Sefer Vayikra* (*Leviticus*). I have always considered *Sefer Vayikra* to be the “heart” of the Torah, not only because of its position as the third of the five books of the Torah but especially because of its significance as a spiritual-ethical guide. Most progressive Jewish schools tend to skip over the lengthy portions of *Sefer Vayikra* that deal with the details of animal sacrifice and other ritual affairs. Instead, they focus only on chapter 19, the famous “Holiness Code,” which contains such ethical gems as “love your neighbour as yourself.” At The Toronto Heschel School, we believe that, in order to appreciate the ethical messages of the Holiness Code, students must study the chapters concerning animal sacrifice, kashrut, and other ritual practices. These chapters remind us that the most beautiful ethical imperatives will fail us unless we appreciate and regularly practise the self-discipline and generosity that rituals teach.

1 A traditional midrash cited by Rabbi Ya’akov ibn Chaviv in the Introduction, *Ein Ya’akov*.

2 Cited in Raphael Ahren, “Never Mind the Bible, It’s the Sanity of the Talmud You Need to Understand the World and Yourself,” *Times of Israel*, August 9, 2012.

3 Emmanuel Levinas, “A Religion for Adults,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Delaware: The John Hopkins UP, 1990), p. 19.

**Greg Beiles, M.A.,** is the Director of The Lola Stein Institute, and Curriculum and Training Consultant for The Toronto Heschel School. Greg targets high academic standards through a culture of learning that integrates Torah, arts, science, and ethical awareness and strengthens children’s cognitive, emotional, and spiritual capacities.



# LOOK AT THE TEACHER: SEEK A MINDSET FOR GROWTH



By Gail Baker

Malka Regan and Edna Sharet, Division Heads at The Toronto Heschel School attended the Harvard Graduate School of Education in July 2012. Their summer course was entitled, "Improving Schools, The Art of Leadership."



Educational excellence of course demands a curriculum based on critical creative thinking and a teaching staff knowledgeable in the academic disciplines, but the magic of the very best classroom experience emerges from the personality of the teacher. After 17 years as a school leader and educator, I can confidently say that classroom success depends on two things: how teachers see their students and how they see themselves. While healthy relationships between teachers and students are important, what matters most in the classroom is what is going on inside the teacher's head. A teacher's mindset, defined at <http://oxforddictionaries.com> as the "established set of values that someone holds," will either create or obstruct a child's opportunity to learn.

**Classroom success depends on how teachers see their students and how they see themselves.**

Great teachers notice their students' personal qualities and correlate their teaching with these attributes so that their students succeed. In the Torah, *Parshat Lekh Lekha* describes how God keeps Avraham in mind and uses various pedagogical methods to keep him on track as he seeks the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> God addresses Avraham's confusions and misgivings with an understanding of the human condition that pushes the mission forward, even as Avraham questions God and doubts God's motives: God encourages Avraham and promises to show him the land (*Bershit* 12:1–2); God requires Avraham to mark himself with circumcision as a physical reminder of the covenant (*Bershit* 17:11); and God inspires Avraham by sending angels to announce Sarah's pregnancy to reassure him of his progeny (*Bershit* 17:21).

As I looked through *Lekh Lekha* for multi-dimensional pedagogy, I noticed that not only do these biblical passages reveal God's understanding of His student, Avraham, but they also indicate that God's mindset as a teacher was one to model. The multiplicity of techniques God employed to bring Avraham along underscores God's commitment to Avraham reaching Canaan, even while Avraham felt tested and confused en route.

This reflection reminds me of the story of Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan. As you probably recall, Helen Keller became blind and deaf

at the age of 18 months. Her communication with the entire world was cut off until Annie Sullivan came into her life as her teacher. What was it about Annie Sullivan that allowed this very challenging relationship to flourish and enabled Helen to succeed?<sup>2</sup>

Annie was a creative, tenacious, and courageous thinker. When she taught Helen, she found that many strategies didn't work, yet she persisted and tried as many different tactics as were needed until Helen was successful. The famous breakthrough came when Annie held Helen's hands under running water and, while doing so, spelled out each letter of the word "water" by touch on Helen's hand. Finally, Helen understood that what she was feeling was what her teacher's fingers were identifying with the word "water." Annie then took Helen to explore her surroundings, spelling out everything by touch until Helen understood how words were connected to meaning.

The Avraham and the Helen Keller stories exemplify how students benefit from teachers with growth mindsets. God kept faith with Avraham by using multi-sensory techniques to support him on the path to the Promised Land. Annie Sullivan had faith in Helen Keller and kept her on a path by understanding who Helen was and what she could do. As we know, Avraham did reach Canaan and Helen Keller achieved impressive international success as an author and lecturer.

**Good teachers see themselves as creative, capable of bringing in new ideas and not overly committed to past practices.**

Annie Sullivan was driven to teach those whom the world had forsaken because that fate was what she experienced early in her life. She, too, was visually impaired and had been abandoned at a young age. Fortunately, an inspector at her orphanage understood Annie's gift and helped her to go to school. He was what psychologist and researcher Dr. Julius Segal called the "charismatic adult" in her life, someone from whom a child gathers strength.<sup>3</sup> Annie Sullivan, in turn, became Helen Keller's "charismatic adult."

We want our teachers to be like Annie Sullivan. We want them to

see their students as children who can grow and learn and whose achievements are not "fixed." To assure ourselves of this, we have to look inside our teachers and ask them how they view themselves. Dr. Robert Brooks, a psychologist who researches and publishes on the subject of raising resilient children, writes that the differing mindsets, attitudes, and assumptions held by teachers about themselves and their students are the main determinants in how they will teach and what their expectations of their students will be.<sup>4</sup>

**The mindset of our teachers is the real game in town.**

School leaders are responsible for securing teachers who have the right mindset for their schools. A good teacher will see himself as creative, as capable of bringing in new ideas and as not overly committed to past practices. She will be a critical thinker who can evaluate and be evaluated openly, and who collaborates well with peers, students, and parents. For instance, if staff decline professional development seeing themselves as sufficiently experienced professionals, this shows me a "fixed mindset." And, as Dr. Carol Dweck says in her book *Mindset*, a teacher who has a fixed mindset about herself will likely feel the same about her students.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of teacher might say, "Suzy is naturally good at mathematics; reading is just not her strength," or "Jamie is just not that bright. How can we expect him to think in an abstract way?" If you delve deep into this teacher's psyche, chances are she too sees herself in fixed and particular ways.

**The teachers who see themselves as perpetual learners are those whose students succeed.**

Contrast a teacher set in his ways with the teacher who, just for fun, takes a class or seminar and gets excited about the learning. Teachers who see learning as a joy have a "growth mindset." Whether they are 20, 40, or 60 years old, the teachers who see themselves as perpetual learners are those whose students succeed.

We who are the heads of our schools spend a great deal of time fashioning the right curriculum and building a supportive community to educate our children. We also have to look at our teachers thoughtfully and honestly and be thankful for their enthusiasm, their commitment, and their wisdom. The mindset of our teachers is the real game in town.

1 Rabbi Nathan Laufer, *The Genesis of Leadership: What the Bible Teaches Us about Vision, Values and Leading Change* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), pp. 43, 45.

2 See the video *Teacher*, included in Stephen R. Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

3 Julius Segal cited in Robert Brooks, "To Touch a Child's Heart and Mind: The Mindset of the Effective Educator," Center for Development and Learning, [http://www.cd.l.org/resource-library/articles/touch\\_child.php](http://www.cd.l.org/resource-library/articles/touch_child.php)

4 Robert Brooks, "To Touch a Child's Heart and Mind."

5 Dr. Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006).

**Gail Baker, M.Ed.**, co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and has served as Head of the School since 2001. She is the Learning Community Director of The Lola Stein Institute, which she co-founded in 2003. Gail's parallel commitment pursues the essential individuality in each child and the unique talent in each teacher. She presents lectures and seminars throughout North America and writes regularly for educational journals.

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# A new Israeli-Jewish language of spiritual quest and prayer.

Singer Berry Sakharov

## ISRAEL'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

By Yossi Klein-Halevi

Turn on Army Radio these days and you are as likely to hear, along with the usual pop songs, the prayers of medieval Spanish Jewish poets like Ibn Gvirol and Yehudah Halevi. Increasingly, contemporary Israeli song has become home for a new Israeli-Jewish language of spiritual quest and prayer. The movement encompasses some of Israel's leading singers and composers – Berry Sakharov, Ehud Banai, Etti Ankri, Daniel Zamir, to name just a few. The result is nothing less than a transformation of Israeli culture.

These are prayers written with a modern sensibility, at once ironic and anguished. The musicians argue with God even as they seek His Presence. In *Aneh Li* (Answer Me), Ehud Banai, this generation's great Hebrew balladeer, compares his frustration at not hearing God's voice to a broken phone connection: "Maybe it's the wrong number, maybe a malfunction/ Maybe we should hang up and try again." In *Ayekah* (Where Are You), actor-turned-singer Shuli Rand admits, "Master of the Universe, if we can speak frankly/sometimes I have no strength to live in Your world." And in *Shelcha La'Ad* (Forever Yours), Yehudah Poliker, son of Greek Holocaust survivors, challenges God: "How could You have abandoned them/the chimney's smoke is forever Yours."

God has become a major protagonist in Hebrew song.

Modern Hebrew music is an unlikely vehicle for the re-Judaization of Israeli culture. Hebrew music – for Israelis, the most beloved art form created by the Zionist renaissance – was initially intended as the carrier of the secular Zionist ethos, the revolt against religion. God is hardly mentioned in the old songs, which instead celebrated the reborn nation and the flowering land.

**Israeli musicians are drawing on our shared cultural traditions.**

That music was almost entirely Ashkenazi. Israel's Sephardi majority, whose music naturally embraced religious themes, was effectively disenfranchised from the mainstream by the Ashkenazi cultural gatekeepers. Israeli radio barely played the music of Sephardi bands – the so-called cassette music because it was primarily available on cheap cassettes sold around the old Tel Aviv central bus station.

The turning point occurred in 1977. With the rise of the Likud in elections held that year, the Sephardi majority was empowered politically. And, coincidentally or not, the first Sephardi-led band to break into the cultural mainstream likewise emerged in 1977. Habbreira Hativit (or the Natural Gathering, as the band called itself in English) sang Moroccan-Jewish prayers and lamented the spiritual crisis of traditional Sephardi immigrants in a secular Ashkenazi-dominated Israel.

**Not only are Israelis no longer negating the Diaspora, as Zionists once did, Israeli musicians are celebrating it.**

But by the 1980s, the Habbreira Hativit moment seemed to pass, and Israeli music reverted to its largely secular concerns. Musically, though, Habbreira Hativit left its mark on a wave of east-west synthesis bands like Mashina and Benzine in the 1980s, followed by Etnix and Kobi Oz's Tipex.

Not until the end of the 1990s did Israeli music begin to show renewed interest in spirituality. The catalyst was Sheva, which began as a new age-style band but soon turned to Jewish devotional music. When the Second Intifada began in September 2000, bringing the worst wave of terrorism in Israel's history, young Israelis felt an urgent need for answers to life-and-death questions. Secular Zionism had long since lost its vitality and its ability to function as a substitute faith. And so, young Israelis turned increasingly to spirituality – and many to Jewish spirituality.

Israel's rock musicians gave the clearest expression to that longing for Jewish renewal. Many of them participated in the *piyut* project, Yedidi Hashachata (My Friend, Have You Forgotten), sponsored by Hillel at Hebrew University, which promoted the renewal of *piyut*, Sephardi devotional music. *Piyut* became a primary source of inspiration for the new Israeli spiritual music. One example: Berry Sakharov, prince of Israeli hard rock, collaborated with Rabbi Chaim Louk, the Moroccan-born doyen of Israel's *paytanim*, or singers of *piyut*.

Along with *piyut*, Hasidic music – especially the complex musical tradition of Breslev – has become increasingly influential in contemporary Israeli music. The latest trends indicate a merging of Sephardi and Ashkenazi devotional music, creating an Israeli synthesis.

The implications for the Diaspora-Israeli relationship are profound. So long as Hebrew music dealt primarily with internal Israeli themes and expressed the emergence of a new Israeli culture, Diaspora Jews were largely excluded from the conversation. But now, Israeli musicians are drawing on our shared cultural traditions. Not only are Israelis no longer negating the Diaspora, as Zionists once did, Israeli musicians are celebrating it.

My hope is that the new Israeli music will be an educational and experiential bridge between Diaspora and Israeli Jews, a transcendent language Jews can share, wherever they live.

### Here is a very partial list of some of the most notable Israeli-Jewish spiritual albums:

Rabbi Chaim Louk, *Chayeh Olamim* (Eternal Life)

Shuly Rand, *Nekudah Tova* (Good Point)

Yonatan Razel, *Bein Hatzlilim* (Between the Sounds)

Eti Ankri, *Yehudah Halevi*

Berry Sakharov, *Ibn Gabirol*

Ehud Banai (anything by Ehud Banai)

Meir Banai, *Shma Koli* (Hear My Voice)

Habbreira Hativit (any of their collected works)

Sheva, *Yom Valayla* (Day and Night)

**Yossi Klein-Halevi** is a senior fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute and a member of its iEngage research team. He is author of the forthcoming book *Like Dreamers: The Israeli Paratroopers Who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation*.



# INTEGRATION, EDUCATION, AND ME

By Aliza Millo



For those of us who teach an integrated curriculum at a Jewish day school, our professional educational mission sets a great challenge for us. Our work is to interconnect academic subjects with one another – what is often called interdisciplinary study – and, additionally, we work to correlate themes from the Jewish and the General Studies programs. These programs are traditionally divided in Jewish day schools, but at The Toronto Heschel School, we carefully interweave all areas of day study – Judaic Studies and General Studies. We were the first Jewish day school in Canada to achieve this and have been working on it since 1996.

## We turn Judaic study into social action and ethics when we integrate Judaic Studies with the General Studies program.

For me, to teach through an integrated framework has been a journey liberating me from my own early experiences as a learner. The Passover Haggadah teaches that in each and every generation a person is obligated to regard her/himself as having personally left Egypt. The Hebrew word for Egypt – *Mitzrayim* – literally means “the narrow places.” I was educated through a narrow “pencil and paper” pedagogy and am often quite envious of my students and the style of education they benefit from and so enjoy. I see that the quality of their education is extraordinary and I recognize that it stems from integration.

For the past number of years I have had the opportunity to teach a Grade 5 unit where we explore the big ideas of freedom and responsibility that lie rooted in the Passover narrative. Imagining

the Israelite journey from slavery to freedom, we remember to be grateful for our own freedom and consider how to use it responsibly to help others. We turn Judaic study into social action and ethics.

An integrated curriculum is an orchestration of education that very intentionally brings students to learn through multiple contexts and varied methodologies in one coordinated framework. This is best achieved through focus on an overarching “big idea,” that students can relate to as they engage in all areas of their study. For example, if the theme is freedom, then students learn to understand what freedom means in history classes, literature classes, and art studios. This offers them historical and social content as well as the opportunity to feel and experience freedom aesthetically and emotionally. Additionally when the big idea integrates with the various subjects or disciplines, the result serves to enhance the value of studying the theme in particular as well as deepening the learning in the various disciplines.

One illustration of integration is our “Dramatized Haggadah” unit, which is part of the schoolwide Living Haggadah curriculum, an interdisciplinary study of Passover through studies in Chumash, Haggadah, language arts, science, math, Hebrew, visual and performing arts. (This program is explained in this issue of *think* on page 18.)

Both universal and particularly Jewish themes of slavery and freedom emerge as the students’ study the Torah narrative of the Israelite journey out of Egypt. Through their parallel study of the novel *Underground to Canada*, the students compare the Israelites’

Exodus to the history of the Underground Railway that brought American slaves to freedom in Canada. They discover similar themes and tensions and create a dramatic presentation. The unit culminates in a Hebrew performance for which students write the script, build the sets, compose the music, and choreograph a complex presentation that demonstrates all of the learning they experienced in this unit. They present it to their parents and school community.

Having taught the Dramatized Hagaddah as an English Language Arts teacher, a Hebrew language teacher, and a teacher of Chumash, I can attest to the educational advantages of teaching this material as an integrated unit. Each component is completed as a rigorous Grade 5 academic exercise and the combustion when the units are combined is fascinating to see.

When we integrate Judaic Studies with General Studies, we add credence and value to the Jewish learning in the eyes of our young Canadians. They come to experience their Jewish learning and knowledge as an intrinsic part of their day, in stride with and not isolated from the wider world of learning. When they see that Jewish values are inherent in universal values and reciprocally that universal values are reflected in Jewish traditions, our students begin to see their whole world fit together; both authenticity and relevance are part of their education.

## When we integrate Judaic Studies with General Studies,

Executing large-scale project-based learning such as the Dramatized Haggadah is a wonderful way to knit various academic “pieces” of a unit together. It also instills tremendous camaraderie and unity in a group of students, which is especially important as they head for junior high. At our school, the Dramatized Haggadah is a major “coming of age” event for the students. It helps create a community of learners where students are encouraged to succeed and simultaneously motivated to support and encourage one another cooperatively as a team. Learning as a community enables students of all talents to work together and it showcases their strengths and skills.

Our obligation to regard ourselves as though we left Egypt helps us appreciate our freedom, one that comes with responsibility. Having experienced my own journey from “slavery to freedom” as a learner and educator, I am reminded of this and it empowers me. As an educator today, I have long left the *Mitzrayim* education world to which I once belonged. I have learned that students are best educated in an integrated environment that sees the value in both individual learning and community collaboration.

Yes, I am no longer in Egypt. Nonetheless, it remains my responsibility to remind myself from where I came; doing so will help me continue to educate my students in the way that I am certain they learn best.

**Aliza Millo**, is from Winnipeg. After completing a B.A. from the University of Manitoba, she received a Specialized Honours Arts Degree and Bachelor of Education Degree from York University. Aliza has taught at The Toronto Heschel School for five years, in Grades 4 through 7.



## The Lola Stein Institute NEWS 2013

### MARCH

Publication of “Jewish Education, Democracy and Pluralistic Engagement,” a chapter by Greg Beiles in *Discipline, Devotion, and Dissent: Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic Schooling in Canada*, eds. McDonough, Memon and Mintz,  
<http://www.wlupress.wlu.ca/Catalog/mcdonough-discipline.shtml>

### JUNE

“The Parent Child Relationship as a Paradigm for Teaching and Learning,” a presentation by Greg Beiles at the Network for Research in Jewish Education Conference, New York.

### SEPTEMBER

Shalom Hartman Institute Senior Educators Forum, in Toronto  
Lola Stein hosts 4th year of professional development. Theme: “People of the Body: Embodied Jewish Ethics.”

### OCTOBER

The Renaissance Child:  
A Colloquium in Toronto on Jewish Education.  
Scholars include Prof. Martin Lockshin, York University; Prof. Mark Meyerson, University of Toronto; Dr. Yehuda Kurtzer, Shalom Hartman Institute North America; Prof. Melissa Shiff, University of Toronto.



# FISHING FOR WORDS

## HOW POETRY AND METAPHOR MAKE US LITERATE

By Greg Beiles with contributions from Lesley Cohen

The Jewish month of *Cheshvan* is called *Mar Cheshvan*, which means “bitter *Cheshvan*,” for it is the only month of the Jewish calendar in which no religious or historical festivals take place. To take the edge off bitter *Cheshvan*, which coincides with an often dreary Canadian November, The Toronto Heschel School creates its own annual celebration – a Poetry Festival. The Festival has become both an academic and soulful treasure that delights the entire school community.

Coming six weeks into the school year, the Poetry Festival marks the culmination of the first unit of English Language Arts study for all students from Grades 1 to 8. With heightened concern these days over early literacy, a back-to-basics approach to reading and writing, and making sure that everyone can spell, one might wonder why our school chooses to dedicate the first full unit of the year to the study of poetry.

**Good writing is deeply rooted in how children think, feel, and experience the world.**

Many language arts programs consider poetry to be a bit of a frill – something to touch on later in the school year, once students have nailed down their particular grade level’s basic requirements for writing. Our poetry curriculum is based on the premise that good writing of any sort is, in fact, deeply rooted in how children think, feel, and experience the world. We concur with educational philosopher and psychologist Professor Kieran Egan who teaches that poetry lies at the root of human thinking and therefore deserves a formative place in the curriculum.

Egan rejects the Piagetian notion that young children think concretely and are capable of the more sophisticated forms of thinking usually associated with poetry only later in their maturation. Egan asserts, “The central fact of our minds is their poetic nature.”

Egan cites researchers such as Howard Gardener and Ellen Winner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education to explain further:

Human children are equipped with some specific intellectual capacities that reach their peak in our early years... For example our ability to generate appropriate metaphors reaches its peak by age five, and declines thereafter.<sup>1</sup>

According to Egan, the linguistic practices that are inherent in poetry are not advanced cognitive developments, but are, in fact, “the true basics of education.” Many elements of poetry, such as forming images from words, understanding abstract notions and appreciating the moods and emotions that different cadences and rhythms can convey, are fundamental to the way the human mind works and makes sense of the world.

Egan’s point becomes clear when we recognize that the technique of metaphor, which is usually only valued as a language skill, is at play whenever children are able to understand one thing in terms of another. When a child imagines that a leaf is a bird flitting down to the ground, or an airplane soaring up in the sky, they are engaging in sophisticated metaphorical thinking. It is this same cognitive leap through metaphor that allows a child to accept the figure “4” as equivalent to four three-dimensional objects on a table.

Ted Hughes is another thinker who recognizes that the techniques of expression involved in poetry closely mirrors the way the minds of children actually work. His book *Poetry in the Making* is one of the finest on teaching poetry. Hughes writes that reading and writing poetry amounts to “learning to think.”

The thinking that we learn in poetry is a kind of thinking that we often ignore: it is the contemplative activity that helps us express our most elusive perceptions and thoughts. Hughes describes how, as a school boy, he felt “plagued” by his inability to express his thoughts in words:

I became very interested in those thoughts of mine I could never catch. Sometimes they were hardly what you could call a

Award-winning poet Adam Sol participating in the Poetry Festival, November 2012

thought – they were a dim sort of feeling about something. They did not fit into any particular subject – history or arithmetic or anything of that sort.<sup>2</sup>

Hughes writes that inchoate thoughts and feelings that belong to the world of “memory, emotion, imagination, intelligence and natural common sense” are not mere embellishments to life, but in fact constitute “the world of final reality...which goes on all the time, consciously or unconsciously, like the heart beat.”<sup>3</sup> The “thinking” that poetry teaches is the process by which we reach this inner life.

Hughes likens poetic thinking to fishing. If we do not learn this way of thinking, “then our minds lie in us like fish in the pond of a man who cannot fish.”<sup>4</sup> Hughes draws further on the metaphor of fishing to evoke the practices of patience, close observation and “concentration on a small point” that we use when we read and write poetry.

And yet poetry is not only about reaching inside ourselves, it is also a way to communicate and share our thoughts and emotions with others. Just as science constitutes a method for investigating and sharing knowledge about natural phenomena, so poetry provides a method for exploring and sharing inner personal experiences.

**“...then our minds lie in us like fish in the pond of a man who cannot fish.” -Ted Hughes**

Metaphor – the ability to see one thing in terms of another – allows us to express unique experiences, and yet understand one another. For Robbie Burns, love is a “red, red, rose,” Leonard Cohen calls it “a broken Halleluya” and, for e.e. cummings, “nothing, not even the rain has such small hands.” Each poet describes love using a different metaphor; and yet through our common understandings of roses, broken praises, rain, and hands, we can share in these poets’ individual experiences of love.

Metaphor’s remarkable quality to preserve a unique experience and yet render it sharable, is what Natalie Goldberg, author of

*Writing Down the Bones*, means when she writes, “We are all connected. Metaphor knows this and therefore is religious.”<sup>5</sup> This “religious” quality of metaphor is the premise behind a Grade 5 unit of study that we call “Metaphor and God.” Since metaphor helps us relate to feelings and thoughts which are inaccessible through regular language, “God talk” is one place where the power of metaphor comes to the fore. In this unit students explore the many metaphors for God found in the Bible and the Siddur (prayer book). These include “healer,” “source of life,” “maker of peace,” and “parent.” By regarding these terms as “metaphors,” students see how we can articulate our diverse experiences of God without pinning God down through a singular definition. They also appreciate that while each of us accesses experiences of God differently, as a community we all acknowledge the same One God.

Through its ability to articulate unique personal experiences, within the framework of shared understandings, poetry builds communities of young learners founded on respect for individuality and empathy for one another. It is this kind of community, nurtured by the “small hands” of poetry that we celebrate during our Poetry Festival. And so, in *Mar Cheshvan* – the bitter month – we hear a very sweet song.

1 Kieran Egan, “The Arts as the Basics of Education,” *Childhood Education*, Vol. 73, No. 6 (1997), p. 8.

2 Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 55.

3 Ibid., p. 57.

4 Ibid., p. 58.

5 Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, new ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), p. 45.

**Greg Beiles, M.A.**, is the Director of The Lola Stein Institute, and Curriculum and Training Consultant for The Toronto Heschel School. Greg targets high academic standards through a culture of learning that integrates Torah, arts, science, and ethical awareness and strengthens children’s cognitive, emotional, and spiritual capacities.

**Lesley Cohen** received her teaching degree at OISE, and also holds a B.A. in Psychology and an M.A. in Religion and Cultural Studies. This is her second year teaching at the Toronto Heschel School, where she teaches Grade 6 and Junior High music.





# SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

## HEBREW IS GOOD FOR THE BRAIN

By Lisa Richler

Learning a second language has many benefits – it can expose a person to new cultures, new countries, and new ways of thinking. In recent decades there has been overwhelming evidence showing that speaking two languages improves brain function, particularly in childhood and late adulthood. In other words, people who speak two languages have a significant cognitive edge over their monolingual peers.

Dr. Ellen Bialystok, an internationally renowned language and cognition expert at York University and Baycrest in Toronto, has published extensive research on the effect of bilingualism on children's language and cognitive development. She argues that bilingual children show accelerated mastery of specific cognitive processes.

**Bilingual children have an advantage over monolingual children not only in their ability to focus attention, but also in acquiring literacy skills.**

Dr. Bialystok explains that children who speak two languages develop a mechanism for focusing on each language at a time, paying attention to the language they need when they need it and ignoring the other. This ongoing task of keeping two languages separate requires bilingual children to become adept at controlling their attention. As a result, bilingual children become better at controlling attention in other tasks than monolingual children. Dr. Bialystok explains that "simple attention tasks – ignore the squares

on the page or the arrows that are pointing in the wrong direction – very simple perceptual tasks ... are performed better by bilingual children and bilingual older adults" than by their monolingual peers.<sup>1</sup>

Bilingual children have an advantage over monolingual children not only in their ability to focus attention, but also in acquiring literacy skills. In a 2005 study, Dr. Bialystok and her colleagues looked at four groups of first grade students: a monolingual group, a group fluent in Hebrew and English, a group fluent in Spanish and English, and a group fluent in Cantonese and English. The researchers found that each group of bilingual students had a better "general understanding of reading ... and how forms can be decoded into meaningful language" than their monolingual peers.<sup>2</sup> The study also found that the bilingual students whose two languages are written in alphabetic systems (i.e., the Hebrew-English speakers and the Spanish-English speakers) were able to transfer reading strategies across their two languages.

Researchers argue that the brain's executive function system is wired differently in bilinguals than it is in monolinguals. The executive function system, also sometimes referred to as the executive control network, is a complex network that connects regions at the front part of the brain with other areas, some of them at the back of the brain and some deep down in the subcortex. It is responsible for controlling cognitive processes, such as verbal reasoning, attention, planning, working memory, problem-solving, and task switching. Dr. Bialystok explains:

Using language, for bilinguals, requires more attention and more control than using language for monolinguals. So that executive control network gets connected up to the language systems. The whole brain has rewired that important network. When you go to use that executive control network for other things, non-language things, you're using a different network, a slightly reconfigured set of connections. The data are telling us it's a more powerful system.<sup>3</sup>

Studies in which bilinguals and monolinguals were put into an MRI machine and asked to perform simple attention tasks showed that "the network of activation used in their brain while they are performing these simple tasks is different between monolinguals and bilinguals," says Dr. Bialystok. In other words, the MRI imaging shows that bilinguals use different parts of their brain than monolinguals to perform attention tasks.

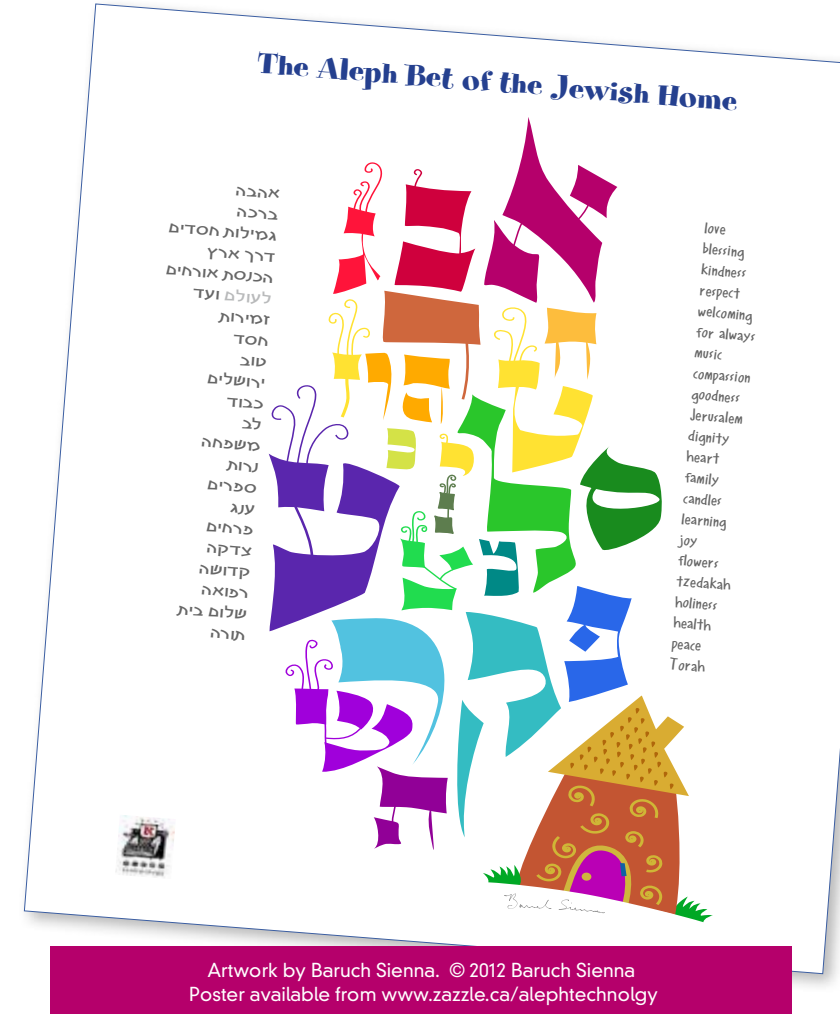
Research on older adults has shown that bilinguals use less energy than monolinguals when they switch from one mental task to another. Dr. Brian Gold, a neuroscientist based at the University of Kentucky at Lexington, recently published a study in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in which the brains of bilingual older adults and monolingual older adults were imaged while switching between two simple tasks, one that required them to pay attention to colour and one that required them to pay attention to shape. The images recorded which parts of the brains were most active and how much oxygen the brain cells used to complete the tasks. Dr. Gold was able to prove that the brains of the bilingual older adults were more efficient than those of the monolinguals.<sup>4</sup>

**The biggest differences between bilinguals and monolinguals appear in childhood, when the executive control network is developing, and in late adulthood, when it is in decline.**

Dr. Bialystok's research into older adults reveals that bilingualism can be significantly beneficial at warding off the symptoms of dementia. Her work has shown that bilingual people "who eventually do become cognitively frail and show up at the memory clinic are, on average, significantly older" than those who are unilingual and closely matched in other respects.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Bialystok found that dementia occurred four or five years later among people who spent their lives speaking two languages compared to those who spoke only one.

Speaking two languages seems to offer the biggest boost to brain health at the beginning and the end of one's life. Dr. Bialystok explains that younger adults (in their 20s, 30s, and 40s) tend to have executive control systems that "work pretty well," no matter how many languages they speak. Neuroimaging shows that bilingual younger adults do have slightly different configurations in their executive system than monolinguals but that these groups seem to perform equally well at cognitive tasks. The biggest differences between bilinguals and monolinguals appear in childhood, when the executive control network is developing, and in late adulthood, when it is in decline.

Most of the research into bilingualism's effect on brain health looks at people who speak two languages fluently and regularly. But Dr. Bialystok points out that there are cognitive advantages to speaking a second language at any level of proficiency. She argues:



Artwork by Baruch Sienna. © 2012 Baruch Sienna  
Poster available from [www.zazzle.ca/alephtechnology](http://www.zazzle.ca/alephtechnology)

Kids learning a language – whether at school or through an extended family exposure – they're in some sense not monolingual. There is something that they know that purely monolingual children do not know, even if their ability in this other language is limited.<sup>6</sup>

Further research is required to understand the extent to which gaining competence in a second language affects specific cognitive processes and brain development.

Dr. Gold points out that unlike other factors that may contribute to brain health (like genes), learning to speak a second language is something a person can choose. "To the extent that we can identify lifestyle variables that can help us age successfully or gracefully, that's of high importance both for individual satisfaction and for the health care system," Dr. Gold recently told *The Globe and Mail*.<sup>7</sup>

1 Ellen Bialystok, phone interview with the author, Toronto, Ontario, January 30, 2013.  
2 Ellen Bialystok, Gigi Luk, and Ernest Kwan, "Bilingualism, Bilinguality, and Learning to Read: Interactions Among Languages and Writing Systems," *Scientific Studies of Reading*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2005), pp. 43–61.  
3 Bialystok phone interview.  
4 Ivan Semeniuk, "Bilingualism Helps Ward Off Dementia, Study Shows," *The Globe and Mail*, January 9, 2013.  
5 Killian Fox, "Ellen Bialystok: Bilingual Brains Are More Healthy," *The Guardian*, June 12, 2011.  
6 Bialystok phone interview.  
7 Semeniuk, "Bilingualism Helps Ward Off Dementia, Study Shows."

**Lisa Richler, M.A.,** earned a Master of Arts in Humanities at the University of Chicago and worked as a writer and teacher before having kids. She now volunteers in various roles at The Toronto Heschel School and The Lola Stein Institute.



# THE NATURAL BIBLE:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR BARUCH SIENNA

**Baruch Sienna** is an environmental Jewish educator, technologist, and graphic designer who combines his passion for nature, art, and education to create Jewish digital art and innovative publications. After years of research and work in Toronto and at The Heschel Center For Environmental Learning and Leadership and at Neot Kedumim, the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, Sienna has published *The Natural Bible*.

### WHY DID YOU WRITE THIS BOOK?

Today, global climate change, pollution, and habitat destruction are critical problems facing us all. If Judaism is to continue to be relevant, it must speak to this environmental crisis. I think Jewish environmental values have a lot to teach us about how to develop a healthier relationship with the earth. My book includes essays on what our classical Jewish sources teach about sustainability and stewardship of natural resources and our relationship to animals. It also suggests how Shabbat can be a model for living more ecologically.

Awakening an appreciation of the natural world of the land of Israel is crucial in order to connect in a fundamental way to Judaism. I felt that most Jewish environmental books were missing this link. Living in an urban setting in Canada, we often are disconnected from our own natural setting, and even more disconnected from the nature and land of Israel.

It is challenging to connect to the Jewish calendar, for instance, to celebrate spring on the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shvat when we are in the middle of winter. Also, we sometimes do not understand how the Bible uses the natural world symbolically. For example, many of us do not know that the palm, myrtle, willow, and citron (etrog), which comprise the Four Species of Sukkot, relate in a special way to the landscape of Israel, and to rain and water. These plants represent victory, immortality, regeneration, and luxury. Knowing these associations enhances the meaning of the ritual.

**WHY AN IPAD IBOOK?** I began this project as an interactive, multimedia project because technology can be leveraged to make learning more engaging. Although we call this a "book" because that is what we are used to, the iPad iBook platform is much more powerful than a traditional book. The entire text is searchable, and the built-in glossary and dictionary make the meaning of any word accessible at the tap of a finger. Pages can be bookmarked and text highlighted. You can even write notes in the margin and create study cards. The iPad allows for audio, multimedia, and interactive quizzes.

My favourite page is in the essay about the Jewish calendar, where I explain how the Jewish month stays synchronized with the phases of the moon. I thought, wouldn't it be great if I could include a picture of the moon's phase the way it looks tonight in the sky. This book does that.

### WHY WOULD THE COMMUNITY BE INTERESTED IN THIS BOOK?

Many years ago, I began this project as part of an innovative initiative of the Board of Jewish Education with a modest grant to work with teachers from The Toronto Heschel School. It made perfect sense to partner with a school that already is a leader in environmental Jewish education. We grossly underestimated how large a project this would be and how the technology we had at the time (CD-ROMs) was neither sufficiently powerful nor sophisticated to actualize the project. I never gave up, and when the iPad became available, I realized that the project was feasible for the first time. This book will be a valuable resource for teachers, parents, and (upper-level) students, linking classical Jewish texts with environmental sensibility and sensitivity.

### WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU HOPE THE BOOK LEAVES WITH THE READERS?

I believe passionately that insights from Jewish texts can instill in us a respectful and reverent attitude towards the earth. Reciprocally, appreciating the natural world can help us better understand biblical sources and connect more deeply with Jewish tradition. I hope this guide will help readers build a bridge between our Jewish heritage, Jewish ethics, and the natural world.

**HOW CAN OUR READERS LEARN MORE?** They can visit [www.thenaturalbible.weebly.com](http://www.thenaturalbible.weebly.com) to learn more, or they can download a free sample from the Apple iBookstore at <http://bit.ly/XK9n2E> and <http://bit.ly/XK9n2E>



# REMEMBERING RABBI WEISS

By Martin Lockshin

As someone who has taught for the last 38 years and who constantly assesses his own teaching skills, I often think back on the teachers who made the greatest impression on me as a student. I had a few stellar teachers in university and one or two who stood out among my instructors at the Yeshiva in Israel. But even today, in my sixties, at the top of the list is my Grade 5 Hebrew and Jewish studies teacher, Rabbi Yehudah Weiss.

Only many years after Rabbi Weiss was my teacher did I learn how tragic his early life had been. He had lost a wife and a young daughter in the Holocaust. He tried to rebuild his life in Israel after the war and married again. But, like many people, he found life in the new state difficult, and so he came to Canada to teach at the Associated Hebrew Schools.

In Grade 5, it would never have crossed my mind that this man could have had a tragic past. For me, he was a compassionate man who loved children and who knew how to get them to learn and to laugh.

Rabbi Weiss was the consummate raconteur, teaching through stories that he invented. The heroes of his stories were often day school children who knew more about Judaism than the adults around them. We loved those stories and it was obvious that he was trying (and succeeding!) to get us to recognize the value of the education that we were receiving.

Another set of stories that Rabbi Weiss loved to tell involved *Gveret Shabbat* (Mrs. Shabbat) and her feelings about accommodating guests in her home. Often *Gveret Shabbat* was very obliging to her guests. Although she liked to eat three meals a day, whenever Mr. Yom Kippur came to visit her, she joined him in his fast. And although *she* liked to eat challah at her meals, when Mr. Pesach came to visit she happily substituted matzah for the challah. But if Mr. Pesach pulled out a cigarette and wanted to smoke in her house, she told him that guests in her home were not allowed to smoke. And whenever the morose Mr. Tisha B'Av came to visit her, bemoaning the destruction of the Temple, *Gveret Shabbat* firmly but politely sent him next door, to the home of her neighbour, Mrs. Sunday. We used to laugh at these stories but at the same time we learned many details of Jewish law: the fast of Yom Kippur can fall on Shabbat and override Shabbat, but the fast of Tisha B'Av cannot. Smoking is not permitted on Shabbat but is permitted on a holiday, like Pesach. (Yes, back in the sixties, Jewish day school students were being taught that smoking was permitted six days a week.) The *Gveret Shabbat* stories also taught us lessons about how to treat guests. We learned that hosts should be accommodating, but that there are limits!

Rabbi Weiss understood that teaching has to be at least partly entertainment. Every once in a while when he saw that we were having trouble concentrating on a difficult text, he would take out

some cellophane or shiny paper (yes, occasionally it was the liner paper from his package of cigarettes) and build before our eyes a pelican or some other animal, totally unconnected to our lesson. But after such a show, somehow we were always more willing to get back to our serious studies.

As an 11 year-old, what appealed to me most about Rabbi Weiss' teaching was his sense of humour and his sincere love of us children. As I grew older and continued with my studies, I realized that Rabbi Weiss had another great advantage over most of my other teachers, one that I could not have figured out as an 11 year-old. Rabbi Weiss' level of knowledge about Judaism in particular, and about the world in general, was far beyond what he really needed to teach Grade 5. He was a true intellectual. Had he lived a few decades later, perhaps he would have been a very successful professor (and the Associated students would have been the poorer for it).

I believe that students, even elementary school students who have no real way of measuring the knowledge of an instructor, still can and do sense whether depth is there. At any level of instruction, students are bound to ask questions that are not part of the lesson plan. Teachers can answer well only if they have a high level of expertise in the subject matter. I believe it was this depth of understanding that made Rabbi Weiss so successful at conveying his love for Judaism and Jewish texts to us.

Teachers at such a high level can potentially set very high standards for their students. And Rabbi Weiss did. As far as I remember, he never uttered one sentence in English to our class. He insisted that we too speak Hebrew. He may have used the occasional English word to translate a particularly difficult Hebrew word. But I can remember that many of us used to even wonder how good his English was. (It was fine, I later learned.)

Sadly, the end of Rabbi Weiss' life was almost as tragic as the beginning. He and his wife brought up two sons here in Toronto. The younger one, Meir, made aliyah as a teenager and joined the Israeli army. In the Yom Kippur War, Meir Weiss, of blessed memory, was killed in action. It was some 30 years after Rabbi Weiss had lost his first family to the Nazis.

Yet despite adversity that he faced, Rabbi Weiss, the consummate professional, was a source of joy and entertainment and of truly deep knowledge for his students. I was just one of many elementary school students who kept up with him for the rest of our lives. He touched many people and his legacy lives on.

**Martin Lockshin** is Chair of the Department of Humanities and a past Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at York University in Toronto. He is interested in tradition and innovation, and writes widely on "modern Orthodoxy."



# SUPPORT FOR TEACHER TRAINING

## PINCUS IN JERUSALEM RECOGNIZES LOLA STEIN VISION FOR INTEGRATED JEWISH STUDIES



The Eco-Seder is beloved in Grade 6 at Toronto Heschel. It is one part of the school-wide Living Haggadah Program.

The L.A. Pincus Fund for Jewish Education in the Diaspora is an Israel-based foundation committed to educational excellence in Jewish communities around the world. Since 1977, the Pincus Fund has supported more than 800 projects in over 50 countries, ranging from the establishment and expansion of Jewish day schools to teacher training and adult education.

"The greatest thing I always say about the Pincus Fund is how far a little money can go," says Julie Koschitzky, a leader

in Jewish organizations in Canada and internationally, and former chair of the Pincus Fund. "If you go to communities anywhere in the world and you say Pincus Fund," continues Ms. Koschitzky, "it's held in the highest esteem, because sometimes it saves an educational component, and it does so much with very little."

In 2012, the Pincus Fund recognized The Lola Stein Institute's outstanding curriculum in integrated Jewish studies and its capacity for teacher training. Pincus awarded Lola Stein a grant to pilot a collaborative process that will enable Jewish day schools to adapt and implement Lola Stein methods and curriculum for their own schools. Throughout the 2012–2013 school year, Lola Stein Institute staff, along with several teachers from The Toronto Heschel School, where the methods and curriculum have been used effectively, joined forces on the Pincus project with colleagues from Robbins Hebrew Academy (Toronto) and Kehila Jewish Community Day School (Hamilton).

The first phase of the project saw the Lola Stein and Toronto Heschel cohort introduce the philosophy and methodology of integrated curriculum to their project partners, along with explanatory course materials to ease collaboration. Both Robbins Hebrew Academy and Kehila Jewish Community Day School chose to adapt for their own use discreet segments of a larger school-wide interdisciplinary project called the Living Haggadah. The adapted curriculum was then taught in their respective classrooms in preparation for Passover.

The Living Haggadah is a collection of Passover programs that encompasses several academic disciplines and allows students in a range of grades to interpret the Passover story through a fresh lens

every year. Students in Grades 3 and 4 at Kehila Jewish Community Day School worked on a unit called the Halutzim Haggadah, which connects elements of the Passover Seder to the story of the nineteenth-century pioneers (the Halutzim) who left their homes in Eastern Europe for the land of Israel. The students looked at the prayer chanted every year on Passover, "Next year in the land of Israel," and learned that the Halutzim were people who decided to make that prayer a reality.

With parts of the unit appearing as lessons in their English Language Arts classes, parts in their Social and Environmental Studies classes, and parts in their study of Hebrew Language, the Grades 3 and 4 Kehila students gained a deeper appreciation of important Passover themes, such as the meaning of a journey to a new land and the pursuit of new goals. They also gained insight into a fascinating period in the modern history of the Jewish people.

Rachely Tal of the Kehila Jewish Community School told *think* that "the curriculum is very interesting and very challenging and [that she has] been enjoying it in spite of the fact that [she is] spending lots of time on finding and creating support materials such as songs, videos, photographs, flash cards, games, and lesson plans."

At Robbins Hebrew Academy, Grade 7 students worked on a unit of the Living Haggadah called the Eco-Seder. The Eco-Seder is an interdisciplinary project in which the Passover Seder is examined from an ecological perspective. Each student completes work through a specifically organized process of Judaic text interpretation, biological research, data management, environmental study, and visual arts. Students explore the Seder for ecological themes, such as the use of water, life and death in nature, food distribution, and green spaces. The integrated approach encourages analogical and integrative thinking skills while achieving learning objectives specific to each discipline.

"The way [The Lola Stein Institute] integrates their Judaic Studies into the rest of the curriculum," says Julie Koschitzky, "they do such interesting things and this grant means that people will know about it."



On a visit to Robbins Hebrew Academy, Lola Stein Director Greg Beiles mentors teachers Shoshana Taitz and Lauren Damelin on the math and science components of the Eco-Seder.



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE  
OF NORTH AMERICA

מכון  
שלום הרטמן

## STUDY WITH HARTMAN IN TORONTO AT THE SHALOM HARTMAN SENIOR EDUCATORS STUDY FORUM HOSTED BY THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE

World-class faculty — Serious text study with educational leaders from day schools, congregational and supplementary schools, summer camps and universities — Learning over lunch at different locations around Toronto

CURRICULUM 2012-2014

### PEOPLE OF THE BODY: EMBODIED JEWISH ETHICS

The Forum will explore the relationship between Judaism and the human body. In every faith and age, the body has been the locus of tension, conflict, and concern, often a platform for cultural symbolism, meaning, and values. With society so preoccupied with physical strength, beauty, and health, how can Jewish views of the body inform our sense of self and self-worth? What can Jewish ethics teach about the Jewish approach to human life?

We will ask: Is the body "holy" or a source of sin and temptation? What do Jewish approaches to sexuality teach about body and gender? What do Jewish ethics teach about our responsibilities for our bodies and health? How has Jewish history in the Diaspora and State of Israel affected Jewish attitudes towards the physical body?

REGISTRATION BEGINS JUNE 2013 AT [www.lolastein.ca/020~hartman/](http://www.lolastein.ca/020~hartman/) or send an email to [info@lolastein.ca](mailto:info@lolastein.ca)

## SENIOR EDUCATORS TESTIMONIALS:



**RABBI AARON KITCHEN, ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
HILLEL OF GREATER TORONTO**

Being a part of the Senior Educators Forum has been such a *bracha* (blessing). To connect with world class scholars on topics that I struggle with in both my personal and my professional life, with the purpose of developing myself personally as well as professionally, is such a *zechut* (an honour). Then, to refract those conversations, through a diverse cadre of serious Jewish educators which highlights the resources and accomplishments we have right here in Toronto, truly rounds off a great experience.



**KAREN KOLLINS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CAMP GEORGE**

It has been a pleasure to participate in the Forum. It has allowed me to spend time with colleagues while engaging in higher-level thinking. In the hustle and bustle of preparing for the summer camp season we rarely have enough opportunities to do this. The Educators Forum has reminded me of the importance of learning for learning's sake and enabled me to dialogue with colleagues, both new and familiar, in a very different way.



**KAREN L. GOODIS, PRINCIPAL, BETH SHOLOM HEBREW SCHOOL**

Studying with colleagues at the Forum is a highlight of my year. In the minutia of daily life, it is very easy to lose sight of why I became a Jewish educator, which was to build the Jewish future. The Forum challenges me to contemplate serious issues and their impact on me personally as well as on my school. Our study dates are in virtual ink in my calendar and I will not schedule other meetings at those times. I offer my deepest appreciation to The Lola Stein Institute for offering this wonderful study opportunity to the community.



# BEYOND COURAGE:

## THE UNTOLD STORY OF JEWISH RESISTANCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST | by Doreen Rappaport

A book review for *think* by Rabbi Joe Kanofsky, Ph.D.

The story of the Holocaust is of ultimate importance; yet if six million books were to be written on the Holocaust, it would still remain for myriads of other volumes to explain the event and plumb its depths for insight into the human condition and the Jewish condition. The way we tell the story is also of significance.

First, there was silence. Perhaps the horror was most appropriately conveyed in the muter roar of its survivors. Once the narrative entered the word, it was necessarily constricted, but also transmissible. Anne Frank's *Diary*, published in Dutch in 1947 and in English in 1952, told of the terror leading up to the extermination, but not the event itself. Elie Wiesel's *Night* – first published in Yiddish barely 10 years after the liberation, then in French, then in English – was the groundbreaking literary introduction of eyewitness to the flames of extermination. Over a half century later, the blurb on the back of a paperback edition still does it justice: “a slim volume of terrifying power.” Two decades later, Gerald Green's novel and groundbreaking TV series *Holocaust* brought the topic to the

masses; a generation later, the film *Schindler's List* extended its reach.

**Often, the literature slips over and renders invisible the countless moments of spiritual resistance and defiant humanity that endured at the edge of the abyss.**

Through the tens of thousands of volumes of analysis, eyewitness, and scholarship published to date about the Holocaust, certain perspectives endure. That the Jewish victims went “as sheep to slaughter” remains a persistent trope. Often, the literature slips over and renders invisible the countless moments of spiritual resistance and defiant humanity that endured at the edge of the abyss. The origins of this reading of Holocaust victimhood could lie in early Israeli attempts to grapple with the national tragedy; casting Shoah victims as powerless may have been a move to highlight the contrast between exile and Israeli, victim and self-defender, Old Jew and New Jew.

Doreen Rappaport's *Beyond Courage* aims to tell the story of some of this resistance to a young teen audience in a way that promises to supplant the “passive and subservient victim” narrative with a much more muscular view of Jewish action in confronting the tide of extermination. For this we owe Rappaport a debt of gratitude; she recasts the Holocaust experience for those who are familiar only with the trains and gas chambers portion of the story.

To be sure, the substance of the book, in documenting acts of sabotage or mostly armed resistance by Jews against the Nazi onslaught in the ghettos, in the camps, and as partisans accomplishes its goal. The gripping and enthralling tales of sabotage, escape, reprisal, and uprising depart radically from victimhood. They portray Jews as seizing their own destiny, insofar as it was possible, and resisting to the last the Nazi strategy of dehumanization and disempowerment. In fact, in the pages of this book, Jews shed the role of passive victims, in which the intervening decades have cast them, and are now seen in many dimensions, beyond numbing statistics and grim faces peering out from the cattle cars.

The efforts to move children out of occupied Europe by clandestine or other means are documented; as are the Bielski Partisan troupe portrayed in the film *Defiance*; and the smugglers, later the fighters and leaders of ŻOB, the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, the Jewish Combat Group of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Here too are the authors of *Vedem*, the children's underground artistic and literary magazine in the Theresienstadt ghetto; Abba Kovner and Vitka Kempner of the Vilna Partisans; and escapees from the Novogrodek labour camp in Byelorussia. In the death camps we now see the sonderkommando uprising in Auschwitz and the Sukkot escape from Sobibor. All these give depth and dimension in rounding out the “untold story of Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust,” as per the book's subtitle.

**In the pages of this book, Jews shed the role of passive victims.**

As a series of compelling tales of refusal to accept victim status, the narration provides enough detail to remain engaging, and the length of each holds the reader's interest. The teenage or young adult reader might be left to wonder what motivated some to resist and others to follow instructions; some to jump from the moving trains and take flight in the ghetto sewers and others not to try. This raises the larger question of what resistance entails: is it only demolition of bridges and smuggling children, or can it also be teaching Torah in the ghetto, or singing Shabbat *zemirot* in Dachau? This is a question for adults as well as younger readers to ponder.

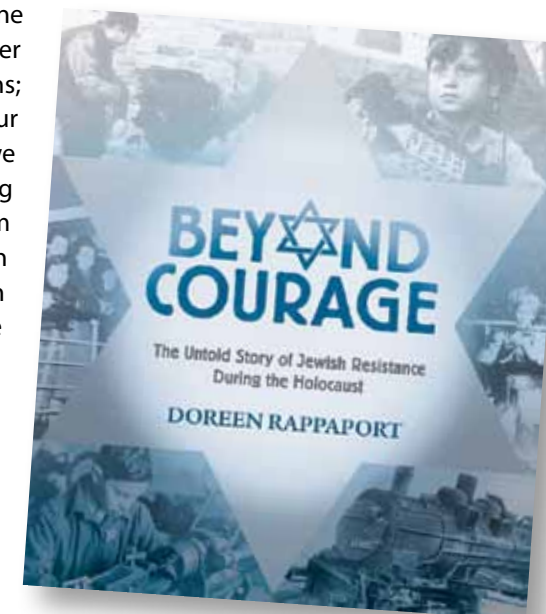
The best historical nonfiction can transport the reader back to the time and place of the subject matter; as awful as it is to imagine oneself in the kingdom of night, *Beyond Courage* offers the reader the chance to think about what bravery, heroism, humanity, and determination might mean in a world where the guiding lights of morality, order, and decency seemed by all accounts to have been extinguished. What can it be, the reader might ask, that gives one a moral compass when morality seems to be at best inverted, or at worst vanished from the face of the earth? What was it in the formative years, the culture, or the beliefs of those Jews who resisted, that motivated them to step off the conveyor belt of the death factories and grapple with their tormentors?

As with any survey, one can always wish for a broader scope: there are almost no images of identifiably religious Jews. In fact, of the handful in the book, one depicts Jews in religious garb “humiliated,” three wearing swastikas daubed on their clothing and two wearing *tzitzit* unnaturally; the other shows Jews in *talit* and *tefillin* and is accompanied by the note that the photo “may have been staged.” Unfortunately, the images of religious observance here for the most part only resonate with derision and mockery, not with heroism. The paucity of images of visibly religious Jews might imply that physical, armed resistance is qualitatively different than spiritual resistance.

**It offers us a chance to think about what bravery, heroism, humanity, and determination might mean in a world without morality, order, and decency.**

That notwithstanding, Rappaport performs an important task in showing a side of the Holocaust experience that had much more to do with creativity, innovation, determination, and will than victimhood. The question of “passivity” of those who went to their deaths is not one to be conclusively answered, and to pronounce that judgment on those who can no longer speak for their decisions is unfair. Still, this volume is an important addition to the Shoah curriculum, and deserves praise as it opens new avenues of understanding and hopefully new avenues of inquiry about the Shoah.

**Rabbi Joe Kanofsky, Ph.D.**, earned a Doctorate in Comparative Literature from Boston University. He was ordained at the Rabbinical College of America where he was a Wexner Fellow. From 2001-2004 he was Director of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Poland and currently serve as Rabbi of Kehillat Shaarei Torah in Toronto.





# BETTER LEARNING, BETTER MEDICINE: INTEGRATED STUDY IN MEDICAL EDUCATION TODAY

By Dr. Jeff Weissberger

The Krebs Cycle. This key biochemical pathway involved in the production of energy within cells was discovered by Hans Krebs, a Jewish biochemist and Nobel Laureate. For many decades, aspiring physicians studiously memorized the details of this pathway, as rote learning was de rigueur in medical education until the latter part of the twentieth century. After twelve years in clinical practice, I have referred to this critical biochemical pathway exactly zero times.

In 1992, the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine embarked on its "New Curriculum," which was a huge shift away from the rote learning of earlier times, with an emphasis on critical thinking skills, communication skills, and learning for understanding. The impetus for this change was the Educating Future Physicians for Ontario project. It had become clear by the late 1980s that the public needed and expected more from physicians than just being medical experts, and the goal of this project was to determine what Ontarians expected of their physicians. The outcome of this project was the identification of eight key roles for physicians – medical expert, communicator, collaborator, health advocate, learner, manager, scholar, and "physician as person."

**The focus of medical education has expanded beyond acquiring knowledge to the demonstration of knowledge through practice.**

Part of this shift meant a new emphasis on hands-on learning. Students began interviewing "standardized patients" – actors simulating real patients – in their first week of medical school. The final two years of medical school became clinically-based, rather than classroom-based. The primary focus of education expanded beyond acquiring medical knowledge to being able to demonstrate knowledge through practise. While a "final exam" is still part of evaluating trainees, many programs are moving towards a competency-based curriculum, where completion of a component of training does not necessarily reflect a predetermined amount

of time spent in the component, or attaining a certain grade on an exam, but rather in the demonstration of competency with respect to a group of learning objectives.

**Integration created a richer learning environment.**

The education of medical students also widened to include ethics, psychology, and interpersonal skills, with new emphasis on social determinants of health, public health policy, and global inequities. Physicians were recognizing that their sphere of influence extended beyond the one-on-one patient meets in their offices. Many physicians have had prominent roles with the Ministry of Health, and with non-governmental organizations such as Doctors Without Borders. To more effectively address social determinants of health, such as poverty, housing, and education, medical students needed to be able to assimilate knowledge from a wide array of topics.

The Faculty of Medicine's "New Curriculum" also shifted away from sequential courses of the major study areas, such as anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology towards integrated disciplines, such as cardiology – where the relevant anatomy, physiology, pathology, and pharmacology were taught as interwoven components. This integration created a richer learning environment where key ideas could be better understood and incorporated into a student's knowledge base.

For an example of this integrated approach, imagine a medical trainee assessing a patient who presents with a heart attack. The trainee's understanding of pathology is critical to making a diagnosis. His/her ability to communicate knowledge of anatomy to the patient is critical to the patient experience. Additionally, an understanding of the patient's psychology can help motivate behavioural changes such as quitting smoking and increasing physical activity. Appreciating the patient's socioeconomic status

as a major determinant of health helps the trainee understand how any limits on the patient's ability to afford a diet rich in fruits and vegetables.

The vast collection of medical knowledge grows and changes day by day. The complete acquisition of this knowledge is simply an impossible task. The changes in the ways future physicians are now being educated reflect this fact; they are now taught how to access current information, how to think critically about this information, and how to apply and assimilate this knowledge. Many of my colleagues, just 15 years older than me, went to school before AIDS had been diagnosed. During the time of my medical education, AIDS was a universally fatal illness. It is now considered a chronic disease with many patients living long, fulfilling lives. Only through ongoing education and assimilation of changing information can one truly practise medicine effectively.

While these ideas are highly applicable in medical practice, they really reflect the approach to any profession in the twenty-first century. Knowledge is exploding. Access to information is unprecedented. Success in any field requires a culture of critical thinking, where one becomes so accustomed to assimilating and applying new knowledge that this becomes a habit.

**Toronto Heschel mirrors many of the methods for learning that are used in current medical education.**

It is this approach to education that attracted my wife and me to The Toronto Heschel School for our children's education. The school mirrors many of the methods for learning that are used in current medical education. At Heschel, students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 are immersed in a culture of critical thinking where integrated experiential learning acclimatizes them to connecting

disparate ideas, demonstrating their understandings and applying their new knowledge in meaningful ways. Just as today's medical students are groomed to become mindful practitioners, Heschel students are groomed to develop habits of heart and mind.

Heschel students become accustomed to higher-level academic thinking very early. They feel at home with interdisciplinary linkages and are comfortable investigating ethical and spiritual issues within the context of what they are learning in science class, language arts, or social sciences. For example, Heschel children begin to explore the imperatives of social responsibility and *Tikkun Olam* (repair of the world) beginning in Junior Kindergarten and these concerns remain interwoven into almost everything they learn until they graduate.

**For doctors, integration means better medicine; for children, it means better learning.**

We hope to raise children who feel awe and gratitude towards the world around them. We want them to strive earnestly for deep understanding and top-notch skills, to recognize what is wrong and have the strength to make things right. Integrating these goals into a school's culture supports students to start this lifelong journey with tremendous advantage. For doctors it means better medicine and for children, better learning.

**Dr. Jeff Weissberger** is a family physician and supervisor to medical students and residents. In 2012, he received the Award of Excellence from the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and the Teaching Award for Teaching in Clerkship from the Peters-Boyd Academy of the University of Toronto. Jeff and his wife Laya live in Toronto with their children.







**The Lola Stein Institute**

# gratefully thanks



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