



# think

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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## **TOWARDS YOUR BEST SELF**

**TEACHING FROM  
THE INSIDE OUT:  
A JEWISH VIEW**

**MIRACLES  
IN SENIOR  
KINDERGARTEN**

**TEACHERS TALK  
WAR AND PEACE  
IN JERUSALEM**

**TALMUD,  
SHAKESPEARE,  
AND HUMAN  
RIGHTS**

**FRINGE BENEFITS  
FOR THE SCHOOL  
VOLUNTEER**

**JEWISH  
HIGH SCHOOL  
AND THE WHOLE  
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Integrated Jewish Studies espoused by The Lola Stein Institute are delivered at The Toronto Heschel School, a Jewish day school in Toronto, Canada.



Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly.

We honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many.

We lovingly remember Mannie Stein z"l whose enthusiasm and support for our work with children is gratefully acknowledged.

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## WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE?

EDITOR'S DESK | BY PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

In 2015 our society is riveted by the biggest networks and the smallest. It is routine to repeat that the Internet takes us everywhere virtually and virtually everywhere. Science journeys deep into our brains and bodies describing our personal biology and chemistry, illuminating even the systems for how we think. We have the global village and we have the genome, we have galaxies and we have stem cells. Do we have it all? Is there something else?

In this issue of **think** our writers consider what is personal and internal – the mind and not the brain, individual identity and not social definition, the management of perspectives and not information. They write about connections and patterns that are forming inside our children as they learn and mature.

There is a story from the court of the Satmar Rebbe. A jester was imitating the folk standing around and began to mimic the Rebbe at prayer. The Rebbe saw this and began to cry. The clown begged forgiveness, but the Rebbe denied it was necessary. Indeed, he felt

gratitude. If his swaying and shifting his *tallit* were so predictable that he could be imitated, then he was not really praying, he was just going through the motions. The Rebbe's tears reveal a man who knows who he is deep inside and who he wants to be.

We do not want our children to grow up to realize too late that they were not fully alive to their own experiences, but just going through the motions. What do our children think of themselves? What do they care about? What are educators seeking when they teach to the inner life of each child? How do we cultivate values? Do schools nurture self-awareness and self-respect? Do parents? Are we raising children who can think for themselves?

Greg Beiles writes that the ideas behind developmental psychology also underlie time-tested Jewish educational methods; child-centred education and content-based Jewish curriculum dovetail for deep Jewish learning from the inside out. Talya Metz cherishes her very young students' thoughts and words and this respect leads them to appreciate their own voices. Rabbi Lee Buckman also targets students' social and emotional sense of themselves; he advocates that Jewish high school offers solid ballast for maturing young adults.

In her first **think** book column, Gail Baker recommends two children's authors who write to empower the very young. As well, Gail suggests two books that encourage parents to reflect on their personal goals and recall the strength that lies inside all of us. Karen Chisvin reviews *The Material Child* by David Buckingham, who deciphers raising children in a consumer culture and also identifies parents' self-awareness as a key catalyst to managing the pressures of our times.

We think about being unique. Rabbi Joe Kanofsky reminds us that the enduring Jewish people comprise individuals who make and live by personal commitments every day. Bryan Borzykowski presents a Grade 8 program highlighting the importance of the individual through a coordinated study of Shakespeare, science, and human rights. Daniel Abramson guides his Junior High art class to search for the shared and distinct attributes of heroes and heroines and to seek similar individuality in themselves.

We think about others. Lesley Cohen notices that the fanfare of social media's social action may, in fact, cloak a lack of personal empathy. Coby and Robyn Segall kindle kindness and inspire children to help out, and Joanna Shapiro also looks at the power of the role model. As a school volunteer, she hoped to focus her family on the Jewish ethics and activities of her school community; watching their mom, her children learned the meaning of commitment and the habit of personal responsibility.

The whole world is looking at what children are busy doing. Schools emphasize technological skills and global focus, blazing talent and peak performance. There is learning from the outside in and there is learning from the inside out; both must be considered. We present a beautiful poem by Adam Sol that conjures more images, and stirs more thinking about adults and children. This is **think** magazine this winter. We hope you enjoy an interior view of education.

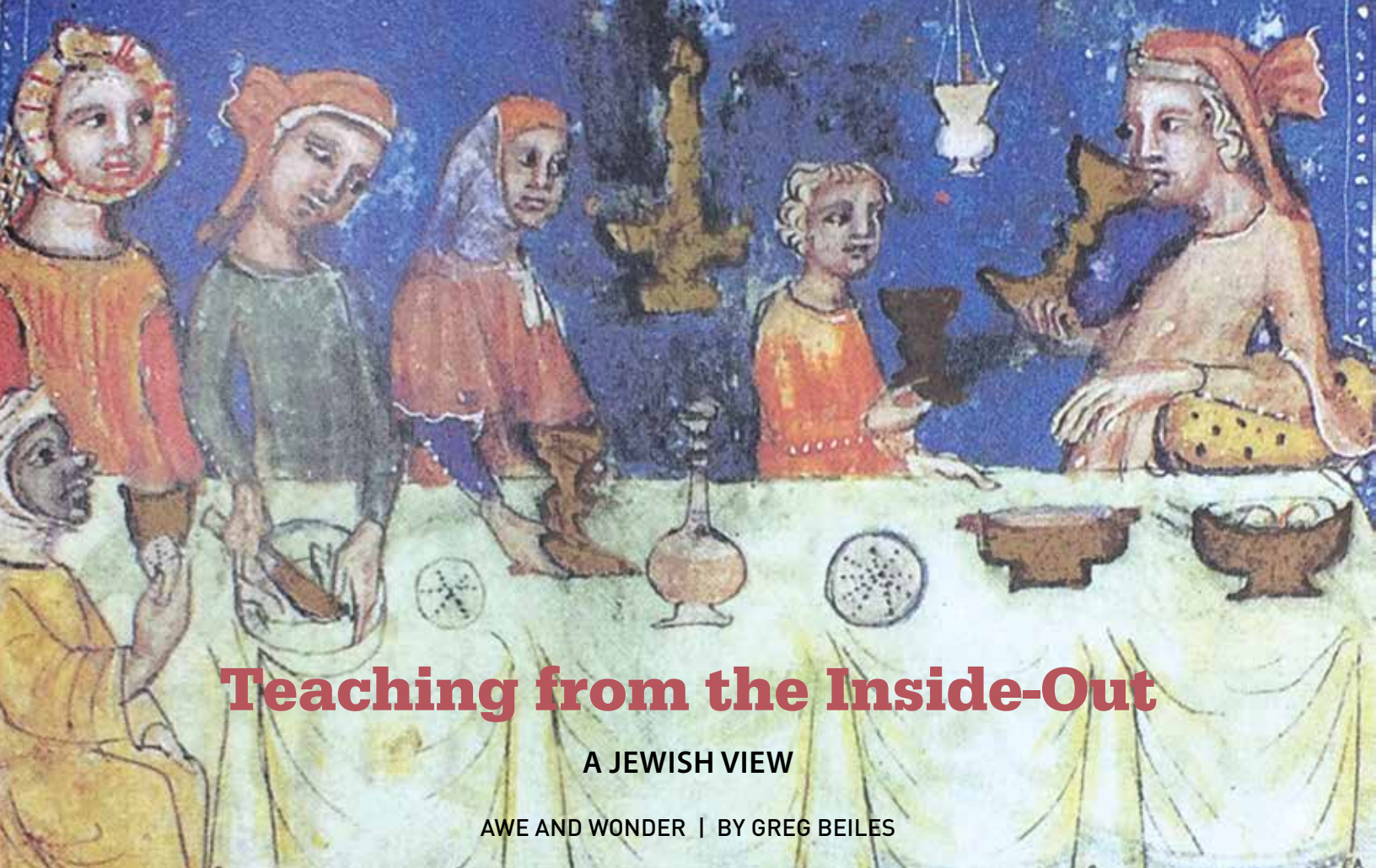
### Quotes for think #16 from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Self-respect is the fruit of discipline;  
the sense of dignity grows  
with the ability  
to say no to oneself.

When I was young,  
I used to admire intelligent people;  
as I grow older,  
I admire kind people.

The principle to be kept in mind  
is to know what we see  
rather than to see what we know.

Awe rather than faith  
is the cardinal attitude  
of the religious Jew.



# Teaching from the Inside-Out

A JEWISH VIEW

AWE AND WONDER | BY GREG BEILES

Jewish educators in the 21st century face a unique dilemma. Do we follow our instincts as modern progressive educators and focus on learner-centred education, or do we root ourselves in our heritage and let the Jewish curriculum impart its wisdom? Put another way, do we teach from the inside-out or from the outside-in?

Is there a third path? Can we allow Judaism, which we learn from the “outside,” to serve as a vocabulary enabling new learning to emerge from within? Can we teach this?

Progressive education is oriented towards children as learners, their thinking skills, their habits of mind and motivations. For the past 75 years, psychologists, such as Jean Piaget, have studied how children think and learn; progressive education blossomed from their theories on the developmental stages of cognition. An alternate and more traditional view of education places emphasis on particular content: facts and ideas, cultural and intellectual capital. Jewish education, with its rich tradition of texts, norms, and practices, naturally fits into this more traditional format.

Learner-centred education began with the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, which rejected doctrinal Church “curriculum” in favour of using observation and reason to reveal truths about the universe. When progressive educators talk about “discovery-based learning,” they are invoking the right of children to use the scientific method – their senses and their reason – instead of memorizing and regurgitating pre-set knowledge.

The Renaissance also emphasized the importance of the individual and the inner life of the person. William Shakespeare’s soliloquies revealed the hearts and souls of his characters, and Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* was the first portrait to convey the uniqueness of the individual. When we orient education today towards the development of the whole child, we are also invoking these perspectives.

Jewish education by definition has curriculum with important cultural, intellectual, and spiritual content. We study ancient texts and traditions. The Torah stands at the centre of Jewish learning, along with the Mishnah and Gemara. We also have religious and cultural practices and historical narratives that we feel are important for our children to learn. A curriculum-based pedagogy is recommended by the Torah itself, which instructs us to recite daily: “You shall repeat these teachings to your children” (Deuteronomy 11:19).

We may well wonder whether a “learner-oriented” approach is consistent with Jewish learning. Can we possibly teach Judaism from the inside-out?

I believe a slightly different view of teaching from the inside-out is consistent with both child-centred learning and the strongest impulses and traditions of Jewish learning. First, we must expose one of the weak spots of learner-centred education, namely, its failure to account for the importance of culture in the development of thought. The most obvious example relates to language.

No child, however motivated, curious or scientifically minded, can

learn to communicate without language. Some argue that without language, we cannot even think. And, let’s face it, language is an imposed curriculum. We don’t ask children if they want to learn the language of their family and culture; we just expect them to do so.

How children learn a language is incredibly fascinating. As the Russian-Jewish psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, discovered, children learn language by experimenting with thoughts and sounds until they can match them up in a meaningful way. He noticed children mimic and play with the sounds and words they hear even before the sounds and words have any meaning for them. This is evident in children’s babbling, and later, in their misuse of words and grammar as they figure out how it all works.<sup>1</sup>

The content-based curriculum of Judaism is a language. We expect our children to use it before it is fully understandable to them and we encourage them to find meaning in what they are hearing and seeing. They watch the Shabbat candle lighting and they hold up the challah. They separate milk from meat and perform acts of *tzedakah*. The reasons for doing each act change, deepen, and become meaningful only over time.

The richest meaning emerges when we acknowledge the uniqueness of each learner.

Jewish rituals are learned as the nouns and verbs of sentences that take on life-meaning that children slowly construct; *mitzvot* (obligations) are the verses of poetry in a language of ideas that begins very early. The Jewish sentences, paragraphs, and soliloquies that our children compose, in the language we give them, will reflect their individual processes to find meaning.

The Torah teaches that in each generation children inquire and seek meaning afresh. On three separate occasions, it is written that future children will ask about the meaning of the central Jewish ritual – Passover:

“And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say to you: What mean you by this service...” (Exodus 12:26)

“And it shall be when your child asks you in time to come...” (Exodus 13:14)

“When your child asks you in time to come, saying what mean the testimonies, and the statutes and the ordinances, which the ETERNAL our God has commanded you...” (Deuteronomy 6:20)

The rabbis who authored the Passover Haggadah saw that the Torah repeats this again and again to emphasize that different



Jean Piaget (1896-1980) teaching children in a classroom. Piaget’s work led to the creation of scientific fields such as developmental psychology and cognitive theory. Much of his study was based on how children’s minds develop. He showed that children think in different ways than adults and that children’s misconceptions are often entirely logical if their limited knowledge is taken into account. Consequently, he thought that there is often more than one way of knowing something. He believed that children constantly build and test their own theories about the world. Bill Anderson/Science Photo Library

children will ask different kinds of questions, seeking different kinds of meaning. Hence, there are four different children of the Passover Seder: the wise, the provocative, the whole-hearted, and the quiet. We remember that children approach learning in individual ways, and we must answer each accordingly. The richest meaning emerges when we acknowledge the uniqueness of each learner.

In progressive education circles it is common to call for child-led emergent curriculum where students devise what they want to learn. Conversely, Rabbi A.J. Heschel writes that all the rituals and commandments of Torah are “sources of emergent meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish curriculum has survived several thousand years by evoking emergent meaning. It blooms when we respect the questions that each learner brings.

Franz Rosenzweig, the great 20th-century Jewish philosopher, believed that it was only possible to make meaning for oneself by first passing through the teachings of previous generations who had made meaning before. At the same time, Rosenzweig wrote that true learning begins “only where the subject matter ceases to be subject matter and changes into inner power.”<sup>3</sup>

Learning happens when the old teachings of the parents are transformed into a new spirit in the heart of each child. This is Jewish teaching that is also child-centred learning.

<sup>1</sup> Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, trans. Alex Kozulin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).  
<sup>2</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Time for Neutrality,” in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p.77.  
<sup>3</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p.76.

**Greg Beiles** is the Head of The Toronto Heschel School and the Director of the Lola Stein Institute. Since 1998 Greg has served the school as teacher, division head and director of curriculum. His doctorate at the U of T remains a work in progress.



## JULY IN JERUSALEM

### EDUCATORS STUDY WAR AND PEACE

#### A think interview with Malka Regan and Heidi Friedman, Toronto Heschel School Division

Heads, who spent two weeks studying at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel during the Gaza War

##### think: How does a teacher's own learning lead to better teaching?

**Heidi Friedman:** It was a powerful and rejuvenating experience to be a student for 10 days at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. As a day school teacher, I am continually giving to others, immersed daily in preparing and planning lessons, always thinking about how to help each child reach his/her potential. Suddenly, I was on the receiving end, learning from brilliant educators, with a chance to stop and really think. I was once again a student. I felt challenged cognitively and ethically. Life-long learning leads to better teaching because, when we receive, we are better able to give back to our students.

**Malka Regan:** There is both excitement and vulnerability when teachers assume the role of the student. We have to stretch our minds to take in new information and force ourselves to take risks. Standing in the shoes of the learner helps to clarify some of the expectations we

hold for our students. We want them to take responsible risks, to collaborate and engage in active listening and productive peer dialogue. When we teachers re-experience being learners, we remember how some of these standards are easier to master than others, and this insight helps us to better reach our students.

##### think: Has your study experience in Jerusalem influenced your teaching here in Toronto?

**Heidi Friedman:** At the Hartman Institute, I saw how powerful a program can be when led by teachers who share a vision. Hartman educators each have personal beliefs and teaching styles, but they also have a common vision of education that permeated all our sessions in Jerusalem. It was seamless, but very apparent. The Hartman study experience directly influenced how we structured the Professional

Development Week at Heschel when we came home. We clarified our shared vision and diffused this vision throughout the meetings and tutorials that we led for our own teacher training that week in August.

**Malka Regan:** I found the study experience in Jerusalem inspiring and thought-provoking. It was a great privilege to study such carefully chosen texts and sources with learned scholars. Working in *chevrutah*, which we do often here at Heschel, was a large part of each study day at the Shalom Hartman Institute, but the Hartman way was different. The instructors introduced sources and points of focus before we heard the speaker; our way with youngsters is the reverse. I found this new method very effective. It will integrate well into the Heschel classroom.

##### think: What was it like to study war and peace at the Shalom Hartman Institute during the outbreak of violence in Gaza?

**Heidi Friedman:** It was very poignant to study war and peace during the violence in Gaza. The media exploded with commentary and repeated rhetoric, while we were cocooned with deep thinkers who are committed to navigating a new path and a more authentic conversation. It was refreshing and inspiring. I left feeling hopeful that there are people working hard to think outside the box to forge alternative ways to peace.

I appreciated that our lecturers' theses on war and peace remained solid and that the learning continued even though things were unravelling outside our walls. When I returned to Canada, and as the war progressed, I noticed that I was talking about war and peace in a new way. My frame of reference had grown. I was looking at the war from a wider perspective.

**Malka Regan:** It felt surreal to be studying war and peace at the Shalom Hartman Institute during the outbreak of violence in Gaza. It was also strangely comforting to be learning there during that frightening time. We were among experts on Israeli politics and on issues of war and peace, insulated within the walls of the Hartman Institute. We engaged in collegial discussions about the situation while the external world hovered nearby. We shared tears and prayers when we heard that the bodies of the three kidnapped boys had been discovered. We shared ideas, experiences, laughter, and song at other times. It was indescribable.

##### think: What was the most profound learning you experienced?

**Heidi Friedman:** The most profound was Donniel Hartman's lecture entitled "The Challenges and Problematics of the Jewish Narrative of Peace." He spoke of the four types of peace: utopian peace, imperial peace, peace of justice, and real peace, and described how peace is

central to Jewish tradition and how praying for peace is central to our liturgy. He asked us whether, when we pray for peace, we actually envisage what peace will look like in practical terms. He suggested that we clarify what peace means before we glibly claim to believe in it. Donniel's words forced me to think about how easy it is to pray for peace but that it is not enough; rather, we must delve deep into our souls, consider all the implications, and be clear about what we want.

**Malka Regan:** One of the most profound learning experiences I had there was when we reflected on war, peace, hope, and despair through Israeli and Jewish poetry and song. It was a rare opportunity for me to re-experience the metaphors and dramas of Jewish literary arts. While the language of a poem is beautiful, lyrical, and meaningful, each poet evokes the harshness and the realities of war, and each creation is textured by our Jewish ways and histories.



##### think: Has the intensive study experience affected your identity as a teacher? How do you feel now about teaching?

**Heidi Friedman:** The shared vision of the educators at the Shalom Hartman Institute affected my identity as a teacher. It highlighted the power that institutions can wield when there is a clear, shared vision. My experience this past summer made me realize the potential that lies within vision-driven organizations, and what can happen when the vision is clear, seamless, and authentic. I felt privileged to be working at The Toronto Heschel School, a school that was founded on a defined educational mission, and that remains committed to its vision.

**Malka Regan:** My belief in the importance of learning for learning's sake has been reinforced. It is critical that as educators, we delve into the study not only of best practices and pedagogy but other areas of interest as well. Just as we provide a wide array of learning opportunities for our students, we must remember our need for the same. We strive to teach our students in ways that will lead them to experience awe and wonder through their learning, and we must do it for ourselves too. I experienced awe and wonder during my studies at the Shalom Hartman Institute. I am a better teacher for it.

David Buckingham suggests that we look behind our children's sense of need and see what's there.

## The Material Child

A **think** BOOK REVIEW | BY KAREN CHISVIN

We live in a material world. We are surrounded by commercial messages, exhorted to develop brand loyalty, and continually urged to buy. Consumption seems to be valued above all.

How does this affect our children? If we see children as “vulnerable victims,” we may be inclined to try to avoid or to control the consumer environment. If we view them as “resilient and competent” participants, how do we help them negotiate their own independent course through this material world?

David Buckingham's *The Material Child* (2011) is a thoughtful response to this challenge. His book prompts us to consider deeply how we view and value children. Are they psychological beings to be evaluated by adult norms or are they “social beings in the here and now”? Are they exploited or empowered? Must we protect our children from the market and defend them against consumer messaging, or can we let them freely experience the consumer marketplace for themselves? Buckingham recommends that we reframe the challenge to transcend these stark polarities. He suggests that we consider the relationship between childhood and consumer culture in a more nuanced and changeable way.

In 2008, Buckingham (Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London) was invited to lead an independent assessment of “the impact of the commercial world on children's well-being.” *The Material Child* is one outcome of that assessment and it touches on the most critical dilemmas within the profusion of consumer messaging today. These include food marketing and obesity; early sexualization; the role of parents and the impact of “pester power”; the influences of peers; and marketing in broadcasting and

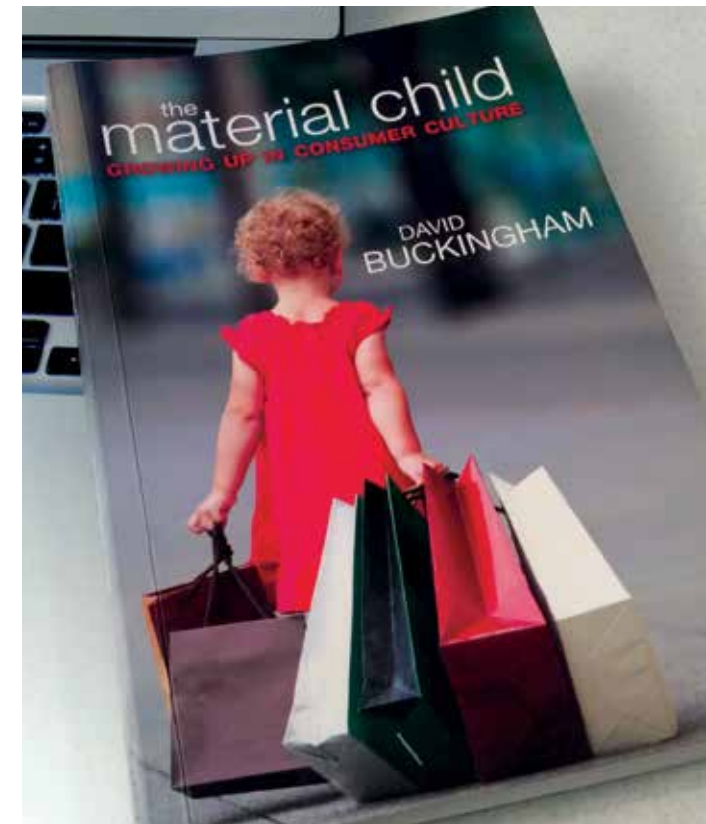
educational settings. While his thorough analyses are sophisticated and not easily summarized (read them for yourself, it is well worth your time), his approach is important to share.

Chapter by chapter Buckingham shows us how to apply a critical eye to the literature on the topic that may misdirect us. He perceives the biases of the authors, identifies limitations with their data, questions the applicability of research findings, and notes confusion between correlation and causation. He suggests new research into the role of parental gender in socializing children to the market, the impact of socio-economic status on consumer behaviour, and the role of social and emotional attraction in impeding rational thinking in consumer behaviour.

It is the emotional, social, and psychological strength of each child that we need to bolster.

The key to Buckingham's argument is that consumer culture is not some objective condition separate from our daily existence. Consumer culture is simply the social environment that we each create for ourselves; it becomes “embedded within everyday life and interpersonal relationships, and in wider social and cultural processes.” He sees that attempts to separate ourselves from this culture or to fully regulate it will be frustrating.

Buckingham advocates that we examine consumer culture as a



construct of our society and notice how our own choices and social relationships affect our children's materialistic responses. Are we making purchases for social and emotional reasons? If we look at ourselves first, we can develop a more accurate sense of how both children and adults respond to consumer messaging. We can then consider the changes we choose.

He also argues that in discussions and studies, “children's own perspectives and practices need to be much more fully taken into account.” The challenge for parents and educators is to understand the unique qualities and needs of each child and to accept the significant role that adults play in the equation. We establish the values and model them; we open or close conversations with younger children, we make ourselves available to older children and teens or we elude them.

It is our adult attitude that determines whether a child is petitioning for a purchase or pestering. We must be comfortable that “no” is as legitimate a response to a request as a “yes.” When we interact with children on their material requests in a manner and tone free of moralizing and judgment, we are giving them the chance to test their emerging values in conversations and deliberations. This engagement is key and Buckingham emphasizes that it is an ongoing process and not a one-time effort.

If we understand the arguments that play on our guilt, we can more easily resist reactions to our children that focus on controlling the consumer environment – an exhausting and inadequate response. We can recognize, as Buckingham does, that the ownership of an item of clothing or appliance may be part of an individual and group

identity and demonstrate something positive sometimes too. We have to look not at the “ask,” but at the sense of need and this enables a more nuanced response.

Where can we begin? We can read and discuss this book as a way to explore our own values and perspectives with other adults. We can maintain ongoing conversation with our children about consumption to help them find their own way.

His book prompts us to consider deeply how we view and value children.

It is inviting to approach the consumer world as a challenge for parental control; rules do simplify our lives. Unfortunately, there is no single, easy answer. Buckingham encourages us to make room in all our responses for choice, community, and creativity.

And, while we should of course encourage media literacy with the critical thinking it implies, for David Buckingham, media literacy cannot deflect or overcome the emotional, social, and psychological attractions of consumer culture. It is the emotional, social, and psychological strength of each child that we need to bolster. Then we, and our children, can better manage the material world.

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**Karen Chisvin** is an architect and visual artist. She facilitates workshops that use arts-based activities to address organizational challenges. Karen is the mother of two Heschel alumni. And, she likes to *think*!

# GOOD BOOKS FROM GAIL BAKER

Gail Baker – renowned teacher, principal, mother, and grandmother – presents a short list of Good Books for children and the people who love them.

Gail has spent her career teaching and reaching children in Toronto since 1977. She co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and retired as Head of School in 2014.

Gail writes, “I recommend these particular books because each one helps to bring us back from the chaos and anxiety of our lives. They show us how to be the parents we want to be and remind us that we are capable to do it. Sometimes it’s as simple as remembering our core values, and sometimes it takes a small child to prompt us to remember just what is important in life.”

## ***The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds (Candlewick Press, 2003)**

This expressive and simple book inspires children and adults towards creativity and achievement. It’s about making your mark and being brave enough to be active in the world.

## ***The Man with the Violin* by Kathy Stinson and Dušan Petričić (Annick Press, 2013)**

It is fortifying for our children to know that they can teach us and motivate us. This wonderful visual display of sound and beauty helps us remember to slow down and listen, to notice the beauty in our daily lives. It also cheers on our children to remind us what is important in life.

## ***Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age* by Dan Kindlon, Ph.D. (Miramax Books, 2001)**

This parenting guide is clear and powerful but not patronizing. It encourages us to remember our own needs as adults and reclaim our positive role as mentors in our children’s lives. The author argues that we must teach toddlers and children to control their impulses and that we must understand how role modelling and living within limits will help our children grow up to be mentally and physically healthy adolescents.

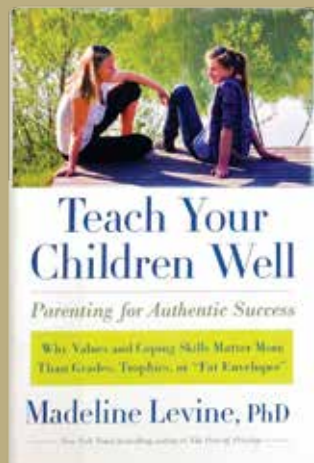
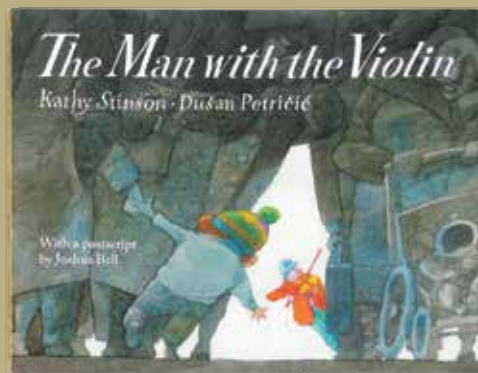
## ***Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success* by Madeline Levine, Ph.D. (HarperCollins, 2012)**

We all want our children to grow up to be successful. Madeline Levine argues that we also use them as status symbols. The result is emotional turmoil. She challenges the pervasive parenting style that she calls “hyper-parenting” and advises that if we connect our parenting decisions to our core values, and not to high marks and trophies, we will see our children become more successful and much happier adults.

2  
GOOD BOOKS  
FOR CHILDREN



2  
GOOD BOOKS  
FOR PEOPLE WHO  
LOVE CHILDREN



# CITY SONG

BY ADAM SOL

Who's seen the phantom boy  
who used to drum pennies against metal gratings  
down here by the switching station?

Where could he be, now that I finally  
have something to show him,  
after months of marching past

on my way to strategy meetings and lunches?  
I used to shrug  
at his pathetic entreaties,

suggesting that I had nothing to give him that day,  
not today,  
and the shrug satisfied both of us.

He would smile and say, “Nice day,” or “Cold one,”  
and I would take that for  
a metaphysical forgiveness.

In this way we achieved an understanding,  
a sort of communion between men,  
an agreement to accept

that we would never touch each other.  
But here I am,  
I have walked this strip of sidewalk

for two hours in search of him  
because I think I found his dog behind my building  
half buried in leaf oatmeal.

Bones so thin they could be syringes.

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Adam Sol's fourth book of poetry, *Complicity*, was recently published by McClelland & Stewart. He teaches at Laurentian University's campus in Barrie, Ontario, and lives in Toronto with his wife, Rabbi Yael Splansky, and their three sons. Adam is a parent at The Toronto Heschel School.



“When we notice and accept differences on the outside, we can then see common worth on the inside.”

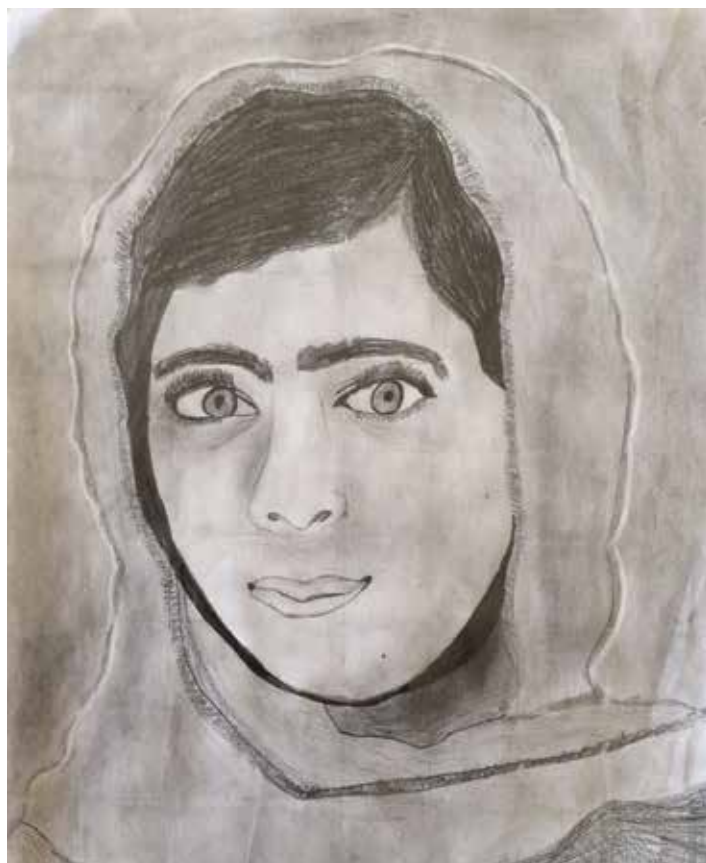
## Life Lessons and the Art of Portraiture

BY DANIEL ABRAMSON

Like many people, I have always been fascinated by old family photographs. I love looking at familiar faces in those black-and-white photos, trying to see myself. These images of mostly small moments, frozen in time, repeat their stories each time I look at them. Sometimes they joyfully reveal something new that I missed the last time I looked, and sometimes they quietly bring forward an ache of memory, with its persistent insistence of absence. The images are always meaningful, but each time I look, the meanings aren't always the same.

On one hand, to anyone who has ever looked nostalgically at an old photo, it seems obvious to say that the way we find meaning in these images depends on the narratives and perspectives that we, the viewers, bring to an image at any given time. Consider though, the broader implications of that statement. If the meaning of an image is created inside the viewer, as something dynamic and transient and not inherent or fixed in the image itself, then how is it possible for an artist to create anything meaningful at all? After all, isn't it the artist who is making a statement through the use of chosen artistic forms and materials?

Such complex questions about the “location” of meaning in art are among the most challenging and interesting questions that have been asked ever since drawings first appeared on cave walls 60,000 years ago. These questions are the driving force behind the discourse of the postmodern era. At Toronto Heschel, we pose essential questions like these to our students and to ourselves as teachers. We ask students to consider these dilemmas as their understanding of a particular idea evolves.



Is artistic practice essentially an inward-looking reflective process or do artists look to create meaning through mimicry of outward forms? Reframed pedagogically, should we ask students to paint what they feel or what they see? As is often the case in matters of the post-modern, the answer is...it depends.

In Senior Kindergarten, there is significant value in teaching students to start their lives as artists by painting what they see. The young students learn to draw their own faces as they look carefully at their reflections in small mirrors. Examining their faces closely, they learn formal design elements such as line, colour, texture, shape, symmetry, and scale. They also learn about expression and meaning, as they observe how subtle changes in outward facial expressions speak about their inner feelings.

Even at a young age, drawing the face raises telling questions about difference. What makes us look different from one another? Do these differences matter? What is common in every face? How are we all like one another?

We approach these early questions with artistic practices that are “outward looking”; the artist looks out into the world and observes, records, and communicates what he/she sees. These foundational explorations give the children important tools for decoding complex non-verbal cues as they take their first steps to become empathetic, understanding observers of the world.

Much as our own thoughts and feelings about old photographs change as time passes, our pedagogical approaches to portraiture evolve as our students progress through their years at Heschel. In

Grade 8, students study the “rise of the individual” and wonder about the motives and meaning behind great works of art, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, a painting famously obtuse in its subject's outward expression. Students also study important human rights activists and create portraits of them, which gives them a chance to wonder what is going on behind their eyes, too.

The students also draw self-portraits and compare their images to those of the human rights activists they have painted. The focus of this exercise is on the elements of artistic practice that are inward looking and reflective. The juxtaposition of the students' own faces and the faces of the well-known changemakers invites questions to go deeper than the external observation and mimicry of outward appearances. When we ask students to wonder about the similarities and differences between themselves and the activists, we are not asking about physical traits. Rather, we are nudging our students to look beyond the image and see the human attributes that may have compelled these activists to act with such conviction and passion.

The amazing thing about portraiture as an art form is that, at its best, it is simultaneously a celebration of the uniqueness of its subject and an obliteration of the notion of individuality. Portraits are thought-provoking. They open up interesting areas of ambiguity, and they pose tough questions about difference and sameness.

These very questions are so important for students in early adolescence. As they come of age in our tradition, they are already working through the subtle process of figuring out who they want to be. At Toronto Heschel, we integrate this kind of important generative expansive theme across the curriculum. In language arts class, students address the theme of individuality through literary character studies; in science, they study the reason and timelines for the emergence of human diversity; and, in art class, they use portraits.

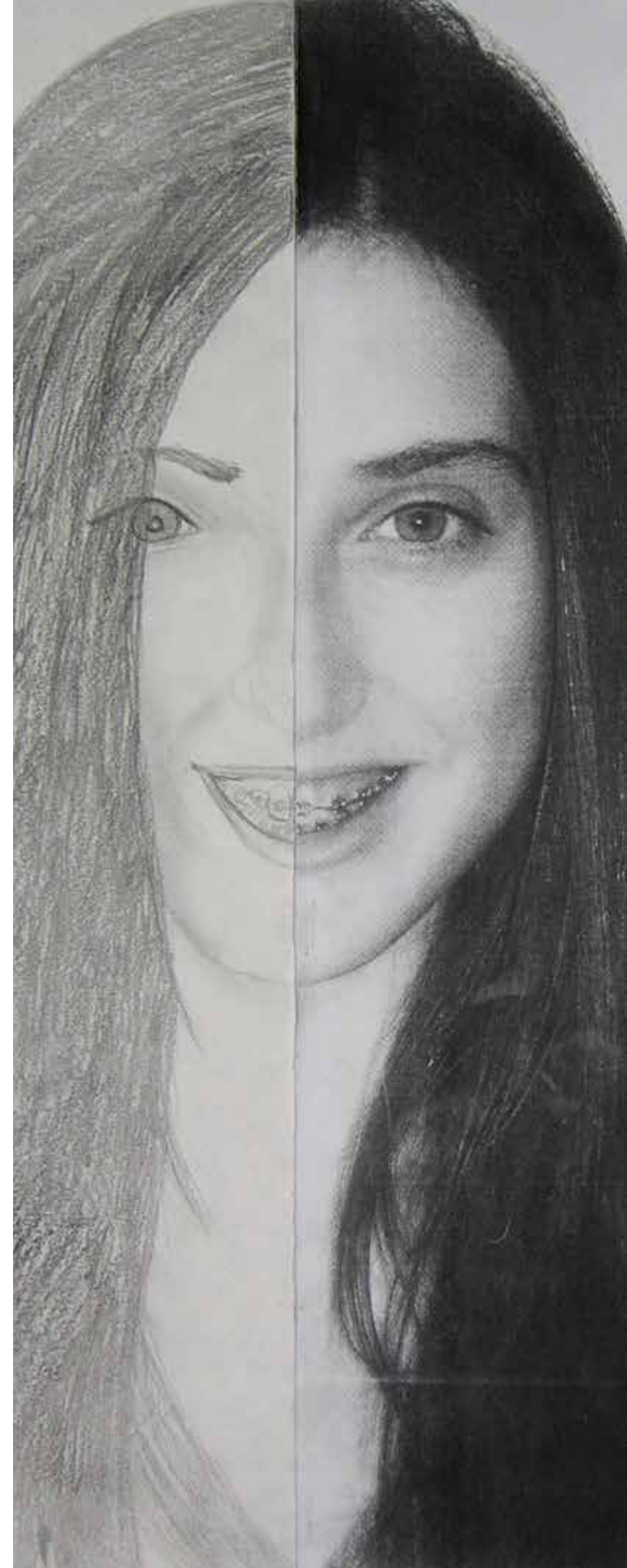
At the end of it all, we wonder...does the art of the portrait help us to see the uniqueness of each person, or does it allow us to recognize what is common to us all? As with other challenging questions, we find compelling answers in Jewish texts. In this passage from Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Sanhedrin* 38a, students are taught to consider the wonder of diversity:

When a coin maker mints many coins from one mould, they are all alike. Their identical appearance makes their value equal. In comparison, when God fashioned all people from the one mould of the first person, not one resembles the other, yet all have the same value.

When we look carefully at each other, when we notice and accept each other's differences on the outside, then we can strive to see the common worth on the inside. This is what we encourage from Senior Kindergarten through Grade 8.

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Daniel Abramson is an artist, photographer and teacher. At the Toronto Heschel School his classes include Junior High science and art.





## MIRACLES IN SENIOR KINDERGARTEN

BY TALYA METZ

I regard each child who walks through my classroom door as inspirational. When I see the profound and beautiful idea captured in the quote above, my eyes open to the infinite potential of a child's mind. To me, each student is a miracle.

When asked what comes to mind on hearing the word "miracle," most people conjure up something akin to the splitting of the Red Sea or the Ten Plagues of Passover. Typically, a miracle has a divine component far beyond human scope. After all, we have never actually seen a sea split or water turn to blood. If we define a miracle as something unpredictable, inspirational, and worth exploring, it's not hard to consider each child as a miracle.

I see miracles every day; in tiny dew drops on the morning grass, in how a mirror reflects what is in front of it, in the growth of a seed into a plant, and in the eyes of the children I teach. At age five or six, children are not yet conditioned by the doubts that plague older minds. They see the world as it truly is – a gift, a miracle. In my experience as a teacher, the parameters that constrain our adult thoughts and possibilities do not limit our children.

Walking through a garden, a child will notice that no two plants

look the same. Even in a bed of roses, a child will observe subtle differences in colour, texture, and smell. She will actually "stop to smell the roses." Children question what makes a tiny seed become a plant; how does that miraculous transformation occur? Watching each stage of a plant's growth, they stare in utter amazement at the changes they observe. They see a plant as a small miracle.

I see a child in the same way that a child sees a plant. I see that no two children are alike, and that the growth of a child is unpredictable, inspirational, and worth exploring. Both need careful tending. A gardener ensures that plants receive water and light to thrive; but no matter how much water and light is given, it is never predictable exactly how each plant will grow. The gardener can only do her best to give each plant what it needs.

As educators, we provide children with information, but we can't predict where they will take that information nor insist on how they interpret what we say. Both gardeners and educators create environments where little miracles are nurtured to blossom independently in their own unique ways. These environments are nonetheless fundamental to shaping growth.

There's not only light from the sun. There's also light from the heart, which means kindness. Maybe on Day 1, God created the kindness. Not just the light from the sun but light in your heart.

–Senior Kindergarten student

I make sure that my classroom environment reflects our school's educational philosophy; I ensure that the room is a physical representation of our vision of learning and of our respect for children as learners. In Senior Kindergarten, my classroom space is intentionally designed to inspire awe and wonder. A discovery centre awaits children's curious minds, inviting them into a world of sensory exploration through elements such as textured rocks, natural smelling herbs, diverse plants, mirrors, magnifying glasses, and other sensory-enhancing stimuli. The set-up appeals to children's natural inclination and invites them to live life in "radical amazement," in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel. When I watch a little girl observe a magnet sticking to metal surfaces with wide-eyed fascination or a small boy marvel at primary colours mixing to create secondary colours, I remember that true learning relies on a sense that life around us is truly phenomenal.

My Senior Kindergarten curriculum shows children the world through a lens of awe and wonder. I make sure that they get in the habit of questioning and commenting on what we are studying in a creative yet critical way. For centuries, Jewish commentators have contemplated fundamental questions posed by Jewish text, and I engage my students in the very same authentic process. I find that through the study of Jewish text a lot of miraculous learning takes place. Our way is to create opportunities for children to interpret text and the world around them and to express their thoughts fearlessly and independently. We document the conversations that develop while the children are studying.

As a teacher, I will read a passage directly from the Chumash and stop to give students an opportunity to respond. We ask the children to contemplate what they have just heard and take a moment to share their personal interpretation. We record their words verbatim, showing the children that their interpretation and understanding of the text holds a unique quality that is valued. The children learn that their words are important and have power. There will be no future learning if this basic lesson is not successful.

As educators, we understand that our children's observations arise from an innate sense of intrigue and excitement; this point of departure enables us to structure classroom experiences that cultivate learning through inquiry and mystery. For instance, in Junior Kindergarten, our four-year-olds observe a tree in the Toronto Heschel field over the course of a year and document any changes

they see. We watch as the children marvel at the astounding natural phenomena that are recorded through their observations, drawings, discussions, and explorations. Their own works shows them how, from one season to the next, the tree looks different – not because humans intervene and physically change the tree, but because the tree itself goes through an astounding natural cycle each year.

I have learned in my years as a Senior Kindergarten teacher that we do not need to teach young children to be amazed by new information or new experiences. We also do not need to teach them to think creatively. They simply need immersion in an environment that protects and nurtures their natural ability to gaze through the lens of awe and wonder. Educators need only help children retain their ability to see the world as marvellous.

Wonder, not doubt, is the beginning of knowledge...our goal should be to live life in radical amazement...get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.

–Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

I feel very lucky to be surrounded by children every day. They have led me to recapture my own sense of awe and wonder. Through their curiosity and enthusiasm, I now see everything around me as a miracle. I no longer take for granted the beauty of the moon each night – not since one small student said, "Did you ever think how cool it is that the moon just floats in the sky? It is made out of rocks but it never falls out of the sky."

While gravity may explain why the moon "floats," I now understand that there are inexplicable components to even the most obvious scientific explanation. My students have taught me to see the mysterious and the spectacular in every aspect of life. These children are my small miracles. Every single day, they remind me that "life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but the moments that take our breath away" (Anonymous).

**Talya Metz**, B.A. (McGill), M.A. (UofT), holds degrees in Psychology and Child Study and Education. As a Senior Kindergarten teacher at The Toronto Heschel School, Talya finds creative ways to inspire young children to learn, while combining strong academic and social skills development into her program.



# SHAKESPEARE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

## THE ART AND SCIENCE OF BEING A PERSON

BY BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI

On the surface, it may seem as though Shakespeare's Elizabethan-era plays and the study of human rights have nothing in common, but, as one Grade 8 class is discovering, the Bard's texts offer incredible insights into the human condition.

Greg Beiles, Toronto Heschel School's longtime curriculum director and new Head of School, has worked with a team of teachers to develop a Grade 8 program that teaches students about the importance of the individual in many different contexts throughout the school year. The idea came from words in the Talmud that describe how God creates all human beings as equals with many differences; *Masekhet Sanhedrin* points out that a coin maker mints coins of equal value by stamping each from the same mould in the exact same way, and that God also creates human beings from one mould with each having equal value. Yet each human being God creates is remarkably different from the other.

In this complex Junior High program, Toronto Heschel students learn about empathy, independence, the inner workings of individuals, and their relationships to one another.

"We are giving students multiple entry points into really big ideas," says Beiles. "They learn about human interactions, responsibilities, the interconnectedness of the world, and more."

### Studying Shakespeare

The students study Shakespeare's tragic play *Romeo and Juliet* in conjunction with the words from *Masekhet Sanhedrin*. The story of Romeo and Juliet really drives home the year's themes of individualism and empathy.

Using the play is so important because of how the legendary writer created his characters, says Toronto Heschel teacher Dana Cohen, whose classes include ancient civilizations, language arts, and civics. Cohen worked with Beiles to develop the integrated Grade 8 curriculum. She explains that before Shakespeare came along, theatre focused on ideas or groups of people and not on the individual characters themselves. Shakespeare changed the way that stories were told.

"Romeo and Juliet are unique individuals," she says. "Shakespeare took so much time and put so much thought into evolving his two

characters into a particular young man and a specific young woman that *Romeo and Juliet* became the perfect play to study for our theme about the individual."

The students begin to understand how everyone's got something going on in their inner life.

By studying Romeo's inner struggles and Juliet's personal fears, students are able to learn that what happens in each individual's life matters – including theirs and their classmates.

"The students begin to understand how everyone's got something going on in their inner life," says Beiles. "When they look at their friends and peers, they'll know that that person is also having experiences, thoughts, desires, and fears."

### Incorporating Human Rights and Adding Science

Intertwined in the curriculum are classes devoted to the study of human rights. Students learn about human rights issues from around the world and, at the end of the year, they are tasked with writing and delivering a five-minute speech on a human rights topic of their choosing. They must integrate their Talmudic learning into the speech and connect all the dots. Past topics have included the education of girls in Afghanistan and the right to a democratic vote.

"It's quite a substantive project," says Beiles. The year-end speech is the culmination of months of studying human rights.

"It's a narrative that goes all throughout the year," says Daniel Abramson, who teaches science, environmental studies, and visual arts at Toronto Heschel Junior High.

They learn that being aware of their own perspective makes a huge difference in understanding what they see.

Abramson's first science unit of the Grade 8 year deals with astronomy, which may also seem as though it has nothing to do with human rights. However, as the students look through telescopes into outer space, they begin to realize that what they see has much to do with their viewpoint from Earth. They learn that being aware of their own perspective makes a huge difference in understanding what they see.

His second science unit focuses on optics and how things can seem different depending how light is manipulated. Abramson finds that connecting science to respect for others as unique individuals is an easy bridge to cross.

"Students see how our individual experiences shape who we are by

shaping how we interpret things, and the same goes for our friends and their experiences," he says.

Other classes touch on respect for the individual and human rights in additional ways. In language arts, students read poetry that expresses the trials, tribulations, and aspirations of others. In civics they develop an "action-driven" project with a global focus and collaborate with organizations helping those in need. While the 2015 project is yet to be determined, the students are considering ways to help people in the African countries struck with Ebola. In nearly every Grade 8 subject, the question of how to understand the individual is somehow discussed. However, it's the lesson of tragic romance where the ideas really click.

"Shakespeare's literature is laden with different aspects of human rights," says Cohen. "So you first learn about what the ancient Hebrew text has to say about human rights, then you move into poetry, and then onto Shakespeare."

The subject matter can be heavy at times, says Beiles, but it's the perfect time in the students' lives to explore these topics. Young teenagers are learning more about themselves, about their surroundings, and about others. They also know what's happening in the world.

I want students to understand that to be powerful and responsible citizens . . . they have to know who they are, where they are, and what's going on around them.

"Kids that age are interested in big questions," he says. "If we don't engage them, then they'll wonder if what we're teaching them is really relevant or important. They know what's going on, and part of the educational goal is to let them sink their teeth into what they're hearing about. We don't want them to develop a sense of powerlessness."

By June and the end of Grade 8, many of the students do become more aware of their surroundings. It is then that the combination of all the entry points that Beiles and Cohen have opened for them takes hold. And while learning something about one of history's greatest playwrights is always a good thing, Cohen's not expecting her students to develop a lifelong devotion to Shakespeare's texts. They will, however, appreciate what he has done for theatre and, what's more important, they will better understand the human condition.

"I want them to come away knowing that our world is filled with patterns from history, and that people who are afraid of diversity and change will not thrive," Cohen concluded. "I want students to understand that, in order for them to be powerful and responsible citizens of our world, they have to know who they are, where they are, and what's going on around them."

**Bryan Borzykowski** is a Toronto Heschel School parent and a writer for a number of publications, including *The New York Times* and CNBC.

# BEYOND SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

## DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE IN THE CLASSROOM

BY LESLEY COHEN



The summer of 2014 saw the emergence of a social media phenomenon known as the “Ice Bucket Challenge,” which encouraged individuals to douse themselves overhead with a bucket of ice water and post a video of the process online. The purpose was to raise awareness, and hopefully funds, for a neurodegenerative disease known as ALS. Hundreds of thousands of people accepted the challenge and donations to ALS organizations skyrocketed.

The Ice Bucket Challenge was a brilliant initiative that generated funds for a worthy cause. Nonetheless, critics soon popped up, denouncing the challenge as digital “slacktivism”: armchair engagement in social justice that imparts little understanding of the cause at its heart.

### Viral campaigns create followers instead of thinkers.

As an educator, I began to consider what the critics of slacktivism are truly battling, and I believe that, at the root of things, they are simply against jumping on bandwagons. They are decrying the lack of agency among participants of challenges such as the Ice Bucket phenomenon, and pointing out that viral campaigns create followers instead of thinkers.

As I pondered this, I began to wonder whether slacktivism might be at play in our schools. Do we plant the seeds of slacktivism when we ask youngsters to bring in a can of soup for the homeless when they never see its beneficiaries? Is slacktivism at work when Junior

High students sign petitions supporting causes that they do not fully understand?

These questions grew larger: Can we somehow motivate youth to make meaningful decisions to support the welfare of others? How do children develop empathy and a genuine sense of responsibility? How do we help children notice social needs based on their own personal moral sensibilities, and how do we inspire them to create innovative solutions? Can students cultivate a sense of social responsibility not just because they are tweaked externally by their screens and peers but because deep inside they want to help?

In the Junior High civics classroom at Toronto Heschel, we are consciously nurturing empathetic global citizens. My students learn to notice their community’s needs and to search for answers, just as the founders of the Ice Bucket Challenge did so well. Students’ inspiration and innovation emerge authentically from their experiences, their natural sense of justice, and their morality. My job is to foment concern and motivation.

According to the celebrated psychologist and author Lawrence Kohlberg, children’s morality and sense of justice develops through a series of stages as they grow. As small children, their sense of right and wrong is entirely self-motivated; as they become young adults, they are conditioned by social conventions to do what others think they should do, until ultimately they mature to recognize that a greater social good is worthwhile, despite one’s own feelings or attachments.

Researching how this works, Kohlberg found that children who are immersed in “democratic” educational environments – where they can assume responsibility for decision making and commit to engaging

in shared, agreed-upon ethical practices – fare much better in their moral development than children who do not engage in these ways at school. The environments cannot be where children simply learn about democracy or justice; they must be where the children themselves participate meaningfully in democratic processes.<sup>1</sup>

Learning from Kohlberg, our Junior High civics curriculum features a weekly class devoted to producing social justice results that the students generate themselves. We follow Kohlberg’s rubric and begin “up close and personal” before moving outward. At each developmental level, the students must be able to both empathize with the cause at hand and identify with the possibility for social action. Each classroom project must resonate with each age group.

Year by year our students engage in projects of broadening scope and impact. Grade 5 students learn what responsible, informed decision making looks like and how democracy functions in their classroom, city, province, and country. The Grade 6 project creates an environmental project that benefits their school community, which for Heschel kids is a very familiar cause to champion. Grade 7 students branch into the local and even international Jewish community, while the Grade 8 initiative is grounded in universal identity. The graduating class’s project encompasses the global community as the students study human rights and pursue plans to protect and promote them.

### Year by year students engage in projects of broadening scope and impact.

What differentiates our civics class from the Ice Bucket Challenge is the sense of personal agency that is embedded in the effort. Students deliberate and vote on all decisions relating to their initiatives, and they feel empowered as, over time, they determine the content, pace, and direction of the work. Year by year the process makes sure that students understand what it means to be a catalyst and a leader.



Our civics classes annually and effectively implement feasible projects that contribute to the greater social good, and they do it through engagement in the kind of thoughtful planning that real-world problems demand. In writing on democratic classrooms, Dr. Steve Bailey explains that, in a school that honestly empowers its students to assume responsibility for much of the school atmosphere and gives them the power to problem-solve and change existing conditions, students become active, responsible partners in their own education.<sup>2</sup> Being a responsible partner is an essential ingredient; it makes the achievement meaningful.

Opportunities to do exciting, socially valuable projects emerge as the children practise how to express an opinion without judgment and how not to put words in others’ mouths. Through this process, mutual respect blossoms. I have witnessed classes that choose to refrain from an important vote if even one classmate is absent, and watched as students painstakingly work to incorporate others’ suggestions into their own proposals.

### If we teach students the social value and personal rewards of active participation... then deeper and concerted acts of social justice will become as second nature as clicking the “Like” button.

Most notably, I see the growth of empathy in the depth of my students’ understanding of why they are proposing certain projects, and for whose benefit. Slacktivism is written out of the equation when the children’s own voices and moral convictions matter. As students define both the process and content of their own social justice experience, their commitment to the cause becomes deep and real.

Maybe slacktivism gets a bad name because it’s so easy; it doesn’t take much to click “Like” on Facebook or post a video to social media. However, I believe that if we continue to teach students the social value and personal rewards of active participation – at school, online, in their peer groups – then, perhaps, as they become citizens with full legal rights and responsibilities, deeper and concerted acts of social justice will become as second nature as clicking the “Like” button.

1 T.C. Hunt and M. Mullins, “Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development,” *Moral Education in America’s Schools: The Continuing Challenge* (New York: IAP, 2005), pp. 173–180.

2 Excerpts from “Democratic Classroom” Workshop by Steve Bailey, retrieved October 1, 2014 from [http://www.lookstein.org/articles/democratic\\_classrooms.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/articles/democratic_classrooms.htm)

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# JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL AND HOW TO NAVIGATE THE TURBULENT WATERS OF JEWISH ADOLESCENCE

BY RABBI LEE BUCKMAN

I am now in my second year as Head of School at TanenbaumCHAT, the community Jewish high school in Toronto. Every day I come to work knowing that I am doing something significant and sacred. I can say this because a Jewish high school education does nothing less than build a strong future for the Jewish people.

Most of my students won't appreciate this. Most probably see their school as just a high school with Jewish studies doubling their workload. Their perspective is not wrong, but they are teenagers and haven't climbed up the mountain high enough to get the full view. And this is why I believe that the decision to send a son or a daughter to Jewish high school should remain the parents' decision. It is a very big picture question.

We live in a world where parents increasingly acquiesce to their children's desires. Sadly, this seems to include a child's inclination to drop out of Jewish education at the age of 13. After bar or bat mitzvah, youngsters may tell their parents, "I know enough Torah, already." Parents wouldn't accept the argument if the child was announcing that he/she knows enough math, so why accept it for Jewish education?

Jewish day school education is merely foundational, but you can only understand this if you appreciate what gets built on top of it. Our children can't see this, but we can. Despite the trends, and before

friends and neighbours cede their parental rights as decision makers, I would like to suggest three compelling reasons why parents should enrol their children in a Jewish high school education. It is all about how to navigate the turbulent waters of Jewish adolescence

Teen years are a time of intense identity development. It is a time when young people try on different "selves," test parental authority, and challenge family values. At a Jewish high school, teens become part of a community of Jewish peers who are asking the same questions and wondering about the same complicated ideas. A Jewish high school offers teenagers a wide range of resources that help them to construct meaning in their lives. Teachers introduce them to the rich treasures of Jewish wisdom that challenge them to live more purposefully and to begin making sense of life's deepest questions.

Adolescence is not just about who the student is now, but about who that student is becoming.

This past summer saw renewed anti-Semitism around the world. Chants such as "Death to the Jews" or "Hitler was right" were reported in Brussels, France, Argentina, and elsewhere. Governments and universities, Jews and non-Jews were trying to marginalize, demonize, and ostracize Israel. How does a young teenager deal with this? I worry for Jewish high school students who lack a place for these conversations – not just about Israel but about all Jewish issues. How are they coping with the questions that surround them today?

Our high school engages with this challenge head on. Through peer programs, speakers, and coursework, students develop a relationship with Israel that accepts nuance and complexity as part of the Jewish situation. Teachers, counsellors, and special guests collaborate to enhance students' understanding of the Jewish people. Students learn that they can disentangle their perspectives and values from the media and hype around them, and do it with a critical eye even as they affirm their Jewish identity with pride and courage. Students emerge with a feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, a profound but worldly connection to the State of Israel, and an abiding sense of responsibility to both.

Our students are Canadian teenagers and Jewish high school ensures that they become equally literate in two civilizations: Western and Jewish. Students should feel equally at home in both. Studying the two civilizations on parallel tracks, side by side, mirrors our teenagers' everyday lives. They learn the laws of physics and the laws of Judaism with equal sophistication, and they study Jewish history and European history with the same rigour. They converse about the need to care for the orphan and the widow in their Torah classes with the same ease as they discuss the survival of the fittest in science.

Jewish high school integrates the whole teenage community. TanenbaumCHAT has an introductory Jewish education track to

welcome students with no prior background in a Jewish day school. "New Stream" students pursue their Jewish studies at an entry level and their secular studies alongside graduates of the day school system. We are a community school.

When we let 13-year-old children opt out of Jewish study, their knowledge of science, language, and Western thought continues to develop but their Jewish thinking remains static. Eventually, their appreciation of Judaism appears juvenile and irrelevant. The messaging is not passive. The challenge to educate for complex identity is fundamental to secondary school; to educate the whole child properly, we must nurture every part.

Adolescence is not just about who the student is now but about who that student is becoming. The third benefit of Jewish high school is that it is good for society and the global world in which we live. This is not the platitude that it may appear to be. Jewish high school provides students with the key ingredients for leadership and purposeful living; it fosters grounded self-awareness, identified values, and a strong sense of community.

Jewish high school provides students with such a rich understanding of who they are as individuals and as Jews that they will be the ones who will be equipped to contribute to today's multicultural society. They will have a clear picture of their unique voice in the diverse symphony of peoples and religions that surround them. This includes an appreciation for diversity within the Jewish community and the contributions that all streams of Judaism make to contemporary Jewish life. What greater blessing can our students offer the cultural mosaic in Canada?

It is not surprising that TanenbaumCHAT graduates take leadership roles in their professional lives and constitute the pipeline of leadership in the Jewish community as well. When no one else stands up for Israel, our graduates stand with Israel. They head up lay and professional roles in disproportionate numbers in our federations, synagogues, summer camps, and a host of non-profits. They are the organizers, the initiators, and the advocates.

Our graduates become the organizers, the initiators, and the advocates.

One can receive an excellent high school education in many places, but only in a Jewish high school does a Jewish student have the chance to fully experience all that growing up Jewish can mean. No other place will inspire students day in and day out to be exactly who they are born to be, to love their identity, and to live their Judaism. No other place will equip them to become passionate, committed Jewish adults. In the turbulent teen waters of 2014, Jewish high school really floats the boat.

Rabbi Lee Buckman is Head of School at the Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto.



## Towards Your Best Self: *Lech Lecha*

BY RABBI JOE KANOFSKY

If you ever wonder, “Why me?” Or if you ever think about the Jewish people and ask, “Why the Jews?” Then *Lech Lecha* is the section of the Torah, the *parsha* for you.

Consider Avraham’s story and life experiences. We might ask, “Why Avraham?” We see that G-d speaks to him one on one. Also that Avraham circumcises himself at an advanced age, makes promises that seem unrealistic, has children at an even more advanced age, and almost loses both of them. What did he do to deserve this attention? Why was Avraham chosen?

G-d calls on Avraham and tells him to go – get out – leave his land, his birthplace, and go to a place that G-d would show him. G-d would then make his descendants into a great nation. Based on what?

Nachmanides explains:

This *parsha* did not explain things at all, for why should G-d command Avraham to leave his land and why would G-d

bestow such greatness upon him...without stating first that he was a servant of G-d or that he was blameless and righteous like Noah... [Nachmanides says] the way of Torah is to write, “draw near to me and I will do good for you, as was said to David and Solomon...” (Commentary on the Torah)

The interpretations and commentaries of the rabbis of the Midrash fill this gap and describe Avraham as smashing idols and encountering different challenges successfully. The stories suggest that Avraham was qualified for his mission.

The amazing thing is not that we have a Torah; it is that we are not in a museum.

The Maharal of Prague – Rabbi Yehuda Löw ben Betzael, who lived from the mid-1500s to 1609 – takes a different view. He emphasized in his *Netzach Yisrael* (1599) that G-d chose Avraham for no specific reason, that Avraham’s specialness consisted in being chosen. The reason that this is noteworthy, continues the Maharal, is that it applies to the Jewish people as well. Did you think we were chosen because we are smarter than others? Holier? Because we are better in some way? Not so, says the Maharal. We were not chosen because we were special. We are special because we were chosen.

Furthermore, the way we view “choseness” as in “the chosen people” is often inaccurate.

In Hebrew, to say that G-d chose us because of an outstanding quality, we would use the verb *borer*. (As when someone looks at strawberries, selects the most delicious, and declines the others.) Yet, when we say, “You chose us from among all the nations,” the Hebrew translation is not “*asher barar banu mikol ha’amim...*” When we say, “You chose us from among all the nations,” the Hebrew translation is “*asher bachar banu mikol ha’amim...*” We use *bachar* as in *bechira chofshit*, which means free choice. Where the options are equal, the selection is free, not merit based, but discretionary, perhaps a whim. It tells us that Jews are identified for this journey for a reason known only to G-d. We know that we are chosen for this and that is what is particular about us. I’m talking to you, says G-d, and that’s all you need to know. Instructions to follow.

Identification is only part of the story. What makes the story worth telling is that Avraham responded. He heard the call, listened, and did what was asked of him. Some of it ran counter to logic and intelligence: Wander out, you will be great! Still Avraham decided, “I’m going to be a part of something larger than myself.” This buy-in is what makes our story worth telling.

It’s not just that G-d offered us this precious legacy that makes us what we are. It is the fact that we answer, accept it, and live it on a daily basis. At the end of the Torah blessing we say, “*Baruch ata Hashem notein hatorah*” (Blessed are you G-d who gives the Torah). Note the

verb. The blessing is in the present tense. We don’t accept that G-d gave the Torah at one specific point long ago in history; G-d gives it constantly every day on a renewed basis. And every day we choose either to accept or not.

Museums are full of tablets and codes even older than ours. The amazing thing is not that we have a Torah; it is that we are not in a museum. We are a living, breathing people, a nation as diverse as any in history, and still going strong, with documented continuity since Avraham. We don’t always get along, and we don’t always agree, but we have always heard the call and responded to the challenge. We are not a historical relic.

The very name of *Lech Lecha* puzzles translators and interpreters, but it need not do so. *Lech Lecha* has been translated as “get thee out, go out, leave, get yourself out, go forth, depart, go for thyself, get up and go.” Literally, however, *lech lecha* means go to yourself, or go for yourself. The journey at hand is to become who we are supposed to become and to realize the potential that we are each given. If the search to actualize ourselves is not the universal human project, it certainly is the Jewish project.

Jewish life likes to unsettle us just a bit. We eat unleavened bread on Pesach, sit on the floor and mourn on Tisha B’Av, fast and pray all day on Yom Kippur, and part with our hard-earned money for *tzedakah* (charitable works). Judaism takes us out of our comfort zone and asks us to consider why we are here. G-d gives us a life, a community, energy, talent and ability, but we each ask, “What am I here for? What am I trying to accomplish and what is the best use of my energy?”

The journey at hand is to become who we are supposed to become.

Many things compete for our time and attention. It is perhaps harder to live Jewishly in the modern age, given all the distractions. There used to be a few TV channels, and now there are hundreds. In 2013 there were 861 million websites, and just one year later there are a billion. It all amounts to considerable diversion: it is a high-tech *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) to keep us from doing what we are supposed to do: cure disease, end hunger, care for each other, build a community, and bring G-dliness to a world which is more than a bit confused about what exactly good and evil is. *Lech Lecha* reminds us that we each do know what to do.

When I read *Lech Lecha*, I take at least one step forward towards myself – towards my best self. We can each move towards making the best out of what G-d offers us the chance to do and to be in the course of our lives. *Lech lecha*.

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**Joe Kanofsky** is Rabbi of Kehillat Shaarei Torah in Toronto. He earned a Ph.D. in Literature, and has published popular and scholarly works in Israel, Europe, Canada, and the U.S.

“I was sending my children the message that what they do all day matters to me.”

## The Fringe Benefits of Volunteering at School

BY DR. JOANNA SHAPIRO

When I began to help out at my children's school, I did it for the obvious reasons. I wanted to contribute to the success of the school and, on a purely personal level, I hoped to find the volunteer work fulfilling and stimulating. Over time, and without any expectation, I began to see that something else was emerging; it seemed my children were experiencing some very positive fringe benefits from my volunteer involvement at their school.

I initially signed up for the Chevra Committee. *Chevra* is the Hebrew word for a collection or group of friends, and our committee's mandate was to build our school community. Our *chevra* events were to foster the village that raises our children. I enjoyed the social and creative aspects of planning. I liked attending the events and was gratified to see our school community's warmth and cohesion growing. The events strengthened the community, and the community strengthened the school. What I didn't notice at first was that my role in planning the events delivered the biggest bang for the buck to my own children.

By devoting my time and attention to their school, I was sending my children the message that what they do all day matters to me; and, by extension, that they matter. I noticed their growing interest in the details of events that I was planning, how they asked logistical questions and wanted to share their ideas about the challenges that arise when preparing an event or working with a committee. It became clear that through my participation and their engagement with me, my children were developing a new sense of ownership of their school. Their "buy-in" translated into speaking about their school with pride and to offering enthusiastically to help out at various school events.

As my children became accustomed to committee meetings held in our home and acclimatized to seemingly endless deliberations about future school events, they learned the "language" of volunteerism. They learned that volunteers can brainstorm, work collaboratively, and pitch in; and the conversations continued in our house long after the meetings ended.

The kids could see that this kind of community support was something that their parents took seriously. It was happening in their very own home and at their school. The language of the volunteer became second nature to my children: to speak up, offer your time, and participate, just like this mom and that dad and that mom and this dad. Whether over a meal or just on the fly, we would talk about what was on the Chevra Committee's agenda and they would jump to help out again and again. I could ask, "Can you make me a sign to advertise *Havdalah* On Ice?" or "What kind of social action project might the Grade 8's like to organize for Mitzvah Day?" or "Can you find five students to make waffles for Breakfast in the *Sukkah*?" It was what we did.

They also saw the rewards of volunteering first hand. One example was a new *chevra* event that they watched from conception to conclusion – Toronto Heschel's Teacher Appreciation Week. The Chevra Committee sent out a request for quotes from students about their teachers, and my children eagerly read and commented on the emails that flooded into my computer. They helped us as we cut out the colourful boxed quotes and made a beautiful montage that greeted the teachers as they arrived at school on Monday morning. My kids felt like insiders – as gratified as proud parents – when they saw



the delighted and surprised reactions of teachers and students alike. And later, as their teachers received surprise afternoon deliveries of healthy smoothies, my kids were happy to know that their mom was on the committee behind the excitement. Observing an event from beginning to end taught my kids that volunteering was rewarding, and that it was fun.

In later years, when I began to serve as a member of the school's board of directors, my children's vantage point and questions changed. Why are you going again, Mom? What does the board do? What do you talk about when you're there? Will you request that my friend, so-and-so, is in my class next year? A new conversation had begun; my kids' "inside view" was now a perspective on the existence of an adult enterprise that acted on their behalf even if they could not share in it. They knew it must be something important if I let it take me out late into dark winter nights.

They began to understand that there are many levels of thinkers and leaders and volunteers devoting time, interest, and expertise to their school.

They began to understand that there are many levels of thinkers and leaders and volunteers devoting time, interest, and expertise to their school. It was enlightening for them to realize that so many people were working so hard to make their days meaningful and

stimulating. It widened their point of view and helped them appreciate a world beyond themselves. Now, when discussions and dilemmas arise for them at school or elsewhere, I think there is a deliberate pause in the conversation so that my kids can consider the other side to the story. The world is not always exactly as it seems; things are complicated.

My volunteer work has immersed my children in the world of community action and introduced them to the language and lifestyle of volunteerism.

My volunteer work in the intimate community that is our school has immersed my children in the world of community action and introduced them to the language and lifestyle of volunteerism. It has also engaged my kids more intensely with their school, its principles and our community's values; they see our family working together and our community collaborating as well. My kids are proud of me. To me, this is the best proof that what I do matters. It is the most unexpected of results from getting involved, and, I admit, it's one of my favourites.

**Dr. Joanna Shapiro** is Co-Chair of the Board of Directors of The Toronto Heschel School. Her eldest daughter has just graduated from Heschel, and her two sons attend the school.



# PEW! IT'S GOOD TO BE HOME!

## JEWISH CONTINUITY NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE BORDER

BY DANIEL HELD

Nearly six years ago, after having grown up in Toronto, I moved to New York. I could blame the move on my wife who was starting residency. I could also say that my own career ambitions took me to the United States to pursue academic and professional avenues not available in Canada. No matter the reason, we quickly adapted to the rhythm of The City and fell in love with our synagogue community.

In 2013, as we were both coming to the end of our academic programs, it was time to consider our next step. Should we stay in New York, in the community where we had built a family; should we look for work in other communities across the U.S.; or should we return home to Toronto? We spent six months agonizing over the decision. We travelled for interviews across North America, looking at houses, schools, and shuls. We considered options, made pro and con lists, and spoke to friends and mentors.

There are many reasons why we chose to return to Toronto. Family, jobs, and friends were, of course, at the top of our list. For me, as a father and Jewish communal professional, the nature of the Jewish community was also critical. It is important to us to contribute to the growth and well-being of our community, wherever we choose to live. The continuity of the Jewish community is something we don't take lightly.

### Concerns about Continuity

Just after we left New York in 2013, the Pew Research Centre released *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*.<sup>1</sup> The study is the most comprehensive national survey of the Jewish community since the 2000–2001 *National Jewish Population Survey*. Its findings made waves. Throughout the fall and winter following its release, talk of Pew was endless, even here in Toronto. I read articles and attended webinars, listened to lectures, and engaged in Shabbat table debates. Most of us agreed: even for the ever-dying people, Pew painted a bleak outlook.

Unlike the U.S. census, which hasn't asked about respondents' religions since 1957, Statistics Canada's long-form census has asked respondents to indicate their religion and their ethnicity. Judaism appeared as an option under both of these questions. Using this data, the Canadian Jewish community derived information such as population growth, immigration, geographic distribution, socio-economic makeup, and intermarriage rates. Layering other data on top of these numbers provided estimated levels of communal engagement in Jewish education and other programs.

The comparison of data from Pew and from Statistics Canada is challenging. The methodologies, questions, and resulting information differ, making comparative statistical analysis nearly impossible. It is possible, however, to explore general trends in the two communities and to extrapolate ways in which the two are similar and ways in which they are distinct.

Judging by the deluge of commentaries following the publication of the Pew report, I imagine (and hope that) there will be a similar wealth of analysis to be drawn from the Canadian National Household Survey, which replaced the long-form census in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Here, I offer a view on a limited number of data points that are important to my own work – as a father and communal professional.

### Overview

While some have read the Pew results as the death knell of American Judaism, that is certainly not the case for Canadian Judaism. The Canadian Jewish community, and specifically that in Toronto, demonstrates compelling vibrancy. At the same time, data from the National Household Survey do point to a number of indicators that flag the need to proceed with caution and care if we are to safeguard this vibrancy in the future.

### Population Growth

The Pew survey estimates that there are 4.2 million people in the United States who identify Judaism as their religion. If one includes those who say they have no religion but were raised Jewish or who consider themselves Jewish aside from religion, the number grows to 5.3 million. Benchmarking this number against previous estimates of the American Jewish population is difficult because of differing definitions and survey methodologies. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the population is growing, shrinking, or remaining stable.

We can, however, be more definitive with the Canadian Jewish population. Between 2001 and 2011, the population grew by 17,605 people or 4.7%, and the Toronto population grew by 4.4%. In comparison to most contemporary Jewish communities, this growth is remarkable and certainly speaks to the strength of Canadian Jewry. At the same time, however, the rate of growth has slowed over the past decades to the point where it is now at a near standstill.

### Intermarriage

The headline most associated with the Pew survey was intermarriage rates. According to the study, 79% of married American Jews of no religion have a spouse who is not Jewish, compared with 36% among Jews by religion. The overall intermarriage rate among American Jews is 44%.

Concerns about intermarriage stem from the likelihood of these families raising their children as Jewish. Among couples where both spouses are Jewish, nearly all (96%) report that they are raising their children as Jewish by religion. Among Jews with a non-Jewish spouse, however, Pew reports that only 20% are raising their children as Jewish by religion, and 25% are raising their children partly Jewish by religion. The rate of intermarriage among those most recently married – between 2000 and 2013 – was 58%.

The National Household Survey reveals that the intermarriage rate of Canadian Jews in 2011 was 25%. In Toronto, that rate dropped to 17.3%. One often hears an assertion that the Canadian Jewish community is one generation behind the United States. Intermarriage this low, however, has not been seen in the U.S. since before 1970.

The low rate of intermarriage among Toronto Jews should not, however, lead to overconfidence. Intermarriage rates outside of Toronto are higher than those in Toronto, and even within Toronto, intermarriage rates are higher outside the Bathurst corridor. Intermarriage rates in Toronto continue to grow, though the rate of growth has slowed over the last decade.

Of most concern is the intermarriage rate among young Torontonians, which was higher than that of older couples. Among married couples in which both partners were under the age of 30, 28.4% were intermarried. Among couples in which both were over the age of 39, the intermarriage rate was 15.1%. This trend could mark an indicator of growth in future intermarriage rates.

### Jewish Education

Of course, for me as an educator, engagement in activities of Jewish learning is critical – not only for my livelihood but also because a robust Jewish education system is the most important predictor of a strong Jewish community. According to the Pew study, 23% of respondents report having gone to yeshiva or Jewish day school. In Toronto, rates for attending elementary Jewish day schools have consistently been in the range of 32–35% for at least the last four decades. Recognizing that some students will attend day school for only some of those elementary years, the overall number of those who once attended day school is much higher than that in the United States. Similarly, high school attendance rates in Toronto are considered high with 24.5% of Jewish youth attending Jewish high school in 2011.

While day school is considered the gold standard in Jewish education, it is not the only option that parents consider. Pew reports that 59% of respondents participated in another form of formal Jewish education – most likely supplementary school. In Toronto, the field of supplementary school education remains underdeveloped compared to that in the United States, demonstrated by the fact that only 10% of Jewish elementary aged students attend supplementary school in any given year.

### Conclusion

Making our decision of where to live, where to work, and where to raise our family was gruelling. Countless times we debated, came to a decision, and then second-guessed ourselves. We wanted to live in a community that offered good education opportunities, dynamic social and religious components, and where we could actively participate in community life.

Just as we can't predict the Jewish community of the future, neither can the Pew study nor the National Household Survey. But each of these studies demonstrates the strength and tenacity of our communities while exposing their vulnerabilities. We look forward to raising our family in Toronto's vibrant Jewish community and to contributing to its strength and well-being in the years ahead.

1 *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews*, Pew Research Center, 1 October 2013, <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=18058>

2 In 2011, Statistics Canada switched from a long-form census to a voluntary National Household Survey. While 20% of households completed the long-form census, one-third of Canadian households were given the National Household Survey and, of these, 78% completed it. Despite the methodological change, the data provides the Canadian Jewish community with invaluable information for communal pulse-taking and planning. Data from this survey relating to the Jewish community are being compiled and will be released shortly.

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# SAVING AND SHARING ALL DAY LONG

CULTIVATING KINDNESS AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL

BY COBY AND ROBYN SEGALL

As parents of two young children, we share a goal: we want our kids to be compassionate. We want to cultivate in them a sense of *chesed* (kindness and empathy). We are very aware that our various, and often difficult, choices as parents indelibly influence our children.

To demonstrate to our children just how important the value of *chesed* is, we make it a priority to engage them in meaningful and direct experiences of giving. Meanwhile, we know that every day we also deliver indirect unspoken messages to them. Sometimes these unspoken messages are even stronger and more powerful than the former.

A year ago, we began what we call our “Save and Share Project.” Our children, ages 6 and 4, painted and personalized two small wooden boxes. One is labelled “share” and is essentially a *tzedakah* (donations) box; the other is labelled “save” and holds each child’s personal allowance. We give them a number of coins each week and they choose how much to put in each box. How much will they save for that coveted new Beyblade, and how much will they store away for “the man on the street”? It is not an easy choice for an adult, let alone a child.

When the “share” box is almost full, we go downtown on a family excursion and use our “super-hero” eyes to find homeless people with whom to share our coins. The children are eager to open their

boxes, but first they must engage in a casual and respectful conversation with the recipient. The kids ask if they can explain their project and the recipients are generally happy to speak with us, and they are grateful to accept the gift. This casual chat models how *tzedakah* includes respect; when an adult is receiving money from a child, the situation demands we address this important aspect of giving.

Our kids attend The Toronto Heschel School, which also focuses on modelling and cultivating compassion and empathy in its students, beginning with the youngest in Junior Kindergarten. When our son stayed home with the flu last year, we were touched to receive a phone call from his classmates and teachers checking in on him and wishing him well. Each of the sixteen children left a kind, and sometimes silly, message for him. The smile on his face taking it all in was priceless. This small but beautiful gesture left our little guy feeling included and cared for by his classroom community; it taught him how it feels to be cared for by others when needing it most.

This display inspired us to take an initiative to the school. Beyond our family projects, we both work in the Toronto Jewish community with not-for-profit organizations, Ve’ahavta and The House, both of which focus on education and social action initiatives. When we offered to lead hands-on care experiences for members of our children’s school community, we were thrilled (and impressed) when

We see a culture of caring  
coming home to us and we are happy.

Toronto Heschel accepted our proposal. We planned to celebrate Purim through the “Pay It Forward Purim” program with Grades 7 and 8 students, their families and teachers.

On a cold winter night last year, we loaded *mishloah manot* (gift baskets) made by the younger grades into our cars and Team Heschel headed downtown. We split into smaller groups and distributed two gift baskets to each homeless Torontonians we encountered. We gave one for the recipient to keep, and one for him or her to “pay it forward” by giving the second basket to someone else in need.

We were hoping that empowering a recipient to become a “giver” might initiate small ripples of change and kindness in their street community. This very abstract potential opened our volunteers’ eyes. The students and their families began to view acts of kindness from a wider perspective, and we talked about the different kinds of implications that might flow from the simple act of handing over a coin or gift. It also taught us that people who live on the street are some of the most generous people that we know and that they usually only take what they need at that moment.

Another group of “*chesed* recipients” that greatly appreciates our acts of kindness are the elderly. Once a month some wonderfully loyal volunteers join us at the Cummer Lodge nursing home for a program that The House has facilitated over the last seven years. Working one on one, we encourage elderly men and women to get out of bed and join a joyful Jewish service in the auditorium. Our volunteers help the elderly residents get ready and then escort them to where live music and young smiles greet them.

Not surprisingly, young volunteers sometimes find it uncomfortable to witness the challenges of aging – dependency, anxiety, and sometimes startling yells. It’s even a little frightening. Nonetheless, soon after each Sunday event begins, the seniors transform and so do the volunteers. With music and singing, storytelling and conversations, smiles shine out from behind frowns of doubt. No other place in the world seems like a more “right” place to be at that moment. It is a profound and uplifting experience for both the seniors and the volunteers.

They see the behaviours daily at their  
school and make them their own.

Needless to say, the decision of where we place our children to spend their whole day, every day, is the kind of indirect unspoken message that has an immense influence on how our children mature. They see the behaviours role modelled daily at their school and they

are naturally inclined to mimic them and make them their own. We are relieved and pleased that the ethos of social conscience and direct engagement that we prize for our children and our volunteers are deliberate and vibrant at Toronto Heschel.

This culture of *chesed* lurks in many of the activities that the Heschel kids do every day. Whether it is the famous opening of doors that visitors continually remark on as they pass students in the school hall, or the litter and recycling chores that are as structured and stringent as *kashrut*, we see a participatory culture of caring coming home to us and we are happy. We feel that choosing a school for its lived values – not just its stated plan – is essential when strategizing to cultivate Jewish-inspired and solid humanitarian values in our children.



In partnership with The Toronto Heschel School, The House, Ve’ahavta, and our synagogue, the Village Shul, we will continue to introduce our children to meaningful personal experiences. We hope that these acts of *chesed* will build their character, their Jewish identities, and their participation in the community at large. If you have any educational or parenting ideas on this topic, we would love to hear from you. [Coby\\_segall@yahoo.com](mailto:Coby_segall@yahoo.com) [robynts@gmail.com](mailto:robynts@gmail.com).

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