

הידועות

חורף תש"ע • Winter 2009

apostrophe: the
Exceptions include a few names that would have an
-es but that would not be pronounced that way.

plu·ral·ism /plöör'ə-liz'əm/ n. 1 the condition of being multiple or plural. 2 a: a theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality **b**: a theory that reality is composed of a plurality of entities 3 a form of society in which the members of minority groups maintain their independent cultural traditions. 4 a: a condition in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups are present and ~~tolerated~~ ^{accepted?} within a society. **b**: The belief that such a condition is desirable or socially beneficial. **d**: The belief that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life. ???

jewish

school

denominational

in THIS ISSUE:

HaYidion: The RAVSAK Journal

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Threefold Pluralism: A Strategy for Building “Hybrid” School Community

• by **Michael A. Kay**, page 6
 responses by **Simon Klarfeld, Ilisa Cappell, Jim Rogozen, Nora Anderson and Stuart Zweiter**

It Can’t Be About Pluralism

• by **Devora Steinmetz**, page 14

Tolerance: For a Minimalist Definition of Pluralism

• by **Adam B. Seligman**, page 16

Pluralism: The Demographic Reality

• by **Barry Kosmin**, page 18

Rival Versions of Pluralistic Jewish Education

• by **Jennifer Glaser**, page 20

Israeli Shlichim in Pluralistic Schools

• by **Micha Balf**, page 22

Toward a Pluralistic Form of Peoplehood

• by **Shlomi Ravid**, page 26

Can Pluralistic Schools Accommodate Everyone?

• by **Michal Miszkat-Barkan**, page 28

Taking a Lap for the Jews

• by **Bruce Powell**, page 30

The Influence of Pluralism on High School Students

• by **Susan Shevitz**, page 32

Transitioning to a New Model of Pluralism

• by **Lillian Howard**, page 38

Teaching Pluralistically in a Reform JDS

• by **Micah Lapidus**, page 40

Pluralistic Day School Collaboration

• by **Kim S. Hirsh**, page 42

Fundraising in a Pluralistic Setting

• by **Marc N. Kramer**, page 46

Pluralism in RAVSAK Schools

• pages 48-50

Jewish Education in the Postmodern Era

• by **David Bigman**, page 52

Spiritual Lessons in the Tensions of Halakhic Debate

• by **Shawn Fields-Mayer**, page 54

Pluralism in the Teaching of Tanakh

• by **Susan Tanchel**, page 56

How to Produce Pluralistic Jewish Educators

• Interview with **Rami Wernik**, page 58

Training Teachers for Pluralistic Day Schools

• By **Zvi Hirschfeld and Susan Wall**, page 60

The Art of Pluralist Jewish Education

• by **Brad Hirschfeld**, page 62

A Word from the Editor, Page 3 • President’s Message, Page 4 • Bookcase, Page 70

From the Editor

■ by **BARBARA DAVIS**

THE mission statement of RAVSAK, the network of Jewish community day schools throughout North America and abroad, speaks to the lofty goal of “fostering authentic Jewish pluralism.”

But what exactly is pluralism? Diana Eck, writing an introduction for the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, posits four points that define the term. Pluralism, she writes, “is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity.... [P]luralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference.”

She notes that pluralism “is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments,” which means “holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.” The fourth critical component, in Eck’s view, is dialogue because “the language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the ‘table’ will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.”

Clearly the subject of pluralism is contentious. In our everyday lives as Americans, we face issues of diversity in the political and social realms, where even a medium such as the Internet appears to create divisions and pluralities rather than unity as our presumably “independent” choices are increasingly determined by our clicking preferences. As educators, we face issues of pluralism in the changing demographics in our schools, where one can no longer assume that the “normal” Jewish family is composed of the biological, white, synagogue-affiliated, heterosexual parents of 2.5 children. And as Jews, of course, we have always had to recognize that two Jews means three opinions, and many Jews means many more.

This issue of *HaYidion* brings many of these issues to the table in a spirited discussion of the theme of Jewish pluralism in the community day school setting. Not all of these voices

are in agreement; some challenge the authenticity of pluralism, some accept it so totally as to be unaware that others may re-



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ject their vision. But the voices are strong, provocative and powerful. The many viewpoints and perspectives of this issue’s authors contribute significantly to the depth of the dialogue on this timely and important topic. They make fascinating reading and provide a learned framework for further discussion and conversation. ■

Corrections

Due to a production error, the incorrect advertisement for PEJE appeared on page 20. The correct ad was distributed by email.

The location of B’nai Shalom Day School was misidentified in the fall issue. The correct location is Greensboro, NC.

RAVSAK strengthens and sustains the Jewish life, leadership and learning of community day schools ensuring a vibrant Jewish future.

RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network is a non-profit entity, organized under IRS Code 501 (c)(3). In order to provide outstanding support and leadership to Jewish community day schools and the over 30,000 children they serve, we rely on the generosity of those dedicated to the future of the Jewish People.

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From the Desk of Susan Weintrob, RAVSAK President

■ by **SUSAN WEINTROB**

PLURALISM is a term that we often hear used and defined according to our own predilections and experiences. Living together with diversity is an ideal that is fraught with tensions; finding common ground requires strength, vision and a good sense of humor. This is especially true when we confront diversity in our Jewish beliefs and observances.

Some schools find the hot buttons around who wears kippot and when. Others find the definition of kashrut troublesome. Some members of a school community solicit money at Shabbat dinners that everyone drives to, when others would never carry money or drive. As a head of school, we find these (and many more!) issues brought to our door. “Why can’t everyone just get along?” a parent of a current fourth grader asked me early in the year. This question could be directed not only to student behavior but also to questions of pluralism.

There are moments when our textured community works. Such moments are seen at the RAVSAK conferences. The diversity manifests in multiple minyanim, head coverings, Hebrew language facility, geographic, pedagogical, and political variety—in fact, all aspects of the North American Jewish community are present in our temporary gathering. We see a possibility of what can be. And this we all take home with us as inspiration and as opportunity. I hope to see all of you in Teaneck, New Jersey, this January, to become immersed in an ideal common ground. We are given the most wonderful opportunity to see old friends, meet new colleagues, learn, share and grow together.

RAVSAK has been part of my life for many years now, and I thank all of the past presidents, along with past and present Executive Committee members for their

contributions and wisdom. As I step down from the presidency, I know that able professionals and volunteer leaders will support this amazing organization to the next stage, fortunate under the



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strong leadership of the new Board of Directors and Dr. Marc Kramer.

RAVSAK needs our support, and I encourage all of you to contact the New York office to volunteer, to support our programs, to be as generous as you are able. This support from RAVSAK has been integral for so many of us, and will continue for many years to come.

See you in Teaneck for the conference!

Bivrahbab,

Susan ■

חג חנוכה שמח

We at RAVSAK wish you and your loved ones a Happy Chanukkah!

RAVSAK's

Moot Beit Din

April 2010

For more information, please contact
Dr. Elliott Rabin at 212-665-1320
or erabin@ravsak.org.

Moot Beit Din Catches Fire Through the High School Network

The response to this year's program has been overwhelming! Twenty-two schools have registered to take part in the largest and most exciting venture in Talmud Torah for North American high school students. A full 80% of members of RAVSAK's High School Network are participating this year. All schools that participated last year are returning—a ringing endorsement of this premier interschool competition.

Mazel tov to this year's participating schools:

- American Hebrew Academy (Greensboro, NC)
- Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School (Rockville, MD)
- David Posnack Hebrew Day School (Plantation, FL)
- Donna Klein Jewish Academy (Boca Raton, FL)
- Frankel Jewish Academy (West Bloomfield, MI)
- Gann Academy (Waltham, MA)
- Herzl / RMHA (Denver, CO)
- Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy (Overland Park, KS)
- Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy (Bryn Mawr, PA)
- Jewish Community High School of the Bay (San Francisco, CA)
- Kehillah Jewish High School (Palo Alto, CA)
- Milken Community High School (Los Angeles, CA)
- New Community Jewish High School (West Hills, CA)
- San Diego Jewish Academy (San Diego, CA)
- Samuel Scheck Hillel Community Day School (North Miami Beach, FL)
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- Tanenbaum CHAT Kimel Centre (Vaughan, ON)
- Tanenbaum CHAT Wallenberg Campus (Toronto, ON)
- Tarbut V'Torah Community Day School (Irvine, CA)
- Weber School (Atlanta, GA)

Students are already well underway with analyzing this year's case and preparing to write a psak Halakhah. They will convene after Pesach in Washington, DC, for a Shabbaton of learning, collaboration and competition. *Hatzlachah* to all participating students!



This program is funded by the Covenant Foundation

Threefold Pluralism: A Strategy for Building “Hybrid” School Community

■ by **MICHAEL A. KAY**

THE notion of creating a Jewish institution characterized by a commitment to ideological pluralism is not new. As long ago as 1934, Mordecai Kaplan envisioned a “community center” that would aim “to be affirmatively Jewish without committing itself to any specific type of Jewish religion.” He believed that an organization that would strive “to unite on an equal plane all types of Jews, Orthodox, Reformist, and Conservative, believers and non-believers, Zionists and non-Zionists, the recent immigrant as well as the Americanized Jew” would be able to offer “the best that can be obtained in education, music, art, and literature.”¹ Kaplan expected that this trans-denominational approach to Jewish life and learning was to become the cornerstone of Jewish communal renewal in the years after the Great Depression.

While the widespread enactment of Kaplan’s vision was delayed perhaps longer than he had anticipated, the number of community-wide Jewish schools—particularly high schools—in North America has expanded rapidly over the past two decades. This proliferation has coincided with a reconceptualization of the notion of “community” in American education in general. As Gail Furman has written, the *modern* conception of community was quickly being replaced by what she called a *postmodern* one. Whereas communities had previously been based upon a “strong center of sameness” and aspirations of homogeneity, the new model is centered much more around the “inescapable awareness of others, of multiple cultures, of values and belief systems, and of interdependence with those who are different.”² Members of a community could still share histories, customs, and values, but they had become more apt to celebrate the different ways in which they approached this common tradition.

Twenty-first century pluralistic Jewish schools face a perilous task: to craft school communities that are “hybrids,” at once modern and postmodern. Like Jewish institutions throughout history, they seek to emphasize a degree of homogeneity and sameness—the cultural, religious, and historical heritage that unites Jews across expanses of space and time. At the same time, they endeavor to honor the diversity that exists within this heritage and to promote the presentation of multiple perspectives as a foundation for learning. Leadership in pluralistic schools is fraught with complexity, as tensions between the “modern” and “postmodern” elements of the school mission can engender conflict, pedagogic difficulties, and seemingly unreasonable expectations for

community engagement. Ideological pluralism in schools, however, presents not only challenges but also guiding strategies for overcoming these challenges. Leaders who develop a clear understanding of pluralism—particularly of the three different



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ways in which the concept may be defined and enacted—can succeed in navigating these tensions and crafting thriving hybrid communities.

Challenges of Hybrid Community Building

In seeking to craft school communities that celebrate both commonality and diversity, leaders are liable to face numerous tensions and challenges. Primary among these is the propensity of such communities toward intra-organizational conflict. To be sure, organizations of all types—including the most homogeneous institutions—face conflict. Often, however, the organizational mission and philosophy are useful in helping leaders to arrive at answers. In the case of Jewish community schools, quite the opposite may be true: the nature of the trans-denominational mission and philosophy often makes mutually agreeable solutions even more elusive. The line between diversity and divisiveness can be a fine one, and most community schools have experienced circumstances in which

Response by Simon Klarfeld

the expression of opposing viewpoints—the very act that defines the school as a vibrant community institution—has created potentially destructive tension within the school community.

No school leader is a stranger to conflict; one study from the early 1990s indicated that school administrators spend approximately 40% of their time engaged in “conflict management.”³ Nevertheless, what makes conflict in pluralistic schools particularly threatening is that the issues that are likely to be the subject of the most vigorous debate within such schools constitute the very essence of what the school is all about: What are our central educational goals? What should we teach, and using what methodologies? Who should teach in our school, and how should those teachers be trained? How should Jewish ritual be observed? What religious principles, if any, should we take into account when devising school policies? As we define the “community” for the purposes of our Jewish community school, who is in and who is out—where do the boundaries lie? For a school that is both modern and postmodern, that seeks to honor both a shared heritage and a diversity of approaches to this heritage, each of these questions has the potential to present a significant obstacle to the process of community building.

A second source of tension that challenges school leaders is the complexity associated with instruction in a community school. As the expanded notion of community gains traction within the Jewish world, it is now simply expected that a teacher will master several different perspectives on a particular issue, understand each perspective well enough to answer questions about it, and present all of the perspectives fairly without giving preference to any one. And while it may be easy for school leaders to articulate such a vision for pedagogy in their school, implementation frequently proves difficult. In many schools, students and parents find that the pedagogic methods in which Judaic Studies teachers were trained, often in movement-based training institutions, differ from those preached by the administration as ideal for a com-

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Michael Kay’s essay clearly outlines the three modes by which a school needs to address, project and facilitate pluralism among its community. However,

I suggest that we must first explore *why* pluralism should be the core ideology of a Jewish communal institution such as the community day school. In order to do this, we must articulate how pluralism is a fundamental Jewish value. We must recognize that pluralism is not simply a modern concept to allow for civilized discourse among a broad cross-section of society but is the central narrative which our community should embrace and engage with. Towards that end, to be a truly pluralistic community, we must train our students—the next generation of communal leadership—in the art and skills of pluralism and community-building.

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise, one who learns from everyone, as it is said “From all who would teach me, have I gained understanding” (Psalms 119:99). Pirkei Avot 4:1

Pluralism is not just a *modus operandi*—a system to incorporate or include heterogeneous voices, or expressions and beliefs under a single umbrella. Neither is it simply a way to allow disparate groupings of individuals to come together, or a pragmatic methodology to allow a community to function. Rather, pluralism is a lofty goal in and of itself. It means seeking love or at least respect among people with significant differences, not stopping at merely tolerating each other.

Therefore, if we fundamentally believe in the Torah having many faces, the multiple ways in which Judaism is interpreted and embodied are all valid. Are we therefore willing to oppose “orthodoxy”—the notion that there is a singular right or correct path that is known? And furthermore, must we then embrace the idea that true knowledge is evasive and that truth is unknown in all certainty to human beings? What does that mean for our institutions, philosophy and pedagogy?

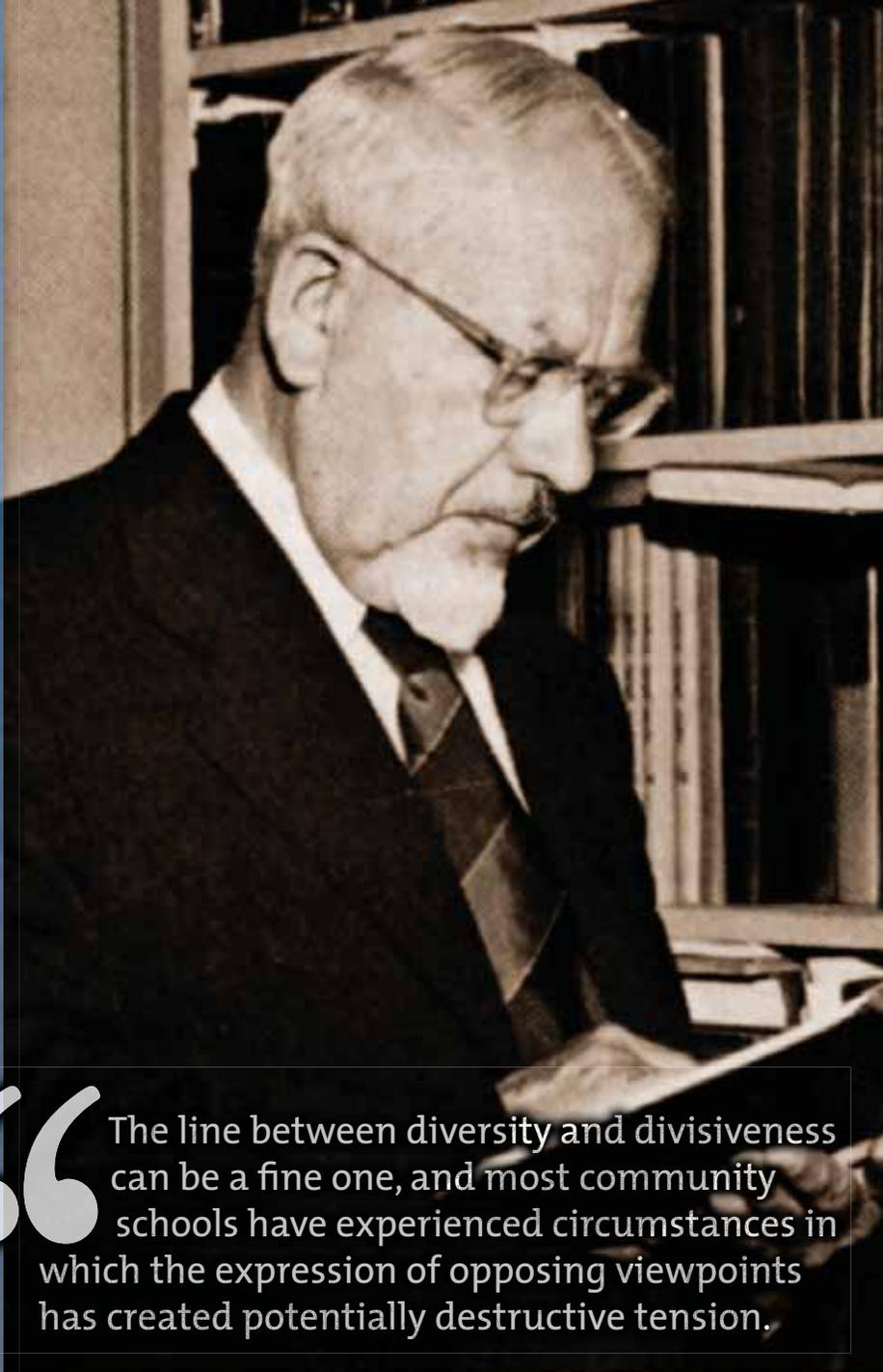
Pluralism requires a commitment to providing authentic role models for our students. For an educator to speak with knowledge, compassion and empathy “on behalf of” someone else’s Jewish experience and outlook is at best shallow and insufficient and at worst patronizing and insulting. Therefore, the question we must ask is, Can we train educators in pluralistic settings to teach and facilitate all faces of Torah so that *all* our students and their families feel represented in what and how our institutions are expressing?

In order to begin to answer the call to a truly pluralistic community school, we must ask ourselves a series of questions: Who owns the community? Who is in and who is out? Who sets the parameters of community? How often do those values and parameters need to be re-examined?

Given the growing diversity of Jewish expressions and identifications among today’s families, we must also ask ourselves, how broad a pluralistic community do we want to create—for the atheists, non- or anti-Zionists, for those committed to practicing elements of both Judaism and Islam or Christianity? What are the boundaries of the community or limits to the pluralism of our institutions?

The primary challenge facing the pluralistic school, therefore, is to answer the question: Can we create a clear, pluralistic set of Jewish values and teachings that can form the basis of the day school curriculum (and all of our communal institutions)? If not, whose values will dominate and whose will be undermined? If these articulated shared values are so vague in order to create “buy in” from as broad a constituency as possible, what in essence are we stating we believe or stand for? Without definition—without clarity—these values become merely bumperstickers and not an ethos by which to live and build community. ■

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“The line between diversity and divisiveness can be a fine one, and most community schools have experienced circumstances in which the expression of opposing viewpoints has created potentially destructive tension.”

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7]

community school, or that the student experience varies considerably from classroom to classroom. The effort to enact such a vision of instruction often constitutes another major challenge within our schools.

A Jewish day school’s mission of identity-building can be a third source of complication in a community school. The notion of bringing together individuals representing a diversity of perspectives and promoting thoughtful interaction among them works well when the par-

ticipants already possess clear understandings of their own beliefs and practices. But what about day school students who are only just beginning to develop their own Jewish identities? Can a school foster substantive interaction among diverse identities while at the same time working to develop these identities, in many cases from scratch? When students, many of whom attend denominational synagogues or have had a particular set of traditions instilled in them by their parents, are presented in school with a variety of alternative viewpoints that are equally com-

prising, do schools risk replacing robust, individual identity with a diluted sense of Jewish universalism? As one head of school asked me, “Are we going to do a lot of everything and end up with nothing?” Given the degree to which the enterprise of Jewish education values individual identity development, we must be aware of the risk that we are taking when we seek to emphasize diverse perspectives.

A final challenge that community school leaders are likely to face is a lack of ideological diversity or ideological passion within their school communities. For one thing, many of our community schools simply do not boast sufficient breadth to consider themselves truly representative of the Jewish community at large. Furman’s vision of postmodern community functions most effectively when the diverse perspectives that are expressed represent the genuine views of the people expressing them. It is possible for a classroom teacher to inject into a discussion approaches that are not represented by students within the class, but this is seldom an adequate substitute for vibrant debate among people whose outlooks legitimately differ from one another. Second, construction of a community that values diverse perspectives requires that participants demonstrate characteristics that do not come naturally to many people—especially to children and teenagers. These traits include ideological passion and an eagerness to engage in principled discussion on issues of religious belief and practice. If a student chooses not to take part in conversations on these topics, or does not demonstrate sufficient interest to sustain spirited, thought-provoking debate, then that student’s views will not be represented. It is difficult for a community to understand and celebrate diverse viewpoints if these viewpoints are not expressed with clarity and fervor by the members of the community.

Defining Pluralism

There are no universal solutions to these challenges, and the most effective strategies will vary significantly from community to community. Nonetheless, our

field has often identified “pluralism” as a guiding philosophy that can help us craft communities honoring both commonality and diversity. The trouble with pluralism, however, is that we have never quite been able to define what the term means. As Susan Shevitz has pointed out, the word has generally been regarded as nebulous, with each practitioner and scholar in the field devising her/his own meaning, and many people simply refraining from using the word for fear of being misunderstood.⁴ I suggest that some of this confusion derives from the fact that pluralism is not a unitary concept. There are three different, yet related, phenomena that all are known by the name “pluralism,” and a school that seeks to implement all three is likely to have the most success in building a strong, vibrant, “hybrid” community. These three phenomena may be called *atmospheric pluralism*, *informational pluralism*, and *interactional pluralism*.

Atmospheric pluralism

Atmospheric pluralism refers to the cultivation of an environment in a school in which individuals who represent diverse approaches to Jewish belief and practice may coexist comfortably. Stakeholders of an institution that is atmospherically pluralistic celebrate the ideological diversity that exists within their community, and they strive to create an atmosphere that is perceived to be welcoming, open, and tolerant. In order to achieve atmospheric pluralism, members of a school community need not necessarily interact extensively with one another, achieve deep understanding of one another’s perspectives, or adopt an open stance toward mutual influence. They must simply recognize their diversity and construct an atmosphere in which this diversity is respected and honored.

Many community schools have prioritized atmospheric pluralism (without naming it as such), and it is generally easy to identify manifestations of this concept. An atmospherically pluralistic school might display books, artwork, or other prominent objects that are representative of numerous ideo-

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In his essay, Michael Kay sets forth a three-pronged approach to developing a strong “hybrid community.” Based on my experience in a small school located in the geographically isolated region of West Texas, Kay’s model of pluralism can only be strengthened by partnering with our local communities. In our school, reaching out to the community and involving rabbinic leadership demonstrates for our students that pluralism is not just a static ideal to be achieved within the walls of our schools. Instead, it is a vibrant and dynamic part of our larger Jewish community.

Kay introduces the concept of atmospheric pluralism, which he considers “the most passive” and “often the most noticeable” form of pluralism. I agree with Kay and consequently, in our school, we rotate the location of our monthly board meetings through the local synagogues and invite the rabbis in the community to give *divrei Torah* at one of our meetings. We also alternate the location of our graduation ceremony annually through the different synagogues and all the rabbis participate in this ceremony each year leading the invocation, blessing and prayer.

The next layer of Kay’s three-part structure, informational pluralism, is not only a good “guiding principle” it is also good pedagogy. If we are engaging in “actively promoting understanding of diverse religious ideologies,” providing opportunities for our students to engage with our local clergy can help support our goals. Pluralism in our school is a dialectical process: not only do the clergy members meet with students on our campus, but also all of our students visit each of the synagogues throughout the year for programs and prayer services. Furthermore, the clergy are involved in developing a curriculum focused on celebrating diversity in Jewish life.

According to Kay, interactional pluralism “creates opportunities for school stakeholders to engage directly with colleagues

whose opinions may differ markedly from their own.” Born out of support for this form of pluralism, our school developed an ad-hoc committee made up of a diverse group of individuals representative of the larger community. This group meets to discuss issues of policy and ritual practice that reflect, embrace and respect the goals of a pluralistic community.

While Kay is receptive to the need for schools to be aware of the surrounding community, I believe he misses an opportunity to strengthen our schools’ commitment to pluralism. He argues that “a pluralistic school leader must be sensitive to the school’s demographics, history, and surrounding community as he/she seeks to enact the three forms of pluralism.” This is a good starting point, but we must move beyond a basic understanding of the community to an active involvement of the “surrounding community.” Our students need to see models of leadership in their communities working together.

While smaller Jewish communities may embrace a pluralistic model out of necessity, the planning and actualization of pluralism in the school must be deliberate. In *Orot Ha-Teshuvah, The Lights of Penitence*, Rav Kook writes: “There are those who mistakenly think that world peace can only come when there is a unity of opinions and character traits... true shalom is impossible without appreciating the value of pluralism intrinsic in shalom... Indeed, in all the apparent disparate approaches lies the light of truth and justice, knowledge, fear and love, and the true light of Torah.” Kay gives us a strong foundation for beginning this process. We can strengthen Kay’s three-pronged approach by further partnering with our communities, collaborating with our local clergy and enacting for our students a strong pluralistic *kehillah*. ■

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9]

logical perspectives—I was once in a classroom, for example, that featured a bookshelf with *siddurim* from four different denominations and a copy of the ArtScroll *Tanakh* sitting alongside Richard Elliott Friedman’s *Who Wrote the Bible?* Such a school’s ritual programming could include multiple *minyanim* or other approaches that allow each individual to practice Judaism in the manner that is most comfortable for her/him. Some schools also craft policies that encourage diverse expressions of Judaism through dress, such as by encouraging the wearing of *kippot* or *tzitzit* without mandating it. While atmospheric pluralism is the most passive form of pluralism, it is often the most noticeable. Decisions that leaders make about school atmosphere can be fraught with symbolism, and these decisions play a major role in crafting a community that is genuinely perceived as honoring multiple approaches.

Informational pluralism

Informational pluralism seeks to go beyond the creation of a comfortable atmo-

sphere by actively promoting understanding of diverse religious ideologies. This form of pluralism requires the transmission of knowledge pertaining to diverse approaches to Judaism. Not only must stakeholders be welcoming and respectful toward people with a variety of views (as in atmospheric pluralism), but they must also learn about and demonstrate understanding of these views. Participants are expected to develop familiarity with the beliefs and practices of those whose approaches are different from their own, even if they need not necessarily interact extensively with such people.

Within a school context, informational pluralism is most likely to manifest itself in the curriculum. Teachers must be prepared to expose their students to a variety of perspectives on central questions

of Jewish belief and practice without espousing any particular approach as ideal or prescriptive. Through the activities that take place inside the classroom, students are given the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of the diversity that defines the modern Jewish world. A student should not be trained to view every individual approach as equally valid—indeed, such an approach would undermine the development of individual religious identity—but he/she should be expected to give due consideration to alternative viewpoints and to articulate thoughtfully why her/his personal perspective is right for her/him. As Rabbi Daniel Lehmann has written, a primary goal of pluralism is to “shape a generation of Jews who understand the particularity of their own commitments in the context of the broader Jewish community.”⁵

“When students are presented in school with a variety of alternative viewpoints that are equally compelling, do schools risk replacing robust, individual identity with a diluted sense of Jewish universalism?”

The classroom is not the only domain of informational pluralism. If we want our students truly to demonstrate deep understanding of multiple approaches, and also to be prepared to make well informed, autonomous choices about their personal systems of religious belief and practice as they prepare for adulthood, then we must expand our methodologies of Jewish education into the realm of the experiential. A student will not achieve the comprehension and connection that we desire simply through listening to explanations of—or even reading texts about—different religious philosophies or ritual practices. As we prepare students to comprehend a variety of practices and make thoughtful decisions about their own lives, we should emphasize the types of experience-based educational opportunities that many pluralistic schools now offer: have students hear multiple liturgies and melodies in their prayer services, watch as both a live chicken and a sack of money are lifted over head for the *kapparot* ritual before



Yom Kippur, or stage mock Jewish weddings in accordance with diverse modern nuptial traditions. The experience of these observances—and the reflective discussions/debates that follow—can be moments of genuine informational pluralism, exposing students to different approaches that communities have taken and the multiple belief systems that underlie these approaches.

Interactional pluralism

Interactional pluralism is the most dynamic form of pluralism, and—when implemented thoughtfully—it can be the most effective guide for overcoming the challenges outlined above. This form of pluralism requires that community stakeholders actively engage with one another and open themselves to the possibility that their own views may be influenced through exposure to the approaches of others. Beyond simply respecting and tolerating—or even just learning about—one another, participants in this model of pluralism take an active role in articulating their own views, listening thoughtfully to alternative perspectives, and making informed decisions about possible modifications to their systems of belief and practice. In a school that is interactionally pluralistic, individuals (or groups) representing diverse ideological viewpoints participate in dialogue, think carefully about how these interactions might enrich their own views, and yet remain confident enough in their individual identities to resist the forces of assimilation or homogenization.

Interactional pluralism takes a number of forms in community schools. Inside classrooms, teachers use vibrant discussion as a pedagogic tool, encouraging students to articulate their own viewpoints and to debate respectfully with their classmates. Outside the classroom, experiential educators may expect students to declare openly their own ritual preferences as they collaboratively craft a communal Shabbaton or holiday experience. In open forums or beit midrash sessions, members of the school community are given the opportunity to voice their beliefs and hear from their

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As much as I am a “Conservative” rabbi and educator, I try to get beyond labels and stereotypes in search of new ideas and synergies.

Nevertheless, my personal experience with community schools (as a head of school for seven years in California, and as a RAVSAK board member) has left me with the impression that many K-8 community schools are weak in terms of Jewish text-learning, ritual skills and commitment to observance as compared to Schechter schools. This is because people with diverse agendas tend to put aside the tough issues for the sake of shalom bayit. “Too much Judaic content” is, unfortunately, equated with “too religious.”

Community schools’ marketing puts great emphasis on fostering respectful dialogue, creating community, and integrating curriculum. All of these are valuable but they are rather generic “best practices” in the independent school world. At the very first organizational meeting of RAVSAK, one central agency professional warned that “Community schools are at best pareve.” Rather than use the word “pareve” I’d say the meal isn’t complete. As Kay points out, “Schools risk replacing robust, individual identity with a diluted sense of Jewish universalism.”

Equally important are the difficulties in accomplishing these goals—as Kay notes, “implementation frequently proves difficult” and “construction of a community that values diverse perspectives requires that participants demonstrate characteristics that do not come naturally to many people—especially to children and teenagers.” I believe that so much of what’s good about community day schools is better suited for the older grades. A more “essentialist” approach to the curriculum in the early grades would provide students with the Judaic knowledge needed to better

engage in more sophisticated “community building” later on.

I fear that we have lost the sense of what it means to be an educated Jew. While Judaism has been an ever-evolving tradition, there was always a strong allegiance to our sacred texts that guided change. When we allow “the dialogue and the diversity” to become the main thing, we have lost our way. One advantage to being in a Schechter school is that at many levels our school’s ideology, curriculum and observances are tied to standards that serve as a baseline: these are the things you need to know in order to participate most effectively in the dialogue.

Does a denominational school like Schechter stifle dialogue or create “levels” of Jews? Not a chance! Families in my school come from 17 different congregations, from all denominations and patterns of observance. What they all share is a desire to give their children something they didn’t receive as children: a deep, meaningful connection to Judaism. Just as important, this diverse group of people models a true Klal Yisrael community of respect and learning.

Finally, Dr. Kay states, “Pluralistic community schools constitute the only sector of non-Orthodox Jewish day school education that is experiencing growth.” After many years of strong growth in Schechter schools, the current dip in numbers is, I believe, due to a weakening of the “branding” within Conservative synagogues. It will be interesting to see how current institutional reformulations within the Conservative movement will impact enrollment trends in both community and Schechter schools. ■

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Jewish community day schools embrace pluralism as a philosophy and core value. Rather than having a specific religious philosophy (hashkafah), pluralistic schools embrace the concept of Jewish Peoplehood (Klal Israel). Kay defines three levels of pluralism: atmospheric, informational and interactional. His definition provides a framework for school leaders to identify and assess the ways in which they honor diversity and commonality. In order to promote atmospheric pluralism, a school leader may be asked to create an environment that is perceived as welcoming, an environment where children from different religious backgrounds can outwardly live their religious life in a comfortable and safe setting. For instance, will the students have tefillah opportunities which meet their needs? Is the kashrut standard comfortable for all children to partake in shared experiences? Does the concept of communal activities respect the boundaries of Shabbat observance?

Regarding informational pluralism, school leaders should look at the Judaic studies curriculum and clarify the “when and how” different branches of Judaism will be discussed. Do students have opportunities to learn from each other’s practices and tenets? Will the differences be studied under the umbrella of commonalities? Will this new perspective shatter the prejudices and truly honor Klal Israel?

These two levels of pluralism are achievable at a K-8 level. Students from early childhood through early adolescence can be brought into the discussion of information, respect and celebration. The challenge a K-8 school has is at the third level. According to Kay, the main goal of interactional pluralism is to construct a “hybrid” community where not only is there an environment of knowledge and respect, but stakeholders are open to being influenced by the viewpoints of others.

In order to achieve this level of pluralism, stakeholders should engage in discussions where decisions are made through information, openness and compromise. However, it is important to note that this type of interaction can provide a confusing layer of questioning for which early adolescents may not be prepared. Ten- to fourteen-year-olds are vulnerable, as they are in the process of questioning their beliefs while concurrently opening their minds to viewpoints other than those of their parents. This is a time where the struggle of the parent-child relationship can enter tumultuous times. Therefore, developmentally, are we asking too much of young children if

“Any school community that seeks to recruit a student body representative of the ideological diversity of the Jewish community and to encourage vibrant discourse must first cultivate an environment that is viewed as welcoming and respectful toward multiple viewpoints.”

we expect them to make decisions about their own religious practices?

I believe that it behooves K-8 pluralistic schools to provide a safe environment where different religious practices are honored and celebrated. We must be part of a movement that crumbles the walls of prejudice between Jewish denominations. At the same time, we need to be sensitive to the developmental needs of children and not place them in situations where their inner conflicts are exacerbated. We are obligated to provide students with the foundation to question and to learn. Yet we must do it with the understanding of their developmental, emotional and intellectual needs. ■

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classmates and colleagues on challenging questions of religious practice within the school. And on the level of professional and lay leadership, interactional pluralism may be enacted through deliberations about dietary practices, admissions policies (who is considered “Jewish” for the purposes of attending our school?), faculty hiring, and educational goals. In each of these cases, the pluralism that is enacted in the school goes beyond an effort to enable Jews of diverse views and backgrounds to feel comfortable and respected, and beyond even learning to understand one another’s views. Rather, it creates opportunities for school stakeholders to engage directly with colleagues whose opinions may differ markedly from their own, and

it expects them to adopt a stance of openness toward learning from one another as they strive to construct a “hybrid” community that celebrates both commonality and diversity.

Threefold Pluralism as a Guiding Strategy

By striving for enactment of these three forms of pluralism, schools leaders can take important steps toward navigating the challenges associated with building hybrid communities. Atmospheric pluralism, for example, is a crucial prerequisite for addressing several of the tensions discussed above. Any school community that seeks to recruit a student body that is representative of the ideological diversity of the Jewish community at large and to encourage vibrant ideological discourse must first cultivate an environment that is viewed as welcoming and respectful toward multiple

viewpoints. And in the realm of conflict, it is important to note that the most effective way of addressing this source of tension is not through the suppression or avoidance of discord, but rather through the recognition of the existence of diverse opinions, respect for an individual's right to express her/his opinion, and careful management of a process by which these opinions can be voiced. As Albert O. Hirschman noted in his book *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970), an atmosphere comfortable for those who wish to voice dissent is a crucial feature of a healthy organization.⁶ An individual who feels that such an atmosphere does not exist is liable to respond by simply withdrawing from the organization, which would be crippling for a school that seeks diverse perspectives as a component of its *raison d'être*. As such, the pursuit of atmospheric pluralism provides an important guideline for school leaders who seek to craft communities that value multiple approaches to a shared heritage.

Like atmospheric pluralism, informational pluralism can be invoked as a guiding principle for addressing the tensions that confound community school leaders. As noted above, the complexity of instruction in community schools is among the most acute challenges faced by our schools. It is also the area, though, in which targeted professional development can be most effective. It is often easier to train teachers to understand and present a broad range of information than to create a comfortable atmosphere or to cultivate fruitful interactions. Additionally, this need is likely to be consistent across schools: the nature of particular ideological conflicts or the degree of ideological passion may vary considerably from community to community, but almost all schools could benefit from training programs that help teachers feel confident in their own understandings of diverse approaches to Judaism and comfortable exposing students to these approaches—through traditional means and experientially—without prejudice. Training in informational pluralism thus constitutes an excellent opportunity for coalitions of school to pool their intellectual and financial resources as they seek

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Michael Kay outlines the challenges facing the growing pluralistic school community in its desire to provide an effective educational program that addresses the complex, multiple needs of a parent and student body deliberately composed of diverse elements.

Several thoughts to further the discussion: What distinguishes, and I believe, positively energizes pluralistic schools is the dialectical tension created by the desire to establish and maintain identity while addressing the needs of the diverse population. What is needed is the sharing of ideas regarding how the issues resulting from this tension can be addressed philosophically and programmatically. Defining the seemingly indefinable term “pluralism” or for that matter “postmodernism” seems to contribute nothing toward addressing the inherent tension.

As Kay suggests, each school must work out its own way of dealing with these issues in determining its own particular vision, mission, school culture and policy. But this is really what any school must do; this is not a process particular to ideologically pluralistic schools. Interestingly, in the case of pluralistic schools, a broad resolution of this tension would be counterproductive. The dialectical tension actually defines and enriches the school culture and program.

The description of atmospheric and informational pluralism illustrates a situation that is not radically different than similar issues that exist in select modern Orthodox schools. Kay's anecdote about the bookshelf with siddurim from four different denominations reminded me of a class in Job that I taught almost 25 years ago in a modern Orthodox high school where students were encouraged to bring commentaries ranging from Mikra'ot Gedolot to the Anchor Bible. The students appreciated the fact that this enriched the discussion significantly, and they also walked away with the clear understanding that

there is no such thing as a text that belongs to any particular denomination and that they should be prepared to engage in any and all types of text study and analysis. Is this not, according to Kay's definition, actually a form of interactional pluralism?

What is referred to as atmospheric pluralism describes a healthy environment that should be encouraged in *any* school that welcomes and encourages an ideologically diverse student body. There may be a difference in degree between a modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and community school, but not in the underlying goal in this area.

Interactional pluralism reads like a description of educationally sound active learning and student engagement. Should this not be going on in any fine school? The difference may be in the degree and in the emphases, but again, each school, pluralistic or otherwise, would be conducting its own active engagement and in the process refining its own particular culture.

Kay refers to the difficulty faced by these schools in understanding and celebrating diverse viewpoints. I believe that students nurtured in educational environments characterized by encouragement and respect for diversity will learn to exemplify that in their own lives. That alone will be an incredibly important contribution that these schools will make to the quality of Jewish life and community.

I maintain that one of the most effective ways to achieve this is by spending substantial amounts of time (probably significantly more than these schools do now) on in-depth study of Jewish texts. While text study naturally and commonly promotes disagreement, at the same time it blurs differences, and is one tangible way to bring students together to focus on what they share in common. ■

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It Can't Be About Pluralism

■ by **DEVORA STEINMETZ**

BUZZWORDS make me nervous. They make me nervous, first of all, because often it's not clear what people mean when they use them. A buzzword often stands in for a vague cluster of values to which we are all committed, but its fuzziness can stand in the way of people being challenged to think carefully about what they mean when they use the word and about what it would look like to put that commitment into practice in a thoughtful way.

Buzzwords make me nervous, also, because of the powerful pull that their currency and popularity exert on communal life. The power of the buzzword to rally assent can overshadow other core commitments that we ought to hold primary, commitments that may be longstanding and that lack the power of novelty to rally the same excitement and support. And so, even if the buzzword represents the introduction of something important and salutary into communal life, it can at the same time stand in the way of critical discussion about other core commitments on which we ought to focus in the shaping of our lives and our educational agendas.

Finally, buzzwords make me nervous because they tend to take on a life of their own. What may have begun as one element of our educational approach can end up becoming *the* criterion against which our program is measured and which shapes our decision-making. And a usage that may initially have expressed a clearly thought-out commitment may end up losing that clarity or taking on a meaning different from the one that we originally intended. No matter how carefully we may initially have thought through what we mean, and no matter how well-balanced our initial situation of this particular commitment may have been, the expression of our commitment in a buzzword makes us vulnerable, down the road, to devolving into a less mindful institutional practice than we might have if we had forcefully rejected the use of buzzwords in favor of more complex articulations of our varied commitments.

"Pluralistic" is one example of a buzzword that has increasingly been used to characterize Jewish institutions in general and Jewish educational institutions in particular. What does pluralism mean? Pluralism can refer to a general philosophical or epistemological stance about the nature of truth or of knowledge. Or pluralism can refer to the desire to create a community that is as inclusive as possible—in this case, of Jews who represent a range of beliefs, identities, and practices. Or pluralism could refer to a pedagogical stance—to the idea that allowing different people to approach ideas openly and freely, in dialogue with each other, enables each person to come to a deeper and more true understanding than any one person could on his or her own.

Which of these meanings or of others do people or institutions refer to when they self-define as pluralistic? Perhaps there is a tacit understanding of the



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word that *is* shared, even if not usually so clearly spelled out. Or perhaps there is no shared understanding of the word, but that is exactly the point. The pull to embrace something that seems open and inclusive and that celebrates multiple meanings rather than definitive commitments might be the very power of this buzzword, and further inquiry into what we really mean when we talk about pluralism may add nothing to its power or perhaps even threaten to shake up our shared celebration of this value. But different understandings of pluralism might, in fact, point to different practices or policies, and our institutions are impoverished if we rely on a shared embracing of a vague concept rather than taking the challenge of figuring out what we are really committed to and of envisioning how we will give life to that commitment in the day-to-day practices of our settings.

Even if we do have more clarity about what we mean when we use the word pluralism than I think that we do, though, I worry about pluralism taking its place as *the* defining commitment of communal or institutional life. "But we *do* stand for something," I recently overheard a giant of one of Judaism's liberal movements saying to a colleague—"Zionism and pluralism." The implication is that



the movement celebrates individual Jews' choices in Jewish life but that, in fact, there are certain non-negotiables even in such a world, and that these do need to be communicated clearly within the movement's educational settings. I will leave Zionism out of the equation for heuristic purposes and think for a moment about what it means to say, in effect: We believe that each individual chooses his or her own beliefs and commitments, but there is one belief and commitment that is constitutive of Jewish life as we understand it—and that is a belief in and commitment to pluralism. Now, this strikes me as a statement that is at once very attractive and utterly nonsensical. What such a statement might be intended to mean, of course, depends on one's definition of pluralism, but—by any definition—there is something oddly through-the-looking-glass-like about this statement. What, at the end of the day, do we believe is at the core of Judaism and Jewish life if the one thing that we can defini-



What, at the end of the day, do we believe is at the core of Judaism and Jewish life if the one thing that we can definitively say about it is that it's pluralistic?

tively say about it is that it's pluralistic?

In my own work as an educator who founded a non-denominational day school, Beit Rabban, I avoided the word pluralistic, chiefly because of the word's ambiguity. Would it mean that the school is committed to a certain understanding of the nature of truth or of knowledge (not necessarily); that children from all denominations of Judaism or from none are welcome to the school that I founded and that children are taught to treat each other with respect (true); or that the school believes that open and thoughtful inquiry in dialogue with others, informed by strong skills and knowledge and by the ideas of others who have shared in this same inquiry, is a form of learning that is both authentic

to the Jewish tradition and most likely to help children come to their own best understandings of what they are learning and how to shape their life choices? This last was true and, in fact, central to the school's educational approach across both Jewish and general studies. The school was non-denominational, then, in the sense that we did not attempt to pre-determine the specific understandings and interpretations of the tradition with which we hoped that all children would emerge. We did not believe that children's inquiry or conclusions should be limited by the understanding held by any particular denomination of Judaism. Such artificial limitations would be inconsistent with our general educational approach, with its emphasis on respon-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 68]

Tolerance: For a Minimalist Definition of Pluralism

■ by **ADAM B. SELIGMAN**

[Editors' note: The following is adapted from an article in the April 2003 issue of the Cardozo Law Review. We present it here because it offers a significant, thoughtful, and principled view of pluralism that runs counter to the dominant perspective in common discourse.]

My daughters go to an intentionally pluralistic Jewish day school. This means that there are children from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish families who attend the school, as well as children from families who have very little religious (as opposed to cultural or historical) identification as Jews. Even though the school has won an award for pluralism from the Jewish community, no one is quite sure just what that means. Consequently, every couple of months we have discussions long into the night concerning the meaning of pluralism. During one of these discussions, I presented some of the ideas developed below and was immediately subjected to a barrage of criticism. One parent was quick to point out that tolerance of difference was not at all what was needed. Instead, difference needed to be embraced and engaged so that we could grow and develop together with those who are different.

By the end of the evening, however, after quite a few parents had given vent to their feelings on how the curriculum did not adequately express their religious commitments and needs, this parent (and others) came to think that maybe tolerance was not such a bad thing after all. Perhaps a minimalist virtue was in fact precisely what was called for. As these parents came to realize just how long the way was to actually embracing difference, they came around to the idea that until such time as this could be realized—if it could be realized at all—it might not be such a bad idea to promulgate the virtue of tolerance. While it seemed a second-best solution, it was one that seemed realizable and would contribute to the conduct and culture of the school.

Toleration, as philosopher Bernard Williams once remarked, is an “impossible virtue.” It is impossible because it involves accepting, and abiding or accommodating views that one rejects. It calls us to live in cognitive dissonance and presents contradiction as a sought after goal. We are obliged to “bear” what in fact we find unbearable. Of course, if we did not find this, that, or the other word or deed objectionable, there would be no call to tolerate them.

From another perspective, tolerance is far from being sufficient a virtue. It is deemed too vapid, too thin, and far from adequate to the construction of a civil order or civil society of mutual appreciation and recognition. Tolerance, with its historical associations of suffering the presence of what is detestable (in the eyes of G-d and mankind), in this reading, is too feeble a thing to promote. Pluralism and the celebra-



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tion of difference and otherness is what is called for rather than the insipid call to tolerance.

Complicating this picture even further is that whether we view tolerance as either impossible or insipid, argument can be made that in neither case does it take us very far. For almost all would agree there are actions (and perhaps words as well, though that is much debated at present) that are beyond any moral compass and should not be tolerated. Accordingly, we are left with the need to define the boundary of what can and cannot be tolerated. It is far from clear what criteria would be used to define this boundary; such a task seems then but to push the problem of tolerance up one analytic level, but not to solve it.

Despite these problems, I will make the argument for tolerance, as indeed a minimalist position, though for all that one not easy to attain (though not impossible either). In addition, I will claim that what passes for tolerance in contemporary modern societies is often not tolerance at all,

but rather some mixture of indifference, Realpolitik, and the denial of difference (that is, the denial that there is really something else, other, different and thus perhaps threatening that I must engage with in a tolerant manner).

The denial of difference comes in many forms, most often as what may be termed the aesthetization of difference. Differences are a matter of tastes, not morals, and as there is no accounting for tastes, no real tolerance of difference is called for, merely a recognition of each individual's "right" to their own opinion. The aesthetization of difference is often accompanied by a trivialization of difference. Here the differences, or the arenas of difference, are not deemed important enough to merit a principled tolerance. Your rather poor taste in neckties is not something that demands of me a tolerant attitude, though I find it both offensive and in bad taste. Precisely because this is a matter of taste (aesthetics) and of no great significance (trivial), tolerance does not effectively enter the picture. This is a form of denying difference rather than engaging it. Furthermore, we do this all the time—it is of the very stuff of our social life.

It may be useful to recall here that in medieval cannon law, tolerance was practiced towards two groups of people: Jews and prostitutes. Both were groups who were indeed tolerated, and for whom tolerance was seen as a second-best solution. Better would be to do away with them, but the consequences would have been too detrimental to society. Of course, these origins give rise to the very negative associations we have with the word toleration, whose cultural baggage includes some very horrible episodes in the historical relations of Jews and Christians. The point I wish to stress here, however, is that tolerance—and intolerance for that matter—does inherently have to do with groups and with individuals as existing within groups, rather than with individuals as autonomous, self-regulating moral agents, endowed with individual rights, and acting as such on the public stage.

It is important to point out that tolerance is a very circumscribed virtue. It is not the solution to all evils—it is not a panacea. Nor is it without boundaries. Clearly some types of behavior are intolerable, though it is not absolutely clear how one would go about defining what is beyond that pale. Certain religious and philosophical categories come to mind—ideas of natural law or in Jewish context, the Noahide commandments, present some useful general orientation. However, within these limits there is certainly great room of disagreement for rejection of much of what one considers as misguided, immoral, reprehensible—hence for the need to tolerate what one believes to be wrong and that which makes one uncomfortable.

Groups have boundaries, and cannot exist without these boundaries. One cannot make claims to any type of identity without that identity being defined, which in some sense involves it being bounded and circumscribed as well. To ask a group to tolerate what threatens that identity, is to ask the group to dismantle itself—to make itself cease to be. If anything is a model of intolerance it would be this eradication of existence. Tolerance then is a virtue that has

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 65]

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Pluralism: The Demographic Reality

■ by **BARRY KOSMIN**

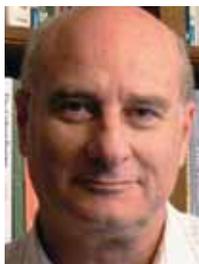
PLURALISM as a goal or even an acceptable societal manifestation is an essentially liberal concept. It suggests the recognition of variety and diversity in the world. In contrast, those disposed to an authoritarian personality and fundamentalist views prefer uniformity and do not welcome intellectual and theological pluralism since they believe they have discovered “truth.” Nor do they desire much social pluralism if it involves the endorsement of relationships and behaviors that are not sanctioned by their ideology.

This culture clash is not unique to the contemporary U.S. Jewish community. What is unique to American Jewry today is an abundance of diversity across the three “Bs” of worldviews: belonging, belief and behavior. This is a rather unique situation in terms of Jewish history. Historically the Jews placed a premium on unity and conformity. As an oppressed, pariah people, we showed a preference for the unified kehillah, the *Einheitsgemeinde*, and tended to deride or be suspicious of the *Austrittsgemeinde*. Nevertheless, all the social surveys and recent research shows that in the U.S. in 2009 / 5770 there’s an enormous variety of types of Jews with a huge range of attitudes, opinions and lifestyles out there in the cities, suburbs and towns across this vast country.

In recent decades the response to this burgeoning of varieties of “Jewishness” and new ways of being and “doing Jewish” has been an efflorescence of new and refurbished organizations, institutions, and communities each trying to cater for a niche market. Since the 1980s American Jewry has been transformed internally. National bodies have lost power and authority to local and “parochial” ones as the felt need among the Jewish public for standardization and homogeneity in Jewish life has attenuated. The community at both national and local level has moved from the department store to the boutique approach to meeting the Jewish identity needs of its constituency.

In terms of measuring the extent of pluralism in the Jewish population it very much depends on one’s definition of “Who is a Jew?” The more halakhic the definition the less pluralism manifested by the enumerated. Of course, the corollary to this is the more exclusive the definition the smaller the size of the population. A preference for Jewish pluralism means more Jews and more pluralism. However, the extent of the social transformation means that we have gone beyond the old retort that it’s not really a “Who is a Jew” question but “Who is a rabbi.” The situation has gone beyond the power or influence of rabbis of any or all synagogue groups to determine the boundaries of American Jewry. The decisions are made by the mass of sovereign individuals, the consumers of Jewish services.

In a modern, free society the wider the boundaries and the more inclusive the group the greater the sheer numbers and the different sorts of persons that will be involved. The more fringe Jews one recognizes as potential members of one’s institution or organization then the greater the variety of Jewish types there is and the less traditional it will be ap-



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pear in what we might call normative or historical terms. This is particularly true for Jewish demography. When we exclude self-reported Jews on the basis of ancestry or birth (half a million report a Jewish mother) who follow other religions—BuJews, Messianic Jews and all those who claim two religions and/or syncretistic forms of Judaism—who number in the millions (see <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/AJIS2008.pdf>) we are left with a total of 5.2-5.4 million people.

This 5.4 million is the population comprising individuals who either claim that their religion is “Jewish” and those who say they have no religion but consider themselves Jewish (i.e., cultural Jews). Yet even then there is still a lot of variety present in terms of socio-demographic and sociological characteristics. For instance, as a result of immigration, conversion and adoption 10 percent of this population is made up of minorities (i.e. people who identify as other than Non-Hispanic White and so are Asian, Hispanic or black). Minorities are more

likely to be found among the younger child population than among the older Jewish people. So educators (outside of the ultra-Orthodox yeshivas) are more likely to meet Jews of different hues than nursing home directors. They are also more likely to meet Jews with non-Jewish grandparents and relatives.

Jewish couples of different heritages (Ashkenazi-Sephardi, American-Israeli, etc.) and national and linguistic backgrounds are not a new phenomenon but they are more frequent today. From a sociological point of view there is also increasing pluralism when it comes to family and household structure among contemporary American Jews. A heterosexual Jewish couple in their first marriage both born of Jewish parents with their own biological children is a decreasing proportion of the married population. Divorce and family break-up produces lots of blended families—with “yours, mine and our” offspring. Intermarriage produces three possible types of outcome: conversionary, mixed religion, and no religion (neutral) couples. So even the so-called “intermarried” are diverse.

American Jews tend to be social innovators. For instance they were the first population group to adopt family planning and limit family size already from the 1920s. So it's not surprising that there are more adoptive families and gay families than average. Gay families come in different forms. They can have

families that do not result from divorce.

What of religious trends? American Jews are becoming more diverse and polarized between the Orthodox

“What is unique to American Jewry today is an abundance of diversity across the three “Bs” of worldviews: belonging, belief and behavior. This is a rather unique situation in terms of Jewish history.

and the other synagogue groups. The middle ground is eroding so the Conservative movement is in decline with the result that there is less kashrut and more glatt in most communities. And practices and rituals are changing. There are more sukkahs in non-Orthodox congregations but fewer keeping two days during the chaggim. Denominational loyalties are in decline and there is a kind of cafeteria, pick-and-choose Judaism emerging across the spectrum.

However, today the largest and fastest growing group of Jews, comprising 37% of the total population, is the non-religious segment. These “Jewish Nones” or cultural Jews are largely missing from the organized Jewish community and particularly Jewish education. This is obviously a serious threat to the long-term demographic, social and economic viability of American Jewry. It is a constituency that needs to be served educationally, but so far, despite all the innovation in other

Of course there is a tendency for different types of Jews to cluster in certain localities and neighborhoods. The strictures of Shabbat travel for observant Orthodox and Conservative Jews has residential implications. So the

proportion in any one particular location of all or any of these varied types and combinations of Jews is very locally specific. But clustering is also true for other social characteristics. The teacher in San Francisco may have more children from gay families in his or her class while the teacher in Miami may have more children with a recent immigrant background whose first language is Spanish. This is more important for educators than other types of Jewish professionals because schooling is delivered locally, i.e., the catchment areas tend to be smaller in size. And since social change occurs over time and most often among younger age cohorts it is people dealing with the younger generation who will or should meet change first.

If you are an educator that can identify with the social reality that I describe then you have a hard task ahead of you, for dealing with pluralism and all its manifestations for education and socialization is not an easy challenge to meet. On the other hand if all this pluralism is unknown to you and seems to be taking place in a parallel universe then your school is not reflective of contemporary Jewish society and it obviously does not recruit students from across the full spectrum of the Jewish community.

In higher education we are constantly reminded that a plural society should have a diverse student body. Is this a valid goal or a necessity for Jewish day schools? ■

“The “Jewish Nones” is a constituency that needs to be served educationally, but so far, little effort has been made to include this population.

either two mothers or two fathers and the couple can also both be a Jewish or a mixed couple. Single unmarried Jewish women are also more likely to choose to have babies through artificial insemination by anonymous donor than other middle-class Americans. So we now have more Jewish one parent

spheres, little effort has been made to include this population. Yet Jewish communities in Latin America today and in Europe between the wars managed to do this successfully, so there are models available. But it will require Jewish schools that respect the ideology and wishes of these Jewish parents.

Rival Versions of Pluralistic Jewish Education

■ by **JENNIFER GLASER**

PLURALISM might be the word of the day—but what version of pluralism do we aspire to? And does it matter? Isn't simply being "a good pluralist" enough? In this article I argue that it is important to be clear about what form of pluralism we endorse because different kinds of pluralism will lead us to justify our curricula choices and structure the educational experience of our students in different ways.

Because the subject of pluralism is broad and multi-dimensional, I want to begin by explaining my conception of the term. There is a difference between plurality and pluralism. Plurality points to sheer multiplicity—to there being at least two things, not merely one. These "things" might be truths, cultures, values, visions of the good, forms of Jewish life, ambitions or projects. Pluralism and relativism are two approaches to dealing with this diversity. The key difference between relativism and pluralism lies in the way these diverse elements are understood to be situated toward one another.

In a relativistic universe, each element stands alone, to be judged or justified solely by its own resources—that is, to be judged relative to its own form of life. Relativism rejects the notion of external standards, and with it, criteria that can be used to judge between systems. This rejection of standards has often been falsely identified with pluralism and led to a misdirected criticism of pluralistic Jewish education as promoting an attitude that "anything goes." The critique rests on the false assumption that pluralism's concern with inclusiveness means that it cannot exclude any practice a student or teacher says is "Jewish" as long as it makes sense and is meaningful for them. This is a critique of relativism, not pluralism.

Pluralism differs from relativism precisely around this point concerning judgment. While pluralism embraces the idea that there is more than one form of Jewish life that is worthy—more than one way of living a Jewish life well—it also says "not everything goes." In a pluralist world it can be legitimate for *me* (who lives one way) to say to *you* (who lives another) "*we* don't do that here." In order to be able to invoke the plural "we" in this way, pluralism requires some degree of agreement across different Jewish lives, some notion of "things shared" among all who are considered to be "one of us." That is to say, pluralism needs to be able to appeal to some shared standards or criteria that hold across the internal plurality of our community by virtue of which we can make judgments concerning the boundaries, or limit-positions to what *we* find acceptable as a whole school community (criteria that enable us to judge what is ruled "in" and what is ruled "out" for us as a whole).

In order to count as pluralism (rather than relativism) the boundaries of "one of us"

apply to us *as members of this group*, and it is by virtue of my participation in this group that I am held accountable to the boundary conditions and standards the group imposes on itself (the norms of the community). We might say that whereas



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the relativist can justify their claim from the personal point of view, the pluralist needs to be able to justify their claim from the *social* point of view—from the perspective of the community as a whole. This is to think from the periphery, to contextualize one's own thinking within the bounds of the community of which one is part.

This is precisely where different forms of pluralism become interesting—because different understandings of pluralism rest on different accounts of what it is we appeal to when we seek to establish the veracity of one another's claims, set limits to what is acceptable within the community, and address emergent issues together.

Pluralistic schools need to be reflective and articulate about exactly what version of pluralism they endorse and to be consistent in communicating this within the school community. Without this articulation and modeling they neglect to educate members of their school community (staff, teachers, students and parents) toward negotiating the sheer plurality of contemporary Jewish life in an informed

and principled way. That is, by not highlighting the meta-criteria, principles and standards that guide their own choices as *pluralistic* ones (articulating the criteria and commitments that lead them to be able to say “we do that here” or “we don’t do that here”), they run the risk of educating toward relativism rather than educating toward pluralism.

The rest of this article seeks to highlight a number of forms of pluralism that might underlie pluralistic Jewish schools, and show how each of these forms of pluralism suggests a different way in which schools determine the boundaries of Jewish diversity and justify curricular decisions. It is important to note that each of these probably manifests itself within any complex school environment—it is not a matter of choosing one in totality. But this makes it even more important to be able to identify and articulate which operating assumptions lie behind specific curriculum choices and norms laid down in the school.

Perspectival Pluralism

One common way to ground limit positions across diversity is by appeal to a set of criteria or standards or values that have global reach because they identify something in common among us *as individuals*. This appeal to commonality is important to many pluralists because it lets us say something—for instance, something about values—that is true for *all* individuals who are “one of us Jews”

“Pluralism differs from relativism precisely around this point concerning judgment. While pluralism embraces the idea that there is more than one form of Jewish life that is worthy—more than one way of living a Jewish life well—it also says “not everything goes.”

despite differences in our theological positions, cultures and histories. Jewish text study, Israel, mitzvot, tikkun olam, kedushah, engagement with the idea of G-d, tefillah, and Jewish values have all been seen by some as contenders for a core set of contents and concerns that



Jews share across their differences. This enables a pluralistic school to set a core curriculum that all students participate in and gives saliency to such questions as “What should our ideal student know by the time they graduate?”

However, while these elements are mandatory, in a pluralistic environment there is a plurality of ways within the school community that these components might be viably expressed. This results in a kind of *perspectival or cultural* pluralism. We all share these elements, but

the multiple ways we interpret them, how firmly we embrace them, how we express them in our lives, will differ within the plurality of who “we” are. For example, we may determine that all students attend tefillah, but provide for multiple minyanim and interpretations of tefillah within the school. We may all study Bible, but offer students some classes that teach from the perspective of literary criticism, while others focus on traditional commentaries. Within such an environment the focus remains on individual students; encountering other perspectives enriches the possibilities for their own meaning-making while allowing them to appreciate the rich diversity of the Jewish people as a whole. This is a popular approach in an American context that values individualism and sees education in terms of the flourishing of each child.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 69]

Israeli Shlichim in Pluralistic Schools: Challenges, Solutions, and a Proposal for Change

■ by **MICHA BALF**

THE pluralistic spectrum of Jewish practices and behavior is often baffling to Israel educators who have spent their lives in systems differentiating between being “religious” or “secular.” The teachers can be loosely divided into two groups. Orthodox teachers come to the U.S. with excellent Jewish knowledge, but, especially in Jewish community schools, have a difficult time understanding the pluralistic Jewish community. The other group I will call kibbutz teachers who have a better understand of a heterogeneous world, but little understanding of the Jewish precepts and practices which are at the heart of the community school.

One might think that any effort to expand, revitalize and add relevancy to the Israel connection in Jewish day schools would include a systematic approach designed to train, integrate and optimize the presence of Israeli teacher-shlichim as authentic role models and native Hebrew speakers. Yet if the spring issue of *HaYiddion* on Israel & Zionism Education is any indicator, the Israeli teacher is barely noted as a spectator, let alone as an active, positive participant. This article looks at challenges that schools confront arising largely from the culture gap between Israeli teachers and their American counterparts. It offers strategies for administrators to address those challenges. While I believe that these strategies can be effective on the local level, more needs to be accomplished on the global level to ensure a steady pipeline of shlichim who know the situation of American schools and can be integrated quickly and effectively. Hence, I present a proposal for a structural solution for training Israeli teachers to work productively in Diaspora education.

CHALLENGES

I encountered many Israeli teachers in Jewish day schools during my three years of experience (2006-2009) working with the Jewish community as a Makom/JAFI education shaliach in Greater Washington, DC. The majority of them are local Israelis who are long-term residents in the US. A minority of the teachers are teacher-shlichim who come to the US on short-term contracts, usually via the Jewish Agency. These are primarily employed in Orthodox schools.

“Local Israelis” and “teacher-shlichim” are the two main categories of Israelis teaching in day schools. Local Israelis are usually a dominant component of the

Hebrew staff and in many cases a significant part of the Judaic staff. These teachers often have strong convictions about their connection to Israel and strive to inculcate Love of Zion and Israel con-



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nectiveness in their students. Nonetheless, I often sensed a slightly bemused reaction among colleagues, and particularly parents, who signified with a raised eyebrow that if the “homeland” is so important, why is their home in my neighborhood? This is not to say that the Israelis were not accepted in the Jewish schools as good teachers and colleagues, but their ability to preach with personal conviction was often viewed skeptically, though candid discussions of this topic are taboo.

There is a different set of issues for teacher-shlichim. The people chosen have a minimum of five years experience in the Israeli system and often considerably more. They are usually high caliber educators in Israel embedded in a different system than what they encounter in community Jewish schools and even in many Orthodox schools. Many of the teacher-shlichim are excellent teachers and authentic role models committed to goals of furthering the identification and understanding of Israel. However, the fact that the prevalence of teacher-shlichim has not expanded even as the emphasis on teaching Israel has increased and the

dearth of Hebrew speaking teachers is more prominent indicates that there are endemic reservations on the part of day school leadership.

The majority of teachers in both of these groups are married with children who are costly to absorb into the school system. Teachers do not always feel obligated to those “extra-curricular moments” in which the Israeli teacher can experientially impact students and teachers. There can be relocation issues that involve money and time as Israeli families struggle with an unfamiliar world. Today there are few teacher couples in Israel, so bringing one married teachers means some measure of responsibility for the spouse and assistance in a job search. Also, the combination of the authentic Israeli capable of presenting an alternative while respecting the local US institution can prove to be elusive.

Finally, few Israeli teachers are trained in the skills necessary to teach Hebrew as a second language. The language skill set

for a non-Hebrew speaking population is usually not part and parcel of their training or life experience.

All of these factors together limit the prevalence and relevance of the teacher shaliach, in spite of the fact that many of them are excellent educators who by virtue of their personality and Zionist conviction make Israel accessible in a way that conventional curriculums rarely accomplish.

Solutions

These problems are certainly not insurmountable. Administrators who are aware of the challenges can by and large preempt them by adopting the following strategies.

Pre-hiring:

Look for people who have had significant experience overseas (i.e. outside of Israel) both as youngsters and as adults. No amount of preparation can completely prepare a person for the

reality of living in a foreign country. The best guarantor is that a person was able to transition once.

A shaliach teacher is a teacher, but he/she is a family package. Meet the spouse and children. Take into account the ages of the children—a loose rule of thumb is that pre elementary school is difficult because the spouse must work and early child hood arrangements are precarious and prohibitive. Teenagers, no surprise here, often have a very hard time adjusting. If the spouse needs to work, is he/she employable? What is the extent of your personal and institutional responsibility to make that happen?

Bring your teacher over for a visit if you can afford it. It is not cheap, but then personnel errors are much more costly. Make sure that your candidate stays with host families, it is cheaper and gives a much better opportunity for acculturation and developing bonds.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 24]

*If you often feel tired,
it could be anemia.*



If you're Jewish, it could be Gaucher Disease.

Gaucher Disease, a treatable, genetic disorder, can affect infants, children and adults of all ages, genders and ethnicities. However, it is more commonly found in Jewish people of Ashkenazi descent.

Before 1991, there was no effective treatment. Patients of all ages often suffered from serious manifestations including:

- ▲ Fatigue
- ▲ Easy bruising
- ▲ Nosebleeds and other bleeding problems
- ▲ Bone pain and easily fractured bones
- ▲ Distended stomach or abdomen due to enlarged liver or spleen
- ▲ Low platelet count and anemia
- ▲ Bone deterioration and osteoporosis

A blood test can tell your physician whether you have Gaucher Disease and then determine if you need treatment. If you are currently being treated, you should be aware of multiple treatment options including intravenous and oral medications that are FDA-approved, FDA-approved treatment protocols and drugs in clinical trial.

For current treatment information, your physician can contact any of these pharmaceutical companies, including Actelion, Amicus, Genzyme, Protalix and Shire, or visit www.clinicaltrials.gov.

For additional information, testing and treatment, call toll-free: **1-888-230-7703**

www.gaucherdisease.org/rk

Think you have Gaucher?
You're not alone.
Click the [Mentor Program](#) link
on our website to connect with
real people living with Gaucher.



[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23]

Define your expectations, benchmarks for contractual extension and level of overall responsibility for the well-being of the family. This is not a normal hire—the expectations are different and the level of dependence of the shaliach-teacher on your institution is not as with local hires.

Many schools, I think, are looking for teachers who have the ability to be charismatic outside of the classroom. Probably all of your candidates will be competent and good classroom teachers, but do they have that special ability to create an experiential situation for a Shabbaton, holiday, Israeli event?

Finally, the level of English is important. Before I came on shlichut I was of the opinion that it may even be an advantage in the classroom to have minimal English skills, but in two areas English skills are critical – parental interactions and e-mail. Speaking with parents is an acquired skill and can often be an area in which cultural gaps are most exposed. Secondly, when a greater and greatest percentage of reporting, grading and communicating is by e-mail it is a real hindrance to not be proficient in written English.

Post-hiring:

Obviously any strategy will depend on the particulars of the individual, but as a start it is possible to review the pre-hiring points and see how things stand.

Providing assistance to your Israeli teacher in filling out report cards, checking e-mail correspondence and adapting language to culturally acceptable patterns can be very helpful.

Organizing a program of hosting your teacher and family in people's houses can often reduce cultural misunderstandings. Encouraging your teacher to host as well is also important. Most Israelis are not used to feeling that someone needs to take care of them, so reciprocity is a good thing to encourage.

Especially in smaller schools, principals sometimes are the mentors, probably to avoid burdening staff. It is important to appoint someone else to mentor in order to allow the Israeli teacher, who almost certainly will have something to say about how Israel and Hebrew are taught, a neutral venue to vent.

It takes time to adjust, but there are limits. One of the biggest cultural adjustments for all Israelis is the reliance on long-term planning. This cultural difference extends far beyond the school. Most of my Israeli friends send out wedding invitations a month in advance. In the US that is bordering on criminal negligence. The Israeli teacher arrives geared up to make a difference, and when he/she realizes that the calendar is booked until spring, it can be hard. On the other hand, if after a year your teacher does not appear to be on the way to “figuring it out,” think seriously about your commitment. Cultural flexibility, openness and acceptance are not always acquired in spite of the best efforts of people and schools.

Finally, challenge your Israeli teacher—and empower him or her to challenge you. The phenomenon of the school that wants to transform itself with the condition that everything remain the

a license to implement should be a good format.

A Proposal for an Alternative System to Recruit Teacher-Shlichim

Can Jewish day schools find Israeli teachers who are young, unencumbered by families, less expensive in terms of salaries, flexible about relocation and capable of being both instructors of subject matter, leaders of experiential activities and authentic role models? Are there Israeli teachers who are not Orthodox, but aware and interested in the broad spectrum of Jewish activity that characterizes the American Jewish community? Are there excellent Israeli teachers who are skilled in pedagogy, experienced in dealing with a broad array of educational situations and yet not completely wedded to an educational system inherently different from the pluralistic American environment?

The answer to all of the questions is YES. These young teachers exist at prominent Israeli teacher colleges such as Oranim and Seminar HaKibbutzim. These institutions are an untapped resource of skilled teachers in their mid to late 20s who have been trained in classrooms.

“A steady return of Israeli educators exposed to a pluralistic Jewish educational environment would have a transformative impact on the Israeli educational system.”

same is not unknown to educators. Your Israeli teacher shaliach should not be committed to doing the same old, same old. On the other hand, change is often encouraged, but rejected as impractical, not feasible, etc. Challenge your Israeli teacher to overcome, but provide the resources, the back up and the organizational support to optimize the possibilities for success. Two months to adjust, one month to decide on a challenge in collaboration with a group of staff and parents and then allocating resources and

Many of them have additional experience in national service frameworks or in the IDF. They are far more aware and open to pluralistic Judaism than previous generations. They are knowledgeable, committed to the field of education and amenable to training.

During the course of my shlichut I had discussions with prominent people in the above mentioned teachers colleges. The idea of creating programs in their universities to train teacher-shlichim for day

school work was enthusiastically endorsed.

The reasons for the enthusiastic response are important to understand. They reflect their sober analysis of and commitment to the importance of Jewish peoplehood in the 21st century. They reflect an understanding that a training program would lead to future educational collaboration and be a special track for outstanding students. Additionally, they believe that a steady return of Israeli educators exposed to a pluralistic Jewish world and educational environment would, over time, have a transformative impact on the Israeli educational system.

Some of the indicators of just how serious and attuned these institutions are can be found in their suggestions for creating three year training programs:

- developing appropriate curricula in conjunction with American advisory boards
- requiring participation in Jewish camp experiences
- visiting day schools in advance to diminish the adjustment time for future teachers
- above all, training a candidate pool from which the day schools would be completely sovereign to choose their teachers

When we broached the idea to educators, principals and Jewish leaders in the US there was a generally positive response. Here were some of their main questions and our answers.

1. *Is this program a fast track to yeridab?* Possibly for some, but there is reason to believe that this would not be the trend given the profile of the teachers. The experience of the Jewish Agency with shlichim in their 20s is instructive. The vast majority of them return to Israel. A well designed training program and long term commitment

would influence candidates to choose based on their core values.

2. *Would these people have enough experience to be effective teachers?* Although as in any hiring there is an element of risk, all of these candidates have had a great deal of practical classroom training including working as full-fledged teachers in their last year of university. Also, many of them came through programs for national service, IDF teacher programs and youth movements. Their



The combination of the authentic Israeli capable of presenting an alternative while respecting the local US institution can prove to be elusive.

educational resumes are impressive. Their life experiences and teacher training are far more diverse and substantive than the average US college graduate.

3. *Isn't this a long program for teachers who will work for a short time in a US school?* Based on our discussions with potential candidates, we believe that it is reasonable to contract for three to four years with an option for a school to end the arrangement after one year. If a school/community were to enter into a long term arrangement with one of the teacher colleges in Israel, future teachers would be chosen from a known and trusted candidate pool, thus mitigating some of the issues of turnover. A long term sustainable relationship between a consortium of schools/communities and several teacher colleges in Israel could only benefit all of the involved parties.
4. *They can speak Hebrew, but can they teach it?* Teacher colleges in Israel were willing to offer specific training for students to prepare them for the challenge of teaching Hebrew to non-native speakers. They saw the

opportunity to provide native Hebrew speakers appropriately trained to teach Hebrew in the Diaspora as a worthy educational challenge. An organization like Hebrew at the Center, dedicated to revitalizing and professionalizing Hebrew teaching, is known and recognized in Israel.

Conclusion

My understanding is that many principals and schools would like more excellent Israeli teachers who would fill the role

of true shlichim and return home to the homeland at the end of their tenure, while being capable of adapting and contributing to a pluralistic Jewish world. These young teachers would add authenticity, vitality and creative spirit to their schools.

This is the time to begin to create the connections and the programs so that soon a new breed of Israeli teachers can begin to transform Israel education in North American day schools and to serve as a force in bringing pluralistic Judaism to the Israeli school system.

The Israeli educational system is in need of change. Teacher training will be a key component in that process. Jewish day schools are in need of better Hebrew teaching along with authentic, attuned, charismatic Israeli teachers who can provide cognitive content and experiential Israel engagement to the pluralistic Jewish communities of the US.

The challenges are not insignificant, but the potential for a positive educational impact on Jewish day schools and the Israeli educational system is real and worth exploring. I was taught that if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. Who will take up the challenge? ■

Toward a Pluralistic Form of Peoplehood

■ by **SHLOMI RAVID**

Dedicated to Gary Tobin z"l

ONE of the most revolutionary paradigmatic changes Judaism has experienced in modern days is the introduction of pluralism as a core constitutive value. Some may see this as one of the greatest achievements of modern day Judaism expressing the true nature of the old faith. Others may believe it is sacrilegious and poses the greatest danger to the Jewish future. Still others will claim that the clash between modernity and Judaism simply left no choice but to adopt a pluralistic approach. All of them would agree that it would not be possible to explain current day Judaism without employing the pluralistic category.

The main challenge of the introduction of the pluralistic approach is that while it allows for significantly different religious perspectives, it erodes at the premise of Jewish commonality which provided the basis for feeling part of the Jewish collective. To put it bluntly, religion in modern days seems to have created more divisiveness and antagonism between Jews than a sense of unity. This, to be sure, is expected as at the core are fundamental beliefs and existential perceptions. Nonetheless, the challenge of sustaining a sense of being part of one people, sharing a past and a future has become ever more complicated.

The growing interest we have been witnessing in the notion of peoplehood in recent years is, in my opinion, an attempt at sustaining a sense of Jewish unity in a Jewishly pluralistic world. Because the essence of peoplehood is the collective dimension of Jewish existence, it is very well poised to contain the different modes of being a contemporary Jew. Peoplehood seeks to engage Jews in the conversation about the Jewish enterprise (Kaplan framed it as their “civilization”), regardless of their religious Jewish affiliation, or lack of it as is the case for most Israeli Jews. It seeks to provide a sense of joint responsibility and concern for hareidim, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular Jews. Peoplehood is the space where they can come to discuss what they share beyond their particular religious differences. Peoplehood transcends the national and ethnic dimensions of Judaism and has respect for all forms of Jewish life throughout the globe.

In a sense, peoplehood takes the question of *what can Jews in modern times have in common* beyond the religious domain. Intellectually it is an attempt to revisit questions Ahad Ha’am, Kaplan and others grappled with a century ago, which has been interrupted by the Holocaust and then by the utopian aspirations to “solve

the Jewish problem” that came with the Zionist enterprise. The current reality of a weaker and growingly divided Jewish world brings new urgency to the task of reinterpreting what Jewish peoplehood



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can mean. Just like pluralism became a cornerstone of the modern Jewish scene, the meaning of being part of a people needs to be carved by modern Jews so as to fit the current and emerging paradigms.

The challenge, then, is not whether peoplehood and pluralism can co-exist. If they are to complement each other in shaping a sustainable model that allows for a plurality of individual religious expressions, yet still within the framework of a collective identity, the nature and substance of that identity needs to be figured out. While pluralistic in its approach, Jewish peoplehood is in search of a substance that will make it a relevant and meaningful framework for Jews in modern time.

The twentieth century thinkers grappling with the notion of connecting Jews in a modern pluralistic paradigm pointed to four unique assets Jews have that could provide the building blocks of modern-day peoplehood. Ahad Ha’am suggested that the Jewish **ethical heritage and sensitivity** could turn the modern Jewish people into a global universal ethical avant-garde. Both he and Kaplan saw the

role **Jewish culture** can play in the development of a religiously pluralistic **Jewish civilization**. Soloveitchik pointed to the **covenant of fate** and **covenant of faith** which links all Jews, whether they be religious, irreligious, or non-religious. If we add to those the emergence of **Israel** as the modern experiment in Jewish sovereignty, we are looking at a fairly rich base for conversation and collaboration upon which a significant and meaningful Jewish peoplehood can be built.

These pillars provide only a schematic list upon which to build the concept of peoplehood. How to fill that scheme with content, relevant to this generation, is the real challenge of the day. The decision of what form of ethical commitment— is it Tikkun Olam and what do we actually mean by it?—is the role of the next generation. What will a covenant of fate and covenant of faith mean and what place the notion of Jewish civilization will take in modern identity are also to be defined by them. The role of educators here is to raise the questions and lead the conversation so they achieve the goal of

reinterpreting what can make being part of our people relevant and significant.

This role is not to be underestimated. Part of the problem of developing a vibrant sense of peoplehood is that we were caught by surprise. What used to be developed effortlessly

What this requires of educators, many of whom are products of this paradigm themselves, is first and foremost their own grappling with the questions as well as their own interpretations of what Jewish peoplehood can and should mean. This is not to enforce their views on their students, but to



The growing interest we have been witnessing in the notion of peoplehood in recent years is, in my opinion, an attempt at sustaining a sense of Jewish unity in a Jewishly pluralistic world.

without a need of a distinct pedagogy, partly as a result of the unique existential Jewish situation, does not seem to work anymore. The sense of belonging to a global people in a free world where most Jews are equal citizens of their countries is no longer bred intuitively. It now requires justification before it can be taught. It also conflicts with contemporary trends of individualism on the one hand and universalism on the other.

frame the questions and engage students in a significant conversation. This task, which we are only beginning to understand as it unfolds, is extremely complicated, and winning the day is by no means certain. However, if we are not successful in inspiring the conversation about a pluralistic and vibrant sense of peoplehood, we risk losing the basis for our collective conversation altogether. ■



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Can Pluralistic Schools Accommodate Everyone?

■ by **MICHAL MUSZKAT-BARKAN**

WHEN a Jewish day school defines itself as a “pluralistic school,” it means that its ideology entails legitimacy to various Jewish lifestyles and attitudes. This appreciation of the plurality of the Jewish culture might be expressed in admissions and staffing, as well as in curricular and co-curricular choices.



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One important question faced by a pluralistic school is: how can a school hold a pluralistic agenda and at the same time have a strong educational and cultural identity?

At a recent conference on pluralistic Jewish education in the summer of 2009 (sponsored jointly by Hebrew Union College Jerusalem and the Melton Center for Jewish Education at Hebrew University), Dr. Michael Marmor and I discussed three principles of pluralistic Jewish education. Together, these principles offer a way to grapple with this central question.

In our paper we suggested that three key principles of pluralistic Jewish education are:

- A positive approach to plurality in Jewish culture;
- A quest for a Jewish identity which is both self-reflective and dynamic; and
- A conscious sense of connection to communal frameworks.

A positive approach to plurality is based on an acceptance of the pluralistic nature of reality. It insists that there are multiple aspects of the human experience, and different ways by which we learn and express our identities as individuals within cultures. This is not only a philosophical or theoretical understanding of human reality. This approach can affect the way Jewish content is prioritized, interpreted and taught. Pluralism does not mean passively tolerating differences but appreciating of nuances and diversity as legitimate (although sometimes competing) truth claims. The second principle is **the quest for identity**. Pluralistic Jewish education should aim not only to introduce the variety of Jewish options but to encourage deep understanding and commitment to Jewish life. In terms of the individual, we strive for a **Jewish identity which is both self-reflective and dynamic**.

Self-reflective and dynamic Jewish identity cannot be a result of only intellectual exposure to the variety within Jewish culture. It requires a vivid personal encounter with plurality. Having a culturally diverse student body is not always easy in terms of class discus-

sions and decisions. At the same time, this situation can be perceived as promoting a deep understanding not only of the other, but also of the self. Encountering Jewish culture together can lead to constant re-

flection and re-examination of one's own beliefs and actions, and those of the other. Such understanding might be enhanced if this group comprising different individuals explores what they have in common and what distinguishes each one of them.

The third principle may seem less obvious than the first two, and it invites the school to offer students a **conscious sense of belonging to communal frameworks**. This is a basic human and Jewish principle that has guided Jewish life during past generations and continues to guide it. It can be perceived as threat to individual freedom. How can the school maintain a variety of competing Jewish practices? Should one lifestyle or one approach to practice be enforced on the entire school community? If a day school gives up the desire to educate for a Jewish lifestyle, Jewish studies will become a component that students learn about but not practice as a community. What are the legitimate decisions that can be taken in order to create a strong educational ‘platform’ for the development of students as people and as Jews?

Containing a plurality of Jewish voices within the school can lead to curiosity to

the different ways in which Jewish life is lived in the Jewish world as well as in the school's community. Yet accommodating any Jewish voice into the school might potentially create two serious difficulties for Jewish education. It might create a culture of shallowness and lead towards "a bit of everything" without enough seriousness about anything.

The other difficulty is relativism, or giving up the quest for truth, and weakening of the cultural identity. I believe that it is possible for a school to maintain a pluralistic spirit while stating clearly the philosophy of Judaism which it espouses.

Indeed, it might be to a school's advantage to state that its pluralism leads to a collaborative search for

“Self-reflective and dynamic Jewish identity cannot be a result of only intellectual exposure to the variety within Jewish culture. It requires a vivid personal encounter with plurality.”

Jewish identity. At the same time, parents (and their children) should also know that if they think differently than a school's decision, their view will be respected and discussed, even though the school maintains its position.

Jewish practices in pluralistic schools need to enable every student and teacher in the school the opportunity to strengthen their own Jewish identity and at the same time to appreciate others' identity as well. In order to achieve this balance a school needs to set its boundaries.

Mediating conflicting interests and views may require drawing a line and deciding what is and is not acceptable within the school. This discussion, in which the school professionals and stakeholders as well as parents and students should participate, may yield a fruitful dialogue. Pluralism in Jewish education is about Jewish plurality, identity and community—good foundations for an educational approach, in general.

In summary, the challenge of pluralistic Jewish education is to balance inclusiveness and the distinctive culture of a school community. Community day schools may try to accommodate the entire Jewish community. However, promoting one principle of pluralistic Jewish education, the principle of accepting plurality, requires attention to the other two principles I propose—the quest for identity and the conscious sense of belonging to communal frameworks. Using these principles, the great opportunity and challenge of Jewish education can be met in the spirit of *Klal Yisrael*, accepting diversity and at the same time strengthening individual and communal Jewish identity. ■

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Taking a Lap for the Jews: Pluralism at a Community Jewish High School

■ by **BRUCE POWELL**

Roee is fast; indeed, he is very fast. Most importantly for our discussion of pluralism, Roe is a fast Jew.

As a tenth grader, Roe could sprint 800 meters (the metric half mile) in about two minutes. Some of us remember Glenn Cunningham who is regarded by many as the greatest of early American runners. Glenn ran the mile in about 4 minutes. Roe was about that fast at the age of fifteen.



Dr. Bruce Powell is Head of School at New Community Jewish High School in West Hills, California. He can be reached at BPowell@faculty.ncjhs.org.

Roe entered New Community Jewish High School (NCJHS) in the tenth grade. He had originally enrolled for grade 9 in a local public high school where he knew he could run for a serious high school track team. By the end of ninth grade, he realized that the public school might have a great track program, but he needed something more; he needed a place of Jewish community, Jewish values, and solid academics. He also knew that not only did NCJHS lack a track team, but that all meets took place on Shabbat and that it would be impossible for him to continue his track career as a representative of our school, even if we were to field a team.

Tenth grade went very well for Roe. He earned top grades, blended beautifully into the culture and values at NCJHS, and made some life-long friends. Roe had asked us if he could run for our school on Shabbat, and our answer at that time was no. He accepted the decision. Yet, something was still missing. After all, Roe still loved to run. He joined our cross country team—we won the league title that year. But, as wonderful as the team was, it still did not match the thrill of seriously tough competition in his main sport, the 800 meter sprint.

By eleventh grade, Roe had grown into a thoughtful, insightful young man with a continued passion both for running and for Judaism. In the early fall of his eleventh grade year, Roe approached me and asked if we might consider allowing him to pioneer our first-ever track team. Of course, the challenge of Shabbat remained, but I agreed to consider his request. Following our meeting, Roe's father called and suggested a meeting to discuss Roe's request. His father is a passionate, pluralistic Jew, and a professor of education at a major university in Los Angeles. This was beginning to get very interesting.

I decided to query the three rabbis on our staff (trained as Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox) about the idea of convening a rabbinic council to hear Roe's case and allowing him to bring his father as "special counsel." Our rabbis thought this was a fabulous opportunity to teach the halachic process as it might evolve at a Jewish community high school, and to engage a serious student and serious Jew in an important discussion about life, Judaism, ritual observance, and values.

What the rabbis could not know was how this meeting would change all of our lives.

A week later the meeting was set.

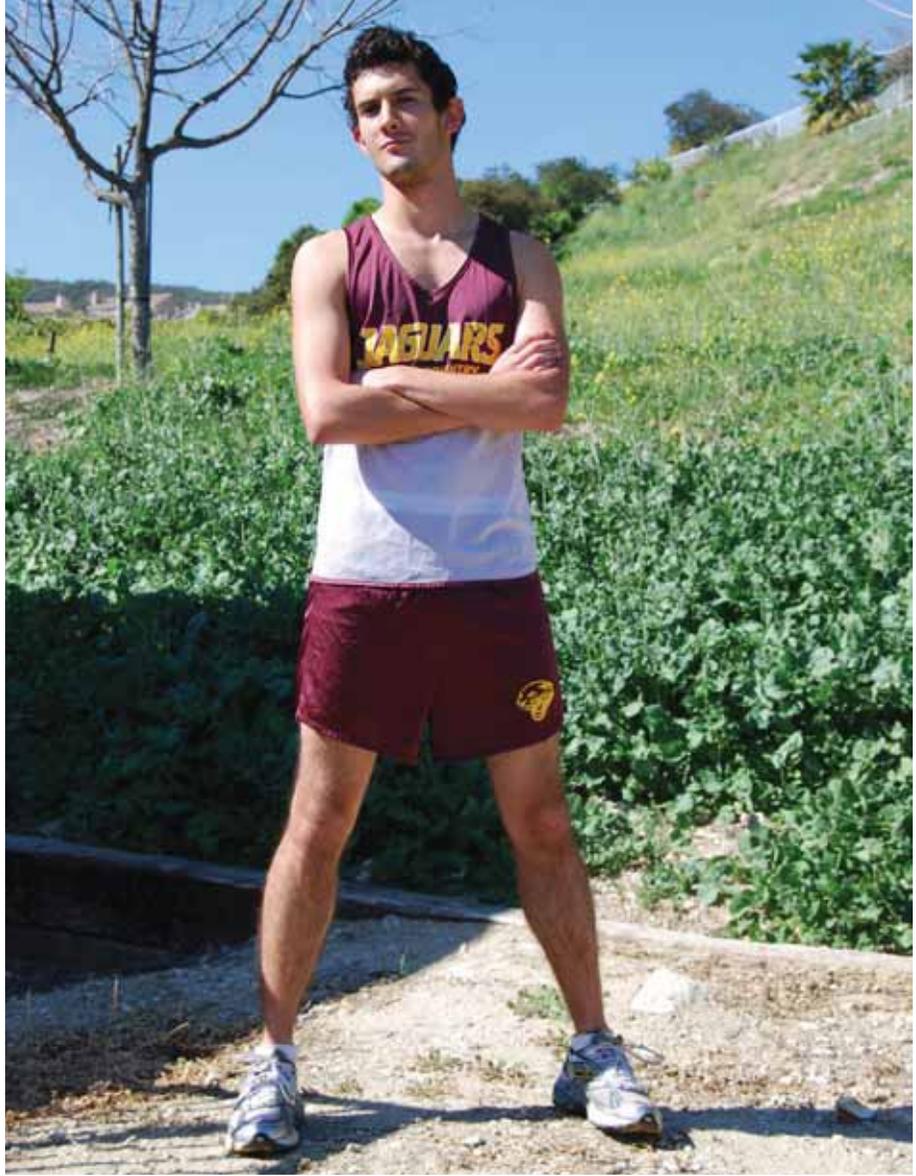
Roe's father, Dr. Ron Astor, opened the meeting with an eloquent statement of Jewish pluralism. He outlined for our council that, as a community school, we have an obligation to serve all of our Jewish students and to engage all of their views into our decision-making process. He asked pointed questions as to why his family's Jewish choices were any less "Jewish" than those made by more Jewishly traditional students. He



outlined the Jewish identification of his family through day-school attendance, synagogue affiliation, support for Israel, engagement in the Maccabiah Games, careful attention to the laws of *leshon hara*, and their general commitment to *mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro*. He even suggested that non-halakhic Jewish observance is no less Jewish than those who select halakhic practice. And, if we are true to our pluralistic ideals, shouldn't those ideals embrace Reform practice and its vision of choice, as well? Aren't we imposing an Orthodox halakhic position within the context of a pluralistic Jewish high school? As a knowledgeable Jew, Dr. Astor cited sources, Jewish history, and the evolution of Jewish culture and civilization to strengthen his points.

Roe spoke next.

He explained that on a recent trip to Europe, he and his family stopped in Munich. He had learned of the massacre of our eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games and this history engendered in him a deep need to reach out over time to those murdered by the terrorists. He was allowed to enter the Olympic track stadium where he decided to run around the track in memory of the eleven fallen athletes. Roe explained that, as he ran, he developed a strong *kavanah*, almost prayer-like in its intensity, repeating to himself as he ran, "I am here; I am strong; I am a Jew; I am running for my fellow ath-



letes; and we cannot be defeated." Roe ran eleven laps, one for each of the fallen. He explained that, even after lap eleven, he could not stop. He ran for two hours. He told the rabbis, "That day, I ran for the Jewish people."

Roe continued. The family trip included stops at several former Nazi concentration camps. At each camp, Roe described a similar scene. He ran around each camp with complete *kavanah*, remembering the six million, and repeating his mantra, "I am here; I am strong; I am a Jew; I am running for those who perished; and we cannot be defeated."

Once again, Roe had taken a lap for the Jews.

Finally, Roe explained that sometimes running on Shabbat is how he "does Jew-

ish." It is both for memory and for focused intentionality.

At the end of Roe's centered and self-reflective oration, there was a sacred silence in my office. The rabbis were silent; Roe's father was silent; and within that silence one could hear the movement of boundaries. Jewish pluralism at New Community Jewish High School was, within that silence, defined anew.

Roe and his father left the office. The rabbis, athletic director, and I remained. Unanimously, the rabbis voted to allow Roe to "take a lap" as a representative of our Jewish high school. Roe and his family agreed to take lodging near the site of track meets, move in on Friday afternoons, celebrate Shabbat in their family's tradition, walk to the track stadium on Shabbat, and remain

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 66]



Four Years Later: The Influence of Pluralism on High School Students

■ by **Susan Shevitz**

As with other philosophies, competing claims are made about the effects and suitability of pluralism as an approach to Jewish education. Some people enumerate its potential to shape students who will be at home in Jewish tradition and prepared to determine their beliefs and practices as well as to understand and respect divergent ideas and beliefs; others, just as passionately, assert that pluralism leads to relativism and confusion. In order to understand just what effects pluralism has on adolescents, I studied a group of students enrolled in an intentionally pluralist day high school when they were freshmen and, again, when they were seniors. During the freshman year the school, which I am calling Tikhon, socializes its students into its view of pluralism. By the end of the senior year these same students reflected on their understanding of what pluralism is and how it has influenced them.¹ This article discusses some of what we learned.

In the Beginning

It is a warm day towards the end of summer as eighty-five freshmen gather to meet each other and the educators who will be integral to their lives over their four years at Tikhon. Amid the ice-breakers, getting-to-know-you and community building activities the faculty has skillfully planned sessions to begin to introduce students to Tikhon's expectations, ethos and to the educational approaches that characterize the school.

Pluralism is hardly on the students' radar. As with any group of adolescents, they are concerned with the pressing questions: Will I fit in? Who will my friends be? What is the school going to expect of me? What do I need to know to get started? Will I

succeed? As we are to learn later, students don't know what pluralism is and it was not a factor in their enrollment at Tikhon (although some of the parents were more knowledgeable and committed to it). They think that it "encompasses all



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denominations of Judaism so that we live together under one roof" and believe that they have to "get along with each other," "accept everyone," and "interact with others regardless of difference." In reality, the school's understanding of pluralism is far more ambitious.

The teachers, assisted in the orientation by some upperclassmen, quickly begin to lay the groundwork for Tikhon's particular orientation to pluralism. First is hevruta learning, something that the students will experience throughout their years at the school. Hevruta is a traditional Jewish approach to text study in which pairs carefully investigate the material together before it is explicated through some kind of whole group discussion. The Bible teacher leading the text study lays out rules:

- "You have to be open to learning, to really looking at the text and listening to your hevruta partner carefully."
- "Everyone has responsibility for exploring the text."

1. In 2005/06 Rachel Wasserfall PhD and I were participant observers of Tikhon's ninth grade. I returned in Spring 2009 to assess how students understood and were affected by pluralism. In addition to an analysis of documents the students wrote before graduation, students filled out surveys and helped to analyze the findings, participated in discussions of cases of dilemmas about pluralism and were led in structured discussions about their views about pluralism.

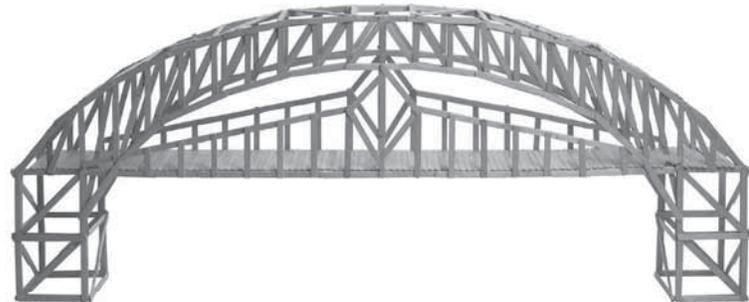
- “You have to be supportive of your hevruta; it might be a challenging time for him or her.”
- “There are always multiple interpretations that are supported by the text.”
- The teacher is signaling some values that are key to Tikhon’s approach to pluralism. As orientation proceeds, several themes recur.
- Tension between the needs of the community-as-a-whole and of the individuals and groups within it is part of Tikhon’s ongoing reality;
- There are multiple views of texts and phenomena and these viewpoints influence action;
- Recognition of others’ differences is essential;
- Compromises that support different groups’ sensibilities are to be found;
- The school “pushes students” by asking them to explain their positions;
- Students are to be responsible for their own experiences and the school will be responsive to their voices;
- Sensitivity to others’ religious, intellectual and emotional lives is required.

Where Pluralism Is Experienced

During the next four years, students will experience several settings in which pluralism is explicitly modeled and probed. Among them are the “pluralism labs” in which different approaches to Jewish life are explored, multiple (but mandatory) prayer service options, experiential programs such as shabbatonim and trips in which the students have to figure out how to be a pluralist community, classes that look at alternative approaches to Jewish texts, and the school’s hallmark “De-Bate Midrash” format for probing different approaches to real problems in a way that promotes argumentation, listening, openness to new ideas and opportunities to change positions as this information is presented.

Other expressions of Tikhon’s pluralism are more subtle. They are embedded in its policies and programs. The mix of teachers, range of speakers who address the student body, types of trips available, ways that prayer, kashrut and other observances are handled, and much else reinforce the school’s commitment to its view of pluralism. If effectively enacted, pluralism will permeate the school’s culture and become a powerful lens through which to see the world.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 34]



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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33]

Exposure to divergent ideas came through students' social networks. Almost all (98%) of the class of 2009 maintained friendships with people with different religious outlooks; almost half of these students say that they "always" had friends with different views. About two thirds of the students discussed the religious differences with their friends at least some of the time. But, as high school students, "just chillin' with friends" and engaging in activities together is what many of them valued.

The teaching staff, consisting of people with a wide range of perspectives and backgrounds, has an important role in stimulating and supporting religious as well as intellectual growth. They are role models who are available to talk about their own religious values and experiences. Over 70% of the seniors report that they had close personal relationships with teachers who had religious approaches that are different than their own. About a quarter of the students always had such relationships and about 30% often had them. This allows students to see role models who represent, with integrity, very different views of Jewish life and who could help students sort through their concerns.

I am in no way about to put on a black hat and grow a black beard, but my class with Rabbi Zalman was one of the few times where I really thought I was experiencing a Jewish viewpoint different from my own. It greatly helped me "pick and choose" from Judaism.

Some Changes in Beliefs and Practices

Students did more than see and discuss religious diversity. Their beliefs about Judaism—more than their practices—have changed over the four years at Tikhon. About 58% report that their beliefs have changed somewhat or a lot while 35% say the same thing about their practices. When asked more specifically about their experimentation with religious practices, however, we learn that about 70% experi-

mented with more traditional forms of being Jewish (8% always, 23% often and 42% sometimes experimented) and a similar number experimented with less traditional forms: 10% always, 16% often and 43% sometimes experimented. One person characterized this as "my roller coaster ride!" The experimentation sometimes led to a new religious self-definition and eclecticism, such as a student from a non-traditional background wearing tzitzit or a going to—and liking, much to his surprise—the mechitzah minyan in which men and women sit separately and women do not take liturgical roles. Among observances students report are dressing more modestly, observing Shabbat, "taking more personal responsibility," saying the Shma every day, and "being more of a Jewish activist."

I am aware more in day-to-day life about my Judaism, desire to be more observant, more thoughtful about different ways of being an observant Jew.

Other students wrote about questioning the halakhic system while still being attracted by ritual practices.

I have a deeper understanding about the importance of communal ritual and how it helps one find their niche in a society.

Students who moved towards less traditional practice say they have become "less strict," "developed my own scale of kashrut (not my par-

ents')," "do what I want (but still do), not bound by Halakhah." Some students claim they moved from being agnostic to believing in God, others from belief to agnosticism. Being in an environment where they see alternative beliefs and actions stimulates reflection.

My exposure to many different Jewish beliefs has caused me to really reflect on what I believe about Judaism.

Tikhon pushes students to raise questions and define their own positions while realizing that their positions might very well change over time, as well as seeing alternative positions and actions. This strengthens many students' beliefs.

My beliefs have not changed, but the reasons which drive these beliefs have in my mind become more mature and valid.

The pieces of Judaism that attract me are those I find meaningful to ME, not those that someone else tells me are supposed to be meaningful or important.

This theme of personal autonomy is developmentally appropriate at this stage of life. For many Tikhon students questions of autonomy—"What do I believe and do as opposed to what my family does?"—focus on religious life.

MOVEMENT (SELF-IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS)	ON ENTRY	AT GRADUATION
Conservative	59%	48%
Reform	29	19
Non-Denominational/ Trans-Denominational	3	15
Just Jewish	5	0
Reconstructionist	2	0
Renewal	2	2
Orthodox	0	0
Other	0	16



The most pervasive aspect of pluralism that seniors talk about is the communal aspect of living productively and with integrity in a diverse community.

The biggest way my Jewish beliefs have changed is that now I am not afraid to question and critique Judaism, G-d, our traditions. I understand that part of being Jewish isn't just blind faith . . . but asking why we do certain things. My view of Torah changed in my 12th grade documentary hypothesis class. While at first I was uncomfortable with the idea, I later came to terms with it, even if I do not agree with it. I also have a greater sense of what I think G-d is.

I question more and am still unclear about my own religious beliefs.

Changes in Movement Affiliation

When they entered Tikhon, students mostly identified with the movement their family belonged to. By the time they graduated, there was a shift away from identification with a specific movement.

With Tikhon's emphasis on exploring ideas and articulating one's own point-of-view in an environment that tries to be respectful, challenging and supportive, it is not surprising that some students

move from identifying with any particular denominational movement. Where 8% of the freshman did not identify with a movement, 31% of the seniors refused denominational identities. This is consistent with general trends in American Judaism and is also the result of an education that eschews denominational boundaries and intended, at least in its early years, to prepare students who would be pioneers in efforts to transform the Jewish community. Students who answered "other" range from "traditional/egalitarian" to "agnostic" and from "secular" to "confused." The consistent message of Tikhon, that students should grapple with ideas while at the same time exploring religious options, leads many students to forge religious identities that do not neatly fit denominational definitions.

What Pluralism Means

Not surprisingly, students' understanding of pluralism matured over the four years at Tikhon. From a vague notion that it had something to do with being together with people who have different views on religious matters, their views clustered around several points.

There is a cognitive component to Tik-

hon's pluralism. Pluralism requires, in a student's words, "knowledge of what I think and the ability to justify it while at the same time recognizing what others' think—and their justifications." They come to see multi-vocalism as part of classical Jewish texts as well as contemporary experiences.

The seniors also express an interpersonal component that is, for some of them, the most important aspect of being in a school that values and works with diversity: "I have learned to be sensitive and try to understand others' viewpoints, especially around sensitive issues," and "I am learning how to question myself and others and work together towards a common goal."

The most pervasive aspect of pluralism that seniors talk about is the communal aspect of living productively and with integrity in a diverse community. Seniors describe times they or their friends did something to allow or enhance others' practice, such as making the minyan in the mechitzah minyan so someone could say Kaddish or becoming more sensitive to how they talk about religion to people with different views. They acknowledge

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 65]

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Pluralism Redefined: Transitioning from One Model of Pluralism to Another

■ by **LILLIAN HOWARD**

As a Jewish community high school named after the very concept of community (kehillah means community in Hebrew), Kehillah Jewish High School defines and identifies itself as a pluralistic school. Since the school's opening in 2002, we understood pluralism in terms of the breadth and depth of our community. We wanted to open our community to as wide a spectrum of Jewish students as possible, educating them in Jewish traditions, texts, and practices. We debated and eventually decided on a Jewish studies curriculum, put policies relating to observance and ritual in place, and actively sought out diversity, in personnel, in ideas, and in programming.

Two years ago, we set out to take our approach to pluralism to the next level with the underlying goal of increasing the school's enrollment. We found that despite our initial planning, a lack of clarity about pluralism was the topic of ongoing conversations around our school's identity and programming. We found ourselves revisiting the same issues in an attempt to satisfy competing viewpoints; we spent a lot of time spinning. We also recognized that this perceived lack of clarity surrounding our identity as a pluralistic Jewish school was working counter to our recruitment efforts.

We formed a task force of faculty and administrators from across departments and years of service to look at our identity as a pluralistic school. How did our application of the notion of pluralism enhance or limit our community? How did our approach to pluralism play out in our Jewish studies curriculum and our experiential and Jewish life programming?

Our task force met every few weeks off-site for half-day retreats. We reflected on who we are and who we wanted to be. We surveyed students, parents, and community members, and worked with our board of directors to review our mission. We researched the practice of pluralism at other Jewish high schools nationwide, met with educational leaders, and spent significant time looking at how best to support the process of identity formation for teens, perhaps the primary task of high school students. We reviewed our curriculum across Jewish and general studies and looked at how our classes, activities, and programs enlivened pluralism.

We soon discovered that the concept of shalom bayit best described the way we understood pluralism within our school community up to that time. We quite literally

worked to make and keep peace in our house, the Kehillah community, striving to make peace from our differences. We wanted each community member to feel comfortable here as they expressed their identity as Jews within the well-defined perspectives of the major Jewish affiliations and movements. Our Jewish studies curriculum strove to engage these varying perspectives through traditional text study and teaching the knowledge and skills that define being Jewishly knowledgeable.



Lillian Howard is Head of School at Kehillah Jewish High School in Palo Alto, California. She can be reached at lhoward@kehillah.org.

We discovered that our community, while striving to find comfort from our differing perspectives, focused proudly on the process of debating. This is not surprising as this is intrinsic to the shalom bayit model where striving to make peace assumes an inherent disagreement. Indeed, in the rabbinic tradition of Hillel and Shammai, we as Jews elevate the process of disagreement to something positive and holy. *Machloket* (holy argument) defined the process by which we made communal decisions while it taught our students the skills of analytic and critical thinking. Although we never overtly identified the process of communal participation as *machloket*, debating and the impassioned presentation of one's views colored communal participation and decision-making.

We also discovered that we did a lot of

counting, always aware of the number of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and unaffiliated Jews in our study body, our faculty, and on our board. Our task force questioned the reasoning behind having these numbers in the forefront. We recognized that they served as a proof point of our school achieving its mission as a pluralistic school. Yet we also found that this identification could work counter to our mission as our community members often understood their roles to be ones of individual advocacy for their own way of being Jewish.

This emphasis on individual advocacy in conjunction with our valuing of the process of disagreement often failed to serve our community well. It necessitated an inherent evaluation of positions, a judgment that belied the message central to the rabbinic debates of Hillel and Shammai, that there is more than one way to be holy or right. Some of our community members felt that they needed strongly to present and defend their views concerning all manner of school activities, from the definition of kashrut to what it means to be Jewishly knowledgeable. Although there certainly was a plurality of views, we wondered if this was the most effective way to live our mission and guide our Jewish teens to developing and affirming their identity as Jews.

After nearly a year of work together, our task force and board committed to ensuring that pluralism at Kehillah was based on the recognition of the validity of multiple Jewish perspectives. We agreed that we needed to re-envision the model upon which we built our pluralistic school community, moving from *shalom bayit* (making peace in the house) to *b'niyat bayit* (building the house together). The emphasis shifted from the individual to the community in many ways.

We now focus on communal advocacy and

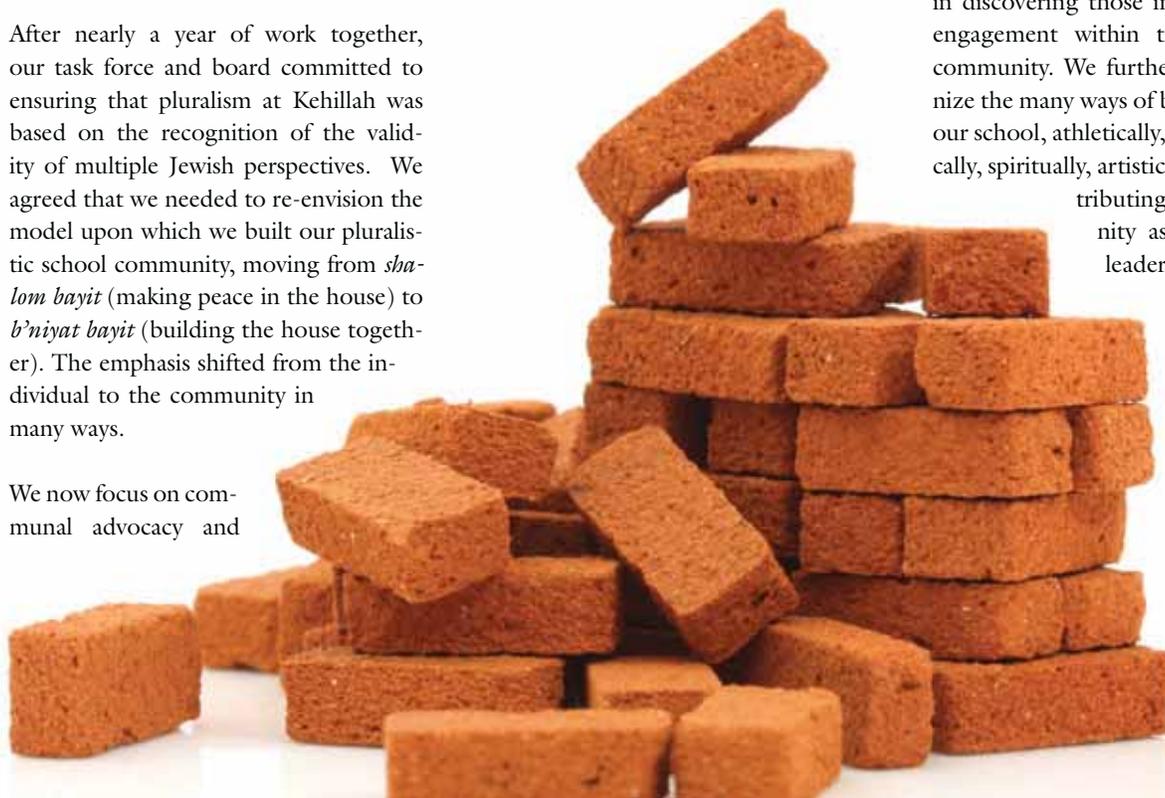
drashah (exploration of views) as a means to establish and support our community and communal standards. We are together building and sustaining our kehillah while accepting the views (and identities) of one another as inherently valid. The evaluation intrinsic to a pluralism that comes from making peace from difference has been replaced by a validation of the perspectives of all, a sense of belonging that is requisite for success. For only within a community that accepts a student's identity can that student take the risks necessary for true learning.

Our goal of valuing the identity and perspective of each community member has reached into all aspects of our school community. Our former mandatory sequence of Jewish text courses (Bible I, Bible II, Rabbinics I, Rabbinics II, Jewish History, etc.) has evolved into a wide range of options (Sefer Bereishit, The Origins of Human Violence, The Books of Ruth and Jonah, A Jewish Approach to Interpersonal Ethics, Judaism in the Environment, History of Zionism and Israel, The Experience of the Classical Prophet, The Ethics of Life and Death, etc.). Students can choose which Jewish studies course to take each semester from courses that are designed to connect students to their Jewish identities in different ways; while some emphasize

classical textual analysis, others use ethics, culture, Israel, history or science as the connection point. Pluralism no longer means students with differing Jewish identities learning classical Jewish text together, but students exploring through open dialogue aspects of Judaism that engage them.

Likewise, we have increased choice within our language department. While we had required three years of Hebrew for all students, we now require one year of Hebrew and 2-3 years of a language (Hebrew, Spanish, French, or Latin). While Hebrew language is an important aspect of Jewish identity for many of our students, it is not the connection point for others. Our redefining of pluralism affirms that there are many ways to be an actively engaged Jewish teen (and adult), and we are working to create a community that affirms and supports these myriad paths.

The shift in our interpretation of pluralism has brought our community together in palpable ways. Our board and staff in a joint committee worked side by side to create a new school image and accompanying materials emphasizing our focus on a student's individual journey through our community. Our faculty work closely with our students in a newly revised advisory system to assist students in discovering those important areas of engagement within the larger school community. We further work to recognize the many ways of being successful in our school, athletically, socially, academically, spiritually, artistically, through contributing to our community as a participant or leader. We don't define one way as more meaningful or more important than another. We value them all and in doing so we value all of our students and their own individual voices. ■



Honoring Heritage, Celebrating Difference: Teaching Pluralistically in a Reform Jewish Day School

■ by MICAH LAPIDUS

WHEN it comes to Judaic studies and Jewish life on campus, every school faces a challenging balancing act between honoring Jewish heritage and celebrating Jewish difference. Honoring heritage means teaching the enduring traditions and texts of Judaism as well as Jewish history. To celebrate difference means embracing the particular stream of Judaism to which our school is connected and giving students the opportunity to analyze the significant differences that exist among these streams. Given that we live in a pluralistic world, balancing these two educational aims is necessary if our students are going to have a sense of their own Jewish identity in relation to other Jews and people of other faiths. Balancing heritage and difference is challenging because of time restraints and the nature of faculty instruction, and because honoring heritage and celebrating difference isn't only about curricular decisions but factors into the broader culture of the school.

The mission statement of the Alfred and Adele Davis Academy celebrates difference by referring to the school as “Atlanta’s K-8 Reform Jewish Day School.” However, it also accounts for honoring heritage:

The Davis Academy strives to create a community in which children develop a life-long love for learning and a commitment to Jewish life founded on morals, values, and ethics, grounded in Torah.

The Davis Academy’s mission statement reflects the balancing act between honoring heritage and celebrating difference. On the one hand, it summons us to teach Judaism in a way that honors heritage so that our students’ education is “grounded in Torah.” On the other hand, it obligates us to be a Reform Jewish Day School with particular ideological commitments, practices, and approaches to Jewish tradition. Only by balancing heritage and difference can we achieve the integrity of difference that is at the core of our school’s identity. There are times when the scales are clearly tipped in favor of honoring heritage and times when the scales are tipped the other

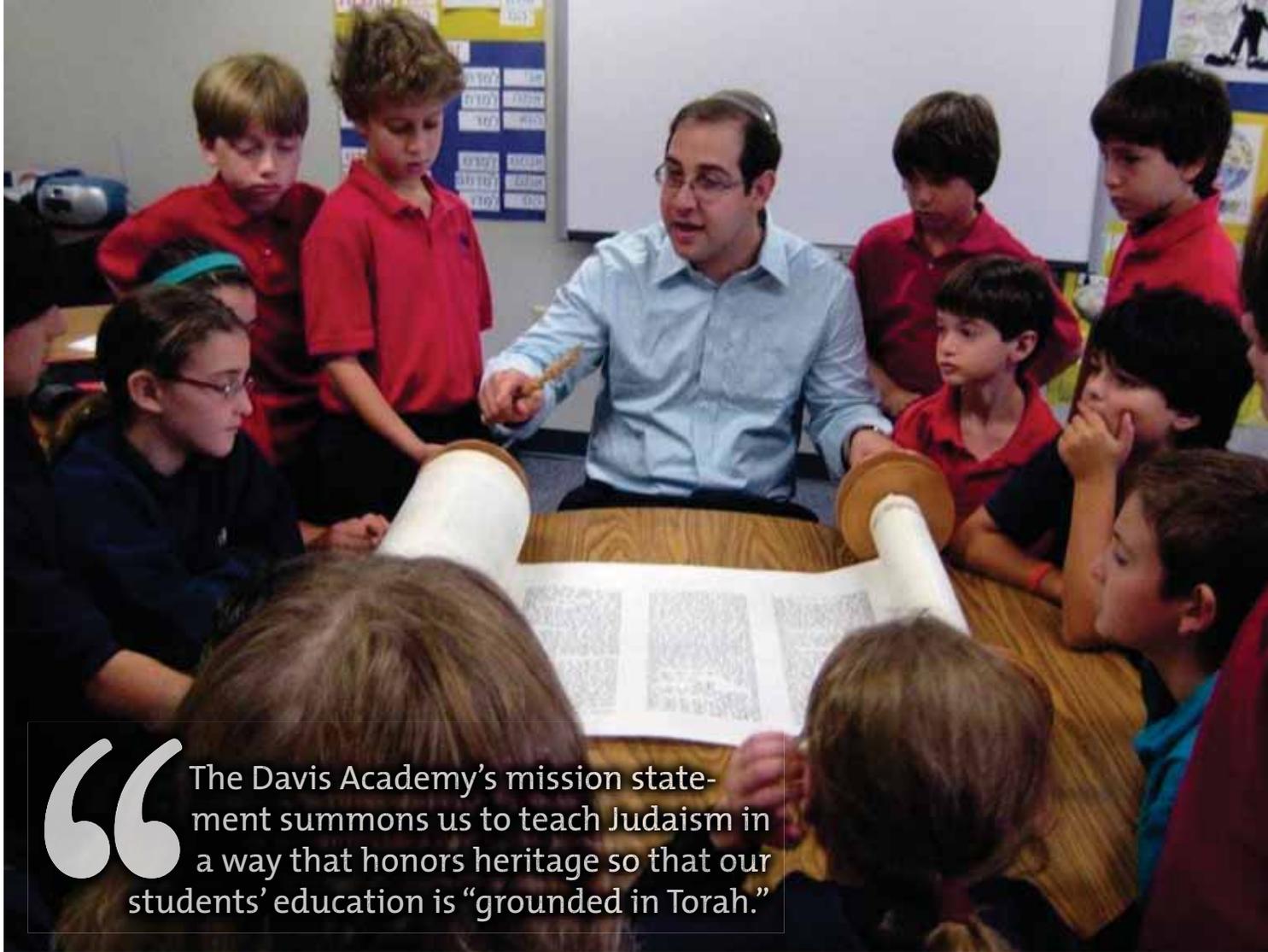
way. Our challenge as Jewish educators is to be conscious of the balance and to ensure that the dialectic between heritage and difference generates creative and reflective conversation among faculty and administration.



Rabbi Micah Lapidus is Director of Judaic and Hebrew Studies at The Alfred & Adele Davis Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. He can be reached at mlapidus@davisacademy.org.

In grades K-5 our Judaic and Hebrew Studies programs focus on honoring heritage. The Judaics curriculum covers all five books of the Torah while also teaching the basics of kashrut, tefillah, and chaggim. Through the various Hebrew language curricula we use, including Tal Am and Chaverim B'Ivrit, we give our students a foundation in Hebrew, our heritage language, and teach them all about Israel. We recognize that it is





“The Davis Academy’s mission statement summons us to teach Judaism in a way that honors heritage so that our students’ education is “grounded in Torah.”

critical for children to have a sense of Klal Yisrael and to learn about Judaism without focusing on the particular tenets of Reform Judaism.

At the same time, examples of celebrat-

ing difference abound. During tefillah and at our Friday morning Kabbalat Shabbat service our students use *Mishkan T'filah*, the siddur of the Reform Movement, chant with Reform nusach and incorporate melodies from URJ Summer Camps. At our Middle School we even have a Kabbalat Shabbat band as we try to capture the spirit of Reform Jewish camping. One of the main areas in which we celebrate difference is in our approach to Jewish ritual observance. I'll give one example: kippot.

Every year we purchase beautiful kippot for all our students emblazoned with The Davis Academy logo. Every year they magically disappear into the dark recesses of middle school lockers. As of last year every child at The Davis Academy was required to wear a kippah until their bar or bat mitzvah unless they wrote an essay explaining why they objected to the wearing of kippot. When this was the

policy our faculty struggled with the issue of enforcement. Do we send children to their lockers to find their kippot even if it means disrupting tefillah? Do we really want to write students up for dress code violations if they don't wear a kippah? If wearing a kippah is truly not meaningful to a middle school student is it disrespectful to the notion of the kippah to ask them to wear one?

This year we conducted an experiment: The Great Kippah Debate of 2009. Students met with me and together we studied a variety of arguments pertaining to kippot. We also studied the history of kippot and their place in Reform Judaism past and present. These students wrote arguments in favor *and* against the wearing of kippot and conducted a debate in front of their classmates. The goal of the debate was to create meaningful dialogue among the student body

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 67]



Pluralistic Day School Collaboration: Lessons Learned

■ by **KIM S. HIRSH**

FOR most of the past forty years, the three Jewish day schools in MetroWest, New Jersey, had little contact with one another. (“MetroWest” is the federation area covering Essex, Morris, Sussex and Northern Union counties.) Occasionally, there would be meetings among professionals, but for the most part, the Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy/Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School (Modern Orthodox), Solomon Schechter Day School of Essex and Union (Conservative), and the Hebrew Academy of Morris County (Community/RAVSAK) operated in separate spheres. Though only a short car ride apart, these three day schools might as well have been located in different parts of the country.

Four years ago, the MetroWest community began its first serious effort at collaboration. Here is what the situation looks like today:

- Teachers from the three schools come together regularly for professional development sessions within their fields of study, whether Hebrew, language arts or social studies.
- The schools’ development staffers share ideas and plan together on expanding alumni relations to build greater support and future leadership from among the schools’ graduates.
- The community’s leading day school philanthropists, day school presidents, federation leadership and others join together three times a year to oversee collaborative grant-making for the schools and study common day school challenges, such as expanding affordability and teacher retention. Last school year, in the face of the economic crisis, this group was able to grant \$100,000 in emergency scholarship funds to retain students whose parents had suffered job losses.
- Top administrators are negotiating together for a day school-university partnership to improve science education in the three schools’ middle and high schools.

Most importantly, as a community, MetroWest has experienced a shift from “my day school” to “our day school community.”

Across the country today, communities are looking to collaboration as a way to help meet the growing challenge of maintaining quality day school education amid the

need to cut costs. In MetroWest, we have found that collaboration can help our schools enhance excellence in a cost-efficient way, while simultaneously tackling the hard work of expanding affordability.



Kim S. Hirsh is Development Officer with the Jewish Community Foundation of MetroWest, the planned giving and endowment arm of United Jewish Communities of MetroWest. She can be reached at khirsh@UJCNJ.ORG.

Thus, we are asked the following questions all of the time:

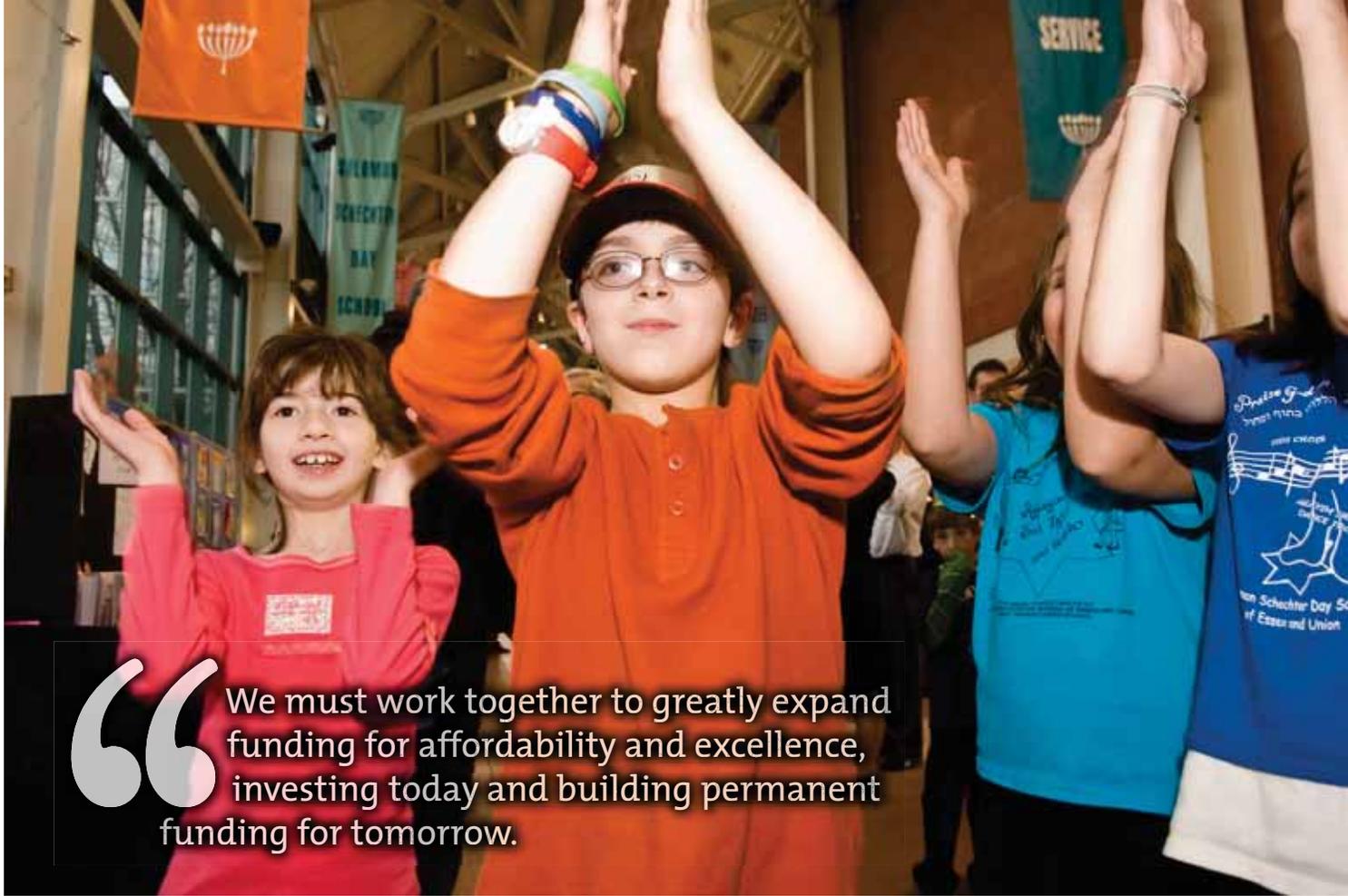
How did Modern Orthodox, Conservative, and Community day schools learn to work together on common ground?

Most importantly, what are the critical ingredients for successful collaboration that other communities should look for?

While each community must tailor collaboration based on its own make-up and interests, certain key elements would be needed in almost any area. Here are six areas that helped us lay the foundation for success to date.

Common vision: Simply put, vision drives change.

The most critical step taken early on was to gather together leading philanthropists from the three schools as well as presidents and top administrators to discuss the common challenges facing the three schools. For the most part, lay and professional leaders from the schools had never met each other before, so it was energizing simply to be in the same room, acknowledging common problems and aspirations. Representatives of United Jewish Communities of Me-



“ We must work together to greatly expand funding for affordability and excellence, investing today and building permanent funding for tomorrow.

troWest (UJC MetroWest), the local federation, as well as the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE) acted as the neutral moderators of these discussions.

At these parlor meetings and working sessions, the schools learned to share all of their critical data—enrollment histories, tuition assistance costs, annual fundraising, faculty salaries, and more. The schools found that they were more alike than different.

The walls were slowly coming down.

Together, we were able to articulate a common vision that “fired the engine” and continues to drive change today: High quality, affordable Jewish day school education is essential to ensuring a vibrant future of MetroWest and the broader American Jewish community. To achieve this, we must work together to greatly expand funding for affordability and excellence, investing today and building permanent funding for tomorrow.

Investment: If it is only professionals meeting together in a room, you won’t get very far with collaboration.

It takes more than ideas to create transformative change; it takes *tachlis*. Our vision laid the foundation of Metro West Day School Campaign, a community-wide \$50 million endowment campaign to enhance affordability and secure academic excellence in the three schools, officially launched in April 2007. A dozen donors from the three schools—representing current parents, alumni parents, alumni and grandparents, as well as UJC MetroWest—came together to establish four sets of funds: a Community Day School Fund, supporting all three schools, as well as funds for each individual school. In this way, our community could help spur collaborative change while also meeting donor interest in targeting support for individual schools. Today, about 90 donors have committed nearly \$22 million in current and future commitments (such as bequests) in all the funds combined.

Collaboration does not always require such a major investment. Over the past year, the Solomon Schechter day schools of New York and New Jersey have joined together in a marketing collaboration that required each school—or a private donor from that school—to put relatively modest contribution in a common “pot” to get things rolling. To date, these schools, coordinated by the Solomon Schechter Day School Association, have been able to hire a marketing consultant to help guide branding and use of electronic media for reaching an expanded audience.

Leadership: It is more than incidental that among 11 donor families who founded MetroWest’s collaboration were six former or current presidents of day school boards, as well as other board members and long-time volunteer leaders.

Change requires leadership—leaders who can see beyond petty differences and plan strategically for the future.

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While the Community Fund drew the participants to the table initially, today the relationship among the professional leaders is also based on mutual respect and collegiality born of shared experiences, and the relationship among the philanthropic and community leaders is based on shared pride and a vision for the future.

Commitment and hard work: Lasting change does not happen overnight. From the beginning, our partners had to understand that it would take years of dedication and hard work—and a willingness continuously to crane our necks and steer around the inevitable roadblocks along the way.

Coordination from a central, neutral party: The UJC MetroWest and its partner agencies have played the critical role of coordination, providing a neutral, trusted partner to bring the three schools together.

er. The fundraising piece is coordinated by the Jewish Community Foundation of MetroWest, the Federation’s planned giving and endowment arm. Collaborative academic programming is coordinated by The Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life, UJC MetroWest’s Jewish identity agency. A part-time day school coordinator works with school administrators and keeps plans moving forward.

Leap of faith: Even the best-laid plans have an element of uncertainty. From the beginning, we really did not know where our collaboration would lead. We just knew it felt right, and that the old way of doing business in our community was no longer good enough.

Now, the spirit of working together has developed beyond anyone’s initial expectations.

“The Community Fund has really brought the schools together,” said

Paula Gottesman, who, along with her husband, Jerry, are the leading benefactors and visionaries of MetroWest’s Day School Campaign and the resulting collaboration. A long-time supporter of day school education both locally and nationally, Paula now chairs the MetroWest Day School Advisory Council, the philanthropist-leadership group that oversees the Community Fund.

For the long term, the most important outcome is that the perspective on working together—from inside and outside the schools—has shifted. In all likelihood, there will never be a return to the old “our school alone” mentality.

“People are tied to individual schools, but their primary concern is Jewish education,” Paula Gottesman said. “The most important thing to me is that Jewish education thrives. It can only thrive if the groups cooperate. Collaboration is the only way to go.” ■



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Fundraising in a Pluralistic Setting: Helpful or Hindrance?

■ by **MARC N. KRAMER**

AT RAVSAK, we believe that being a pluralistic school is an unquestionable asset. As this issue of *HaYidion* confirms, the challenges that rise from the diversity we promote pale in comparison to the opportunities it bestows upon our students and their families. Reflective of the authentic variations within the communities we serve, RAVSAK schools are exciting laboratories for making a better Jewish life possible for our children.

While pluralism is an asset as an educational lens, is it an asset when it comes to fundraising? Does the word “pluralism” excite or confuse? Should boards, heads and development directors focus fundraising efforts on the school’s core identity or on something else entirely? Interviews with a number of development professionals in RAVSAK schools provided a wide range of answers to these important questions. The strategies proposed fit well in some settings and not in others. As you read, consider which tactics might elevate your development approach.

Place the emphasis on the school as a venue for the transmission of Jewish values and let the pluralism speak for itself.

In some community day schools, “pluralism” is a widely understood term and for key constituents, the primary reason for providing support. In many schools, however, Jewish values—specifically, their transferability to a new generation—are key. Many of the development directors interviewed stated that it is essential to focus on ideas and ideals well understood by donors, and to embed within them more abstract, aspirational concepts such as pluralism. One development director shared that she foregoes conversations about pluralism, favoring instead language such as “students will carry legacies, values and traditions of our people into the future.”

Help donors understand that pluralism is a Jewish value unto itself.

In schools where diversity and the rich conversations it invites are essential, it is vital to help those who support the school—as well as those yet to support the school!—to come to see pluralism as a value and an asset. One development professional stated that, in her school, “one of the most appealing things to donors is knowing that their gift supports all Jewish children, not just certain types of Jewish children.” An active lay leader in another school shared that he tries to engage potential donors by explaining that “our school is all about the Jewish people, all kinds of Jewish people, because acting this way is essentially Jewish.”

Continuity is more important to donors than diversity.

Another asset is that our schools ensure a vibrant Jewish future. This theme has

been reiterated countless times since the 1990 Jewish Population Study reported that the size of the Jewish community is shrinking. Whether this notion inspires action or fear varies from one person to the next; regardless, the notion of continuity still resonates for many day school



Dr. Marc N. Kramer is Executive Director of RAVSAK. He can be reached at mkramer@ravsak.org.

supporters. One of our development directors explains to her donors that “you are doing nothing less than investing in the future of our Jewish community” when you support her school.

Focus on socio-economic diversity as a subset of pluralism.

Many people understand that community day schools are “big tents” inclusive of Jews from across a wide range of religious and cultural practices. What may be more compelling to funders is an awareness that community day schools strive to include Jewish children from different economic backgrounds. Economic diversity is an essential part of a community day school’s social fabric, and this can make a compelling case for giving.

Focus on the school as the community’s school (and the community’s responsibility).

Many RAVSAK schools have a unique corner of the market within their communities: the only venue for a full-time Jewish education. This fact can be enough for many supporters; for others, the case needs to be made that the community’s

school includes children from all sectors of the local Jewish community. By explaining that the school is transforming the Jewish community, the donor can understand themselves as part of a broader goal.

Learn what your donors value and help tie their values back to pluralism.

Understanding the needs and dreams of supporters is a basic fundraising principle, one that every development professional and volunteer embraces. Some of those interviewed expressed that in a community day school, this was a start, but that long-term support for the school comes only when the donor can see the links between what matters to them most and the pluralistic nature of the school. One development director shared that she regularly uses the expressions “and that resonates here because we are pluralistic” or “as a pluralistic school, we really bring that to life.”

Learn what other schools say.

Many development professionals and volunteers said that part of what informs their messages is knowing how other community day schools frame their asks. This information helps prevent “reinventing the wheel,” but more so, it places each school in the context of community day schools across North America and beyond. RAVSAK is a useful source of this networking and knowledge. Please share your development questions, ideas and success stories with us and colleagues by sending them to Rachel Alexander, Director of Institutional Advancement, at Rachel@ravsak.org.

Key to all of these approaches, different as they may be, is to manage your message, listen to donor interests, be planful in your approach, and above all, keep your eye on the prize: the financial stability of the school. ■

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Pluralism in RAVSAK Schools

THIS issue of *HaYidion* demonstrates that pluralism can be hard to define and harder to come to consensus on. And yet, in the day to day operation of a community Jewish day school, there are no issues that seem more concrete and vital. We asked schools to share challenges they have confronted over questions of pluralism, and describe innovative programs and structures that ensure the flourishing of pluralism within their walls. Here are four.

Minyan Klal Yisrael

■ JCDS, Watertown, Massachusetts

At JCDS, we support multiple expressions of Judaism even if they are in tension. We favor language of description and open possibility and avoid prescribing Jewish belief, practice, or priorities. And yet pluralism slides easily into relativism. If many paths are legitimate, provided they're informed by meaningful Jewish learning, does it matter what a person chooses? If all paths are equally good, may one simply choose the path of least resistance? Can children make good choices in regard to their Jewish practice?

JCDS believes that the path a person chooses matters. We seek vigorous discussion and even debate about the choices. We hope to convey a sense that Jewishness is a calling and that we ought to respond to the Jewish voice that calls to us most compellingly.

Students need opportunities to engage compelling models of different modes of Jewish living. It's true that, in their teachers, the students see many different models in school. Yet, we teachers are trained not to make ourselves the curriculum. Offering ourselves explicitly as models compli-

cates our goals of teaching all the students and of facilitating their identity formation.

With all this in mind JCDS created Minyan Klal Yisrael as one among our weekly Middle School minyan electives. There, JCDS parents and teachers share their personal Jewish stories and honestly answer the students' questions. The minyan offers what the pluralistic culture at JCDS cannot so readily provide on a day to day basis: explicit, serious, personal stories of distinct and evolving Jewish perspectives, of personal, communal, and family obligations, of struggling with the implications of the Jewish commitments each of us makes.

For example, in recent sessions, a teacher spoke of her secular upbringing and how she, as a girl, begged her parents to expose her to Jewish community; a parent shared her effort to bring Jewish ethics into the secular, self-satisfied world of computer technology; another spoke of finding sanctity in Jewish community, practice, and prayer without faith in God; one spoke of her childhood home imbued by her hasidic grandfather's severe faith,

of her dismay as a young woman feeling devalued by traditional Judaism, and of her powerful sense of holiness in the world of independent minyanim; and one parent conveyed her complex Jewish identity and commitments by displaying and discussing 15 (!) different hats she wears.

The students' respectful and evocative questions do not come from mere intellectual curiosity.

"Did that experience change your belief in God?" was a way of asking, *Do you believe in God? Should I? Can I?*

- "How did your parents respond when you did that?" was a way of asking, *What would my parents do if I did that?*

Each week, the students see in our presenters committed adult Jews living their lives with integrity, purpose and meaning. With Minyan Klal Yisrael, JCDS hopes to help our students develop a sense of their capacity and possibility and to appreciate the dignity and joy of Jewish commitment. ■

Sensitivity to Religious Diversity Committee

■ **N. E. MILES JEWISH DAY SCHOOL**, Birmingham, Alabama

Spend a day in Israel, and the opportunities and challenges of a diverse population are instantly apparent. Spend a day at the N.E. Miles Jewish Day School (NEMJDS) in Birmingham, Alabama, and the story is the same. Traditional families—modern Orthodox, Chabad, Conservative—join Reform families, unaffiliated, and even a few non-Jewish families, to create a rich tapestry of diversity.

This range of practice has led the school to pursue new avenues to create dialogue among the various streams of Judaism. In 2003, the need for this dialogue was addressed through the creation of the Sensitivity to Religious Diversity Committee, an advisory committee to the Board of Directors and Head of School. Many of the topics addressed by the com-

mittee, and the resulting recommendations, illuminate constructive ways to address religious diversity issues faced by a community day school.

Over the past six years the committee has addressed both major and minor issues. The committee has made recommendations about siddurim used during morning tefillah, working to ensure that the individuality of each child is respected. Also on the agenda was the use of non-hekshered restaurant gift certificates as silent auction items at the school's gala fundraiser. The committee has reviewed the school's personnel manual regarding sensitivity to staff members in non-traditional long-term relationships. Each of these topics proved to be indeed "sensitive," and at times the conversations

were emotionally charged. Yet, in the end, committee members felt educated in important ways about the varying Jewish perspectives shared.

The Sensitivity to Religious Diversity Committee also took action to formalize its place within the school's structure. The NEMJDS Committee is now a standing committee of the Board with members from each of the local religious institutions represented. At any community-based Jewish Day School, diversity is a reality requiring continued care and communication. A clearly delineated process for concerns to be aired, based not on an individual response but on group reflection, reinforces a Jewish sense of discourse and community problem-solving. ■

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Kashrut Policy

■ DONNA KLEIN JEWISH ACADEMY, Boca Raton, Florida

All schools, both independent and public, face challenges of various magnitudes, involving different constituencies. This situation is of course far from unique to the Jewish Community Day School world.

The challenge of educating the community about levels of observance and practice, and the importance of respecting differences, is always present. At Donna Klein Jewish Academy, we have been faced with kashrut as an issue when non-kosher food is served at birthday parties, and the host family does not investigate whether there are children attending who will not be able to eat the food served. This also occurs at B'nai Mitzvah celebra-

tions. In addition, there have been occasions in which teachers closed their eyes to students buying non-kosher food from vendors on overnight field trips.

“In Parshat Nitzavim, the phrase ‘All Jews are responsible for one another’ originated. This idea of mutual responsibility is what makes a school family stronger,” said Yafa Levit, Principal of Lower School Judaic Studies. “Therefore, when parents face the dilemma of when to hold a birthday party or what kind of food should be served, the answer should be easy: Everyone should be able to participate and be included.”

Although we have dietary rules in our

handbook, we felt we needed to take a more proactive role in educating our community. Last year we created a kashrut committee comprised of our three principals of Judaic Studies, an area rabbi, parents and teachers. The end result was a Kashrut Policy Handbook which will go online for our families, hard copy to our faculty and staff, and a meeting with our faculty to review.

The big issue is respect for differences. Each time there is understanding of the ways in which our families from different streams of Judaism observe, respect for these differences develops. We then become our tag line, “More than a school, a family.” ■

Revisioning to Pluralism

■ HERITAGE ACADEMY, Longmeadow, Massachusetts

In 2002, Heritage Academy began its slow but steady re-visioning from a Torah U'Mesorah affiliated school to a RAVSAK aligned school. First, we began work on a new Mission Statement, one that would reflect the need to be more inclusive and embracing of the surrounding Jewish community. The board, faculty, and parents worked on this together, resulting in the important line: “dedicated to welcoming families from the spectrum of Jewish practice.” As one parent put it: “We were trying to create a vision and a practice that incorporated all the different denominations of Judaism into the daily life of Heritage Academy.”

Work began on redesigning Tefillah. We started using a variety of siddurim, including one created by the middle school students; having all the area rabbis participate in the Annual First Grade Siddur Presentation; and creating Iyun Tefillah opportunities. These included meditation

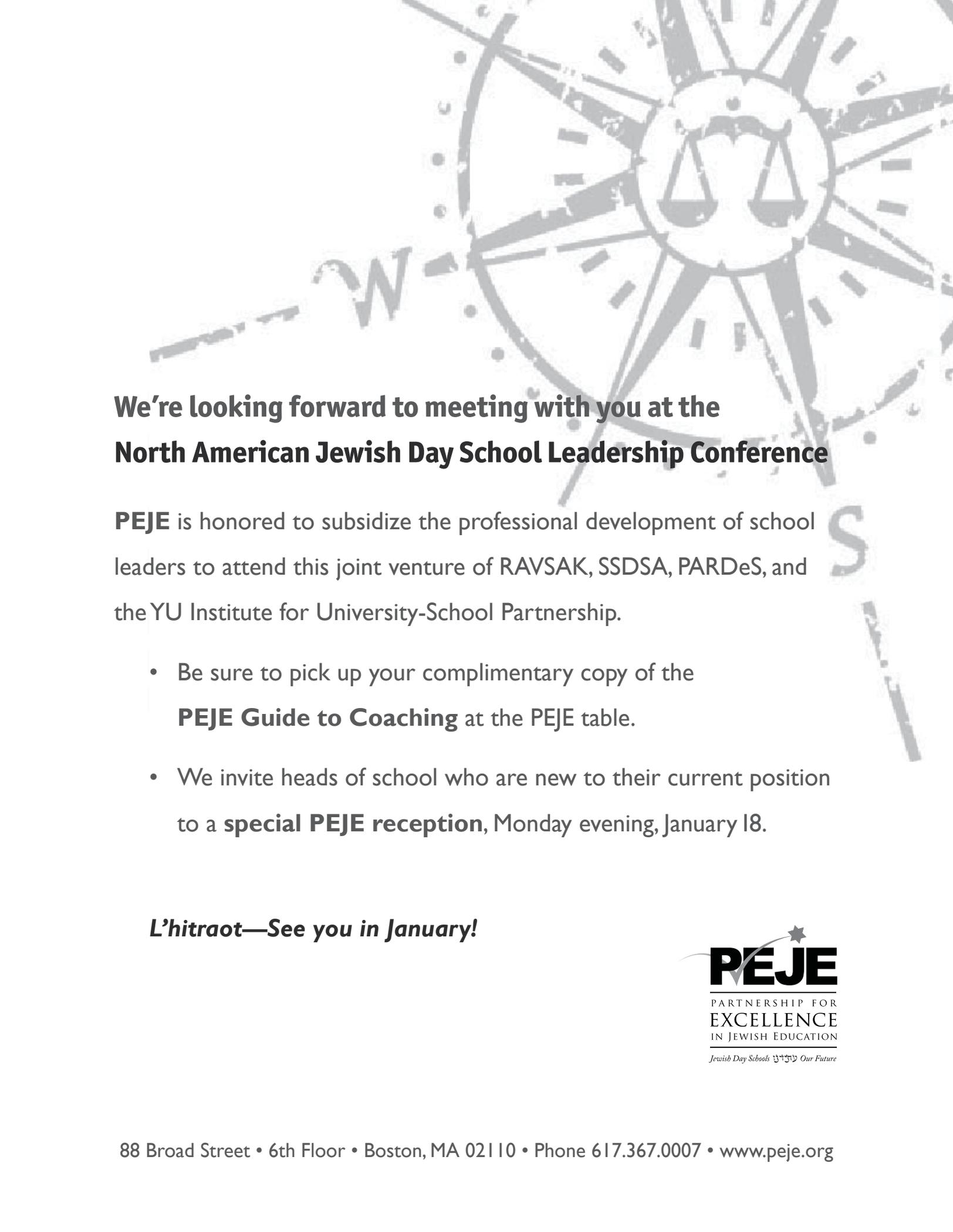
and prayer, movement and prayer, study of the Amidah, alternative prayer melodies, and synagogues around the world.

The Judaic Studies curriculum came under scrutiny and was restructured. The biggest change came in the middle school. To better address the diversity of practice, observance, and beliefs of our student body, courses were restructured and labeled as core or electives. Everyone had to take the five core courses: Hebrew, Bible, Parashah of the Week, Israel Studies (a new three-year curriculum), and Tefillah. All other offerings were elective courses, which included Women in Judaism, Leaders and Leadership in the Bible, Talmud, Pirkei Avot, Current Events in Israel, Israeli Poetry, and Jewish Life-Cycle Events.

During this ultimately successful process (which took about five years, and sometimes was tension-laden), we always tried

to be mindful and respectful of the “lines in the sand that you could not cross.” For our observant community, that was strict kashrut (we are under the auspices of the Springfield Vaad) and Shabbat observance. For our Reform families, it was patrilineal descent. For our Conservative families, it was egalitarianism; our girls have to be able to participate and learn anything that is available to the boys. This give-and-take has worked for the school. Everybody has to give a little and compromise a little, and that is how you live together; that is what Klal Yisrael is all about.

As one board member put it: “I think Heritage Academy has given my children a fabulous education both religiously and educationally. But, more importantly, each of my children graduated from Heritage Academy as proud and knowledgeable Jews, with tremendous self-confidence, compassion for all humanity, and a zest for life.” ■



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Jewish Education in the Postmodern Era

■ by **DAVID BIGMAN**

PLURALISM, relativism and postmodernism have created an atmosphere that make adherence to any particular mode difficult. This is all the more true when regarding cultural lifestyles that are dissonant vis-à-vis the prevalent mores. The following discourse will describe the Orthodox Jewish community's reaction to this challenge and its pitfalls; and consequently suggest means to alleviate the distress to some extent. Although my discussion chiefly relates to this particular world, the fact remains that all religious and cultural traditions are in dire straits; and indeed, cultural continuity itself is challenged. Therefore, although the description will be specific, the suggested prescription can be applied universally.

An intelligent young woman once asked me a halakhic question at the grocery store. Since the issue was rather complex, and since I prefer the recipient of my response to understand the issues at hand, at least in a rudimentary fashion, I opened by asking her what is the standard answer to any halakhic question. She automatically responded: "Forbidden!" I was quite astounded by this reaction, and told that in fact I was referring to "argument." I then proceeded to explain the various points of view regarding her inquiry, and suggested the mode that I thought most appropriate.

As I walked home in a melancholy mood I thought of the generation gap and the new form of Judaism that was emerging.

In this form of Judaism, argument and variety are shunned as they undermine authority and communal confidence. The stringent opinion will always prevail as it seems a sure "bet" for fulfilling Divine Will, and will certainly entail an element of sacrifice and asceticism. Under extreme circumstances, life is viewed as profane and withdrawal as holiness. In almost all cases the Jewish way of life becomes a sheltered mode of living.

The Torah itself is recreated in this image: years ago our esteemed rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, described Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh as Noah's ark and the world outside as a flood of evil. This imagery seemed strange to us and was not taken seriously. In the wake of postmodernism and the ensuing cultural milieu, this approach can be very appealing and for some may be the most meaningful

function of Judaism in their lives.

This mode obviously will not contain itself to practical halakhic modes, but will in fact almost always affect think-



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ing on other subjects. Issues that in the past were tackled by Torah scholars with various degrees of candor, creativity and communal responsibility, meeting the intellectual challenges of their time, are not even addressed today, and are viewed as axiomatic. Rarely do we discuss the struggles of the past and the great variety of opinions. It is even less common to use their struggles as paradigms for our own. Often times, students' questions are delegitimized for these very reasons, and in some extreme cases, thinking itself becomes anathema.

“The sincere question is the basis of all Torah learning both in form and content. Healthy curiosity creates motivation and feeds creativity that exhilarates the student.”

The sincere question is the basis of all Torah learning both in form and content. Healthy curiosity creates motivation and feeds creativity that exhilarates the student. New ideas evolve, making us partners in the chain of rethinking in novel ways which has been our tradition for thousands of years. Since questioning and argumentation are such prominent features of our tradition, those who fear

challenging young minds tell them that questioning and argumentation are important, though only certain questions and certain arguments are legitimate.

Usually only questions and argu-

“The lenient and stringent opinions are not only equally legitimate, but should, in fact, both be considered significant and thoughtful expressions of our human endeavor to fulfill Torah, each containing a grain of truth.”

ments used in the past are sanctioned as they have the aura of being the questions of Torah giants. The near-strangulation of natural curiosity is detrimental to all scholarship but is absolutely lethal to the study of Torah.

How can we meet this challenge without the destructive process? The solution may be in the same cultural milieu that created the problem in the first place. In spite of postmodernism, most students I meet from North America are convinced that scientific truth is the only acceptable truth and the only true measure for any decision. And yet, is it not absolutely ludicrous to speak of religious truths as if they were Euclidian geometry?

I would suggest opening their minds to different kinds of truth and different measures for adopting positions. We need not be philosophically rigorous in order to open their minds; it should suffice to pose the following question at the appropriate time: When we choose our path, what are the relevant values in making a decision? Ethics, esthetics, communal language and culture, universal and particular religious experiences, and last but not least—a discussion over the essence of truth. Almost anyone can recognize the truth in *Huckleberry Finn* even though it is a work of fiction. Likewise, the apparent non-scientific apparel of modern religion should not be disregarded on the basis of a one-dimensional conception of “truth.”

This, however, is not enough. We can

invigorate our way of life; we *must* talk openly about religious experience without cynicism yet avoid kitsch. We can invigorate Torah scholarship. We are capable of reveling at the great depth

and breadth of various opinions. The lenient and stringent opinions are not only equally legitimate, but should, in fact, both be considered significant and

thoughtful expressions of our human endeavor to fulfill Torah, each containing a grain of truth. Our sages even took the Sadducees’ opinions seriously.

We can counter the siege mentality. My mentors taught me that nothing should be shunned if it is within the bounds of morality and Halakhah. Within these bounds we can embrace the world: the splendor of His creation from the smallest particle discovered, to the grandest photographs from Hubble. We can embrace mankind created in His image: the thoughts of men, their creativity in the arts, their scientific discoveries, the philosophical inquiries and even their capability to question the Creator and His Torah. ■

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Process Over Product: Spiritual Lessons in the Tensions of Halakhic Debate

■ by **SHAWN FIELDS-MAYER**

THE Hebrew term for Jewish Law is Halakhah. The term translates, literally, as “the way,” implying that there is a single way of Jewish law. Based on the name alone, one might think that in the instruction of Halakhah, the educational goal would be to convey to students a body of traditional legal literature, and that the optimal methodology would prioritize teaching the rationale and content of significant Jewish legal topics. In order to teach “the way,” we might aim to expose the students primarily to large swaths of Jewish legal codes such as Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* or Joseph Karo’s *Shulkhan Arukh*—sources that articulate the “best practices” of Jewish religious life—for recitation, memorization and personal application. After all, if we’re teaching the way, then we should hand it down whole cloth.

Holy Cacophony

But nothing could be farther from the truth. Neither Halakhah itself nor the study of halakhic literature is static or one-dimensional. One of the keys to Jewish historical longevity is the dynamic quality of Jewish law through discussion and debate. Furthermore, it has always been characterized by articulation by a chorus of multiple voices, rarely singing in unison. The Babylonian Talmud offers a famous reflection of the dynamic, multi-hued nature of the study of Halakhah:

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, the one asserting, “The Halakhah is in accordance with our views,” and the latter asserting, “The Halakhah is in accordance with our views.” Then a *bat kol*—a heavenly voice—came and declared, “The words of both are the words of the living G-d...” (Eruvin 13b)

For contemporary Jewish educators, this passage contains three salient messages. First, the two sides are engaged in what appears to be a long-standing, ongoing debate—it is as though they have **agreed to disagree**; second, **there is no resolution** agreed to by the parties; and third, when G-d finally steps in, the divine voice articulates **praise, respect and acceptance for both sides**. In other words, both the arguments and the arguers are holy and beloved of G-d.

Those three messages are brought into sharp focus when viewed through the lens

of the Maharshal—Rabbi Solomon Luria, the great 16th-century Jewish legal scholar—who penned an astounding elaboration of the Talmud’s teaching in his seminal work of Jewish law:



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All these views (in debates about matters of Jewish law) are in the category of *words of the Living G-d* as if each was received directly from Sinai through Moses... Each (person at Sinai) perceived the Torah from his own perspective in accordance with his intellectual capacity as well as the stature and unique character of his particular soul...one concluded that an object was impure in the extreme, another perceived it to be absolutely pure, and yet a third individual argues the ambivalent state of the object in question; all these are true and sensible views... **all positions articulated represent a form of truth.** (Introduction to *Yam shel Shlomo, Bava Kama*)

At its core, traditional Jewish intellectual life is a multi-layered activity, honoring multiple voices singing not in harmony but rather in cacophony.

The Power of Pluralism

In the contemporary Jewish day school classroom, cacophony transforms into a chorus of pluralism. What constitutes pluralism? And how does it manifest in the study of Halakhah?

Nicholas Appleton, in his work *Cultural Pluralism in Education: Theoretical Foundations*, describes some manifestations of pluralism. At one extreme is *assimilation* (all individuals conforming to the majority); at the other end is *modified classical cultural pluralism*, an environment characterized by a common shared culture with a high level of interaction between individuals. In this issue of *HaYidion*, Michael Kay articulates that pluralism can be found in three forms: atmospheric, with multiple views coexisting; informational, in which multiple views are shared; and interactional, in which those views are discussed and challenged. Interactional pluralism demands that all views be seen as *divrei Elohim Chayyim*, the words of the living G-d. How do we make our schools—and in particular, our classrooms teaching Halakhah curricula—into interactional pluralistic communities? How to beckon Hillel and Shammai into the room?

The Spirituality of Cacophony: One Approach

At Milken Community High School in Los Angeles, we weave pluralism into our halakhic learning by three avenues: atmosphere, curriculum and pedagogy.

The Atmosphere

As a community high school, we welcome students from all parts of the Jewish religious spectrum. In any given classroom—or sitting around any given lunch table—students wearing tzitzit sit alongside students who are less observant. In this social setting, dialogue is organically created and nurtured. The physical plurality is deepened by multiple community experiences that encourage sharing of opinions, backgrounds and beliefs: Friday Oneg Shabbat programs offer regular cultural exchange; students join together for Shabbat and holiday meals; they plan and share Shabbatonim together; and they write their opinions in the school newspaper as well as our journal of opinion and debate. The school fosters creative, respectful open dialogue.

The Curriculum

An ongoing relationship with the halakhic process runs throughout all four years of high school Jewish studies; as students develop in maturity and intellectual sophistication, they return to matters of Halakhah with increasing levels of depth. Each year of study gives students tools for engagement in interactional pluralism.

Curriculum is divided into topical units of study reflecting both traditional values and resonance for Jewish teens. These units *help the students to develop both a language and an experience of pluralism*. In the ninth grade, for example, students consider the laws of ethical speech—both the Halakhah of *tokhechah* (rebuke) and *leshon hara* (gossip). After learning basic sources, they pose questions to one another: what limits on speech are necessary for a just society? What limits are reasonable? Which ones are extreme? Through debating these boundaries, students consider their own roles in the community and the difficulty of disagreeing in a truly respectful way.

Later in the year, students learn Biblical and Talmudic rules regulating Shabbat. They ask themselves: what does it mean to truly rest? How to best keep and honor the Shabbat in my family? My city? My community? What are the parameters of religious experimentation? Finally, later in the year, students will dive into Hal-

akhah related to the most modern (and sweeping) aspect of their lives: technology. They'll contemplate ethical behavior in light of the realities of social networking, cell phones, Internet searches and other aspects of digital life.

Pedagogy

Both classroom learning and assessments are aimed at creating a space for debate and discussion through active listening, respectful disagreement, and creative integration of multiple ideas. But the purpose is not just argumentation. It is transformation. Students become teachers. The experience of the classroom is ultimately a re-enactment of Hillel and Shammai. It is respectful—even playful—and highly spirited. Texts become mirrors, in which students see reflections of themselves and others, consider what they have seen, and grow in spiritual depth.

Ultimately, in the best form of halakhic learning, each community member values process over product, questions over answers. Since Halakhah itself is dynamic, the process of learning it must be anything but static. For Jewish teens, perhaps the most lasting education will come not in studying *what*, but in asking *why*—spurring them to leave the sidelines and join the conversation—and add their voice to the holy cacophony, the vibrant and dynamic process of Halakhah. ■

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Pluralism in the Teaching of Tanakh

■ by **SUSAN TANCHEL**

TEACHING Tanakh in a pluralistic setting has all the expected complexities of teaching sacred texts and some additional ones. The first challenge is probably to have a working definition of the term “pluralism.” For these purposes I am defining pluralism as a sociological reality and as an educational philosophy. More specifically this means that the students come from diverse religious backgrounds and that I choose to engage them with Tanakh through a variety of methods and modes in order to cultivate certain habits of mind and habits of heart. An instructive way to think about pluralism and the teaching of Tanakh is to consider how pluralism affects each component of the instructional triangle: students, content and teacher.

Students: We all teach in schools that have students with diverse learning needs, skills and interests; here I am limiting the discussion to students that come from different religious backgrounds. There are of course many places that these religious differences can play out in a school day (sharing of food, school prayer, celebrating Shabbat as a community), and the Tanakh classroom is a particularly fertile one. Through conversations about the meaning and relevance of biblical texts, students can reflect upon what they hold sacred, what they value, and their own burgeoning identities, confronting and challenging one another on topics that are more or less weighty and controversial. Discussions range from a particular verse to who wrote the Bible.

In order to maximize the benefit of these interactions, it is essential to seek and to value the presence of students who hold different religious commitments and diverse opinions and beliefs, and who can go beyond merely tolerating these distinctions. The students need to be able to engage, confront and challenge one another, lovingly and respectfully in safe, nurturing and rigorous classroom communities, firm in the conviction that it is through these types of interactions and relationships with the other that they will strengthen their individual positions, their sense of self, and over time build their Jewish identities. Moreover, these experiences offer students invaluable opportunities to learn to navigate complexities and thereby to develop certain intellectual capacities and characters traits that will continue to serve each of them long after high school. One such capacity is cognitive pluralism, that is, the ability to hold two contradictory opinions, to handle nuance and to live in a complex gray world. Said differently, it is the ability to hold onto your own belief as you deliberate issues and simultaneously make enough (emotional and intellectual) space for the beliefs of others.

Content: Indeed the study of Tanakh, the subject matter itself, is well suited for a pluralistic educational environment, for we are blessed with a tradition that embodies the

value of multiple opinions. Open a page of Mikra’ot Gedolot and you will see the celebrated co-existence of interpreters each offering a distinct possible meaning of a verse. Seeing this page also provides implicit evidence for a student that the same verse of the Tanakh can yield multiple possible valid interpretations—an idea that is essential in a pluralistic Tanakh classroom. A page of commentary also conveys the message that Jews have been reading and making meaning of these texts for centu-



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ries and they are now being invited into this conversation. This fact implicitly brings to light that despite the different affiliations and beliefs of their classmates, we all share and hold the Tanakh as sacred (though the source and import of this sanctity may manifest differently in our lives). It is the master story of the Jewish People; as our communal foundational narrative it gives us our common past, which informs our collective present.

Teacher: This shared text has many points of entry, for there are a variety of methods to choose from when studying a biblical text. In a pluralistic setting, it is crucial for a teacher to know and to offer students multiple ways or approaches to make meaning of a Tanakh text, for one method will grab the interest of one student, while another will open the heart and mind of a different student. Any such choice needs to be curricularly justified and developmentally appropriate and made with the knowledge that each method concentrates

“Tanakh teachers should explicitly reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions, because the teacher’s own belief system will implicitly affect myriad choices, including curricular ones.

on different aspects of the text and thus will affect the meaning students make of the texts.

For example, in the case of Genesis 1, a teacher could choose to concentrate on the question of why the Bible begins with a universal text rather than one that specifically commands the Jewish People, or she could teach it with an eye toward the ways in which the biblical text is similar to and different from other ancient Near Eastern creation narratives, or she could teach the text from a literary perspective or wonder about how it connects with Genesis 2-3. Having both flexible subject matter knowledge—knowledge of Tanakh and the discipline of biblical studies that they are able to use and to hold differently depending on what is called for at any given moment—and pedagogical content knowledge—the ability to express what they know in ways that build a bridge between the subject matter and the particular students who are with them in the classroom—is vital in this kind of educational setting.

In addition to these types of knowledge, a Tanakh teacher also requires the skills and capacities to create a classroom environment where students can have the kinds of experiences and opportunities outlined above. (I am not suggesting here that all responses are satisfactory, but rather that a teacher can delineate what the requirements are for an interpretation. For example, in my classroom I teach my students that our interpretations need to be supported with verses, and any that go against what a text says are not compelling.) Tanakh teachers should explicitly reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions, not only because they will be asking their students to do likewise, but also because the teacher’s own belief system will implicitly affect myriad choices, including curricular ones. If a teacher holds that texts

have one “right” meaning to which she is leading her students, the students will not be encouraged to search for multiple meanings. Moreover, having one meaning in mind will affect how the teacher answers students’ questions or responds to their suggestions. What the teacher knows and cares about will profoundly impact the ways her students connect with and learn Tanakh in small and big ways.

The components of the instructional triangle have illuminated the complexities

of teaching Tanakh in a pluralistic day school. Learning in these types of schools affords students opportunities to develop into confident adults who know that there are no easy answers, that life is complex and that it is filled with dilemmas. Through the process of learning biblical texts, students become young adults who have much experience in dealing with differences and handling complexities. Over time they construct their Jewish identities by hearing divergent opinions, by exploring competing values, by determining when to compromise, and by figuring out where they stand on issues of import. These Jewish adolescents are developing the knowledge, skills and capacities necessary to forge a new kind of Jewish community through reading our sacred ancient texts. ■

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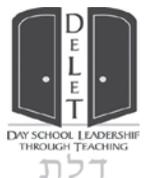


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How to Produce Pluralistic Jewish Educators: One University's Program

■ Interview with **RAMI WERNIK**, Dean, Fingerhut School of Education

Is training educators to work in a pluralistic environment an explicit goal of the Fingerhut School of Education?

The Fingerhut School of Education is *itself* a pluralistic institution. By modeling not just tolerance but understanding and celebration of a wide range of Jewish expression, philosophy, and observance on our campus, we train our students to adapt their thinking and behavior for work in a wide variety of Jewish settings.

How important is it in the school's repertoire of educational objectives?

The Fingerhut School is committed to Jewish Peoplehood in its concrete diversity, and we see pluralism as a core value for sustaining Peoplehood in the contemporary sociological landscape. We strive every day to create broad canopies for substantive engagement, respectful compromise, and even constructive disagreement among Jews of many different backgrounds, beliefs, and customs. Our graduates, therefore, are uniquely qualified to serve in pluralistic Jewish environments.

How do you understand pluralism?

For us, pluralism means the embracing of the notion of unity in diversity, and a commitment to learning about one another with an open mind and heart. This means that we encourage a diversity of Jewish practice, philosophies—religious and secular, and distinctive commitments to Israel, tradition, history, G-d. Robust pluralism requires distinctive identities mutually encouraged rather than a flattening of differences into a least common denominator.

How does Fingerhut educate towards pluralism?

We accept only respectful dialogue in the classroom. Students and faculty share stories of their Jewish journeys; representatives from different denominations and the trans-denominational movement are brought to campus and are reflected in our faculty; courses are never “movement-specific” and draw examples from multiple Jewish contexts; different ideologies are explored and celebrated; community-building activities encourage friendships and mutual understanding.

Our Judaic courses allow for multiple interpretations of texts, and even our prayer-leading requirements are often adjusted for students' denominational preference or background.

Off-campus, our students participate in mandatory teaching and administrative internships while in the program. These can take place at almost any Jewish institution, so students have a chance to try different environments, and they do, sometimes two

at the same time! Students can truly get a full range of experience while at AJU. Then, they reflect on these experiences with their classmates.



Rami Wernik is Dean of the Fingerhut School of Education at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He can be reached at RWernik@ajula.edu.

What does your ideal graduate who is a “pluralistic educator” look like?

This graduate would be knowledgeable about the colorful landscape of the Jewish community, including the affiliated, non-affiliated, denominational and trans-denominational communities as well as a range of approaches to Zionism and the Land of Israel. She is able to interact with and mentor Jews of different backgrounds in an open and non-judgmental way. He possesses “pedagogical content knowledge,” which means knowing the content sufficiently well in order to teach it. To have pedagogical content knowledge in the subject of Jewish pluralism, one needs to know about Jews, Judaism and Jewish life, but one also needs to be engaged in Jewish life from a personal vantage point while being able to anticipate and answer students' questions about Judaism, with the awareness and sensitivity that sustaining a pluralistic community demands.

How does the Fingerhut School measure success in this area?

While in the program, courses such as Teaching & Learning, Sociology of Ed-

“We encourage a diversity of Jewish practice, philosophies—religious and secular, and distinctive commitments to Israel, tradition, history, G-d. Robust pluralism requires distinctive identities mutually encouraged rather than a flattening of differences into a least common denominator.

ucation and Philosophy of Education expose students to a variety of thinkers from across denominational lines, and ask them to engage with these thinkers as they create their own statement of what an “educated Jew” ought to know, value, and be able to do.

In the capstone seminar before graduation, students devise strategies for implementing change in educational settings, which often requires them to confront the demands of pluralistic institutions, or those affiliated with movements that may be different from the one with which the student most closely identifies.

Upon graduation, we rejoice in the fact that our alumni serve effectively as lead educators in pluralistic educational institutions, programs and agencies, and in institutions that are the result of interdenominational mergers. Our alumni also regularly mentor each other and current students across denominational lines.

How are students kept engaged in the subject of pluralism?

I think our students are really energized by the opportunity to get to know each other and learn to appreciate the diversity among them. We endeavor to create a safe space in which this can take place, knowing that pluralism is a sensitive topic for many, which has sometimes led to emotional class discussions and has even tested relationships between students. Where possible, we give opportunities to our students to explore the issue further if they choose, such as by designing curricula or lesson plans on the topic.

Can you recount an experience that bears on this topic?

A recent session in the Jewish Experience through Prayer course helps to illustrate the rich variety of students and backgrounds that we have at AJU. In the class are secular Israelis who are

still learning prayer fundamentals, yeshiva and day-school trained students who *daven* with great fluency but are still mastering spoken Hebrew, students whose strongest ties are to philanthropic Judaism and who see social action as the greatest expression of Judaism, master music educators, and students for whom prayer is largely a discipline to be studied from afar. They had an electrifying discussion one recent morning on the way prayer education is conducted in Jewish settings—at its heart, the question they were asking was, What does a Jew need to know and do? They answered in many different ways, with emotion and passion. But the conversation was taking place today, mirroring and shaping the Judaism of tomorrow. ■

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Training Teachers for Pluralistic Day Schools

■ By **ZVI HIRSCHFIELD** and **SUSAN WALL**

WHAT does it mean to seriously address the challenge of being a community day school? At the turn of the twenty-first century, this question of vision engaged the leadership of many of the new schools being created as well as those already in existence. A vision began to emerge of schools whose parent body represented a range of belief and practice; an institution which would allow its students to grapple with texts, issues of Jewish life and meaning, and the value and formation of community, while at the same time respecting their diversity. As that vision took hold, and as funding sources supported the building of more community schools, the question arose as to where would the teachers for such a program come from. Already there was recognition that a special kind of teacher would be needed to bring the vision to fruition.

The AVI CHAI Foundation turned to The Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, already experienced in teaching learners from a wide variety of backgrounds, and created the Pardes Educators Program. Nine years and 90 graduates later, the program has evolved greatly, yet it continues to struggle with this very question of how best to train teachers, the majority of whom will go out to teach in community day schools. What follows is based on our personal insights gleaned from training teachers in the program and from visits to our graduates in scores of community day schools across North America. We believe that this article will be useful not only to those training teachers for such schools, but for lay leaders and administrators as well, who set standards for hiring new teachers and provide professional development opportunities for those already on staff.

TRAINING TEACHERS FOR COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOLS

What preparation will allow our teachers to intellectually challenge, relate to and support students who come from a wide variety of backgrounds? How can we best prepare these teachers to help all their students find meaning in and a passion for some aspect of Jewish life and Jewish living, even when those choices may differ from that of the teacher's own beliefs or practices? Just as excellent schools have a vision of the kind of student they hope to produce and structure their curriculum

and school culture accordingly, so too must we have a vision of a community day school teacher. In order to prepare teachers to meet the challenges of the



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Dr. Susan Wall directed the Educators Program from 2002-2007, and currently teaches pedagogy to the educators and directs the Alumni Support Project. She can be reached at susan@pardes.org.il.

community day school, serious thought must be given to what is taught and how: the content of the preparatory courses, the culture of dialogue, the methodologies modeled, and the understanding/formation of community.

THE CONTENT

What should a Judaic studies teacher entering the field know? Mastery of both classical sources and modern approaches is essential. The Jewish bookcase in pluralistic institutions looks different. Fluency in traditional texts and language must be combined with knowledge of liberal Jewish thought and practice. A book on biblical criticism can sit next to one espousing Orthodox theology—and the teacher must have access to every shelf.

Jewish history should be taught in a preparatory program to achieve three primary goals. First, while the Jewish people are

quite divided about the present, the awareness that we come from similar places creates connection and shared appreciation, the essence of peoplehood. Second, a sophisticated and nuanced view of the past provides the platform for building a Jewish identity that includes room



A book on biblical criticism can sit next to one espousing Orthodox theology—and the teacher must have access to every shelf.

for difference. Our history is rich with data that illustrates that unity is not sameness, and that diversity has been a consistent part of our culture. Third, awareness of the past can be inspiring, through examples of how Jews successfully overcame difficulties that parallel the challenges of modernity.

Teachers need to feel their own connection to the people of Israel and the State if they are to teach the value of Israel. While Israel is a central project of the Jewish people, some would argue that Israel today creates more divisiveness among Jews than shared purpose. Israel education must foster a sense of the State as a living laboratory of Jewish history, values, and expression, without ignoring the complexity and challenge posed by creating a Jewish State. This includes exposing teachers to a wide range of voices from within Israeli society, and learning how to combine criticism and connectedness. An Israel based program can give participants the experiences and memories that will foster a personal connection with Israel and Israelis. For the reasons stated above, training programs situated in North America must incorporate Israel education and an Israel experience into their formal program.

Most critically, Judaics teachers must be trained to engage Judaism as a resource for spiritual growth, investing the time to make it relevant and inspiring for themselves, if they are to inspire their students. Training teachers to lead prayer or ritual are critical tools, as are methodologies and approaches that foster a spiritual dimension to Jewish life through text study, character education and community service. Without a unifying theology, the teacher

in a pluralistic setting must be prepared to engage and explore issues of Jewish spirituality from the widest possible angle. This means training the teachers to provide experiential learning opportunities that are open to diverse views and theologies.

In sum, the curriculum must include intensive text study, Hebrew, Jewish thought and Jewish history (with an emphasis on Israel and Jewish peoplehood) and opportunities for spiritual growth. However, even emphasizing diversity within what is taught is not enough. How the material is presented to these teachers-in-training is critical.

THE CULTURE

While future teachers bring their own personal views and commitments to their learning, the training institution must foster an environment that appreciates the richness and invaluable growth opportunities that arises from diverse thinkers and approaches. The goal is not to harmonize or minimize the differences between Reform and Orthodox or mystical and rational; the challenge is to see debate and difference as an opportunity for every individual to ask hard questions and develop or discover their own approach.

Teachers must be trained to appreciate Judaism from a variety of perspectives and engage a range of assumptions. For example, while the teacher can insist the entire class take text seriously, relevance cannot be assumed.

We cannot take for granted that all future teachers bring an openness to discussion and dialogue. Our training institutions need to model safe space and teach our students how to create it in a classroom. They need to be encouraged to question and challenge, but learn how to do it in a respectful and caring manner. We need to help them develop listening skills, particu-

larly for those things that are hard to hear or that one strongly disagrees with. To develop those skills they need opportunities to take stands and to hear others present theirs in an environment that will encourage honest and open dialogue. They need to hear from experienced teachers and administrators working in community schools as to the issues that arise. Case studies can provide them with the opportunity to hear a variety of ways to deal with real challenges.

A hevruta-based model of study is an ideal way for program participants to experience the enormous benefit to studying in a diverse setting. By learning with a partner who holds different views or assumptions, the participant appreciates how difference can generate new insights, prompt interesting questions, and develop new ways of relating to the material. In short, hevruta becomes an ongoing example of how diversity is a strength. Going beyond tolerance, hevruta study can generate a culture of respectful debate that values every participant for the strengths and uniqueness that they bring to the learning process. Hevruta becomes a microcosm of the whole training model.

Finally, our teacher-training institutions should model our commitment to Jewish community by reinforcing those behaviors which strengthen group unity and addressing those actions which destroy community. We need our future teachers to experience respect for individual differences while finding communal vehicles to express solidarity, achieve common purpose and celebrate together.

In summary, what we teach and how we teach is complex and crucial. Our graduates need a rich background of text, Hebrew, Jewish thought and history. They need to explore what spirituality means to them, their connections to the Jewish people and to the land of Israel. They need to master the tools that will allow them to create an open, respectful and caring community which celebrates diversity. Only then will our graduates go out equipped to fulfill and contribute to the mission of our community day schools. ■

The Art of Pluralist Jewish Education

■ by **Brad Hirschfield**

MUCH of the conversation on Jewish education in general, and pluralist Jewish education in particular, focuses on either the science or technology of the work. In my experience however, neither a scientific approach, by which I mean that which the educators must know, nor the technological approach, by which I mean that which they must do, are the most helpful ways in which to approach and achieve a genuinely pluralist Jewish education.

I take for granted, given the readership to which this is addressed, that the value of such education need not be demonstrated here, nor does anyone need my particular list of classical sources upon which one might base their commitment to such education. Instead, I hope to offer an alternative metaphor which might guide our efforts in doing pluralist education.

Ultimately, pluralist education is best viewed as neither a science nor a technology, but rather as an art, and its goal should be the creation of Jewish spiritual/intellectual artists. For me, pluralist Jewish education is not simply one in which multiple forms of Jewish practice and thought are given equal weight and consideration. Instead, it is one in which the pursuit of Jewish learning and the use of Jewish practice itself nurtures a pluralist approach to both Judaism and life in both students and teachers.

Once that decision is made, the issues of pretty much everything from prayer practices within a school, to kashrut policies, to every other practical issue which challenges the communities with whom I have worked, can be addressed relatively easily and in ways which respect the integrity of all members of the community. It is not that such challenges simply vanish, but what it means to “solve” them is redefined.

The pragmatic challenges shift from those of structural arrangements and practices to ones of values and consciousness. The challenges move from how we make space for each other in what we think of as a pluralist community, to how the decisions we make about any given issue bring to life the community’s commitment to pluralism.

Of course, all of this assumes that when we speak of pluralist or community education, we are speaking of something greater than structural arrangements which assure that the greatest number of Jewish children turn out a specific way. And it is certainly about something more than working backward from a pre-conceived notion of what is “really” Jewish and simply getting as many people as possible to move closer to that goal. That is not pluralism, it is utilitarian communitarianism—it may

be useful, but it is hardly the art form about which I am writing.

Pluralist Jewish education, like much Jewish education in general, is too often like the old Venus “Paint by Numbers” kits, albeit with more colors included in the set than is offered by non-pluralist providers. In either case, the challenge is to get people to paint the pre-set pictures according to the color scheme the experts indicate with those little numbers

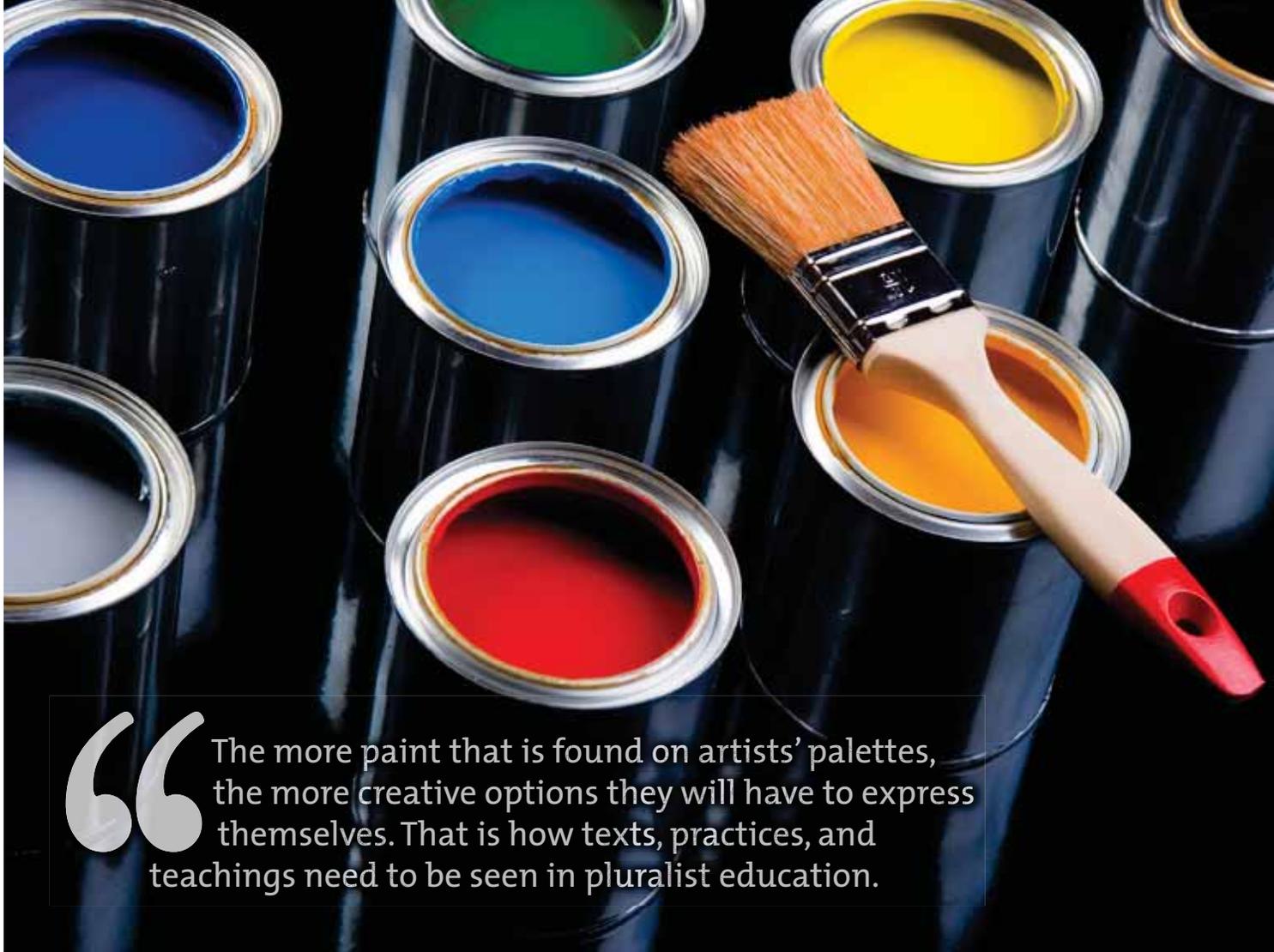


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which appear in the outlined picture.

At best, that approach will create a culture of technicians who may become increasingly adroit at coloring within the lines, but, like all technicians, will lack a sense of larger purpose and be more inclined to take a dim view of those who paint differently from themselves. How could it be otherwise when they have been educated into a system in which the picture is already drawn, the appropriate colors already determined, and their task has been reduced to filling in someone else’s conception of how things ought to be?

While there is of course room for such directed processes—in even the most radically pluralist settings, they’re often what distinguish them from relativist ones—the goal of genuinely pluralist educations must be to create people who see both themselves and others as artists engaged in a creative process. To be sure, such creativity demands both discipline and



“The more paint that is found on artists’ palettes, the more creative options they will have to express themselves. That is how texts, practices, and teachings need to be seen in pluralist education.”

a genuine command of the paints upon one’s palette, but it celebrates the artist’s work even when many consider what has been produced to be “bad art.”

It does so, because in a culture in which the production of art is valued above the particular pieces being produced, more great art is produced, and more importantly, the value of art increases, even as debates rage about what is good art and what is not. Is that not a reasonable description of how we hope Jewish ideas play in the lives of people who get a Jewish education?

In such settings, we acknowledge that the more paint that is found on artists’ palettes, the more creative options they will have to express themselves. That is how texts, practices, and teachings need to be seen in pluralist education. They are not simply proofs for conclusions al-

ready reached, but tools that can be used (or not) by those who are given access to them. And as with artists who may never paint from certain ranges of the spectrum, but who value that full range, students in pluralist settings come to see the value of even those “colors” of which they may never avail themselves, yet are seen as invaluable to the overall project of making art in the world.

Ultimately, artists don’t make art because they are compelled to from without, or because it assures their identity as artists, or because others tell them that what they are producing is the “right kind” of art. Artists make art because they feel they have no choice, because it is the highest expression of who they are, because the world needs art and they can make it. My hope is that would be how all those engaged in Jewish education, particularly pluralist Jewish education, would think about it.

We need not agree on what constitutes good art, or art that will last, or art that assures that there will be artists in the future. We need to get as much spiritual/intellectual “paint” into the hands of as many people as possible and invite them to begin painting. We need to help them use the paints that we call Torah and Jewish living to do just what artists do—i.e., use the “paint” we provide them as the medium to express their best selves and make the richest possible contribution to both their fellow artists and the world.

Imagining for them what that will look like will never work, at least not on a truly grand scale. But if we trust that a culture of artists, empowered by their knowledge and experience of the resources of their collective past, will ultimately be good for the arts, the future is ours to create and it will be a rich one. ■

Threefold Pluralism

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13]

to improve instruction and reduce difficulty for teachers.

A careful approach to interactional pluralism can also be an important strategy for navigating the tensions of community building. For one thing, it can help a school to overcome the challenge of ideological apathy: studies have shown that the internal struggle among competing ideas is a critical stimulus of identity development, and that individuals who are forced to articulate and defend their views within the context of a well managed disagreement tend to deepen their understanding of their own perspectives and acquire superior ability to employ critical thinking, debate, and higher-level reasoning strategies. As Susan Tanchel wrote based upon her own experiences working in a pluralistic Jewish high school, “By listening to and challenging one another, students become more aware of their own assumptions and beliefs, and begin to realize in what ways their existing beliefs are satisfying, and in what ways they are not.”⁷

Interactional pluralism can also be valuable in addressing challenges outside the classroom. In the realm of conflict, for example, the insistence that participants remain open to being influenced by the viewpoints of others provides a guideline for managing discord productively. If school stakeholders come to see ideological disagreement as a fruitful element of organizational pluralism rather than as a zero-sum battle that produces winners and losers, then the school may begin to reap some of the benefits that can accrue to dynamic, diverse institutions. As scholars have noted, these benefits include the forging of group consciousness and relationships, as well as establishing an environment that enables organizational change while avoiding the stagnation that can be associated with ideological uniformity. Providing a forum for conflict within a framework of interactional pluralism also vests individuals representing diverse Judaic viewpoints with the authority to play influential roles within the school community, limiting the perceived dominance of any

single perspective. The mandate to take into account multiple perspectives ensures that numerous stakeholders will be given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Distributed leadership is thus another important benefit that is likely to manifest itself in a school that filters its conflicts through the lens of interactional pluralism.

To be sure, pluralism is a guiding philosophy, not a predictor of specific outcomes, and it does not offer formulaic solutions to the problems of community building. Thus, even if two schools profess to have similar theoretical philosophies of pluralism, the specific manifestations of this philosophy are likely to vary considerably between the schools, and the schools’ strategies for navigating the challenges outlined above may vary as well. It is impossible to answer such general questions as “How does a pluralistic Jewish school curriculum address the issue of Biblical authorship?” or “Must a male student cover his head in a pluralistic Jewish school?” A pluralistic school leader must be sensitive to the school’s demographics, history, and surrounding community as he/she seeks to enact the three forms of pluralism and set up processes to address questions such as these. If he/she thoughtfully takes these factors into account, however, then threefold pluralism can serve as an invaluable guide for crafting solutions that are uniquely suited to her/his particular school community.

Conclusion

There are many challenges that plague Jewish community school leaders as they seek to craft communities that are, in Gail Furman’s words, both “modern” (adhering to a shared history and tradition) and “postmodern” (celebrating the diversity of ways in which this common heritage may be approached). Community schools face conflict, pedagogic difficulties, a complex identity-building mission, and often a lack of ideological diversity and/or passion. Among the field’s most vexing challenges, though, has been our inability to agree

upon a definition of pluralism—the very philosophy that school leaders have sought to employ to guide them through these other tensions. I propose that the term in fact is used to refer to three distinct, yet related, phenomena: atmospheric pluralism, informational pluralism, and interactional pluralism. By seeking to enact all three of these forms of pluralism in our schools, we can take steps toward transforming the challenges outlined above into opportunities that will reap significant benefits for our school communities. Conflict can become an enlightening process of identity formation and leadership distribution, and a homogenous, apathetic student body can discover the benefits of its ideological diversity through proficiency in critical thinking and debate.

Pluralistic community schools constitute the only sector of non-Orthodox Jewish day school education that is experiencing growth, and thus the demand for comprehensive knowledge that can foster success in these schools is expanding rapidly. Fortunately, the level of enthusiasm in the field to persevere in the face of the evident challenges, to seek the benefits to individual and community that the enterprise of pluralism promises, and to continue to develop theoretical and practical approaches to enacting pluralism appears high. As Michael Gillis wrote in his analysis of the challenges of pluralism, “Those whose commitment to Jewish peoplehood prevents them from simply throwing in the towel will continue to wrestle with the problems rather than gleefully retreating into self-righteous isolation.”⁸

Those of us who have embraced this wrestling match are now able to undertake systematic analysis of the tensions that community school leaders must navigate and the forms of pluralism that provide strategies for navigating these tensions. Equipped with the lessons that are to be learned from this analysis, North American Jewry may be empowered to move one step closer to the idealized vision of pluralistic communal life that Mordecai Kaplan articulated 75 years ago. ■

Tolerance

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17]

everything to do with boundaries and margins.

If we follow this logic to its conclusion we reach a very interesting finding: the thicker the boundaries, the greater number of individuals, behaviors and attitudes will reside on that boundary; the thinner that boundary, the fewer. Hence, the thicker the boundary the more issues of tolerance and intolerance are raised, becoming relevant, and the greater chances one will come into contact with behaviors and beliefs that one finds objectionable (without them necessarily threatening one's identity, though perhaps causing one to make endless calculations as to the existence or non-existence of such a threat). And of course it is once again clear why tolerance was such an important theme in societies with strong group identities—these are societies with very thick boundaries, with very wide corporate identities and group definitions that necessitate such tolerance however often and tragically it may be defined by its empirical absence or failure.

My point here is that modern societies do not so much make societies more tolerant, but rather do away with group boundaries. Recall the classical enlightenment response to “the Jewish Question,” given by Count Stanislaw de Clermont-Tonnerre in 1789: “We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, and accord everything to the Jews as individuals.” This became perhaps the paradigm statement of attitudes toward the other—his and her constitution solely as individual entities rather than as members of corporate groups. In the public sphere, boundaries are parsed into razor-thin edges; group identities have been replaced by individual identities, and the problem of tolerance of difference has been replaced by the legal recognition and entitlements of rights. In the process, tolerance goes from being a community-centered act to an individual, almost psychological attribute or personal characteristic.

Of course there is nothing wrong (practically or morally) with “solving” the problem of intolerance by removing the social conditions that make tolerance necessary. On the contrary, when it is possible it seems to work well. Nevertheless, my feeling is that the conditions that defined the modern, Western nation-state are currently changing. Return to group-based identities and to religious commitments in many parts of the world, the growth of transnational identities predicated on religion, as well as ethnicity and nationhood not dependent on statehood, are all calling into question the type of individual identities that stood at the core of the modern idea of citizenship.

To the extent that these developments are indeed challenging existing ideas of citizenship and tolerance, we will have to reinvent a language of tolerance not predicated on liberal and modernist ideas of the self and of the interaction between selves. To do so, I believe we will need to have recourse to religious foundations for tolerance. ■

High School Students

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35]

that the process of doing this is sometimes tiresome and not always successful, but it sometimes stimulates personal learning: “It took me out of my comfort zone” and “allowed me to take risks and experience different ways of being religious.” It is also challenging:

It forced me to grapple with the balance between allowing room for everyone's preferences and doing what is best for the community as a whole when, as is often the case, the two goals cannot be accomplished within one system.

When it is accomplished, the sense of community transcends sub-groups and energizes the group: “We really are a community.”

There are, of course, skeptics. Not all seniors appreciate or support Tikhon's pluralism. There is a minority group of students that think that pluralism is “an impossible dream,” and that it saps the group of time and energy by requiring so much attention. Some seniors report that they avoided trying new approaches or engaging in the ongoing—and to them, irrelevant—deliberations. Some are confused by all the talk of pluralism and do not see it as a value or goal and say that being in a pluralist setting has not affected them.

I have elsewhere written about how heavily Tikhon values “cognitive pluralism,” which requires students to articulate, evaluate and rearticulate positions in the ongoing effort to define and build a community that honors and supports its diverse members. Some students will inevitably be uncomfortable and even bewildered. But most of its students, to some degree or another, have experienced and understood Tikhon's goal of creating a community in which pluralism is a pervasive value. As one graduate wrote:

Tikhon has spent four years teaching us the concept of pluralism, giving us a powerful understanding of how to live in, learn from and reconcile different worlds and points-of-view. As we begin the next phase of our lives we are sure to confront a struggle between many competing worlds, ideas and values. This is what it means to be a Jew in the modern world. But we have learned...that this is not something to shy away from, nor is it something we need to resolve. Pluralism is in part about our capacity to hold competing aspects of who we are, what we believe, even where our hearts are; to embrace our different selves and to live with this complexity. ... We have learned to think deeply about challenging issues; engage in spirited discussion and debate and communicate respectfully and act morally, guided by a connection to our common roots and a commitment to making the world a better place.

A pre-eminent scholar of religious pluralism in the contemporary world, Diana Eck, talks of “coming to the table with one's commitments” as a goal of pluralism. Tikhon and other schools like it hope that its graduates will be able to do that: come to the table knowing who they are while also being prepared to work with people who differ to reach shared goals and common aspirations—both in the Jewish community and beyond. ■

Pluralism at a Community Jewish High School

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31]

until after three stars on Saturday night.

The rabbis reasoned that, whereas competition might be antithetical to celebrating a halachic Shabbat, once the technical/objective aspects of observing Shabbat were worked out (staying on-site, pre-registration, walking to the field), all that remained was the subjective *spirit* of Shabbat. Roe's *kavanah* was clearly not one of competition, but rather one of spiritual connectedness and

identification with the Jewish people.

They were clear that Roe was, indeed, "taking a lap for the Jews," and upon that lap, the *Shekhinah* certainly rested.

As a community Jewish high school, did we fulfill our Jewish mandate? Or, did we create a "slippery slope" so often cited by our more traditional colleagues and leaders? Did we expand the boundaries and application of pluralism too far? Or, did we remain true to the spirit of a non-judg-

mental, pluralistic Jewish high school in the United States? And will the *Shekhinah*, over time, find a *mekom kodesh* within our tent? I, for one, am comforted that Roe continues to "take a lap" for those living and dead unable to run, and continues to engage in acts of G-dliness.

Today, Roe attends the University of Southern California in its special BA / MD program. As a future physician, we know that Roe will continue to "take a lap for the Jews." ■



Re/Presenting the Jewish Past Helps Schools Integrate General and Jewish History

Re/Presenting the Jewish Past's second cohort of ten schools is immersed in making important changes to the teaching of Jewish history in North American Jewish high schools. Funded by the AVI CHAI Foundation, Re/Pre is a program run jointly between New York University's Steinhardt School of Human Development, Education and Culture and RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network, focused on improving how students encounter the Jewish past in their high school education. Emerging out of a need to address several challenges facing those teaching history in Jewish high schools, Re/Presenting the Jewish Past partners with schools to craft and implement a vision of Jewish history education that supports schools' missions.

One of the major challenges facing teachers of history in Jewish high schools is the classic conundrum: To integrate or not, and if so, how? A number of our schools wrestle with these questions, and have spent much of their time trying to come up with different ways to address this challenge in their particular school settings.

Two of our participant schools are perfect examples of how this problem cuts both across general studies *and* Judaic studies. The Frankel Jewish Academy's Jewish history department has already outlined important points of intersection between Jewish and general history, and the teach-

ing between the social studies teachers and the Tanakh teachers.

All ten of our schools are sending representatives to a follow-up workshop to be held at New York University in March 2010, where they will present their cur-

re/presenting THE JEWISH PAST

ers from both departments are working to include units of focus on Jewish history in the general history classes. Educators from the Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy have concentrated on a different challenge of integration—how to properly synchronize what students learn about Jews in history and in their Judaic studies classes. They have already created a special committee to deal with issues of integration of Jewish history in their school, and cross-departmental collaboration is flour-

ishing between the social studies teachers and the Tanakh teachers. All ten of our schools are sending representatives to a follow-up workshop to be held at New York University in March 2010, where they will present their cur-

ricular projects with the entire cohort, and where these projects will get disseminated to all the other schools—thereby enabling professional cross-fertilization in ways that will impact the teaching of Jewish history across the ten schools. We are currently recruiting schools for our third cohort. For more information about the program and how to apply, please contact Shaya Klechevsky, at shaya@ravsak.org. ■

Teaching Pluralistically in a Reform Jewish Day School

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41]

and to empower our students to make informed choice based on knowledge (a core concept in Reform Judaism). The end result is that some students elected to take kippot and others elected not to. While we explored the notion that men and women may have different orientations regarding kippot we also emphasized that Reform Judaism is egalitarian and that, in a Reform context, men and women are equally welcome to wear kippot. Students know that kippot are always available and that they are expected to wear kippot when they come to the lower school (separate campuses) for tefillah and other sacred celebrations at least in part because lower school students are still required to wear kippot during tefillah and Judaic studies. The Great Kippah Debate is one example of how we attempt to honor our common heritage and celebrate difference at The Davis Academy.

Another area where we balance heritage and difference is in our holiday celebrations. For Sukkot and Passover the balance is tipped in favor of honoring heritage. Among other things our students decorate the Sukkah, eat meals there, shake the lulav and etrog and learn about the tradition of ushpizin. For Passover our lower school students study the basic elements of the traditional seder and then lead a small seder to which all the parents are invited. Shavuot on the other hand leans more toward celebrating difference.

Last year we decided to transform Shavuot into Torahpalooza by taking the half day before Erev Shavuot and turning it into a time of learning for our 5th through 8th graders. We took as our theme Micah 6:8, "G-d has told you what G-d requires of you: doing justice, loving goodness, and walking humbly with your G-d." We asked the faculty to develop sessions on the topics of justice, kindness, and G-d, and then allowed the students to select which sessions they attended. In order to get to the pizza party lunch they had to submit a punch card that showed that they had attended one session in each category. The content of the sessions reflected the diversity of our faculty. Popular sessions included the reenactment of a famous court case involving the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, "kindness basketball," and a session focused on developing empathy for people with learning disabilities. Though Torahpalooza is offered as an example of celebrating difference the impetus for the celebration was honoring the festival of Shavuot. Torahpalooza is what emerged out of the creative dialectic of balancing heritage and difference.

It's a lot to ask of any one Judaic teacher that they be responsible for teaching common heritage and celebrating difference. Moreover it's not the responsibility of one teacher to ensure that this happens. The balancing act must be linked to an ongoing conversation among faculty and administration. The Judaic content of our schools isn't conveyed exclusively or even primarily in the classroom. It permeates everything that we do—it's who we are.

As we seek to ground students in the common heritage of the Jewish people we must also prepare them for the reality that there are different kinds of Jews. It is up to each institution to make each student and each family feel blessed and fortunate to be a part of *our* school and *our* community and to develop a balanced program that feels authentic. This necessarily involves celebrating difference so that when our students interact with a complex and pluralistic world, the lessons we've taught them and the education we've given them speak to them and guide them toward an authentic and complex life. ■

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It Can't Be About Pluralism

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15]

sible autonomy, as well as with our understanding of the nature of the richness of Torah and of the responsibility of all Jews to seek their best understanding of Torah and of how to live their lives.

My avoidance of the word pluralism, then, lay mainly in my not wanting to be held to a meaning of the word that I never intended. But it also avoided the two other pitfalls that I mentioned earlier. I would not want pluralism—or any –ism—to define the core agenda of the school. And I would not want pluralism—especially in a meaning in which it was never intended—to end up being *the* criterion by which the program is measured or that which shapes the direction of the school. Let me elaborate on this last point and then close by discussing what I think *ought* to be at the core of a Jewish educational institution.

I certainly value the diversity of the Jewish community; participating in and teaching students who come from each of the main movements of contemporary Judaism—as well as students in both the United States and Israel—has enriched my life and challenged me to grow as a religious Jew in numerous ways. And I also believe that it is critical for Jews of different beliefs, practices and religious cultures to come to a better understanding of and appreciation of each other, for the sake both of the ongoing cohesiveness of the Jewish people and of the ongoing vitality and richness of Jewish life. But if pluralism is taken to mean inclusion of Jews representing the broadest possible range of Jewish denominations and Jewish commitments, and if that meaning of pluralism becomes the defining criterion that shapes the educational and religious policy of a school, then that can lead to a watered down version of Jewish life and learning, a version where the key goal is to offend no one and challenge no one—where we succeed to the degree in which (we might imagine that) no one feels marginalized rather than to the degree in which everyone is brought to a

deeper engagement in, knowledge of, and commitment to the core texts, ideas, and practices of Judaism.

At Beit Rabban under my leadership, we didn't try to make a school that was for everyone. What I articulated to prospective parents, whose job it was to choose whether this school matched their family's educational and religious aspirations, was simply this: "This is a school for families for whom Jewish learning, practices, and ideas are central rather than peripheral to their lives." And then, of course, I would elaborate as to what this means. It did not mean that families needed to meet particular standards of practice or share particular understandings of questions of Jewish belief. It did mean that children at Beit Rabban were going to engage deeply and effortfully in Jewish learning, and that parents would need to support that work and participate soulfully in family learning activities each weekend. It meant that children would be engaged in Jewish practice at school and would learn extensively at school about Jewish practices that take place outside of school—that, for example, our school would not have a model seder but rather would work with the children for a full month before Pesach so that the children could be the fullest possible participants in their *family's* seder. It meant that children would be immersed in acquiring Hebrew and in learning Torah, that Torah study would be central to the children's experience at school and to the "mattering map" (Rebecca Goldstein, *The Mind-Body Problem*) of their school culture, and that that would be dissonant for a child if the family did not share in the conviction that Jewish learning matters deeply to their lives.

Which brings me to the issue of the core. A school needs a core, and pluralism cannot be the core. Schools need to talk more about the way they envision their core, and talk of pluralism should not be allowed to divert our attention from what may be a difficult discussion of what *is* at the core. To my mind, the core of a Jew-

ish school must be *talmud Torah*, Torah study writ large, Torah study that includes the formation of a person who is steeped in the practices of the tradition, who experiences him or herself as a participant in the ongoing practice of learning Torah and the ongoing quest to understand Torah, and who continually tries to reshape him or herself as a person guided by the teachings and the spirit of Torah. Pluralism—whether it has an epistemological, communal, or pedagogical meaning—can be an element of the mode of *talmud Torah* in which children at the school are engaged. But pluralism has to be about something—has to describe the way in which we do something—and at a Jewish school it should be about the search to know and to understand Torah, the quest to grow as Jews, and the commitment to serve others and to help shape a vibrant Jewish community.

Now what exactly *talmud Torah* means, what it looks like and how it is practiced, what standards of knowing are to be met and what kind of knowing shapes the kind of person and community that a school aspires to cultivate—all of this too needs to be clarified if *talmud Torah* is not to be another fuzzy term that garners broad assent but gives scant guidance in shaping educational practice. But if schools talked more about *talmud Torah* and worked hard to articulate what that means in their own educational visions, then they would be focusing on a practice that moves us outside of ourselves toward something that is worthy of taking a central place in our individual and communal lives.

If, instead, it is pluralism that we focus on as defining our educational institutions, then I fear that this may be just a form of communal solipsism, a celebration of the multiple we's that constitute our community, rather than a focus on what it is that, in our plurality, we are committed to. That is not all that much better than the individual solipsism that characterizes so much of contemporary life. That's not what Judaism is about, and it's not what education should be about. ■

Rival Versions of Pluralistic Jewish Education

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21]

Procedural Pluralism

A second way to ground the boundaries of what is viable is by reference to who we are and what we stand for as a community. This is an anti-essentialist form of pluralism and sees community organizing as a way of arriving at agreements for a *specific, historically situated, group of people*. Ways of establishing limit positions might be arrived at via a deliberative process in which stakeholders in the school community seek to arrive at a negotiated set of beliefs, principles and values that express the shape of the bounded community. Procedural (negotiated) pluralistic Jewish education will always be, at least in part, a consciously political education—seeking to prepare its students to confidently take their place in the public sphere of Jewish life, developing competency in participating in the public process of interpretation and decision-making. For this kind of pluralist education to be *robustly* Jewish, the meta-level process of inquiry and boundary setting will need to be Jewishly informed and shaped because this is as much the “site” for education for the students as the classroom.

Approaching pluralistic Jewish education with procedural pluralism in mind will also shape what we understand the curriculum to be about. Rather than seeing text study primarily as the initiation of students into master stories, text study becomes a way of engaging students in the ongoing historically extended debates and commitments expressed within their tradition through their engagement with “the Jewish public sphere” present in our texts. Attention will be placed on how I come to articulate my own Jewish voice and negotiate its place among other voices within the tradition and classroom. Content knowledge is still important here, but it is how I put this knowledge to use that signifies growth.

Further core values are affirmed because they are seen as essential to this procedural process. Examples might include educating toward critical thinking, developing

respect for diverse points of view and respect for persons, epistemological care (a care for truth) as well as moral care, a trust toward the other and a hermeneutics of trust, in which we approach the other as making sense and ask “What would it mean to really hold that point of view?”

Substantive Pluralism

Substantive pluralism extends to the meta-level of standards and forms of justification that determine our boundaries. Whereas in the other models the procedures for setting boundaries were shared across the community, in this case they may not be. The requirement that members of a pluralist community share either a core content or procedures of justification is not taken for granted. In this context, pluralistic education will focus on students and teachers living their convictions consciously among others who are living their (different) commitments and generating a deep dialogue between them that enables new responses and practices *for the community* to emerge. Recognition is given to the fact that a secular student and one embracing a theological framework have different ways of justifying their claims about Jewish life—ways that might not correspond in their core contents or forms of explanation. Substantive pluralism emphasizes people’s whole identities, not dividing them in such a way that makes “what is shared in common” part of the public realm while “privatizing” aspects of their Jewish life that diverge from the norm.

This form of pluralism is the most difficult to negotiate but the one that leaves students most fully feeling respected for, rather than in spite of, their differences. Thus, tefillah is not mandatory for all students (secular and religious alike), but students are educated to ask themselves “What does it mean to live my convictions on a daily basis?” and find forms of action that embody their answer. Substantive pluralism requires a negotiated curriculum that leaves space for students to pursue diverse Jewish interests. It does not mean “anything goes”—students still need to offer

an account for why their choices enhance communal Jewish life rather than detract from or weaken it. The basic structure of decision-making within the school changes from *either-or*—your way or mine—to *neither-nor*—community practice is neither what you would do on your own, nor what I would do on mine, but a new set of possibilities that arise out of the dialogue between our differences.

Some thoughts about educational imperatives in pluralistic Jewish education

Certain educational imperatives are put forward in this article for the field of pluralistic education:

We need to be clear ourselves about the forms of pluralism we are employing, and to educate to them with theories in mind.

We need to attend to the relationship between the kind of pluralism we choose to employ and the conception of intellectual progress in our classes. What does it mean for our students’ knowledge, understanding and identity to grow through encountering the diversity in our classrooms (in approaches to subject matter, among students, of theories, interpretation, etc.)?

If we are to educate for pluralism we need to engage students and teachers in discussion about standards that are shared across the diversity within the community. What constitutes them? How do we justify them? How do we establish the veracity of one another’s claims and make judgments concerning the boundary conditions of the community?

Education for pluralistic community demands of us that we explicitly address the normative commitments, values, and beliefs that underlie the concepts we employ in making our evaluations. For instance, what values and beliefs underlie our own understanding of concepts such as responsibility, autonomy, tradition, Halakhah, and the place of reason in Jewish life? ■

Bookcase

THIS column features books, articles, and websites, recommended by our authors and people from the RAVSAK network, pertaining to the theme of the current issue of *HaYidion* for readers who want to investigate the topic in greater depth.

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