

SPRING 2017 אביב תשע"ז

HaYidion

הידיעון



JEWISH INSPIRATION



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

HaYidion

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JEWISH INSPIRATION

I lift up my eyes unto the mountains—from whence cometh my help? Psalm 121:1

The ancient Roman poets divided into two camps over the question of the proper method for writing poetry. A first group of poets, who called themselves water drinkers, claimed that good poems come from poets who work soberly to refine their craft and master poetic form, one word and verse at a time. Hard work is the only path to excellence. A second group, the self-proclaimed wine drinkers, rejected this method as hack work of plebeian scribblers. They thought that memorable poetry requires extraordinary inspiration, a bolt from beyond. Our ordinary habits and senses are incapable of achieving this level of greatness; some sort of altered, heightened state of consciousness is required. Inspiration cannot be planned for or accessed during work hours. Among the most highly regarded Roman poets, the wine drinkers prevailed: "No poems live long or please many people that are written by water drinkers" (Horace).

Contemporary Jewish day schools are places that try to combine the water and wine (or, given the age group, perhaps we should say "nectar") of Jewish inspiration. Day schools engage students in the hard work of learning a dual curriculum: tefillah, Chumash, Navi, Mishnah and Gemara; Hebrew, modern and ancient, along with talmudic Aramaic; and a full menu of secular studies that do not receive short shrift. Through the patient devotion to years of study, schools hope, students will develop the skills and knowledge needed to live a rich Jewish life, pursue a career of their choosing, and participate in the important issues of their country and the world. Inspiration will come of itself, when the student is ready and the teacher and material resonate with the right alloy of thoughts and emotions.

But a growing number of educators have come to believe that different pedagogical strategies are necessary if we want our students to be not just knowledgeable but also inspired by their learning. The field of experiential education posits that students become inspired when they are actively engaged in their learning, not just absorbing information from books or lectures. Project-based learning, Inquiry learning and related initiatives adapt the principles of experiential learning to the classroom setting, in the belief that students are inspired when they are empowered to grab the reins of their own learning. Trends toward individualization serve the same goal of enabling students to grow at the rate of their abilities and in the direction of their interests. Increasingly, the water of day-to-day progression up a spiral curriculum is paired with the wine of hands-on projects specially designed to elicit students' curiosity, imagination, collaboration skills and critical thinking.

These new developments are especially relevant to the Jewish life and learning in day schools, because so much rides upon them. For at some level, the mission of all day schools is Jewish inspiration. Day schools seek to turn students on to Judaism, to ensure they find Judaism meaningful, for them to turn to Jewish teachings for guidance and solace. They hope that their students continue to belong to Jewish communities, to participate actively, to take leadership roles; to pray, eat, study, think, breathe Jewishly. Day schools aim to endow students with a kind of Jewish inspiration so powerful that it will last a lifetime, and even beyond.

We thought it worthwhile to devote an issue of *HaYidion* to understand this concept of inspiration, to address it from multiple perspectives and to articulate some of the questions and challenges surrounding it. What is inspiration? Can it be transmitted, and if so, how? What methods best align with the goal of inspiring students? Where do day schools succeed, and where do they struggle? How do teachers, curricula, school activities accomplish it?

In the first section, authors seek to explain inspiration and offer guidance for success. **Heller Stern** enters the gates of the Pixar studios to draw lessons on how creative organizations help creative people stay creative and increase their creativity. **Ben David** turns to the thought of Rav Kook to connect Jewish inspiration to Jewish aspiration. **Alter** argues that Jewish inspiration should not be an excuse for superficiality; the water of Torah can only be drunk through diligent study and reflection.

The next group of authors looks at various Jewish day school stakeholders and what inspires them. **Bloom** presents research on day school alumni, **Pell** proposes a method for inspiring parents and donors, and **Cabag and Lahr** tease out what day school employees of other faiths find inspiring about working in this setting. Inspirational author **Carroll** shares insights into the critical importance of play and sports in cultivating passionate engagement in all areas.

In this issue's school spread, six alumni of different schools reflect upon a teacher who inspired them and continues to exert a lasting influence on their Jewish outlook and identity. The issue's second section explores ways that teachers deliver Jewish inspiration to their students. **Perl and Horn** describe a program of spiritual mentorship that brings the teacher-student relationship to bear upon the delicate, personal issues of spiritual development. **Cannon and Kotler** bring their experience of helping schools develop capacity in using game-based learning and STEAM for Jewish education. **Maayan** describes ways that social justice education can inspire middle schoolers to live out the Jewish principles they've studied. **Kislowicz** proposes expanding the scope and relevance of Hebrew in day schools, while **Avidar** challenges day schools to inspire students in Israel education through the conflict, not despite it. **Chanales** shares his efforts and struggles with the notion of "relevance" in Talmud study. **Gereboff and Kligman** find that intergrade programming lays the groundwork for students to inspire each other.

We hope that you find ideas in this issue that inspire you to create new forms of inspiration for your students, teachers and the whole school community, and that you take the time to share your own inspiring stories and initiatives with the field, whether through *HaYidion*, Prizmah's Reshet groups or elsewhere. For those of you who were able to join us in Chicago at the Prizmah Jewish Day School Conference, we at Prizmah hope that you returned to your schools inspired by new ideas, initiatives and colleagues. Over the months ahead, we look forward to building and renewing relationships that will inspire us all to move our schools, and Jewish education, from strength to strength.



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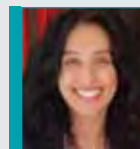
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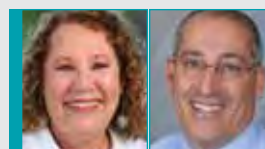
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FROM THE
CEO



PAUL BERNSTEIN

INSPIRING EACH OTHER

It is a pleasure to welcome back readers to the second Prizmah edition of *HaYidion*, published as Prizmah enters the second half of its launch year. What our authors so generously share in these pages adds, I hope, to the vast universe of Jewish texts, religious and otherwise, that so richly inspire our communities through the generations.

With writings accumulated over the millennia available to us, the question is, how can we most effectively learn and develop ideas that will guide our future? We must continue to read our sources, most of all the Torah itself. But the Talmud (Berakhot 63b) teaches us that “Torah is only acquired in a group” (chavurah). Only? Strong word, indeed. According to Midrash Rabba, Rabbi Chama Bar Chanina said, “Just as a knife can only be sharpened only on the side of another, so the disciple of a sage can only become sharpened by his chaver” (friend).

Educators are constantly seeking to inspire the next generation of Jewish youth to be their best and to lead productive, positive, Jewish lives. Prizmah was founded to help day school educators enhance that experience and help them be more successful in serving children. Yet the role of a school leader, indeed frequently the role of a teacher, can be lonely. If Torah is truly acquired only in a group, how much more can we achieve for young, bright Jewish minds by sharing and learning together among our schools?

As anyone who has learned in a chevuta knows, the richness of experience side-by-side with a fellow learner is beyond parallel. Moreover, often the chevuta meets in the company of other pairs also learning together. The shared experience of many chevutot in one place brings greater richness to what and how we learn. And the highest level of success in a chevuta is achieved when each participant brings all their energy and commitment into the pair and into the wider community learning.

The Prizmah team, executives and board are deeply committed to enhancing the day school field and making the connections that maximize schools’ learning opportunities. To build the most effective organization serving the day school field, we are learning with your guidance every day. As our board chair, Kathy Manning, describes in her

column, we have been visiting and meeting with professional and lay leaders across the field to learn and help guide what Prizmah should become.

However, the Prizmah network will only be as strong as our members make it. The same principle of learning in a group (chavurah), whether pairs or more, guides the opportunity we have in Prizmah to enrich our learning together as educators. By gathering together and learning with each other, fully putting our energy into a shared experience, we will maximize the opportunities to enhance our schools. The more each of us puts in, the more we get out of it.

The recent Prizmah Jewish Day School Conference was the largest opportunity in our calendar for shared learning. The conference featured many excellent teachers and speakers, opportunities to hear about ways in which teaching, learning, school management and funding can be improved. But most of all, the conference facilitated the gathering of chaverim—our friends and learning partners. What we learned and gained from the conference directly related to our choice to be there and each to put his or her whole self into the experience among peers.

The learning opportunity continues through the year in each person’s engagement with fellow Jewish educators through Prizmah. This is your organization, the place, both physical and virtual, to engage and learn with chaverim. We are seeking your active engagement, which means we are seeking your leadership. That leadership includes helping us know what you need and what will most enhance your work and the lives of the students you serve.

Bill Gates said, “As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.” The route to empowerment is to engage actively with each other, and learn together what will best enhance our children’s education. We are each seeking inspiration and the ability to inspire others. I hope that this *HaYidion*, like all others, plants a seed for you that will grow into a powerful educational experience. I also invite you to learn together with friends in Prizmah, shaping this organization so it may best enhance the day school field and support your school’s success.

KATHY MANNING

From the
Board



INSPIRING JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

The theme for this issue of *HaYidion* is Jewish inspiration. As I sat down to write this column, I was overwhelmed with the effort to select just one example of inspiration from my Jewish heroes, Jewish history, our sacred texts or the remarkable story of the Jewish people. Clearly there are just too many good choices.

Then I began to think about my Prizmah journey over the past six months: all the communities and schools I have visited with our CEO, Paul Bernstein; all the teachers, students and parents we have talked with; and incredible teaching we have observed. And I realized that my Jewish inspiration today comes from those students, teachers, schools, communities and all the generous donors who understand that the key to a strong and vibrant Jewish future is outstanding, nurturing, accessible Jewish day schools.

Since August, Paul and I have visited wonderful Jewish day schools of different sizes and affiliations and met with educators and day school supporters in West Hartford, Baltimore, Boston, MetroWest, San Francisco and Los Angeles. We've met students brimming with enthusiasm as they explained the intricate inventions they created in their school's cutting-edge maker spaces with the guidance of dedicated science teachers. We walked through a group of excited high school boys singing with gusto to celebrate their achievement of reaching their 316th mitzvah. We watched middle school students using new computer technology that allowed each student to progress through difficult math problems at their own pace. We saw kindergarten students joyously singing in Hebrew and acting out the words of their song.

We listened to a headmaster explain with pleasure how his high school students created multiple morning minyans to accommodate everything from traditional practices to feminist approaches to prayer, making sure that all students could find meaning and beauty in Jewish prayer and ritual. We talked with parents, board members and community leaders about the success they are achieving in creating great schools, new funding models and in some cases unbelievable success in raising endowment funds to make day schools accessible to all students. There is no question that many day schools are facing significant challenges, particularly in the area of financial accessibility, and to some these challenges seem insurmountable. But we have seen what can be done when a community comes together to support their schools and their students, as well as the impact a few determined and dedicated leaders can have. I have been inspired by the passion and devotion of those we have met, those whose dedication to Jewish education and the Jewish future motivate me to work even harder for the success of Prizmah.

In December, I was privileged to attend two remarkable events that celebrated laudable achievement in the Jewish world. In San

Francisco, I attended the retirement celebration of Chip Edelsberg, the CEO of the Jim Joseph Foundation. Under Chip's leadership, the Jim Joseph Foundation has invested heavily in Jewish education, including Prizmah and our recent Prizmah conference. Listening to leaders from across the Jewish community describe Chip's visionary leadership and the impact he and the Jim Joseph Foundation have had was inspiring and made me hope that others who attended that auspicious gathering will emulate Chip's devotion to Jewish education.

The very next day, I attended the 27th annual Jewish Educator Awards Luncheon in Los Angeles, presented by the Milken Family Foundation with the BJE (Builders of Jewish Education), a beneficiary agency of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation. As articulated by the Milken Foundation Chairman, Lowell Milken, and Executive Vice President, Richard Sandler, "The goals of a Jewish day school education [are] more vital than ever to reinforce and perpetuate the intellectual, spiritual and ethical values of the Jewish people." The Milken Family Foundation created the Educator Awards "to dramatically expand the support and recognition for teachers, administrators and other education professionals." At the luncheon, we were privileged to learn about the four extraordinary educators who were honored, first watching the videos of the school assemblies where the teachers were surprised with their awards. Not only did we get to see the astonishment of the award winners, we got to observe the joy and pride of the students who watched their teachers being honored.

I am energized by the work that is going on in the field and among our Prizmah staff. Everywhere I visited, I heard from educators that our Prizmah programs are helping heads of schools improve their skills, admissions directors refine their recruitment plans, board chairs improve the governance and fundraising efforts, and educators create networks where best practices are discussed and shared.

Finally, I am inspired by the dedication of our board members, who continue to give generously of their time and resources. I want to thank Ann Pava, Lisa Coll, Michael Bohnen, Yehuda Neuberger and Brad Klatt, who put together valuable visits to their communities for Paul and me and took time out of their schedules to accompany us on our visits. I want to thank all of our board members for attending our recent board meeting in New York, where we spent considerable time working on creating a strategic plan for Prizmah that will help us meet our goal of helping schools with educational excellence, financial vitality, and expanding the field of day school education. If we can help schools inspire Jewish students with a deep love of education and knowledge of Jewish history, values and ritual, we will have achieved our ultimate goal of ensuring an inspired Jewish future.



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SNAPSHOTS

FROM THE 2017 PRIZMAH JEWISH DAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE

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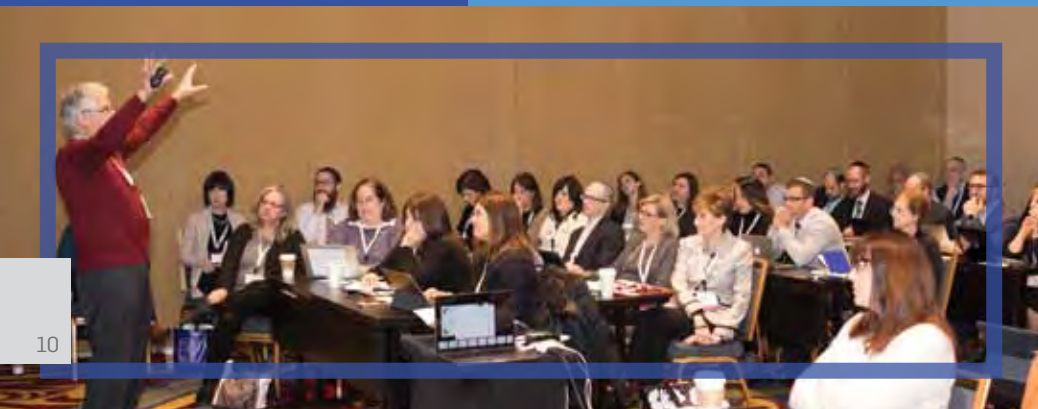
A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE

One that we dreamed would be like **no other**. One that met **current needs** and **inspired dreams** about what could be true for our schools. Our inaugural conference **celebrated YOU** — school leaders, lay leaders, and everyone who **champions Jewish education** on a daily basis.

OUR SINCEREST THANKS

To everyone who attended, shared, and **invested in their own professional growth**.

THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING....





#PRIZMAH17
FEBRUARY 5-7 CHICAGO



THE PLAYGROUND



What is possible when we create a hub for interactive engagement, out-of-the-box exploration, and viewing what's new and next for learning innovation?

A TASTE OF COACHING

What is possible when we offer attendees complimentary sessions with our coaches to discuss their most pressing questions and receive individualized guidance?



CREATIVE CONNECTION

What is possible when we use illustrations to serve as a visual mirror to reflect back participants' insights from the conference?

SNAPSHOTS

FROM THE 2017 PRIZMAH JEWISH DAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE

THE SECOND CITY WORKS

What is possible when we become comfortable with discomfort and use improv tricks of the trade to sharpen our storytelling skills and enhance our communications?



KEYNOTE SPEAKER: DR. JANE MCGONIGAL

What is possible when we use the neuroscience behind gaming to solve challenges and help our students succeed?





#PRIZMAH17
FEBRUARY 5-7 CHICAGO



EXCURSIONS

What is possible when we step out of our traditional learning environments and engage with the world around us?



TEACHER DAY

What is possible when we bring together 75 teachers from local Chicago Jewish day schools to lead each other in roundtable discussions about their most effective classroom strategies and tools?

LAY LEADER, FEDERATION, AND FOUNDATION BREAKFAST



What is possible when lay leaders, philanthropists, and federation representatives connect with each other and dive deeply into some of their biggest challenges?

NETWORKING

What is possible when a thousand colleagues seek to share expertise and build connections with others who share similar roles?



INSPIRING
SCHOOLS





Leaving a meeting wondering what was accomplished. Staring at the screen trying to decide where to begin. Ticking the easy items off the “to do” list because the big picture feels overwhelming to tackle. Pushing through a predictable routine of meetings and putting out fires. Educational leadership can easily get consumed by tasks that make us feel stuck. How do we get unstuck?

Lessons from Pixar Studios

Staying Animated in Leadership

Take a field trip. Applying the Talmudic adage, *Meshaneh makom meshaneh mazal*, Going to a new place may change your fortune, taking a field trip can lead us to see our world differently. My inspiration for this essay draws from my recent tour of Pixar Studios, where I learned how some of the leading animators, writers and executives in the film industry hone their creativity. In addition to finding the real Dory in her Emeryville, California, fish tank, I also found perspective on a question that animates me: How can creative practices enhance the work of educators and learners? I discovered ways that an institutional culture can promote creativity and dodge the bullets that kill inspiration. Stepping outside of my own institutional culture enabled me to pivot from tweaking “what is” to imagining “what might be.”

Establish a brain trust for feedback. At Pixar, the Brain-trust is the meeting of the minds where a draft of a film is screened, problems are identified, and numerous solutions are brainstormed. The Braintrust is no ordinary meeting of colleagues. It is a mechanism for taking an idea, a plan, a work in progress and making it better. Instead of scrutinizing the creator, candid comments are directed at the project under review. Conversation is governed by an operating assumption that the smart people in the room have a shared investment in enhancing the quality of the project. No directives are given; the ideas on the table are meant to stimulate the thinking of the director so that she can steer forward.

If I am the director of a movie, or a teacher who has created a new curriculum, or a teacher leader who has introduced a new program into my school, it is likely that I am deeply invested in my project. My professional identity is wrapped up in the work. Often, we dwell so far inside our own projects that we cannot see what needs to change. To find the inspiration and direction to pivot, we need our brain trust to participate with candor and in good faith. We need to be able to trust that they are smart and that they know what it feels like to be in the hot seat. Feedback must spring from empathy in order to be constructive; otherwise it just deconstructs and leaves us right back where we started: stuck. A good brain trust will produce alternative ideas that inspire action rather than paralyze progress. If the feedback can stimulate new thinking and advance my project, I can flourish.

Educational leaders are often expected to produce solutions quickly, as if they could be pulled from an instruction manual. But the challenges they face are similar to the directors’ need to rework a flawed plotline or character. They need a space to iterate with trusted colleagues and consider multiple solutions. The achievement of solving the puzzle, and seeing success in the form of students and their families flourishing, is similar to the accomplishment of dreaming up the right end to the story that will satisfy the audience.

Learn a new creative skill. Pixar Studios has a wing of its campus called “Pixar University,” where every employee



can take classes in drawing, storytelling, creative writing, sculpting, painting, belly dancing, and more. This in-house “university” is guided by a belief that if you want to get better at what you do, you must take time out to learn something completely different. As Pixar President Ed Catmull describes the approach in *Creativity, Inc.*, the way to enhance creativity is “keeping our brains nimble by pushing ourselves to try things we haven’t tried before.”

Many of us have hobbies that we pursue alone to help us relax, get centered and find inspiration. However, at Pixar University the communal setting for learning builds camaraderie around experimentation and self-expression. Classes bring together professionals from different departments and levels of company hierarchy to try their hand at a skill in which they may all be novices. In a corporation where everyone is expected to produce at a high level and often under intense pressure, in these classes, everyone has permission to be a learner, to play, to fumble and to try again. The computer programmer, the office assistant, the CEO, the marketing director, may all have the opportunity to take risks and learn together.

In schools, we prioritize professional development for skills that are explicitly related to the educational leadership portfolio: board development, assessment, curriculum design. But learning to draw might inspire me to map out a program visually. A creative writing class might help a team develop their professional voice together. Mindfulness might lead us to listen more attentively. Whatever the discipline, the possibility of individual and collective inspiration is valuable in and of itself, and for the possibility for stimulating new ways of thinking and doing in the workplace.

Adopt “a beginner’s mind.” There is no doubt that highly talented experts are essential for Pixar’s success. Yet there is concern that if they settle too comfortably into their expertise, they settle into routine decision making and their ability to discover new creative solutions wanes. The brain trust and creative classes are strategies intended to open employees’ minds and keep them in learning mode; an open mind is essential for these strategies to produce creative results.

Unfortunately, our brains are wired to do the opposite. Psychologists have demonstrated that our brains are inclined to exercise “cognitive control” or “fast thinking” when we encounter something new, layering our previous experience and knowledge over a new experience. As a survival skill, this tendency in the human brain is useful when it comes

to recognizing people, sensing danger or understanding quickly. There is a downside to this phenomenon though, as theater professors Saxton and Miller argue in their research on drama as an educational tool: “To survive is a given, but to have our brain frame what we see in the same way each time diminishes our ability to move beyond the predictable.” We often rob ourselves of our own inspiration, because our brain wants to recognize what we see and hear as being just the same as what we already know. Drama, parable, metaphor and changing position are all tools to encourage the brain to see things anew.

Somewhere between the routine and the rigor of a school day, “fast thinking” becomes the norm, and the possibility of stepping back and imagining a new approach gets lost. Surviving becomes the measure of success instead of thriving. If “expertise” can be defined not just by what we already know, but by our ability to constantly learn and puzzle-solve, leading as an expert can be inspiring work!

Vanquish the culture of fear. Encouraging new thinking, giving feedback guided by candor and trust, leveling hierarchy and practicing new creative skills are all intended to lower the barriers of fear that inhibit creative work. The inner voice whispering “What if I fail?” and “What if I am not perfect?” needs to be silenced. Fear may motivate, but it does not inspire. Pixar’s methods for overcoming the obstacles to inspiration mirror recent research by affective neuroscientists, who posit, “We feel, therefore we learn.” Immordino-Yang and Damasio suggest that emotion is the scaffold for our cognition; our physical responses to situations, stirred by our emotions, can stimulate or inhibit learning. Our brains engage in “emotional thought” in order to make the risky, creative decisions necessary to survive. In fact, Immordino-Yang and Damasio define creativity as “a means to survive and flourish in a cultural context” and learning to respond to situations “in increasingly flexible, sophisticated and creative ways” is perhaps “the chief purpose of education.” Our brains respond to our cultural context; as leaders, we need to build cultures that cultivate creative thought and productivity rather than undermine it.

Many of us rely on personal practices and hobbies for inspiration, such as prayer, hiking, yoga, painting, travel or reading. The problem is, these practices are an escape from our work instead of guideposts for our work. What I have described here are ingredients for an institutional culture that insists upon breathing inspiration into the very fiber of the place. Animation is quite literally the job of the folks at Pixar; but staying personally animated in a competitive, high-pressure environment ruled by deadlines and high stakes requires intentional encouragement. Creativity is obviously an essential practice at a successful movie studio. Creativity is also an essential practice for thriving at Jewish day school—and nearly everywhere else.

Recommended Reading

Ed Catmull. *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration.*

Juliana Saxton and Carole Miller, “Drama, Creating and Imagining: Rendering the World Newly Strange,” in *How Drama Activates Learning*, eds. Michael Anderson and Julie Dunn.

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang. *Emotions, Learning and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience.*

Becoming a “School of Becoming”

ARYEH
BEN DAVID



The role of Jewish education is to inspire us to become our best selves. To inspire students, teachers first need to inspire themselves. Teachers don't need to create inspiration, but model it for their students.

What does it mean to inspire? Doesn't it all just boil down to being charismatic and a great singer/storyteller?

Actually, “inspire” means to inhale, to breathe in deeply. In Hebrew, the word *lishof* means both to inhale and to yearn. In other words, the Hebrew language is teaching us: There is no inspiration without yearning. Inhaling and yearning both give life. Moreover, the deeper the yearning or inhaling, the more powerful the inspiration. What is yearning in education? Through the Jewish wisdom I am teaching or learning, I begin to imagine and envision becoming a better version of me. If we want our teachers to inspire, we must encourage them to see themselves as works-in-progress; to see the Jewish wisdom they're teaching as the key to their own self-growth; and to share this with their students.

Many teachers “go into” education for the wrong reasons:

- They loved to learn.
- They loved their subject.
- They succeeded as students in school.

People who become educators for these reasons tend to be uninspiring because they focus on the transmission of content. Perhaps this approach worked in previous generations when knowledge held a certain mystique, but educating for

content is not relevant and certainly not inspiring for today's generation. Thanks to technology, kids are able to access information that interests them from a very young age. One's ability to self-teach from a place of ease and comfort will only expand in the coming years. Plus, when browsing the internet, I am free to choose exactly what interests me. But in class, even if the teacher loves his or her subject, only a few students are there out of love. To summarize: Content alone is hardly a recipe for inspired teaching.

So how can we move from a content-driven educational approach to an inspiration-driven approach?

Step 1: A paradigm shift on how teachers approach their teaching

Before thinking about how to present material to students, teachers need to look inside themselves, reflect, and imagine how they themselves can be personally impacted and changed by what they are about to teach. If teachers are not deeply affected by what they teach, there is no chance that their students will be deeply affected. Students will never be more engaged than their teachers. To be inspirational, teachers do not have to be charismatic or utilize advanced technology; they



need to “inhale their subject,” to become affected by the subject matter they are teaching.

The practical advice here is that teachers *need to envision their better selves emerging* on account of their engagement with the material they’re about to teach. Teachers need to ask themselves the following questions:

“What is this subject saying to me right now?”

“How can learning this subject affect and impact my own life?”

If the material is not affecting the teacher, then in the classroom the teacher will only be giving over information, without inspiration.

For example:

- Hanukkah is a story of national courage. An educator looking to teach about Hanukkah should reflect on courage in the educator’s own life and evaluate how, through *teaching* about Hanukkah, the educator can become a more “stand up” individual.
- The story of Cain and Abel is about comparing and jealousy. An educator looking to present this event should stop, look inside him/herself, and ask: “How am I doing with the challenge of comparing myself to others and getting jealous?” As a result, the teacher will first undergo a personal learning experience related to this topic that will only strengthen the inspiration potential in the classroom later.
- When teaching about Israel, educators need to recognize what is missing or broken in their own relationship with Israel, reflect on how they can deepen or fix the relationship, and through learning-teaching, renew that bond.

This is how educators can see themselves not as masters and transmitters of content but as role models of “letting the learning into my life”—yearning to become one’s better self via focused learning. When educators succeed in personally inhaling the material, then their classrooms naturally become inspirational. During the last four years I have personally witnessed this transformation, both at the teacher level and through student responses.

To build this kind of teacher, we need to institute a completely different approach to teacher training.

First of all, we need to find teachers who view themselves as fellow journeyers, as works-in-progress. People who love Judaism not only because of its wisdom, but because it is the essential key through which they personally grow. We should no longer be looking for masters of content, for experts. We should no longer be looking for teachers who build efficient lectures or have the coolest gimmicks. We need to find teachers who see Jewish wisdom as the key to discovering their better selves and who are deeply dedicated to pursuing this goal. The truth is that the teachers who model personal growth will also be more successful in conveying content.

Secondly, we need to cultivate the ability and capacity for teachers to share their own journeys with their students. To make the classroom inspirational, teachers do not have to be charismatic, technologically savvy, great storytellers, or singers of niggunim. They do not have to be scholars in their fields. To bring inspiration to the classroom, teachers need to be modeling their journeys—with personal openness, vulnerability and sincerity.

So often teachers feel compelled to “cover ground,” to not “fall behind.” Ultimately, what will really impact students’ inner lives is not the amount of material they cover in class, but the depth and vitality of the students’ personal relationship with the material. Teachers need to share with their students why they, the teachers, also need to learn and reflect on what they’re teaching in order to continue on their own personal journeys. When teachers share from their own lives how their subject is impacting them then the material becomes alive, even electric, for their students. If teachers evoke this inner yearning, then their students will echo it. If not, then not.

Rav Kook writes that the goal of education is spiritual unity (*Orot HaKodesh* II: 247). According to Rav Kook, spiritual unity is achieved through evoking, balancing and harmonizing four primary qualities: intellect, emotion, imagination and action. The animating, energizing and inspiring element of education is the third element, imagination. First we learn Jewish wisdom (intellect). Next we engage with it personally (emotion). Third, we envision how it can impact our lives (imagination). Finally, we live it (action). Most Jewish education today ends with the first or perhaps the second stage, intellect and emotion.

Our day school classrooms are suffering from a lack of imagination. According to Rav Kook, imagination is the key to Jewish education working, creating actively Jewish human beings who constantly grow through their engagement with Judaism. We need to be able to imagine how Jewish wisdom can affect and change our lives. Yearning is the expression of our imagination and inspiration is the result.

Here’s how imagination enters education: Imagination is seeing the better me that does not yet exist. I know who I am today, but I can only “imagine” a better me. That “better me” does not yet exist in reality. Imagination is a product of yearning; we are not satisfied with who we are today, we are not satisfied with the present reality, we yearn for our better selves, so we imagine how this might come about. Learning Jewish wisdom should open the floodgates to imagining my better self. In the study of Jewish wisdom, pure knowledge is not the end goal; study is the springboard for imagining and guiding myself to a better version of me.

“Inspiration” bears a different face in today’s Jewish schools. Often schools over-rely on extracurricular activities such as shabbatons and trips to supply inspiration to their students and to compensate for uninspiring classroom education. The clear message: Text-based learning is functional and uninspiring, and only non-learning activities have the potential to be engaging or inspiring. Basically, we’re settling for lifeless classrooms, devoid of *she’ifah*—inhaling and inspiring.

The antidote to the comatose classroom, the fuel for inspiration, is imagination. In art school, the first requirement of new students is to practice sketching many hours a day to free their imagination—to teach their hands how to speak freely, without self-censorship or insecurity. Similarly, teacher training should be dedicated to engaging and cultivating imagination, practicing getting to feeling safe and comfortable bringing this imagining to their own lives and their classrooms.

It is not easy for educators to undergo this paradigm shift. Many teachers never had educational role models who experienced active personal growth or shared it with them in the context of learning. Often teachers operate from a position of power, from the assumption that there is something they know and their students do not. We need a paradigm shift that breaks down the familiar hierarchy. Teacher or student, we are all human beings seeking to grow through Jewish wisdom.



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Step 2: From knowing to becoming

Principals and heads of Judaic studies departments need to learn how to lead the process in transforming their school into a school of “becoming.” They need to model for their staffs and students being works-in-progress, imagining and demonstrating their growing through their learning. It is virtually impossible for teachers to risk teaching from this new paradigm, to share their yearning and personal journey, if they do not have the support of their principals and Judaic studies department heads. Heads of schools need to lead by example. From the first day of the school year, the principal and department heads need to set the stage by sharing personally with their students and staff how they themselves are works-in-progress, looking to grow during the upcoming school year. They need to share concrete examples of how they grew during the last year through learning and what they are presently working on. Again, if we want our students to be affected by their learning, and to do so we need our teachers to be affected by their learning, then the heads of school must be the supreme modelers and leaders of being affected by their learning.

Imagine a professional development program that teaches school leaders and senior educators how to:

- Become more personally reflective and deepen their awareness of being works-in-progress.
- Approach their own personal learning as vehicles for their own growth.
- Build a school atmosphere of journeying and being works-in-progress.
- Have faculty meetings focusing on the personal growth and yearning of the teachers.
- Develop collegiality with other school leaders and senior educators who can act as kindred spirits to support this process.

This is not rocket science. It’s a perspective that any educator and administrator can adopt. Judaism itself is not just about information or “knowing,” it is about “becoming.” The Jewish story begins with the journey of Avraham and continues with the journey of the Jewish people. Journeying is the antithesis of complacency; it’s the action that comes with yearning for something more. If we want education to be inspiring, if we want our teachers to feel inspired, we need to create an educational culture of yearning and “becoming.”

How would most day school educators complete the sentence: “Jewish education is ...”?

I would offer: “Jewish education is a community of becoming—where Jewish wisdom is the premier tool that helps me and my community imagine and evoke our better selves.”

MELANIE EISEN
*Associate Director for
Professional Development,
Prizmah*

THE
ADVICE
BOOTH



TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS

Our teachers possess a wide variety of interests, needs and experience; how can our school offer professional learning that is relevant for all?

Dear How Can I Please Them All,

We often come into schools where teachers and leaders have heard of a new idea or are looking to add some spice to their routines. In such cases, we recommend forming Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In schools where the mission statement includes “developing lifelong learners,” PLCs help the teachers model the very idea that learning never stops.

Here are some steps to follow in bringing PLCs to your faculty.

1. Take a survey to gauge for interest and hot topics; not every teacher needs to be involved, as this will be driven by the teachers and for the teachers.
2. Decide on topics that are based on the interest survey.
3. Choose teachers who you would like to see take a leadership role to facilitate the groups.
4. Groups can be by grade level or subject area, but do not have to be. Successful groups often involve multiple points of view, adding to the richness of the conversations.
5. Teachers meet on a monthly basis and discuss their topic. Meetings can include
 - i. Reading and responding to an article
 - ii. Identifying a teaching tool or strategy related to the topic to share with the group
 - iii. Sharing data and observations of students
 - iv. Sharing student work
 - v. Classroom visits and reflections
6. At the end of the year, have each of the PLCs present to the rest of the faculty about the experience, and provide evidence of change that has occurred as a result of the PLC. This activity will build engagement and momentum moving into year 2.

Let Prizmah know how we can help you get started!

How can we support teachers learning from each other in their PD?

Dear Looking for Learning in All the Right Places,

I commend you on your thoughtfulness. PD should never be a one and done. The way to add value to the PD is to allow for opportunity to share and debrief the experience. The best PD often can happen without ever leaving the building. Teachers are doing amazing things in your school—right now! Give them the chance to share; encourage them to open their doors and let their colleagues in. Set up a Pineapple Chart in the faculty room, similar to a board at an edcamp. Put up the schedule of days and periods and let teachers fill in when they are trying something new. This is the invitation to come in, observe and reflect on your own teaching by watching a colleague teach.

If a teacher goes to an off-campus PD seminar or conference, the school leader should make sure to check in with a conversation about the benefits of their learning and the top three ideas they discovered. I would encourage you to allow teachers to choose the PD that interests them and to go with a buddy so they can reflect on how the learning can take effect back at school. Remember to give them time to share at a faculty meeting, to encourage others to learn from them.

Be the leader that asks questions. After a teacher returns from a PD session, check in with her to see what you can do to support any applications to their classroom. Do they need an extra set of hands to set up groups? Do they need a brainstorming partner for classroom management issues? Are they looking to start a book club to continue the discussion? Your questions should go well beyond “How was it?”

Check in with Prizmah to share the questions you have asked!

**Have a question about day schools that you'd like answered?
Submit it to advice@prizmah.org.**

DANIEL ALTER

The Inspiration Trap

I enjoy TED Talks. I find them both inspiring and enjoyable. I was listening to a TED Talks video with my children recently, featuring Benjamin Zander, who is the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. Mr. Zander shared that his goal for the talk was that “every single person in this room (1,600 attendees strong) will come to love and understand classical music.” Mr. Zander’s talk was exactly as expected: inspiring, pleasurable and funny. Some time has passed now since Mr. Zander’s talk, and neither I nor my children are listening to more classical music or feel a deeper connection to the music. The net result of the talk is that nothing has changed.

The “TED Talks phenomenon” is based on the idea that inspiration today can be accessed and acquired in short bursts. The proposition is that “in 18 minutes, we can inspire you in a way that will change your life.” This modern phenomenon of short, sweet, to-the-point inspiration is problematic. Changes can be made quickly, but often take a lifetime of diligence and maintenance to sustain a real difference in behavior.

I worry that in our zeal to inspire students to love of Judaism, we rely too heavily on the concepts and influence of the “TED Talks phenomenon.” We fall into the trap of trying to inspire our students by placing a premium on the flashy, exciting lessons, the charismatic teachers, and the short inspirational messages that we believe will transform the lives of our students. This is no substitute for long-term and sustained study of Torah and practice of tefillah on a daily basis.

I offer a few examples from well-intended Judaic teachers who may exhibit the following characteristics:

- They do not give homework because students should understand that Judaics are different from general studies.
- They ensure that all students get good grades, deserved or not, so that the students can feel good about themselves.
- They keep students engaged by rewarding them with external stimuli such as recess, candy or other prizes (a method that has been shown to be ineffective).
- They feel the need to engage students largely by telling stories and/or allowing students to regularly divert conversations away from the lesson because these conversations are more important than the lesson.
- They sacrifice academic rigor for fear of turning off their students.
- They are nervous to teach sections of the curriculum for fear that students may grow bored.

This phenomenon affects administrators as well. We find administrators who place a premium on charisma when hiring Judaic teachers, often sacrificing pedagogical expertise in the process—a sacrifice that they would never make when hiring a math or social studies teacher.

These actions stem from a desire to inspire and motivate students. The unintended consequence that results is that Judaic studies become less important and less sophisticated compared to general studies.

To be perfectly clear, I have no intention of implying that inspiring students is unimportant in any way. I merely contend that the drive to inspire students, when not considered judiciously, can lead to negative outcomes.

How can we address the challenge?

The Talmud tells us, *Yagata umatzata, ta'amin; lo yagata umatzata, al ta'amin*. "If someone tells you that he worked and found success, you can believe him. If a person tells you that he did not work and still found success, do not believe him."

Jewish forms of spirituality found in tefillah or talmud Torah require effort, practice and thought to achieve success. Torah study, by its nature, is cerebral, and tends to be specific and detailed. The Torah is sophisticated and complex, and as such requires effort to comprehend.

Tefillah also requires effort to achieve success. Daily recital and focus on the same words and message affords us an opportunity to focus regularly on our unique mission as a people and as individuals, our declarations of belief, and what we value in this world. While this may not have the same allure as a one-time trek to a remote nature preserve, it has greater impact and certainly will last longer.

The model of Jewish inspiration as seen through the mediums of Torah and tefillah requires effort, practice, thought and a high level of aspiration. We need to be thinking about our roles as Jewish educators in similar ways. Here are some of the many implications that I wish to share.

1. Clear standards and expectations are the norm in general studies. Transparency of curriculum creates accountability. Judaic studies should be no different. Foundations looking to invest in Jewish education should continue to invest in developing curriculum, standards and benchmarks to further the field.
2. Mastery of Judaic skills must be a top priority for Jewish educators. The enjoyment of Judaism that our teachers so desperately seek will be found in our students by giving them the ability to master Judaic texts independently so that they feel empowered to own their learning.
3. Student interest should be gauged based on best practices in the field of pedagogy, including student agency and a student-centered environment, not a charismatic teacher dominating the entire lesson and conversation.
4. Finally, if I really want my children to love classical music, I must invest in music lessons, listen to this music, discuss the music with my children on a regular basis, and encourage them to listen regularly as well. Similarly, if I want my students to love Judaism, I must treat their studies as seriously and intensely as any of their other studies.

This will lead to a life of Judaic inspiration.



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HARRY BLOOM

Inspiring Day School Alumni

As Jewish day schools work mightily to generate the funds to improve the quality of their programs, maximize mission-compatible enrollment, and strengthen volunteer leadership, they need to tap into every potential resource. I would assert that no available resource base offers more potential than that of inspired day school alumni. There are literally hundreds of thousands of day school alumni whose active support could make a huge difference to our schools if properly harnessed. Measuring Success has conducted extensive research to understand the factors that inspire alumni engagement. That research, combined with my own learning from working over the past decade with well over 100 Jewish day schools on strategic, enrollment and development issues, yields the following insights that I hope will inspire your school to pursue alumni research and cultivation strategies with increased vigor and also consider new ones to unlock this potential.



Are Day School Alumni Inspired?

My personal experience with PEJE programs (Recruitment and Retention Academy, Atidenu and Governance & Finance Academy) indicates that while some schools have a relatively easy time inspiring alumni to support them, others find this to be challenging. Less positive alumni experiences in some area of their school lives, coupled with the fact that many schools have simply not kept in touch with their alumni to continue to cultivate positive relationships, or only reach out to alumni to solicit funds, has created an environment of alumni ambivalence, even negativity in some cases. Compounding these situations is the fact that alumni relations have simply not been a high priority for many school leaders.

Evidence of the lack of priority starts with the fact that many schools do not have anywhere near comprehensive databases containing current information about their alumni, let alone thoughtful, research-informed programs to engage them in a manner that causes them to feel valued. These shortcomings are especially common for K-8 schools because school leaders have assumed that it would be nearly impossible to compete for alumni support when high schools and then colleges and potentially graduate schools are similarly vying for their attention. Yet as we will see, there is evidence that even K-8 schools can create and sustain strong alumni relationships—and parent of alumni relationships—if they start cultivating them early enough and constantly seek ways to add lasting value to their students. There are specific areas of value that tend to distinguish schools that succeed in cultivating long-term positive relationships with their alumni relative to those who do not.

Why is it Important to Inspire Alumni?

First and foremost, it is important because a school's alumni are its ultimate “product,” its most vivid manifestation of its added value. They are the most informed about what worked for them as students and what did not, and they can serve as invaluable sources of information to school leaders in this regard. They are also the most credible ambassadors to potential students and donors. When schools do not connect prospective families or donors to relevant alumni, who will be positive if not effusive in their support, they indirectly cast doubt about the quality of their schools. Missing out on alumni ambassadorship and advocacy robs a school of its very best tools to build donations, enrollment and volunteer support.

There is an “elephant in the room”: In some schools, the historical program quality was not at the elevated level of its current program. Such schools may have alumni whose experiences were not the most positive in nature. Current school leaders may find themselves rebuffed in outreach attempts to alumni (particularly when they are geared to “what the alumni can do for their school” and not the reverse). My advice to such school leaders is to face into the problem. Actively engage with your alumni, learn about and accept their criticism, and discuss what you have in common and what you can do together to enhance your relationship. Often, within the medley of memories of your school, there are both good ones—often connected to exemplary faculty role models and events—in addition to less positive ones. Take the time and make the effort to learn about and acknowledge both. While not all negative alumni relationships are salvageable, many are.

In general, schools that continue alumni relationships and value-added connections (those that provide mutual benefit, not just as a means for alumni to give money) find they reap enormous dividends.

One of Measuring Success' independent school clients that works intensely at alumni relationships generates 20% of its annual campaign from alumni gifts, year after year. And the dividends are not only from the alumni, but often also from their parents who are more likely to continue to support their children's day schools after graduation if their children continue to have a connection to the schools. A good example of such a school is the Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago, a 50-plus year preschool-eighth grade school that, based on benchmarking analysis, generates a highly competitive \$2,000 per student from alumni parent gifts each year. This level of support comes because of *hakarat hatov*, the Jewish value of desiring to express appreciation, and also a great deal of hard work on the school's part to maintain alumni connections and alumni family connections.

One important way to stay in touch with alumni, learn about their experience with your school and the difference it made in their lives, and about how they would like to stay in touch with your school, is by conducting relatively frequent alumni surveys. They provide a research-based roadmap on how to create positive alumni relationships in the first place and how to maintain them over time. In recognition of the importance of alumni surveys, Measuring Success, in collaboration with Prizmah, is about to launch a new series of alumni surveys (along with a new complement of parent and student surveys) this spring that offer a great opportunity for schools to build their alumni program from a solid fact base informed by peer analysis.

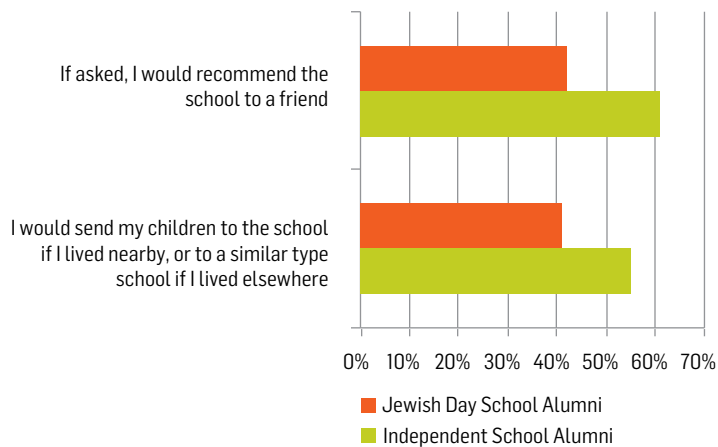
How Do Day School Alumni Compare with Independent School Peers?

A key reference point for how well our schools are doing inspiring alumni affinity and support is how well we perform relative to peer independent schools. Measuring Success has some recent information from alumni surveys that sheds interesting light on this issue. From 2013 to 2015, Measuring Success conducted surveys involving more than 3,000 independent day school high school alumni from six independent schools, three secular schools and three Catholic schools. During that same period of time, it conducted surveys involving more than 1,200 Jewish day school high school alumni from four schools that spanned the Jewish denominational spectrum. These survey results are, admittedly, from a relatively small number of schools, but they are revealing and suggestive of the need for additional research, which we are intending to conduct in conjunction with Prizmah.

The survey findings indicate that whereas among the Jewish day schools 42% would recommend their alma mater to a friend, 61% of the independent school alumni would do so. While 41% of Jewish day school alumni would very likely send their own child to their alma mater, 55% of independent school alumni would do so. These results are statistically significant, at a 99% confidence level.

What is causing the relative enthusiasm gap? In attempting to understand the gap I examined the ratings the Jewish day school

Jewish Day Schools Relative to Independent Schools

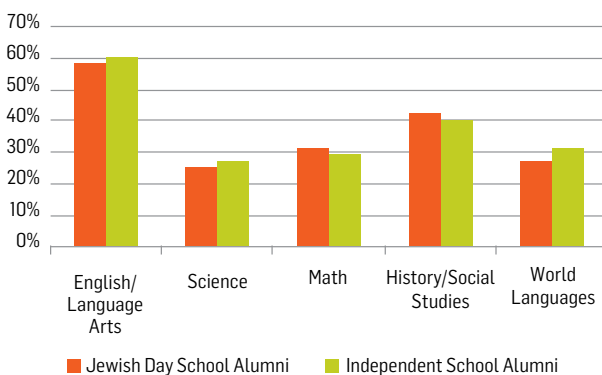


alums gave their schools relative to those of the non-Jewish independent schools and discovered something interesting and potentially of great importance. In the arena of academics, there was very little difference in satisfaction with alma mater performance between the Jewish day schools and the independent schools.

However, when it came to believing their schools were very helpful in advancing their time-management skills, social relationships and college and career and leadership potential, the independent schools' alumni gave much higher ratings to their alma maters than Jewish day school alumni gave to theirs.

All of these differences were statistically significant and worth paying attention to as potential levers to inspire greater alumni support. What can Jewish day schools learn from this? Our schools need to start paying more attention to the quality of life of our students in school and to giving them a foundation that will enhance their future lives following graduation. Most crucially, day schools need to ensure that students perceive the value of the benefits they receive while they are still in school.

How Well Did Your School Prepare You for Higher Education Coursework? % Very Prepared



What Can We Learn from Jewish Day Schools that Effectively Inspire their Alumni?

There is also a great deal to learn from Jewish day schools that do perform well in inspiring their alumni, as evidenced by higher propensities to enthusiastically recommend their alma maters to friends, enroll their own children, and make donations. In the two higher-performing schools from our research sample, more than 50% of alumni would highly recommend their alma mater to a friend and enroll their children in their alma mater, and in the lower-performing schools only about 35% would do so. Alums from the higher-performing schools were also more than twice as likely to consider their alma mater one of their top three giving priorities.

Why? Let's start with the factors that did not differentiate the higher- and lower-performing pairs of schools. The school

% Strong Positive Impact	How did your school experience impact your efforts to develop the following?	
	Jewish Day School Alumni	Independent School Alumni
Managing Time Effectively	38%	48%
Motivation to stay physically healthy	20%	35%
Motivation to maintain a healthy balance in life (mind, body, spirit)	25%	32%

% Strongly Agree	How has your school impacted your life?	
	Jewish Day School Alumni	Independent School Alumni
Acceptance to a college that was appropriate for me	46%	56%
Preparation for my professional career of choice	23%	35%
Motivation to take on leadership roles	33%	42%

pairs did not differ in their assessment of the quality of their academic preparation in English/language arts, math, science, history and social studies or music/drama/dance/performing arts or visual arts. Nor did they differ in their perceptions of the extent to which they felt their schools supported them in being accepted to an appropriate college or in preparing them for a career of their choice.

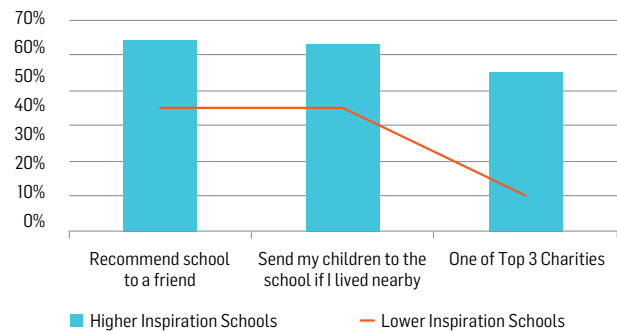
Where they differed significantly was in three key areas: the extent to which alumni felt their schools had a strong positive impact on the development of critical thinking skills, of empathy for others, and their motivation to take on leadership roles.

This is not to say that academic excellence or cocurriculars or college guidance are not important—they are. But it does shed at least preliminary light on the factors that students really believe matter in the long run in making their lives successful and worth living. I will call these “the gifts that keep on giving.”

Increasing Alumni Inspiration

What can Jewish day schools do, post-graduation, to positively inspire their alumni? Here, too, alumni research provides some answers. There are a couple of engagement strategies, including facilitating professional networking opportunities among alumni and organizing alumni social events, that tend to be uniformly popular. But there are other strategies that aren't uniformly desired by each school's alumni, which suggests that each school needs to do the research that informs its particular alumni engagement plan. Rabbi Marc Baker, head of school at Gann Academy, credits this kind of research as having made a significant difference for his school. “As a result of the (survey)

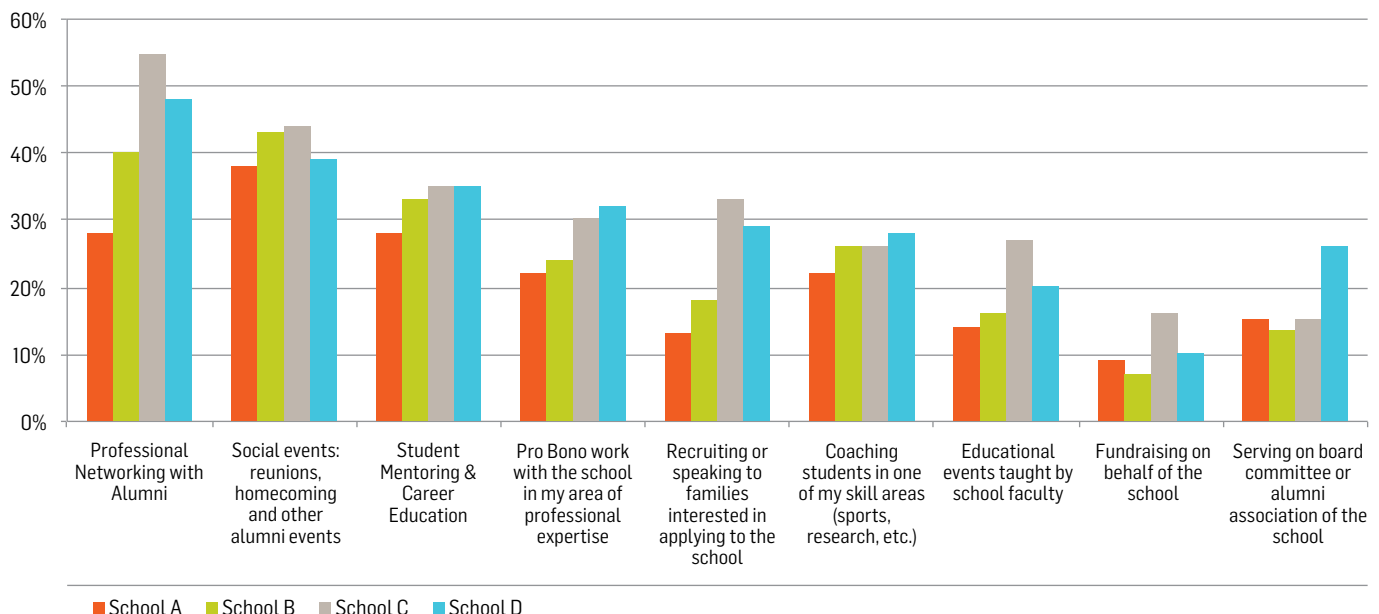
The Benefits of Better Inspiring Alumni




work, we now have a significantly more robust alumni community than we've had before. We've ramped up our alumni activities because we learned from Measuring Success what the alumni actually want from us.”

Building inspiring relationships with your school's alumni is strategically important in creating a higher-quality, more sustainable school. It isn't easy, but there is evidence that by ensuring that Jewish day schools offer students the kinds of social and emotional experiences and a “leg up on post-graduation life” that they value, and by viewing alumni as a valuable market segment that your school cultivates with research-informed programming, Jewish day schools can succeed and build a foundation for growth and prosperity.

Percent of School Alumni Desiring to Engage in Alumni Activities








HARRY PELL

Masa lePolin

Inspiring Parents and Donors,
in Order to Inspire Students



"Thank you so much for this inspirational experience." These words were repeated many times over by participants as we completed our closing banquet in the brightly colored dining room of the Jewish Community Center of Krakow. The travelers had spent the last four days traveling the highways and backroads of southeastern Poland, seeing beautiful, soaring, centuries-old synagogues, connecting with members of Poland's growing modern-day Jewish community, and of course visiting now-silent death camps and Shoah-era *kivrei achim* (mass graves) over the course of their 500-kilometer journey.

But this closing banquet was taking place over summer vacation, not during the school year, and despite this being a school trip, the participants were not students or even teachers. The 37 members of the Schechter Westchester kehillah celebrating the end of a meaningful journey were mostly current parents and alumni parents, many of them board members, together with a handful of grandparents, community members and friends, and several of us staff members from school. Together, we were enjoying the closing hours of what had been an extremely moving *Masa lePolin* (Journey to Poland) experience. And as much as they were thanking us, we were the ones who should have been thanking them.

The field of Jewish day school education offers educators the opportunity to inspire and transform the lives of students on a daily basis. We have the ability and the privilege to help young Jews develop their identities, and in doing so, to impact the next generation of the North American Jewish community. But doing so doesn't come cheap. With many families unable to pay the full cost of tuition, most Jewish day schools struggle to raise the necessary funds to cover operating expenses. In this reality, perhaps the most important question to ask is not, what can we do to inspire our students? Instead, we should examine the experiences that inspire our students and ask, what can we recreate for our parents and donors that will inspire them as well? How can we share our students' experiences with them in order to inspire their Jewish identities as adults, and just as importantly, to inspire them to support our schools?

This past August marked Schechter Westchester's third *Masa lePolin* adult journey to Poland. The motivation behind these educational and experiential summer journeys is summed up succinctly in one of our marketing slogans:

Every winter our high school seniors have the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors when they visit Poland on the way to Israel; this summer, take advantage of the opportunity to follow in their footsteps and experience Jewish Poland for yourself.

One of the culminating experiences of a K-12 education at Schechter Westchester is the 12th grade *Lev veNefesh* (Heart and Soul) experience, through which seniors spend two months traveling and studying Jewish history in the places where it happened. The students begin with a week in Poland and spend the remainder in Israel studying Jewish history and the history of the Land of Israel in chronological order, with an emphasis on the modern day and building their connections to the land, state and people of Israel.

Masa lePolin seeks to recreate for parents the Poland portion of *Lev veNefesh* within a slightly shorter time frame, while staying true to the general philosophy and itinerary of the student experience, which is unique. Many such trips focus primarily on sites connected to the Shoah, and without question, many of the most visceral, haunting memories in any Jewish trip to Poland will come from these sites. We have learned that for the experience to be as impactful as possible, though, our student and adult journeys must consciously focus on three different eras of Jewish history in Poland.

In a sense, the Shoah portions of the itinerary are predictable: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Treblinka, Plaszow, and for the students also Sobibor or Belzec, depending on the year. Before understanding these horrible sites of the Final Solution, though, we want students to understand how and why Jews arrived in Poland in the first place, why they stayed, and how they grew to build a new Jewish civilization, and the largest Jewish community in Europe before the Shoah.

To that end, we visit tiny, medieval walled cities complete with their fortress synagogues like Szydlow, built-up Jewish community complexes like the Kazimierz neighborhood of Krakow, and landmark monuments that attest to the Jewish life that flourished in Poland for centuries. For the adults this summer, one such monument was the recently restored great synagogue of Dobrowa Tarnowska, which left parents marveling in awe at its cathedral-like ceiling and intricately painted interior.

Understanding this era of Jewish history is essential for students and parents alike, for two primary reasons. It is impossible to understand what was lost during the Shoah without first understanding the Jewish civilization, in Europe generally and in Poland specifically, that the Nazis destroyed. Far more importantly, we have a deep-seated belief that our students' Jewish identities cannot be based simply on perpetuating Judaism because others have sought to destroy it through our deaths. Instead, our students must be inspired to invest in and continue their Jewish journeys because of the incredible meaning and inherent beauty Judaism offers us in our lives. These sites convey that sense of beauty and meaning in an accessible, tangible way.

We have also found it enormously powerful to connect with Jews and others living in Poland today. For both our adult and student journeys, this has meant *mifgashim* (meetings and cultural interchange) with Jewish peers in Poland, and for our students, with Polish Catholic high school students as well. Our most inspirational moments of connection to modern Polish Jewry often occur at the JCC in Krakow, where our teens meet Polish Jewish teens much like themselves, and at the Ronald Lauder Jewish Day School in Warsaw, where the delightful cacophony of students filling the halls between classes sounds exactly like it does in Westchester, except in Polish!

The third main focus of our journey in Poland is understanding the events that took place in the six short years between the German invasion of Poland in September of 1939, and the liberation of Auschwitz in January of 1945. While we plan our itinerary to make sure that no day for either group of travelers is composed exclusively of Shoah sites, we also recognize the reality that for both our 12th graders and our parent participants, it is the camps, ghettos and forests they are coming to see. What they may not realize until they arrive, though, is the many layers involved in visiting these horrible places of loss.

These sites must be approached with reverence, as the final burial places of tens of thousands and in some cases hundreds of thousands of Jews and other victims of the Nazis. They are also spiritual places, where we are left to ponder both man's inhumanity to man, as well as the incredible acts of faith, sacrifice and kindness attested to in the testimony of so many survivors. On top of all of that, these sites functioned as complex operations, and as visitors we must study and understand them in order to explain how they operated to others. Especially for our 12th graders, if and when they encounter Holocaust denial or skepticism on the college campus, it is essential that they be able to share not only a list of places they visited, but their understanding of how these places functioned: how ghettos were designed and operated across Poland, how selections were conducted on the ramp at Birkenau, and how German *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads) with local auxiliary support rounded up and shot entire Jewish communities in the forests on Poland's eastern edges.

The combined experiences of this week in Poland have a lasting impact on our 12th graders, for whom it is the first step towards their extended travel experience in Israel. In multiple senses, that impact is

the reason we began offering the same journey to our parent community. First and foremost, if the journey can have a lasting impact on our students, why shouldn't adults have the opportunity to be similarly impacted? Especially when we acknowledge the role that day schools can play in transforming the Jewish lives of entire families, and not only their school-age children, it becomes clear that whenever possible, our schools benefit from offering the same inspirational Jewish experiences to the parents that we offer to their children. Just as importantly, if we believe this Poland experience in the context of the larger two-month *Lev veNefesh* Israel experience is essential for every 12th grader who desires it, then in a school where 52 percent of families receive some level of tuition assistance, we must find new and innovative ways of raising the necessary funds to ensure that every student can participate.

Masa lePolin is therefore planned and executed as a partnership between the same team of experiential travel educators that plans the expanded student version, and our institutional advancement team, which is charged annually with raising the money needed to support a robust tuition assistance program. Very intentionally, the journey is offered to parents and community members at cost, and does not generate income directly. This enables the participation of community members who can afford the trip, but who would not be able to afford a mandatory additional donation. Nevertheless, because of the experience it offers participants, and their resulting desire to enable every student to participate, traveling on *Masa lePolin* invariably leads to significant financial support for the student experience. In short, our adult participants return home inspired, and when in a financial position to do so, they want to make sure that our students can be similarly inspired.

Equally critical, participants return home having become advocates for the importance of such travel experiences because of the impact it has had on their Jewish identities. This is even more poignant for the board members who have traveled with us, many of whom have sent their children on the student journey in previous years and long promoted it to the community, but who only now fully understand its importance and potential to influence the lives of our students. More often than not, they thank us sincerely for the experience and the opportunity to "see what their kids see," as so many did at our closing banquet in Krakow last summer. The ultimate beneficiaries of the adult journey, though, are not the summer travelers themselves. It is the future generations of students who will require support, yet still be able to have this inspirational experience, who will benefit the most, and for that we all have much to be thankful.

As day school educators and leaders, we must be thoughtful and creative in thinking of new ways to solicit support for our schools. We benefit when we recognize our potential to impact the lives not only of our students but also of our wider parent communities. To do so, we should start by recognizing the unique experiences and educational opportunities we afford our students, and how we can offer them to adults as well. What classes do each of our schools teach that could benefit the parents as much as the kids? What trips or programs are milestones for our students, and could they be equally impactful for adults? What are the ways in which our schools inspire our students, and which of these inspirational experiences could lead parents and donors to appreciate the need to support our schools? I believe our day schools are essential to the future of the Jewish community, which makes these essential questions to ask, for the benefit of our students and the adult community alike.





TAKING IT PERSONALLY: WHAT IT REALLY MEANS FOR STUDENTS TO OWN THE LEARNING

What's the big idea?

Who owns the learning in a school?

The teachers? The principals? The board? Those who create and mandate standards? In order to unleash the potential of our children, the answer that is resonating deeply with a wider number of schools, including many Jewish ones, is ... the *students*. Shifting the unit of measurement in a school from a "class" to a "student" is truly significant. Progressive ideas such as "differentiated instruction," where a teacher adapts her material to the different learning styles and needs of her students, still leaves the teacher at the center. Personalized learning puts the student at the center. Everything about the ways schools structure the educational experience, even our basic understanding of how schools use time and space, are subject to re-conceptualizing if our starting point is the individual student. To be fair, there are long-standing philosophies of education, Montessori most notably, which put the child at the center. However, advances in technology allow for a type of personalization unlike anything we've seen before.

"Personalized learning" is one of those educational phrases that run the risk of misuse or overuse. I find it easier sometimes to look at the extremes because they paint the most vivid pictures. Personalized learning in its extreme puts the student in control of what they study, when they study, where they study, why they study, and how they study. According to Andy Calkins, deputy director of Next Generation Learning Challenges, we have achieved innovative and disruptive personalized learning when the student has control of "time, place, path and pace." Although technology is not a requirement for personalized learning, there is little doubt that it allows for enormous new possibilities. What might a school look like where teachers use technology to give control of time, place, path and pace to each student? In one word: **AltSchool**.

Who's doing it?

"We started in 2013 by exploring a wide swath of the school experience, to determine where we could offer the most value," said Max Ventilla, CEO and founder of AltSchool. "Through the past three years of testing and iteration, we have determined what we think is the most transformative combination of tools and services: a technology platform that helps educators offer a whole-child, personalized education that fosters student agency."

AltSchools are small communities ranging from 30 to 130 students. Each is dedicated to personalizing the school experience to benefit

each student, from the school environment, school-day schedules, academics, parent interaction, and more. Educators use AltSchool's technology platform as a resource to support their work with students, working in partnership with its engineering team to test and improve tools on a daily basis. The platform enables schools to change and adapt in real time, continually collecting and iterating on feedback from teachers, students and parents. The effect is continuing improvements that happen in hours and days, not years. There are currently eight AltSchools, with two additional schools under development for the 2017 school year in Chicago and New York.

What's the charge?

Thanks to the support and leadership of the AVI CHAI Foundation, the Jewish Education Project, the Kohelet Foundation and many others, a growing number of Jewish day schools are experimenting with technology-driven personalized learning. Examples include the BOLD Schools, Digital JNetwork Network and Yeshiva Lab School. As more and more schools consider personalizing the learning experience for its students, Prizmah is interested in serving as a means to connect fellow travelers, facilitating conversation and linking to organizations in and outside the field.

Schools interested in "Innovation" or learning more about personalized learning are encouraged to continue the conversation across any and all of Prizmah's channels. Look for specific links and suggestions on Prizmah's website, including the launch of "Reshet Innovation."

If you are a Prizmah school and you want to continue the conversation, please join our Reshet Innovation.



How can I learn more?

AltSchool has launched a new program "AltSchool Open" to partner with existing schools: open.alt.school.

Read AltSchool's blog: blog.alt.school.

Watch an interview with founder Max Ventilla: [youtube.com/watch?v=JQSV0kMqATl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQSV0kMqATl).

Dr. Jon Mitzmacher is Prizmah's vice president of innovation.
jonm@prizmah.org

How Judaism Inspires Us

ERICA CABAG
ALEXANDRA SOMERS LAHR

We are a math teacher and a development professional, both identified Catholics, who have found our ways to a Jewish high school, Gann Academy in Waltham, Massachusetts. As members of this professional community, we have opportunities to learn about Judaism, to see the ways that being in a Jewish school can enrich our lives as people and professionals, and even to explore our own faiths. This summer, we even travelled to Israel with 23 of our colleagues to experience elements of the new Israel program that is currently being introduced at our school. This is a conversation about what working in a Jewish high school means to us.

Know that every deed counts,
that every word is power.
...Above all, remember that
you must **build your life**
as if it were a work
of art.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
20th Century Rabbi and Philosopher

When do you feel inspired by Gann's mission?

Alex: I celebrate being part of a community so deeply focused on and dedicated to fostering human dignity on many levels. As a math teacher, I aim to develop students' critical thinking skills while honoring the different approaches to problems or solutions that students take. All the while, I encourage students to listen to others, to practice compassion and patience with one another, and to honor the learning process and individual identity of all members of their class. The tail end of Gann's mission plays out in my classes daily: "Jews who, through critical thinking and the contribution of their unique voices, will

create a vibrant Jewish future and build a better world where human dignity will flourish." Through creating such a space of reflection and respect in my classes, students leave each class meeting feeling good about their learning process, even if they struggle with math generally. By respecting themselves, they more easily and habitually respect others and encourage such a safe space from others around them.

Erica: I'm constantly inspired by Gann's mission, especially when I interact with the students, which can be harder to do when you're on the business side of the school. When I first started at Gann, I attended as many student-led club meetings and classes as I could, for all the new-to-the-job reasons but particularly to get a sense of the type of individuals Gann was helping to develop. Not only are these students intelligent, but they are thoughtful and kind. They don't just sit by and let life happen around them. They are engaged with each other, with their community, and with the world; they are encouraged to have tough conversations and are taught to think critically and reflect constantly.

For example, I chaperoned a group of students to North Carolina for an Exploration Week trip to participate in a Habitat for Humanity building project. Being in development, I had not previously had a role like this, and I was hyperfocused on chaperone duties like lights-out and making sure everyone was where they were supposed to be. About half-way through the trip, I started to remind a small group of students that it was time to go to bed, but I realized quickly that they were having an intense conversation about Israel, much of it so politically astute that some comments flew over my head. I couldn't shut down the conversation. I was enthralled by their thoughts and emotions and how they were conveyed. It was unbelievably refreshing, and I had to keep reminding myself that they were teenagers.

When do you connect (or feel connection) with the culture and community?

Alex: Though this will feel very strange to Jewish readers, I feel most connected to the culture and community when I attend church. The first reading of a Catholic mass always comes from the Old Testament. Having once shared an office at Gann with a scholar of the early Christian church, I know so much more about the early days of the Catholic Church than I learned in Catholic school or from my very knowledgeable Catholic mother. The biblical stories of the Torah, which I have

learned more deeply at Gann, have so much more meaning when I connect them to my experiences in church. Being able to bridge Jewish and Catholic learning is a wonderful intellectual pursuit of mine, and without Gann I would not have the context and would not be able to make the connections that I do.

Erica: Tikkun Olam resonates with me deeply. I believe in the notion that we all have this responsibility to leave this world better than when we entered it. When I learned about it as a Jewish value, a light bulb went off in both my heart and mind. Growing up, I would sometimes have this guilt of wanting to do good, because I had this feeling that I was supposed to do it for ultimately selfish reasons of getting into Heaven. The short statement of "repairing the world," coupled with the intention that what I was doing would help people beyond my time, was very concrete and provided a beyond that didn't belong solely to me. I also connect it to the end of the Catholic prayer "Glory Be," which finishes with "world without end," and the two statements feel very complete and concrete. So many people I've worked with take that value very seriously and explicitly, and it's really empowered me to do my best to prioritize working and volunteering for organizations that have strong missions that I can support 100%.

In what ways have Jewish teachings inspired you?

Alex: For years before coming to Gann, I felt that I was missing a spiritual practice. That is, I did not feel that attending church connected me to the God of the Bible or made me a more spiritual person. I started a practice of Mussar during my first year at Gann. Mussar looks at ethical decision making through a Jewish lens with a focus on middot, soul traits, that one aims to strengthen through the practice. One thing led to another, and I ended up bringing elements of the practice into some of my math classes. I engage the students in questions and discussion about how choices we make are influenced by our attention to certain middot (savlanut—patience, kavod—honor/respect, anavah—humility). The goal here is to help students be better partners in learning during math class time and even outside of it and to instill the sense that all humans deserve our empathic ear first and our judgment never.

Erica: In a past job, we rotated the responsibility of giving a dvar Torah during weekly staff meetings. While we were welcome to focus on other topics outside of the current parashah, I cannot stress enough how daunting this task was for me. The thought of me teaching something remotely religious was absurd—who am I to give a dvar Torah? I also would wrestle the importance of this activity within the context of the setting. On the other side of the coin, I often enjoyed hearing from other colleagues during this exercise, so I chalked it up to participating in the full experience (while simultaneously trying not to let the anxiety of the activity get to me).

Having this experience of sharing a dvar Torah allowed me to reflect on several things that I connected with my own Catholic practice. How am I hearing the homily—or am I even listening? What may the priest have done in preparation for this week? What is happening in the world today that brings me back into this ancient text? If I hear the same story again, do I come to the same conclusion? It was a very introspective practice for me, and I feel fortunate that I still work in the Jewish community where I am regularly exposed to the divrei Torah given by many inspirational colleagues. I have a deep appreciation for them and listen with intent more than ever before.

Can a non-Jew have a Jewish journey?

Alex: In a sense, yes, a non-Jew can have a Jewish journey. As I described above, Mussar, and its roots in Jewish texts broadly speaking, have brought a spirituality back into my life that I had lost for a while. By engaging with the practice of Mussar, I am brought into the fabric of Judaism in a very tangential way, but it is a Jewish journey of sorts nonetheless. In another sense, I have been brought into exploring Judaism and coming to a deeper understanding of traditions, practices and rituals. My Jewish friends jokingly comment that my learning has surpassed theirs to some extent. Whereas I'm not always sure that is true, I do have some nuanced knowledge that others who are not daily immersed in this community do not. That is another way I am on a journey: by educating others to what I have learned by being at Gann, and by constantly asking questions when I do not know something I see or hear.

I also have my own Jewish heritage that I have explored as much as I can. Though I identify as Polish-Catholic, my paternal grandfather was Jewish and became a bar mitzvah. His great-grandfather established an Orthodox synagogue in my hometown of South Orange, New Jersey, in 1874. I have looked into his past but have not found much. I would like to learn more.

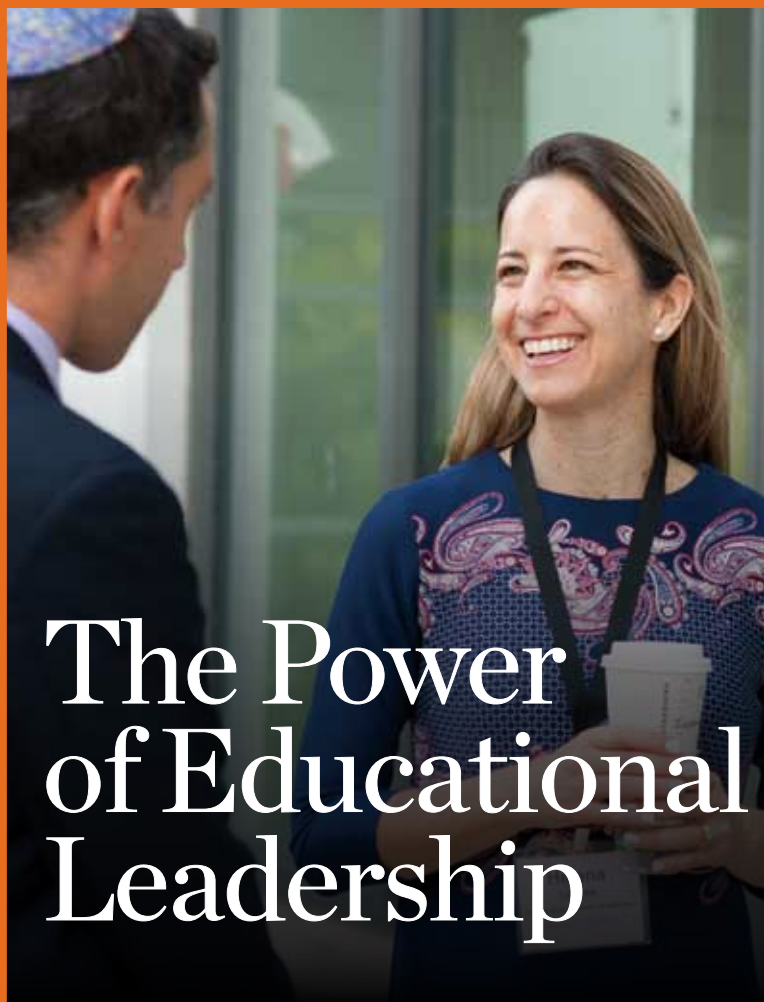
Erica: It didn't occur to me as a possibility until a couple of colleagues separately mentioned that I could be on a Jewish journey. By chance, I've spent about two-thirds of my professional life working in the Jewish community or through a strong Jewish lens. Gann is the third Jewish organization where I've worked, so I can't help but see it as a journey now. Colleagues have commented along the way on my strong curiosity about Judaism and have listed it as a major strength in how I approach my work. It has also been personally enriching, as I've identified with certain elements like Tikkun Olam, and it provides me with new ways to reflect on Catholicism and how I practice it.

Has there ever been a time where your identity is in tension with some aspect of your role at the school?

Alex: I am a cook and baker at home. Every time kashrut comes up at Gann, I feel separated from some students and colleagues. Not being able to share food I produce from my kitchen with others saddens me, as it is a key part of my identity. There is no compromise here. Despite offers to cook in kosher kitchens of others, one's kitchen is deeply personal. This is acutely an issue at Christmas when I bake up a storm to share with family during the holiday.

Erica: Being a Filipina-American Catholic working in the Jewish community does elicit that questioning look on people's faces when they first meet me. I often self-reveal quickly that I am not Jewish just so they don't have to ask me—and sometimes it feels like they want to ask me. However, working in a pluralistic day school with a diverse Jewish community, I am challenged to revisit my own preconceived notions of who is or looks Jewish, or who can support and/or work within the Jewish community. This has helped me become more comfortable in my own skin and owning my identity of being a minority within a minority.

In closing, we both find value in these conversations because it helps us find our place in the community that isn't inherently our own. We imagine that other Jewish day schools also have non-Jewish faculty and staff, and encourage everyone to also engage in this type of discussion. We believe it can strengthen the school community and lead to greater understanding and connection to colleagues, as we are all collectively responsible for accomplishing our schools' missions.



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OF JEWISH EDUCATION

COMMENTARY

SOUL DOCTORS

**Rabbi Yehuda Jeiger, associate principal,
Bi-Cultural Day School, Stamford, CT:**

Approximately, a century after Benderly made his famous inexplicable proclamation, I found myself in a somewhat analogous situation, making a similar declaration and receiving almost the exact same perplexed response (from my family). I am sure we faced many of the same questions: How could we give up the prestige, honor and lavish lifestyle that generally accompany the medical profession? Why would we waste our time in a stagnant field thought to be reserved for those who lacked the ambition to do anything else? Today, nearly two decades after making that life-altering decision, I feel so blessed to be work in a Jewish day school during an era of unprecedented growth in pedagogy and practices of Jewish education. At Bi-Cultural Day School, we are blazing a trail of transformation, growth and innovation—a trail started by idealistic pioneers, such as Benderly over 100 years ago. With the enormous investment of our incredible staff and the abundance of resources that are readily available through the efforts of organizations such as Prizmah, I feel that we are truly living in a time where carrying out our holy calling will bear their most meaningful fruits. At the end of the day, to us “healers of the soul,” it’s not about the income—it’s all about the outcome!

**Dr. Dan Glass, head of school,
The Brandeis School of San
Francisco:**

The word “heal” in English traces its origins to our language’s deepest past, going all the way back through the Germanic branch of our linguistic family tree to the Proto-Indo-European root word *kailo-*, which meant whole, or of good portent. That “k” became an “h” sound somewhere over the millennia, and today our English is scattered with *kailo*’s descendants: whole, hale, health, heal, hallow, even holy. Like Samson Benderly, my path into Jewish educational leadership began with recognizing a need: seeing that “educating the whole child” as we did in independent schools still left so many kids unmoored and burning out amid the adolescent onslaught of stress, anxiety or drug abuse. I found myself drawn to work in an educational model that would address the spiritual development of children not as an ancillary benefit, but as central to the project. Certainly, this election season has reminded us of the need to make our democracy whole, and I believe that work begins in the healing, holy work of education.

**Avi Baran Munro, head of school,
Community Day School, Pittsburgh:**

Throughout Jewish history there have been critical moments when choosing learning was the only way to save Jewish lives. Ben Gamla, in the first century CE, noted with alarm that the ancient system of Torah learning would be extinguished and Torah would be forgotten if only male, wealthy children of educated fathers had access to learning. He created the first known system of public Torah educa-

tion to afford everyone access and spread Jewish literacy throughout the Jewish people. In 70 CE, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai engineered the life-saving transplant of the heart of Judaism from the destroyed Temple to the academy of Yavneh, giving rise to the post-Temple rabbinic tradition that created the Judaism we recognize in our homes, synagogues, schools and communities today. In Jewish history, the life-saving doctors are indeed the educators who keep Jewish learning alive and relevant for the current generation and the ones to follow.

We are now, once again, at a critical moment in our history where it is clear that Jewish day school educators have in their hands nothing less consequential than the Jewish future. I challenge the Jewish world to not squander this moment and to put the community’s resources solidly behind their Jewish day schools that are the soul, heart and home of tomorrow’s Jewish communities.

[Samson] Benderly liked to tell the story about how [in 1900] he broke the news to Dr. Friedenwald that he was leaving medicine to devote himself completely to [Jewish education]. Friedenwald apparently responded by checking Benderly’s pulse to determine whether he was ill. He and his associates considered Benderly’s career decision to be “suicidal” and attempted to dissuade him. “You know, Dr. Friedenwald,” Benderly is said to have retorted, “healers of the body there are many, but there are very few healers of the soul, and I want to try my hand at that.”

**Jonathan Krasner,
*The Benderly Boys & American
Jewish Education***

**Naomi Lev,
head of school,
Denver Academy of Torah:**

When I started my teaching career, there was a tremendous push from people around me to teach in public schools, because I would be able to retire after 20 years and collect a pension. I remember the arguments so clearly, people telling me that I could transition later to Jewish education. My response then is the same as it is now: Education, and education of Jewish students, is my clear passion and it is where we should be applying our talents. We enter Jewish education to be able to feed the mind and the soul, and we stay because we are truly providers preparing our students to live rich lives full of knowledge, Torah, inspiration, passion and a love of learning.

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The Red Rubber Ball

Passion and Creativity

Interview with Kevin Carroll, Communicator/Change Agent/Creative Catalyst



Kevin is the author of three highly successful books. He has helped turn creative ideas into reality for many organizations such as Starbucks, Walt Disney, Nike, and Mattel. Kevin has dedicated his life to advancing education, sports and play as a vehicle for social change and success.

Tell us about the red rubber ball: how did it inspire you and what has it come to represent?

My parents chose their addiction over raising three sons. We were “rescued” by a stranger, shuttled down to a Greyhound bus station in Bowling Green, Virginia, placed on a bus alone (ages eight, six, and three) and sent on a 200-plus mile, one-way fare to my grandparents’ house just outside Philadelphia. Without parents in my life, I resorted to finding my life lessons from many sources: businessmen and laborers, winos and alcoholics, drug dealers and users, sport coaches, my peers and oldheads at the playground, merchants, war vets, school teachers, librarians, custodians, food service workers, other kids’ moms and dads. I learned to be constantly on the lookout for any nugget of insight that would assist me on my quest to rise above my suffering and circumstances.

I spent endless hours at the neighborhood playground, where I found my calling: a red rubber ball. That red rubber ball—my symbol for sports and play—and Preston Playground proved to be a catalyst in my journey from a hardscrabble upbringing filled with dysfunction, upheaval and uncertainty to becoming an author, a speaker and a global change agent. Preston Playground + school + the public library (coupled with an unexpected + uplifting community of encouragers) were all instrumental in my effort to rise above my circumstances.

I know firsthand about the transformative power and value of sports and play, and how a “ball” can save/change someone’s life. I believe that the “red rubber ball” is an activity that inspires us, brings us joy and fuels our imagination to dream big! Discovering your “red rubber ball” sparks you to make a commitment to chase and pursue it for a lifetime. Take a moment and think back to your childhood and to the years dominated by playtime, exploration, curiosity and investigating anything and everything. There were endless hours to fill, and the only agenda was to be captivated in the moment, to have fun and thoroughly enjoy the day. Ask yourself: What brought me joy? What inspired me? What did I find irresistible and tickled my brain? When you participated in moments/activities that answered those questions, you were enjoying your red rubber ball. You found ways to be around that primal source of joy.

Your red rubber ball inspires you to tap into a seemingly endless supply of energy, cleverness, resourcefulness and creative agility. When that happens, your work is always your play! (“The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play.” James Michener)

Jewish day schools are places that take study seriously, and the school day is typically filled with classes from a dual curriculum, half general studies and half Hebrew/Jewish studies. How can teachers and administrators keep their eyes on the importance of play and creativity while engaging in study?

A plethora of play research is available about why play and recess are catalysts for academic success. In my own life and in the many schools I’ve been involved with, I’ve witnessed how movement/play/recess serves as a catalyst for academic and professional success. Here are a few articles that discuss the research findings:

“The Secret to Saving American Education Is Something Kids Have Been Doing for Centuries,” *Business Insider*, April 26, 2016

“A Research-Based Case for Recess,” US Play Coalition, November 2013

“How Finland Keeps Kids Focused Through Free Play,” *The Atlantic*, June 30, 2014

“Sport for All, Play for Life,” The Aspen Institute Project Play

How can adults and teachers take steps to incorporate a mindset of play, and how does this help?

Nurture your neoteny. I heard the term *neoteny* used several years ago by Dr. Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute for Play and author of the book entitled *Play*. He shared with me some of the research explaining that in most species there are “adult-aged” members who retain youthful traits and behavior. As Dr. Brown put it, “Neoteny is the state or attitude of perpetual immaturity and playfulness.”

In an article in *The New York Times Magazine*, Dr. Bruce Charlton shares his research on the value of a youthful state of mind for adults in the 21st century. He hypothesizes that the demands of the 21st century, such as embracing technological advances and dealing with the uncertainty of business and personal situations, especially change, require adults to take a much more teenlike approach (be more adaptable, malleable, open to new things, etc.), what he calls “psychological neotony.” I believe the concept of neoteny provides adults and teachers with scientific insight for the importance of play and fun. We should not to marginalize them to a weekend or holiday/vacation pursuit. The “kid within us all” needs to be given permission to have fun regularly—especially in the workplace—and celebrate play’s big purpose throughout our entire life.

What’s new in 2017?

I will continue to do my level best to assist in advancing the human condition in a positive manner via sport, play, education. I’m currently workshoping a theatrical production of a one-man show (inspired by Billy Crystal’s *700 Sundays* and August Wilson’s *How I Learned What I Learned*). I’m continuing to work on my family and writing a children’s inspirational book, *I Have A Wonder... 13 Bedtime Stories to Live By*. Game on!



Alumni Inspired by Teachers

MEREDITH DISKIN

age 26, The Shlenker School, Houston

Teaching with Love and Faith



A good teacher can teach you something that you will remember for a day; a great teacher will teach you something that you will remember for the rest of your life. Several of the defining teachers in my life came to me at a time when I needed them the most during my days as a student at the Shlenker School.

I was diagnosed early on with an auditory learning disability, and it hindered my ability to analyze and make sense of information that my teachers were trying to impart. Seeing that other students could understand new information long before I was able to process and comprehend it greatly lowered my confidence. My learning disability coupled with my diminished self-esteem made school difficult and not enjoyable for me.

The teacher who changed my life and helped me reach my full potential was my second grade teacher, Judy Zainfeld. She was unforgettable as a mentor. She was the first teacher who really took an interest in me and gave me the tools necessary to overcome my learning disability. She taught me that having a learning disability would not limit my potential, but that I should embrace it and use it to my advantage. She took the time to add in visual aids and examples when explaining a new concept. She required me to actively participate and asked me thought-provoking questions to be sure I understood the concept. She suggested books to read and helped me figure out what subjects I was most passionate about.

Mrs. Zainfeld had faith in me, and that faith galvanized me as a student. She never let me forget that I possessed special talent. In her class, I went from a shy and quiet student to a student who loved to learn. Because I didn't want to let her down, I worked extra hard to make sure my learning disability no longer held me back. She set the stage for future learning, and she is one of the main reasons I perform so well in school today.

There were several other teachers at the Shlenker School who helped transform me into a successful student, and I am grateful to Shlenker for giving me the tools necessary to achieve my dreams. The seven critical core values of the school, including knowledge, faith and character, are the reasons why I am who I am today. This past summer I received my master's degree in marine biology, and this fall I began a PhD program in this subject. I have received scholarships and grants to support my research, and have been asked to give several talks at major scientific conferences.

I still use the lessons that Mrs. Zainfeld taught me at Shlenker, as they have been proven to be invaluable throughout my graduate school career. Two of the most important abilities a teacher can have are to make learning enjoyable and influence students to be the best at whatever they dream to be. Mrs. Zainfeld exemplifies that.



SHIMON DICKER

age 20, Politz Day School,
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

A Memorable Middle School Mentor

Politz Day School was for me a unique and exceptional school in providing its students with a close-knit, intimate environment of excellence in Judaic and general studies. What made it especially outstanding was its eclectic array of teachers. During my 12-year Politz experience, I was fortunate to learn from mentors of numerous faiths and backgrounds, each of whom had an idiosyncratic story to tell in the classroom. As a middle school student, I was surprised at how individuals from such dissimilar worlds could inspire and impact so profoundly.

My seventh and eighth grade rebbe, Rabbi Eliezer Abramson, was one such person. He lived in Lakewood, New Jersey, a town more renowned for the study of Judaics than secular works. However, upon entering his home, this preconceived notion would immediately dissipate. On his bookshelves stood Judaic books alongside secular works, covering the classical subjects of philosophy, art, science and history. In class, he quoted from both the Talmud and the classics alike. His breadth and depth of knowledge on all subjects, and his ability to synthesize them all, made a great impression on me. He inspired me to learn in the *Torah uMadda* style, embracing and mixing *limmudei kodesh* with *limmudei chol* (Jewish and secular studies) to achieve a true understanding of the world, history, God, religion and human nature. He

showed me that, paradoxically, facing the challenges of complexity would facilitate the path to spiritual and intellectual clarity.

In addition to his academic role at Politz, my rebbe engaged outside the boundaries of his immediate community to effect change. He invested much time in several *kiruv* organizations, mentoring individuals from various backgrounds in the ways of *Torah uMadda*. In advocating his worldview, he consciously and confidently stood out among his neighbors. My rebbe's pride in his work, his students and his *kiruv* community was evident and positively infectious.

I carried my rebbe's lessons with me throughout high school, and continue to reflect on them today. His commitment to engagement and synthesis continues to speak to me and shape my development as a citizen and Jew. As I learn in Yeshivat Har Etzion, with plans to study in Columbia University, I hope to successfully live my rebbe's values for years to come.

Alumni Inspired by Teachers

A Giving Teacher

JODIE APPLEBAUM

age 32, Denver Jewish Day School

When you think about your fondest memories from school, it is easy to think about a time your friend made your day, or that test you aced after a whole night of studying. What is often more challenging is to think about what and who made those culminating experiences possible. Each and every day, there are people who came to school to help students learn, to help them become better people, and to help them discover their true passions in life. If you are fortunate enough, hopefully one of those teachers will take the time to get to know you as a person. He will stop to say hello to you in the hallways, ask how your day was, and tell you that you had a nice shot in the basketball game the night before. He has a kind smile that says he is not just asking because he feels like he has to, but that he truly cares.

Sadly, not everyone is lucky enough to experience being truly heard and valued in a student-teacher relationship, but if you are fortunate to learn from an inspirational teacher, it can make all the difference. Jerry Rotenberg, director of student life and Judaics teacher, has dedicated the better part of his life to helping students succeed and enjoy the journey that is middle and high school at Denver Jewish Day School. He treats his students like adults and values their opinions. His classes always present some sort of real-world problem, and well-thought-out responses are encouraged. Engaging discussions always seemed to just happen magically in his room. As a teacher myself, I know now, that is never how it actually happens. Class culture is carefully created and manufactured by the environment a teacher sets in his classroom. Jerry is a master at creating such an environment. Each student's opinion is valued, and no one sits simply as a bystander in class.

I cannot believe how much time I spend with my students. Many days, I am the adult my students interact with the most. The occasional "mom" I hear in class instead of my name, and the embarrassed student after she realizes what she said, actually makes me feel honored. Being a teacher is demanding, hard work, and your students are not just "your kids" during the day, it is as if they come home with you each and every night, and their successes and failures stay with you constantly. By this point in Jerry's career, he probably has hundreds of kids, not to mention his two biological children.



After spending four years going on an overnight field trip with my fourth graders, I know what kind of time commitment this job can be, and what teachers give up in their own lives to be with their other families: their students. Jerry has been going on the annual tenth grade trip to Washington, DC, for more years than I can count, and he has even added another student trip to his repertoire. He takes his personal time to chaperone four—yes, four—student trips each year. I never understood what kind of commitment these experiences were for the dedicated adults who traveled with us. After volunteering to coach the Denver Maccabi volleyball team, I cannot believe that Jerry has been attending and planning these student trips for years. He puts in at least 12-hour days, combined with a full day of activities that he often plans, not to mention the stress of going through the airport with your students.

Not only does Jerry commit his time to these overnight trips, he also continues to lead our school's student council, attending weekly meetings and planning school programs. As a former council member, I remember feeling empowered, like I was making a real difference in our school's future. My experiences on student council made me go to college thinking that I could have an impact, I could lead others, and I could manage not only my own life, but help others to become more productive members of our community.

Jerry also serves as co-athletic director. His responsibilities extend beyond the school day as he often remains at school for multiple athletic events in one evening. Reflecting on my fondest memories in high school, there seems to be one constant: Jerry was there supporting me in my experiences. He was there, or at least behind the scenes, for every part of my academic, social and athletic career, which has left me with lasting memories.

Jerry's dedication to his career and students is unique. The time he spends to help each student feel successful and valued should be praised. Thank you, Jerry, for helping to shape me into the person and teacher I am today, and for setting an example of hard work, loyalty and commitment.

The Spark That Lit My Future



SOPHIE OSTROW

age 19, Bornblum Jewish Community School, Memphis

Eight years ago, an amazing teacher named Michal Almalem lit a flame deep inside me that is still burning brightly in my life today. She was my teacher, my bat mitzvah tutor and my friend, and now I know, my inspiration. The ways she influences me even today are too numerous to list here. Suffice it to say, she is an extraordinary teacher.

She teaches with such dedication, inspiration and with such an interactive style. But she does more than teach the material, she makes you love the subject and content. She gives up her own time for the benefit of others, whether it is enlightening them through learning, doing chesed (acts of kindness), or by simply inspiring others through her bright smile.

What seems like a very short seven years ago, I was ready to prepare for my bat mitzvah. Being a traditional Jewish girl, I did not plan to go up to the Torah to receive an aliyah like most of my friends. I wanted to do something different, something meaningful to me. I chose to study Pirkei Avot, a part of Mishnah that is traditionally studied in the summer, because my bat mitzvah was in August. I had my idea; I just needed a teacher.

I wanted someone extraordinary to teach me this book and these meaningful ideas, but I wanted to learn them through a different

and creative lens. Morah Almalem was the obvious choice. She is not only a teacher but a talented artist. We met and she immediately sparked a match inside of me. I discovered my love for Jewish learning, responding to her passion. Together, we deeply learned a few tractates from the book and created a painting that conveyed the ideas we learned. To this day, that painting hangs on my bedroom wall. And its meaning grows deeper to me every time I look at it.

That little spark Morah Almalem lit inside me has turned into a burning flame. I am following in her footsteps, studying Jewish education at Yeshiva University. I realize I have so much to learn about teaching. But what Morah Almalem taught me above all, is that the job of the Jewish educator is not just to convey information, but to light the flames of Jewish souls. This is the one lesson that I learned from her that inspires me every day. It is the lesson that I will carry with me as a teacher, a wife, a mother and a Jewish adult.



Alumni Inspired by Teachers



MICAH HYMAN

age 20, YULA High School, Los Angeles

Building Castles in the Sky

Rav Soloveitchik famously remarked, “I always enter the class in despair. And I ask myself ... can there be a dialogue between an old teacher and young students? Between a rebbe in his Indian summer and boys enjoying the spring of their lives?”

Many institutions answer this question with a resounding no; young, modern rebbeim are the crown jewels of the staff. Excellent ball handling skills have practically supplanted talmudic acuity as job prerequisites. Yet the Rav himself concluded that the cross-generation rebbe-student connection was not only possible, but the very backbone of the transmission of the Mesorah.

I write not to lampoon the model of relatable rebbeim. Many of my closest rebbeim have helped me grow tremendously through being able to strongly identify with them on a personal level. That said, one of my most inspiring teachers in high school was Rabbi Nachum Sauer, a veritable symbol of the more “old school” approach. Rabbi Sauer learned for many years with Rabbi Soloveitchik. His Torah knowledge is tremendous and he serves as a dayan (judge) on the RCC Beit Din. Needless to say, sports references were not commonly featured in shiur.

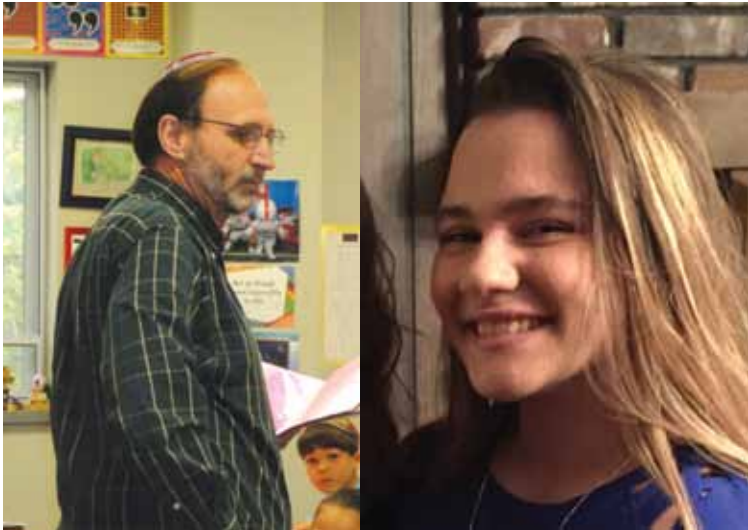
Rabbi Sauer simply modeled an elevated life of Torah and mitzvot. He had complete conviction in his beliefs and a concomitant clarity on the purpose, both existentially and personally, of life. His unshakeable faith visibly guided

him in every facet of his life. Every challenge that arose was met with an immutable set of beliefs; every discussion centered around the same fundamental goals.

Humanity searches for meaning in life—our souls cry out for depth. Millennials specifically struggle with finding their place in the world. Technology has broadened our horizons, but dauntingly so. The global village weighs on us, shifting our heroes from local do-gooders to world-altering leaders. Our aspirations grow in proportion. We perceive small kindnesses as irrelevant and big ones as impossible. We have trouble perceiving the luster of our own star as we contemplate the existence of billions of galaxies.

I felt drawn to Rabbi Sauer’s purposefulness like a moth to a light. I wanted to feel part of the chosen people. Rather than stooping down into the dirt to help us up, Rabbi Sauer built castles in the sky, lowered the drawbridge and invited us to come visit.

My first step forward was an increased effort at prayer. I prayed not because I truly understood the words I was saying, nor because I found prayer particularly inspiring in its own right. I prayed because I wanted to have our relationship with our G-d. I wanted to have a strong ethico-religious compass that guided me through life, an atlas that showed me my place in life. I prayed because I aspired to join Rabbi Sauer in his castle in the sky.



MARLIE THOMPSON

age 13, NE Miles Jewish Day
School, Birmingham, Alabama

A Kind and Captivating Voice

One of the most inspiring teachers I've ever had the honor of learning from is Paul Miller. Mr. Miller was our librarian, music teacher and Judaic elective teacher. He was amazing, talented and helpful—just to name a few things about him. He taught us the curriculum of reading, writing, Hebrew, etc., but most importantly, he taught me how to love learning and make it fun. He never failed to make me smile with his voice when he sang, or captivate me when he taught. He put his students and teaching first, even when he should've had his top priority be himself. He inspired me to love what I do, just as he did, to be kind, just as he always was, and to live life to the fullest, just like he did.

I like to think that he still looks over me and my old classmates, to make sure that we're doing okay, and because of him, I am okay. Because of him, I see the best side of people, I understand my

Jewish heritage, I can live like there's no tomorrow, and I can't thank him enough. He was always funny, but never mean, and always talented, but never prideful.

Speaking of talent, I never got tired of hearing his voice. When he sang, everyone around him would want to sing along, but only quietly, so we could still hear him. It was so joyful, and full of hope. He inspired me—I am completely tone deaf—to try and sing, but I knew I could never spread as much happiness with my voice as he could. He inspired me to find any way to spread happiness to people around me. By charity work, telling jokes, or just being nice in general.

I still remember him every day, thinking about how much joy he gave me. I was always so excited to see him, whether in was in class, around school, or at Shabbat services, it was always such a treat to be in

his company. His class was especially fun because he just absolutely loved teaching, and his students loved learning. I was so interested in whatever he had to say. I could've honestly listened to him give a three-hour lecture on grass growing, and I wouldn't be bored for one second. I always admired that about him. He had such a way of captivating anyone and everyone he talked to. I always wished we had that in common, and because of him, I try my best to do that, so that others who didn't have the privilege to have him as a teacher and mentor, can get some tiny piece of what it was like.

I miss him so much, even more every day, but I will always remember him, his lessons, and his aspirations to be the best version of himself he could be, so I can use that to even be a fraction of what he was. I love you, Mr. Miller, I hope you're looking down and me and classmates, and that you're proud of us. Thank you.

MELISSA PERL
AARON HORN

Confronting the Religious Apathy Crisis

A Schoolwide Program for Religious Growth

"I just don't get it," Shira muttered and flung herself dejectedly into the chair. Prodding a bit, I tried to understand what, exactly, she didn't get. "Judaism, the rabbis, Halakhah, everything!" she exclaimed as her cadence quickened and her pitch rose. "I just can't relate to any of it. I don't buy into this system!"

Shira's religious crisis was only one in a series of events that led to the creation of the religious guidance program at Kohelet Yeshiva High School. After repeated conversations with disheartened students and discouraged faculty, it seemed as though more and more students were foundering as they mindlessly went through the motions of a religious lifestyle and yet failed to find meaning. Frustrated with Judaism and disillusioned with religion, these students were struggling with deep questions while longing to connect to someone and something beyond themselves.



The Research

Rather than rely on our own instinctive responses to this problem or on solutions we had seen others try, we turned instead to the research literature on religious development in adolescents in the hope of shedding light on the developmental, cognitive and emotional factors at the core of the issue. In 2005, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist published the results of their National Survey on Youth and Religion (youthandreligion.nd.edu). The study aimed to measure what young Americans thought about religion, how they practiced their faith, and to what degree parents, peers, religious institutions and other factors influenced their beliefs. This report found that more than 70% of American teens were apathetic to organized religion and relegated it to "benign whateverism."

Smith and Lundquist were surprised that, despite their dislike of religion, the majority of teenagers nonetheless believed that there is a God who created the world and who watches over mankind. In the mind of these adolescents, this God wants people to be kind and to feel good but neither concerns Himself with the day-to-day actions of man nor prescribes specific actions for man to do. Smith and Lundquist coined the term

“Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” to encapsulate this perspective. They explained that a “moralistic” religion is one that expects man to be honest, kind, ethical and responsible, and a “therapeutic” religion focuses more on how man can feel good than on how man can avoid sin. Unlike the deism of the 18th century that posited a Creator who does not interact with the natural world, deism in this context suggests that God has the ability to intervene if mankind wants His help but that He does not make demands on people in return.

The authors found that the majority of adolescents in America believe that there is a God who wants them to be moral and happy but who does not care about anything else that they do as long as they do not hurt other people. Although we didn’t feel that 70% of our students embraced the notion of Moral Therapeutic Deism, upon reflection we realized that these findings do mirror a growing trend in the day school system. With each passing year, there seem to be more students who articulate the notion that they do not believe that God actually cares about whether they follow Halakhah as long as they are moral and ethical people. We wondered whether a better understanding of this research could help us to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of the students who seemed the most disillusioned.

Whereas the majority of respondents in the survey viewed religion apathetically, the research also indicated that there were a small percentage of adolescents who did, in fact, possess what was termed a “high faith commitment.” These individuals believed in a more traditional view of God and found organized religion to be meaningful. Further research attempted to tease out what was different about these teenagers and what factors contributed to their more conventional viewpoint. Identifying these factors gave us critical direction to help our students who were currently lost and disengaged. The data indicated that the adolescents who were most likely to practice their religion and embrace its teachings were also most likely to have the following:

- **Parent role models.** Those adolescents who had parents who modeled religious beliefs and actions were most likely to possess a high faith commitment.
- **Non-parental adult role models.** Even absent parental role models, relationships with other adult role models supportive of their religious development resulted in a high likelihood that they would attain a strong faith commitment.

- **Active involvement of the adolescent in religion.** The next most significant factor in creating high faith commitment was the degree to which teenagers had positive experiences with prayer and with the learning of sacred texts during adolescence.
- **Personal convictions and sense of self.** If a teenager could articulate a “creed to believe,” consider himself to be part of a community, and feel as though he has a religious mission or purpose in life, he too is more likely to follow the path of those with a high faith commitment.

There was a striking similarity between Smith and Lundquist’s findings across adolescents of all religions and our anecdotal experiences in Modern Orthodox high schools. While there are clearly a number of elements at play in helping students develop a high faith commitment, some of which are beyond the scope of what a high school can do, the Youth and Religion survey has strong implications for what schools should do to position their students for the greatest likelihood of religious engagement. The research stresses the critical role that relationships with adult role models can play in the formation of the adolescent religious identity, it provides a roadmap for how to achieve religious engagement through positive experiences with prayer and text-study, and it identifies the important contributions that community, faith and purpose play in the religious evolution of the adolescent.

At the core of a Jewish day school is the mission to facilitate a connection to the past through the study of ancient texts and a connection to the present through the fostering of a deep connection to the divine in prayer. The research certainly affirmed the need to shore up that foundation so that adolescents encounter textual learning and prayer as both positive and relevant. However, the more radical notion that emerged from this research was that schools need to ensure not only that they create opportunities for meaningful relationships to flourish between their students and their faculty but that they also help their students articulate their beliefs, join together as a community, and understand the mission and purpose that Judaism gives their life.

We knew that if we could successfully create a program that accomplished these goals, the research indicated that our students would be less likely to follow the mindset of Moral Therapeutic Deism and would be more likely to become engaged individuals who found the practice of Judaism relevant to their daily lives.

Our next step was to determine how to construct a program that would accomplish these

goals in a school setting. After investigating a number of approaches, we decided to train a few teachers in how to implement the methodology used by life coaches. Our intention was that doing so would provide our teachers with concrete tools to not only cultivate relationships with their students but also to help their students reflect deeply on their beliefs, explicitly identify their goals and values, and begin the process of creating profound opportunities for meaningful reflection. This, in turn, would enable students to develop the personal convictions and sense of self that Smith and Lundquist determined were correlated with a high faith commitment. Tony Stoltzfus, a life coach who has worked with clients in both the secular and religious worlds, explains that coaching is different from counseling, teaching or mentoring because it is about building relationships that transform the way people view their lives. He maintains that coaching builds an individual’s “character and capacity as a leader and as a person” (*Coaching Questions: A Coach’s Guide to Powerful Asking Skills*). Stoltzfus’s coaching methodology hinges upon the power of asking questions. He writes that “questions cause us to think, create answers we believe in, and motivate us to act on our ideas.”

The Program

The program we established revolves around fostering relationships between teachers and students, as well as providing opportunities for adolescents to cultivate their beliefs, articulate their purpose, and join with others in a growth-oriented community. However, it is important to note that one reason why our religious guidance program has experienced success is because it was not created in a vacuum. Since those initial conversations with Shira and the limmudei kodesh faculty, there has been a conscious effort to focus our energy on cultivating a culture where religious evolution and development is the norm. Over the past two years, in addition to the implementation of the religious guidance program, our shabbatons, yemei iyyun, advisory and special programming have all focused on creating this reflective community. The synergy between these programs has resulted in a culture where our students are continuously encouraged to contemplate their own religious beliefs and ideology and where many of our students have started to re-engage.

The religious guidance program is predicated on the notion that when there is a strong, multifaceted connection between a student and an adult, there is also a willingness for

that student to open up, reflect and think critically. As such, all students at Kohelet Yeshiva High School are asked to choose the limmudei kodesh staff member with whom they believe they can best connect and who is in the best position to help them grow. When describing to our students the goals of the program and the importance of this choice, we ask them to make their determination based on who they think they can be open and honest with, who they view as a religious role model, and who they imagine would be supportive of their religious growth. Since student buy-in is such an integral element of this program, it is imperative that they are paired with someone with whom they feel comfortable. In our program, students are asked to select their top three choices out of 12 possible candidates and are told that they will be matched to one of their top choices.

Over the course of the school year, each student is required to meet with his or her counselor a minimum of four times, although many of them meet much more often. Cultivating and nurturing the personal relationship is just one part of what Kohelet staff members do during their religious guidance sessions. The goal is not to be a therapist or to give advice but rather to help a student recognize his or her own strengths, desires and motivations as well as to articulate his or her own thoughts, ideas and beliefs. In these conversations, faculty use Stolzhus's methodology to assist students as they examine their own personal Judaism. They unpack tough religious questions and discuss issues surrounding religious beliefs. They push the students to consider who they are, who they want to be, what is realistically possible and what is holding them back from achieving their goals. In these conversations, students are asked to visualize, contemplate and formulate some of the foundational elements of their religious persona.

Before setting specific goals, the counselor will spend time talking to the student to gather background information and learn about the student's current religious beliefs and practices. When interacting with the students, the counselor will consider this background information and will work with the student to set a specific goal based on that particular student's interests, passions and beliefs. Counselors enter into each session with a list of over a hundred powerful questions that are designed to ease students into a more reflective frame of mind and to help open them up to the possibility of religious growth. These questions range from

"Who do you admire most in the world?" to "What are you passionate about pursuing, and what are you eager to leave behind?" and "If you had unlimited resources and knew you couldn't fail, what would you try?" Once students begin opening up, the religious guidance counselor's role is to meet students where they are, to listen intently, and to carefully encourage them to identify and pursue a next step within their zone of proximal development. One student may set a goal about increasing her kavvanah in tefillah, another may want to determine how to improve his interpersonal relationships within the framework of Judaism, a third may wish to set a goal to improve his kibbud av va'em, and a fourth may desire to understand her place in the universe vis-a-vis an all knowing God.

An important element of the program is the documentation, communication and follow-up that takes place after each session. Counselors carefully document both the goal that the student has set as well as the plan that has been outlined for how to accomplish that goal. They discuss each student with their program administrator at least once a quarter, and they make sure to pass along any relevant information to the appropriate teachers and administrators for follow-up. Counselors are encouraged to reach out to parents and to meet with them during parent-teacher conferences as a means to bolster the partnership and to encourage open communication.

Initial training is certainly a necessary component when preparing teachers to serve as religious guidance counselors. We designed our own training program based on the work of Stolzhus and other life coaches and required all counselors to participate in the day-long seminar before they started working with students. These sessions taught teachers how to ask open questions as opposed to closed questions, provided them with models for coaching such as the GROW model, the coaching funnel, and the life-wheel, and gave them the tools to probe without judgment and to generate action steps. Participants learned how to document information and when information should be kept confidential or be passed along to the administration and school counselor. All religious guidance counselors were also asked to participate in ongoing professional development where, on a quarterly basis, the various counselors discuss specific scenarios, role-play difficult conversations, and extend their knowledge and understanding of how to be a life coach.

Even with the best of training, if the counselors do not have enough time to meet with

their students, the program will not get off the ground. In the first year of the program, our ratio was 1 counselor for every 23 students, and each counselor was compensated for five periods of counseling per week. While for many students religious guidance was a powerful experience, the faculty felt that the ratio was too high. In the second year, we have reduced the ratio to 1 counselor for every 9 students. Although this is certainly a major financial investment on the part of the school, the program seems to be working more effectively.

The goals we have set for this second year are modest in nature. As we indicated, Smith and Lundquist found that 70% of adolescents follow benign whateverism as an ideology and Moral Therapeutic Deism as a philosophy, and only 30% have a strong faith commitment. At the bare minimum, we would like for that ratio to be flipped, for at least 70% of our students to have a high faith commitment. We certainly recognize that there may be 30-40% of students for whom religious guidance is not the answer and who don't yet enjoy the relationship they have with their counselor. However, for the remaining 60-70% of students, we would like at the very least for all of them to form a relationship with an adult who is supportive of their religious growth and development, for 30-40% of them to significantly improve their relationship with God, and for 15-20% of them to truly grow as individuals and to increase their religious commitment in tangible and measureable ways.

At this point, we have not yet collected data to support whether we are reaching these numbers, although a survey is planned at the end of this year. Anecdotally, students and faculty alike have commented that there has been a noticeable shift in the tenor of the school's culture. Stronger relationships between students and staff have emerged, and a significant number of students know who they are, where they are headed, and what they believe. We are confident that in the coming years the program will continue to grow stronger as our teachers become more adept facilitators and as the culture of reflection becomes even more pronounced.

Shira is a few years older now. These days she speaks openly about her own evolution and growth, alongside her renewed commitment to Jewish beliefs and practice. She still has questions. But through the religious guidance program at Kohelet Yeshiva High School, she found an avenue in which to ask her questions and, in the process, she found her voice.

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JONATHAN **CANNON**
ALANNA **KOTLER**

Using Innovative Educational Methodologies

to Improve Jewish and Israel Studies



In the work that we do for the AVI CHAI-sponsored Jewish Day School Collaborative and for Educannon Consulting, we have had the opportunity and privilege of visiting or connecting with well over 100 Jewish day schools across North America. The schools range across the denominational, geographic, size and economic spectrum. One question that we always ask the head of school when beginning a visit is, "What are the four or five biggest challenges that your school is facing?"

For many schools that list is headed by the cost of schooling and enrollment challenges. That being said, the top programmatic challenges of the school always include a subset of teaching Judaic studies, Hebrew, Israel or tefillah. The challenge is similar at almost every school: The students are not engaged sufficiently, they do not see the subject matter as relevant, and there is a shortage of effective teachers. This situation is compounded by a sense among some educators that using innovative educational methodologies is somehow antithetical or ineffective in the teaching of Judaics and Hebrew.

There are multiple reasons that explain the desire to maintain the status quo, including the belief that change negates tradition, and a concern that a focus on skills and engagement may lead to a corresponding lack of knowledge of core aspects of Jewish text and practice. This can lead to classrooms being teacher-centered rather than student-centered and an overreliance on instructional methodologies such as frontal teaching, Q&A and assessments that rely on recall and memorization. Conversely, the passion and success that teachers who utilize STEAM, game-based learning, project-based learning and student-centered education indicate that these new approaches are desperately needed for this generation of students to grow as literate and engaged Jews. These changes should be incorporated when teaching Jewish texts, traditions and practices; when teaching Hebrew language; when educating about Israel engagement; and when teaching tefillah.

Interestingly, there is much evidence that our tradition regards extrinsic and intrinsic motivation as not just legitimate, but almost inevitable. Perhaps the most famous example of this comes from Maimonides introduction to Mishnah, Sanhedrin, chapter 10.

Thus, the teacher may say, "Read and I will give you some nuts or figs; I will give you a bit of honey." With this stimulation the child tries to read. He does not work hard for the sake of reading itself, since he does not understand its value. He reads in order to obtain the food. ... As his intelligence improves still more and these things ... become unimportant to him, he will set his desire upon something of greater value. Then his teacher may say to him: "Learn this passage or this chapter, and I will give you a denar or two." Again he will try to read in order to receive the money, since money is more important to him than study. ... Ultimately, the purpose of study should be knowledge, and the ultimate purpose of truth should be to know that it is true.

To be fair, Maimonides is not suggesting that using treats and money is ideal. However, he is addressing the reality that absent motivation, many students will not engage. A more positive way of framing this idea came from BF Skinner, who stated, "It is the teacher's function to contrive conditions under which students learn." Like it or not, the conditions under which students learn are undergoing an exponential change. If we are going to maintain relevance and engagement in the core mission of our schools, then those responsible for the teaching and leading in the areas of Judaic studies, Hebrew, Israel engagement and tefillah must embrace those practices around which learning is designed in general studies, and across our learning environment, including the games that are played at home.

While this is easier said than done, there are educators who are applying best practice to the subject areas within the Jewish mission. We would like to share a couple of strategies that have proven effective, together with some specific examples of how they have been implemented.

Game-Based Learning (GBL)

Game-based learning is an approach to teaching that focuses on process, the process of student learning and the process of designing an engaging learning environment. The Institute of Play, a resource for teachers and schools to learn about GBL, has seven game-like learning principles:

- Everyone is a participant
- Learning feels like play
- Everything is interconnected
- Learning happens by doing
- Failure is reframed as iteration
- Feedback is immediate and ongoing
- Challenge is constant

These principles help to frame the approach to teaching content and skills to students, while at the same time highlight many of the desired goals teachers have for their daily classroom environment. More importantly, the principles prioritize students' active participation, willingness to take risks and realization that "failure" is part of learning.

When thinking about creating a game for the classroom, a teacher decides the learning goals that he/she wants to focus on, and then develops a game to help students reach those goals. The game-like learning principles are part of the process of game creation and the experience students have while playing. This strategy helps students feel more in touch with the content, motivated to ask questions and to seek the answers in collaborative ways. Game-based learning does not negate the importance of teaching content and skills. In fact, it relies on the teacher's understanding of the students, their needs and the specific areas that they struggle with or are less excited about, to help engage them in the learning.

At Rav Teitz Mesivta Academy (RTMA) in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the teachers sought new ways to engage their students in the study of Gemara. One class in particular, a sixth grade boys' class, had a few students who were reluctant to participate in discussion or activities. The teacher wanted to create a lesson that focused on the "give and take" of the Gemara and created a game, based on the seven principles, to assess the students' understanding of the structure of Gemara. At the start of the lesson, the teacher declared with incredible enthusiasm, "Today your mission is to create your own Gemara!" The boys, a bit perplexed, looked at him and each other with a glimmer of excitement and suspicion. As the class unfolded, students were challenged to take a Gemara tractate and put it in the correct order. The classroom came to life with young boys debating, discussing and questioning why one's order was more correct than another's.

Afterwards, the teacher spoke about one particular child who began the lesson with his hood on and head on his desk. He said, "Once I had *him*, I knew that I had it [the excitement around learning]." This particular student has learning differences and would rarely become involved in the class; not only was it hard for him, it had little or no relevance to his world. When thinking about the Institute of Play's gamelike learning principles, the teacher had touched on each one of them without losing the essence of his lesson: for students to understand the structure of a Gemara. He had also provided a space to debate, question and discuss one's ideas without the fear of being wrong. This risk-taking environment allowed for deep learning and engagement. The game elevated the students' experience of serious study; it provided a path to engage students in a way that merged their interests with text study and understanding.

MEET THE BOARD



MICHAEL J. BOHNEN

Tell us something about yourself.

I grew up in Providence, where my father was the rabbi of a Conservative synagogue. I attended an Orthodox day school, graduating in ninth grade, and my continuing Jewish education remains a personal priority. I practiced corporate law in Boston for more than 30 years, and for the past 10 years I have been president of the Adelson Family Foundation. As an active volunteer in the Boston Jewish community, I have chaired the Jewish Federation, the Community Relations Council and the Solomon Schechter Day School. I was founding chair of Gann Academy. Nationally, I chaired the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education.

My wife taught at an Orthodox day school and was admissions director at a pluralistic day school. My two daughters are Schechter grads, and my four grandchildren all attend day school. So I am passionate about the subject from a personal point of view. From a communal perspective, I believe that a vibrant Jewish future is dependent to a significant degree on a cadre of informed, proud and inspired day school alums.

What do you bring to the Prizmah board?

I hope to bring my passion for Jewish education and the lessons I learned as a leader in the Jewish community, especially grappling with the challenge of affordability. As a lawyer, I have represented many charities, and I believe that my experience as a negotiator and advocate will be helpful. As a foundation professional, I think I have gained a unique understanding of the philanthropic community.

Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?

The Tanakh tells us many things we are supposed to do, but I am aware of only two things that we must actively *pursue*: justice and peace. "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20). "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34:14). To achieve these essential attributes of the good life, we all need to make an extra effort.

STEAM

Curriculum integration is an important part of the Jewish day school world. With limited time to fit in all the secular and Judaic subjects, finding curricular intersection points can become a method to ensure content and skills are being addressed. However, curriculum integration is not just a time-saving measure; it is the world that our students live in and will graduate into as they move into their future learning and professional lives. Disciplines are no longer silos, they exist in tandem to bring about new ideas and innovations.

To bring about greater creativity and engagement into their Judaics classrooms, several schools were interested in exploring how to best integrate STEAM. The challenge was how to ensure that the content of the Judaics classroom was not "watered down" by the desire to have STEAM-related learning as part of the units. Using the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the schools looked for natural entry points into their curriculum. Each school used the chaggim as the organizing principle to bring authentic STEAM experiences into the classroom.

Every STEAM-related project was rooted in text study and understanding. At the Heschel Day School in Los Angeles, the students in first and fifth grade worked together to design a Tashlich pool that recycled water. In their study of Tashlich, the students understood that the water source had to be a moving body of water. They learned about water conservation, and how to create a motor to ensure that the water was constantly moving. The study of Sukkot was enhanced at Chicago's Sager Solomon Schechter Day School by applying Rambam's sukkah requirements to a mathematical-scaled model of a sukkah. The students had to use their understanding of a kosher sukkah and apply their mathematical understanding of scale to recreate a version of a sukkah. Again, the Jewish laws of the chag were the root of the learning, while the STEAM aspects brought about the use of math, study of the environment, creativity and trial and error. However, perhaps the most important aspect of the work was how the students were able to bring their learning to life in authentic ways.

When considering the classroom environment and what each student needs, the answers are varied. However, the changes in education and the ways in which our students learn urges us to question if we are providing an educational model that matches not only the world, but the lives and development of our students. The study of Tanakh or Gemara or chaggim shouldn't be different. We can't be afraid to look at new ways of innovating our work because we feel that the study of text will be sacrificed. Instead, we need to consider the possibility, look carefully at what our students respond to and decide if engagement and love of learning is central to our work.

It is becoming clear that, with the appropriate professional development and commitment, depth and engagement, instilling knowledge and inspiring Jewish learning are not either/or propositions. The alternative is to accept the phenomenon of students in our schools who don't see the relevance of Judaic study in their lives and will not want to learn, to question or engage in the real purpose of education: the desire to keep learning. Developing the most effective learning environments will result in the best engagement and retention. As our students learn in the classroom, only when we embrace risk and are prepared for failure are we able to achieve success.

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Middle School Social Justice Trips Bring Meaning to Young Teens



CHERYL **MAAYAN**

Middle school students are crying out for meaning—body and soul. During the tender years, when they are plagued by an obsession with pimples and popularity, young adolescents are grasping for autonomy. They are unsure of their place, and test out the boundaries in all directions—with their parents, their teachers and their friendships. Middle schoolers feel powerless, and it is upon schools to show them that they do indeed have sway.

Jewish schools are uniquely positioned to motivate middle school students to channel the authority that they do have, and direct them to exercise their muscle. For day schools have both the time and the breadth of Judaism to guide them through life. It is a gift to be able to pull together global issues with Judaism, history and science, and demonstrate for young people how Jews navigate life's challenges. Day schools have the potential to elevate the intellectual space that occupies the minds of adolescents and to inspire them toward action. In science, they learn about the many ways God's earth is being damaged by humans, and ways we can help. In social studies, they learn about violations of civil rights and human rights throughout history and open their eyes to the same violations that are occurring now. In Judaism they learn about our sacred obligation to protect the earth, guard justice, give tzedakah and show compassion to those in need. Middle schoolers take all of this in and start to formulate their own role in the improvement of society.

Day schools should go the extra mile by giving students the space to respond. By doing so, we allow them to exercise their power and lead them to believe that they—even as middle school students—have value. School leaders need to carve out time in the schedule and gently coach students, by pushing forward their drive to improve the world.

At Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School, we reinvented the middle school experience (for sixth to eighth grade) five years ago to align with our students' need to exercise influence and control. Each year begins with a theme of social justice: hunger and poverty, civil rights, or the environment. We begin by taking the entire middle school on a five-day trip to immerse them in the study of that year's global issue. We return to school with children who are shocked about the extent of the problem, angry that more people aren't out there fixing it, and ready to put themselves to work to change the world. We then gently facilitate a process by which they formulate an action that responds to their newly ignited passion. Students have the room to take leadership if they choose and the freedom to decide on the direction of their

response. If Jewish schools spend more time igniting the fire in our students' bellies and letting them take the lead, we will provide them with excellent leadership training.

One way to accomplish this is through intensive focus. The modality of a school trip that exposes students to significant issues has a high impact. On the hunger and poverty trip, students are led through a poverty simulation at Heifer Ranch in Arkansas. Overnight in the woods, they experience what it's like to have less than you need, and gain extraordinary empathy for those who live in poverty every day. Students are divided into "families" and given challenges, roles and limited supplies. One family member is a parent, holding a water balloon baby in a sling. The biggest challenge is to get a fire lit before dark so they can cook dinner. While several families are given matches and a small portion of firewood, only one has a matchbook with which to light the match. Each family receives some provisions: one a bag of onions, another two potatoes and three carrots, another a cup of rice. One family has access to drinking water...and so the bartering begins. The students are on their own to figure out how to get enough food for dinner. Some steal. Some trade. Some share. No matter their choices during their simulation, the students have volumes to talk and write about how hunger, discomfort and stress impacted them.

As part of the experience, they also learn about the value of asking for help, about statistics on hunger and poverty, and about the geographic landscape of world poverty. Upon return, the students respond with a project. The middle school faculty carves out time for them to formulate a response and does not dictate its direction. This allows students to explore. After the most recent hunger and poverty trip, the children were inspired to help children in Ferguson, which is about 15 minutes away from school. They found that our local NCJW has a community closet in one of the elementary schools and mobilized the faculty, elementary school students, their parents, grandparents and the St. Louis Jewish community to collect personal care items for these local children who are at risk. They delivered the items and were able to tour



the facility. Their response was the beginning of an ongoing relationship between our school and the community of Ferguson. We have continued the relationship by participating in two peace through pyramids circus projects in which our students join together to learn and perform the circus arts. We are also currently formulating a literacy partners project in which our middle school students will help children in Ferguson work on their reading skills.

On the Civil Rights trip, students are agape as their bus passes Confederate flags on the highway heading south. They stare shocked at the KKK uniforms in the Civil Rights museums in Montgomery. They sing "We Shall Overcome," as we march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. For our students, racial discrimination feels like ancient history—until they notice that the plaque next to the KKK uniform staring out at them is from 10 years ago. In Memphis, they walk in the shoes of Martin Luther King Jr., just before he was shot. The students are challenged to think about what it would take for them to give up their safety for a cause, like those who joined the Civil Rights movement. They become aware of their own tendencies to stereotype and are sobered when faced with the potential effects of a society that normalizes racism. Upon return to school, the students struggled to find an appropriate response. Ultimately, they decided to take a role in protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline. Although the uncomfortable political climate has made it challenging, the students are working on conducting a "Stand In," for the Standing Rock Sioux, in which they hope to raise money by standing collectively for 24 hours during an overnight at school.

During the environment trip to the Smoky Mountains, our students learn about watersheds and nocturnal creatures, and participate in citizen science research on salamanders. They take an eight-mile hike, ending with a glorious shower in a waterfall. They measure their food, water and paper usage, and become determined to reduce waste. They return more aware of the careless manner in which they impact our environment. After our last environment trip, the students responded by leading the entire school through a waste audit. They engaged the elementary school as well as the faculty in collecting data on food, water and paper waste in the school building. The middle school students developed a campaign to raise awareness and encourage the school community to reduce waste. At the end of elementary school's lunch each day, the middle school students would quiet the school down, and with great anticipation weigh the food waste. An announcement about the progress made, including the reduction of paper waste also became routine, and so encouraged the community to be cognizant of their everyday impact on the environment. Middle school students were inspired, and they used that passion to inspire others.

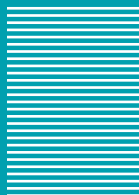
Students emerge feeling proud of their sophisticated knowledge, and of the success of their efforts to improve their community. Young adolescents thrive in a community of shared values, where they can rise above the surface and spend their middle school years working toward something significant and meaningful. The social justice trips serve to form a sacred shared sense of community in middle school.

During the middle school years, students' physical and mental capacities rapidly mature. They seek to find productive ways to exercise their place in the world around them. As mission-driven institutions, Jewish day schools are poised to provide them with the guidance they need by helping them to take the Jewish learning and apply it to issues in the larger society. Through intensive programming in social justice, including both lessons in the classroom and in the field, Jewish schools can inspire students to not only understand Jewish content, but to enact Jewish values. By doing so, we raise young people who have direction with which to navigate the many challenges of adolescence.



BARRY KISLOWICZ

Setting the Stage for Hebrew Learning



The classic conversation has repeated itself in one faculty room after another. The Hebrew teacher turns to her colleague from the math department. “You are so lucky. The kids don’t give you any trouble. They know that learning math is important. I wish they thought Hebrew was that important.”

Anyone who has taught or observed a math class, especially one with struggling students, knows that teaching geometry is no picnic. But the fundamental point is still valid. In most of our schools, Hebrew holds less cultural capital than math, science and even Judaics. As a result, many students enter class less open, and sometimes downright resistant, to learning Hebrew. This challenge is exacerbated as students enter adolescence and are naturally more focused on building a culturally meaningful identity. By contrast, when English is taught as a second language in countries such as Israel, the status of English as a privileged language in films, TV and other media paves the way for teachers.

In a recent article in the *Journal of Jewish Education* ("Hebrew Education in the United States: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions"), Sharon Avni has chronicled the way our approach to Hebrew teaching has evolved over the last 100 years. Both her analysis and anecdotally collected experiences support the conclusion that success or failure in Hebrew learning is not just about what happens inside the classroom. Highly trained teachers and excellent curricula are the vital basis for success, and in fact provide the foundation for what we will suggest below. However, they alone are not sufficient.

How can we inspire our children to open their minds to Hebrew learning?

The solution begins with a recognition among school leaders that what happens in Hebrew class cannot stay in Hebrew class. Because of the challenges inherent in second language

acquisition, and because of the specific challenges surrounding a less privileged language, success in Hebrew requires a school-wide approach.

This approach needs to begin with the recognition of a fundamental premise. As Vygotsky taught us many years ago, language is not simply how we communicate. Language is the matter of thought. Language shapes how we see, process and interact with the world around us.

The corollary to this premise is that language and culture can become almost inseparable. This is particularly true in the case of Modern Hebrew, a language endemic to only one country and as a result all the more deeply intertwined with Israeli culture. If we want to open our children's minds to Hebrew learning, we need to elevate the status of Hebrew and Israeli culture within our schools. This is not a simple task. Our students are surrounded by English and North American culture throughout their daily lives. The uphill battle cannot be fought solely by Hebrew teachers; it requires the collaboration of school leadership to create an explicit and thought-out plan.

While Hebrew is indeed tied to Israeli culture, that culture is by no means monochromatic. As a result, before school leaders launch a plan to elevate Hebrew-Israeli culture, they need to think carefully about what strains of Israeli culture are an appropriate match for their community. Having made this choice, they can get to work.

While by no means the only approach, an effective plan should consider the following.

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Ever wonder why so many schools hold science fairs? Contrary to popular opinion, it is not because principals have an innate affinity for baking soda-induced volcanic explosions. Rather, schools understand that excellence in science is a key selling point for their communities. This is not to say that science is not intrinsically important, or that fairs are merely a marketing tool, but rather to note that communal perception often influences which aspects of student learning we choose to publicly exhibit.

Fortunately, the reverse can also be true. What we choose to exhibit publicly can influence community perception. Many schools already post Hebrew and Israeli decorations, including art, news and other postings, throughout their facilities. Creating a physical environment that emphasizes the centrality of Hebrew culture can have a subtle but important impact on student perception.

More important than decoration, however, is how we treat student work. Here we are fortunate that the considerations of effective pedagogy and communal perception point us in the same direction (which, we know, is all too often not the case). Many of our schools have been experimenting with and implementing a project-based learning approach integrated within or in place of regular courses. Research and field experiences point to authenticity as one of the central requirements for effective project-based learning. This includes authentic materials, choice of topic and work patterns. It also includes an authentic reason or goal for the project. Schools at the cutting edge of PBL, such as High Tech High, generate this authentic goal by ensuring that an exhibition of learning forms the capstone experience of major projects.

Imagine if in addition to the annual science fair each spring, our schools held an exhibition of Hebrew learning? This exhibition would not be a place to display poster boards that parents created the night before. Nor is it the old “Yom Ivrit,” isolated to one day a year. Rather, this would be the culmination of weeks or months of student work. The exhibition itself would provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their mastery over the material, to teach an audience of parents, and to showcase the products of their learning.

The impact such an exhibition can exert on student and parent perception of the importance of Hebrew is significant. The event would visibly elevate the status of Hebrew learning across the community. Moreover, artifacts from the event can be kept on permanent display throughout the school. At High Tech High, student-led tours typically highlight such artifacts to illuminate the school’s culture of learning for visitors.

At the same time as it generates greater cultural capital for Hebrew, a sophisticated PBL unit presents an opportunity for students to connect not only with vocabulary and language but also with its underlying culture. Project topics should be chosen from aspects of Hebrew/Israeli culture that resonate powerfully with students, and a strong Hebrew curriculum will facilitate and provide a basis for this kind of school-based expansion. This type of topic, which can span from social issues to sports, technology, education or cuisine, each approached through the PBL lenses of creative exploration and thoughtful analysis, will offer students an opportunity to build their own perspectives on and connection with Israeli culture. The exhibition and permanent display of their work

can then serve to integrate these new perspectives further within the school and student culture.

In addition to showcasing student work, schools must generate other opportunities for students to demonstrate Hebrew mastery, thus creating authentic reasons for students to learn and use Hebrew. Here each school must understand what its community is ready for, and often these opportunities must be scaffolded or introduced in steps.

Consider some of the following: an annual high school Hebrew play, produced with as much fanfare as the traditional English play; student council elections where all candidates must deliver campaign speeches in Hebrew; a Hebrew debate society that holds events in front of a schoolwide audience; or an Israel action/current events club that conducts all of its meetings and presentations in Hebrew. Each of these provides an opportunity for authentic usage of Hebrew and meaningful connection to Hebrew and Israeli culture. None of them will directly involve all students, but each of them will elevate the prominence of Hebrew across the school community.

In addition to programming ideas, we must think more creatively about how we deploy our human resources. Ensuring that we have excellent Hebrew teachers in the classroom, and that these teachers receive ongoing professional development, is a basic foundation for our efforts. However, as we suggested when it came to programming, here too we must look past what happens within the four walls of the classroom.

Day school faculty typically include a variety of Israeli staff members: teachers who have permanently relocated to North America, shlichim, and young shlichim such as bnot sherut or shinshinim. Often, we do not utilize those who are teachers beyond their classrooms. And while we do tend to involve young shlichim in our experiential programming efforts, these are often relegated to the days or slots set aside specifically for “Israel programming,” such as Yom Ha’atzmaut.

Instead, we need to consider allowing these faculty members to impact the day-to-day life of our schools. There are numerous subtle ways in which this can take place, all of which begin with school leaders inviting these faculty to think about school culture rather than about discrete programs. Principals who establish weekly meetings with their Israeli faculty as a “school culture committee” of sorts will quickly discover appropriate aspects of Israeli culture that can be brought to bear within their school community. These may range from school décor, to the sound of the bells, to the way that teachers and students greet one another. By definition these will be innovations that native North American educators are less likely to come up with on our own, and they will likely feel foreign. However, if nurtured and applied carefully, they can help us create a community that incorporates and prizes Hebrew/Israeli culture, thus paving the way for effective Hebrew learning.

Not every one of these interventions will be appropriate for every school, and no school should apply all of them at once. However, if we want to improve Hebrew learning in our schools, we must understand that the struggle cannot be relegated to the hours of Hebrew class or pursued by Hebrew teachers alone. Rather, as school leaders we must catalyze the change that will pave the way for our students to learn and to love our national language.

MEET PRIZMAH'S SCHOOL ADVOCATES

Prizmah members receive personalized customer service, advice and support through one-to-one contact with one of Prizmah's school advocates.

These are skilled day school professionals and lay leaders with expertise in different ideologies, school types and issue areas.

When a school joins Prizmah, they will be matched with a school advocate whose professional experience is aligned with the school's identity and priorities. As a school's primary point of contact with Prizmah, the school advocate will work with the school to identify their needs, connect them with the right mix of Prizmah resources to address those needs, and offer ongoing support.

School advocates also facilitate Prizmah's affinity groups, ensuring that within each school's ideology or identity—PARDES, RAVSAK, Schechter and Yeshiva Day School—affinity group members can access relevant guidance and resources.

Prizmah's school advocates and affinity groups will ensure that a school has

- A contact at Prizmah who deeply understands your religious affiliation or role within multiple ideologies/affiliations.
- Access to a community of peers who share a school's religious affiliation, practices or identity.
- A safe space to discuss complex issues affecting their type of school.



Shira Heller is the school advocate for the Yeshiva Day Schools. She designs learning opportunities for Jewish day school teachers and leaders, connecting them

to valuable resources and to each other. A dynamic presenter with an ability to build relationships with and among a variety of audiences, Shira is a sought-after teacher, consultant and coach. Before joining Prizmah, Shira worked in diverse educational settings. She was the assistant director for professional development at YU School Partnership, served as a classroom teacher, a campus Jewish educator at Boston University, and an adult educator at the Manhattan Jewish Experience. Shira has done postgraduate work in teaching English at Florida Atlantic University and received her MSW from Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work.



Chaya Friedmann

is a school advocate for Schechter schools. She is passionately committed to Jewish education. Chaya has served the field in a variety of roles,

including as head of school of a Solomon Schechter Day School in New Jersey, school liaison for the TaL AM curriculum, director of general studies at a New Jersey yeshiva, and as a teacher of Hebrew, Judaic, and general subjects in Grades 3 through college. Chaya is a graduate of Brooklyn College, has master's degrees from Hunter College and Hofstra University, and is completing work on her doctoral thesis at Gratz College. She and her husband, Tom, a writer and professor of English and film, are the proud parents of Ilana and David, both graduates of Schechter schools through high school.



Traci Stratford is the school advocate for PARDES (Reform) day schools. She is also the program manager for Prizmah's GFA and Generations financial vitality

programs, and manager of L'Dor V'Dor, the national endowment and legacy donor recognition society. Before joining Prizmah, she worked in Jewish camping, youth engagement, and congregational education in the Deep South and in Boston. Traci is passionate about building strong relationships and communities. Her work has focused on experiential education, leadership and curriculum development. Traci has a master's in organizational leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, degrees in Jewish studies and nonprofit management from Indiana University and a certificate in fund development for nonprofit organizations from the IU School of Philanthropy.



Amy Wasser is the school advocate for RAVSAK schools. She is a native of Philadelphia and a graduate of Akiba Hebrew Academy, the impetus for her dedication to

Jewish day schools. Amy earned her BA and MA at JTS and Columbia, respectively. Her career began at United Synagogue, where she was director of USY on Wheels and National Assistant Director of USY. For the past 20 years, Amy has been at Hillel Academy, 13 years as head of school. She was active in the accreditation process of the Florida Council of Independent Schools. Amy devoted more than 20 summers serving on the staff of Ramah camps, and her three adult children are all day school and Ramah alumni. Amy resides in Tampa, Florida.

GALIA AVIDAR

The Arab/Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

A Source of Inspiration?

In the past, Israel provided a kind of simple, unmitigated inspiration; now, that kind of simple presentation of Israel often leads students to rebel and question their connection to Israel when they discover a more complicated and fraught picture of the country. Israel can still be inspiring, but schools need to engage students in the history and arguments of the conflict to inspire them.

Israel as a Source of Inspiration

Israel has been inspiring American Jewish students since its inception. There are abundant existing programs that connect students to Medinat Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael. Educators regularly draw from historic and religious texts, liturgy, Hebrew language, culture, arts, school twinnings, mifgashim and shlichim to strengthen Jewish identity and affiliation to Israel. Beyond that, the “Israel Experience,” as youth travel from Diaspora countries to Israel is known, has become the standard method of tying students to the land and people. Even with the hypervisibility of Israel in the media, and its frequent portrayal in a negative light, schools have found means to demonstrate the country’s richness, diversity and example of democratic self-determination. This is the work of inspiration, but it is only the beginning.

The Challenges to Inspiration

Inspiring students about Israel requires more than just instilling positive emotions. As the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict persists, schools can no longer avoid the difficult choices of when and how to teach about controversial issues surrounding Israel. Ongoing wars, and the work of pro-Palestinian activists on campus and in the media, have raised the awareness of the Palestinian struggle to the level where it can no longer be ignored in American Jewish classrooms. Jewish students are wrestling with their impressions of Israel. This turmoil is internalized by students, and will persist, whether Jewish day schools choose to address it or not.

In recent years, there have been countless recommendations from researchers and thought leaders on ways to re-engage with Israel in a more nuanced and complex manner. According to Peter Beinart, in his 2010 book entitled *The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment*, embracing an “uncomfortable Zionism” is considered by American liberal Zionists a more “ethical use of Jewish power.” This need for reevaluation stems from a few factors. Some researchers suggest that young American Jews have become less attached to Israel than prior generations. Students are facing anti-Israel sentiment on college campuses that is morphing into anti-Semitism, and they are wrestling with societal pressures to espouse the characteristics of the millennial generation, which strongly favors the universal over the particularistic. Self-determining nation-states, especially Israel, are viewed as oppressive by their very nature. The consensus seems to be that if there is hope to be had, it will come through what they view as more benevolent (and consensual) international oversight.

So how do schools justify the goals of the State of Israel? Should Israel be portrayed as a victim or culprit in this conflict?

How Schools are Responding

In the past decade, Jewish schools have responded in a number of ways to this dilemma. There are some that maintain Israel education as originally designed and have not recognized that something must change. Other schools have reached a critical level of awareness, knowing their program is not working well, but unclear as to what is needed. Others are in the exploration phase, trying new approaches, generally in low-risk situations (e.g., purchasing advocacy curriculum, fitting an Israel course in senior

year, inviting guest speakers). Some schools, with the support of various stakeholders, have transitioned to a new system and are actively taking risks (examples include using “side-by-side” curriculum to examine competing narratives, and implementing policy reforms). By contrast, select schools have created a new infrastructure, and can describe their Israel education approach in detail. They now have the tools in place to continually evolve their programs.

Schools may be in different stages of transition, but it is safe to say (unfortunately) that we still have not reached a point where a nuanced Israel education approach is embedded in most schools in a well-thought-out and deliberate manner. Systemic change can be daunting and ideological change centered around controversial issues is even more intractable. How can schools be motivated to see the benefits of embracing the conflict? Is there a possibility, upon closer examination, to have this contentious topic become the source of inspiration, or a catalyst for revamping and updating Israel education?

Breadcrumbs from the Classroom

While researchers Alex Pomson and Howard Deitcher show that 60% of elementary and secondary day schools devote a required course to teaching about Israel and 80% develop their own curricula, very few studies have documented the dynamics of Israel education classrooms to date. I felt it was imperative to examine how students and teachers, representing the full spectrum of American Jewish life, confront controversial issues related to Israel. In my doctoral research, I had the privilege of observing the teaching and learning of controversial issues related to the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict in three different American Jewish day high schools (Modern Orthodox, Conservative and Community).

My findings offer an understanding of the teaching and learning dynamic of the Israel classroom. I believe that in order for schools to see the benefit of teaching the conflict, it is important for them to understand the various permutations of Israel classrooms that already exist, and the consequences of each approach. Through multiple interviews with teachers and students throughout a semester, I uncovered areas for improvement, which may inspire further review to determine what is necessary to develop a robust and comprehensive Israel education system within a school.

Recommendations

Awareness of Curricular Frameworks

The three different teachers I observed each had contrasting curricula and conceptions of Israel. Nevertheless, all three confronted common features in the teaching of the conflict. The dimensions that teachers should take into consideration are 1) the ways that educators tend to present the “other”; 2) how history is presented; 3) the presentation of time (e.g., the effects of a chronological or thematic approach); and 4) the choice of pedagogy when presenting conflicting narratives.

For example, two of the teachers I examined espoused contrasting foci between the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. Along a continuum of the presentation of the “other,” one teacher was situated closest to Israel’s perspectives on the origins and perpetuation of the conflict, as demonstrated by the extensive time he spent on religious Zionism. The second teacher used a dual-narrative textbook on Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, guided by the selective choices of the textbook’s narrators. One approach is not inherently better than the other, but can assist educators in identifying if the curriculum maintains strong ties to a culture of conflict (and common collective memory experiences) or whether it advances towards a different reality, a culture of peace (reconciliation and reforms in political, societal, educational realms). Essentially, teachers need help in becoming aware of the influence of their personal, political, religious ideology on their curricular choices. Conducting assessments on how educators view the conflict personally, and how this view informs their teaching, can go a long way toward uncovering bias in their overall approach and delivery of the conflict. It can also be useful for schools that may want to ensure that teachers are following any promulgated Israel mandates.

Engaging with the four features above can help reveal strengths and weaknesses in, for example, a multiple perspectives approach, and inform what curricular choices need to be made to offset any political, ideological and pedagogical imbalances. For example, a teacher should be trained to ask herself: Why am I choosing these multiple perspectives? Are they diversified? And if so, do they present traditional or revisionist perspectives? Are the voices authoritative, or do they present the victims of conflict? According to what criteria am I making these decisions? When do I teach multiple perspectives in a factual manner, and when is it more nuanced?

When do I rely on the chronological approach over the thematic approach, and why?

Managing the Conflict in the Classroom and Beyond

Teaching controversial issues is stressful for teachers. Fear, unfortunately, informs curricular choices and pedagogical approaches. In studies that examined teacher bias, many teachers preferred not to disclose their personal views. Teachers instead preferred to align themselves with ideal values such as tolerance, justice and equality. In having to maintain the persona of impartiality, teachers employ predictable teaching strategies to manage the discourse of the conflict. I found that all three teachers used specific controversial terms to teach controversial issues and show films and literature to present difficult situations. These strategies aided or constrained classroom discussions. For example, the use of videos and documentaries presented difficult situations that were easier to view than to talk about. These were classroom moments where emotions were most palpable, but prompted minimal engagement and discussion. These films set the stage for rich conversations, but teachers were too afraid (unprepared) to allow the discussions to take place. Pivotal moments were lost.

In the three case studies, student emotions are controlled through the curricular choices of each teacher. Each school community has certain beliefs about Israel. Often, if something other than love for Israel gets triggered, the teacher becomes the one who creates the denial of space for the emotional experiences of the students. With the films example, I saw students whose faces were animated and whose words were caught in their throats, but fear of discussions getting out of hand forced the teachers to keep a tight lid on potentially very rich learning moments. Each student remained siloed, frustrated with these new emotions, not knowing how to process these new feelings. I recommend that teachers receive training in conflict management (facilitation, mediation) before engaging in this work. The strategies they can learn will offer schools and teachers an opportunity to examine communal and individual power relations and how they inform emotional discourses around Israel. This awareness will aid educators in (re)designing their curriculum to use their materials to encourage difficult conversations, not eschew them.

Know your Students and Their Desires

Jewish day high school students have a longstanding and personal association with

the conflict. Through my student interviews, I found that their backgrounds had an enduring impact on their perceptions of Israel, regardless of new information learned. While it is not clear exactly how or when student perspectives became cemented, it is important to work with the knowledge and desires that they bring with them. Mainly, the students have a strong need to understand Israeli and Palestinian perspectives and wish they had the tools to engage in dialogue with them. Opportunities for classroom discussions about the conflict, mediation role-plays, knowledge assessment, and debates offer students the opportunity to test their perspectives and those of others.

These skills aid in developing personal, social and political action. Teachers in my case studies engaged their students to greater or lesser degrees on the topic of future advocacy work, with two teachers employing empowerment dimensions in their curriculum, one along the lines of advocacy work and one in the area of peacemaking. Interestingly enough, pertaining to advocacy, student interviews across the board revealed that no student felt prepared for the work of advocacy, but all were motivated to advocate. This phenomenon existed regardless of whether their teacher emphasized the topic of advocacy or not. For many, a semester-long senior year course left them feeling underprepared for college. This was a clue to me that they are simply not given enough opportunities to practice these skills, whether they are desiring to be peacemakers, advocates or (ideally) a combination of the two.

Engaging with Ideology and Critical Thinking

It is time for schools to come to terms with the fact that Israel education means encountering ideology. I found that the three teachers' conceptions of Israel and their personal experiences with the conflict guided their instruction. My finding conforms with existing research on teacher beliefs and instruction, which states that teachers tend to take elements from the proposed curriculum—particularly culturally valued texts—and put them into their own narrative contexts in a way that they find familiar and acceptable.

Ideology is not a bad thing, but its role and place needs to be recognized by schools. That schools are political spaces and that ideology tends to drive pedagogy in these cases can be instructive to those engaging with the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Schools that do have a clear Israel mandate have

worked with a team of stakeholders to form it, including parents, students and teachers. If there is a mandate, there has already been buy-in. A well-formulated Israel program also partners with various departments (history, English, limmudei kodesh, Hebrew). This kind of transparent collaboration can assist schools in deciding when students engage with Israel's controversial issues, where it is taught, who teaches it and the choice of instruction and assessment.

Conclusion

My research indicates that passing through the difficulties inherent in the discussion of controversial issues promotes active learning, principled thinking, and achievement for students. When teachers become aware of conflict education criteria and frameworks, the teaching and learning of Israel's and other controversial issues becomes unmasked and less intimidating. Teaching and learning about conflict implements several learning dimensions. Students not only acquire and integrate knowledge, but they learn to extend and refine knowledge (eg, by making new distinctions, clearing up misconceptions, and reaching conclusions). It can help motivate students past a sense of hopelessness that comes with intractable situations and into an empowerment dimension in which they can become participants rather than merely observers. Through the study of this conflict, students can appreciate the role that power relations have in creating and perpetuating controversial issues.

Having students tap into their own ideologies and compare them to those of their families and schools can help them better appreciate where knowledge is gained, how perspectives are formed and what makes them obstinate. And along the way, they can discover what truly motivates them. Students who learn to view conflict narratives from a metacognitive plane, a more objective level, will be served well in the coming years, as they continue to "hug and wrestle" with the State of Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Finally, controversial issues and intractable conflicts present opportunities for conflict resolution and peace education. Students exposed to the notions of cultures of conflict and cultures of peace will understand that there are different ways of choosing to view and act within a conflict situation. Preparing for the complex social realities and difficulties of adult life is an inspiring reason to engage with conflict early and often.

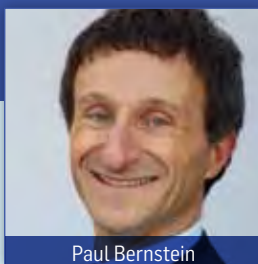
WE ARE PRIZMAH



Elana Alfred



Rabbi Maccabee Avishur



Paul Bernstein



Jim Blankstein



Ilisa Cappell



Jane Taubenfeld Cohen



Annette Davies



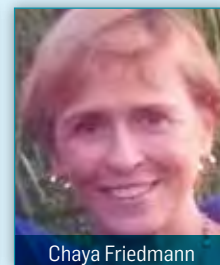
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Robin Feldman



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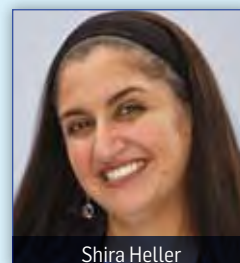
Dr. Idana Goldberg



Alisha Goodman



Sharon Haselkorn



Shira Heller



Andrea Hernandez



Jill Kessler



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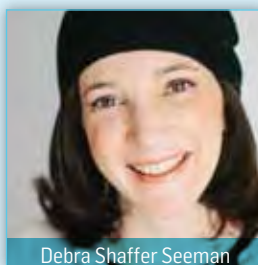
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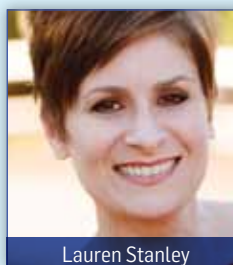
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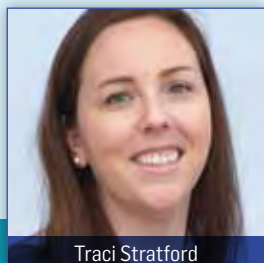
Debra Shaffer Seeman



Lauren Stanley



Yael Steiner



Traci Stratford



Silvia Rosenthal Tolisano



Donna Von Samek



Amy Wasser



Adele Yermack

Bringing Talmud Study to Life

Inspiration, Authenticity and Torah Lishmah

At the Fuchs Mizrahi School in Cleveland, our annual high school retreat is one of the highlights of the school year. In addition to the community building that comes through bonding and fun activities, spending an extended weekend together as a school community provides many opportunities for experiential learning and moments of inspiration. This year, the theme for the weekend was *deveikut*, literally “cleaving to God,” exploring different ways we find religious meaning and connection. In one of the conversations that I facilitated, I asked students to share what they feel is the ideal way to connect to God. Involvement in *chesed*, activities of kindness, as well as *tefillah*, prayer, were high on their lists. While the discussion of philosophical or ethical texts made the cut for some students, the careful analysis of Talmudic or Tanakh texts that covers most of their Judaic learning time in schools was totally absent.



What prevents students from finding meaning and inspiration in their regular Torah study? To be sure, there are structural factors inherent in classic school design and formal education that play a role. It is difficult to find inspiration when exams and grades loom large. In addition, in a dual curriculum school day with up to nine or 10 periods of 40 minutes each, students must quickly transition, for example, to solving math problems, before they have time to reflect on the essential questions or inspirational message that just emerged in their Talmud class. It is telling that students who do ultimately develop a passionate connection to Torah study often find that passion in the learning that takes place in the focused environment of a summer program or a gap-year yeshiva or seminary.

Tackling these issues and rethinking the way we structure time and accountability in Jewish schools is critical and may even be a precondition for successfully implementing some of the suggestions below. At the same time, we must also consider the implicit messages that we send students about the value of Talmud study and what could or should make it inspirational. Even if students may not walk out of every high school Talmud class inspired, how we hope to inspire them and what we hope they are inspired by must play a role in the pedagogies we use, questions we raise and roles we ask our students to play as learners.

Talmud and the “Real World”

In his thought-provoking work *BeTorato Yehegeh*, the late Religious Zionist thinker Rabbi Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (better known as Rav Shagar) analyzed various methodologies of Talmud study in an attempt to explain the disconnect many Religious Zionist/Modern Orthodox students feel with Talmud study. He posits that the foreign world and foreign language of Talmud is too distant from the lives of students for them to connect with. Since these students actively participate in a secular world and culture that is not soaked with the language and assumptions of Torah and Halakhah, they don't inherently view its world as their own. Rav Shagar, therefore, argues that more explicit connections must be made to connect learning to students' lives. This can be achieved by more consistently asking the “why” questions and searching for the values that legal and conceptual categories represent.

In the world of general education, the growing prominence and success of Project-Based Learning (PBL) has also focused teachers' attention on the “why” of learning. Through an emphasis on compelling driving questions, authentic products and presentations, PBL frames learning in a way that helps students see the “real world” application and value of their learning. When successfully designed, PBL answers the classic “why do we need to know this” question and helps motivate students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to successfully solve the problem or create the product. Carefully reading complex texts become a necessary and valuable resource in helping students solve real problems. The process teaches student to inquire, research, revise and reflect on different iterations of their learning as they move towards the final product. Applying elements of the PBL framework to how Talmud is studied can help bridge the divide and provide students with the ability to appreciate how Talmudic analysis and values can help them navigate issue in their lives.

Sukkah Project Reflection Questions

1. Did your learning and knowledge of Masechet Sukkah impact or play any role in *your actions*—the decisions you made over Sukkot to do things in- or outside the sukkah?
 - If it did:
 - › Clearly explain how it did, with at least one or two specific examples.
 - › Reflect on that experience. How did using your knowledge to make decisions make you feel about the mitzvah? About learning Torah/Gemara?
 - › To what extent did your choices impact your regular routine? Do you think that helped or hurt your connection to the mitzvah of sukkah?
 - If it did not:
 - › What did impact your choices/decision-making over Sukkot?
 - › Reflect on the experience: Why do you think our learning did not play a role?
 - › To what extent did your choices (whatever they were motivated by) impact your regular routine? Do you think they helped or hurt your connection to the mitzvah of sukkah?
2. Did your learning and knowledge of Masechet Sukkah impact or play any role in *your feelings/experience*: your appreciation of the mitzvah of sukkah and the values it is meant to encourage you to think about?
3. To what extent do you think our Torah learning in school should impact the way we live our lives outside of school? What can you/we do differently to better help the Torah learning we do in school impact our lives outside of school?



Sanhedrin Rabbinic and Communal Leadership Project

Your Job:

As members of a newly established Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn, Ohio, you are on a committee of leaders working together to determine the ideal makeup of the religious leadership for the community. The community has already made significant profits off those who assumed its products were from Brooklyn, New York, and is not concerned about budgets in its decision-making process.

Some members of the community are arguing that there's no need to hire a rabbi, others are looking for someone who can answer all of their halakhic questions and give high-level shiurim, while a third group of members are more concerned about the rabbi's pastoral skills. The new community also contains a number of men and women who are vocal about the importance of being sensitive to needs of the women in the community and would be happy to see some role for women in the rabbinic leadership.

The tentative date for the general membership of the community has been set for when your committee will present its conclusions, including job descriptions for any position and a source sheet/annotated bibliography with key sources that back up its conclusions. While you are presenting the proposal you believe to be ideal, you must also take into account and be able to respond to the various constituents in the community described above.

At that meeting, the community (potentially including parents, students, teachers and rabbinic personalities) will vote on which committee's proposal to accept. Until that point, the committee will be responsible for periodically sharing notes from its meetings and initial conclusions/findings with the shul's executive board.

Your research/learning will come from five basic areas outlined here and described in detail below:

1. Learning the relevant texts in Masechet Sanhedrin.
2. Individually researching at least one topic and sharing and learning from classmates about their research (in teams).
3. At least one individual interview with an out-of-school adult (preferably a parent), sharing and learning from classmates' interviews.
4. Interacting with and reflecting on guest personalities brought to discuss issues with the shiur as a whole.

What could this look like? Below are two different examples from my own classes of how a "real world" frame can change the type of products and role we give students in the learning process.

Making Mitzvah Performance Meaningful: The Sukkah Journal and Reflection

When studying Masechet Sukkah, students may study the scope of the obligation to live in the Sukkah. They likely will learn about the concept of *teishvu k'ein taduru*, living in the Sukkah as if it were one's home, and be tested on the various ways that concept impacts the laws. Unfortunately, even if a student studies all the information and successfully answers questions on a traditional exam, their experience on the holiday of Sukkot may remain unchanged.

This past year, after spending six weeks studying various sections of Masechet Sukkah, students in my Talmud class were asked to journal over the Sukkot break. They recorded decisions they made about what to eat in or outside of the sukkah, as well as other activities they chose to engage in during the holiday. Students were then asked to explain several of their choices, using talmudic sources and commentary. Following the holiday, students brought their work to class and were asked to reflect on a number of questions (see sidebar).

The following exceptional student response to one of the reflection questions highlights the potential value of the assignment: "My knowledge affected my feelings because I was able to feel very proud for what I learned and how I applied it to certain instances. For example, when I derived an answer to a problem that I had from my own knowledge, I felt that I had actually accomplished something in my learning. I was very happy whenever I knew something more relating to Sukkot and Torah in general."

The juxtaposition of our learning in class and their actual observance of the holiday helped students see the way that their learning could enhance their focus and appreciation of the mitzvah of sukkah. They felt empowered to apply their learning to personal decision-making and to raise questions when they were not sure what to do. Sharing my own journal and my answers to reflection questions also provided student with a model for discussing personal experiences with certain dilemmas, highlighting a type of thinking they were not accustomed to.

Social and Communal Issues: Masechet Sanhedrin and Rabbinic Leadership

Perhaps one of the most controversial and critical issues in many Jewish communities today revolve around the role, authority and requirement for religious communal leadership. What role should a rabbi play? What qualities make an ideal candidate, and what can legitimately disqualify them? If our goal is not only to educate the next generation of Jewish practitioners but also those who will build and shape Jewish communal life, we want students to grapple with these questions and recognize the role that talmudic text, commentaries and precedent can play in these complex issues. While we may differ on the level of independence we

want students to have in reaching conclusions, we at least want them to recognize that careful Talmud study and broad knowledge of halakhic literature are necessary preconditions for a meaningful discussion.

When teaching the beginning of Masechet Sanhedrin, I framed our learning of the talmudic passages relating to rabbinic authority by telling students they would need to apply their learning to developing a proposal for a new community's rabbinic leadership (see sidebar). As we delved into deep textual study, learning was supplemented by regular visits or skypes with local or national leaders who helped share differing perspectives from the front lines. Students developed proposals for the mock communal board and were required to justify their suggestions by combining their analysis of talmudic sources and their understanding of communal needs.

These two examples can serve as paradigms for different ways to think about Talmud units. Similar type of projects have been applied to the study of Tanakh: asking students to solve problems of anti-Semitism based on Megillat Esther, develop proposals for more welcoming and inclusive communities based on Megillat Ruth, or design change initiatives and anticipate resistance to change based on Shemot or Yirmiyahu. Thinking about curriculum design and implementing projects like these over the past five years has reinforced for me their benefit and the way, with consistent exposure, they can impact how the values of the Talmud (or Tanakh) can inform real world issues.

At the same time, the level of self-directed learning, higher-order thinking and time needed to complete projects like these have presented challenges in the high school setting. Introducing such projects often initially meet with resistance from students who prefer less open-ended, more comfortable learning environments and assessments. If the goal is to develop in students a mindset and connections-oriented approach towards Talmud study, scaffolding demands and thinking more broadly about a department or school culture that supports such goals is critical.

Reservations: Authenticity and Torah Lishmah

Besides some of the practical issues of implementation, more fundamental questions remain about the desirability of implementing PBL units and an approach to Talmud study that emphasizes relevancy and real-world impact. One of the tenets of PBL is the importance of having students engage in creating authentic products. They should be performing scientific investigations whose results can inform their communities or using history and literature to understand social issues and propose solutions. These goals make learning more meaningful for students and help them appreciate the “why” and “what for.” The assumption of projects like those outlined above is that the meaning and sense of authenticity comes from the ability to extract values or behaviors from the text and apply to the “real world” of the student. But this view bumps up against traditional Jewish views of the purpose of study. Is this really what authentic Torah learning is all about?

If we define authenticity based on the way that adults interact with the subject area in a non-school setting, most

adults who continue learning Talmud on a regular basis do not engage in projects or research of talmudic topics to inform communal or personal decisions. They are much more likely to either (a) sit with a chavruta pair in their home or a local beit midrash and study a chosen tractate, one page after another, or (b) attend a shiur, lecture, where an expert analyzes and discusses a text with them.

Consider, for example, the powerful words of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein:

The knowledge we can acquire of God's will increases our conscious, and subconscious, awareness of Him; the very act of weighing His words or of analyzing His laws draws us imperceptibly nearer to Him and to them. *She-ma'or she-bah machziran le-mutav*. The light of Torah returns us to Him. It matters not what segment of Torah we study. Provided that we approach it with an awareness of its true character, Bava Mezia will do as well as Berakhot, and Hallah will affect us no less than Avot. ... Torah study leaves an indelible imprint upon our total personality and, in the process, transforms it.

In describing the ability of Torah, in general, and Talmud study in particular, to “leave an indelible imprint upon our total personality,” Rav Lichtenstein specifically de-emphasizes the role that content or what we can extract from it plays. For him, it is the encounter with text itself—an attempt to understand and analyze it—that serves as the ultimate goal. This is one way to understand the idea of “Torah lishmah,” that Torah should be studied for its own sake, a lynchpin of the thought of Rav Chaim of Volhzin who emphasized the primary role of Torah study in a Jew's life.

If we follow Rav Lichtenstein's approach then, our pedagogy should focus on helping students engage and interact with the text as much as possible. Curriculum choices are much less significant than the attitude and environment within which teacher and students learn. Inspiration and meaning does not come from connecting the Talmud to “real life,” but rather from an almost opposite approach. The teacher's focus should be to frame the learning as something different and separate from other types of learning and other classes. Instead of teaching students how to bring Talmud to their lives, a “Torah lishmah” approach requires asking students to engage in study with the attitude that they are taking a break from the mundane “real world” to become a part of something holier and greater.

My own experience, as a student and teacher, pulls me towards each of these somewhat contradictory approaches. Perhaps, our goal should be to expose students to both approaches. Perhaps, the viability on either approach depends on the culture of the school and community within which Talmud is being studied. *Hazeman katzar, vehamelachah merubah* (The time is short and the work is great—Avot 2:20): Our educational goals and aspirations are indeed many, and the time we have to shape experiences for students, even those who attend day school through twelfth grade and move on to gap-year programs, is quite limited. Hopefully, some of the questions and suggestions raised in the article will both broaden and further future conversations as we look to inspire the next generation of Torah learners.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

EDJEWCON

ANDREA HERNANDEZ

Prizmah

edJEWcon exists to support schools in navigating the transformational impact of the technological, information age on teaching and learning. Coaches provide resources and support to Jewish educational leaders and organizations seeking sustainable, systemic change. We employ blogfolios (blogs + digital portfolios) to create a reflective culture in all areas of curriculum. Blogfolios provide the concentric hub of awareness and exposure to the skills and literacies necessary to communicate, collaborate and share in a connected world. When teachers take the time to be deliberately reflective about their work, they grow, and their schools, colleagues and students all benefit.

By making learning transparent, people beyond the school also benefit. Most teachers admit to using the internet for ideas, resources, lesson plans and templates of all kinds; how many teachers also share their own? Many teachers feel that what they have to share is ordinary or unimportant. In his animated video "Obvious to You, Amazing to Others," Derek Sivers narrates the self-talk that keeps many people from sharing: "You experience someone else's innovative work. It's brilliant, breathtaking, you're stunned. ... Afterwards you think, 'My ideas are so obvious; I'll never be as inventive as that.'" He concludes, "Maybe what's obvious to me is amazing to someone else. We're clearly a bad judge of our own creations. We should just put it out, and let the world decide."

When work is shared with the world, amazing connections can occur. But the alchemy is only possible if the risk is taken to publish, knowing that the audience could be anyone. That feels, at first, like a big risk for many people.

As teachers immerse themselves in documenting and sharing their work on a digital platform, they learn the skills and literacies necessary to teach students in today's classrooms and are contributing to the world of tomorrow. That world will undoubtedly depend on sharing and collaborating, on fluency with open-ended, trial-and-error exploration, on the ethical behavior of global and digital citizenship.

Currently, edJEWcon is coaching a blogging cohort of lower-school teachers/admin from the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland. These intrepid educators are motivated to share their work in order to understand better how to capture and share the work of their students. They are open and humble; despite being experienced and accomplished in their fields, they embrace new ideas.

I asked some in the blogging cohort to reflect on how edJEWcon coaching has impacted their learning. To check out their blog, and comment, go to edJEWcon.org/cesjds.

JESSIE NATHANS, ART TEACHER

THE BLOGGERS' GALLERY

Art teachers know that practicing art-making supports meaningful classroom practice. For example, I make an "exemplar" before I give a lesson. I spend time with the materials and techniques. This helps ensure that all parts of the process are fresh in my mind and prepares me for a workshop classroom environment. These actions of design thinking, drawing, cutting, printing or coloring informs all aspects of my lesson planning.

Like an artist, blogging teachers hold the classroom experience in their hands. They notice and record student performance in nuanced measures of growth. They collect and reframe activity in words as artists do in color and line. The blogger crafts and reworks paragraphs to describe and elevate a moment of learning or remarkable aspect of teaching. This reflective practice creates a window into classroom studios. Come over and have a look in!

KIM SHERK, LANGUAGE ARTS ENRICHMENT SPECIALIST

BLOGGING AS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Professional blogging forces me to step back from the day-to-day teaching and planning. It allows me to reflect on whether or not best practices are being employed, and how to make my teaching more thoughtful and focused on the students. I have been learning how to share my work in a public forum, and manage new platforms for digital authorship. This has allowed me to connect with other educators worldwide and learn from their work as well. This collaboration would not have been possible a few years ago, and it is an area in which our students tend to be much more comfortable than we are. Learning alongside our students can be powerful for both teachers and students.

HADAS HEYMAN, THIRD GRADE JUDAIC AND HEBREW TEACHER AND IT MENTOR

BLOGGING AS A MIRROR TO MY JS CLASSROOM

I was pretty nervous to use the EdJewcon blog during the first month of this school year. I didn't feel comfortable sharing my thoughts in public and was afraid to expose my feelings. Our four days of training with Andrea made me realize that blogging can serve my school and myself, as a Judaic teacher, in many aspects.

Most important for me was to reflect on my teaching and share this information with my own students and an audience outside our classroom. I had an opportunity to show the exciting things that we do daily in class. It was exciting to encounter many Hebrew and Judaic teachers who blogged. I also liked the idea of taking part in something quite new. Blogging may give our school the possibility to expose all the amazing things that we do and bring the community inside our doors when they are not physically in.

My hope is to connect with other teachers around the country and maybe collaborate with them on different projects in the future. I would love to make connections with other schools and explore new ideas to integrate technology in our classes.



חבר: *chaver*

(noun)

1. MEMBER; an individual, thing, or organization belonging to a group.
2. FRIEND; a person whom one knows and with whom one has a bond of mutual affection.

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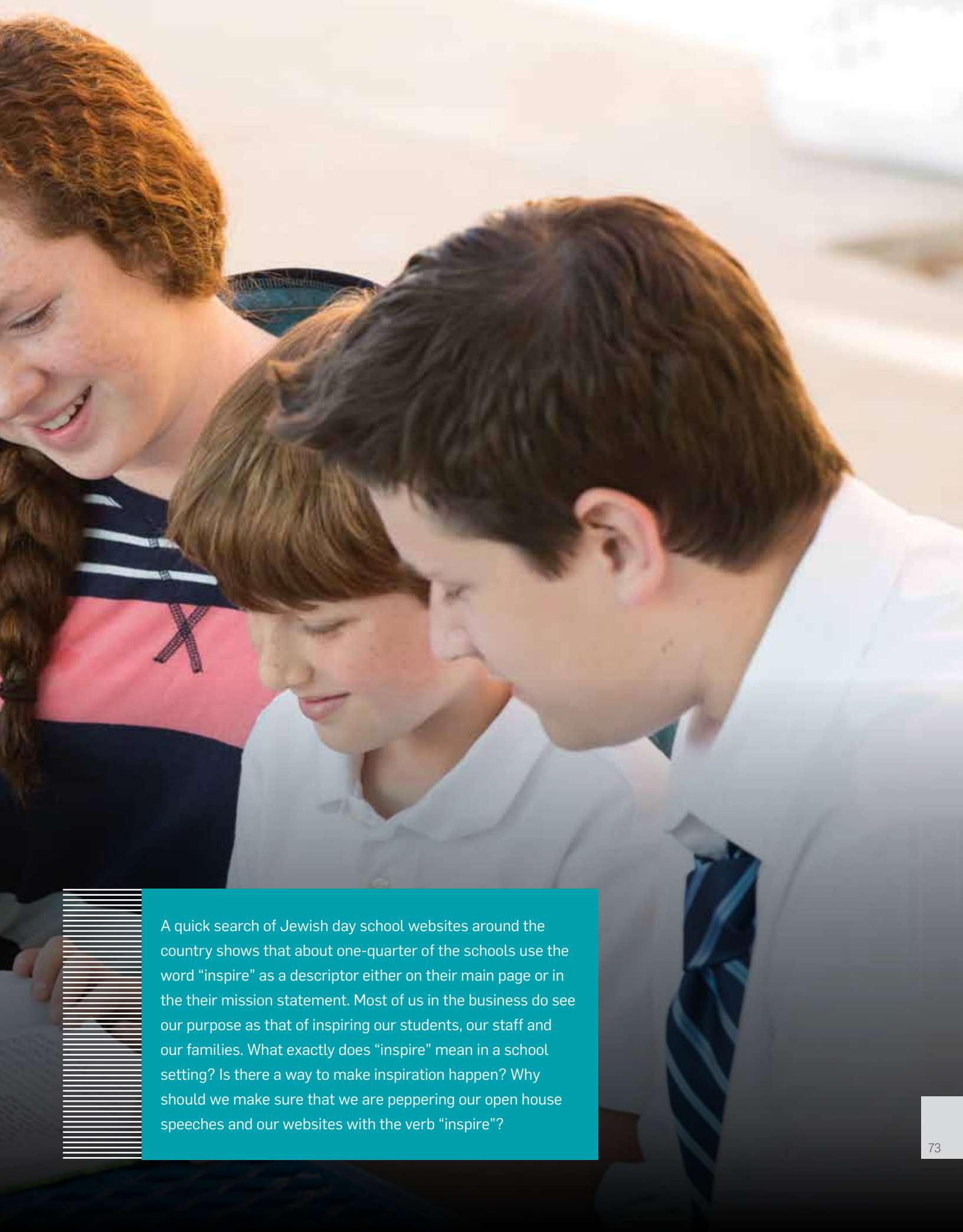
PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

BARBARA **GEREBOFF**
LARRY **KLIGMAN**

The Keva and Kavannah of Inspiration

Intergrade Partnerships



A quick search of Jewish day school websites around the country shows that about one-quarter of the schools use the word “inspire” as a descriptor either on their main page or in their mission statement. Most of us in the business do see our purpose as that of inspiring our students, our staff and our families. What exactly does “inspire” mean in a school setting? Is there a way to make inspiration happen? Why should we make sure that we are peppering our open house speeches and our websites with the verb “inspire”?



The word inspiration is rooted etymologically in divine influence, but commonly it is understood as that “aha!” moment when an experience, an idea or person evokes an awareness that propels us to see something in a new way. The leading researchers of inspiration, Todd M. Thrash and Andrew J. Elliot, find that “inspiration involves both being inspired by something and acting on that inspiration.” In this understanding, there are two sides to the equation—the inspiration stimulus and the disposition of the person to act on that stimulus. Thrash and Elliot’s studies show that people who report being inspired frequently are more open to new experiences, have high rates of absorption in tasks, are less competitive, less extrinsically motivated, are more creative, and more self-reliant than peers who rate low on their inspiration scale.

Schools have some control over both sides of the inspiration equation—over the stimuli and in shaping the stimulus recipient’s receptiveness to inspiration. We create inspirational opportunities by hiring and cultivating teachers who are inspiring and by creating learning opportunities that touch the souls of our students. Scott Barry Kaufman notes that inspiration is not a passive experience, as “it favors the prepared mind.” When we create the conditions that promote intrinsic motivation, resiliency and decreased competition, our students should be positioned to “receive” inspirational stimuli.

As we thought about the concept of inspiration and we listed examples from each of our schools that qualified, we realized that the first examples that came to mind were rather similar.

Both schools have created regularly scheduled, well-planned opportunities for older students to engage with younger children. Most of the time the older children are the leaders or “teachers” in these events, and sometimes younger children are given chances to lead. Not only are all students engaged throughout the activities, they take initiative in suggesting and assuming leadership roles within the school independent of the original activity. The stimulus is the “inspiring” mentor student, and the conditions that have been structured foster receptiveness to inspiration in all children. The outcome of creating new ways to be a leader in the school is the creative output of inspiration.

At Heschel, mixed-aged groups of students share the tradition of Tashlich, building their own fountain together and sharing the meaning of casting away their sins. Older students help the younger ones understand the importance of making mistakes, of accepting their errors, and of repenting for them during Tashlich. In secular studies, a similar dynamic occurs as the third and seventh graders share science experiments, with the younger students teaching the older ones about crayfish, for example. In robotics, which includes students in third to eighth grades, the mentorship opportunities occur in an afterschool robotics program. Heschel has created a K club, where older students serve as teaching assistants in the transitional kindergarten class. Mentorship opportunities are also structured outside of the formal school program. For example, middle schoolers at Heschel are charged with sitting with younger children during bus service to build relationships, teach bus etiquette, and create “one large family.”

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The “one large family” idea is also apparent at Wornick in the chavurah program. The entire school is divided into 22 chavurot. Each chavurah has representatives from each grade, and all teachers and administrators are assigned a chavurah as well. Students remain in the same chavurah over the course of their tenure at the school; as an eighth grader graduates, a new kindergartner takes his/her place. Chavurot meet once a month to tackle a design challenge or a game created by a particular class, and students sit by chavurot during schoolwide Thursday morning tefillot.

Both schools have created intergrade opportunities around their eighth grade trips. At Heschel, as eighth graders leave for Israel, they are blessed under the school's rainbow tallit with all grades delivering Tefillat HaDerekh, the Traveler's Prayer, and the transitional kindergarteners' presentation of letters to the travelers to put in the Kotel. Similarly, at Wornick, when eighth graders leave for Israel, there is a schoolwide ceremony in which each class presents an eighth grader with an assignment for their trip. For example, a second grader might say, “Our class is studying different species of animals. Please bring back photos of the different animals that you see on your trip.” When they return, each eighth grader teaches the younger class what they discovered about their assigned topic.

At Heschel's step-up ceremony in June, each grade demonstrates their work in Project Chesed, a yearlong project in which they select a community organization to support and work with during the year. For example, kindergartners work with the local fire department, fourth graders choose Guide

Dogs of America, second graders are guardians of the earth, building a garden and growing produce. Serving and giving are woven into the fabric of both schools and cut across grades.

The evidence of inspiration from these projects is clear. The sense of community in both schools is palpable. It is not uncommon to see older students and younger students “high-fiving” each other on the playground and at various all-school events. Older children often reach out to the younger students to sit with them at sports events to listen to and to help them solve a social problem on the playground. At Wornick, younger students frequently propose and carry out significant tikkun olam projects of their own. This year, because the projects had become so numerous and so well designed, the school has created a “mitzvah shuk” (similar to a non-competitive science fair) to take place in the spring. Younger grades (K-2) will each present one project per grade, and older grades (3-8) will propose and execute group projects.

The inspiration phenomenon is much more than simple role modeling. An inspirational role model may be necessary, but not sufficient. In fact, a receptive person could be inspired by an awesome event—a spectacular rainbow or an elegant mathematical solution. The structured experiences and the cultivation of receptiveness to the stimuli are key to inspiration in such cases.

In so many ways, the conversation about the possibility that inspiration can be structured echoes the keva vs. kavannah debates about prayer experiences. These discussions, and the





subsequent outcome in how prayer services are structured, focus on balancing the structured (keva) with the spontaneous (kavannah) in prayer. There is an understanding that without keva, kavannah might never happen. Additionally, among the hoped-for outcomes of that perfect balance is a prayer experience that inspires one emotionally to perceive the world in new and wondrous ways, and to conduct oneself with greater empathy and concern for others. Like the inspiration continuum, the awe-inspiring prayer experience that motivates one to engage more deeply with oneself and with community is dependent upon structure and dispositions of receptivity. Intergrade opportunities provide an effective structure to generate the inspirational dispositions that build a community with a deep sense of shared purpose among all members of the community.

We discovered that intergrade opportunities are the core of inspiration in our institutions. The well-researched benefits of multiage activities in the literature on multiage classrooms include older children developing the patience and verbal skills to communicate effectively with younger children, and younger children honing their listening skills. Greater cooperation and empathy are also documented outcomes of multiage experiences.

We found an additional benefit. The pervasiveness and intentionality of the intergrade experiences addresses a basic

human need “to belong” to a community. Our students and our families develop a profound sense of attachment, ownership and enduring commitment that comes from being part of a community where each member has a sense of responsibility to the whole.

Aside from all these compelling reasons for our schools to pay attention to inspiration, there is one more reason. In a competing landscape of schools where we can all tell pretty similar stories about the “what” and the “how” we teach, one factor that will both distinguish us and drive people to us is how well we can touch hearts by creating a community where everyone belongs and everyone matters. Mindfully creating the intergrade conditions for inspiration makes that possible.

Recommended Reading

Todd M. Thrash and Andrew J. Elliot, “Inspiration as a Psychological Construct” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Scott Barry Kaufman, “Why Inspiration Matters” in *Harvard Business Review*.

INTRODUCING PRIZMAH **RESHET GROUPS**

DEBRA **SHAFFER SEEMAN**

Network Weaver

How would you like to connect with colleagues, build powerful collaborations, engage in joint problem solving, reduce professional isolation, find relevant resources, share expertise, join communities where live challenges are discussed, and launch innovative partnerships? As a Prizmah member, you can access all of these offerings and more.

At the core of Prizmah's mission is our wholehearted commitment to support you and your school. With a primary focus on school professionals and lay leaders, Prizmah works to provide individualized support to Jewish day schools of all kinds. In concert with that commitment is Prizmah's unique vantage point as a connector and network builder for the leadership of 375 North American Jewish day schools.

To that end, we have launched Reshet Prizmah, our networking portfolio, as a primary benefit and central component of Prizmah's membership package. There are 20 different networking groups for stakeholders to choose from! These groups are designed in four categories, for ease of access.

Professional and Lay Leadership

- Heads of School
- Judaic Administrators
- Board Leadership
- Learning Specialists
- Admissions
- Development

Areas of Interest

- Innovation
- Schools in Small Jewish Communities
- Alternative Tuition Models

Program Cohorts

- Governance and Fundraising Academy
- You Lead
- Head of School
- Professional Excellence Program
- Moot Beit Din
- Jewish Court of All Time
- Atidenu
- Generations

Affinity Groups

- Yeshiva Day Schools
- PARDES
- Schechter
- RAVSAK

Each Prizmah Reshet (Hebrew for network) centers on a particular area of interest. With support from the Prizmah team, the members of each Reshet design dynamic and creative networked learning opportunities. Organized by school professionals and lay leaders, every Reshet utilizes a variety of digital communication and in-person opportunities to forge meaningful connections across geographically diverse communities. Members of the Reshet groups gain immediate access to the wisdom, expertise and support of thousands of Jewish day school colleagues across North America.

As a part of our deep commitment to networking and helping school leaders build connections, the Prizmah Jewish Day School Conference featured 25 networking sessions over the course of the conference. Sessions specific to heads of large schools, leaders of schools in small Jewish communities, Judaic administrators, high school principals, middle school leaders, development and admission professionals, learning specialists, inclusion professionals, lay leaders, and early childhood educators were built into the schedule. Engaging sessions took place for participants to work with the PARDES, RAVSAK, Schechter, and Yeshiva Day School advocates. There was even time to meet the board of *HaYidion*! In addition to these sessions, the conference featured a variety of opportunities to enable conference participants to connect with one another in person.

Ready to gain access to this network of colleagues? The groups have already launched and conversations are underway. We don't want you to get left behind. Prizmah is offering special perks for inaugural Prizmah members, including a 50% discount on their 2016-2017 membership. Once your school has become a member, you can join the Reshet groups at www.Prizmah.org/reshet.

Questions? Interested in bringing together a particular group of colleagues?
Please reach out to me at debras@prizmah.org.

ON MY NIGHTSTAND

BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS THAT PRIZMAH STAFF ARE READING



The Mystics of Mile End by Sigal Samuel

This novel brings us siblings Lev and Samara Mayer in Montreal's old Jewish neighborhood, Mile End. Covering a span of 15 years, this engrossing story is told from the viewpoints of the siblings, their father and their Holocaust survivor neighbor Chaim Glassman. These alternate viewpoints enable the reader to appreciate different aspects of each character's struggle and growth. The

compelling narrative brings together these different vantage points, giving the reader a complete picture of each situation by the end of the novel. With the exploration of the Tree of Life at the center of the tale, the story weaves through the themes of secrets, silence, faith and reason as the characters deal with life's challenges and a major tragedy. The characters find their own journey through these challenges, while ultimately working to break the bonds of silence and finding their way back to each other.

Alisha Goodman



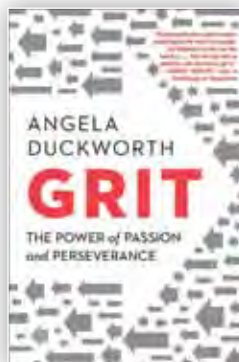
Curriculum 21: Essential Education in a Changing World

edited by Heidi Hayes Jacobs

Every once in a while, a book comes along that changes your (professional) world. *Curriculum 21* was that book for me. It verbalized and connected many of the ideas around 21st century teaching and learning that I was investigating in my school. Hayes Jacobs' words resonated deeply with me: "A school

does not need reform—it needs new forms." The book takes a closer look at what it means to be educated in the 21st century and acknowledges, "New essential curriculum will need revision—actual replacements of dated content, skills, and assessments with more timely choices." With practical ideas around upgrading content, assessment types and skills, global, media, network and information literacies as well as digital portfolios, sustainability and rethinking curriculum, the book is just as relevant today as when I first read it in 2010. Heidi and her co-authors' approach, with a distinction between a "growth model" and a "change model" for school culture, continues to encourage me to keep researching, designing, prototyping, testing, refining and finding new forms of teaching and learning that will prepare our students for their future and not our past.

Silvia Tolisano

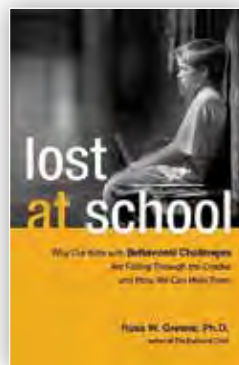


Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

I wish I had a dime for every time a parent told me what great potential their child had, and if only the teacher could make them reach it. In *Grit*, Duckworth shows what all educators know, that aptitude does not always equal achievement. The book gives many examples of how effort surpasses talent, how being the brightest does not

always make you the best and how grit enhances character. As educators we understand the power of failure, but how do we show others that value? *Grit* celebrates the challenge to take a risk, to keep going after failure and show your passion. Reading Duckworth's stories will give us the courage to help students pursue their passions, embrace the act of learning, and know they have a partner in being held to the highest of standards.

Amy Wasser



Lost at School by Ross Greene

My first year of teaching was an epic failure. I had been hired, I believe, because the kids really liked me during my model lesson. After my initial charm wore off and the sheen of my "edutainment" began to tarnish, it became harder and harder for me to control my students. Granted, I had a class that was populated by some of the more "difficult" boys in the school. Every day

I wondered what was wrong with those kids. Years later, I realized that there was nothing "wrong" with those kids; the deficit was mine. And it wasn't primarily a lack of training in classroom management or lesson design (both of which were true, as well). It was a mistake of disposition.

Dr. Greene lays out a novel conceptual framework for understanding kids who misbehave. His notion is simple: Kids do well if they can. Kids who exhibit "maladaptive" behavior in school are not seeking attention, unmotivated, or "testing limits." Rather, they simply lack the skills to behave adaptively. Drawing on research, Greene offers suggestions for how to help our students learn to behave adaptively in school and beyond. A critical read for all teachers and school leaders who work with teachers, *Lost at School* will help you develop a different approach to that boy who just threw his chair and flipped over his desk in class (which happened to me).

Maccabee Avishur

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**Contact Rabbi Maccabee Avishur at
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