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הידועות

HaYidion

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Nurturing Faith

HaYidion: The RAVSAK Journal

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From the Editor

■ by **BARBARA DAVIS**

LIKE many heads of Jewish community day schools, I come to my position via a circuitous route, in my case a doctorate in Spanish literature. In my favorite book, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the self-defined knight of the title makes himself a helmet out of pasteboard. He tests it by slashing it with his sword, destroying it in the process. He then rebuilds it, and rather than testing it, places it confidently on his head, declaring it "a work of the most perfect construction." Such is the difference between science and faith.

Faith is the *raison d'être* of Jewish community day schools and high schools. It is what distinguishes us from our colleagues at NAIS, public schools, and charter schools. At the same time, discussions of faith often make us profoundly uncomfortable, precisely because we are community schools, and our definitions of faith reflect the diversity of thought repeatedly captured in our humorous stories about "two Jews, three opinions" and the island castaway who built two shuls, the one he attended and the one he wouldn't set foot in.

But faith and, more importantly, religious purposefulness, lie at the very core of what we do. Making faith meaningful and purposeful is one of the greatest challenges we face in dealing with young hearts and minds. The articles in this issue address this challenge in many ways, from the conceptual to the pragmatic. The authors themselves, as teachers and leaders, wrestle with the same issues that their students and followers encounter: how to reconcile faith and critical thinking, how to nurture belief, how to accommodate divergent ideas and practices—all within the context of what is developmentally appropriate, particularly with our increased awareness of the unique aspects of adolescence. That we engage with these questions dispassionately and with insights gained from other fields is entirely consistent with our Jewish faith and traditions. As Edmond Fleg wrote, "I am a Jew because the faith of Israel demands of me no abdication of the mind."

We hope that you will find this issue of *HaYidion* valuable and applicable to your work. Faith is a complex and difficult subject because, as Will Herberg wrote in *Judaism and*

Modern Man, the beliefs which a person holds "are not necessarily those he affirms with his mouth, but those that are operative in his life." We hope you will find, in our authors' words, inspiration to make faith an ever more vital and significant part of your students' lives. ■



DR. BARBARA DAVIS is the Secretary of RAVSAK, Executive Editor of *HaYidion* and Head of School at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Dewitt, NY. Barbara can be reached at shds@twcny.rr.com.

Corrections

Due to a production oversight, the fall 2010 article by Dr. Renee Rubin Ross, "Building School Community: Connection and Conflict," starting on p. 30 was left out of the table of contents.

The first paragraph that appeared in the article by Susan L. Shevitz on p. 22 of the fall issue was published in error, copied from an article in the previous issue. The corrected version, without the extraneous material, can be found online at the RAVSAK home page.

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From the Desk of Arnee Winshall, RAVSAK Chair

As we have all come to expect, RAVSAK does not shy away from taking on challenging and tricky topics. This issue of *HaYidion* on faith is yet another example of this. When you look the word up in the dictionary two meanings strike me in particular:

1. confidence or trust in a person or thing
2. belief in G-d or in the doctrines or teachings of religion; belief that is not based on proof; belief in anything

When I think about the personal nature of faith, in the second sense, I am reminded of one of the many profound experiences resulting from my association with a community day school. Upon hearing of a parent's illness that brought him unexpectedly close to death, the school community organized an all-night prayer vigil at the school, open to all to chant Tehillim throughout the night. The power of community, the support we provided to each other and to the family, the Jewish expression of channeling healing energy, and the subsequent turnaround and full recovery of the parent leave me, to this day, overcome with emotion and with a deep feeling of faith.

Judaism provides us with so many tools for dealing with everyday challenges, extraordinary traumas as well as moments of joy and appreciation. It is when we are most vulnerable that we often take the time to strip away our inhibitions, let go of our need to be totally rational and to be open to a strong connection with G-d and an appreciation for the value of each life—true acts of faith.

The first meaning calls up more directly the work of RAVSAK and the focus of many of our board discussions, the faith we have in the power of day schools. As the board of RAVSAK, we are committed to enhancing RAVSAK's role to support schools as they further strengthen their distinct value. We are also committed to helping RAVSAK advocate for day schools and collaborate with other organizations

to spread the word throughout the Jewish community that will result in enhancing the faith the Jewish community has in its day schools.



Arnee Winshall is the Chair of RAVSAK's Board of Directors, and Founding Chair of JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School. Arnee can be reached at arnee@ravsak.org.

The special added value our day schools bring to each of our students, families and staff, and the community is manifest in being more than mere places of academic learning. Day schools are centers in which we enable and encourage the expression of ethical values and create the spaces for all our constituents to connect, to reflect, to develop awe for G-d's creation and to experience a moment that transcends the mundane.

Please join us February 6-8 in Los Angeles, as we share in the opportunity to learn from each other and celebrate together the Jewish day schools around the world, special places where we foster our faith in faith. ■

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Feeding the Hungry: Nurturing Faith in Jewish Day Schools

■ by **HOWARD DEITCHER**

IN 1913 a young Jewish student sent a most disturbing letter to his parents about his intentions to convert to Christianity. In this letter, the student, Franz Rosenzweig, expressed his belief in G-d and at the same time related that he was desperately searching for ways to feed his spiritual soul. His parents lived a typical German Jewish lifestyle that included full membership in the local kehillah and temple attendance three times a year. However, the Jewish education that his parents provided left young Franz hungry and frustrated, and this painful letter describes his genuine search for spiritual sustenance.

Because I am hungry must I—on principle—go on being hungry? On principle! Does principle satisfy hunger? Can being non-religious on principle satisfy a religious need? Or can the empty notation in the registrar's office "Religion-Jewish" satisfy a religious need! If I am given the choice of an empty purse or a handful of money, must I choose the purse? Again, on principle!

Rosenzweig's letter remains as relevant today as it was nearly a century ago. There are many Jewish students in day schools worldwide whose souls are parched for Jewish sustenance, and who identify with Rosenzweig's ongoing search for meaningful Jewish spirituality. In the course of this paper we will argue that Jewish day schools should assume a major role in nurturing the religious development of their students, as this constitutes a critical component of the school's mandate. In addition, we will describe a conceptual model that maps this educational process, and finally, we will present a theological conversation that took place with a group of 9-11 year old day school students and demonstrate how questions of faith development can be addressed in a respectful and meaningful way in a school setting.

The reasons for nurturing faith in Jewish schools are as compelling as they are varied. First and foremost, every healthy and curious child naturally asks theological questions about the world that surrounds them. These young people are engaged in a lifelong search for meaning, and questions of faith and religion play a central role in their ongoing development. They spend a significant portion of their time studying a rich variety of Jewish texts, rituals, beliefs, and ideas. A healthy and desired outcome of this investment of time is the triggering of a plethora of faith-related questions that challenge students' beliefs, assumptions and understandings, and ultimately, impacts their spiritual development.

Children's religious development cannot be seen in isolation from the teaching process. Rather, teaching plays a key role in the development of the individual



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and accelerates the learning process in significant ways that otherwise could not be achieved. In explaining the impact of teaching on human development, Lev Vygotsky considered two levels of mental concepts: *spontaneous* and *scientific*. Spontaneous concepts are unsystematic, contextual reflections on common experiences that occur on a regular basis. In contrast, scientific concepts are logical, systematic, and decontextualized, and are attained through interactions, clarification, and learning activities that trigger an exchange of ideas and insights. According to Vygotsky, schools provide the most natural and conducive environment for nurturing scientific concepts. He maintained that schools should serve as experiential centers for this critical form of human development.

In that sense, Jewish day schools serve as the ultimate venue for faith education, and Jewish studies teachers should be encouraged to engage their students in a spiritual journey that will set the tone for their ongoing religious development. Clearly, this educational responsibility demands a serious commitment to professional development, but in our work with schools worldwide, we have found teachers open and eager to exploring this

possibility. They appreciate the formative impact of faith development and are prepared to invest the necessary time and energy that will enable their students to explore multiple paths of religious development.

Jewish schools serve as communities for their students and their families. They reflect and shape the values of those families and attempt to create a

toward the telos and adult standard of rational logic (allegedly the stuff adults' and only adults' thinking addresses). A series of theological conversations with children by Robert Coles, Kieran Egan, Gareth Matthews and others provide us with a window into the epistemic, metaphysical and moral world of children. Their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs are steeped in extraordinary images and symbols that lay the foundations for their making sense

expect an answer from G-d?

Talya: I don't think we expect it. I think we hope for it, but I don't think that all the times we pray for something we think we are going to get it, we expect to get it. For example, to pray for something concrete, like I want a new bike or something, because I don't think it is fair to ask G-d for those kinds of things.

Fran: Well, I don't expect. Say I say, I would like the messiah to come, and I'd also like my grandmother not to die, and I'd also like my family to buy me a new bike for Chanukah, and I'd also like to die at the age of 104, I don't think that G-d is going to do one of those things. If! But I can hope for it. I can say please let, I don't know, say, please let my grandmother not die because she is sick, maybe He won't do that, but maybe He might not do anything, but He might do everything. He might only do one thing or He might do two things or three things or four things or five things or just one. [giggles]

“Every healthy and curious child is engaged in a lifelong search for meaning, and questions of faith and religion play a central role in their ongoing development.”

sense of mutual respect, appreciation and understanding. While faith is oftentimes perceived as an individual or personal quality, it also includes a social or communal dimension. In Jewish life, faith has always been regarded as a collective as well as an individual phenomenon. And as increasing numbers of Jewish children are educated in Jewish day schools, the social roles of these schools have expanded beyond the classroom to include family education, the celebration of religious and life cycle events, and the provision of a wide range of Jewish experiences. Jewish day schools that regard themselves as communal institutions with a responsibility to forging a sense of community must address the questions of faith that confront their students and their families.

Finally, children's engagement in faith questions allows us to reflect on the very nature of their abstract reasoning—the kind of cognitive moves they make and the ways in which their own worldly experience informs their reasoning about abstract issues. Here we are referring to the underlying concepts, analogies, and associations that children bring to their thinking as they address questions of faith and belief. In exploring these points, we want to challenge the commonly accepted position that belief in G-d is an invariant stage-like process that begins with irrational fantasy (allegedly the stuff children's and only children's thinking addresses)

of the larger world. We believe that issues of faith are critical building blocks in the Jewish child's life, and it is incumbent on Jewish day schools to address these needs in rigorous and meaningful ways.

A THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION

We now turn briefly to a conversation that took place with a group of 9-11 year old children from Orthodox Jewish American families. Within this conversation we see children puzzling over issues concerning the possibility of

“This dialogue demonstrates children's deep interest and acute ability to explore these faith questions within a school setting, and the need for a systematic and ongoing educational approach that will guide this process.”

knowledge of G-d, and the proper object of prayer and its limits. This piece exposes the structural basis of the children's thinking and their deep interest in exploring theological issues that are meaningful in their lives. Our experience teaches us that this topic would receive similar responses from other non-Orthodox children in day schools across North America. (This conversation was analyzed together with Dr. Jen Glaser.)

Ilana (teacher): *When we say a prayer, when we ask something from G-d, should we*

What might this passage tell us about the children's theological reasoning? Firstly, the children are clearly wrestling with the limits of prayer and its relevance for their lives. Second, they insist on distinguishing between expecting and hoping. Here we note that it is Talya who introduces

the distinction, not the teacher, and she does so by modifying the verb that Ilana has used in her question to the students. In distinguishing between these concepts (expecting, hoping) we can see that Talya is engaged in clarifying the different features of each term. *Expecting* depends on a kind of reliance. What matters for reliance is that we take *what it is we rely on* into our plans. To rely on someone picking us up from school is to plan our own activities as if that person will be there. If I am expecting them at the gate and they

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7]

do not show up, I may feel disappointed or frustrated precisely because I took their being at the gate as an expected and assured outcome, and this reliance (acting as if the person would be there) was shown to be mistaken.

Hoping, however, isn't dependent on this kind of reliance. In hoping, we do not plan our activities as if what we are hoping for will actually happen. Hoping is a stance we take to the world that is internal to us. Finally, Talya understands the categories of tangible and intangible, and considers it unfair to ask G-d for the tangible—a position that Fran may not accept. This dialogue demonstrates children's deep interest and acute ability to explore these faith

questions within a school setting, and the need for a systematic and ongoing educational approach that will guide this process.

CONCLUSIONS

What does the area of nurturing faith offer Jewish day school education? First, it offers the children a set of ideas, concepts, and a language that allows them to ponder theological questions in a more nuanced and sophisticated way. Second, the cited dialogue demonstrates how the children's exploration of the meaning and limits of prayer brings their own developing understanding of the world into dialogue with the religious concepts and traditions of which they are part. Their discussion concerning objects of appropri-

ate prayer illumines the ways in which they see moral, theological, and epistemological explanations as fundamentally related to one another. Through a close reading of the dialogue we come to appreciate how statements which at first glance may appear associative and rambling, may, on closer examination, be seen to be cases of complex reasoning—reasoning which explores multiple interpretations of a given situation in light of differing logical variations regarding the subject at hand. Finally, attending to faith development in day school education responds to Franz Rozensweig's plea for spiritual sustenance. In that sense, it addresses a fundamental and critical need that cannot be overlooked in our attempt to produce knowledgeable, curious and committed Jews. ■

Our Client is the Jewish Future RAVSAK רשת בתי ספר קהילתיים Board of Directors Summer Retreat

This July, RAVSAK held its first retreat for the new Board of Directors. The two-day retreat, held in New York City, engaged the board members in exercises in generative thinking, strategy development for RAVSAK's considered and careful growth and clarifying and maximizing RAVSAK's impact in the day school field. In celebration of the hard work accomplished, the Board and staff enjoyed a rooftop barbecue and learned from renowned storyteller Peninnah Schram how best to tell RAVSAK's story. ■



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MASTER STORYTELLER PENINNAH SCHRAM EXPLORES THE ART OF THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE

On Not Teaching Belief in a Jewish Day School

■ by **DANIEL B. KOHN**

MANY years ago I had a conversation with a fellow Judaic studies teacher that touched on the topic of nurturing faith. She had asked me for some teaching advice and rabbinic sources with which to teach her Tanakh classes. As we were discussing our respective teaching styles, she declared that she felt that it was her mission as a Judaic studies teacher to instill in her students a belief in G-d and in the divinity of the Torah. I did not respond but her comment troubled me for some time afterwards as I considered her words.

It took me a while to articulate my thoughts, but what I came to realize upon reflection is that my goal is just the opposite. I believe that the role of Jewish educators is very different from the one enunciated by my fellow teacher. It is *not* our job to teach students what to believe. Rather, it is our job to present our students with traditional Jewish sources and viewpoints and allow them to decide on their own how they want to express their own unique Jewish identity and what ever beliefs that they or their families choose to believe.

When I first began teaching in Jewish day schools twenty years ago, I discovered that it is nearly impossible to teach any Judaic studies subject, whether Tanakh, rabbinics, life cycle, Jewish holidays, or even Hebrew language without touching upon some subject of belief and faith. No subject is immune from such discussions. Especially because I am a rabbi, even when I teach occasional classes on subjects not directly related to a theological subject, questions about personal belief in G-d, the divinity of the Torah, life after death, resurrection, angels, the problem of evil and more inevitably and naturally arise. I welcome such questions because it confirms how inquisitive and interested young people are for some guidance in such complicated and subtle issues.

However, I approach discussions with my students about theology and personal belief with a great deal of care and caution. I believe that it is vitally important for teachers to be open and honest about their beliefs and religious practices with their students. If students cannot trust or respect their teachers' honesty and integrity, then there is very little reason for them to accept other religious lessons from their teachers. I believe that issues of personal theological belief must be approached carefully and perhaps even indirectly in the classroom for two reasons.

The first reason is that when a teacher directly reveals his or her personal beliefs in a classroom, one possible outcome is that some students may either virulently agree or disagree with the teacher. Either reaction can seriously impede the teacher-student

relationship. I remember when I was in high school my American history teacher was a flag-waving, patriotic-slogan spouting politically reactionary Republican. Certainly he had a right to his own political beliefs, and he also had an obligation to be honest with his students about his political opinions. However, the constant interjection of his political views interfered with the subject. It wasn't that my



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history teacher was seeking to “convert” me to his party affiliation or political beliefs. Rather, I felt that he was teaching American History with a strong political spin. Even when we weren't discussing overtly political topics, I always felt that I had to filter out the politics from the information that he was teaching. I also never knew what was his personal political opinion he was trying to foist on us or what was a more neutral presentation of issues. Perhaps if he hadn't been so overt in thrusting his political stripes into the classroom, I might have had an easier time in his class. As it was, I felt that I had to be on guard in his class all the time.

I came to my emphatic stance on neutrality of teaching faith the hard way—by engaging in the very explicit faith-based approach of my fellow Judaic studies teacher. When I first started out as a zealous young rabbi and Judaic studies teacher, I harbored the same fervor to transform all of my students into committed, knowledgeable, observant Jews. It may well be that I was just a poor educator or my approach too heavy-handed,

but those first classes were disasters. My students bridled against my positions, rebelled against my approaches and mutinied against my authority. The very intimacy that I sought in my teacher-student relationships eluded me precisely because of my heavy-handed methodology.

Whenever a teacher in a Jewish classroom trumpets his or her own theological beliefs, whether other students agree or disagree is irrelevant. That teacher has just created a new impediment in teaching his or her students. Every student will unconsciously filter and critique all information learned in that class based on what they know about that teacher's personal theology. The overt presentation of a teacher's personal theological positions can potentially create further obstacles in the fostering of the teacher-student relationship in the classroom.

The second reason that I approach theological issues of personal belief carefully and discretely is that I believe that many students are so eager and thirsty for spiritual guidance that they may be ready to adopt, uncritically and unthinking, any theological statements that their teachers may make. Many years ago I taught an advanced high school class about the Documentary Hypothesis of the origins of the Torah in an informative, tolerant and intellectually open classroom environment. I felt very strongly about not wanting to threaten anyone's beliefs and feelings about the divinity of the Torah. I had thought that I had succeeded when I asked my class if they felt that the theory that we had been learning had some merit or not.



In other words, did they think that there was a basis for positing the Documentary Hypothesis? If not or if so, what had they found compelling or not persuasive? One student raised his hand and admitted that some of the information had convinced him that it was possible. I seized upon his answer in hopes of strengthening his critical reasoning skills by asking why. He stared at me dumbfounded for a moment and then meekly said, "Because you said so"! Even under the best of circumstances it is difficult to avoid influencing the personal, private beliefs of students.

The challenge is that while it is vital as Jewish educators to be open and honest about our own beliefs and theology, I also believe that we seriously impede the spiritual growth and development of our students when we are too overt or enthusiastic about detailing our own beliefs. As Jewish educators, our personal beliefs and

theologies were formed as a result of years of life experiences, education and experimentation over a long period of time. Our system of adult beliefs evolved in response to our life experiences—the very element that our young students lack. When we prove too eager to share the results of our personal process of learning and critical thinking, we stifle such processes in our students.

I believe that it is not our job to teach students what to believe. Rather, it is our job to present our students with traditional Jewish sources and a variety of viewpoints and allow them the freedom and support to decide on their own—along with their family's input—what they choose to believe.

I don't know how many times students have asked me, "Well, Rabbi, what do you believe?" While I certainly have been sorely tempted to answer, I have refrained from sharing my views too explicitly, too directly, in front of the classroom in a didactic way. I have directed my students to other sources and invited them to return to me with what their own thoughts. I have issued open invitations to come and speak with me one-on-one in my office. I have challenged students to reason through their beliefs together with me to further explore their own emerging ideas. However, I am very cautious because I don't want to jeopardize my teacher-student relationships that I have forged. I also don't want to deprive them of the

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Nurturing the Spiritual in Jewish Education

■ by **MICHAEL SHIRE**

JEWISH education today is mainly concerned with the transmission of knowledge, the development of ritual skills, the formation and strengthening of Jewish identity and the affirmation of values. It deals little with the nature of religious experience, the development of religious growth, or the field of spirituality in general. It has found this area of religious education difficult to promote in a modern secular society with teachers and parents ambivalent about their own religiosity, let alone about transmitting it to others.

Jewish education has primarily been concerned with the outer dimensions of religion; the historical, social, and theological forms of religious expression. It has been less concerned with elements of spiritual experience such as trust, awe, and love especially beyond early childhood. Where it has focused on inner dimensions, it has not considered the relationship between inner and outer. Aspirations for graduates of Jewish educational programs often focus on evidence of knowledge, pride of association and expression of moral values. Where spirituality is included, it is often regarded as a separate entity, perhaps expressed in music or experiences removed from the home and synagogue such as camping or Jewish travel.

However, religiosity is a vital component of Jewish life and experience and needs to be integrated into the very fabric of Jewish education. Many Jewish educators are uncertain as to how it can be translated into educational objectives incorporated into the curriculum of Jewish educational settings. One of the key issues for Jewish education is how to make spiritual development an explicit objective of educational programming.

Jews have been uncomfortable with the use of the word “spiritual” when it has related merely to a series of inner spiritual virtues. For Jews, spiritual awareness without explicit religious expression is incomplete. Martin Buber therefore used the word “religiosity” to describe a spiritual openness within a religious tradition. According to Rabbi Arthur Green, Jewish religiosity is described as “striving for the presence of G-d and fashioning a life of holiness appropriate to such striving.” Jewish spiritual life is thus a continual task of creating holiness even in the most mundane of daily acts as Jews seek to build a life of holiness for communities and for individuals.

Since the establishment of the field of faith development in the 1980s, a vast array of research has been performed in the area of children’s spirituality, religious development, theologies of childhood and educational approaches to religious growth. For Jewish educators, however, questions and concerns abound about defining children’s spirituality in a Jewish context as well as understanding the roles of the Jewish educator in enhancing it. Critiques of both the definition of spirituality and its intended outcomes have been expressed by Jewish educators. Nonetheless, spiritual development has become a normative feature of children’s education, even resulting

in its assessment of attainment in British schools by the Office of Standards in Education.

Prompted by this newly developed field of educational development, Jewish edu-



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cators need to ask questions about the nature of educating for religious growth and spirituality and the relationship of religious development to religious learning and practice. Specifically we will want to know how the faith of the child can be characterised and expressed in Jewish terms. What conceptual tools can be used to best understand the nature of the spiritual child? How can faith be formed and nurtured authentically in Judaism, and how can young people be personally enriched and their faith enhanced through Jewish religious education?

What is meant by spiritual development? Is it different from spirituality, religious development or religiosity? There is little consensus about the nature and scope of this particular dimension of life. Where there is research, it has situated itself within the field of the psychology of religion. The originator of this field of study combining theological enquiry with psychological development is Professor James Fowler of Emory University in Atlanta. Fowler’s theory of faith development is summarised as follows:

Faith may be characterised as an integral, centering process underlying the formation of beliefs, values and meanings that



How can faith be formed and nurtured authentically in Judaism, and how can young people be personally enriched and their faith enhanced through Jewish religious education?

(1) gives coherence and direction to people's lives, (2) links them in shared trust and loyalties with others, (3) grounds their personal stance and loyalties in relation to a larger frame of reference and (4) enables them to face and deal with the conditions of human life. The stages of faith aim to describe patterned operations of knowing and valuing that underlie our consciousness.

Fowler uses a broad definition of the word faith. Rather than limiting faith to religious belief, Fowler denotes a process of making meaning which is shared by all human beings. Faith is therefore a process of trusting and structuring meaning making that incorporates belief but goes beyond it.

Fowler conducted research interviews with hundreds of people from a variety

of different backgrounds, ages, sexes and religious affiliations. From these interviews, he derived six stages of faith through which an individual passes. These stages are structural; they characterise the inner operations by which a person makes meaning of the world. These stages are claimed to be common to all people. Though the content of the stage will change from individual to individual, Fowler suggests that all people at the same stage compose meaning in a structurally similar manner. The stages are sequentially ordered with each stage incorporating the processes of the one before while adding to it in a new dimension. Each stage has its own integrity so that stage four is not categorised as more faith full than stage three, rather it has developed in a qualitatively new way. The transition from stage to stage

becomes apparent when the individual is no longer able to make meaning using their familiar processes and seeks to move beyond them. These transitions are often triggered by life crises where new ways are sought to understand painful and difficult circumstances.

From my research into the enhancement of religious development, I have proposed an approach to educational programming that enables educators to explicitly take into account religious development in Jewish educational programming. Three elements of curriculum design have been identified as contributing to religious development in Jewish education: encounter, reflection and instruction.

Promoting experiences for encounter involves supportive times and spaces that evoke an emotional response in a spiritual setting. These responses can be intense feelings, moments of contemplation or peacefulness, expressions of wonderment or awe. The intensity of the experience marks the encounter as students express a closeness to G-d or a sense of G-d's

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presence. A participant in a Jewish educational program describes this phase of the curriculum:

Being spiritual should be a feeling of contentment. It's like opening a door of perception. It can be a road to somewhere else, another way of thinking, another plane of awareness.

The opportunity for spiritual encounter is paramount in nurturing religious development, and the experience of encounter leads to a motiva-

The opportunity for spiritual encounter is paramount in nurturing religious development, and the experience of encounter leads to a motivation to learn more about the nature of a religious life.

tion to learn more about the nature of a religious life. Music, ritual, the creative arts, prayer and meditation are all catalysts for such experiences of encounter. Encounter can be an experience with the self, others, a text, an idea, a location or directly with G-d. Encounter prompts a questioning in students, enabling them to verbalize spiritual feelings and awareness. Group experiences can heighten the sense of encounter particularly in adolescence as the group becomes the shared locus of making meaning. During the phase of encounter, educators act largely as facilitators, structuring experiences and framing perceptions.

A second phase of program design involves reflection. Reflection is an activity that prompts students to question and review perspectives. Reflection provides the opportunity to deliberate on religious questions of meaning and is often evident in personal meditation, prayer and dialogue. Reflection can also be expressed in creative writing, discussion and debate. Reflection is an intimate, imaginative and highly personal activity that allows for speculation, exploration and personal discovery. The connections made during this phase bring deep con-

sciousness and realization to new meanings personally held. Educators facilitate reflection through questioning at the highest forms of Bloom's taxonomy with questions of analysis and judgment.

Reflection allows students to translate their spiritual encounters into Jewish religious language. Reflection aides in naming and understanding the experiences of students. In this mode, educators act in essentially a counseling role, offering encouragement, active listening and sharing of experiences. Reflection is evoked when there is a strong rela-

tionship between educator and student. However, it is often the presence of supportive peers that allows for the most significant opportunities for reflection. This support is fostered where spiritual experience is seen as normative for human development.

Instruction for religiosity is a third phase including the use of creativity, knowledge and acquisition of skills. It provides the theological underpinnings for students' spiritual experienc-

Reflection allows students to translate their spiritual encounters into Jewish religious language.

es. It includes a connection to Jewish history and tradition as well as engagement with the texts of our tradition. Instruction is a phase that includes elements of affective teaching as well as knowledge and skills. Instruction for religiosity provides the theological underpinnings for students' spiritual experiences, and it forms a critical consciousness in the student. Teaching varying concepts of G-d allow students to place their experience in personal meaning understood at its fullest depth: what makes truth religious

is not that it relates to some abnormal field of thought and feeling but that it goes to the roots of experience which it interprets.

The spiritual awareness found in encounter and the verbalizations that emerge from it can lead to articulation of questions in reflection. These questions are responded to by the Jewish context offered in instruction. The three phases of encounter, reflection, and instruction for religiosity are not sequential, but operate concurrently. All three influence each other, as instruction for religiosity opens up students to new encounters. Reflection is a crucial phase, however, in that it allows articulation of spiritual awareness to be connected to explicit religiosity in instruction. Reflection allows others to hear experiences and encourage a future disposition to such encounters or a questioning attitude that places the encounter in a religious context. The sharing of reflections is as important for the individual as it is for the educational group. As Buber has posited, "It is in the asking of questions by students and the subsequent learning in the teacher that a mutuality of education takes place."

The identification of the three phases of encounter, reflection, and instruction for religiosity allow Jewish educators to understand the processes at work in enhancing religiosity in any educational environment. All three phases are need-

ed, and educators will need to plan for them when formulating their programs. In each phase the role of the educator changes, and it is therefore important to understand these differing roles and develop a repertoire of skills to be used in differing phases. The enhancement of religiosity is promoted through the presence of all three phases in the curriculum. The challenge of educating for religious experience is to help learners identify spiritual experience as Jewish religious experience. ■

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When Doubt Enters the Room

■ by **MICHELLE FRIEDMAN**

JEREMY graduates from public high school after attending the local community day school that ends at 8th grade. He enters college at a large state university and takes a course in comparative religion. His roommate, Partha, is a smart, friendly young man from an Indian Hindu background. The two have thoughtful discussions late into the night. Jeremy finds himself wondering, “Partha is a great, ethical guy. Why was I taught that all the stuff he believes in is idolatry? Why isn’t his religion as valid as Judaism?” He takes more courses in eastern religious thought and joins a Buddhist meditation group.

In the winter of Ruthie’s junior year at an Orthodox high school, her mother is in a serious accident. During the immediate crisis Ruthie prays fervently for her mother’s recovery. As her mother’s condition stabilizes into a permanent disability, Ruthie finds that she can no longer pray. She seems detached, even sarcastic in Jewish studies classes. Inwardly, Ruthie is furious at G-d for this hideous injustice and the new responsibilities she has at home.

For faith to mature, a person must encounter doubt. While we understand this idea in theory, coming up close to religious doubt arouses feelings of anxiety and failure on all sides. Educators and parents are on the front line of this challenge. Hopefully we can prepare young people to anticipate doubt and grow from the process. In order to do so, we must probe our own religious identities as well as the parameters of our relationships with our students. Only then can we offer authentic tools to guide young Jews through the inevitable spiritual turbulence of adult life and help them transform religious doubt, perhaps even crisis, into mature, sustaining belief.

The two vignettes above illustrate common scenarios of late adolescence. Jeremy starts his freshman year at college with no formal plan for his Jewish life. He attends occasional Hillel services and finds them boring. The comparative religion class and his friendship with Partha represent Jeremy’s first substantial exposures to other faith traditions. His intellectual curiosity is engaged and he feels emotionally connected during meditation. Suppose that at his day school fifth reunion in June, Jeremy runs into his 8th grade Tanakh teacher. Their conversation leads to Jeremy talking about his confusion about the relative merits of different faith traditions. He tells her that he is considering going on a silent retreat over the summer.

You can imagine many endings to this story. At one extreme, the teacher looks upset and disappointed. She chastises Jeremy for wasting time when he could be getting involved with Jewish campus life. She discusses the conversation with Jeremy’s mother who is horrified that her son’s interests will lead to assimilation and

intermarriage. Jeremy’s connection to organized Jewish life diminishes further. Now, consider another scenario. The Tanakh teacher engages Jeremy’s concerns thoughtfully and with respect. She tells him that that many wise people have grappled with these same questions. She suggests some readings and encourages Jeremy to stay in touch. They email a few times. The teacher advises Jeremy to take



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some college level Jewish studies classes. Jeremy goes on the retreat, loves it and decides to organize a Jewish meditation group.

I might construct parallel stories for Ruthie, the high school student who experiences a crisis when her secure, coherent religious worldview is shattered by tragedy. Certainly faculty members are keenly aware of the accident and provide caring support during the acute crisis. Ten months later, however, does her principal notice that Ruthie is totally unengaged in tefillah? Do either the secular or religious studies teachers, who gave her extensions on papers and exams not even a year earlier stop to ask Ruthie how her emunah is faring in her altered life situation? Does the school guidance counselor include Ruthie’s current religious feelings in the discussions as to which gap year Israel program and then college would be most beneficial for her?

My goal, in both of these vignettes, is to sketch out just a few of the myriad issues

evoked when doubt enters the room. Let's start with ourselves. Who among us has not struggled with basic questions of belief such as reconciling science and faith, and the nature of divine intervention in human affairs? Who has not wrestled with anger when witnessing good people afflicted with terrible suffering?

First and foremost, before educators can respond to powerful feelings in their students, they must be in touch with their own emotional pulses. In other words, teachers and rabbis need to be fully conscious of the feelings that originate from their own personal experiences as distinguished from those of their students. The more they clarify the emotions and thoughts that their words evoke in their own hearts the better they can distinguish

between students' issues and their own. Staying mindful of the border between these realms

“Educators who treat religious questions with dignity demonstrate confidence in the spiritual depths of Judaism and model the capacity of our tradition to respond to challenges of faith and doubt.

freedom allows educators to listen to students' spiritual questioning in a non-judgmental and compassionate manner. Hospitality to critical, even skeptical discussion does not imply agreement with agnosticism.

When an educator disagrees strongly with the premises of a student's behavior or argument it is important to facilitate open conversation. The teacher or rabbi should certainly express his/her position in a thoughtful and non-defensive manner. Educators who treat religious questions with dignity demonstrate confidence in the spiritual depths of Judaism and model the capacity of our tradition to respond to challenges of faith and doubt.

Life beyond high school is sure to expose young adults to compelling ideas and diverse influences. These experiences that will cause them to revisit axioms of the Judaism they learned in earlier years. Educators need to anticipate and prepare their students to meet this challenge. Rabbis and teachers who have explored their own religious questions will not interpret students' doubts as a sign of educational failure. Rather, they will encourage respectful discussions about faith. These educators will also encourage their students to keep learning Jewish texts and otherwise participating in Jewish life. A vibrant spiritual life needs to be nurtured in order to stay relevant and to reckon with the inevitable doubts that come in every life. ■

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Nourishing the Adolescent Soul: Insights and Recommendations

■ by **DAVID PELCOVITZ, SCOTT J. GOLDBERG, and JORDAN ROSENBERG**

HIGH school religious educators face a population whose spiritual development is very much in flux. The high school years, for some students, are the nadir of religious behavior and spiritual receptivity. Our project “Religious Understanding in Adolescent Children” (RUACH), generously supported by the AVI CHAI Foundation, as well as years of experience as psychologists and educators in Jewish schools and communities, has helped us appreciate the nature of adolescent spirituality. A better understanding of adolescent spirituality is particularly important in light of reports that, relative to other religions, American Jewish adolescents ranked lowest in religious vitality and the importance of their religion’s spirituality to their identities.

The development of religious and spiritual values in adolescence is inextricably intertwined with the general process of adolescent development. To understand the cognitive and emotional maturation of adolescents, one must look at the unique changes in adolescent thinking processes relative to their earlier cognitive level. Upon reaching adolescence, youth begin thinking “in a new key.” They express a newfound ability to think abstractly. This newfound skill is at times expressed by challenging religious actions and beliefs. These challenges can be viewed as part of the process of “taking ownership” of the religious aspects of their life. Much of the critical nature of adolescents, as well as their need to define themselves by testing the limits of adult rules and guidelines in the area of religion, stems from this newfound facility in abstract thinking together with a healthy inclination to forge an independent sense of self and identity.

Our understanding of adolescent development has been recently enhanced by advances in neurobiological research. The adolescent brain undergoes a number of changes that result in relatively weaker ability in areas of perspective taking and judgment during the mid-adolescent years. This is followed by significant improvement in brain maturation and associated improvement in behavior by late adolescence. It is therefore not surprising that during adolescence religious change is not only

normal but to be expected. For example, longitudinal research from the general American population suggests that just as adolescents change their behavior, friends and the color of their hair from one year to the next, their religious practice also reflects the fluid nature of adolescent identity formation.



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The RUACH project included qualitative and quantitative investigation of close to 2000 students attending Modern Orthodox Jewish high schools across North America. Through a combination of our quantitative data and focus groups of selected students in participant schools, we developed an understanding of what connects our youth to and

Recommendations

alienates them from G-d. Our analyses of spiritual “connectors” and “alienators” is followed by a summary of our findings of the primary sources of connection.

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO SPIRITUALITY

Perhaps the most important principle to keep in mind in approaching the spiritual education of adolescents is the insight that there are multiple pathways to spiritual connection. Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of Lublin, the 18th century chasidic rabbi better known as the Seer of Lublin, beautifully captures this insight:

“It is impossible to tell people what way they should take. For one way to serve G-d is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose his way with all his strength.”

While it is clear that what works for one teen might leave another feeling disconnected and alienated, there are some common trends that emerge as most effective overall.

ALIENATORS

In the highly structured and academically rigorous world of a Jewish high school, there is little psychological space for the souls of students to be nourished by their teachers and mentors or even by the students themselves. Jewish schools can be environments where rigorous academic requirements and the packed schedule necessitated by a dual curriculum may leave students little room for deep and meaningful conversations with adults or peers. The stillness necessary for meaningful introspection is often absent. Indeed, the informal settings of camp, shabbatonim, and the like appear to provide the room for students to connect whereas the school structure of religious education closes off that possible connectivity for many students. Given the structured nature of most high schools, it is difficult to create a space that gives adolescents the choice and psychological support to foster such spiritual connections. This is captured beautifully in the following:

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 20]

The following are a summary of recommendations for Jewish educators to support the spiritual development of their students.

- Create safe space to talk about G-d and belief
 - Jews relative to other religions are not comfortable with G-d talk. Educators (and parents) need to become comfortable with talking with children about G-d.
 - Examples of how and when to do this include
 - ◆ students and adults sharing stories before tefillah.
 - ◆ faculty speaking about their own relationship with G-d and their own practice.
 - ◆ writing a letter to G-d.
- Adult—student interactions. Teachers need to be aware that
 - how questions of faith are handled can be a pathway to spiritual development or alienation.
 - they are role models, whether actively or through “invisible modeling.”
 - they should partner with parents to advance student connections to G-d.
- Tefillah
 - Develop alternative tefillah “space.” The key to student connection is ownership and empowerment.
 - For younger students, tefillah should be more of a discussion with G-d.
 - Make prayer personal by saying Tehillim (Psalms) for an ill person—this should be initiated by students.
 - Do not allow the conscientious objectors to create a space of cynicism in tefillah. Seat the non-performers apart from those who want to pray with seriousness and ardor.
 - Fluency in tefillah can promote awareness—have students learn to lead prayer services.
- Gratitude and empathy
 - Positive psychology has much to offer the educator in terms of developing learning opportunities for our youth.
 - Include exercises for students in the classroom on a regular basis in the areas of gratitude and empathy, as well as other dispositions/skills that can serve as connectors to the world beyond the self.
- Spreading the spiritual
 - Connect chesed and service learning to G-d/spirituality. Have students take initiative for these programs.
 - Bring the spiritual into all subjects—within Judaic subjects and, if possible, beyond.

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Crashing Through the Woods: If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. If we want to see and hear a person's soul, there is another truth we must remember: the soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, and yet shy. When we go crashing through the woods shouting for it to come out so we can help it, the soul will stay in hiding. But if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while, the soul may show itself. (Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*)

punctuality for tefillah) leads to power struggles over these relatively minor religious expressions. The focus on practice consumes the curriculum with little or no space left for G-d.

Schools often struggle to create a safe space for students grappling with religious behaviors and beliefs. There isn't time in the day for students to explore their opinions or questions with adults or their fellow students. Missing in schools is the opportunity to have frank conversations about religious beliefs or the freedom to ask questions about behavioral expectations. In the rare occasions when,

ing the answers to life's great questions of "how" and "why." Over and above just providing answers, creating a culture of inquiry, where students are listened to, and where their questions are validated, can profoundly affect students. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, the great Jerusalem-based spiritual guide of the last generation, would regularly say: "There is no such thing as a heretical question, only a heretical answer." Teachers need to listen to questions and be open to other perspectives. While it may seem discomfiting or counter-intuitive to a committed Jewish educator, allowing inquiry and promoting student exploration provides space through which students can eventually connect to spirituality.

Sometimes, modeling a lack of knowledge can be a source of connection. Allowing students to see educators' own areas of challenge and growth, mediated by discussions about approaching spirituality despite challenges, transmutes those challenges and inconsistencies from weakness to strength. Educators create connections for students when educators serve as non-judgmental role models, and not as overwhelmingly knowledgeable, perfect, and pious demi-angels. Educators need to use literature, personal events, and the reality of students' lives, whether tragic or joyous, as opportunities to listen to students and opportunities to learn from them. These moments of real sharing are teachable moments not because educators get to share their dogma. Rather, the teaching of these moments is

“ Perhaps the most important principle to keep in mind in approaching the spiritual education of adolescents is the insight that there are multiple pathways to spiritual connection.

Unfortunately, the school structures that alienate students are often pillars of the educational system, such as grading and discipline. Whereas grading in academic subjects creates accountability for students that can be helpful, grading in Judaic studies does more than report on student learning. Judaic studies classes are taught in order to deepen and enrich the religious life of a student. Academic assessment in Judaic studies can be perceived by the students as passing judgment on their religious and spiritual life.

Likewise, while optimal learning occurs in a classroom with clear behavioral expectations and consequences for not meeting those expectations, such consequences for tefillah (prayer) infractions serves to alienate students. Students have described feeling that teachers are “driving [them] away from meaningful tefillah” as opposed to promoting ideal behavior and practices. Instructing students in religious practices is quite complex and has several potential alienating side effects. Teaching religious behaviors often centers around the “do nots” of Judaism, relegating Judaism to “a religion of no.” This also creates a situation in which basic religious behavioral expectations (e.g., wearing a kippah,

as has been reported to us, questions are asked, students state that defensive and apologetic responses are often given.

The adults in the lives of students are role models regardless of whether they actively pursue that title. Religious inconsistency and lack of sincerity on the part of adults are additional alienators. Educators sometimes expect more consistency and sincerity from students than they do of themselves. Their behavior is viewed by students as hypocrisy, and such adults are dismissed as role models.

“ Jewish schools can be environments where rigorous academic requirements and the packed schedule necessitated by a dual curriculum may leave students little room for meaningful conversations with adults or peers.

The structured environment of the school, however, can also be viewed as amazing opportunities to connect our youth to spirituality.

CONNECTORS

Connecting students spiritually is often viewed by educators as a result of know-

between students and their peers and between students and themselves.

Educators need to create spaces within the busy schedule of students for deep and meaningful conversations with and between students. For some, stillness alone is enough. For others, music, a rustic or natural habitat, art, or poetry will

be the connector. While it might be easier to develop isolated informal programs that incorporate these opportunities, these opportunities can be integrated within the school environment as well. One way to incorporate these moments is to develop periodic “spiritual check-ups”—safe spaces for each individual student to speak with an adult about the role that G-d plays in their lives.

“Educators sometimes expect more consistency and sincerity from students than they do of themselves. Their behavior is viewed by students as hypocrisy, and such adults are dismissed as role models.”

DEVELOPMENTALLY INFORMED APPROACHES TO ENHANCING ADOLESCENT SPIRITUALITY

As noted earlier, religious connection during adolescence takes place in the context of their rapidly shifting cognitive and social development. Understanding this process can help the educator develop a more effective, developmentally informed response to challenges they face in working with students who are struggling with feelings of spiritual apathy and alienation.

Cognitive: Educators must keep in mind that sarcasm, challenge, and questioning often stem from an adolescent’s newfound ability to think abstractly and independently. Allowing and encouraging questioning often has the paradoxical benefit of increased connection. Conversely, responding to questioning with annoyance, condescension, or irritation can easily promote the negative feelings of alienation and rejection within students. Similarly, a lack of humility in discussions of theodicy instead of a simple “I don’t know” or “let’s explore this together” can shut down a healthy source of striving for personal connection to the Divine. When students are asked what they want to learn about the most in the areas of religion, the topic of theodicy tops the list. This can either be a source of increased connection or, when not handled sensitively, of alienation. Also of note, in a qualitative study of adolescent girls attending a

Modern Orthodox yeshiva high school, Shira Weiss found that tragedy was a major source of spiritual connection for the girls in her study.

Independence: In a related sense, the adolescent’s drive for independence necessitates a nuanced response to challenges from the teen regarding religious practice or beliefs. It is a mistake when an adolescent’s search for an independent

identity becomes intertwined with her religious obligations. When battles over prayer, dress or religious belief becomes the battleground upon which the drive for independence plays out, connection to religion becomes confused with the adolescent’s finding his or her voice. Learning which behaviors to judiciously ignore, and those which need to be dealt with in a calm, firm, yet unemotional manner, is

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Religious Talk, Experience and Reflection: Developmental Considerations

■ by **NANCY FLAM**

“From infancy, then, we are inclined to have absorbed generally positive or negative feelings about the universe into which we have been born—a powerful sense of the presence or absence of the spiritual dimension of life. This originating sense of the mystery that we pick up from the group or community around us tends to remain with us for the rest of our lives, even though there are myriad changes and revisions in the course of that life.”
(Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*)

THERE are so many ways for us to become more knowledgeable and skillful in nurturing the spiritual lives of children within the community day school environment. In the following reflections I focus mostly on a few of the challenges and opportunities of the middle and high school years.

TRANSITIONING THROUGH DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

One of the greatest challenges in nurturing the spiritual life of our children is understanding how to affirm and encourage their connection to and identification with images, stories, ideas and behaviors from the Jewish tradition that will not have to be unlearned later in life. Or to state more positively, whatever our children learn in the religious life must be presented in such a way, and ongoing development supported in such a way, that when the inevitable disequilibrium ensues from normal development and the acquisition of new cognitive capacities, the child is able to let go of old ways of seeing and accommodate and assimilate new ways of thinking and putting the world together, still in Jewish terms. Too often, we see children pass from the concrete operational stage of development (ages 7 to 12) into the formal operational stage (ages 12 and beyond) and reject his/her previous ways of relating to G-d, Torah and tefillah, without being supported sufficiently to find new, more sophisticated ways of understanding and relating to these central aspects of Jewish religious life.

The move out of eager engagement with davening and to some extent Torah learning is familiar to those teaching at the upper end of elementary school and into middle school. “It’s all myth.” “There is no One there.” “Science disproves the Genesis story of creation.” We see so many of our young adolescents embrace what I think of as a “naïve atheism” at this time. The disillusionment with one’s earlier ways of Jewish thinking and being, the growing distrust in one’s parents’, teachers’ and tradition’s representations of ultimate reality, and one’s own overconfidence in the role of reason are powerful enough for many Jews entering or in the midst of adolescence to prevent their successful transition into a new and more mature stage of positive, spiritual development.

For instance, children up to age seven (and often somewhat beyond) are usually willing to engage and play with anthropomorphic images of G-d. Torah stories are alive with the character of G-d; tefillah is addressed to a human-like figure known as Adonai; and classroom conversation about G-d is easily assimilated when G-d is spoken

of as “He” or “She,” or characterized as caring, strong, or close to us. But what happens when cognitive capacity for logical thinking develops and children question whether G-d, having been imagined concretely as a Person, is “really there”? How do we help children just on the cusp of a new kind of thinking understand that we have been speaking to them all along until now, and the Torah and Siddur continue to speak, “as if,” in metaphor? (Have we been threading all our conversation about G-d throughout the elementary



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school years with this “as if” qualifier, so even if not understood, the words have been spoken?)

In the shift away from one’s earlier, relatively facile engagement with G-d-language toward skepticism, away from willingness and toward willfulness, what becomes of the child’s experience of his/her past? What factors will mitigate the child’s sense of loss and disillusionment with his/her earlier, often quite positive engagement with Torah, tefillah and conversation to and about G-d? What will encourage his/her sense of possibility about continued exploration and discovery in the spiritual life and inspire the effort, faith and play necessary to grow into a new stage of spiritual development?

For many educators in the Jewish day (and supplementary) school, this transition, taking place roughly around the Bar/Bat Mitzvah years and after, presents the greatest challenge in nurturing

faith. In the elementary school years, we rely on children's developmental openness to engaging in concrete use of language and image in Torah and

of meaning, etc.), and other key Jewish ideas, all from a variety of perspectives, multiple perspectives which they are now developmentally ready to hold. During

from the approach to G-d and the life of the spirit we took with our students as elementary students and approach it from the side, as it were—slant. Rather than debating about G-d's reality or nature, we invite our students into explorations of themselves, made in G-d's image. (They are, as we know, supremely interested in themselves at this time.) We invite our students into their creativity, a capacity we share with Borei HaOlam, the Creator of the world. We invite our students into their capacity for holy relationships, into their connection with the natural world and, most of all, into their questions themselves.

“Too often, we see children reject his/her previous ways of relating to G-d, Torah and tefillah, without being supported sufficiently to find new, more sophisticated ways of understanding and relating to these central aspects of Jewish religious life.

tefillah. In addition, we capitalize on their developmental drive for mastery, method and competence, teaching tremendous siddur and synagogue skills, as well as significant content of Chumash.

In the high school years, when teenagers have gained the capacity for more abstract and logical thinking, we engage them in philosophical conversation about G-d (e.g. as our ultimate Source of values, as the “force for our Salvation” [Kaplan], as the One, etc.), about Torah (as a product of divine and human interactivity, as “sacred history,” as revealing layers or levels

the high school years, many students can explore multiple meanings of “mitzvah” or “observance” or even of “G-d,” and be supported to find an authentic, personally meaningful way of understanding. But what of the middle school years when the project of coming into a sense of one's authentic self and one's capacity for self-reflection are so very new?

TIME FOR NOT KNOWING

During these years, we “tell all the Truth but tell it slant” for “success in circuit lies” (Emily Dickinson). We take a step back

At this time in the life of a young adolescent, a time of questioning, doubt, turmoil and uncertainty, we do best by focusing not on answers but on questions. Through our curriculum and our teaching presence, we teach our students, as Rilke wrote, “to try to love the questions themselves” and not to “search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. ... Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing

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Graduate Interns at RAVSAK

Evan Zauder is in his third year of rabbinical studies at Yeshiva University, as well as a dual master's student and a Jim Joseph Fellow in Education and Jewish Studies at NYU. After graduation from Tannenbaum CHAT, he studied for two years at Yeshivat HaKotel in Jerusalem's Old City. He continued his education at Yeshiva University, earning a BA in political science and a minor in Hebrew language. He spends his summers working for Bnei Akiva as a division head, most recently directing a bus for Mach Hach Ba'Aretz, and he



currently serves as youth director at The Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

Jeremy Fine is currently a fourth year rabbinical student at the Jewish Theo-



logical Seminary, finishing a master's at the Davidson School. He attended elementary school at a Solomon Schechter and spent his summers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. After attending Ida Crown Jewish Academy for high school, he graduated from the University of Illinois in Champaign Urbana, where he served as Hillel president for three years. During his free time he writes a popular Jewish sports blog www.TheGreatRabbino.com and spends time with his beautiful wife Jessica. ■

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it, live your way into the answer” (*Letters to a Young Poet*).

I am suggesting that we imagine a certain period of adolescence as allowing for a religious-theological moratorium not unlike the psychosocial moratorium Erik Erikson describes that takes place around identity formation. Jewish adolescents should be allowed a period of time when they are free from the expectation of theological knowing or commitment, when exploration is explicitly at the center. They need to be encouraged to experiment with learning and expressive activities in school (e.g. in the arts, in investigating their emotional and relational lives, in nature, etc.) that might broaden their experiential base from which to reflect in later years, when reflective capacity will be more developed.

More broadly, our job as educators of young adolescents is to keep the door ajar to questioning and wonder. When the newly acquired and compelling power of logic, rationality, and linear thinking takes hold, our job is to resist its totalizing influence. A central feature of the spiritual life, born in childhood but potentially nurtured throughout a lifetime, is the capacity to wonder. By “wonder” I certainly mean the experience of encountering the natural world, creatures and events as “wonderful,” awesome, astonishing, amazing (in a Heschelian sense), the kind of wonder that might naturally lead to the form of tefillah we call shevach, praise. But I also mean the capacity to wonder *about*, to contemplate, to question.

One of the most powerful and simple teaching tools toward this end is social-emotional educator Rachael Kessler’s use of “mystery questions.” As adolescents explore existential questions of meaning and purpose, they are invited into safe ways to honor and express the important questions they carry in their hearts. “Does my life matter?” “Why do bad things happen to good people?” “Do I have a soul?” “What happens when we die?”

These existential questions are so deep that

*we can never find the bottom. Certainly by the time a child enters adolescence, “each senses mystery in the cosmos and needs relationship to that mystery” (M. Gurian). (Rachel Kessler, *The Soul of Education*)*

It is at this juncture that I believe it is most important for our students to be taught by educators who themselves are models of people “living the questions”; people who are unafraid of their own unknowing; people who engage in their own wondering; people who continue to nurture their own inner lives through practice and investigation; and people who know how to create truly safe environments for such deep exploration. Such educators, of course, need Jewish communal support to engage in their own spiritual development.

JEWISH IDENTITY FORMATION, RELIGIOUS FORMATION AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

If successful, the result of day school education should be the establishment of a strong, stable, positive Jewish identity. We are dedicated, in partnership with parents and others in the child’s Jewish community, to “making Jews.” In addition to engaging in Jewish identity formation, our project includes the mandate of Jewish religious formation: shaping our children to understand themselves and their experience in Jewish religious terms (e.g. kadosh, neshamah, mitzvah, teshuvah), in Jewish time (e.g. Shabbat, Yom Tov, yemei chol), using Jewish language and ritual to express their inner being (through engagement with Torah, tefillah, gemilut chasadim). But by high school, when we hope the foundation of such Jewish identity formation and Jewish religious formation has been established, we need to focus on yet another area of formation: spiritual formation.

At this point, when we can more fruitfully engage the high school student in greater philosophic and rational theological discourse, we also need to turn our attention to the growing capacity of high school students for self-reflection and individuation, when they feel themselves not only part of a group (Jews) but also more and more clearly their own per-

son, with their own, precious inner life to nurture: a potentially central source of meaning, insight, and guidance. In other words, we need to engage not only in the ongoing process of Jewish identity and religious formation but in *individual spiritual formation*, as well.

While Jews at this age are part of a religious community, they are also beginning to discover and name their own particular spiritual preferences (akin to personality preferences; see Carl Jung, Myers Briggs) and proclivities. They need to be supported in discovering their own spiritual path and expression.

*Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz once said to his teacher, the Seer of Lublin: “Show me one general way to the service of G-d.” The zaddik replied: “It is impossible to tell men what way they should take. For one the way to serve G-d is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting, and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose this way with all his strength.” (Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*)*

Here we can learn from recent decades’ work in the Jewish community with adult spiritual development and apply it to the high school years, where appropriate. In particular, the recent work in the development and application of Jewish spiritual direction (now offered at most liberal seminaries, and pioneered through the work of two Jewish spiritual direction training programs, Lev Shomea and Morei Derekh) becomes a resource and model for nurturing the inner life of the individual. Perhaps it is possible to offer high school students voluntary, monthly sessions with a trained Jewish spiritual director to help the student understand, value and savor the glimmerings of his/her own particular inner life.

Spiritual Direction is a relationship in which we dedicate a regular period of time to the exploration of the presence of the Holy in our lives. In one-on-one relationship to a spiritual “director” or guide or in a group, seekers are guided to notice, savor and deepen their awareness of how the Di-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 30]

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Experiences That Nurture Faith

■ by **BINNY FREEDMAN**

WE live in an age that is thirsty for meaning, and perhaps our greatest challenge as educators is to transmit a sense of meaning to our students. But how can we effectively nurture faith? My sense is that the task has become a cerebral affair, instead of the experience it is meant to be, and that the solution lies not in trying to convince our students of anything, but rather in sharing meaningful, joy-filled Jewish experiences with them.

To that end, I would like to recount a particular Chanukah experience I had while serving in the Israeli army many years ago. To be honest, I wasn't particularly looking forward to Chanukah that year and hadn't really had much time to think about it. Our armored battalion had recently spent a few months in Lebanon, and while I was thankful we would be spending the winter in Israel and not up in the freezing cold mountains of Lebanon, we were still in the process of overhauling the tanks—not a particularly enjoyable task.

We were so involved with the procedures involved in getting the tanks back on alert status that it was only a few hours before Chanukah when I realized that I had no menorah, no candles or oil, and certainly no gold coins or dreidels. As the newest officer, I also had no hope of getting leave just to get some Chanukah lights. A wave of depression swept over me, as I realized that I would be celebrating Chanukah alone, surrounded by dirty, exhausted soldiers who didn't place much stock in the holiday anyway. As the sun set, and the mountains of Jordan changed colors, my mood worsened. I remembered what Chanukah used to feel like, how much I always looked forward to it, and how sad it was going to be to just light a Shabbat candle in a corner of the dining room.

At this point, to my great surprise, one of the reserve duty soldiers who were helping us overhaul the tanks wished me a happy Chanukah. I guess he saw the surprise on my face, because he smiled and said, "*Mah haba'ayah? Atah lo rotzeh chag sameach?*" ("What's the matter? You don't want a happy Chanukah?")

I launched into a long-winded explanation of how depressing it was to be alone on Chanukah, especially since one of the major points of the Chanukah celebration is supposed to be *pirsumah de-nisah*, publicizing the miracle. With great clarity of vision, my fellow soldier responded, "*Az eifoh ba'olam yesh makom yoter tov lachgog et hanes hazeh, me'asher hamakom hazeh?*" ("So where else in the world is there a better place than here to celebrate the miracle of Chanukah?")

As my company headed to the dining hall for dinner, the reservist grabbed my arm

and told me to follow him to the edge of the line of tanks, where some spent 105mm shell casings were lying on the ground, waiting to be taken out to the ammo dump.

He grabbed a couple and gave me one, and started walking back to the mess hall. Picking up a shovel from the emergency fire stand, he dug a hole and shoved the empty tank shell casing into



Rabbi Binny Freedman, a company commander in the IDF, is Director of Isralight and Dean of Orayta, a leadership training gap-year program for post-high school students in the Old City of Jerusalem. He can be contacted at ravbinny@orayta.org.

it, shoveling some of the dirt into the shell casing, which was about waist-high. By this time, I was grinning, having figured out that when we were done, we would have the largest makeshift menorah I had ever seen. We poured gun-oil on top of the dirt in each shell casing, and then topped it off with some very flammable benzene. I grabbed a lighter and was about to flick it when he looked at me with horror, and said, "*Mah karah lecha? Lech tikra lekulam!*" ("What's the matter with you? Go call everyone out here!")

I went inside and made a fairly weak announcement that we were lighting Chanukah candles outside, and that whoever was interested should come join us. I figured it would be nice if a few guys decided to join us. Suddenly, the battalion commander stood up, looked around the dining hall, and strode outside. At that point the entire base, at least a couple of hundred men, also came outside.

My comrade handed me a stick with a



So what do you say to two hundred modern day Maccabees defending the borders of Israel, after two thousand years of exile, in a modern Jewish state?

rag dipped in some benzene and said, "Go ahead and light." But I refused, feeling this was really his show, and he should have the incredible privilege of lighting the menorah he had created. So he took the stick in his hand and, when everyone got really quiet, announced in a loud voice, "*Lifnei she-nadlik, Bini yomar kamah milim!*" ("Before we light, Binny will say a couple of words!")

He had set me up, and with everyone watching I had to say something. So what do you say to two hundred modern day Maccabees defending the borders of Israel, after two thousand years of exile, in a modern Jewish state? Words failed me that night, and to be honest, I don't really recall what I said, which is probably as it should be, because some experiences are not meant to be put into words.

I do remember looking over at my new-found friend, whose name, to be honest, I cannot even recall, and watching with surprise as he took a kippah out of his pocket and put it on his head before he lit the candles. And I remember being even more surprised as he recited all the blessings for the first night's candlelighting from memory. Someone started singing and a few of the guys started dancing, all by the light of the Chanukah "candle" in a 105mm tank shell casing, in the middle of an Israeli Army tank base, near the Jordanian border.

And when we were done, I went over to thank the reservist, who instead thanked me with the following explanation: He had been one of the original tank crews on the Suez Canal, on the infamous Bar-Lev Line, when thousands of Egyptian tanks

and tens of thousands of Egyptian soldiers crossed the canal into Israeli territory. He made it out of the first wave and found himself, on the third day of the fighting, with one of the tank units attempting to counter-attack and regain lost ground.

Deep in the desert, the night turned into day as tanks all around him burst into flame. His unit, he told me, was at the mercy of the newest anti-tank missiles being fired by the Egyptians from the dunes. The whole scene seemed to him like candles burning in the night, and, terrified that his tank was next, he found himself thinking of Chanukah and the menorah lights, which he had not lit in a good number of years. So he made a deal with G-d that if he made it out of that inferno, he would light the Chanukah candles that year with all the blessings and all the bells and whistles. And indeed, he managed to do just that, and had not missed a night of Chanukah candles ever since.

And one thing I can say with conviction: I have never lit Chanukah candles in quite the same way. ■

Nourishing Diversity: The Leader as Catalyst

■ by **SUSAN WEINTROB**

JEWES are very proud of their support of diversity. Chests swell when remembering Abraham Joshua Heschel, of blessed memory, who marched with Martin Luther King. We publish books about our rescue of Jews from the former USSR, Yemen, Iran or Ethiopia. We love Jewish basketball players, Jews from China or from the “lost” Lemba tribes of Zimbabwe.

While we may be proud of the diversity in our global community, smiles fade when it comes to differences among synagogues and movements, observance and non-observance. Frowns begin to appear at day schools when discussing which students wear kippot, what level of kashrut is observed and how tefillah is organized.

While all Jewish day schools and yeshivot share concerns of diversity, community day schools in particular serve families across a large spectrum of the Jewish community; one would therefore think that expecting diversity of thought and practice would be sine qua non.

Centers of Jewish population such as Los Angeles or Teaneck often have several specialized Jewish day schools, frequently cut along ethnic or religious lines, such as a predominantly Sephardic or Modern Orthodox school. In smaller Jewish communities, there is usually only one school. Unfortunately, many prospective parents never make it to the school’s entrance because of a perceived lack of welcome or open-mindedness towards the unaffiliated or non-observant. A recent community survey at my current school found this to be the case with some families.

Some administrators try to recruit non-observant families by watering down the Jewish side of the curriculum, removing Hebrew as a required language or substituting yoga for tefillah, for example. This apologetic attitude ultimately does not gain students. Yet pride in our identity is no excuse for not reaching out with welcome and warmth to the diversity that exists in our communities.

An intermarried relative of mine had enrolled her young children in her city’s community day school. When her elder son was in first grade, he came home to tell his parents that he wanted to keep kosher. The parents, fearful that the child would one day judge his parents’ marriage and their lack of home observance, immediately pulled their children from the school and put them in public school. No one from the school called to discuss their feelings or to make them feel that the door was always open to return.

This same perception that non-observance would be judged was echoed recently at a meeting where a Reform parent told me he wouldn’t ever enroll his child in our school, as he wouldn’t want him taught anything that he and his wife might disagree with.

He was worried that his lack of kashrut, Shabbat observance, and synagogue attendance would be judged at school. He worried his children would be taught



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observance and be distanced from him. Therefore, the child was placed in public school. Jewish connections were considered a greater risk than being taught to celebrate Christmas or learning Western history without the richness of the Jewish experience. Our school has begun to schedule outreach meetings where such fears can be respectfully listened to, trust established and, with a bit of work, connections built.

Fear exists in the more observant as well. An Orthodox parent at a community day school did not want his child to meet the community’s Conservative female rabbi, as he didn’t want him to know that female rabbis existed. This parent was against participation of rabbis from a variety of congregations, as he did not want his son to learn anything he disagreed with. These examples demonstrate a fear of interaction with Jews from diverse backgrounds. Perhaps this reveals a lack of confidence in the strength of one’s own family or the fear of being judged lacking by others in the community, school or even in one’s family. In our small population, we maintain divisions that hurt us and our children’s future.

How we enforce observance in our schools can bring intense disagreements.

One of my schools required boys and girls to wear kippot during tefillah, Jewish studies and meals, even though the few observant families protested it was against their understanding of Halakhah for their daughters. I have heard some religious Judaic studies teachers describe parents' lack of observance in disparaging language to students and, on the other side, have heard some staff describe Israel and Jewish practice with disdain. While we may have parent education about differentiation or standardized tests, we often do not know how to explain why we do what we do Jewishly in our schools.

There are positive choices that we as leaders may institute to shape a more profound and open environment in which to learn and teach. The learning environment can be a model of diversity by building a Judaic studies curriculum that teaches how to read texts on many layers. Teachers from diverse backgrounds can engage their students in Jewish texts and tradition without being condescending towards any group. These skills are strengthened in dialogue-based classes, learning the meaning of the words and the structure of the texts in Chumash or Navi, and the gift of the ability to understand the wisdom of our Torah on many levels and from many sources. Framing the learning of Jewish texts in the paradigm of a Talmud page is instructive for all of us: the opinions shared around the page are respected even as they are not always in agreement with each other. This framework from our heritage shapes trust in the school and in one's own values.

Tefillah is a challenge both in engagement and diversity. In some schools, there is a separate minyan for girls and boys as they become adolescents. How can our young men and women be empowered to understand that prayer is important for women? It is important for school leaders to create a spiritual environment filled with respect for all the families. Boys and girls can lead Shacharit in their own minyanim. There can be time, even if brief, for questions, new melodies, and presentation of divrei Torah, in their own words, with guidance from any source and tradition: internet, parents, teachers, friends, rabbis. Some post-bnei mitzvah boys and girls lead services and read Torah in their own syna-

gogues to allow this experience for families that wish this for their sons and daughters.

Boards, as well as students, need to experience the positive nature of diversity. Many boards begin their meetings with a dvar Torah, trustees sharing their insights from their own traditions or insights. From time to time, instead of giving a traditional dvar Torah, each trustee may share what his or her brit with the school is. Some may talk of connections, a covenant with their children; others may feel the covenant with the traditions of their families; others may connect with Israel or with Jewish customs. Moments such as these allow each person to be heard and validated. Action plans from our boards must understand the need to develop frameworks respecting our families' diversities. The affirmation of our vision of Klal Yisrael advances when we cultivate trust and an understanding that the strength of our schools lies in building common ground for our families, especially true in times of economic downturns and shrinking Jewish populations.

Studies show that comfort with diversity helps our children in the marketplace of the future. In addition to career success, our core belief is that our schools should be spiritual communities that develop character. Building community is part of tikkun olam, based on our understanding that each human is created in the image of G-d, betzelem Elokim.

How we support and accept diversity in our community takes constant nurturing. If we stop our efforts, within a short amount of time much reverts back to exclusion, mistrust and fear. Each person in a leadership position has the opportunity and responsibility to include all our families in daily speech and interactions. Mentoring leaders among staff, students, parents and community develops the constant attention and optimistic vision needed to support safe and secure Jewish identities in our schools.

A good leader actively asks questions and continues learning. Our ability to guide is directly enhanced by knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish texts, and by the support of a continual learning environment for all. With values that already exist in Jewish tradition, we can and should build a community with families that may look, think or live differently. Celebrating diversity opens the door to these Jewish families, creating common ground for all of us. This diversity polishes our values and aspirations, tests our assumptions and stretches our notions of identity. Leaders who encourage partnerships establish meaningful and successful ways to guide. Inspiring others occurs best when we allow others to teach and inspire us. We who are teachers and leaders know that others need to believe in us, but the fact is that our diverse students and their families give our professional lives meaning and purpose. ■

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1) Tell us something about yourself.

I am a proud husband and father of three. Born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, I served as general director of the Jewish youth movement at HEBRAICA, Venezuela's largest Jewish community center. While there, eventually becoming general operational manager, I provided strong leadership while shepherding significant growth and promoting deeper connections to spiritual roots and Jewish values within the organization.

My commitment to Jewish education began early as a teacher of Jewish history and Israeli geography courses at Caracas's Jewish day school. Additionally, I have been an active proponent of Jewish summer camps in Venezuela. Besides my board commitment to RAVSAK, I serve on the board of governors of the Hillel Community Day School in North Miami Beach and as chair of the Consular Corps Committee for the



American Jewish Committee's Latin American Task Force.

2) Why do you believe that Jewish day school education is important?

It is imperative that Jewish parents provide their children, our next generation, with a framework to lead lives centered on the Jewish values of tikkun olam, ka-

vod, tzedakah, Torah and a love for Israel. Only Jewish day schools are equipped to provide the requisite balance between educational knowledge and Jewish values. It is Jewish day schools that provide families with the sense of identity our future generations will need to survive the Jewish community's biggest threat: assimilation.

3) What strengths do you bring to the RAVSAK board?

My multidisciplinary background working in and with myriad Jewish community organizations as well as my heritage as a Latin, Ashke-fardic Jew.

4) Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?

אם אין אני לי, מי לי? וכשאני לעצמי, מה אני? ואם לא עבשיו, אימתו?

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" *Pirkei Avot 1:14* ■

Religious Talk, Experience and Reflection

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24]

vine has been present in their lives in recent days and weeks. Seekers may speak of any life experience—tragic or joyful, powerful or ordinary—and in the reverent context of the spiritual direction relationship, discover a sense of the sacred that might otherwise have escaped their notice. In Spiritual Direction we look beneath the surface of our daily lives, recognizing sparks of the divine, experiences of Oneness, or a sense of being guided or accompanied along our life journeys. We ask what a particular life event or struggle may have to teach us, what new level of growth we are being called to, or what G-d may be offering us through this experience. (Rabbi Amy Eilberg, "Ayeh Mekom Kevodo?")

Monthly spiritual guidance can be helpful to many young people, not only those who are contemplatively oriented or fac-

ile with G-d language. The ritual checking-in with a wise guide who regards the student's inner life to be interesting, compelling and valuable helps the young person regard his or her own experiences similarly. Such attention fuels the light of the soul and allows it to shine more brightly, in no small measure through the affirmation of a trusted adult's listening and interest.

Not only must we help our students understand their inner lives as real, important, and potentially guiding, but also, where possible, as related to Jewish religious categories. A time of painful, emotional constriction can be reflected back as a kind of "mitzrayim," and the experience of release and renewal as "yetziat mitzrayim." Times of alienation from a sense of G-d's presence can be framed a

"hester panim"; moments of insight and clarity about one's own purpose and direction as a personal "matan Torah"; a sense of maintaining wholesome physical boundaries as protecting our personal "mishkan." Such work can take place within the context of a spiritual direction/guidance relationship.

By paying attention to Jewish identity formation, Jewish religious formation, and individual spiritual formation, we hope to avoid the growing phenomenon of Jews identifying either as "Jewish, but secular" or "spiritual, but not religious." Our generation of Jewish day school educators is charged with the challenging, complicated and worthy goal of setting the foundation for our children to grow into a meaningful sense of themselves as Jewish, religious and spiritual. ■

On Not Teaching Belief in a Jewish Day School

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11]

experiments in critical thinking and the experience of independent learning.

Growing up in a predominantly Christian and even evangelical country, many of us—especially Jews—may have had the experience of being proselytized by missionizing Christians of one flavor or another. When it has happened to me in the past, I have remembered thinking that despite the outward respect and deference that such evangelicals have shown me, they had actually been denigrating my intellectual capacities and ability to think for myself.

Whenever educators set out to “teach belief,” I believe that we subtly disparage our students from thinking for themselves and deny them the opportunity to make their own independent intellectual decisions.

Perhaps I was so disturbed by my fellow Tanakh teacher’s comment because I viscerally understood the connection between what she perceived as her mission to be as a Jewish studies teacher in a Jewish day school and Christian evangelical proselytizers. As Jewish educators, we

should not have faith-based personal missions. Nor should it be our avowed goal to convince our students to believe in God or the divinity of the Torah. That is their business, not ours. If this is the case, then what should be the goal of Jewish educators?

My answer is that Jewish educators should stress the important and legitimate role that personal theological beliefs may play in our own lives and others. However, the content of that belief is not for anyone else to determine. I believe that my role is to encourage students to wrestle with their beliefs and to help them to understand the implications of various options. In class, I frequently engage students in very intense and personal conversations about religious beliefs. I always inform them of my willingness to share my own personal views in a less public setting. However, I insist that they share an equal responsibility to work out their own beliefs and not simply adopt whatever I might have to say without question. I also emphasize the importance and legitimacy of being confused! Not all questions of personal belief can or should be answered quickly. Living with tension and ambiguity can help focus the questions for many students and en-

able them to better frame the parameters of the answers they may generate.

While I may not have shared my fellow teacher’s sense of “mission” to instill a belief in God and the divinity of the Torah in our students, this does not mean that I am not interested in encouraging students to develop their own theologies. On the contrary, I believe that through the study of Jewish subjects and biblical and rabbinic texts, students will be exposed to a wide spectrum of historically traditional Jewish beliefs that will influence the development of their personal beliefs. The study of such texts provides students with the opportunity to critically evaluate various theologies and encourages them to develop their own based on our tradition. The teaching of belief can be more effectively instituted indirectly, through the careful and critical study of the classical texts of the Jewish tradition, rather than through a frontal assault. Teachers should encourage students to think independently, experiment and develop their own beliefs. Jewish educators should also be prepared to support students when they become confused or despondent, and legitimate their feelings of confusion and ambivalence.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 42]



Welcome to Tiffany Yankovich, Development and Communications Manager

RAVSAK is pleased to welcome Tiffany Yankovich as the newest member of our staff. The position of Development and Communications Manager is designed to create an infrastructure for and culture of philanthropy at RAVSAK, as well as enhance our communication efforts. Tiffany has widespread experience in the Jewish communal field, working in fundraising, outreach, engagement, and community development. Most recently, Tiffany was at United Jewish Federation of Greater Stamford, New Canaan and Darien, first as Director of Community Outreach and then as Director of Campaign Outreach.

Tiffany pioneered a community-wide effort to reach out to unaffiliated and marginally affiliated Jew, working with community organizations to identify modifications they could implement to be more welcoming. She founded Next Gen Jewish Council and merged it with Young Jewish Professionals, creating a cohesive group serving Jews in their 20s and 30s. As Director of Campaign Outreach, Tiffany was responsible for the Real Estate Divi-



sion and large-scale fundraisers, including Super Sunday. She also served as Director of the Behrend Institute for Leadership, a year-long seminar for emerging leaders in the Greater Stamford community. Tiffany received her BS from Boston University and holds dual master's degrees from NYU in Hebrew & Judaic Studies and Public Administration. She is passionate about using her creative talents to help build a stronger Jewish people. ■

Pluralistic Tefillah Education: Hearing the Voices of Teachers

■ by **TALI ALDOUBY-SCHUCK**

At the open house for prospective kindergarten families at a pluralistic community day school, a young father asked, “Can you guarantee that my daughter will come out Orthodox at the end of her nine years here? This is very important to my family.” His anxiety is understandable. This young father felt that his daughter’s exposure to multiple expressions of Judaism threatened his family’s religious identity. With so many models of Judaism expressed within the school, something outside of his family’s practice may have a significant impact on his four-year old daughter’s Jewish identity. This article explores the diversity of religious beliefs and practices among community day school teachers and suggests ways that this diversity can support the growth of our students’ religious identity.

Beyond a school’s Judaics curriculum and the way it practices tefillah, the teachers themselves have a profound impact on the students in the school. The ways in which they pray, speak about prayer, and model serious engagement within the minyan significantly influence the students’ religious experience. In a denominationally affiliated school, teachers are generally expected to “tow the party line.” However, in a pluralistic community school there is no imposition of a particular ideology. The teachers are diverse in their religious attitudes, affiliation, and expressions of Judaism. How does this diversity impact the culture of the institution and the kids who learn within it?

Pluralistic education at its best utilizes these differences within the faculty to expose kids to different ways of thinking about and practicing Judaism. It is not achieved by simply plugging students into different minyanim that align with their family practices. The question that drives education within this environment is how we can directly expose kids to a variety of Jewish expressions while affirming the choices to which their families are committed. This requires a safe environment in which educators encourage students to be curious about the choices other people have made while instilling a sense of pride in their own family’s practices. At Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Academy (WFHA), we call this “dynamic diversity,” and it is key to successful pluralistic education. To do this in an authentic way, the teachers who model Jewish life for the kids must also reflect the religious diversity of the community. A faculty comprised of teachers from multiple religious denominations is thus critical to the success of any pluralistic Jewish day school.

At WFHA, the religious backgrounds of our faculty are as diverse as our students.

Our teachers identify as Modern Orthodox, Conservative, and “traditional.” We also have teachers who are secular Israelis, an identity that is in many ways a culture unto itself. I invited six Judaic



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studies teachers to discuss their personal ideas about prayer, G-d, and Jewish observance in order to explore our school’s dynamic diversity and its impact on our students. Each teacher whom I interviewed facilitates tefillah for various grades. These conversations reveal what distinguishes these teachers one from another as well as what binds them together as teachers of tefillah.

It is remarkable that regardless of the teachers’ backgrounds and religious affiliation, there are a number of shared attitudes toward and beliefs about prayer. All of the teachers speak about prayer with unquestioned reverence and feel that prayer is a crucial element of their Jewish identity that perpetuates important Jewish values. Independent of their religious affiliation, they all feel that prayer is a means of connecting us to the holiness of our tradition. They believe that it exposes us to the beauty of the world around us and helps us learn our place within it, stressing humility and connection. Each teacher understands prayer as an important vehicle to link us to our community, thus enabling us to transcend our individual needs. But these needs are not entirely suppressed, as all of the teachers conceive of prayer as an important means of creating space for self-reflection. Peda-

gogically, each teacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the language of prayer as a gateway for meaning.

In a pluralistic school with a diverse faculty, it is these commonalities that should comprise the core mission of tefillah education. In summary,



In a pluralistic community school, teachers are diverse in their religious attitudes, affiliation, and expressions of Judaism. How does this diversity impact the culture of the institution and the kids who learn within it?

every teacher regards tefillah as an anchor for Jewish identity, with the sacredness of tradition, communal responsibility, and personal meaning at its center. These core beliefs transcend denomination, and thus form a unified vision for what every minyan in the school should communicate to the students. Every family in the school, regardless of denominational affiliation, would be comfortable with these values being communicated around prayer. Though students will pick these values up over time by being exposed to prayer and the teachers who facilitate these minyanim, the school should also create educational programming that aims to explicitly communicate these shared values. This combination would be mutually reinforcing of these values and thus create the core vision of tefillah education in the school.

Yet, because of the diversity in background and hashkafah (religious outlook), there are some differences among the teachers as well, most of which revolve around two issues: commandedness and G-d. The question of whether or not one is commanded to regularly pray as a religious obligation is articulated unequivocally. Teachers feel either that one prays when one chooses to or that it is an obligation to do so, and these attitudes generally reflect the normative beliefs of the denomination with which s/he affiliates. Conceptions of G-d vary deeply, and one of the most fascinating elements of my conversations is that their understanding of G-d does not neatly correspond with the theological doctrine of the move-

ments with which they identify.

Ellen, a Conservative Jew, does not believe in G-d as the result of a personal trauma that “shattered her faith in G-d.” Ruth, who identifies as a “non-practicing Orthodox Jew,” rejects the notion that G-d is an active presence in her life who

judges, rewards, and punishes. She understands G-d in a more abstract way, as a being that is manifest “in everything that is good about the world.” Karen, a *secular* Israeli, has no doubt about the existence of G-d and feels G-d’s presence in her life. Rachel, an Orthodox Jew who is *shomeret mitzvot* and prays two to three times a day, does not believe in G-d. It was only Josh, an Orthodox Jew who grew up in the yeshiva world, whose theology reflects his movement’s doctrine. He believes in a G-d who is an ever-present resource in his life, and his obligations to G-d trump his personal fulfillment.

What is the educational implication of these differences? Given the fact that in tefillot, the teachers *themselves* impact the religious experience of the students, this diversity of religious perspectives will organically expose kids to different



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conceptions of G-d, faith, and sense of religious obligation. The power of pluralistic education lies in this very fact, and if a school creates supportive environments in which these teachers can share these nuanced facets of their beliefs, a sophisticated understanding of these theological concepts will be nurtured over time.

In addition, kids will learn to be curious about other people’s beliefs, and they will learn to accept the differences between them as unthreatening.

How can we do this? For the older students, *iyyunei tefillah* would create opportunities for exploration both of their own beliefs and those of their teachers and peers. The experience of hearing an Orthodox teacher who prays regularly in a minyan and who models a deep commitment to religious life discuss her doubts about G-d can be profoundly empowering for kids. Questioning authority and iconoclastic thinking is a normal part of the emotional development of middle school and high school children. Creating a space for them to explore the ways in which this impacts their religious life is incredibly important if our goal is to keep children engaged. Exposure to the ways in which their teachers thoughtfully address these questions while remaining deeply committed to the core values that they all share regarding tefillah (the values I stated above) will strengthen the inner lives of our students.

Let us return to the young father I mentioned at the beginning of this article. Our task as educators is to help him understand that his anxiety is natural, but that it is an anxiety of every element of parenting; it is not unique to pluralistic education. Every parent worries that as his or her child matures, he will choose a lifestyle different than the one of his parents. As educators, our task is to help

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The Four Children: Nurturing Diverse Daveners

■ by **TSAFI LEV** and **YONATAN ROSNER**

In a community formed by anything less than 100% like-minded people, the outcome of tefillah betzibur (communal prayer) is a polite, well-intentioned tangle of different customs, divergent expectations, decidedly real impediments of faith, and a paradoxical hope that everybody in the room will be able to balance equal measures of both individuality and belonging. In the larger Jewish community this is mitigated by a variety of synagogue choices: Reform, Chabad, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, or no synagogue at all. Even if a community Jewish day school offers a variety of prayer modalities, however inclusive of the panoply of Jewish expression, the school setting does not allow for the central choice which makes “adult” synagogues work: the choice to attend or not attend. The high hurdle of requirement is all the more intimidating when it is considered with the other significant challenges of a school’s tefillah program.

A poll of New Community Jewish High School students points to a range of expectations regarding tefillah, insightful echoes of their parents, teachers, clergy, and classmates. The three most central hopes for tefillah are a connection to G-d, self-reflection, and the building of community. Regarding experiencing the divine in tefillah, we must recall that the G-d experience is a profoundly individual matter. It is one that cannot easily be coaxed into fruition at will. Martin Buber wrote, “The *Thou* meets me through Grace—it is not found by seeking.” If the individual cannot will such an I-Thou moment, can we expect to purposefully contrive such a moment for a collective? *Has it happened since Sinai?*

The expectation of tefillah betzibur as a moment of self-reflection, if not as theologically loaded as the G-d question, is almost as difficult to program for. But while the Hebrew infinitive “to pray,” *lehitpallel*, is a reflexive verb, sometimes translated “to judge oneself,” such self-reflection seems antithetical to the communal experience. As a nod to the value of meaningful “self-time” while surrounded by others, the extent to which contemplative prayer is validated in most communal settings is with “a moment of silence.” Togetherness and a sense of belonging are more attainable goals, but no less worthy in an age of lightning-fast fiber optic connections that has also ushered in a wave of loneliness and depression, especially among teens.

Multiply the force of each of these opposing expectations by the number of people in the room, and one can really wonder what to do and where to begin. Within the

school setting, students are expected to move directly from the cerebral and academic to the soulful at the Pavlovian ring of a bell. “Pencils down... now pray.” In



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the community school setting there is the added challenge of divergent perspectives on tefillah, as well as different family background and support. The school setting requires us to ask: Can we carefully craft a prayer service for different daveners, as we would create a single lesson plan to meet the varied needs of our many learners?

The tricky reality about tefillah in the community school setting is that however many real challenges there may be, and however muddled an articulation of the expected results might be, we sense its intrinsic value and we know that sometimes it works. It works when our students’ faces remind us of the classroom; the look in their eyes lets us know that they have internalized some part of the lesson. We have planted the seeds deeply enough to know that something will grow. Heschel taught us that to be a prophet one must hold both G-d and man together at once. Thus it seems that the dictum “*Da lifnei mi atah omed*” means not just being aware that you stand before G-d, but we must know the people before whom we stand.

As teachers, we do. These are our kids; we spend hours a day with them. Every Pesach we hold a single seder for four wildly different children. *Keneged arba’ah banim dibrah Torah*, the Torah

describes four different children. The good news is that the same approach that we take with a good seder or with a good classroom lesson can work during tefillah if we remember before whom we stand. Based on our experimental tefillah program, it has become clear that successful tefillah in the community day school requires consciously including students in creating the expectation you are working toward as well as crafting a purpose-driven multi-modal approach throughout the service.

Chakham mah hu omer? The wise child asks, “What is this testimony and what are the laws and regulations that our G-d has commanded us? Begin to answer this child with the laws concerning Pesach.” This child is at the heart of our tefillah program. The educational maxim “If they can do it for themselves, they should” applies to tefillah, too. If you want to educate the wise child, let him or her lead.

Our tefillah program is completely student-led. For the Chacham, we have created the Tefillah Kehilah Institute (TKI). A select core of motivated and proficient students take this leadership course as their regular Jewish studies course. In class they examine rabbinic text on tefillah and study the siddur. Special lessons are geared toward leadership: how to communicate engagingly; how to evaluate effectiveness; how to plan and coordinate a dynamic and varied forty minute all-school tefillah; how to elicit response through questions, through tone, and through nonverbal communications. There are regular classes that are geared toward the experiential: music, music composition, 2D art, media arts, Iyyun, creative writing, midrash, and dramatic skits. These experiences give TKIers a variety of modalities for them to create different experiences for their classmates as the service goes on.

Additionally, there are TKI club members who are not part of the class, but they are given meaningful leadership roles in planning and executing tefillah. They are included in weekly meetings, online Wiki planning sessions, and of course on the bimah during tefillah. Like a seder leader trying to keep the entire table happy while moving the seder forward, TKI leaders

find the responsibility of crafting tefillah for the different needs of the kahal meaningful, challenging, and invigorating. The rest of the student body appears more attentive as tefillah has now become an opportunity to support their fellow students.

Rasha mah hu omer? The wicked child says, “What is this service to you? To you—but not him.” We know this student as well, and for him the key is engagement. The needs of this student lie not in skill, ability, or proficiency, but rather in a lack of trusting himself to fit in and in so doing, not lose his newfound individuality to the group. TKI students engage this wise but skeptical student through activities that don’t require personal sharing, such as a popular song that shifts to a quick lesson. Guitar, drums, and various vocals make this easy for the school to join in. A favorite is a song they have composed called “Tell Me a Story (About Jewish History),” set to the melody of

the Shema in an aesthetic and kinetic way. The result was beautiful, and many of our Tam students incorporated lessons they heard into their colorful art—they turned “*shema*” listen into “*shema*” see. Over four different student-led tefillah sessions, the Shema portion of the service was taught in four different ways (art, music, meditation, and discussion).

Ze she'aino yode'a lish'ol... The One Who Does Not Know How to Ask looks and feels lost. He is not familiar with the outline of the service, the words do not sound familiar to him, and the Hebrew is an impossible obstacle for him at this point. TKI students created and project a PowerPoint outline over the bimah throughout the service to help students know what is going on and what to expect next. They also project transliteration and lyrics to songs so that everyone can feel comfortable. These TKIers lead the core parts of tefillah and they help the student



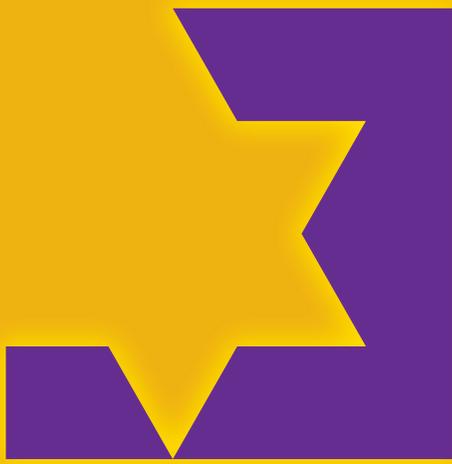
The good news is that the same approach that we take with a good seder or with a good classroom lesson can work during tefillah if we remember before whom we stand.

“Alice’s Restaurant,” where different students pop up and give a quick lesson. The skeptical child does not have to confront any of his misgivings about tefillah during such parts of the service; it’s always fun and always light. Every tefillah has such a component that is primarily communal and only secondarily prayerful.

Tam...mah zot? The Tam, the open but uninitiated student, needs to be taught. “What is this,” she asks? This student might not yet have the background to be proficient, but she can be taught. The TKI students who have been given the opportunity to regularly study tefillah in class are tasked with education. The Tam learns from the Chacham, through Iyyun, question and answer sessions, and stories that TKIers create. In a recent tefillah, TKIers asked students to color in the words of the Shema on a page they were provided, while the leaders taught lessons about the different possible meanings of these central words. Their goal was to teach about

body through the different parts of the service. Their goal is to help the lost and uninitiated student feeling inadequate and disconnected from the service.

For Pesach we don’t hold four different sedarim, we hold one—for everybody. It’s not easy. We ask our students to create services whose modalities shift throughout the tefillah. They have to articulate what their goals are at each step (a G-dly moment, a reflective moment, a communal moment). Choices have to be made regarding which modality they should try in reaching that goal (song, art, discussion, chanting), and most importantly for leadership training, TKIers have in place a lengthy reflective process after every tefillah encounter. *What worked, what didn’t, and why?* Our students are fully aware of the challenges that tefillah in a community day school presents and meet them creatively head on. As teachers we support them, teach them, answer questions, and then we take a seat in the pews and kvell. ■



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Deepening Spiritual Awareness: A Work in Progress

■ by **TAMAR RUBIN**

CHILDREN explore ideas and ask questions differently as they move through childhood. This is a maxim that we take to be self-evident when it comes to academic subjects such as math and writing, and educators adjust what they teach and the methods they use accordingly.

When we consider children's spiritual growth and development, how can we bring that same consciousness of the different stages of childhood and form perspectives based on that consciousness? Can a school develop a mission statement for tefillah that reflects this understanding of children's movement from concrete to abstract, and from lower to higher order critical thinking capacity, while acknowledging their psychological growth?

An approach that we are in the process of developing at the Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School is to focus on certain themes in tefillah in each grade level. These themes are selected with consideration to developmental stage and age appropriateness, and they build on one another. Essential questions guide the exploration of ideas found in specific tefillah and in the tefillah experience in general.

In the earliest grades, familiar ideas applied to tefillah ground students in their world while inviting them to think beyond. As an example, the core organizing principle we have developed for first grade tefillah is that of *kodesh vechol*: differentiating between holy and everyday. First graders know every day. It's where they live. They can describe every day in great detail. While students of all ages could discuss this theme, it is especially attractive to use for first graders because of the opportunities it presents for tangible engagement with the idea.

At a first grade level, one of the questions that can be posed when exploring this idea is quite simply: What makes Shabbat special? Students are able to visualize this by looking at the difference between a table set for Shabbat and a table set for a weekday meal, or by differentiating between the way one dresses on Shabbat versus the weekday. Moreover, students are introduced to the idea that certain blessings and tefillot are said at particular times to establish those times as special. Students learn that blessings like *Hadlakat Nerot* and *Kiddush* are said on Shabbat, to help set the day apart and make it unique.

Building on the idea of *kodesh vechol*, second graders look at tefillot and brachot that are associated with *chayei yom-yom*, daily life. Students are able to appreciate how blessings and prayers can be incorporated into the activities they experience on a daily basis. For example, this type of personal exploration can be tied to the study of *Birkhot HaShachar*: students see how the morning blessings connect to their own lives, from the senses they use and the movements they go through at the beginning of the day, to the clothing they wear. Exploring brachot for food and drink or those relating to something seen, smelled or heard, provide opportunities for students to see how blessings exist to mark all sorts of day-to-day occasions, from

eating a snack or a meal to experiencing a thunderstorm.

By learning prayers and blessings that they can clearly apply to their daily lives, young children have the opportunity to develop a personal connection to prayer and by extension, to Jewish spirituality. Ask the question: what does saying a brachah have to do with my actions?



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and students begin to explore and articulate their thinking about this concept. This exploration can lead them to a deepening personal sense of spiritual awareness.

Prior to fourth grade, students' tefillah experiences are focused on ideas that are made tangible, such as the visual differences between Shabbat and chol in first grade, the continuing focus on *chayei yom-yom* in second, or the third grade focus on the synagogue as a unique *makom kadosh* or prayer space. In these years, students connect to foundational ideas in Judaism using methods that acknowledge their stage of development, their personal connection to ideas and the benefits of visual and physical tools.

As students grow older and their sense of the world widens, they develop both more sophisticated critical thinking skills and the ability to empathize with others' experiences in a more mature way. This continued development is taken into consideration when teaching tefillah and discussing spiritual ideas with children. We are in the process of developing a tefillah curriculum for fourth grade that

will facilitate connections between their initial study of Bereishit with tefillah. A key idea that emerges from the text is that human beings are created in G-d's image (betzelem Elokim). With this conceptual framework, students look at how tefillot express that we are created in G-d's image, while also allowing us to be closer to G-d.

One prayer that is especially useful for discussing this idea of tzelem Elokim is the weekday Amidah. When students are learning to say and understand the brachot, they might explore: How can having da'at (as the first of the intermediate brachot describes) make a person more like G-d? Or later in the Amidah: Does praying for peace, Oseh shalom, connect us to G-d?

These types of questions are significantly more complex than those posed in earlier grades, and reflect a belief in the students' growing ability to engage with ideas. In addition, by making connections between their curriculum in Jewish studies and the words of tefillot, students see Judaism in a holistic way and connect their prayer experiences to the stories and history of the Jewish people. The ability to make these connections is a significant intellectual evolution, and also adds a new layer to their spiritual evolution. In addition, by exploring the idea of what it means to be created in the image of G-d, a moral layer is added to students' exploration of spirituality. Students are able to begin to appreciate a dimension of spirituality that goes beyond specific rituals and concerns our behavior towards one another. These two faces of spirituality combine to form the beginnings of a definition of kedushah, a word and concept which is the focus of students' middle school study of, and engagement with, tefillah.

As students enter fifth grade and middle school, their comprehension skills and their ability to articulate complex ideas take a leap. In addition to being able to connect the ideas in tefillot to both personal experiences and to other texts they are studying, students are now able to discuss theoretical ideas in a more abstract way, while continuing to use text as the basis for discussion, learning, and spiritual

growth. To encourage this growth, we have developed a four year middle-school tefillah curriculum based on the concept of kedushah. This concept is one that students will have encountered in various contexts from their young-



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est years, beginning with differentiating from kodesh and chol in first grade. In the elementary years, students' understanding of kedushah focuses on the idea of some times or places being special, or different. In middle school, they examine the concept of kedushah at a higher level.

The focus in fifth grade is on the idea of kedushat hazman, the holiness of time. This brings back an idea they learned in early elementary school, when they studied how Shabbat is different than weekdays. As older children, they build on

these ideas but now look more specifically at the prayer service for Shabbat versus weekday Shacharit, and discover in what ways the services differ and explore possible why's. Students also discuss questions such as, Does setting aside certain times

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Developing a Personal Relationship with G-d— A New Approach

■ by **ARYEH BEN DAVID**

How ironic that Jews, who brought the knowledge of G-d to the world, are willing to talk openly about anything and everything—except their relationship with G-d.

I have been intensively exploring the challenges of developing a personal relationship with G-d during the last several years. The following reflects a summary of what I have learned during this endeavor.

There is good news and bad news.

THE GOOD NEWS

It is possible to develop a personal relationship with G-d.

It is possible to deepen this relationship, and to enable it to permeate all facets of one's daily life.

It is possible to strengthen family relationships and friendships through the process of spiritual growth.

It is possible to discover new kindred spirits and soulmates in this process.

I have both personally experienced and have witnessed in others the occurrence of all these things.

THE BAD NEWS

Judaism, as it is currently configured, has no system or venue for developing a personal relationship with G-d. Neither the synagogues nor the schools provide the mechanisms for any kind of ongoing spiritual development.

Our present systems do not work. No amount of “tweaking” will change this. The answers lie “outside of the box.”

During the last several years of my exploring the challenges of spiritual development, the frustration I have encountered in people is so widespread as to be considered normative. The dissatisfaction spans all the denominations and age ranges.

TWO INEFFECTIVE APPROACHES

For schools, the two primary systems addressing spiritual life are organized prayer and experiential activities. Neither accomplishes the goal of developing a personal relationship with G-d.



Rabbi Aryeh Ben David taught at the Pardes Institute for 20 years and 3 years ago founded Ayeka: Bringing G-d back to the Conversation, which offers numerous series of modules focusing on adult education for the soul. He can be reached at aryeh@ayeka.org.il.

Why not?

I spent nine hours in synagogue this Yom Kippur. One might think that prayer of this length would deepen my faith. It did not. In nine hours of communal prayer there was not even one minute formally dedicated to my personal, sincere and spontaneous conversation with G-d.

To a similar but lesser degree—our everyday prayer services are no different, leaving no opportunity for us to be personally affected. How could they? They are neither our own words, nor our chosen times or settings. Everything we say is dictated to us.

I obediently submit to this order, nonetheless. In my estimation it possesses much worth. Millions of Jews all over the world are reading and singing similar words. A prayer service is a public ceremony of what we believe—a national proclamation of our values. It is our spiritual language—agreed upon by Jews throughout the world, throughout the

generations. This, to me, is very inspiring.

And yet, it does not help me develop a more meaningful relationship with G-d.

MEANINGLESS PRAYER

After years of research and observation, it is clear that I am not alone in this.

I have taught high level courses on prayer for many years (at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem). I have even written a book on prayer (*The G-dfile: 10 Approaches to Personalizing Prayer*). Yet I remain firmly

convinced that no amount of knowledge or expertise can succeed in transforming the prayer service into a nurturing experience of developing faith. This is simply not its purpose. The Talmudic commentators and halakhic decisors have written that even if a person prays to G-d with no kavannah or intent, he or she has still fulfilled the mitzvah of prayer. Their expectations are clear—organized prayer is a community experience. Maybe even a national experience. Organized prayer is not directed at me, the individual. It is not meant to provide a personal framework for developing my relationship with G-d.

The Talmud refers to prayer as “work of the heart.” Unfortunately, prayer has been transformed through the generations into cognitive behavior, into “work of the mind.” And we, Jewish educators, exacerbate this distortion by thinking we can “teach” people how to relate to G-d through reasoned arguments and explanations. All of which are doomed to fail because no amount of intellectual rigor will enhance “the work of the heart.”

Sadly, most educational institutions address the problem of meaningless prayer

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Project SuLaM Welcomes Team Members at DC Shabbaton

Sulamites from Cohort 3 were joined by their lay and professional peers at a Shabbaton held in Washington, DC. Over thirty participants from eleven schools throughout the United States joined five mentors for an intense program of study on the subject of Jewish Peoplehood. They immersed themselves in sources from the Torah, Talmud, and modern period, looking at ways that sacred and secular texts have helped shape our understanding of Jewish communal life and identity. Participants delivered stirring divrei Torah, revealing the progress they have made in their personal learning and their new confidence in leading professionally with a voice of Jewish knowledge and wisdom. They took part in davening, celebrated Shabbat together, and enjoyed fine catered food and the gorgeous environs of the Georgetown neighborhood. The teams now go back to their home communities armed with new ideas and insights, and prepared to design a school program with significant and lasting Jewish impact. The best news: all members of Cohort 3 are invited to join the SuLaM Alumni Shabbaton in advance of the Day School Conference. We look forward to great things from this inspired and inspiring group of leaders! ■



As a lay leader, I had no idea what to expect from a SuLaM Shabbaton. After having experienced it, I find that I'm grateful for having had the opportunity. I learned, I worshiped, and I gained valuable insight into the work our head of school has been doing with SuLaM on behalf of Pardes. Thank you for including lay leaders this time. I'm deeply appreciative that you did!

—Becky Lieberman, Board Chair, Pardes Jewish Day School, Phoenix, AZ

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by “tweaking” the tefillah setting. But singing great melodies and words of explanation or inspiration will not cure the present malaise.

The emptiness or lack of kavannah during prayer is not the problem, rather is symptomatic of a more intrinsic problem—that the students, and many of their teachers, have never explored and/or developed their own personal relationship with G-d. They have not yet learned how to open their hearts to G-d to be “worked on.”

FAILURES OF “SPIRITUAL” PROGRAMMING

A second failed approach to developing spiritual life is “spiritual programming”—warm and fuzzy, “touchy-feely” programs, such as a “tisch,” an evening of singing, a night-hike, etc. These kinds of programs, though entertaining and often momentarily meaningful, fail to achieve serious spiritual education. Personal change and development do not happen through “one-off,” non-contextualized experiences, no matter how powerful they may be. Successful spiritual education takes time. It takes time to personalize and internalize new ideas for spiritual growth. It demands and deserves a well thought out curriculum spanning weeks, if not months.

So what can we do? How can we succeed in educating ourselves and our students in the “work of the heart”?

A NEW APPROACH

In a program aimed at cultivating “the work of the heart” the following six elements are essential:

ments are essential:

1. **A Small Group Setting:** “Work of the heart” is intimate. Developing a relationship with G-d is one of the most personally vulnerable endeavors of life. It simply cannot be achieved in group settings larger than 8-12 students.
2. **A Safe Peer Environment:** An atmosphere of “safe space” is essential for personal and spiritual growth. For people to engage with their hearts they must feel unafraid of cynicism, judgment, disagreements, or attacks by their peers. Unlike a classic educational atmosphere of discussion and debate, the setting must safeguard the sanctity and vulnerability of spiritual growth.
3. **Jewish Wisdom Texts:** A well thought-out curriculum incorporating Jewish wisdom texts is vital. Yet the aim is not an intellectual engagement and mastery of these texts, rather a trigger for the student’s innermost exploration. The goal is to know the sources not only with our minds but also—and especially—with our hearts.
4. **Reflective and Experiential Exercises:** Participants need private time to personalize what they learn. Reflective and experiential exercises (i.e. writing) enable the participants to fully absorb the subjects studied.
5. **A “Spiritual Chevruta”:** Heart-to-heart conversations are essential for developing self-awareness.

Students need to be given the time and structure to talk and to listen to each other in private, one-on-one “spiritual chevruta” settings. Every person with his or her own unique path and pace.

6. **A “Heartful” Jewish Educator:** The educator must model the process of seeking and yearning for his or her own spiritual growth. In addition, the educator must consider him or herself not the “expert” providing answers. A “top-down” approach will inevitably close hearts and create expectations and judgment. Educating the heart is qualitatively different than educating the mind. A “heartful” Jewish educator must be an “enabler,” providing a framework for students to listen to the inner voices of their own hearts.

We are very good at educating the mind; we know how to produce quantifiable results. Now the time has come to develop an equally successful approach to educating the heart.

Enabling ourselves and our students to develop a personal relationship with G-d requires a new venue and approach, outside of the standard prayer service and/or experiential activities. Small groups—wrestling personally with their relationship with G-d—with personal integrity and respect, on an ongoing basis, are essential keys to developing a personal relationship with G-d.

During the last three years, in our experience at Ayeka, we have found that it can be done. That’s the good news. ■

On Not Teaching Belief in a Jewish Day School

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31]

There are plenty of political and religious leaders who are all-too-willing and all-too-quick to think for us and make decisions for us. Therefore, we as Jewish educators must stand as a vanguard and provide our students with the skills, information and confidence to think for themselves. We must respect our

students’ right—and their family’s—to believe whatever they choose to believe. And perhaps—because nothing is ever certain—if we have been effective in presenting the viewpoints and sources of our tradition, and we have been careful in respecting the intelligence and ability of our students to think for themselves, then just maybe we will succeed

in creating a generation of intellectually open, religiously tolerant, knowledgeable and committed Jews who will be able to share their tolerance and intellectual openness with their non-Jewish neighbors and make this world a little bit more tolerant, pluralistic and safer for all of us no matter our race or religion. ■

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Nurturing Faith in Our

“**T**he early righteous ones would delay their prayer for one hour so they could aim their hearts toward the Omnipresent” (Berakhot 5a). In our schools as well, davening is not simply a matter of having the right pronunciation or choreography. Tefillah is also a time that puts students’ faith to the test, a time spent saying a lot of words either addressed to or describing G-d. Jewish prayer assumes emunah, a faith in, or faithfulness to, the Holy One. How do Jewish day schools cultivate their students’ emunah during tefillah time? The following programs approach this question from a variety of perspectives and creative visions.

Hoda’ah as an Organizing Principle in Middle School Tefillah

■ PORTLAND JEWISH ACADEMY, PORTLAND, OREGON

Every year at PJA we have a theme for middle school tefillah, usually a middah (character trait) or a pitgam (expression). One year it was Hillel’s famous statement to greet others with a cheerful countenance. This led to learning about Emotional Intelligence, a little neuroscience, and a several weeks of experiments on greeting different groups of people and reporting the results during tefillah time. Another year it was

“kavod,” honor, which is a schoolwide middah.

Over the summer we decided to spend this year developing a greater personal and communal awareness of how fortunate we are, and so “hoda’ah,” gratitude, was the obvious choice. Just before the year started, Rabbi Benjamin Blech wrote an article about the “10 Questions” that flashed on the billboards in Times

Square in early September—one question for each of the Aseret Yemei HaTeshuvah. The first question was, “What should I be grateful for as I begin the New Year?” This was a perfect opener to our theme for the year and we began with these question: Are middle school students thankful for the blessings in their lives? Are we, their teachers, parents, and responsible adults in their lives, appreciative for all that we have and enjoy?

Yes, and yes, once we begin reflecting and focusing regularly on what is good in our lives. Recently we began a list of things we’re grateful for. Most days we add to it with three individual reasons to be thankful. Right now the well of ideas is still full, since it’s early in the year, but once the usual reasons have all been listed, the students will really need to think about specific things that happened earlier that day that they probably would not think about otherwise. We’ll read inspirational stories and research the beneficial effects of thinking positively. The idea is to help students become more optimistic and positive in their perspective by focusing on the blessings they enjoy every day, and to have an experience of tefillah as a fundamental expression of hoda’ah. ■



Slide Show as Shaliach Tzibbur

■ JEWISH DAY SCHOOL OF METROPOLITAN SEATTLE, BELLEVUE, WASHINGTON

The Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle wanted to create a flowing, seamless minyan that still allowed for real time, kavannah-building moments. From past experiences, we knew that our most powerful minyan moments occurred when the professional staff consciously stepped back and students were able to create a minyan experience that felt autonomous. At the same time, our staff saw the value in helping to craft and direct the minyan narrative.

Our initial experimentation with PowerPoint technology has provided some in-

teresting solutions. During Monday minyan, our students are guided via slide show from prayer to prayer. This slide show also introduces each prayer with a short kavannah and designates a specific student reader to share this brief thought with fellow students. The kavannot themselves are either prayer-specific or they connect with the other kavannot of the day in order to explore or promote a particular message, theme or tefillah-related idea.

Although we are still in the early stages of experimentation, JDS staff have found that

the PowerPoint sprinkles thoughtful student voices throughout the service without sacrificing smooth tefillah transitions and creates a “kavannah-to-tefillah dialogue” that simultaneously drives the service forward and deeper. By assigning various kavannot readers, there is the added benefit of increased student participation without requiring minyan staff to vocally “break the tefillah bubble.” Our goal is for students to sign up for future minyanim in which their own personally developed kavannot are displayed and used to direct the flow and open the minds of our Monday morning daveners. ■

A Layered Siddur

■ AKIVA SCHOOL, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

A challenge most recently addressed in our school is the manner in which we deal with Birkhot HaShachar, more specifically, the three controversial blessings that (in their traditional form) thank G-d for not making us non-Jews, slaves, or women. Other versions of these blessings thank G-d for making us Israel, free, and in G-d's image. These differences do not just reflect moral decisions, historical understanding or visceral response but serve, in some ways, to differentiate and demarcate the different movements within Judaism.

One of the most meaningful moments in tefillah with our 3-6th graders is our discussion of Birkhot HaShachar. Our siddur is entirely in Hebrew and contains the traditional text. In the spirit of the layering that is so present in our tradition, we try to create a space in which our students can participate in this layering: mentally in their discussions and physically in their actions. Students are presented with cutouts of the variations that

fit over the traditional version and ask them how we can incorporate these blessings into our siddur. One student suggests gluing it over the other version and another asks how that would make those who want to use the version underneath feel. Another student suggests attaching it with a paper clip, and the response is that it is not really in the siddur. The students wrestle to ensure that each blessing

is present and finds equal weight in their siddurim. Finally, they are presented with the possibility of creating layers. They are asked to tape the alternative version onto the traditional version with one side creating a flap that can be flipped up and down.

We do not force every student to do this but ask that each student thinks about the value of placing all versions in their siddur. The students get excited that even when they are sick, their friends can use their siddur, no matter which version they recite. Our students recognize that accommodating others' prayers does not detract from their prayer experience but helps enrich their entire community. When we listen to the students engage in Birkhot HaShachar and hear the various versions said loud and proud, we recognize what an opportunity it is to be able to be a part of the active and layered learning that has been our tradition and history for so many years. ■



Nurturing Faith in Our

Davening the Denominations

■ NEW ORLEANS JEWISH DAY SCHOOL, METAIRIE, LOUISIANA

Tefillah at the New Orleans Jewish Day School (NOJDS) truly speaks to the community that builds the school. The essential goal in tefillah at NOJDS is to further educate the students in the tefillah practices of their own movement, and in the traditions and practices of other Jewish movements as well. Four days a week tefillah is held by each class (or two classes joined together). One day a week, the whole school comes together for tefillah. This empowers the older students to educate the younger students in the words, motions, and nusachim (tunes) of the tefillot.

Each quarter, the students use a different siddur to better understand how some of the words and tunes change according to each denomination. Every Rosh Chodesh a rabbi from the community comes to

lead tefillah for the entire school. This is a wonderful opportunity for the students to meet other rabbis in the small Jewish community of New Orleans, and to better understand some of the observances of different streams of Judaism.

One of the struggles that the school faces is the difficulty of teaching different nusachim to the students. This is still a work in progress for the school. The community rabbis and cantors have been very generous with their time and have been quite willing to teach both the students and the teachers the vast variety of tunes for the tefillot. Our plan is to have

an audio library of all the different nusachim. This library will enhance our ability to bring comfort and understanding of the different tefillot practices within all the denominations. ■



Bibliodrama and Torah: Taking it Personally

■ AMERICAN HEBREW ACADEMY, GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

“If I were Moses, and G-d told me that I would die without getting into Israel...” starts one student at Bibliodrama, one of many tefillah offerings Shabbat morning at the American Hebrew Academy.

Aha! “Congratulations, you are Moses!” I declare, sticking a “Moses” name tag on his shirt. Pretty soon, everyone in the group is in character as Moses, Joshua, G-d, or even Mount Nevo.

But what twenty teenagers have to say about Moses’ death is really about their own struggles with expectations, fairness, and mortality. Bibliodrama nurtures faith that our sacred texts offer guidance for Jews in a modern world.

Each Bibliodrama starts with a brief physical warm-up; next, students symbolically set aside any mental distractions, like SATs or a sore throat. Awakened and clear-headed, we then say the blessing “*la’nsok*

be-divrei Torah.” it’s time to get busy and engage in the text!

Students build sculptures out of their bodies to communicate themes from the parashah: faith, longing, goals, and distance. Everyone reads from the parashah, and then we adopt roles.

The date is 9/11. We play a game called Assassin, where people “die” arbitrarily. After connecting our studies to the anniversary, we hold a moment of silent prayer. Then one girl reveals, weeping, that her grandmother is dying, and friends gather round to comfort her. We reflect on Moses’ last moments again.

Bibliodrama ends by symbolically “gathering up” something we gained in our time together. A participant sums it up, saying, “I didn’t know studying Torah could be so...personal.” ■



Sacred Spaces

■ JCoSS (JEWISH COMMUNITY SECONDARY SCHOOL), LONDON, ENGLAND

Getting young people to engage with prayer is a challenge, but helping them to understand that precious time for sacred space in a crowded and noisy 21st century is a possibility can be really satisfying.

At JCoSS, the UK's first state-supported, parent-inspired, non-denominational faith school, our challenge is to embed tefillah in our daily life, to provide students with the opportunity to develop their own sacred space. Of course, this charter includes the appointment of a place for tefillah—we have a beautiful Aron Kodesh in the Multi-Purpose Hall and that will, over time, be the place where a range of regular services will take place. But it also includes the creation of metaphorical senses of space where we can, as a community, pray together, using the canon of tefillot set out in siddurim from all sectors of the community.

We need students to recognise that sacred space is in silence, in reflection—the real and true meaning of tefillah. We want students to have opportunities to be able to turn down the static of technology, the ever-present demands of school work, home demands, the media, and the all-pervading culture of celebrity. In a crowded curriculum, we need times for students to regain some of that childish innocence that is stolen so rapidly.

The core of our school is the Heart Space,



our major thoroughfare. Students, staff and others use it to move from one area of the school to another; it's our entrance area, and at one end the place where students, staff and others schmooze over their lunch.

Creating the Heart Space as a sacred space lifts this normally busy area from

daily banality into a spiritual one. It is where we can gather to light candles for Chanukah, and for Shabbat on a Friday; to hear the Shofar during Elul; to mark silence in front of the Israeli Flag on Yom HaZikaron. It is a place that will grow as the school grows—that makes special the ordinary.

This will be the place where prayer becomes second nature to our students. It is a place that, from the students' first encounter with the school to the time they leave as young adults, will become engraved in their minds as sacred in a physical sense, while also helping them also to find that sacred spot in their own lives. It is a place for them to develop a personal relationship with the Almighty, and one that will become their true friend and confidante as they themselves take the principles of JCoSS to the next generations. ■



Betzelem Elokim: Tefillah as a Forum for Teaching Social Skills

■ AMOS AND CELIA HEILICHER MINNEAPOLIS JEWISH DAY SCHOOL, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

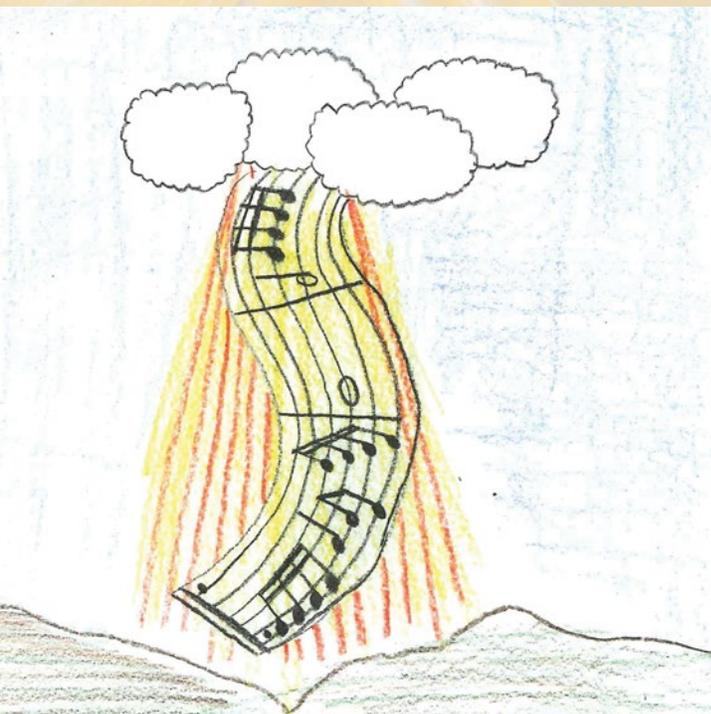
During tefillah for 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, there is always a struggle between balancing the teaching of kevah (structure) and kavannah (intention), especially in a

limited amount of time. As the children navigate their way through their siddurim learning the order of the service, mastering reading the Hebrew and singing the melodies, we make meaningful stops along the way to examine text and to make personal connections.

At a time when bullying has received so much attention, tefillah can be a great forum for teaching social skills. In the context of a discussion about betzelem Elokim, one of my students said, “Everyone has G-d in them. G-d is g-o-o-d with one ‘o’ missing and we all have good in us.” This provides a springboard for focusing on prayers that examine the quality of interaction with others. Here are a few suggestions:

- Teaching the appropriate derekh erez in the beit kneset and other places where tefillot are conducted, including the behavior of the chazan / chazanit and the congregation.
- Asking students to find messages about how to treat others in the context of an individual prayer; for example, in the morning blessings (Birkhot HaShachar) asking children to find one that helps them think about problem solving with a friend.
- In the Amidah, asking the leaders to each select one of the sections that “speaks” to them in the context of friendship. Ask them to read the section aloud in Hebrew or English and then explain why they selected it.

As teachers of tefillah, we are fortunate to be able to create opportunities for children to think deeply about themselves as individuals, their interactions with each other, and ultimately with G-d. ■



The Shabbat Table

■ AUSTIN JEWISH ACADEMY, AUSTIN, TEXAS

At Austin Jewish Academy, we changed the way we celebrate Shabbat. Before this year, our school did not feel that our Shabbat celebration conveyed the sense of the day’s kedushah strongly enough. In our Kabbalat Shabbat program, our students lit candles and recited Kiddush and HaMotzi, and then walked out of our Multi-Purpose room, grabbing some juice and challah on the way out. We knew that there must be another way to make this meaningful.

So this year, we transformed our regular Friday lunch into a real Shabbat experi-

ence. Parent volunteers help to create a different mood with special table cloths, decorative flowers, challah and juice. Each week, students join in singing “Shalom Aleichem,” lighting candles, reciting Kiddush and HaMotzi, and then enjoy their “Shabbat” lunch together.

The change in ambiance from a regular, weekday lunch to our new Shabbat lunch is palpable. The students walk into the room “oohing” and “ahhing” over the beautiful set-up, somewhat surprised each week as the décor reminds them that this

is a different day. In addition to Shabbat lunch, students are greeted each Friday morning with a “Shabbat Table” in our school lobby and Shabbat-related music playing over the loudspeaker during the ten minutes before the start of the school day. All of this, plus our Friday morning Kabbalat Shabbat program, demonstrate to our students that Shabbat is a different, holy day. The change in schedule and the presence of music, tablecloths and more has sparked a renewed interest and excitement in celebrating Shabbat as a school community. ■

An Environmentalist Tashlich

■ COLUMBUS JEWISH DAY SCHOOL, NEW ALBANY, OHIO

The Columbus Jewish Day School is in a building shared with the Jewish Community Center and situated on an environmentally rich campus, which includes a pond, a prairie and some woodland to explore. CJDS has made a commitment to include environmental education in the curriculum, reserving Fridays for an integrated experience co-created by the arts, general studies and Judaic faculty members.

The objectives for this year's fifth grade Tashlich experience were enabling students to experience the beauty of nature, developing a communal spiritual inventory, and noting the cyclical nature of creation and Jewish practice. We hoped to find a way for students to experience a personal moment inside of a communal one. We also wanted the students to understand that this ritual was a symbol of a step toward change and to convey clearly that divine help doesn't come without our participation. We remain responsible for our behavior, and it takes work to make needed changes.

We began the ritual on the Friday before Yom Kippur by sitting at an outdoor circle created by large boulders. The circle was filled with smaller stones that we planned to use to communicate the cyclical pattern of our lives. Our first objective, creating our communal list of reparations, was facilitated by general and Judaic studies teachers, one of whom wrote (on dissolvable Sulky paper) the actions students wanted to change, and another making sure each

student had a turn to share. During this process, the art teacher began developing a mandala-like design by placing the smaller stones found inside of the circle in a radiating pattern. She would position stones as students came up with their ideas, pausing until a new idea was presented. At a certain point she began open-

list. Students found a spot to do their reflection and then returned to add to the stone design. We then walked quietly through the prairie to the pond to continue with a traditional Tashlich ceremony.

When we returned to the original stone circle, students shared their experiences.



ing her hands after each contribution, and students began handing her stones that had come to represent the weight of their communal behaviors.

After the communal inventory process, students were given time to create a personal inventory, an invitation to add to the circular design, and a piece of the Sulky material so they could write down their

Some communicated a feeling of lightness as compared to the experience they had at the outset; others said they felt more connected to one another. The Judaic studies teacher asked the students whether this process was over. Do you now think that your job is finished? That sobering question clarified each person's responsibility for the communal and personal repairs needed. ■

Faith and Critical Jewish History: A Complex Relationship

■ by **ROBERT CHAZAN**

VER the past two centuries, a new kind of historical study has emerged in the Jewish world. As described elegantly by Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi in his book *Zakhor*, this new historical study has critically reexamined and reassessed aspects of the Jewish past, in the process often confronting and contradicting many of the traditions sacred to Jewish memory. Like so much else in Jewish life over the ages, this new development has not been self-generated from within the Jewish world; it is the result of the broad tendency in the modern West to investigate anew historical realities and—in the process—to subvert traditional thinking. The more firmly Jews have engaged and absorbed modern Western thinking, the more intense the Jewish commitment to critical historical study has become. Today, there are major centers of Jewish historical scholarship all across North America, in the State of Israel, and in many European countries. The products of this scholarship are diffused far and wide throughout all these settings and regularly involve reassessment of traditional Jewish convictions about the past.

The current commitment to historical scholarship and the challenge this scholarship poses to traditional thinking are in part simply a byproduct of the nature of contemporary academic study. The contemporary academy is committed to the creation of new knowledge in all areas—the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities as well. Scholars, including historians in general and historians of the Jews in particular, are encouraged—in fact required—to produce innovative findings. This requirement commits historians to advancing new perspectives on the past and thus leads ineluctably to creating challenges to the venerable and accepted.

For Jewish historians, challenging the venerable and accepted has often been undertaken with the explicit goal of undermining negative “truths” broadly held by non-Jews about Jews. For example, researchers into the Jewish past have labored intensely and successfully to dismantle the destructive stereotype that Jews have historically been involved economically only in the problematic field of finance, making economic contributions in no other area. The Genizah research of S. D. Goitein has put that stereotype to rest, as he uncovered incontrovertible evidence of the widest

possible range of Jewish economic activity among Jews in the medieval Islamic world. Jews have generally been most appreciative of this undermining of traditional anti-Jewish historical “truths.”



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Likewise, the traditional Western sense of the Jews as a people without a history of aesthetic sensibility or achievement has been subverted by nineteenth-century reclamation of the poetry of medieval Iberian Jews and twentieth-century archaeological uncovering of the Jewish art of late antiquity. Again, these subversions of prior negative stereotypes held by non-Jews have been welcomed by Jews.

Modern historical research has not limited itself, however, to reexamining and reassessing traditional non-Jewish thinking. Traditional Jewish thinking as well has been subjected to critical scholarly investigation, often with the overt intention of subverting accepted “truths.” Much of nineteenth-century Jewish historical research was related to the efforts to reform Jewish social and religious life. It is no accident that many of the key researchers in this early period of Jewish critical history were important figures in nascent Reform Judaism. Their research and their religious activism went hand-in-hand. Their research was directed at undoing the traditional views that undergirded the authority of the rabbis, and it played a major role in justifying efforts to change the structure of Jewish reli-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 52]

Advancing History in High Schools

Re/Presenting the Jewish Past, a joint project of RAVSAK and NYU, gives day school teachers an opportunity to share their expertise with one another as they chart new directions for the teaching of Jewish history. Here Re/Pre alumni and staff share their own insights and approaches to teaching Jewish history at the high school level.

Using Case Studies

Jonathan Golden, Director of Academic Operations, Gann Academy, Waltham, MA

The Gann history department uses a case study approach to teach Jewish history in the context of general history. Gann students explore essential questions of Jewish peoplehood through experiential modes of education and close examination of “texts” (broadly defined).

Tenth grade Gann students engage in a Labor Zionist-Revisionist-Brit Shalom debate set in the 1930s about the future of the Jewish homeland and the relationship between Jews and their Arab neighbors. Other case studies include the historical background of Chanukah and the founding of the New Amsterdam Jewish community.

These exercises not only give students a deep encounter with the past but also provide them with access to the essential questions and issues still being debated in our own time. Crucially, case studies restore the range of choices that Jews have had throughout history, thereby adding nuance to the Jewish historical narrative and modeling ways to navigate the pluralism of Gann Academy and the wider Jewish world.

This integrated approach works in partnership with Jewish studies courses and the school’s informal Jewish education program to foster student commitment to Jewish civic participation and invites students to be co-creators of the future Jewish narrative.

Opening up the Curriculum

Barbara Ellison Rosenblit, Humanities and Judaics Teacher and Director of Mentoring, The Weber School, Atlanta, GA

When I ask my upperclassmen what in the world made them sign up for an elective class titled “Jewish Women in Modern America,” a predictable, albeit tongue-in-cheek reply goes something like, “Hey, we’ve been studying Jewish *men* until now! *Were* there any women around?” So begins the re-balancing of the historical scale. There *were* women, it turns out, and I have begun to measure success in this course by daily counting the audible gasps of, “I didn’t know that!”

Once we share a hundred gasps of historical surprise, we move beyond history found in books, anthologies, and our most savvy Internet source, www.jwa.org. We move into the world of chronicling and celebrating the lives of community women whose lives span most of

re/presenting THE JEWISH PAST

the 20th century. We have many reasons for turning toward chronicling personal narratives. One is the work of Emory University’s MARIAL (Myth and Ritual in American Life) Center whose research suggests that resilience itself is a by-product of the transmission of personal narratives. Students interview a Jewish woman 75 or older, and then we move yet a step further. Guided by art educator Sheila Miller, the class translates that narrative into the emotionally weighted language of conceptual art, distilling the life of the woman they’ve interviewed into visual metaphor.

The gallery exhibition of their artwork acknowledges and publicly celebrates the lives of women whose stories, if we listen, can begin to fill in the silence left by history’s purposeful devaluing of women’s experiences. These days, none

of my students leaves my class still thinking that history was lived by only half of those alive at the time.

For a glimpse at some of our work, see <http://www.covenantfn.org/news-and-press/covenant-in-action/silent-role-models-no-more>.

Thinking Out Loud

Arielle Levites, Director of Education and Outreach, Re/Presenting the Jewish Past

We all like critical thinking. The problem with teaching critical thinking is that most of it goes on inside our own heads. This issue is exacerbated in the high school history classroom because much of what students have read on this subject thus far have been textbooks, which do a very poor job of explicating how historians think.

As teachers we have ample opportunity to uncover how our students think when we ask them to write papers or essays. We also get a lot of airtime in the classroom to share what we think, yet the processes that led us to our conclusions are often obscure. How can our students know how we think unless we tell them?

Modeling is one way of shedding light on something that may seem mysterious to our students, particularly those who are not reading popular history in their spare time. Consider sharing a primary source with your students and talking aloud as you, the teacher, work through the questions, answers, and associations the source elicits. What do you look for? What other knowledge do you bring to bear? How do you check your own understanding?

By talking students through our own process of historical thinking, we can strengthen theirs. ■

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50]

gious life in nineteenth-century Europe. In similar fashion, it is no accident that the Zionist movement, from its earliest phases, produced a rich body of historical research, intended in no small measure to buttress the ideological foundations of the movement and to contradict prior views of the Jewish past.

Innovative perceptions of the Jewish past have come to the fore for all periods of that past. Because of the special salience of the ancient periods—first early antiquity and the Bible and then late antiquity and the rise of rabbinic Judaism, the impact of innovative history writing on those two periods has been most problematic to many Jews. Since reconstruction of biblical history is a world unto itself and is beset by serious problems of data and methodology, I shall provide a few simpler examples from late antiquity. The traditional sense of the Maccabean uprising against Seleucid domination has projected a wicked Greek king named Antiochus, who attempted to force his own faith on his Jewish subjects. As knowledge of the Seleucid Empire and its policies has expanded, this view has come into serious question. There is simply no evidence whatsoever for such a Seleucid policy in any sector of the far-flung empire or at any time. Modern historians have had to propose alternative explanations, generally looking within the Jewish community itself for explanations of the Antiochene persecution. In the process, the Hanukkah story has been radically altered, to the dismay of many Jews.

Another mainstay of traditional Jewish thinking has projected the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 as the point at which the multiplicity of religious perspectives in first-century Palestinian Jewry, documented in both rabbinic sources and Josephus, gave way to the absolute dominance of the rabbis and the formulation and victory of rabbinic Judaism. As the data on Jewish life in post-70 Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire have proliferated, this simplistic picture has been altered. Rabbinic Judaism took centuries to crystallize, and the same is true for the power

of the rabbis. The traditional picture of destruction and the emergence of a new and unified Judaism occurring simultaneously has been abandoned in the scholarly world.

These examples reflect the impact of newly accumulated data on the Jewish past. In addition to these data-driven perspectives, nineteenth- and twentieth-century students of Jewish history have also challenged the values embedded in traditional historical thinking. For example, traditional Jewish thinking has acknowledged (and often exaggerated) the historic suffering of the Jewish people. This suffering has been depicted at length, has been portrayed as noble and heroic, and has been projected as the foundation for future divinely initiated Jewish bliss. Many twentieth-century Jewish historians have rejected the ubiquity of Jewish suffering and its ennoblement. The young Salo Baron in 1928 attacked his great predecessor Heinrich Graetz, who had presented post-70 Jewish history as a succession of traumas; Baron called for the abandonment of what he dubbed the lachrymose view of the Jewish past. Zionist historians have maintained the sense of ubiquitous Jewish suffering, but have denigrated this suffering and insisted on altering Jewish circumstances in order to remove its causes. Indeed, Zionist historians have attacked as well the second pillar of the Graetz view of the Jewish past, the valorization of Jewish intel-

and parents—perceive critical historical scholarship as corrosive, a danger to Jewish identity and thus a disservice to the young students enrolled in Jewish schools. They feel that challenging traditional thinking serves ultimately to shake the faith of young students and thus weaken their Jewish identity. This is a case that makes *prima facie* sense. Exposing young students to the shortcomings of their tradition would seem indeed to shake their faith in that tradition, by exposing its weaknesses. The issue, however, is far more complex and deserves more nuanced and thoughtful consideration.

In the first place, the young Jewish students whose faith in traditional Judaism might be shaken by exposure to critical historical thinking by no means live in a vacuum. They live in a world of the History Channel and the Internet; almost all of them will proceed on to college. This means that, eventually and in one way or another, these young students will be exposed to critical historical thinking about the Jewish past and the challenges such critical thinking poses. Is it better to have this encounter take place within the confines of Jewish education itself or subsequently in less supportive environments? Is not the corrosive effect of subsequent engagement with critical historical thinking likely to be far more damaging than it would have been in the Jewish educational ambience? Indeed, what message is being sent by this avoidance itself? Does

“Ultimately, introduction of critical history to the Jewish school curriculum carries with it the danger of diminution of Jewish identity—but so does the decision to avoid critical history.”

lectual activity and creativity. Many Zionist historians urged more attention to the physical well-being and prowess of Jews, seeing in what they perceived to be excessive intellectualization the root of many Jewish problems.

Our question then is the place of this critical historical scholarship in the Jewish classroom. Many in American Jewish education—administrators, teachers,

the avoidance not project to young Jews a message of Jewish anxiety and fearfulness, an unwillingness or an inability on the part of their elders to address the modern world and its issues?

Put more positively, engagement with critical historical thinking is a value in and of itself. It sends the message that Jewish tradition is ever-renewing, open to a constant process of reflection and

alteration. It communicates to young students that their tradition puts a premium on mature reflection and valorizes intellectual engagement and rethinking. Ultimately, introduction of critical history to the Jewish school curriculum carries with it the danger of diminution of Jewish identity—but so does the decision to avoid critical history. Decisions concerning critical history in the Jewish school curriculum do not involve simply a choice between strengthening Jewish faith and diminishing Jewish faith. These decisions involve a close look at student bodies and careful assessment of the potential impact of introducing critical history and the potential impact of avoiding critical history.

Moreover, for some young students, the altered picture of the Jewish past—while pointing to shortcomings in the traditions of Jewish memory—brings to light neglected aspects of the Jewish past that are in fact quite salutary. The most obvious

example is the recovery of the history of Jewish women over the ages. Traditional Jewish thinking has slighted the role of women over the course of Jewish history, contemporary apologetics notwithstanding. Contemporary critical history, with its commitment to

sideration of specific school circumstances.

There is surely a relationship between faith and critical Jewish history teaching, with major implications for fostering or diminishing the Jewish identity of students. That relationship, however, is by no means sim-

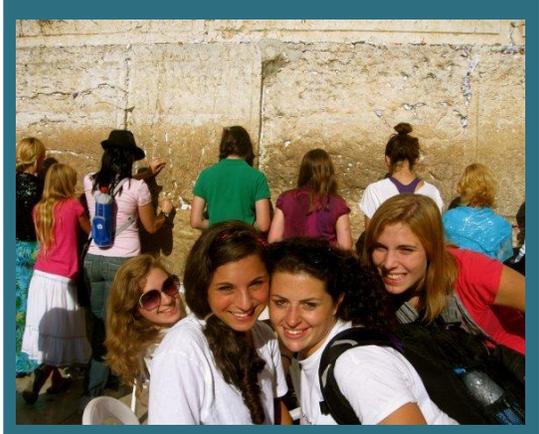
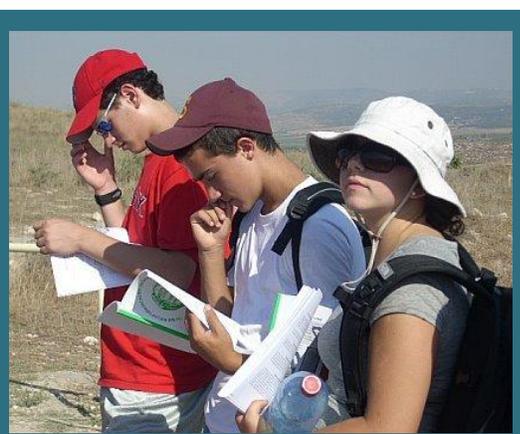


Ultimately, introduction of critical history to the Jewish school curriculum carries with it the danger of diminution of Jewish identity—but so does the decision to avoid critical history.

reconstructing the story of Jewish women and restoring it to a central place on the broad canvas of the Jewish past, is hardly likely to alienate young women students and to diminish their faith in Judaism. To the contrary, this form of critical history has the potential for augmenting the faith of many younger Jews—females and males alike. Once again, the issue of critical history and its potential impact on Jewish faith is complex and requires serious con-

struction and straightforward. In some schools, there may be justification for avoiding critical historical scholarship; in other schools, such avoidance would in fact constitute a profound disservice to students and their Jewish identity. In all schools, teaching Jewish history from a traditional perspective or from a critical perspective or in a manner that engages both perspectives must be examined carefully and thoughtfully, weighing the pros and cons of all approaches. ■

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Faith in Am Yehudi

■ by CATRIELLA FREEDMAN

THE whole notion of faith has been a difficult one to understand and to define, let alone to teach or to nurture. Since the age of enlightenment (and in other points in the development of Jewish thought) the hitherto assumed notion of faith has been disintegrating. As more and more people question religion, G-d, halakhah, and biblical authorship, the whole concept of faith has lost much of its stronghold. Even defining what faith is becomes challenging: are we assuming that faith is belief in G-d? What if one does not accept the existence of G-d? Is faith a declaration of a belief in personal providence? Even those who accept the idea of G-d may feel uncomfortable stating unequivocally that G-d has a hand in one's day to day existence. And yet, in looking at the enduring history of the Jewish people, most would agree that faith has been a major ingredient in ensuring the survival of Jews, their traditions and culture.

The question then is how to nurture an idea in students that today some find difficult to maintain and even difficult to define. Perhaps the best way to develop faith in today's students is to redefine the parameters of emunah. Perhaps educators need to turn to a notion of faith that is not just more relevant to today's students, but one that is more vital to Jewish continuity. I propose here that faith as an active concept should be taught in terms of faith in the Jewish people. Teaching faith in this way would mean emphasizing for students the vital importance of Jewish peoplehood. Rather than focusing on theological and religious definitions, curricular material would focus instead on how students connect to the Jewish people as a whole.

How can educators put this kind of teaching into practice? As an example, I would like to borrow a concept espoused by Dr. Shlomi Ravid called "social capital." Social capital describes how people will, consciously or unconsciously, align themselves into specific social groups because of certain social advantages they will gain from such associations. Translated into Jewish terms, Jewish social capital describes how despite where they lived, their backgrounds, or denominational affiliations, Jews have always been able to depend on each other in all types of circumstances.

We do not need to use the term "social capital" to understand to what ideas Ravid is referring. Stories abound how Jewish merchants who traversed dangerous roads and conditions knew that they would always find a safe haven and would be accepted within Jewish communities throughout the known world. A Jew who was taken as a

prisoner could depend on his community to make every attempt to redeem him. Today, a traditional Jew can count on being able to find a host if her plane has been grounded minutes before Shabbat in a town to which she has no personal connections. A Jewish university student can count on finding camaraderie with other Jewish students at a campus Hillel. A stranded Israeli in Thailand can be sure



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that he will find a warm meal at a local Chabad house.

Taken as an educational initiative, the notion of social capital presents another prism with which to present the notion of faith. While faith in G-d, religion, Torah, and halakhah, may be difficult to define, to teach, and to describe, faith in the Jewish people and their ability to depend on each other is tangible, proven, and is not simply history, it continues through today. It can likewise be highlighted in multiple subjects. When teaching Torah, educators can underscore the development of the Jewish people, from the time of Abraham onward. When did the Jewish people begin to have faith in each other? When were they able to begin to depend on each other and know that they were safe with each other? How did Moses, David, and Solomon use their leadership to promote (or failed to promote) the notion of the Jewish people? Discuss how as much as they needed faith in G-d, the Jewish people needed a faith in each other throughout history.

This then becomes a rich topic for other subjects as well. In discussing Jewish values and middot, the conversation

becomes rich in the values that have ensured the continuity of the Jewish people. Lessons can begin with the notion of *kol yisrael areivin zeh lazeh*, that all Jews are responsible for each other, and how this is translated into day to day life. The list of values that can then be connected to the subject is of course endless: tzedekah, protecting the orphan and widow, redeeming prisoners are just a few examples. The notion of faith in the Jewish people demands an understanding of moral values, how they were practiced in the past, and how they can be implemented today in order to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people as well as faith in it.

much as the Jewish people have kept the Shabbat, so has the Shabbat kept the Jewish people. Here is an example of how a religious value, so integrally tied to a basic faith in G-d and in G-d's commandments, can still be seen as a concept existing outside of a strictly religious framework. Ahad HaAm's notion of

I am in no way recommending that theology and traditional faith be taken out of the curriculum. Rather, an emphasis on this type of faith, a faith that has been proven and is tangible, can be promoted in cases where theology is difficult, or where students' age makes traditional faith difficult to accept or digest. Faith in



While faith in G-d, religion, Torah, and halakhah may be difficult to define, to teach, and to describe, faith in the Jewish people and their ability to depend on each other is tangible, proven, and continues through today.

The question remains whether this concept can be applied to religious values as well. Without touching directly on a faith in G-d, how can religious values be taught through the prism of a faith in the Jewish people? What comes to mind is Ahad Ha'Am's memorable statement that as

Shabbat reflects directly back on a faith in the Jewish people, Shabbat becoming a safety net from where Jews were able to sustain themselves as well as each other. The challenge for educators is to expand this concept and apply it to all aspects of Jewish education.

the Jewish people is real, can be seen in all areas of Jewish learning, and demands action on the part of students: now that you understand what the Jewish people can do for you, and that you can have faith in the Jewish people, what are you doing to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people? ■



RAVSAK Study Demonstrates Enrollment Stability

RAVSAK has again undertaken a study of enrollment trends in Jewish community day schools across North America to clarify the impact the economy and demographic changes have had on our individual and collective rosters. With 111 RAVSAK schools in the US and Canada now reporting, this survey captures an accurate snapshot of enrollment figures, and more importantly, changes in enrollment from last year.

Last year (2009-2010) the field of community day schools was down by nearly 5%, a net loss of approximately 1,300 students from the 2008-2009 school year. While these losses were significant and worrisome, they were far less than had been predicted. Schools all over North America tightened their belts and their focus and weathered what we had all hoped

would be a brief economic storm.

Although the exact state of the economy is the subject of much debate, there seemed to be a broad consensus this past spring that Jewish day schools would again experience a major downturn in enrollment. We are pleased to share, however, that the net change in enrollment this year from last is just 178 students—a net loss of just .7%.

It is important to note that enrollment changes vary greatly, from schools weathering losses in excess of 50% to those that have grown by nearly 40%. The following figures summarize trends among RAVSAK schools (giving percentages of total schools surveyed):

- Loss in enrollment of 10% or greater: 15%
- Loss under 10%: 27%
- Flat enrollment of +/- 1%: 13%
- Growth in enrollment up to 10%: 32%
- Grow in excess of 10%: 14%

While 42% of Jewish community day schools experienced a drop in enrollment, a full 58% of our schools had stable enrollments or experienced growth. These data suggest a split between schools that have sustained or regained stability and those continuing to face notable enrollment challenges. Keep in mind that these statistics offer comparisons but not answers. Through creativity and collaboration, we will get through this rough spot together. RAVSAK is committed to the success of all our schools. ■

Kohelet: Debating Faith

■ by **ELI KOHN**

As a high school Jewish studies teacher, and a subsequent Jewish studies curriculum developer, I have long been troubled by the question of how we educate students towards growth in religiosity, particularly in the area of Jewish belief and practice. Curriculum models have been designed which focus on student attainments in the domains of Jewish studies knowledge and skills. But in the affective domain, for example, educating towards belief and faith in G-d, it is far more difficult both to educate and to measure the impact of our teaching on our students' lives.

Scholars have tried to provide frameworks for religious development within the curriculum. Fritz Oser provides a framework for religious development with which an educator may choose appropriate texts to educate towards this goal. Rabbi Jay Goldmintz points out that we must also consider how the text itself will affect the students' religious development. This article attempts to show how the teaching of a Jewish text, Kohelet, can be taught as a tool to foster religious development and nurturing faith in our students. In particular, my thesis that Kohelet is a dialogue on the purpose of life aims to show how debate on questions of faith can be an important method in nurturing our students' religious beliefs.

Kohelet, or the book of Ecclesiastes, using its English title, is one of the most difficult texts in the Bible to understand. This book has been understood by many as characterizing life as being futile, *hevel* in Hebrew, and of "chasing the wind."

Beyond this rather pessimistic view of life, which stands in seeming contradiction to other biblical texts which emphasize the positive value of life, one encounters in Kohelet teachings that explicitly contradict each other. For example, in 7:2 Kohelet states, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting," while later in 8:15 he writes, "I praised rejoicing because man has no better thing under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be merry." Is rejoicing a good or a bad thing? We find contradictions such as these throughout the book.

Furthermore, there are statements in Kohelet which seem to directly contradict traditional Jewish belief. In 9:10 we read, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with strength for there is no work, nor reckoning, nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave to where you are going." What does this mean? Do whatever you want in this world as there is no reckoning in the next world? What about traditional Jewish views of reward and punishment, the World to come, etc.?

Commentators throughout the ages have grappled with these questions. Some see Kohelet as citing traditional wisdom and then refuting it. Others see the book as reflecting a single author's changing viewpoints over the years as well as life's ambiguities.

My thesis for interpreting Kohelet suggests a further way of understanding these contradictions which I have developed over many years. It is based on the introduction to Kohelet of the Meiri, a medieval rabbinic commentator, and has been more systematically developed by Rav Yakov Medan, a teacher at the Alon Shvut yeshiva in Gush Etzion, Israel. My



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work had adapted the principles to the young adult setting.

The essence of my thesis is that Kohelet is best understood as a book that opens a discussion between different personalities and different opinions. Understanding Kohelet as a dialogue rather than a monologue gives the book logical consistency and cohesiveness. Pedagogically, this approach opens students' minds and hearts to different viewpoints which are all placed honestly on the table, discussed, argued and evaluated through a process of critical analysis and debate.

I identify four characters in Kohelet:

1. The builder
2. The philosopher
3. The pleasure-seeking person
4. The G-d-fearing individual

These characters are debating philosophical questions of faith and belief, in particular, the meaning and purpose of life.

The author allows each character to have his say and argue rationally why his explanation of life's purpose is correct. The builder believes the purpose of life is to design and create structures and build-

ings for the betterment of mankind. The philosopher believes that the purpose of life is to try and understand its processes and why things happen as they do. The pleasure seeking person sees enjoyment and rejoicing as the purpose of life while the G-d-fearing individual sees faith as the core of his purpose. Through debate, argument and dialogue we are led to an understanding why faith offers such a meaningful explanation to the purpose of life. This interpretation of Kohelet can best help us understand the contradictions in this book.

The book can be divided into “speeches” given by the different personalities and the arguments and counter-arguments given by the other characters. I will first give an overall division of the book and then give some pedagogic reasons why I believe this way of interpreting Kohelet is so appropriate for young adults.

Chapters 1-2: introduction; opening statements of the builder, pleasure-seeking person and philosopher

Chapters 2:24-3:22: the pleasure-seeking person

Chapters 4:1-4:16: the builder (normally in the first person “I”)

Chapters 4:17-5:11: the G-d-fearing person (normally in the second person “you”)

Chapters 5:12-6:12: the builder; to whom will he give all his wealth after he dies?

Chapters 7-10: arguments between the characters about how to deal with death

Chapters 11-12: the final winning speech of the G-d-fearing person

Why is this approach so valuable pedagogically when teaching young adults? I give a number of reasons based on my experience and feedback from students:

1. The approach to learning text which allows students to debate and argue is one which young adults thrive on both intellectually and emotionally. There are no axioms with which we

cannot argue. Everything is open for questioning and nothing is a truth which is a “given.” The fact that such an approach is offered by the Bible itself in a “no questions barred” fashion is very refreshing for stu-



Kohelet is a dialogue on the purpose of life that shows how debate on questions of faith can be an important method in nurturing our students’ religious beliefs.

identify with the builder, others with the philosopher but they are all personalities that are part of their lives. Students can be challenged to state the strengths and weaknesses of each character’s arguments about the pur-

dents and this nurtures their faith in the Bible as a source for inspiration and direction.

2. Students relate very well to the above four characters that have been identified in the book. Some will naturally

pose of life as detailed in the text. By so doing, students’ can often clarify for themselves more clearly their own viewpoints about the purpose of life. The fact that the biblical text can be made so relevant and meaningful to

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 62]



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Nurturing Faith Through Music

■ by **MARSHA BRYAN EDELMAN**

SCIENTISTS believe that music is one of the oldest human creations. Apart from the millennia-old flutes and harps that have been discovered among archaeological finds, some anthropologists believe that music was a precursor to speech, that humans used music to communicate moods and even specific information long before there were words to express precise ideas. For a people as connected to the text as we Jews are, that's a powerful notion, theologically affirmed by the sentiments of Psalm 150 encouraging all manner of music-making in order to praise G-d.

Indeed, the Temple in Jerusalem was a place of elaborate performances, with levitical choirs and orchestras accompanying daily rituals, and the addition of extra voices and instruments for special occasions. While the "congregation" took only a limited role in Temple worship (intoning simple responses like "amen" or "*Baruch Hu uvaruch shemo*" in an era before prayer books and formalized religious education for all), the music of the Temple service communicated sacred sentiment and helped to forge a community of worshipers.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the rabbis forbade the kind of public ceremony and musical rituals that had previously distinguished Jewish worship, but they were unable to quash the human need to sing. Moreover, as new prayers emerged to take the place of the sacrifices, the rabbis needed a way to teach and disseminate those new rites, and discovered that the intersection of text and music offered the ideal vehicle for stimulating memory and creating emotional connections. Over time, complex musical customs evolved to identify liturgical time: morning and evening services, weekday and Sabbath prayers, Festival and High Holy Day celebrations are all identified through distinctive melodies, collectively referred to as nusach. Though Jews in different geographic regions developed different musical styles (reflective of the culture of the local majority), the idea of an obligatory body of music became universal, and again, helped to create cohesion among religious communities. Ashkenazic Jews expelled from one region after another could nevertheless find comfort in the synagogue, where, despite inevitable local variations, the music was broadly familiar.

Even—perhaps especially—those Jews who do not attend the synagogue with particular frequency are brought "home" each year by the return of familiar melodies associated with the High Holy Day services or the Passover seder. It is music that imprints these traditional memories. At the same time, when contemporary congregations feel that they are lacking a spiritual connection to the service, they reach out for new melodies that will enable communal participation and engagement with the text. From Shlomo Carlebach to Debbie Friedman, modern composers continue to make a mark on the

music of worship; for many people, it is through music that they are best able to express their faith. Others who do not consider themselves "ritual" Jews nevertheless feel culturally bound to our people through klezmer music, or the familiar songs they hear at a wedding or bar/bat mitzvah, or even the ditties associated with



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celebrations of Hanukkah and Purim.

Given the omnipresence and clear import of music in all aspects of our Jewish lives, it behooves us as educators to make music a greater presence in our classrooms. Here are some of the more obvious ways we can use music to enhance our teaching, and our students' learning:

- Play background music to establish a mood in your classroom (or the entire school, played over the public address system during school opening, dismissal or recess). Choose recordings of songs you have recently taught to accompany the building of craft projects, and you will both reinforce the music and create a quieter environment in the room; or select music you plan to introduce later, and the subliminal exposure to the songs will help prepare your students to learn these new melodies in the future.
- Explore different musical settings used for the same text. Most of the prayers commonly sung aloud have been adapted multiple times, by

composers in varying geographic locations and centuries. How does the “formal” setting of “*Ki MiTziyon*” sung in most synagogues (written by Salomon Sulzer in the mid-19th century, intended for use only as part of the Festival Torah service, but almost instantly adapted for daily usage) differ from a chasidic tune, or an Israeli melody or a song by a popular North American songwriter? Think of all the ways you know to sing “*Hinei mah tov uma na'im*.” Which one suits the mood of the text? They all do, just in different ways! Engage your students in exploring the meaning of the words through the mood established by the music. Which one expresses their ideas about the text? Which one would they most like to sing? Which one feels most like a “prayer”?

- Teach a chasidic nigun and discover the ability of music to transcend the text entirely! The Baal Shem Tov cultivated a radical notion by suggesting that the pure expression of spiritual desire through music might ascend directly to the *kisei hakavod* (Heavenly Throne) and facilitate communion with the Divine, even if the worshiper is not skilled in “formal” prayer. Chasidic *dveikus* nigunim are best suited

to this sort of spirituality (*tish* and *rikud* nigunim are used respectively for singing around the table and dancing) and many decidedly non-chasidic minyanim are using these melodies to begin their services, nurturing a spiritual community without words.

- Explore the distinctive flavor of Jewish communities around the world through their music. Recent recordings of the Abayudaya Jews of Africa, the Ethiopian Jewish community now in Israel, and Sephardic traditions of Jews from the Balkans to the Caribbean and across the Middle East can engage our students in cross-cultural exploration—and reinforce the textual ties that bind us together, despite our variant musical traditions. Imagine a model Passover seder in which each tune comes from a different Jewish community!

Ideally, each school should employ a specialist whose knowledge of the “literature” (repertoire) can create musical connections to virtually every topic covered in the curriculum, but it is not beyond the capacity of every teacher to create a musically-rich environment in his/her classroom. Many Jewish studies teachers who work with younger students already use songs

to help reinforce lessons in Bible, prayer and Hebrew, and music from Israel creates an obvious connection to the country and its language. Some older children do balk at singing the “old-fashioned” or “babyish” songs that are familiar to their teachers, but there is plenty of fresh, new music readily available: Websites like www.Oysongs.com, www.MostlyMusic.com, and www.JewishMusic.com offer inexpensive downloads of the latest music from across the spectrum of musical style and religious sentiment; www.blueandwhite.com has a wide selection of Israeli music for purchase, and virtually all performers have sites where their entire inventory is readily available. Remember, too, that “singing” is not the only way to appreciate music. Your older students, who may prefer not to sing along, can learn a lot about music by simply listening as you guide a discussion of the text and its meaning.

All human communities produce music, and the Jewish community has a rich and diverse repertoire it can call its own. There are many ways to “be Jewish” in today’s world, but fortunately, there is music that can engage every Jew. The music of our people has nurtured and expressed our faith throughout Jewish history; we can, and should, use it to facilitate the spiritual development of today’s students as well. ■



Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz Delivers Lesson Specially for RAVSAK High Schools

RAVSAK was an official partner of the Global Day of Jewish Learning, an event that united Jewish communities throughout the world, with hundreds of participating communities and thousands of people united in their pursuit of talmud Torah.

The event marked the completion of the Steinsaltz Talmud, an undertaking that has helped opened up the study of Jewish sacred text to thousands of Jews from

all backgrounds. On Monday November 15th, Rabbi Steinsaltz delivered a shiur to RAVSAK high schools, on the subject of “Testing G-d.”

Over 100 students and teachers from 15 RAVSAK high schools throughout North America were in attendance on the webinar. After the lesson, participants messaged their questions to Rabbi Steinsaltz. As he taught, within a framework of respect, there are no questions that cannot be asked. ■



Faith in Stories

■ by **RAFAEL CASHMAN**

We are not story tellers, but story dwellers. Darrell Fasching

STORIES have an unusual capacity to live within us in a way that abstract principles do not. They touch our hearts with messages our minds can only distantly grasp, and create a bridge that allows our most profound ideas to make their way into our lives. I believe this is what the Sages meant when they said that if someone wants to acquire wisdom they should learn halachah, but if they want to fear G-d, to develop the emotional and spiritual capacity to experience the divine, they need to learn ag-gadah (Avot deRabbi Natan, chapter 29), the parables and stories of the Oral Torah. Faith is nurtured through stories.



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When we think of the classic Jewish stories we teach, what usually comes to mind are the iconic moments of the Bible and the midrashim of the Talmud. While it has become conventional to say so, I think these are undervalued and underutilized as *stories* in the educator's toolbox at the high school level, where the narrative is lost as reading skills and moral lessons become the primary focus. I am not advocating simply telling more stories to students or turning those stories into moral lessons for older students. Rather, my hope is to turn much more of Jewish learning into a kind of storytelling, the active engagement with the process of a biblical or rabbinic experiences, as a way of deeply impacting the students' growing faith.

When used thoughtfully, stories have the potential to make a profound impact on development, particularly that of faith. Soren Kierkegaard explained that some educational challenges require a roundabout approach instead of head-on explications. An educator may have to circle around an issue or idea because the intellectual concepts may be too distant or abstract, or may reside in the mind but not the believing heart. Stories are valuable in nurturing faith because they have a sense of process, a lived, as opposed to abstract quality. Faith is not an idea to be understood, but a way of being, an experience of life. Thus, stories can be vital as educators try to teach the experience of faith.

Yet even when we learn biblical or rabbinic stories, the forest is often lost as we investigate the trees, and they fail to exert their power as narratives. I think this happens because when we teach the textual narratives we tend to assume that the story exists clearly within the text. But texts are broken down into so many commentators and details that the impact of the narrative is lost. We fail to move students in this model because we confuse a text with a story, and assume that since we have taught a text, we have taught a story as well. But the text does not speak for itself; rather, it becomes a story when it is told, or at a high level of education, re-told, through those who read it.

Take the occurrence of the spies, the *meraglim*, as an example. Most children with

some Jewish educational background know the story of the spies. That is to say, they know what the text says. But this is insufficient for a mature student. At this stage, the text must be transformed into a story once again through a deeper reading, so the text is investigated and commentators are learned. Yet how one reads this text can vary dramatically depending on how one identifies the sin of the spies.

According to Rashi, what happened to the spies spells out the drama of the Jewish people's rejection of G-d in their asking to see the land. This is a drastically different reading, and thus story, from Rambam's, according to whom the spies made a very reasonable and conscious choice, that only went bad later in the narrative. And as one continues through the *text*, it is easy to lose the narrative thread laid out by Rashi or the Ramban because of other interesting ideas or problems. Thus the student is left with a lot of details and not a clear idea about what actually happened.

A teacher must be judicious about prioritizing the central narrative as the lens through which to decide what is important, and relegating other goals (like reading skills or moral development) to a back burner. The main purpose in studying commentators is to gain a greater insight into the narrative itself. This is more than just a technical point. A focus on the narrative arc retains the sense of lived experience, the quality of process, that allows stories to touch us more deeply than abstract principles. This thread is lost if we work on reading skills, addressing tangential moral lessons, or solving textual puzzle.



“A focus on the narrative arc retains the sense of lived experience, the quality of process, that allows stories to touch us more deeply than abstract principles.”

Stories are often seen as a childish modality designed to make illustrative points or to entertain. But to be truly effective, a story has to be *retold*. This may sometimes take the form of something more experiential and participatory, like having the students perform a play or tell the story in their own words. It may also be an iterative process that happens throughout the learning process, as each successive idea is learned and added to the overall story that grows from a particular text. It is this culminating experience that brings the story to life in a way that the process of learning it sometimes ignores. And it is a process that can only happen when one is loyal to the notion of a narrative thread discussed above. It is at this moment in the re-telling(s) that the “story” of the text becomes a story that means something to the student. This is where all the details of learning are brought together to tell a grander narrative than the story each individual originally knew before the learning occurred.

With rabbinic narratives, we face the same problem when we focus on texts to the detriment of the story, a problem exacer-

bated by the need we feel to find a moral message in midrashim. The following midrash arises from an attempt to understand G-d’s *lekh lekha* command to Avraham, that he should leave his home and travel to the land of Israel.

Rabbi Isaac said, “(The command to Avraham) is to be compared to one who traveled about from place to place, and saw a place lit up (note: another version has the palace burning). Said he, ‘Can it be that this place is without a master?’ So he was answered, ‘I am the master of the palace.’” (Genesis Rabbah 39:1)

The midrash then goes on to explain the meaning of this metaphor; Avraham questions whether the world had a master, and G-d reveals Himself as that Master. The Rambam interpreted this midrash as a teleological proof for G-d, the conclusion of Avraham’s intellectual journey in search of truth. Others explore this central metaphor of the midrash as a way of substantiating Avraham’s strong moral sense (i.e., the world is burning morally and Avraham is the only one who responds). Both these approaches see the narrative as trying to con-

vey a specific abstract concept, in the process losing touch with its qualities as a story.

Engaging this midrash as a narrative means delving deeper into its details (Avraham’s wandering-but-directionless journey, the meaning of a conversation between him and G-d which is initiated by man and not G-d, and the lack of G-d’s response or direction after Avraham’s discovery), and then tying these pieces together around the central message to recreate the story in a more coherent and holistic fashion. This movement back to the text as a *story*, and not a *message* in the garb of a story, accesses a depth and richness in Avraham’s discovery of G-d. The midrash must be reengaged after the text has been deciphered in order to produce a deeper narrative that speaks to our lived experience, particularly here, a journey in faith. If the narrative nature of the text is embraced with the results of the textual exploration brought back to retell the story at a higher level, then Avraham’s discovery is truly meaningful because it has been explored as *his* story in process, *his* discovery of faith, and not reduced to an abstract life lesson.

For example, when a teacher goes back to re-tell Avraham’s story, each sentence in this short midrash can now be embellished because of the learning itself. Students come to identify with Avraham’s

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Faith in Stories

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experience of searching; Avraham lacks direction and experiences the feeling of insecurity this brings, along with his motivation to move forward despite the uncertainty of where this path leads. This movement must be narrated, not merely explained, because it is this Avraham, the persistent searcher, the tireless explorer, that comes across the lit or burning mansion. Avraham is desperate to find something to orient and direct his life, give it clarity, direction and purpose. Only when the experience of searching is felt by the listener does the moment of questioning mean something. The life-story of this

man who is confronted by the burning mansion is very different than either the midrash read simply, or knowing intellectually that he searched for something. His question is the culmination (and yet equally the beginning) of his directionless search, a moment of profound satisfaction and clarity. Beyond this, the teacher must re-tell the moment of coming across the mansion, his question, and subsequent encounter with G-d. I believe such a telling, following the experience of deep learning, can impact those searching for faith in a way that the moral of the story, wrung dry of the narrative, does not.

Stories have always played a role in the world of Jewish learning. Whether influenced by the abstract and textual model of Talmudic learning, or the influence of “Athens” to move education from the concrete and particular to the universal and abstract, stories and storytelling have taken a back seat in the beit midrash of conventional Jewish education. The time has come to take stories seriously once again as a genuine pedagogical tool to nurture faith, beyond their capacity to entertain or serve other educational goals. Stories bring the experience of faith to life, and create models for the students’ own growth. It is time to have faith in stories. ■

Kohelet: Debating Faith

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57]

young adults’ lives is an important learning and teaching goal within itself.

3. The topics raised by the four personalities are ones which naturally concern the young adult. In particular the subject of death which is tackled in a very graphic way in chapter 11 is one which many students are grappling with at this age. While the answer of Kohelet is that only the body dies but the “spirit returns to G-d from where it came,” students may argue or disagree with his conclusion. The debating style of Kohelet allows for multiple views and opinions.
4. The fact that the identity of the speakers in Kohelet are not explicitly mentioned but can be derived from the text allows students to discover the speakers’ identities for themselves. Students can be asked to prepare, say, chapter 4 first on their own in pairs and asked to identify the speaker and his arguments. They themselves then learn to appreciate textual nuances and change of tenses which hint to changes in speakers. This can be done almost as well using English translation as it can

be done in Hebrew. This method of “active learning” in the study of Tanakh, made famous by the teachings of Nechama Leibowitz, is pedagogically challenging for students and they enjoy the opportunity that this method of engaging with the text offers. I have found that teaching Tanakh in this way often nurtures students respect and faith in holy texts of this kind.

5. Students come to learn more about themselves and their own identity through learning Kohelet in this way. “Who am I?” or “Who do I identify with the most in these characters?” is a question which often arises in discussion. Could it be that the four characters are really four dispositions which we each have in our own personalities? The question then is, which one is the most dominant in our own human make up? Can I change or alter the relative impact of my dispositions? A discussion of this kind, especially if Kohelet is studied in the period leading up to Rosh Hashanah, can be a very meaningful and spiritually nurturing experience.
6. The study of Kohelet offers opportunities for integration in other

curriculum areas like science and literature. The opening chapter, for example, which describes “the never ending cycle of life” subtly alludes to the four elements of nature, energy, gas, liquid and solid as proposed by the ancient Greeks. A study of the “Time for all seasons” text in chapter 3, for example, offers an opportunity to look at the literature and music say of Elton John’s “Circle of Life.” How do the lyrics of the song mirror what is in Kohelet and how do they differ? This integrated perspective illustrates the point that the Bible is not just another subject in the curriculum. It is part of a holistic learning experience that incorporates all areas of instruction. The Bible is not just a history book or a collection of laws. It contains a book like Kohelet that deals with the core issues of human existence that are part of an integrated perspective of looking at the world.

Unfortunately, our educational system rarely provides our students with the tools to develop a religious perspective on life and its challenges. It is my hope that this approach to the teaching and learning of Kohelet will offer one path to develop such a perspective. ■

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Emphasizing Process over Product: Reaching Postmodern Jewish Youth

■ by **YONATAN YUSSMAN**

How can Jewish educational leaders reach teens who are often distrustful of institutionalized religion and highly individualistic, with contradictory and fluid personal identities? A recent article described a young Jewish girl as “a hetero, eco-feminist, vegan, Jewish, history major.” Another article refers to “Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam” Jews.

Many students in community Jewish high schools a version of “Sheilaism,” after Sheila, a young woman interviewed by Robert Bellah for his book *Habits of the Heart* who named her religion after herself. Sheila took whatever gave her a sense of spiritual identity, and added it to her spiritual toolbox; when something did not speak to her, she got rid of it.

“Sheilaism” is a vivid description of a trend that has been researched and documented in young Jews. They feel that religion is essentially an internal matter, without any feeling of external obligation from the Torah, tradition, school, synagogue, teacher, rabbi, or parent. Who are these “New Jews”? How are we supposed to nurture faith in this postmodern paradigm?

We need to know what our students believe before we can talk about how to nurture them spiritually. Perhaps the seminal study explaining these recent trends in Judaism is Arnold Eisen and Steven Cohen’s *The Jew Within*, which analyzes the “moderately affiliated Jews who make up the bulk of American Jewry.” The authors’ key finding is that the construction of Jewish meaning in America is now personal and private, and that communal loyalties and norms no longer shape Jewish identity as they did several decades ago.

Recent research supports this. A 2005 Reboot study (*OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*) concludes that Generation Y “is characterized by open mindedness and tolerance, believing that people should do their own thing, even if it seems strange to others. For many, pursuing the American Dream simply means, ‘doing whatever I want’.” The study confirms that Generation Y sees religious commitment as only one possible route to find meaning in Judaism. A 2006 Reboot study (*Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices*) finds Generation Y Jews incredibly self-confident about their Jewish identities, but also defined by many other factors in their lives, including their social networks, geography, gender, and sexual orientation. The study reveals that young Jews feel existing Jewish institutions have become increasingly irrelevant to the way they are living their lives. These Jews tend to experience Judaism informally rather than through formal religious practice, and they

do not distinguish between “American” and “Jewish” values.

Most schools currently focus on transmitting traditional Judaism and motivating



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their students to adopt an existing religious construct. Relatively little time is devoted to helping students develop the skills to construct their own identity, and how to sustain this process once they are in college and beyond. While teaching content knowledge, behaviors, beliefs, and skill sets is of course indispensable, schools should also devote time to teaching our students how to construct a meaningful Jewish identity. I am advocating that we focus on teaching the *process* of spiritual development, and not worry as much about the *product* of being a certain type of religious person.

To illustrate, take the example of teaching our students about keeping kosher. How can we engage them in a meaningful process of postmodern spiritual identity development on this topic? The first step in the process is to simply learn about the subject in a non-indoctrinary manner; often, knowledge and understanding are all it takes to make something meaningful.

But what happens if students learn about a ritual like kashrut, and it remains irrelevant? The second step in this process is

critically analyzing exactly what they find meaningful about the ritual, and what struggles they have with it. Help them see both sides of the argument, and consider all perspectives.

The final stage in this process encourages students to move beyond simple rejection of a ritual, and to take ownership of it. How do we inject new meaning into old rituals? For example, perhaps a student will decide that vegetarianism is a way to introduce relevance, spirituality, and connection to Judaism into food consumption. Vegetarianism becomes this person's way of keeping kosher.

As the parent of three children in a Jewish day school, and someone who has devoted his career to being a teacher and administrator in Jewish community schools, I often wonder if the type of Judaism I describe will work. I am confident that I can teach a process of meaningful identity construction and the importance of making good choices. The outcome may be different from my own Judaism, but ultimately I will be happy with whatever Jewish choices my children (both my biological ones, and my students) make. This is because I am committed to the process, and believe that my children are the next generation in an ever evolving tradition that will not only help them live purposeful lives, but will be enhanced by what they, in return, have to offer. ■

Pluralistic Tefillah Education: Hearing the Voices of Teachers

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33]

quency with which their children must pray. They can be assured that all minyanim will reflect a shared set of principal values about prayer, values such as connecting to tradition, creating a sacred space, searching for meaning, fostering a responsibility to community, and cultivating a relationship with G-d. But they cannot control what that relationship will look like, and neither can we. The starting point for all children must be the way in which their religious life is anchored at home; as they grow, they will develop their own ideas about religious life, some of which reflect their parents' traditions, and some of which are unique to them. We need to reassure this young father that the true litmus test is not a guarantee that a child will be Orthodox, as not even a yeshiva can deliver such promises. It should be whether or not a school creates an open and safe environment in which children are encouraged to develop commitments to a deep inner-religious life.

As a pluralistic community, it is imperative to prepare students to engage in a Jewish world that is and has always been diverse. In a world of growing extremes, we want our students to recognize G-d's image in the diversity of Jewish expressions that enrich our community. We will forever face the challenges of guiding students to find personal meaning and relevance in tefillah. But we face these challenges with the knowledge that tefillah is also a time to examine and develop a disposition toward the different voices and different models of Jewish practice. Across their differences, these voices give expression to a core of shared values and model spiritual curiosity with a sense of dignity and great appreciation for the other. ■

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Deepening Spiritual Awareness: A Work in Progress

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39]

for prayer or rituals allow us to connect with G-d, or feel kadosh? We acknowledge our students' growing intellectual capacity for discussing ideas by focusing not only on the visual cues and simple blessings associated with zmanim kedoshim, but also by delving more deeply into the content of longer tefillot and the reason for their placement in the service, and by encouraging students to articulate their ideas about how the creation of zmanim kedoshim can help create a connection to G-d or a sense of spirituality.

At the same time that we are encouraging this conceptual leap, however, in the younger years of middle school we acknowledge that students' abstract thinking skills are still developing. Therefore, while we examine texts and ideas that are more complex than in earlier grades, we still focus on themes such as zman and kahal, community (in sixth grade), so we can continue to incorporate more tangible activities. This is perhaps best exemplified by our fifth grade Shabbaton, where students have the opportunity to experience, and create, a zman kadosh of their own.

By the final years of middle school, our students' ability to think about spiritual concepts in an abstract way is at a point where discussions and other focusing activities can turn towards yet more sophisticated ideas and forming their own definitions of holiness. The seventh grade year, as most students experience becoming bnei mitzvah, is an ideal time to encourage students to discover their own Jewish identities and where they can find a sense of kedushah in their Jewish experiences. There are many different ways in which such an exploration can be facilitated in an inclusive community school. Conversations with rabbis and community members from a variety of congregations provide them with different Jewish perspectives on what it means to connect with G-d or to lead a life of kedushah. Exploring different siddurim provides students with opportunities to compare, contrast, and make meaning. And, with teacher guidance, students can examine specific prayers with an eye towards finding words and ideas that they find personally meaningful. This is what happens in seventh grade, the year of kedushat ha-yachid, individual holiness.

One of the most important goals in eight

grade is to help students imagine how their Jewish life will look in the future. How will students create holy times, places, and communities for themselves once they are out of the secure, daily Jewish environment of their day school? While this conversation is especially relevant given the fact of their graduation, it is also age-appropriate. By eighth grade, students are capable not only of better understanding themselves as individuals, but are also able to begin defining their individual values and apply them to their behavior and choices in their society and communities.

Thoughtful consideration of student intellectual and social development is crucial when developing a focused tefillah program that hopes to enrich student Jewish identity and deepen spiritual awareness. As the minds of our children grow and evolve, so do the ways in which they are able to relate to ideas of G-d, kedushah, and spirituality. Having this development in mind when planning what prayers to study, what ideas to explore, and how to explore them, will go a long way towards providing our students with the best possible foundation for examining lifelong questions of faith. ■

Students of David Posnack Hebrew Day School and the Weber School wanted to strengthen bonds of friendship first forged at this year's Moot Beit Din in DC. We realized that what we needed was a Shabbaton, a way to continue learning from each other, while socializing with more students. After endless emails, phone calls, and video conferences, the idea of a Shabbaton was transformed into a successful reality.

On Friday morning, November 5th, twenty-three of the David Posnack sophomores and juniors flew up to

Atlanta and were hosted by the Weber students. Upon arrival, all the students instantly became friends and throughout the weekend, we fell in love with the spirit inside the Weber School. The

students sang, learned, and prayed together, and overall, we had an incredible weekend.

Maybe next year, the David Posnack students will venture over to the west coast for a Shabbaton. Maybe we'll travel up north to meet and learn with other Jewish students. Since RAVSAK enabled our schools to connect with each other, however, we have the opportunity to visit any Jewish school on the map. Thanks to RAVSAK, we have already begun. —Emily Goldberg, sophomore, David Posnack Hebrew Day School, Plantation, FL ■



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Nourishing the Adolescent Soul

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21]

an important component for educators seeking to nurture developmentally informed religious growth.

Social: It is important that religious educators constantly keep in mind that the greatest fear of any adolescent is not fitting in. When surrounded by peers who are cynical or rejecting of religion, it is increasingly difficult to convince them to commit to any overt signs of religious or spiritual practice outside the established norm. Feeling different or attacked on the basis of religious behavior is a risk factor for spiritual alienation in young adulthood.

This dynamic was clear in one of the high schools participating in the RUACH project. When a small group of students returned from an intensive immersion program that helped them become more religiously connected than their peers, their re-entry to their school was complicated by the subtle message from their classmates that they seemed “over the top” in their clearly intensified spiritual prayer. Sadly, the reaction from their peers quickly taught these students to “tone down” any displays of their spiritual growth. Such activity was clearly viewed by peers as violating the social norm. Based on this experience, school administrators re-

long been acknowledged in the literature, with women generally identified as being more religious than men. In his review of the findings of the World Values Survey, Stark (2002) reported that in 48 out of 49 nations surveyed, women were significantly more likely to describe themselves as religious than were men. Similar findings were found regarding adolescents in the United States, where female

lah relate more to G-d as a confidante whereas boys relate to an authoritarian conception of G-d suggests different approaches to male and female prayer. Similarly, being prepared for a drop of religious connection during the sophomore or junior year, when students are mostly aged 16 to 17, can help educators more effectively plan for these grades in a manner that doesn't overreact to this temporary dip.

“The finding that girls relate more to G-d as a confidante whereas boys relate to an authoritarian conception of G-d suggests different approaches to male and female prayer.”

teens reported higher levels of religiosity in a wide range of religious actions and beliefs than males. In the RUACH project, when adolescents in six Modern Orthodox high schools were given a carefully standardized measure of their religious actions and beliefs, girls consistently scored higher on both actions and beliefs and showed more stability in their levels of religious and spiritual connection over the course of high school. In contrast, boys were significantly less spiritually mindful during high school and showed much more variability. They were particularly at risk for showing a decline in both spiritual actions and belief at age 16.

Parents: Perhaps the most important influence upon adolescent spirituality is parents. Not surprisingly, studies reveal that the majority of adolescents in America follow in their parents' footsteps regarding religious and spiritual practices. When Jay Goldmintz surveyed over 200 adolescents attending Modern Orthodox day schools, levels of family cohesiveness and conflict were most predictive of adolescent religious practices and beliefs. Clearly, educators will greatly increase their effectiveness in spiritual education if they forge effective partnerships with parents. This can include parent-child learning programs and spiritual retreats designed to encourage parents to join their children in exploring modes of spiritual connection and alienation.

“Feeling different or attacked on the basis of religious behavior is a risk factor for spiritual alienation in young adulthood.”

signed the program for the second cohort of students undergoing the immersive experience. The second time around, administrators carefully planned for students' re-entry to their high school. They were given strategies on how to handle their newfound spiritual connectedness against the developmental context of peer acceptance.

Gender and Age: Gender differences in religious observance and beliefs have

Noting these differences in spiritual connection as a function of both gender and age is important when trying to understand how to intervene most effectively. It is likely that what works for girls is not necessarily what works for boys. For example, Jay Goldmintz reviews the literature on how adolescent girls connect to G-d during prayer in a more personal manner than do boys, who often related to G-d as judge and disciplinarian. The finding that girls during tefil-

Throughout this article, we have provided the reader with ideas about how to connect students to G-d in more effective and long-lasting ways. Adults in schools, homes, and communities have enormous responsibilities to create environments that are conducive to spiritual growth. We are not suggesting that each student needs to experience profound spiritual moments on a daily basis. Yet, we have presented reasonable, practical, and actionable recommendations that when taken individually or in combination, can nourish the souls of our youth. ■

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—Michael J. Bohnen, President of the Adelson Family Foundation

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.

Books

Benjamin, Alfred. *The Helping Interview*.

Buber, Martin. *Hasidism and Modern Man*.

Coles, Robert. *The Spiritual Life of Children*.

Fowler, James. *Stages of Faith*.

Goldmintz, Jay. *The Impact of Family Environment on Religious Actions and Beliefs in Adolescents Attending Modern Orthodox Day School* (doctoral dissertation, Azrieli Graduate School).

Gratton, Carolyn. *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*.

Kessler, Rachel. *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*.

Nouwen, Henri. *The Wounded Healer*.

Palmer, Parker. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*.

Peerless, Shmuel. *To Study and to Teach: The Methodology of Nechama Leibowitz*.

Smith, Christian and Denton, Melina. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.

Smith, Christian and Snell, Patricia. *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.

Weiss, Shira. *Letting God In: The Spiritual Development of Modern Orthodox High School Girls* (doctoral dissertation, Azrieli Graduate School).

Wolf, Anthony. *Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me & Cheryl to the Mall: A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager*.

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Online Resources

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www.ijs-online.org, The Institute for Jewish Spirituality

www.JewishMusic.com

www.MostlyMusic.com

www.orayta.org

www.Oysongs.com

www.piyut.org.il

www.youthandreligion.org, The National Study of Youth & Religion

Blogs:

Dov Bear

Frum Kiruv Maniac

Hasidic Rebel

Hirhurim

Mar Gavriel

Mis-nagid

Not the Godol Hador

Orthoprax

RAVSAK Welcomes New Member Schools

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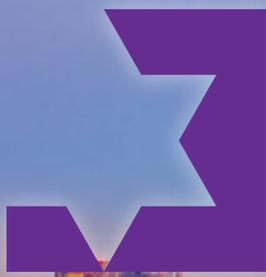
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