

הידיעון

HAYIDION

RAVSAK

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SUMMER 2016

ART AND AESTHETICS

THE RAVSAK  
JOURNAL

HaYidion is a publication of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network. It is published quarterly for distribution to RAVSAK member schools, associate members, and other Jewish and general education organizations. No articles may be reproduced or distributed without express written permission of RAVSAK. All rights reserved. Subscriptions are \$36/year.

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**Design:** BusyBee GD

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Please contact Marla Rottenstreich at marla@ravsak.org or by phone at 646-450-7280.

RAVSAK

254 West 54th Street, 11th floor, New York, NY 10019 • 212-665-1320 • fax: 212-665-1321 • info@ravsak.org • ravsak.org

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**Janine Okmin** is associate director of education at The Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, where she engages teachers and students in learning in and through the arts.  
[jokmin@thecjm.org](mailto:jokmin@thecjm.org)

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**Orna Siegel** is the director of enrollment and tuition assistance at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland.  
[osiegel@cesjds.org](mailto:osiegel@cesjds.org)

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**Rebecca Guber** is the founder and director of Asylum Arts, a global network of Jewish culture that works with over 350 international Jewish artists working in all disciplines.  
[rebecca@asylum-arts.org](mailto:rebecca@asylum-arts.org)

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**Annette Calloway** is the art educator at the Akiva School in Nashville, Tennessee.  
[acalloway@akivanashville.net](mailto:acalloway@akivanashville.net)

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**Talia Hurwich** worked as a middle school level Hebrew and writing teacher and is currently a PhD student at NYU Steinhardt's program in education and Jewish studies. She has appeared on several professional panels exploring the myriad of uses for comics and graphic novels in the classroom. [th1425@nyu.edu](mailto:th1425@nyu.edu)

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**Dr. Barbara Davis** is the secretary of RAVSAK's Board of Directors, executive editor of *H A Y I D I O N* and principal emerita at the Syracuse Hebrew Day

School in Dewitt, New York.  
[bdavis74@twcny.rr.com](mailto:bdavis74@twcny.rr.com)

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**Rebekah Farber** is the chair of RAVSAK's Board of Directors.

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**Cooki Levy** is the director of RAVSAK's Head of School Professional Excellence Project (HoSPEP).  
[cooki@ravsak.org](mailto:cooki@ravsak.org)

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**Dr. Miriam Heller Stern** is the dean of American Jewish University's (AJU) Graduate Center for Education in Los Angeles.  
[mstern@aju.edu](mailto:mstern@aju.edu)

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#### From Pride in the Past to Excitement for the Future



**Dr. Marc N. Kramer and Dr. Idana Goldberg** are the co-executive directors of RAVSAK.  
[mkramer@ravsak.org](mailto:mkramer@ravsak.org), [idana@ravsak.org](mailto:idana@ravsak.org)

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**Elizabeth Diamant** is a senior educator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. [e-diamant@nga.gov](mailto:e-diamant@nga.gov)

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**Sarah L. Kaufman** is the author of *The Art of Grace* and Pulitzer Prize-winning dance critic of the *Washington Post*. Published in partnership with the Jewish Book Council.

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**Hillel Broder** is an English teacher at SAR High School in the Bronx and a co-founder of the Yeshiva Poetry Society. [hbroder@gmail.com](mailto:hbroder@gmail.com)

**Aaron Roller** is former editor of the Jewish arts journal *Mima'amakim* and a co-founder of the Yeshiva Poetry Society. [a.j.roller@gmail.com](mailto:a.j.roller@gmail.com)

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**Dr. Ofra Arieli Backenroth** is the associate dean of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education of The Jewish Theological Seminary and an assistant professor of Jewish education. [OfBackenroth@jtsa.edu](mailto:OfBackenroth@jtsa.edu)

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**David Moss** is an internationally renowned Jewish content artist, a co-founder of Kol HaOt, and TIA's senior mentor. For more information about the Institute, contact [elyssa@kolhaot.com](mailto:elyssa@kolhaot.com).

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**Karen Dresser** PhD is a visual arts and Jewish studies teacher at the American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, North Carolina. [kdresser@aha-net.org](mailto:kdresser@aha-net.org)

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**Ilana Benson** heads the Education Department of Yeshiva University Museum in New York City.

[ibenson@yum.cjh.org](mailto:ibenson@yum.cjh.org)

**Gabriel Goldstein**, the founder and director of Re-Imagining Jewish Education Through Art, is an independent curator and a museum and educational consultant.

[ggoldstein@yum.cjh.org](mailto:ggoldstein@yum.cjh.org)

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For students at all age levels, music can be a powerful pedagogic tool in service of a day school's larger Jewish mission.



**Yehudah Katz**, an American-born Israeli singer-song writer, is the founder of an Israeli educational nonprofit, "Artists and Musicians for Israel," which offers various programs to Americans such as MASA-GAP YEAR, elementary schools, high schools, teacher training programs

and university level students. [www.artists.org.il](http://www.artists.org.il)

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**Sara Beckerman** is the creator of Siddur Sababa, an interactive prayer curriculum for grades 1-9.

**Rebecca Friedman-Charry** has been teaching Jewish studies for more than 20 years. Both currently teach at Schechter School of Long Island.

[sbeckerman@schechterli.org](mailto:sbeckerman@schechterli.org), [rfriedman@schechterli.org](mailto:rfriedman@schechterli.org)

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**Chani Newman** has taught Tanakh and Jewish studies at schools ranging from preschool to high school.

[ChaniYNewman@gmail.com](mailto:ChaniYNewman@gmail.com)

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The study of great artworks can be set in dialogue with Jewish teachings to enrich students' understanding of both.



**Michal Bergman** is educational program content developer and supervisor at Tzav Pius in Israel.

[michalbergman40@gmail.com](mailto:michalbergman40@gmail.com)

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**Cheryl Kleinman-Khalou** is a childhood educator at Temple Israel of Great Neck, NY, specializing in music and art enrichment programming.

[cherylkhalou@gmail.com](mailto:cherylkhalou@gmail.com)

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**Rabbi Charlie Schwartz** is the director of BIMA and Genesis and senior Jewish educator in Brandeis University's Office of Precollege Programs.

[cschwartz@brandeis.edu](mailto:cschwartz@brandeis.edu)

## Paul Bernstein Named to Lead NewOrg



The board of the new Jewish day school organization (NewOrg) has unanimously elected Paul Bernstein as the organization's founding chief executive officer. He will drive NewOrg's mission of unifying and strengthening the Jewish day school field.

Paul brings a wealth of experience both in philanthropy and the commercial sector, having led and funded innovative high-impact companies in the education and healthcare fields, among others. He previously served as chief executive officer of The Pershing Square Foundation and as global managing director of Absolute Return for Kids (ARK). An alumnus of the Rosh Pinah Day School in the United Kingdom, Paul's profound commitment to Jewish day school education is today expressed through his children, students at Solomon Schechter School of Westchester.

A great deal of progress has been made in preparation for NewOrg's launch this summer. Kathy Manning has been appointed board chair, and the board is being composed to include a range of outstanding community leaders committed to the Jewish day school field. The board and the teams of the merging organizations have been very pleased by the momentum building to turn this vision into a reality.

In particular, NewOrg is thrilled to announce a \$2 million grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation. This extraordinary gift demonstrates the Foundation's significant dedication to NewOrg's mission and, together with a previously announced AVI CHAI Foundation grant, will be instrumental in ensuring its financial stability during its first two years of operations.

Several other significant initiatives are underway, such as the development of key programs and services, and the exciting launch of the official NewOrg name and brand. Additional information on NewOrg and updates are available at [www.newjds.org](http://www.newjds.org).

This issue of *HaYidion* is dedicated to the memory of Jonathan Steiner, z'l, beloved son of Joseph and Elaine Steiner.

FROM  
THE EDITOR



BARBARA DAVIS

# A TRIBUTE TO RAVSAK'S DOUBLE CHAI

Thirty-six years of RAVSAK, the Jewish Community Day School Network. Thirty years of conferences. Twenty-eight years of a newsletter that morphed into a journal that is read by hundreds of day school leaders, both lay and professional, and hundreds of other thought leaders in the field of Jewish day school education. This is a double chai legacy of which we can all be very proud. As RAVSAK merges and metamorphoses into something bigger (it's hard for me to say "better," but I mean that too), we are all a little sad. But we are also excited and energized by the thought of being part of something new and different and forward-thinking. We have outgrown our grass roots. In a new age, we are reaching for the stars in a new way, but as determinedly as ever.

*HaYidion* will continue. That is really good news for those of us who read it cover to cover, distribute it to our communities, write for it, highlight its pages, reference it constantly. The many topics that *HaYidion* has covered are so far reaching, so necessary for our professional development and so in line with current thinking—it would be hard to imagine day school education without it. Athletics, literacy, data, ethics, Hebrew, money, mission, size, teachers, trends—even God—have been examined and made educationally relevant in the pages of our professional journal. I would like to take this opportunity to cite the extraordinary work of *HaYidion's* editor, Elliott Rabin. His scholarship, knowledge, dedication, enthusiasm and wide-ranging contacts in the Jewish world have brought the most up-to-date (dare I say "trendy"?) issues to the desks, mailboxes and computers screens of some of the busiest people in the world. Who would have time to learn about Art and Aesthetics in Jewish education, the topic of this issue, were it not for *HaYidion's* fortunate arrival in our mailboxes? Like RAVSAK itself, *HaYidion* provides day school educators what they need when they need it.

The retrospective and tribute pages in this issue speak to the tremendous scope and impact RAVSAK has had on the lives of those who make Jewish community day school education their life's work. The visionary heads of school who founded RAVSAK would be proud of all that it has accomplished. The donors and lay leaders who supported RAVSAK's work deserve gratitude and praise for their support and can feel justly proud of having sustained an organization that has done so much for so many. Our children are our future, and if we want our Jewish future to truly be a Jewish future, we must continue to work tirelessly to assure that Jewish children are educated Jewishly.

RAVSAK and its constituent schools have always set the bar high. We wish all those who continue our work the very best of luck and much success in the years ahead. Ours is a legacy and heritage of beauty, meaning, morality, conviction, and striving toward the betterment of the world. As RAVSAK and *HaYidion* merge with our educational partners into a new organization, we know that we are growing *מחיל אל חיל*, from strength to strength.

# A PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM THE RAVSAK BOARD CHAIR



REBEKAH FARBER

I'm not sure if it's coincidence or providence that the termination of RAVSAK as an independent entity and my tenure as board chair, as well as the graduation of my youngest child from high school, are all occurring at the same time in my life. I have been stewarding children through Jewish day schools for 26 years and working on the boards of my local schools and RAVSAK for 16 of those. So these transitions are monumental for me on many levels.

When one's youngest graduates high school, a parent feels both optimistic and a little sad. I look forward to the opportunities an empty nest will afford my husband and me and to the sense of freedom I anticipate feeling. But I'm also melancholy at the closing of an era and the knowledge that there is no going back to the innocent years of building a family and a future.

My feelings about sending RAVSAK off to NewOrg are similar. We are moving from a singular organization serving 139 community day schools, to a large, multi-dimensional agency serving over 300 schools of many streams. I feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride for all the work that has been done by RAVSAK's lay and professional leadership, but I also feel a bit of sadness as our board dismantles and our staff moves on to other tasks. Change is hard. And acceptance is even harder.

Yet in reflecting on what I have learned at RAVSAK and on the values we hold dear, I feel deep confidence and optimism about the future into which we are merging. Jewish community day schools are microcosms of Jewish life. Renowned for their celebration (not just acceptance) of pluralism, they and RAVSAK are places where people of many different Jewish backgrounds work together for the common good. This must and will continue. The new organization has the remarkable opportunity to model these values on the national scale and serve as an example of how multiple approaches to Jewish life and living can coexist and strengthen each other.

RAVSAK and its constituents understand that a school with Jewish children is not the same as a Jewish school. The strength of a school is linked to the strength of its Jewish mission and how deeply it lives within the school. Thus RAVSAK has invested wisely in both the professional and Judaic development of lay and professional school leaders. This investment has had a disproportionate impact on the day school educational field and will continue to pay dividends in the future.

Perhaps most important, RAVSAK has always understood that people and relationships matter. Our schools know that when they call our offices, they will reach a professional who knows them and will do what it takes to help them thrive. Our Reshet work has enabled hundreds of new connections among lay and professional leaders, who turn to each other for guidance and information. Networking is inherent in our name, and we expect that these connections will grow stronger and broader in the future, as we transition into the new organization.

My sincerest gratitude goes to my colleagues on the RAVSAK board for their deep commitment to Jewish education and their incredibly hard work through this time of transition. The backbone of our day school community is the network of lay leaders who give their time, expertise and money to place Klal Yisrael above all else. Serving as Chair of RAVSAK has been both a privilege and an honor and I will miss this era of my life tremendously. But like my youngest child, I know the future is in good hands and I rest confidently in the knowledge of a job well done.



COOKI LEVY

# SMOOTHING TRANSITIONS

This month, we received two closely related questions. Looking at them together will enrich our understanding of the many issues and actions that surround transition in leadership. The questions are:

*As a head of school who is leaving my position at the end of this school year, how can I help to ensure stability and a seamless transition to the new head? What steps should I take? Are there things I can do to help my successor as s/he takes over?*

And conversely,

*I will be assuming the position of a new HoS at the start of the next school year. What can I do prior to the official start of my contract to pave the way and ensure that the school transitions smoothly from my predecessor to me?*

These two questions are opposite sides of the same coin, yet complex in nature. And to make things even more complicated, sometimes a school leader is simultaneously leaving one headship and accepting another. What, then, can be done to help ensure success?

As in so many areas of leadership, the first consideration should be clear, open and respectful communication. If you are the incoming head, regardless of the circumstances of his leaving, the current HoS deserves your respect. Don't just show up and expect the staff to stop their work and help you. Ask when you may visit the school and when the head will have time to meet with you. Remember that the school staff members are still her employees, not yours, and alienating them at this juncture will hurt you later. I recall a situation when a new HoS visited and immediately appropriated the outgoing head's office! Needless to say, not only was that school head offended, but the staff became fiercely protective of their current boss. Not a good first impression, to be sure!

It is extremely likely that the outgoing HoS has a great deal of field experience and wisdom that will be very helpful to you. Listen well; determine what factors have contributed to the school's success and ask the current head about them. Ask him about the minefields (and every school has some). This is not the time to present your vision, and certainly not the time to critique or tell him how you will do things differently.

Know what you want to learn. Ask for specific documents, and give the staff enough time to get them for you. These may include copies of staff contracts, teaching schedules, curricular materials, handbooks (staff and student), fundraising letters and other outreach, financial statements and budgets, etc. You may have questions; ask for another meeting to explore those and gain additional insights. Listen for rationales for why things have been done a certain way, even if you are convinced that your approach will be better.

With the permission of the HoS, spend time in the school if you can. Walk around, watch how things are done, study the displays, get a sense of the behavioral norms—in short, familiarize yourself as much as you can without interfering. You may be moving to a new community; in that case, spend time getting a feel for the community as well.

And what can a head who is about to leave the position do to promote stability? Accept that you are turning your school over to another. Often that is a result of a choice you have made, but sometimes it is not. Regardless, your obligation is to the school. Be generous with your time and your information. Leave school documents, staff notes and student records in such a way that they can be easily accessed and understood by your successor. Answer questions honestly. There have been instances when the retiring head, feeling that he has been unfairly treated, has erased records and poisoned the atmosphere before the incoming leader arrives. Who suffers? The new leader, of course, but the real burden is on the school, the same school that the outgoing head has worked to build.

Paving the way for good relations between the new HoS and the staff is your responsibility as well. Be positive about the person who will be sitting in your chair—it is highly inappropriate for you to make derogatory comments about your successor. Similarly, refrain from making negative statements about the members of the board. Introduce the new head of school to members of the school community. Ask yourself what you would have liked to know when you began (or what you want to learn about the school to which you are going) and then share that information as best you can.

Transitions in leadership work best when there are good will and respect on both sides and a genuine and generous commitment to sharing information in the best interests of the school. That should be your guiding principle, whether you are beginning or concluding your tenure as head of school.

## Good & Welfare

The **Joseph and Florence Mandel Jewish Day School** (formerly Agnon) in Beachwood, Ohio, received a gift to the school's capital and endowment campaign of \$1.5 million from Peter and Ailki Rzepka.

Mazal tov to incoming heads of school: Jennifer Rosenberg, **Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor**; Noah Kalter, **Rockland Hebrew Academy**, West Nyack, NY; Stephanie Ives, **Beit Rabban Day School**, Manhattan; David Zimand, **Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School**, Palo Alto; Rabbi Aaron Frank, **Kinneret Day School**, Bronx; Tali Zolkowicz PhD, **Columbus Jewish Day School**, New Albany, Ohio.

Dr. Renee Koplon will be the new principal of the **Beth Tfiloh High School** in Pikesville, Maryland.

**Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy** recently took their 9th and 10th graders on a civil rights tour of the South with their counterparts from urban Kansas City school University Academy. Students explored the historic struggle for civil rights as well as racial relationships as they exist today.

**Scheck Hillel Community School** in North Miami Beach has won the Class 1A boys' state title trophy in soccer.

**Lehrman Community Day School** in Miami Beach has been awarded a grant to introduce "Project Based Learning: Recycling to Become Stewards of the Earth" into the curriculum for students across many grades.

**Portland Jewish Academy** (Oregon) celebrated STEAM Day 2016, a pinnacle to the students' yearlong scientific and engineering pursuits.

## The Hebrew Badge Project

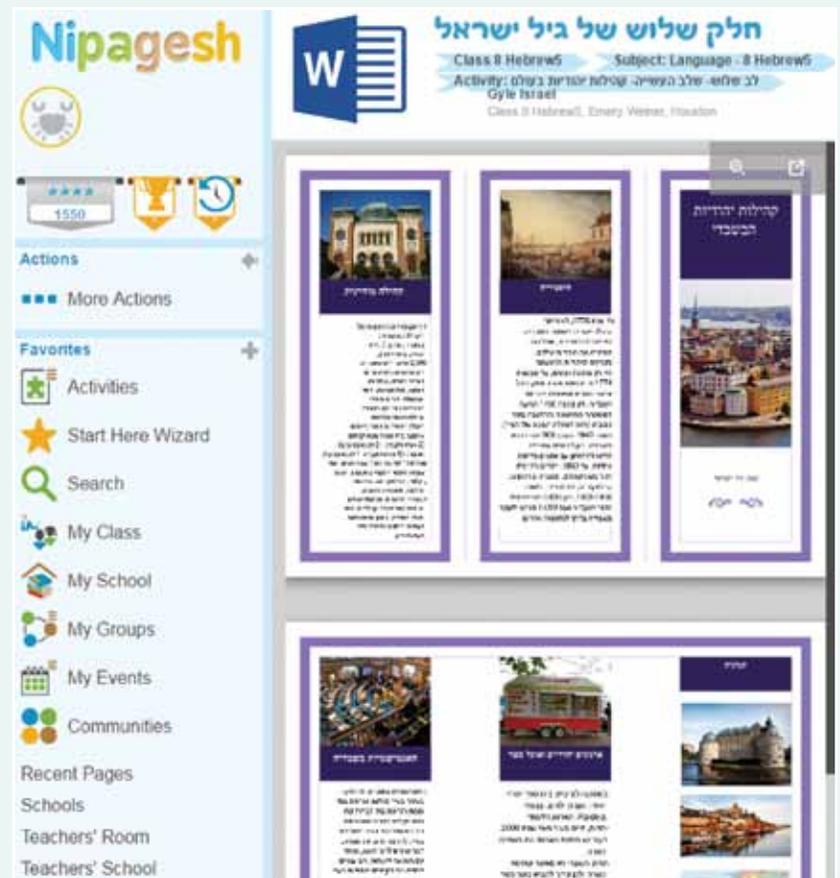
**Vered Gadot, Hebrew Teacher, Emery/Weiner School, Houston, Texas**

Our middle school students are taking part in an exciting opportunity to learn and implement the Hebrew language in a technological and creative way through RAVSAK's Hebrew Badge Project. Supported by Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, this pilot project motivates and celebrates student engagement in the authentic use of Hebrew. The class, comprised of seventh and eighth graders, chose to earn the Kehillah (community) badge, one of the eight badges which integrate Jewish sensibilities and Hebrew language. To earn the badge, students are exploring and learning about different Jewish communities around the world.

Students went through the three levels required to achieve the badge. In the first level, Investigate, they identified, studied and discussed five or more reliable Internet sources about the community of their choice. In the second stage, Design, students planned their full project and presented it to the teacher, who gave them feedback. In the final stage, Do, students created projects such as newspapers and narrated videos about the communities that they had studied. After each stage, students uploaded their work to Nipagesh, the Israeli social learning platform used for the Hebrew Badge Project.

While working on their projects, the students are engaged in great discussions and practice different types of language skills, both online through Nipagesh and in person with peers and teachers. These projects promoted deep and critical thinking and allowed students to investigate something of their own interest. Another element of the program that has been very engaging for students is the immediate feedback that they receive on Nipagesh in the form of tokens and badges. During this age of digital learning, implementing the Hebrew Badge Program has allowed our students to engage with the Hebrew language in new and exciting ways.

Applications are now open for the 2016-17 Hebrew Badge Project. To learn more and apply, contact Yael Steiner at [yael@ravsak.org](mailto:yael@ravsak.org). For more information about Nipagesh and to learn about opportunities to connect with Israeli schools, contact Itay Eshet at [itay@nipagesh.co.il](mailto:itay@nipagesh.co.il).



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JANINE  
OKMIN

# TEACHING WITH CONTEMPORARY ART

PROVOKING THOUGHT AND PROVOKING DIALOGUE



Image: Bruce Damonte

What is the power of linking contemporary art with Jewish tradition? At The Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM), the answer to this questions lies in our museum building—stainless steel-clad geometric forms emerging from an historic brick facade. This building represents the relationship between past, present and future and offers a template for examining Jewish culture through a contemporary lens. To understand the educational potential of contemporary art in the day school setting, it is helpful to keep in mind this metaphor of a conversation between old and new, which is so crucial in Jewish day schools. Contemporary art is often dismissed by educators as obtuse, intimidating or lacking in aesthetic value, and therefore is rarely used as a teaching tool by educators outside (or even within) the arts disciplines. However, more than any other art form, contemporary art has the power to provoke dialogue, deep and critical thinking, questioning and empathy, and is an entry point for interdisciplinary learning.



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## WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART?

In the most general sense, contemporary art is art made by artists living and creating today. However, it can also be understood as artwork made using a variety of materials and media, often while rejecting earlier artist conventions, including aesthetic beauty or traditional techniques. Contemporary art can be seen as commentary: critical of society, critical of the art world itself, and much of it is created to provoke thought or ideas. For these reasons, contemporary art may be seen as challenging to many viewers. Yet for these very reasons, contemporary art can play a vital role in the classroom, and the Jewish day school classroom in particular. It encourages critical thinking, and it can spur students examine the relationship between past and present, tradition and innovation.

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## TEACHING WITH CONTEMPORARY ART

When teaching with contemporary art, there are several key ideas to keep in mind. **Art is a primary source.** Just as a letter, a map, or the transcript of a speech can tell us about a particular place, perspective or moment in time, so can a work of art. Second, **art can be read, analyzed and interpreted, like a text.** Finally, **art can be a thought-provoking set induction**—a springboard for making connections to related topics, curriculum areas, or to contemporary society. A useful framework for teaching with contemporary art involves the following steps: **observe and question, learn or research, interpret and connect.** Questioning, digging deeper and interpreting from multiple perspectives or levels are the tools of the arts educator, much as they are the tools of the Jewish studies teacher. The following case studies, highlighting artwork once on view at The CJM, offer specific ideas for using contemporary art as a point of connection for Jewish topics as well as other curriculum areas.

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## IS THERE A CONTEMPORARY JEWISH ART?

What makes art Jewish? Is it enough to be created by a Jewish artist? Must it explore Jewish themes or ideas? Can art created by those outside of the Jewish community be considered “Jewish art”? Is Jewish art, historically ceremonial objects with ritual function, in conflict with the materials and topics of contemporary art? These are questions we often wrestle with at The CJM. The two examples below offer two different approaches for addressing Jewish topics through contemporary art, one explicitly exploring Jewish ideas, and the other secular in nature.

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## REINVENTING RITUAL

Art is been a vehicle for wrestling with Jewish tradition, complicating accepted narratives, and forging contemporary Jewish practice and identity. A 2010 exhibition entitled *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life* featured contemporary Jewish art explicitly addressing issues related to the reinterpretation of Jewish tradition for our times.

Rachel Kanter’s *Fringed Garment* is one such work that probes gender norms.

Rachel Kanter (American, b. 1970)

*Fringed Garment*

New York, New York 2005

42 x 16 in. (106.7 x 40.6 cm)

Cotton: stitched and appliquéd

The Jewish Museum, New York

Purchase: Dr. Joel and Phyllis Gitlin Judaica Acquisitions Fund, 2008-136



Felix Gonzalez-Torres  
*"Untitled" (America #1)*, 1992. Lightbulbs, porcelain light sockets, and extension cord. Overall dimensions vary with installation.  
 Collection of Vicki and Kent Logan; fractional and promised gift to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.  
 Beyond Belief Exhibition organized by SFMOMA and The Contemporary Jewish Museum. Photo: Ian Reeves

**Observe and Question:** At first glance this is an ordinary, recognizable object—an apron. Yet, upon careful observation, we notice that the patterns and colors, and of course, the four fringes hanging down from each corner. Students can probe more deeply through a series of questions such as the following. What kind of garment are we looking at? What associations do we have with aprons and those who wear them? With tzitzit and with those who wear them? Who do you think might wear this apron and why? What is our initial response to this object?

After an initial conversation based on observations and beginnings of interpretation, it is time to share some information. Below is some context that can enhance student (and teacher) understanding of the work. It is worth noting that many museums have excellent tools for researching and learning about artwork in their collections; finding background information about contemporary art is not only the domain of the art historian! Many museum websites offer suggestions of artwork by topic or subject area.

## LEARN OR RESEARCH

This artwork merges an apron, associated with traditional female gender roles and the domestic sphere, with tzitzit, ritual fringes worn either on a tallit or under the clothing as a tallit katan. Tzitzit, a reminder of the commandments and relationship with the divine, are traditionally worn by men as they are considered a time-bound mitzvah, one from which women are exempt (but not forbidden), due to their domestic obligations. The artist shares, “When I wore a tallit for the first time, it felt uncomfortable, as if I were wearing my father’s overcoat. If I wanted to wear a tallit, it should be made for me. But what would my tallit look like? Using history as a guide, I created a tallit inspired by the four-cornered robes worn by priests in biblical times and designed using vintage apron patterns from the twentieth century” (quoted in Danya Ruttenberg, “Heaven and Earth,” in *Reinventing Ritual* ed. Daniel Belasco). She also shares that the patterns represent fertility and the cycles of the moon. Surprisingly, there is a precedent for this type of garment in the Talmud: “Rab Judah attached fringes to the aprons of [the women of] his household” (Menachot 43a).

## INTERPRET

Once the students have learned a bit of the background information about the artist and artwork, continue the process of interpretation. What gender roles are challenged or reinforced here? What does this object reveal about Jewish tradition? What is your response to this garment? Does the reference to a fringed apron in the Talmud change your initial impressions of the garment?

## CONNECT

This conversation can now be used to reflect on connections to personal Jewish practice, to gender roles in Judaism, or to the idea of personalizing and customizing Jewish ritual. It can even be an opportunity to dive deeply into a study of mitzvot, to reflect on the transformative power of donning a ritual garment, or to explore text related to the wearing of tzitzit. Students may want to respond to the artist’s statement that “I think of my tallit as midrash, as commentary on ideas within Judaism.” This artwork can be connected to other artworks commenting on religious practice or ceremonial art, such as Mona Hatoum’s *Pin Rug* or Andi Aronovitz’s *My Worry Beads*. This opens up potential for creative projects or conversations. What ritual object can students create that would serve as a midrash on Jewish practice itself?

## LIGHT, RITUAL, MEMORIAL AND SYMBOLISM

In contrast to *Fringed Garment*, Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s *"Untitled" (America #1)* was not created by a Jewish artist, nor does it explicitly address Jewish themes. And yet, it is a powerful tool for beginning to discuss Jewish tradition and ritual. At first glance, this installation, on view during a 2013 exhibition entitled *Beyond Belief: 100 Years of the Spiritual in Modern Art*, appears to be a very straightforward object: a series of lightbulbs strung together on a cord, suspended from above, with excess bulbs accumulating on the ground.

**Observe and Question:** Observations of this artwork can begin with the most basic. What do you see? What are the materials that make up this artwork? How does the artist use them?

Because these are recognizable, ordinary materials (as are frequently the materials used by contemporary artists), the instinct may be to overlook them—we all know what lightbulbs are. However, they require examination to make meaning of the object. For example, one can begin to explore the question of where we typically see lightbulbs, then move on to explore associations with and meaning of the materials and form of the artwork. What do we associate with lightbulbs or light? With this form or shape? What might light represent in this artwork?

As an arts educator, I prefer the “slow reveal,” sharing information about the artist or artwork gradually, thus leaving room for student discoveries and interpretations. I have again included information to share, but would recommend sharing this information when appropriate or when it comes up in the class discussion.

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## LEARN OR RESEARCH

This work is one of a series of light string pieces the artist created after his partner died of AIDS. Although the artist was very specific about not assigning any one particular meaning to his works, the mundane materials used in this piece may be understood as a reflection on the inevitability of death: a lightbulb has a limited life span just as we do, and light is an especially potent symbol of vitality. But according to the artist's instructions, the owner has the choice of exhibiting the light string with the bulbs on or off, and if the bulbs burn out, they should be replaced, introducing hope and suggesting the natural cycle of loss and renewal. In addition to commenting on the ritual of tending to the memory of a loved one, Gonzalez-Torres described this work as evocative of the transition from one world to the next. He elaborated, "It is related to the act of leaving one place for another."

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## INTERPRET

How does this information impact your understanding of the artwork? Knowing what you now know, what could the bulbs symbolize? How would the artwork be different if it were displayed with the bulbs turned off instead of illuminated?

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## CONNECT

This is now an opportunity to connect the artwork to other subject areas, through a similar line of questioning. Where and when in Jewish tradition do we encounter light? What does light represent in a Jewish context? If this piece can be interpreted as a memorial, how is it similar to or different from Jewish customs related to memorializing the dead? The doors are now open to a variety of connected topics or explorations—Jewish rituals around death, dying, and *yahrzeits*; text or liturgy study related to references to light; or a comparative study of memorials, from Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial, to the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem, or even the artwork of Christian Boltanski, a French artist who often uses light in memorializing victims of the Shoah. Written or artistic projects exploring these topics, or creating light-based rituals or memorials, are natural extensions of this conversation, which was initiated by an experience viewing contemporary art.

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## BREAKING BOUNDARIES: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE TEACH WITH CONTEMPORARY ART?

Using art to inspire conversations about gender, ritual, symbolism, memory and more can be an empowering and inspiring experience for students. First, the open-ended observation and interpretation of the artwork provokes spirited dialogue and critical thinking, and places students in control of their acquisition of knowledge. That, coupled with the information they research or that you, the instructor, share with them, allows them to construct their own meaning, making for a more powerful personal connection to and enduring understanding of the art object, the learning experience, and the larger theme or topic. Next, this experience engages the visual and the creative, offering alternative approaches to more traditional pedagogy. Finally, learning experiences generated through art create connections across both disciplines and across the curriculum, opening new ideas and forging dialogue between past, present and future. It is this dialogue, the wrestling with tradition and making it relevant for life today, that is at the heart of both the mission of the contemporary artist and the Jewish day school.

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## Jewish Resources

The Contemporary Jewish Museum offers exhibition-inspired resources for teaching with contemporary art, for both Jewish and secular school audiences. Resources are grouped by topic/theme.

[thecjm.org/education/schools-and-teachers/educator-resources](http://thecjm.org/education/schools-and-teachers/educator-resources)

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The Jewish Museum in New York also offers exhibition-related curricula and lesson plans, some related to contemporary art, and others more traditional in focus.

[thejewishmuseum.org/programs/pre-k-12-educators#resources](http://thejewishmuseum.org/programs/pre-k-12-educators#resources)

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The Jerusalem Biennale is an expo of art that merges the contemporary and the Jewish. The website highlights the artist and exhibitions, but does not offer specific teaching ideas.

[jerusalembiennale.org](http://jerusalembiennale.org)

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Avodah Arts shares this comprehensive literature review on arts education pedagogy and the benefits of teaching using art. A great resource if you need to "make the case" for teaching with art.

[avodaarts.org/uploads/Documents/AVODA%20ARTS\\_Final%20Literature%20Review672011.pdf](http://avodaarts.org/uploads/Documents/AVODA%20ARTS_Final%20Literature%20Review672011.pdf)

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## Secular Resources

These "secular" resources are excellent, but would require a bit of creative thinking for ways they connect to Jewish themes and topics (much like the example working with the artwork by Felix Gonzalez-Torres above).

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MoMA in New York offers a great array of resources (by topic) and tips for teaching with modern art.

[moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/tools\\_tips](http://moma.org/learn/moma_learning/tools_tips)

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Art 21 showcases videos of contemporary artists at work with companion lesson plans. It also shares great general information about modes of contemporary art as well tips for using it in the classroom.

[art21.org/teach](http://art21.org/teach)

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The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum also offers lesson plans by topic, exhibition or artist.

[guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/teacher-resources](http://guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/teacher-resources)

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BENNY  
FERDMAN

# JEWISH ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

## CATALYST AND SYMBOL MAKER

### A JOURNEY

Barefoot, students spill out of the classroom, and gather on the field outside. Wandering about—slowly, methodically, each aware of how the surfaces they traverse each day actually feel—soft grass, squishy mud, concrete and gravel. Their meanderings lead them to a circle where slabs of clay have been prepared awaiting their bare feet. Each student carefully sinks one foot into the soft clay with help from a partner. Now the space is filled with giddy chatter as the students get busy casting their footprints with plaster bandage, and preparing to search, with paint and words, for answers to their kushiot (challenging questions) about the Akedah (Binding of Isaac). When Abraham was ordered by God, *lech lecha*—go! and then *kach na*—please take!—he too must have left footprints on his journey.

Jewish studies  
teacher Becca  
Bubis works with  
students casting  
their plaster feet



### THE OPPOSITE RESPONSE

Long ago my feet, sometimes bare but mostly sandaled, found themselves not too far from that spot where it is said that God commanded Abraham to take his only beloved son and sacrifice him on Har Moriah (the Mount of Teaching).

There on the western edge of Jerusalem, on the tense borderland between Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods, I had been wandering on a dirt road in search of a particular vantage point from which to sit and draw the Old City. I was suddenly confronted by a group of boys, running toward me, hurling rocks and screaming. Rather than run away, my instincts caused me to run straight toward them shielding my face with my sketchbook and growling. In an instant they were gone, scrambling down the hillside just as quickly as they had appeared.

Continuing on my way I finally found a good spot, at the bottom of a large sloping field, to sit and draw. No sooner had I begun my work than I heard distant voices coming from behind me. Looking back I saw it was that same gang of boys, only this time they appeared to have an adult with them. Undeterred, I kept drawing, occasionally glancing behind me. As the group came closer I noticed that the adult was carrying a tray with a teapot and glasses. Indeed these young “attackers” were now standing right behind me and offering me tea, which I gladly accepted. I happily continued my drawing while sipping tea, with my former antagonists sitting around me eagerly watching as my drawing unfolded.

This story of the rock-throwing boys became a springboard for several Jewish studies classes that I was collaborating with on a program and art installation to mark Kristallnacht. Employing the concept of “opposite response,” our students considered the idea of broad-heartedness instead of hatred. They found support from the Mishnah (Avot 2:13), with the help of their teacher, Yonatan Rosner: Question: “Which is the honorable path?” Answer: *lev tov*, “A good heart.”



## THE APPROACH OF AN ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

In the day-to-day life of most schools, where teachers are driven to cover predetermined curricula, and students are chasing after grades, what role can an artist in residence play?

I will answer that question with one word: surprise.

The children that threw rocks at me were not expecting my surprising response. By running toward them, I became the prankster, calling their bluff. And with that, the curtain dropped before us, like actors on a stage, now free to sit and share tea together, after the “performance.”

To be a resident artist is to be a kind of benevolent prankster, a trickster, or to use a Yiddish term, a *vitsler* (joker). Like Coyote in Native American lore, or Joha from Sephardic Jewish tradition, the trickster (i.e., artist) takes you through an experience that reveals, and makes tangible, that which was only conceptual, and makes visible that which was invisible. Likewise, the role of the artist in residence is to reveal the unexpected and become a catalyst for surprise.

Art “speaks” a language of its own. Whether the artist is faced with the balance of one form against another, or the implicit narrative of one image next to another, relations can play out on the proverbial blank canvas or in real life, between all things and ideas with which we share our existence. As we step outside the walls of the ordinary, we are no longer bound by physics and logic. When action and expected reaction don’t line up, something new has just been created.

## COLLECTING

While talking about his life growing up in the Polish/Ukrainian town of Lutzk, my father told me that he “once saw a wolf floating down the river on a haystack.” I used that image for one of my paintings, taking it as a metaphor for his world that was about to collapse, and by extension my ancestral world too.

When students gather and make metaphorical connections, whether from personal stories or folkloric traditions, it can make profound their connection to the past. A journey has begun of collecting, interpreting and taking ownership of the bits and pieces that can still be found along “the river’s edge.”

The human impulse to collect and curate is probably one of those things that distinguishes us from other animals. The objects of wonder that surround us, and the documents of our experiences, constitute the essential substrate of human cultural creativity upon which we make meaning and achieve continuity. However, that “human” impulse to collect, when examined within the context of Jewish history, has been an imperative upon which our cultural survival rests.

In 1891 the great Jewish historian Simon Dubnow clearly and passionately articulated this imperative when he called on the Jews of Russia, “Come, let us search and inquire!” His call was not only to document the treasures of 4,000 years of Jewish history but also to collect our everyday folk traditions, stories, jokes, dilemmas and achievements.

Dubnow’s call to action inspired an army of young *zamlers* (collectors) to gather and preserve the pieces of our scattered and stateless cultural life. Artists and scholars, particularly between the two world wars, worked tirelessly to reclaim and reinvent what it meant to be Jewish in the face of industrialization and modernization.

Students in front of Vav Rock celebrate single word flags, taken from their text studies with their Jewish studies teacher Yonathan Rosner

## THEME-BASED LEARNING

*Der Zamler* became one of our yearlong themes; students worked on projects related to the modern Jewish tradition of collecting. They examined the efforts of a few courageous wartime *zamlers* in the Vilna and Warsaw ghettos who were willing to risk their lives, in the darkest days, in order to hide and thus preserve manuscripts, works of art and other touchstones of Jewish life and memory.

An artist in residence can help create and frame a yearly theme for a particular department, or the entire school, which can be culturally transformative. In most cases the theme is something that is not already being taught, requiring research on the part of both the faculty and the students. This creates an out-of-the-ordinary environment encouraging a teacher-student relationship which is more of a partnership, where both teacher and student are learning together.



The poet Abraham Sutzkever rescuing documents, 1941, Vilna, Lithuania

## THE POWER OF OUR FOLK ART TRADITIONS

A trickster ring of rabbits is spun round by a circling leviathan, while an elephant lumbers under the weight of an entire kingdom. Geese with crossing necks, a deer reaching back to scratch its nose, a bear hugging flowers and foliage, lions and unicorns in battle, chickens, swans, squirrels, fish, a wolf with a baby goat in its mouth—while the rest of the herd watches helplessly, endless knots and sacred geometry. It may sound like a whimsical menagerie and cornucopia, but these are just a small part of the endless lexicon of Jewish symbols and motifs that once adorned synagogues, illuminated manuscripts, tombstones and all manner of Jewish ritual objects. All these images taken together with innumerable folktales, songs, jokes, curses, blessings and Jewish languages, constitute the deep well of cultural memory from which to draw.

As artist in residence, I bring this vast collection of wonders to my collaborations with teachers. Likewise other artists make different connections, creating new ways to interpret and make vital, our cultural legacy.



Wooden synagogue ceiling, Poland/Ukraine, 17th century

## THE SYMBOL MAKER

The kind of “artist” that is most effective in the role of artist in residence is one that sees *everything* as art—someone who understands the world in deeply symbolic terms. This person sees forms, objects, words, ideas, events, all living things, and other people as having intrinsic “meaning,” beyond ordinary description and understanding. And it is this kind of artist that can help frame and nurture a school’s understanding of its vision in symbolic and metaphorical terms.

One example of this is a tallis that I was asked to design when our school was founded. It’s a gift that every graduate receives and wears during the graduation ceremony and beyond. Its primary motif is one that I interpreted from our Jewish folk art traditions: the endless or infinite knot. I adapted this maze-like confusion of lines as it fit well the perplexing nature of adolescence, whose challenge it is to unravel and learn the pattern of many “knots” en route to adulthood. It connotes continuity, connectedness, or perhaps the kabbalistic idea of the Ein Sof (Without End), one of the many names of God. But if this motif is to endure, it will need to be understood in terms that are not describable in words—hence, a “symbol.”

Another type of symbol-making is not by design, but rather by discovery. Our campus is situated near a large area of semi-wilderness. Among the many natural features, there is a very large and dramatic cliff face. Carved by nature into the rock, is the form of a perfect Hebrew letter, *vav*. Since discovering this, I have led many field trips there with my colleagues and students where we make art at the base of the mountain. Our journeys to Vav rock have become akin to making a pilgrimage to a sacred place, which has led to many mystical interpretations. It is a letter that is also a word: *and*. It also represents the number six. The first time the letter Vav is used in the Torah is at the start of the sixth word, and the first thing it connects, is heaven and earth...

The stories we tell ourselves give us meaning and give birth to the symbols that bind us, one to the other, to times past and to the shared future we can create.

Whether you are primarily an artist, or primarily an educator, the approaches that I have outlined in this article—the *journey*, the *opposite response*, *collecting*, *theme-based learning*, *the power of our folk art traditions*, *symbol making both by design and by discovery*, and most importantly, *surprise*—are not just exclusive tools-of-the-trade available only to artists, but rather fundamental to how we make art, and how we make meaning, in essence, how we learn.

May we all continue to learn, inspire and play.



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ORNA  
SIEGEL

# SCHOOL ADVANCEMENT THROUGH VISUAL COMMUNICATION

In an era of choice, it is essential to understand that current and prospective parents and donors must feel inspired by the work we do in our schools. One study showed that, “where schools are concerned, [parents believe] that a visual impression can afford an accurate means of assessing the performance of the school. In other words, even if parents rely only on visual cues, they can still make a reliable assessment of the school’s educational quality” (Emily Van Dunk and Anneliese Dickman, *School Choice and the Question of Accountability*). If parents believe they can rely only on visual impressions to make enrollment decisions, it is vital to be thoughtful and proactive in your visual communication.

In admission, development, and marketing and communications, we often work with people who are encountering the school for the first time—people who notice things the rest of us don’t see anymore. At Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, we convened a group of thoughtful professionals to act as the Committee of First Impressions to assess what a visitor to our school might experience. This group included leaders and representatives from various offices and stakeholders to ensure broad input and acceptance of the committee’s eventual recommendations, as well as members from our arts faculty who have expertise in visual design. We further benefitted from the input and advice from two parents who have backgrounds in interior design and architecture. They acted as advisors throughout this process as we examined everything from mundane details such as signage and parking, to larger questions such as, what stories are we telling through the student work on the walls?

When our committee met, we walked all the way out to the street to put ourselves in the shoes of a first-time visitor. We began to understand some of the major tensions and challenges in creating a thoughtfully designed space and are still working to address some of these issues.

**Security v. Welcome:** How do we balance a secure school with a welcoming school? Think about the barriers to entry such as security doors and signs that are there to protect students. In what ways can you prioritize security in such a way that still allows visitors to feel welcome?

**Ownership:** No single person or office is in charge of first impressions. At our school, this effort includes our offices of maintenance, facilities, security, marketing and communication, development and enrollment. Additionally, the faculty, the student body, and our parent association all leave their mark on the school. These various groups, each with disparate goals, have to work together to determine what to visually communicate, and then decide how all groups are going to work in concert to implement that vision.

**Cost:** As with all schools, we want to be fiscally conservative in our spending. Look at your school and determine what can be done for free or for very little money. Save the larger expenditures to discuss when you are setting the budget for the following year. We discovered that there were a lot of changes we could implement without spending much, and could then triage more expensive projects for

## HoSPEP: Seeking Great New Heads

By Cooki Levy, Program Director

The Head of School Professional Excellence Project (HoSPEP), the premiere leadership support program for heads of Jewish day schools, is currently completing recruitment for Cohort 4. Participants in this one-year program will be paired with longtime, successful heads of school who have been trained in the skill sets related to effective coaching. Those who are beginning a new headship, either in their first school or in a new environment, or who have completed their first or second years, are invited to apply. More information and the application are available on the RAVSAK website.

Congratulations to our Cohort 3 fellows, currently completing their HoSPEP year. From their enthusiastic and positive feedback we know that each has felt supported, strengthened and inspired. More than half of this cohort has asked to continue their coaching relationships for another year, further testimony to the important role that HoSPEP has played in their leadership success.

Many thanks to our cadre of exceptional professionals who serve as coaches, and to the outstanding group of Jewish educational leaders who are part of this year's cohort. We also want to express our appreciation to Dr. Marc Kramer for his vision and exemplary leadership, and to our generous donors who make the program possible.

future years as they aligned naturally with other strategic, school-wide initiatives.

**Time:** We're all very busy, and the communal areas of our school belong to everyone and to no one. There isn't any person who makes maintaining communal spaces a priority in their work day. We must develop a community of caretakers in our schools. This culture shift stems from the shared vision of what we'd like to communicate and is then supported by clear protocols around maintaining spaces that allows or assigns time to faculty and administrators to carry out these tasks. How this manifests will depend on school culture, but it might mean a schedule for maintenance and upkeep of public spaces, or time set aside for these purposes in the master schedule as an additional "duty" that faculty and administrators take on.

**Training and Communal Responsibility:** Once the Committee of First Impressions has agreed upon the goals, standards, and protocols, everyone has an opportunity to help with implementation. Faculty and staff must work together to answer questions such as: Who posts work on bulletin boards, and what associated information must be included to make the student work come to life? How will they be maintained? Who is responsible to post and remove parent and student event flyers? How can we keep the hallways clear of student backpacks?

You will have to determine how best to address these challenges in a way that fits within your school culture. It is not possible to address every challenge at once, but it is wise to start with determining the messages you'd like to communicate. When you think about your own school community, what is your competitive advantage? It is important to recognize your distinctive features and the benefits of your program in order to clearly make the case to visitors. One school administrator in Philadelphia decided that the school needed to plant flowers out front to appeal to more middle- and upper-middle-class parents. "He did not want flowers around the school merely because they created a more positive environment for the students; instead, flowers would make the school appealing to discriminating adults and, hence, better able to compete with private schools for such families" (Maia Bloomfield Cucchiara, *Marketing Schools, Marketing Cities*).

At our school, we wanted to do more to show off the education going on in our classrooms. One approach was to analyze the use of bulletin boards in the school. Over the summer we purchased more bulletin boards (all in the same size, style, and color), and moved several others from underused hallways to the main corridor. With faculty representatives and parent input, we developed guidelines for teachers to use when placing student work on bulletin boards. We wanted to communicate what the students were learning, the essential questions and enduring understandings of the lessons, and why this work was important. We've launched this initiative in a few classes this year with our early adopters, and have had amazing feedback. Students are proud to show off their work, and parents not only see their children's work but have a context to understand it. Now, when we ask donors and prospective parents what they notice during their tours of the school, the number one comment we've received is about the student work on the walls and how it stands out from other schools they've visited.

Start by looking afresh at your facility and trying to discern the stories you are telling. What can visitors learn about the school's values, educational philosophy, community, and culture when they walk into your space? When school leaders intentionally construct the physical space, they can positively impact enrollment, gifts to development, faculty and staff morale, and the overall culture of your institution.

# DEVELOPING JEWISH ARTISTS

Artists shape the world we live in now, and help us understand worlds that came before. Art allows us to be curious, shift perspectives, and broaden our awareness. Artists are the documenters and storytellers of our Jewish heritage, and we need to find ways to encourage and cultivate the next generation of artists of our community.

Over the past 20 years, I've worked with hundreds of artists in different disciplines to help them develop sustainable and successful careers as professional artists. This has included over 350 artists who are engaged with the Jewish cultural world. I try to work with them in a fertile period, a few years out of art school, when the right tools can help their careers catapult forward.

Those of us in the professional art field rarely think of the early life stages of an artist, and the key ways that the talent they hold can be nourished and supported, building to the confidence that makes art-making their life's work. There is rich dialogue about the way that arts education impacts brain development and learning, but little is known about the path from a talented childhood doodler or drum banger, to a breakout gallery show or concert for an emerging artist. Many well-known artists have glimmers of their talent in their early work; Picasso's *Bullfight and Pigeons* (age 9) clearly holds the bones of his energetic later styles. When we consider childhood development, there is the balance between innate characteristics and complex external factors. For each artist, the journey is strange and idiosyncratic, but three impactful circumstances were common to my numerous conversations with professional artists in our community:

- Having a mentor-teacher
- Exposure to high-level, interesting and meaningful art
- Being in a community of artistic practice

Several artists shared details with me about these pivotal moments. Poet Leah Falk sees a turning point in her artistic development when she was part of competitive vocational program in a Pennsylvania high school and studied with Deborah Burnham, a poet. She describes her experience:

At the program for the arts, where I studied poetry, I was lucky enough to find myself in Deborah (Deb) Burnham's classroom. Deb was a lover of Robert Frost's longer poems, an earnest lecturer and workshop leader who was occasionally given to girlish hilarity in solidarity with her students. From the start, she encouraged us to spend long sections of class (which we had five hours a day) in the hallways by the radiators, sprawled over our

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REBECCA  
GUBER

notebooks, writing. When discussing our work, she was generous, but not in the way some adults are generous to teenagers, that is to say because their work doesn't matter in the adult world. She taught us as if something depended on those five weeks, possibly our health, possibly our whole lives. It mattered less that she praised our work than that she read it closely, multiple times, and gave us books she knew we wouldn't understand right away, but that would percolate slowly.

As Leah describes her experience, she mentions several characteristics of her mentor that came out in other conversations about the most meaningful teachers, including the capacity to treat the students seriously as artists-in-training. This characteristic is what transforms the relationship from instruction to mentorship. Leah's mentor, Deborah Burnham, also brought the young artists poetry and books that challenged them and exposed them to work that could inspire and engage their creative curiosity.

In a similar vein, playwright Dan Fishback shared the following:

My high school art teacher, Ruth Fishman, treated all of her students like serious conceptual artists. For someone like me, who felt stifled and restless, this changed everything. Because she took me seriously, I felt liberated to finally take myself seriously—to forget about high school trivialities and imagine a world of ideas that was so much bigger than the parochial world in which I lived. By giving me permission to feel like an artist, Mrs. Fishman gave me permission to imagine a bigger life, a better life, and a life that I am—20 years later—still living.

Dan's story begins to pull out the third key strand, that there is a deeply communal process being explained in these stories, with teachers creating a sanctuary for the students, in all of their innate eccentricities, to be taken seriously and engage with other people involved in creative practice. Artists often self-define as outsiders, and are rarely the most socially comfortable and integrated people in any environment. In the uncomfortable terrain of adolescence, this can be a hard place to exist.

## The Technion Jewish Day School Challenge

Four teams from schools around the world received the top awards in the Technion Jewish Day School Challenge, created jointly by RAVSAK and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. Their mission: to build a Rube Goldberg machine in the spirit of Pesach (and inspired by the intricate 2015 Technion Rube Goldberg machine). For the uninitiated, a Rube Goldberg machine is a contraption or device that is deliberately over-engineered to perform a simple task in a complicated fashion, generally including a chain reaction.

"In partnership with Technion, we were able to create an amazing new opportunity for students to blend their commitments to Jewish learning with the sciences, foster a connection to post-secondary education, and prompt them to apply their knowledge of Pesach traditions in a completely innovative way," said Dr. Marc N. Kramer, RAVSAK's Co-Executive Director.

More than 600 students from 41 Jewish day schools—located in Europe, North America, Australia, and Africa—participated in the Challenge. The judges marveled at the incredible entries received from around the world, noting with pride and appreciation the amount of time, energy and thought the students put into their creations.

Students followed a rigorous rubric, which called for the machines to ultimately reveal a Seder plate. In the weeks leading up to the Challenge deadline, students tinkered away and got insider tips from world-renowned Technion mechanical engineering professor Alon Wolf and other Technion faculty.

"I am delighted to see the Technion's role in inspiring all of the participants to do such great work," said Yoram Halevi, Dean of the Technion Faculty of Mechanical Engineering. "You have inspired us, as well, and we hope to see you grow and succeed in your science paths."

In the closely contested High School category, first place went to the team from **Abraham Joshua Heschel High School** in New York City. The judges cited their use of successful energy transfer elements and high creativity level as main reasons for their selection. Second place went to **The Weber School** in Atlanta, whose entry showed a true understanding for the mechanics involved to create a visually stunning display.

There was a tie for first place in the Middle School category. The entry from the 7th grade team from **Bialik College** in Melbourne, Australia, was well thought out, with

many different types of energy transfers—some of which were very unusual for Rube Goldberg machines. The submission of the 6th grade team from **Scheck Hillel Community School** (North Miami Beach, Florida) was lauded for its creativity, and for energy transfer aspects that were executed properly and efficiently.

"The Technion is thrilled to have launched this new initiative together with RAVSAK," said Technion President Peretz Lavie. "In an ever-changing world we need to find new and relevant ways to connect younger generations of the Jewish people with Israel. What better way to do so than a thought-provoking, fun competition that has a strong STEM education focus? Congratulations to all who participated. I hope to see you all at the Technion—as students—in a few years," he concluded.

Videos of the winning and finalist Technion Challenge machines can be viewed on the Technion YouTube channel ([tinyurl.com/technionchallenge](http://tinyurl.com/technionchallenge)), and you can follow all the conversations across social via #TechnionChallenge.



Musician and poet Alicia Jo Rabins discussed her mentor:

*My art teacher Teresa McDaniel Shovlin created an oasis for the weirdos and freaks—a place where we felt completely at home and where what we talked about had a connection to the outside world (practicing artists whose work we looked at). It made school make sense as a place to come to, rather than feeling completely alienating.*

So where do these stories take us? Jewish day schools can be places that can build up the next generation of Jewish artists—people who have deep Jewish knowledge, and are creatively innovative. Arts teachers need not only to encourage creative thinking, but to mentor their students as if they were professional artists-in-training. We must expose students to real art and living artists. If the art teachers themselves are not practicing professional artists, bringing others

into the school environment is crucial. Schedule a performance or artist talk, or even bring in an artist-in-residence, and provide opportunities for the most interested students to engage with them. There must be more than just time to ask questions, but a commitment to creating a space for the most talented and engaged students to hear about the life of a practicing artist, in all its challenges and joy.

There are many opportunities to integrate provocative and challenging art into the curriculum in other areas. Contemporary artists are creatively exploring the Holocaust, Israeli history, the Haggadah, and other topics that are already part of your curriculum. My organization, Asylum Arts, has over 350 contemporary Jewish artists in network whose work explores diverse topics.

Building community is something that Jewish institutions take very seriously, and budding artists are

a valued sub-group. They may not always feel comfortable within the larger group, but they also need to be in a community of practice. Where might creative spaces be built where they can do this together, hopefully with an artist as role model?

Jewish day schools pass on the wealth of Jewish knowledge to the next generation, and we need to ensure that some of our students are prepared to be artists, to continue the sharing of ideas with the broader community. I am deeply drawn to my Jewish heritage, and much of what has always made me feel most connected and exciting is the diversity and relevance of Jewish culture. Educators know that we must pay attention to the ways we share knowledge and ideas. Artists are vital not only for telling our stories, but also for creating meaning. We have an obligation to support them to ensure the relevance of Jewish ideas for the future.



# THE TAPESTRY OF ART AND SCIENCE

Think of a school as a colorful tapestry. Look closely and you will see the beautiful repeating threads of art and music in the students' daily experiences. In a 21st century school, technology is another vibrant thread; it is a medium for innovation as students tap both their imaginations and their problem-solving skills. Dr. Loretta Jackson-Haye of Rhodes College said it perfectly: "Our culture has drawn an artificial line between art and science, one that did not exist for innovators like Leonardo da Vinci and Steve Jobs." At our school, Akiva in Nashville, part of our mission is to erase the artificial line by empowering students to create art through contemporary technology.

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ANNETTE  
CALLOWAY

Stop Motion Animation is used in art to encourage students to create and problem-solve. For years, Stop Motion Animation has been used by motion picture studios to create films such as *Gumby* of the 50s and 60s to more recent movies such as *Coraline*. Stop Motion Animation is now accessible to students through the use of iPad applications. It is a process that makes inanimate objects appear to move without help. The secret, however, is that objects are moved by an outside force in small increments between individually photographed frames. When the frames are played in sequence, the illusion of movement is created.

In art class, students use Stop Motion Animation to produce mini-movies. Working in partnerships, students are assigned the task of creating a three-minute film using clay. One partner serves as the director, physically remolding the clay and moving the figures. The other serves as the filmmaker shooting each individual frame. Students have to think critically about structure, flow and timing to create the stories they are interested in sharing, and these mini-movies become a fun, zany, surreal opportunity for creative expression. A sixth grade student said, "Stop Motion has a feature called 'onion skin' that helped remind me of where the movement stopped in the frame before so we could make the flow of our movie more natural." One team might use clay to create a giant taco that ate people. Another team might make clay snowmen careening down a slide and then collide into one another to form one big snow pile. The ideas are endless. Through trial and error, students hone their skills and improved their stop motion films.

Another art project that utilizes technology is textile story weaving. Students write individual fictional or true short stories. They then mark the rising and falling action of the story with various colored pencils to create the design of their weaving. After similarly colored thread is selected, the weaving on cardboard looms commences. Imagine the calming effect of old fashion weaving in a room full of middle school students. For a moment, we step back in time from the digital age to a simpler time of handwork. After their tapestries are completed and ready for display, the children see their story represented through the colors of a tapestry.

When the textiles are exhibited, students can tell the unique story of the textile weaving in their own voices. To do this, Quick Response Codes (QR Codes) can be displayed alongside the individual weavings. QR Codes consist of black modules arranged in a square pattern on a white background and are popular because they can contain large volumes of recorded information. Students can record their stories on a classroom iPad into an application specifically designed to capture audio recordings that can be accessed by a QR Code. Participants visiting the exhibit must have QR Code readers on their smartphones to be able to hear the story. For this reason, it is good to have an artist statement written, as well as directions for downloading the reader for those who have not done this before.

Our fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students participated in a monster project. They created monsters made of felt embedded with a LilyPad Arduino, a small e-textile computer that can be used in fabric. Though the students had already been formally introduced to coding, the hands-on monster project made coding real to them as they programmed their individual monsters to respond in unique ways. Students led their own troubleshooting sessions, sharing with their peers tips and successes they had learned by making their monsters. Then they shared their projects at the annual Akiva Curiosity Night. They used coding vocabulary to describe how their creatures were able to glow and make music, and explained the circuitry that made it possible.

Akiva students also enjoy a weekly art recess, when they are able to choose art for pure play. Kindergarteners and 1st graders were surprised with 3D coloring pages from an app called Quiver. Students colored what they thought were regular coloring pages, but once the iPad was held over the image, the image came to life. Quiver offers a number of free downloadable images to be used in classrooms. Imagine coloring a bird and then seeing the bird rise up off the page and begin to eat worms and walk around. Or, imagine a fire-breathing dragon flying over a medieval castle. Teachers reported that the expressions on the students' faces looked as if they were seeing magic happen.

Technology can help erase the invisible divide between art and science, and instead build a bridge. Success requires teachers and administration to embrace a growth mindset for incorporating technology.



TALIA  
HURWICH

# JEWISH EDUCATION GOING GRAPHIC

## CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR USING GRAPHIC NOVELS

Since the 1950s, American educators have largely ignored graphic novels. Most considered them lowbrow, with little educational value. Dr. Frederic Wertham denounced comics as “important contributing factors to present-day juvenile delinquency,” which led to their decades-long censorship. Educators and researchers, however, have begun to challenge these views. Carol Tilley has recently shown that Wertham’s research was manipulated and falsified. Today Horn Books, Kirkus, *School Library Journal*, and *The New York Times* review comics and graphic novels, a testament to their increased quality. Graphic novels such as *El Deafo* by Cece Bell and *Nimona* by Noelle Stevenson have received Newbery and Caldecott Honors, and have been National Book Award Finalists. That the Library of Congress chose Gene Yang, a former educator, comics creator and graphic novelist, as its 2016 Ambassador for Children’s Literature reveals just how much this medium has gained acceptance as a powerful classroom tool.

As graphic novels continue to grow in sophistication and quality, research is beginning to demonstrate how graphic novels can be used as potent educational tools. However, educators are having great difficulty finding graphic novels that are appropriate for their classroom environments. Furthermore, educators do not have the knowledge or training to teach graphic novels as a unique medium and ultimately miss critical details in classroom conversations. This article shares some significant findings in research articulating how graphic novels benefit classroom lessons, suggests resources for finding appropriate graphic novels, and recommends strategies for teaching these texts, addressing both visual and traditional literacies.

### REASONS FOR USING GRAPHIC NOVELS

Graphic novels can provide outstanding teaching tools, motivating and engaging students in the power of critical thinking, the use of language and the growth of content knowledge. Here are the main findings of educational researchers.

**Graphic novels support reading comprehension, stimulating creativity and analysis.** Graphic novels use 20% more complex vocabulary than traditional chapter books and contain literary devices such as metaphor, onomatopoeia and idioms. This clearly exposes misconceptions that graphic novels use simple vocabulary with little educational content. On the contrary, these works provide sophisticated tools for teaching reading, language use and language development.

Graphic novels are also powerful tools for learning a foreign language. When both reading and writing graphic novels and comics, students show greater vocabulary acquisition, understanding of symbolism and language pragmatics, and motivation. Research is starting to uncover that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the pairing of image with text make graphic novels wonderful resources for nonnative speakers. Danielle Elsner, for example, notes that reading comprehension in a foreign language can be hindered by the students’ need to convert a word, concept or sentence into a mental image, which is then converted back to their native language. By scaffolding this process, more students understand the content in graphic novels even if the vocabulary level remains unchanged. The boom in

Hebrew graphic novels written for youth over the past decade can provide rich material for Hebrew classes.

**Graphic novels are highly motivating.** One of the most widely noted benefits graphic novels provide to education is that they motivate students to read. In both public libraries and school libraries, comics and graphic novels are high circulators. Researchers Ujiie and Krashen, surveying the reading patterns of students from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds and reading levels, found that “those who read more comic books did more pleasure reading, liked to read more, and tended to read more books” (“Comic Book Reading, Reading Enjoyment, and Pleasure Reading among Middle Class and Chapter I Middle School Students”). As a result, librarians are particularly strong advocates for using graphic novels to reach youth. In another, fifth grade students reported that they found comics more enjoyable and understandable than either prose texts or illustrated chapter books (Jennings, Rule, and Zanden, “Fifth Graders’ Enjoyment, Interest, and Comprehension of Graphic Novels Compared to Heavily-Illustrated and Traditional Novels”).

**By integrating images and text in innovative ways, graphic novels can help students develop sophisticated forms of literacy.** Graphic novels teach verbal literacy, visual literacy and multimodal literacies (a special type of literacy where multiple methods of communicating overlap and complement each other) simultaneously. In the age of Facebook, Tumblr, Pinterest and IKEA furniture assembly diagrams, verbal, visual and multimodal literacies are vital tools and means of communication. Research has shown that using graphic novels to teach visual perspectives as well as the physical aspects of text and image design improve middle school students’ abilities to make sense of their world. Moreover, research is beginning to illustrate how the dynamic pairing of image and text practically shape, and at times improve, students’ comprehension and creativity skills more so than prose novels, animations or even heavily illustrated novels.

Due to this multimodal nature, students’ analyses of graphic novels are more creative than their analyses of traditional chapter books or even of illustrated chapter books, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Jennings, Rule and Zanden, “How Graphic Novels Support Reading Comprehension Strategy Development in Children”). In one study, writing using a comics format led students to create narratives that were more sophisticated and creative than when they were writing prose (Brown, “A Blended Approach to Reading and Writing Graphic Stories”).

In order to integrate graphic novels into the classroom curriculum, teachers must develop skills for reading graphic novels: how to integrate and analyze the language use, text formatting, page design, and illustration choices. All verbal and graphic design elements reflect the author’s choices and are instrumental to the storytelling. The best reference for this task is *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud.

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## FINDING GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR CLASSROOM USE

The first challenge in using graphic novels in the classroom is to find appropriate ones. For English and Language Arts courses, *Kirkus Review*, American Library Association, Horn Books and others provide useful lists of graphic novels. The reviews note each book’s age-appropriateness and describe the story in a paragraph or two. The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) posts a column “Using Graphic Novels in Education,” which highlights specific graphic novels, providing a summary, lesson and discussion suggestions, and related links and resources.

Librarians who know graphic novels can confirm the appropriateness of particular books’ language, images and themes. Graphic novel publishers such as First Second, Fantagraphics, Amulet (an Abrams imprint) and Scholastic are represented at major educational conferences such as the National Conference of English Teachers (NCTE) as well as comic conventions. Their sales and marketing representatives are knowledgeable of the products they

offer, can give guidance as to whether their books are classroom-appropriate, and increasingly provide teacher support and suggested lessons. Of course, nothing can replace a teacher’s own decision about which works are appropriate and meet class goals.

For subjects other than English, such as social studies, despite the existence of many great graphic novels that can enrich and enhance lessons, there are fewer resources to guide teachers towards appropriate texts. This is particularly true in Jewish studies. There is a wide variety of well-crafted graphic novels that can be applied to Jewish classrooms, from adaptations of Tanakh, to the history of Yiddish culture in America, the Holocaust, and many other subjects. However, there are as yet no resources to help teachers find these texts, much less offer guidance for age and educational value.

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## HOW TO USE GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE CLASSROOM

Once graphic novels are selected for classroom use, educators need to know how best to teach their content. As noted above, graphic novels present content through a complex interplay of text, images and design. Therefore, teaching methods for these works cannot be the same as teaching a prose chapter book. Below are several points that I have found particularly useful for my own teaching of comics.

**Familiarize yourself with terms that describe how a graphic novel is formatted.** Just as it’s important to know the definitions for paragraph, protagonist, and plot in order to have a conversation about a text, it’s important to know the vocabulary about how a graphic novel is set up. Teachers should be comfortable using terms such as panel, gutter and dialogue bubble.

**Discuss the images and their contribution to the content of the text.** In illustrated texts, the illustrations generally summarize the text; in graphic novels, by contrast, illustrations and text tell different, equally important aspects of a story. Classroom analysis must include discussion about the facial expressions of characters, the page and panel designs, and the images’ perspective. While characters need not say anything in a panel, artists must show the emotional response. Does the character, despite being silent, look sad? Angry? Guilty? Jealous? Indifferent? Ambivalent? Each of these emotions will look subtly different and can add another layer to understanding the events. Furthermore, are particular expressions and/or body language emphasized? These aspects also help readers understand intent of the characters and the author.

**Discuss the images and texts that aren’t shown and their contribution to the content of the text.** Graphic novels aren’t films; instead of seeing thousands of images that seamlessly blend together to show movement, the reader jumps from panel to panel and must infer what happens in between. This is a process that Scott McCloud calls closure, and is a higher-order cognition skill. Consider: what isn’t shown, why isn’t it shown, and how do we know it’s missing? How do excluded images and dialogue add or detract from our understanding and enjoyment of the story?

**Discuss color use and texture.** Different colors, shades and textures make us feel different emotions. Sepia tones, for example, give an image an antique feel, while red is a color that is mostly closely associated with passion (an obvious example), and appetite (a less obvious example). The publisher sometimes chooses the colors used; sometimes the writer or artist chooses them. While there is no way to determine who made this choice and why (besides asking the writer and artist), such choices change and influence the way we understand and emotionally respond to these texts.

These four suggestions represent some of the ways that teachers can be sensitive to the medium of graphic novels and enrich their classroom use. Whether the work is produced by professional artists or by students themselves, graphic novels provide a powerful tool for enhancing student motivation, cultivating visual literacy, imparting design skills, and diversifying teaching modes—all important goals in strengthening student learning.

# HOW CAN ART SPARK THINKING AND LEARNING?

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ELIZABETH  
DIAMENT

Works of art by their very nature invite us to slow down, look carefully and wonder about them and, when explored, using some simple yet powerful strategies, can invoke higher order thinking. In addition, works of art have many stories to tell and visually connect students to a wide range of content areas. So how can we create experiences with art images that strengthen students' thinking and learning across the curriculum?

Since great works of art are layered and complex in their meanings, they have the capacity to inspire rich and creative thinking, helping students recognize multiple perspectives and generate probing questions about the works of art. The act of slowing down and observing a powerful painting invites students to think critically and empowers them to develop their own personal interpretations.

As a museum educator, I would like to propose a model to integrate the use of art images into the school curriculum to foster creativity and independent thinking across disciplines. This model is based upon Harvard University's Project Zero, a research-based organization that has developed a collection of thinking routines in order to activate patterns of thinking behaviors in K-12 students. Thinking routines are short sets of open-ended questions used primarily in a classroom environment to get students to draw on certain thinking skills such as reasoning, finding complexity, exploring viewpoints, and comparing and connecting.

This teaching model, on some level, extends the art museum tour into the classroom. For example, teachers might tap into the routines, using works of art, to inspire students' imaginative and creative writing. They might launch a Civil War unit through an authentic primary source, *Home, Sweet Home*, by Winslow Homer painted in 1863. In a Jewish day school environment, great works of art can be used to compare and connect characters and scenes from the Bible with painted counterparts. For instance, Hendrick van Steenwijk the Younger's *Esther and Mordecai* from 1616 captures the clandestine and urgent meeting between Esther and Mordechai as they work to save the Jewish people.

At the National Gallery of Art, we have used thinking routines as effective tools for students, as well as teachers, to help them develop their own reasoned interpretations of works of art. We found that thinking routines support both individual and group learning, giving each member of a learning group an opportunity to develop thoughts and ideas about an object, as well

as structuring a conversation to promote dialogue within the group. When these thinking routines are used repeatedly, such as during our multiple-visit museum/school program, students begin to activate thinking dispositions independently, and in other curricular contexts.

On a recent tour of 8th graders to the National Gallery, I used a routine called See/Think/Wonder which focuses on the dispositions of questioning, investigating, making inferences and reasoning with evidence. We explored the painting *New York* by the American artist George Bellows, and I invited the students to spend two minutes in quiet observation, letting their eyes wander across the surface of the work of art, and taking in as many details as possible.

**See:** After those first minutes of observation, students jotted down words or phrases that described some of the aspects of the painting that they noticed. I encouraged them to try to focus on what they could purely see and not rush to interpretation. This initial visual inventory included *horses and carts, tall buildings, a crowd of people and a road sweeper*. After sharing and comparing their observations with a partner, and then with the whole group, they returned to the painting and looked once again. This time I noticed their observations went deeper. Some examples of what students shared: *I see a tramcar, bus and an old-fashioned horse and buggy. I see billboards on buildings. I see the snow and the bare trees. There is hardly any sky in the painting and the skyscrapers are blocking it*. They discovered narrative elements and artistic choices. Through a mix of individual, small group and whole group sharing, everybody's idea had been heard and valued. There was an equity of engagement where everyone had a voice, which is an important outcome of this teaching model.

**Think:** Students were invited to take another look. I asked them the following questions: What do you think might be happening in this painting? Who do you think the people could be? My use of conditional language "might" and "could" invited many possibilities. Students shared: *I think this could be a real place the artist had seen because the billboards seem to have identifiable words on them. I think these people are rushing to their jobs because they look purposeful. I think some of the people must be rich because I notice some top hats but some aren't and don't have a place to go to. I think it must be winter because the trees are bare and there is snow on the ground*. The students' ideas were enriched by their initial observations and they began to make inferences and connections based on evidence from the work of art. I encouraged the students to support their assertions with evidence from the painting. They were also listening to and responding to each other's comments to, once again, build their thinking as a shared community.

**Wonder:** Students were invited to share and discuss in pairs their questions and wonderings, selecting one burning question to discuss as a group. They demonstrated signs of engagement, such as returning to the painting and



*New York*, 1911. George Bellows (1882-1925), National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

looking at it from different perspectives and pointing excitedly when they had an insight. They generated a broad range of questions and then chose their most burning one to share. *I wonder if this is a real place that existed and these were real people? I wonder where they are all going? I wonder why there is a car, and a horse and buggy, in the same place? I wonder how it is I can almost hear the sounds of this place? How has the artist achieved this?*

I then provided an additional perspective on the choices the artist made in this painting, telling the students that George Bellows was part of a group of artists living in New York City who drew inspiration from the life they saw around them. Bellows said, “I paint New York because I live in it, and because the most essential thing for me is to paint the life about me, the things I feel today that are part of the life of today.” However, I told the students, Bellows made deliberate choices in this painting, adding skyscrapers to the intersection of Broadway and 23rd Street in Madison Square. Shortly after this painting was first exhibited in 1911, a reviewer in *The New York Times* wrote, “One applauds George Bellows but at the same time shudders at his truth telling ugliness. . . . Just how far truth should dominate a work of art we dare not say. One thing is certain, if this canvas of Bellows is not very alluring it hums with life; not the overtones but the noises and smells and disillusioning sights.”

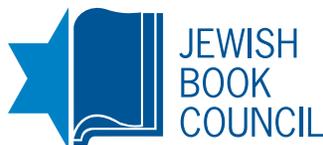
I strategically shared information as something to “act” upon, in order to deepen inquiry, and not to information that provided the “right” answer. I hoped to expand the conversation in new directions and provoke more

questions and curiosities and not shut it down. Instead I asked, “With this information in mind, what new things do you notice or what new questions and understandings do you have about this work of art?” The students raised an entirely new set of questions, and the curiosity and engagement lingered. *Why would the artist have included skyscrapers when they didn’t exist from this viewpoint? Should art be beautiful or truthful?* I tossed the question back at them. *Why do you think he would have made that decision to create a painting that was a document of reality but was really a composite, artificial image? What did Madison Square really look like at the time?* I showed them a photo of Madison Square from the period. Our time was up but their thinking and learning continued. The students had created collaborative ownership and understanding of a multifaceted work of art in a safe, non-judgmental space.

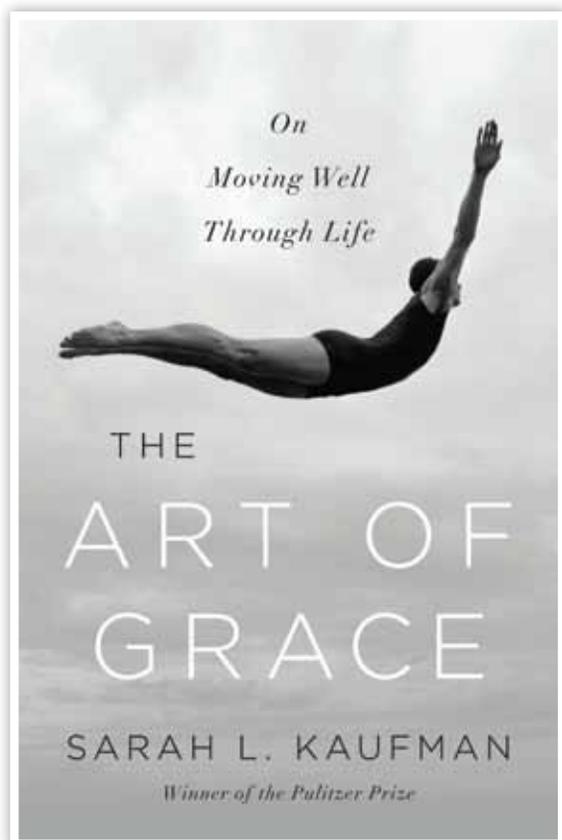
David Perkins, one of the principal researchers at Project Zero, suggests that “learning is a consequence of thinking. Retention, understanding, and the active use of knowledge can be brought about only by learning experiences in which learners think about, and think with, what they are learning.” Whether an encounter with a work of art is a catalyst to inspire rich and imaginative writing or a lens into difficult moments in the Torah narrative such as the binding of Isaac, this teaching model can be used to nurture critical thinking skills across a broad range of classroom material. Thinking routines have the capacity to activate student’s deep thinking by privileging their own ideas as a valuable source of information, getting them personally involved, and using questions to drive learning and uncover complexity.

# MOVEMENT WITH GRACE

Interview with Sarah L. Kaufman, author of *The Art of Grace* and Pulitzer Prize-winning dance critic of the *Washington Post*. Published in partnership with the Jewish Book Council.



[www.jewishbookcouncil.org](http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org)



## *Tell us how you came to write this book.*

I wrote this book because, as a critic and chronicler of beauty and grace for some 30 years, I simply wanted to learn more about what moved me most. I wanted to broaden my understanding of grace, and to follow it through time and geography and everyday life.

The more I contemplated why grace is so enduring and seductive, the more I sought to develop theories of grace—because I couldn't find them anywhere else. There are books on love, and books on beauty, but where was the wide-ranging book on grace, ordinary, everyday, you-and-me grace? This seemed odd, considering that grace underpins major religions, is a prized quality in the arts and is cherished as a character trait. What connects these different aspects of grace? How can we bring them all into our lives? I thought these were ideas worth spreading.

But before I got to all that, I had one of those “aha” moments that got me thinking about grace in general. Here's how it happened. I've always loved classic films, and I decided to write an essay on the way actors moved and gestured in the films of Hollywood's Golden Age. And in studying films from that era, I realized that some of the legendary stars—Lauren Bacall, Audrey Hepburn, Cary Grant—possessed something unusual, an elegance that seemed entirely natural. The word “grace” just dropped into my mind: that's what they had. The beautiful way they moved expressed something about their inner qualities (or so they made us think!). Here was a dancer-like grace, embodied by non-dancers.

I became very excited about the whole notion of grace, and this drove me to more questions, especially about the social and spiritual aspects of grace. How do they relate to the physical? Is grace inherent, or can it be learned and acquired? Here was a challenge, and a great pleasure.

## *Why is grace important?*

I view grace as an expression of the best of ourselves. From a scientific point of view, it is the result of a healthy brain and a healthy body, with our billions of brain cells firing together in the right way, enabling us to move our skeleton smoothly and efficiently. From a social point of view, grace comprises putting others first, thinking of their feelings, being empathetic and kind. And these qualities are essential to social harmony. Grace leads to good feelings and good times.

From a spiritual point of view, grace moves us to be generous and loving, to give rather than take, to think of others before ourselves. In short, grace allows us to slow down and view the big picture, and to exercise love rather than judgment. And in valuing grace, which is what I hope to inspire with my book, we are also taking care of ourselves in a profound, full way—caring for our physical, social and spiritual health. This opens us up to joy, fulfillment, human connections, just about everything that makes life good.

***Grace has at least two aspects: physical, and philosophical or spiritual. How do you explain grace as an idea?***

The way I approach it, grace is a philosophy of living. It's an art that we can practice, and through which we can express our best selves. It combines ease, generosity and "fellow-feeling," or empathy. Grace reminds us to hold the door open for the person behind us, and to really listen to what our children are saying, with the goal of understanding, rather than jumping in to correct. It reminds us to be kind to others, to give our time and attention generously. What's so exciting about grace is that those moments of showing warmth and compassion are often when we feel most happy with ourselves. So grace ignites this terrific feedback loop of contentment, from you to me and back to you.

Grace also reminds us to take care of ourselves with love and gentleness, to maintain our soul's home—this amazing physical instrument that we inhabit. Grace reminds us to take walks and enjoy the outdoors and luxuriate in moving with buoyancy and ease. It reminds us to counteract evil, to stand up for ourselves and for those who need support.

Noticing grace is also part of this worldview, this art. By being open to grace, we get that rush of happy feeling—gratitude, admiration, maybe even love—as we experience, say, Roger Federer's tap dance on the tennis court, or as we appreciate that lovely person who welcomes us into her home, or who helps us out when we've tripped and dumped our purse out on the sidewalk.

***How do you recognize grace in people's movements, gestures, actions?***

I look for a sense of ease and naturalness, and the absence of effort. Graceful people make us feel good, and that comes through in smooth actions as well as in comforting, not-making-a-big-deal-of-it behavior.

***What do you see happening to grace today?***

We've all experienced rudeness and pushiness and unnecessary roughness as we go about our days. Sidewalks, shops and subways are crowded, and many folks unfortunately don't pay much attention to their physical impact on others. They may not be thinking about whether someone minds if they sprawl across two seats on the bus, or if they text during a movie and distract the rest of us.

But all is not lost! I see so many promising signs of grace. I feel that young people are growing up, by and large, with more tolerance for difference than in generations past. "Don't be judgy"—that's an honest value among millennials, and one I heartily endorse, even when my own children remind me of it! Look at how Jimmy Carter publicly handled his cancer diagnosis, with such equanimity, and even cheerfulness as he expressed gratitude for a full life. So grace absolutely still exists; it's up to us to look for it, to appreciate it, to enact it ourselves—and to savor it.

***People often associate "grace," or a certain notion of it, with Christianity, but it is a concept thoroughly embedded in Jewish tradition and sources. What did you learn about Jewish grace?***

God's unlimited, unconditional love for all creation is a cornerstone of the Bible. The first mention of grace in the Bible is in reference to Noah, who found grace in the eyes of God. As a rabbi I interviewed for the book told me, there was something about Noah that God found really lovable, though there's not a lot of direct explanation of what, exactly, it was about Noah that led God to see in him the presence of grace. I find it significant that Noah seems to have been simply a decent guy who could be trusted to care. God entrusted him with the duty of care, caring for his family and vulnerable creatures in a time of upheaval and stress. This is a beautiful expression of grace.

We can view our own graceful acts—in deepening human connections, and infusing our life and work with purpose and meaning, and in treating others with respect and dignity—as reflections of God's grace. They are our response to the grace we've received from God. God has poured his grace onto us, and we pour it forth to others. There's that feedback loop again!

***What are the educational implications of grace? Why, and how, should our readership of educators consider imparting grace to their students?***

I think we've overvalued competitiveness and winning. One has only to look around at the world today to see how inequalities and imposed separations are creating misery. Grace is the medium through which different people can live together with tolerance toward all and harm to none, as philosophers have urged since ancient times.

There are so many ways to teach and model tolerance and acceptance—grace—in the classroom. Emphasizing empathy, for instance, asking students to think of how another child feels when others are whispering or texting and excluding him. Teaching gentleness, courtesy and patience—these are not frivolous qualities, they are essential to good relationships, at work, at home, in a community. Spotting kids' academic achievements is good, but it's also crucial to notice and praise students every day when they are kind, when they stand up for a child who's being bullied, when they show consideration for the quiet kid on the fringes.

***Many of our schools are small with limited time and resources for athletics. Drawing upon your knowledge of and love for dance, what advice do you have for schools in this area?***

Here's a fun fact: the reason we have a brain is to move. The complicated orchestration of movement is a fully cerebral process! (In the book I delve into the brain science behind grace; that's one of my favorite chapters.) So if kids are sitting all day at their desks, they're not taking full advantage of their brainpower. Our moving bodies literally shape our brains. Exercise helps us think and learn by raising growth-factor chemicals in the brain, which build new connections between the brain cells involved in learning. The more complicated the physical coordination involved—say, in dance or tennis—the bigger the brain boost, because the brain is more challenged. Brain cells need a physical workout in order to grow.

Research also shows that after a complicated fitness routine, students score better on tasks demanding a high degree of attention than those who had pursued less-taxing activity. And those who don't exercise at all score the worst.

Why do I go into the brain benefits of exercise in a book about grace? Because we become more graceful movers, with smoother, more connected movement, the more we move. We need the habit of moving. And when we're in the habit of moving, with an invigorated body, we feel better, we're healthier, we're more at ease...and we're more prone to spread those good vibes to others. As I mentioned before, grace is about taking care of ourselves as well as others—and that care loops around and around, feeding on itself.

We tend to put the brain first and body second, but we need to understand that they are tied together. Athletics, martial arts, dance—these are not fluffy extras. They're essential for health and for academic success. You can't go forward on your educational or your spiritual path if you don't have a healthy body—and brain—to take you there. You need a sound physical structure so you can focus on other things without the distractions of disease and discomfort.

That's my major thesis: grace involves and supports the whole person, and ripples outward, enriching and nurturing the community, too.



MIRIAM HELLER STERN

# WHEN CREATIVITY NOURISHES THE MIND, SOUL AND HEART

A group of sixth graders fans out around the school building with their smartphones, in search of God. Their teacher, a professional photographer, has tasked them with taking photos that reveal where God is present in their surroundings. The subjects they choose (a tree, a Torah, a view from the pews in the sanctuary) combined with their choices of vantage point, focus and lighting, tell an emerging story of their conceptions of the divine presence in their world.

And yet, a gallery of their works leaves so many questions unanswered. What was this student trying to express? What choices were intentional? What did they learn through the act of creating those photographs?

Over the past several months, I have been studying and analyzing what it means to teach and learn through creative process with American Jewish University's Dream Lab Teaching Fellows, a cohort of midcareer creative practitioners who are incubating artistic teaching modules in Jewish settings. As we debrief their pioneering work with learners, it is clear how much social-emotional development, deep thinking and community building is happening around the creative process. Here are just some of the ways that creativity is cultivating learners and learning communities.

## Creativity that Furnishes the Mind

Leading psychiatrists Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson describe the brain as having a “downstairs” and an “upstairs.” The amygdala, located “downstairs,” develops early in life, controlling our most visceral emotions and responses such as fear and survival. The “upstairs,” where our more sophisticated thinking and decision-making happens, develops during childhood and into young adulthood. We have tantrums, the experts say, when the “downstairs brain” closes off the stairwell to the still emerging “upstairs,” where more nuanced, controlled thinking can happen.

Artistic work is both therapeutic and stimulating, and can serve as that stairwell to reflection and cognitive stretching. When they dialogue about their creative projects, students learn to witness and wonder; they practice giving and receiving critical feedback, which builds confidence and self-awareness. These conversations essentially give our students a housewarming party for their upstairs brains, furnishing new corners, designing and adorning the space.

The common assumption that thinking is divided neatly into “right brain” and “left brain”—as if every person can only operate on one side or the other—obscures the possibility of combining the two fruitfully. A combination of analysis and amazement, design and improvisation, can flourish when creative process is shared with a learning community. It is the learning community that holds up the mirror so that we can see our own work through another's eyes and appreciate our own potential. The mirror often reveals hidden meanings that we may have produced, but may not have even articulated or seen on our own.

## Creativity that Feeds the Soul

Depending on the setting, Judaic curricula are often caught between two poles: a desire to teach skills and a desire to make the text relevant to the learner. Too much

dry skill-building and we fail to pave a pathway to the soul; too much personalization without access to the text may leave the soul adrift without a reliable anchor. The most effective soul-building Chumash lessons I have observed recently began with close textual reading and utilized creative writing, painting or drama games to fill in the white spaces between the words with a colorful or moving reflection of the soul. Thinking through a different medium or metaphor sparks new understandings and questions. The artistic reflection creates a container for learners to go beyond “What does this text say?” They wonder: “What does this text say to me?” and “What does this text say to the world?”

Our reflection muscles need exercise and practice in order to stretch and function; often the time-constraints of school and the emphasis on grades shortchange reflection in the drive to just get the project done. Finding time to slow down the pace of learning—even if it is just a matter of inserting 10 minutes of journaling, sketching, watercolors—helps students learn how to learn for the sake of learning as opposed to learning to complete the task. When the thought process counts as much as the product, and we prize the quality of wondering and reflection, we pave the path to lifelong soul-searching and learning.

## Creativity that Expands the Heart

Creative acts involve risk. To create in the presence of others without fear requires embracing vulnerability. When I share a draft of my writing, hold up my painting, or tell my story at an open mic, I need to know that I can plunge into the trust fall of putting myself out there, experimenting with new ideas, modalities and languages. The learning community has to step up to provide a safety net of empathy to catch me; I am emboldened by taking the risk, and the community is emboldened to take risks by witnessing my safe landing.

Superficial tolerance is not empathy, nor is empathy merely an emotional gesture. Empathy stems from understanding that bridges the emotional and intellectual. That means I need to give my fellow creator the stage to share his or her creation. I need to witness it with a whole heart. I need to use constructive language to express what I notice and wonder. The discussion around our creations can breed the kind of rigorous emotional and intellectual care famously professed by philosopher Nel Noddings and implemented by education reformer Deborah Meier. Caring is the heartbeat of a community.

Imagine the communities we would have in the future if our Jewish schools were places where educators modeled, and students practiced, the kind of empathy that allows learners to take creative risks without fear of being teased or judged. When playing with new materials, such as words that become poems, or pieces of paper that become collages or beats that become rhythms, we may have an intention, but the execution may display something else, perhaps something we didn't even know we could do.

The act of creating, and the galleries and performances that feature the work, demonstrate only a portion of the learning. Dedicating time to witness, notice, wonder, interpret, critique and perfect each other's creations nourishes the mind, heart and soul. In those reflections, the divine spark of creation is revealed.

FROM SMALL SEEDS **YOU FLOURISHED  
AND GREW,** TO BECOME SOMETHING  
GREAT, **TO INSPIRE SOMETHING NEW.**  
WITH LOVE **IN YOUR HEARTS** AND PRIDE  
**IN YOUR EYES,** YOU LEAVE US TODAY  
WITH **MORE STRENGTH TO RISE.**

— ADAM & TEAM,  
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## Moot Beit Din 2016



More than one hundred students from twenty-one Jewish high schools from across North America met in West Palm Beach, March 30–April 1, to participate in the annual Moot Beit Din competition.

Moot Beit Din challenges Jewish high school students to examine the ethical and moral dimensions of Jewish law through creative engagement with contemporary situations. Each team of students prepared a written decision and presented an oral argument before a panel of rabbis, scholars and lawyers in response to a case. This year's case focused on medical ethics, pertaining to end of life care and the assessment of risks to prolong life. Examining Jewish legal texts, Moot Beit Din participants provided their advice on the medical care of an elderly man with Alzheimer's disease who recently suffered a heart attack.

Leading up to the competition, participants and their school advisors spent Shabbat together as a pluralistic community, participating in text-study sessions, prayer services, and team building activities. On Friday morning, students participated in one of four creative workshops involving art and Torah study as part of the 70 Faces Studio: storytelling, Bibliodrama, papercutting, and scribal arts. By sharing in these experiences and the competition, students formed a vibrant network of committed and intellectually curious Jewish teenagers that extends beyond the weekend.

For more information about Moot Beit Din, reach out to Yael Steiner at [yael@ravsak.org](mailto:yael@ravsak.org).

### Mazal tov to the winners of the 2016 Moot Beit Din Competition!

#### Cardozo Division

First Place: Herzliah High School  
Montreal, Quebec  
Second Place: TanenbaumCHAT Kimel Centre  
Toronto, Ontario

#### Bader Ginsburg Division

First Place: San Diego Jewish Academy  
San Diego, California  
Second Place: Gann Academy  
Waltham, Massachusetts

#### Brandeis Division

First Place: Herzliah High School  
Montreal, Quebec  
Second Place: Donna Klein Jewish Academy  
Boca Raton, Florida

#### Kagan Division

First Place: David Posnack Jewish Day School  
Davie, Florida  
Second Place: Milken Community High School  
Los Angeles, California

#### Breyer Division

First Place: Herzliah High School  
Montreal, Quebec  
Second Place: Beth Sholom Synagogue  
Memphis, Tennessee

#### Ruach Award

Mercz High School  
Cincinnati, Ohio

### The Case (abridged)

Leib Goldstein, a 65 year old widowed man with Alzheimer's type dementia suffered a heart attack. Leib's cardiologist inserted an intra-aortic balloon pump (IABP) to assist his heart; absent that assistance, he would die of organ failure. His daughter Shayna is legally authorized to make Leib's medical decisions. The doctors have presented her with the following options:

- a) They can try a bypass operation, which will let blood flow around the obstruction that caused the heart attack, but the surgery is very high risk.
- b) They can leave Leib as is. Most likely the IABP will fail soon, and leaving the device in can increase other potentially fatal risks.
- c) They can remove the IABP and medically manage Leib's heart disease with medication. The medicine will not prevent his heart from further deteriorating.

Shayna has come before the Moot Beit Din for guidance in how to evaluate these options according to Jewish law. Which options are permitted, which are forbidden, and which option would the Moot Beit Din advise?

### Excerpts from the written decisions

#### San Diego Jewish Academy

Shayna's best course of action is Option A. It will give Leib the chance to live out the rest of his life in accordance with the laws of pikuach nefesh [obligation to save a life]. Furthermore, Leib is not a goses [dying person], which means Shayna should not remove the medical devices which are aiding him, as Shayna is obligated by the halachah to keep him alive through medical intervention. Even though Leib may die immediately from the surgery, he is permitted to risk chaye sha'ah [the life of the moment] in order for him to keep on living for several years.

#### David Posnack Jewish Day School

Shayna is not required to pick one specific option out of A and C... In all laws and statements which make options A and C allowable, the relevant actions are made permissible, but not compulsory. For example, in reference to option A, "it is permissible, but not obligatory, to risk one's remaining life in order to extend life" (Rabbi Dr. Barukh Brody, Taking Issue, p. 263, "Jewish Casuistry on Suicide and Euthanasia"). In option C, we learn that if something is preventing the soul from exiting the body, it is permitted to remove it (Shulchan Arukh Yoreh Deah 339:1). Therefore, both options A and C are permissible.

#### Herzliah High School

Based on our detailed analysis of the Halakhic sources, we have ruled that Shayna, Mr. Goldstein's daughter, is only allowed to approve option A according to Jewish law as this is the only viable option in Mr. Goldstein's case. We have established that Mr. Goldstein Alzheimer's disease should not be a factor in the decision-making process in this case. We have seen that the Poskim rule that when one is faced with definitive death within 1 year, one would be required and obliged by Jewish law to risk this chaye sha'ah [life of the moment] by undergoing high risk treatment to attempt a cure for chaye olam [eternal life], as long as the chance of success is greater than 50%. In Mr. Goldstein's case, the chance of survival after the operation is 60-70%, and he would therefore be required to choose option A.

#### Gann Academy

In conclusion, it is the opinion of our group that Shayna choose option A, remove the IABP and doing a surgical bypass. We believe option A is the best option because of its promising possibility of giving Leib a worthwhile life while still falling within the confines of what is acceptable according to the halakhah. As a tereifah, Leib is halakhically allowed to choose an option with invasive measures as there is something pathologically wrong with his body. Additionally, this group also recognizes that Leib is allowed to accept other options that are not invasive if this is his choice. However, because Leib is currently incapacitated, the choice will fall to Shayna. It is our interpretation that Shayna is not yet ready to let go of her father and wants to explore options that will keep him alive.

# ART EDUCATION IN OUR SCHOOLS

*“Art evokes the mystery without which the world would not exist.”*

Rene Magritte

When the Jewish sages in Pirkei Avot talked about the three pillars upon which the world stands, art was not among them. Nonetheless, this quotation by the famous surrealist artist Magritte would not seem so alien to the ancient rabbis; replace the word “art” with “Torah,” and indeed the mind of an artist and a Torah scholar comes to look quite similar, with both occupied in the pursuit of hidden mysteries essential for the world’s survival. Jewish day schools today see in the arts an essential means for accomplishing their educational mission in all subjects, and in empowering student creativity, independence and collaboration across curricular and extracurricular pursuits. Here are five examples that span different ages, subjects and artistic media.

## DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS BECOME ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

EINAV SYMONS

Head of School, Kadimah Academy, Amherst, New York

In the spring of 2012, Kadimah middle schoolers were treated to a tour of the Darwin Martin House, a landmark designed by the preeminent American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Built between 1903 and 1905 for a wealthy Buffalo businessman, this house is considered by Wright scholars to be one of his finest and has been extensively renovated in recent years. The visit was sponsored by a Kadimah parent who is a Martin House donor.

The students demonstrated an extremely keen interest in the house. Their curiosity was aroused: Who was Mr. Martin? Did Mr. Wright design other houses like this? When will the restoration be complete?

Their interest did not fade once the tour was over. Delighted by this enthusiastic response, the Martin House education volunteers Cynthia Silverstein and Kadimah’s middle-school science teacher Anna Martinick created a new experience for these would-be architectural historians. Students who were trained by Martin House education docents gave a one-time tour to their family and friends. The opportunity allowed students to share their knowledge, work on their public speaking skills and gain a new appreciation of their city.

Much was accomplished by this collaboration. The Kadimah students began to appreciate their regional heritage; their parents saw just how much their children were capable of, and the Martin House found the next generation of stakeholders. This student’s response was typical:

*After the tour, I started to really think about the house and I realized how much history there is in this story and how important the Darwin Martin house is. I hope other people understand how much I love the culture and history of the house. I definitely want to come back and be a junior docent again.*



The Kadimah students paved the way for other schools to participate in this unique and challenging Martin House program.

But the story does not end here. In 2014 Kadimah was approached by the Darwin Martin coordinator to partner with them on an expansion of the program. Students were introduced to the history at the time that the Darwin Martin House was being built. Michael Wohl, a docent and history teacher, took the kids on a journey, expanding their knowledge about the city of Buffalo. Penny Silverman taught the students about stained glass art, and students explored the I-beam construction of the Martin House. They created their own stained glass windows, which went on display at the Darwin Martin Great Batch pavilion. In science, students built balsa wood bridges to study forces. History, art, science and math were integrated, and the students wrote about their experience—in Hebrew!

Kadimah students showcased their expanded understanding of the history and architecture by leading another tour of the house.

This year, Anna Martinick and Kadimah students are continuing the journey with the exploration of restoration and reuse of beautiful structures in the city of Buffalo. Students were introduced to the notion of adaptive reuse; they toured Buffalo’s Grain Elevators and explored new uses for them by building architectural models. On another trip, they visited the Richardson-Olmsted Complex, another site designed by Wright, and studied the treatment of mental illness at the turn of the century. Students learned about the architectural, environmental, and social aspects of the complex’s past, present, and future.

This project provides an outstanding example of the benefits that day schools can reap from ongoing collaboration with cultural resources in their local communities.

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**JAKE MARMER**

Teacher, Kehillah High School,  
Palo Alto, California

## MIDRASH AS CREATIVE WRITING

Teaching midrash at Kehillah presented a multifaceted challenge. The classroom included learners with vastly varied levels of familiarity with the material. Some were fluent in Hebrew, previously studied Tanakh, and had some sort of exposure to the hermeneutic practice. Others were opening Tanakh for the first time. Not all students were Jewish, either. Inasmuch as it is impossible (and unproductive) to divorce the midrash from the religious goals of its makers, it was clear to me that those goals would not resonate with most of my students.

Being a practicing poet and performer, I thought to offer the students midrash as an authentic Jewish art form: that which French literary critic Roland Barthes called “writerly reading”—that is, reading as a writer, composing one’s interpretation rather than passively absorbing the information.

In her introduction to *Turn it and Turn it: A Forum on Contemporary Midrash*, award-winning poet and literary scholar Alicia Ostriker defined midrash in the following way:

Traditional midrash may be homiletic, witty, mystical, wildly imaginative; it is always, however, deeply religious in intent. Contemporary midrash, as the term has been widely and loosely used for several decades, may take the form of poetry, fiction, drama and bibliodrama based on biblical narratives, as well as visual art, film, and music. Like traditional midrash, contemporary midrash addresses itself to the potential meanings of scripture in one’s present moment, and to pressing psychological and social issues in one’s present community.

The rupture—and continuity—between traditional and contemporary midrash is apparent. However, it is equally apparent to readers of Ostriker’s work that the poet herself mastered the traditional midrashic tendency of giving voice to marginal biblical characters, who are often unnamed, or in any case allotted minimal narratological space in the Tanakh itself. Just as midrash expands the character cast, and the archetypal assortment, so does Ostriker, using the genre to give voice specifically to female characters. Re-writing Miriam’s narrative, she offers:

Call me rebellious, call me bitter sea / I peel the skin off myself in strips / I am going to die in the sand / Miriam the leprous, Miriam the hag / Miriam the cackling one / What did I have but voice to announce liberty / No magic tricks, no miracles, no history, / No stick / Or stone of law.

There are clear allusions to the Torah verses and traditional midrashim here—as well as feminist critique of the male-centric Torah narrative.

The looseness and fluidity of midrash, as Ostriker defines it, is expansive enough to include work that was not necessarily conceived as midrash by its author, and yet becomes midrashic when presented within the hermeneutic framework. Chicago-born Jewish poet Jackson Mac Low, an avant-garde legend, wrote a series of “Light” poems, which I invited my students to read in our discussion of the Creation stories.

The light of a student-lamp / sapphire light / shimmer / the light of a smoking-lamp // Light from the Magellanic Clouds / the light of a Nernst lamp / the light of a naphtha-lamp / light from meteorites // Evanescent light / ether / the light of an electric lamp / extra light.

Resisting an easy storytelling model, the rhythm of the poem leads the reader into a meditative, visceral experience of light in the vastness of its endless varieties. Cataloging human experience, the poem accentuates the poignancy of that ancient metaphor. I invited students to write their own light—and darkness—poems, which ended up being deeply personal, and helped us elucidate the ancient myth of Creation and our relationship to it. Does it seem like a stretch to call such texts “midrash”? One may only need to remember that traditional midrash writers, too, were fond of radical recontextualization of verses, images and indeed whole stories.

Giving voice to marginal voices and recontextualization are only two of the many methodologies that can be adopted by young writers; literary puns, intertextuality, dialogic writing are a few of the others we reviewed in class. The students were not always sympathetic to the content of the midrash, yet they were awed by the strategies and creativity of the work. Above all, they learned to read deeply, bravely, with agency and inspiration, embodying and owning the sacred texts. One student introduced her final portfolio with the following reflection:

Before entering the class, I had perceived midrash as only explanations. I was amazed and excited to find out that virtually anything could be counted as midrash. It was a joy to find out that one is not restrained to explanations, that one could explain through poems, stories, and even dreams.

# WHY STUDENTS SHOULD RUN THE SHOW

AARON MARGOLIS  
Jordan Alexander Ressler  
Arts Chair, Scheck Hillel  
Community School, N. Miami  
Beach, Florida



The stakes are high, and the show is literally in their hands. A student sits behind an ETC lighting console with her finger over the “go” button, one in front of a digital mixer with all ten fingers spread over the “mute” buttons, another student by his side catching any missing microphone channels, and one student with her finger over the next musical accompaniment track. The director calls a cue, and in unison they transition and cross-fade into the next scene. This happens hundreds of times during the rehearsals leading up to opening night.

These students are the technical theatre crew for the Jordan Alexander Ressler Arts Program productions of *You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown* and Disney’s *The Lion King Jr.* at Scheck Hillel Community School. They will execute all lighting, sound and microphone cues.

Opening night for any main-stage production begins long before the curtain opens. Much hard work goes into the seamless collaboration between the creative team (faculty) and the dedicated students. In the process, the students—across grade levels—develop wide skill sets, with a focus on audio and lighting. Beyond everything technical, these students pick up the invaluable skills of working and functioning within a team, collaborating, engaging and persisting in the face of challenge, accepting and growing from feedback, and constantly reflecting and improving on their work. The benefits of arts education cannot be overstated.

In a professional setting with their work on display on the main stage, these students interact with everyone from award-winning musical directors to professional sound engineers, while

supporting the student cast. They learn the tools of the industry and the tricks of the trade from educators with professional backgrounds, many actively engaged in the industry from local equity theatres to Broadway and other major venues and events. Additionally, the students are invited to participate in other real-world educational experiences, including backstage technical tours of local venues such as the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts and the New World Center, home of the New World Symphony, and representing the school on occasions such as public television fund drives alongside internationally renowned artists, with tours of the technical elements of the studio.

When students in the technical theatre crew earn enough show credits, they are inducted into the International Thespian Society, the Educational Theatre Association’s student honorary organization. In recent years, Scheck Hillel main-stage productions with student crews have included Disney’s *The Little Mermaid Jr.*, *Aladdin Kids*, *Into the Woods Jr.*, *Number the Stars*, *Feiffer’s People*, *Willy Wonka Jr.*, and *Seussical Jr.*

As students work their way up to running the technical theatre for events, shows and productions, these skills are put to use with our state-of-the-art equipment, thanks to our Jordan Alexander Ressler Arts Program endowment. From digital and analog sound consoles and a rack of 20 ULX-D wireless microphone systems, to conventional and LED stage lighting and intelligent moving fixtures, students receive first-rate training. At the heart of it all, it’s about crafting an educational experience that sparks and cultivates skill and talent, passion and ambition.

**BETH FINE**

Judaics Coordinator and Instructional Coach

**SARAH RENSIN**

3rd and 4th Grade Judaics Teacher

The Jewish Day School, Bellevue, Washington

# VISIONS OF TORAH

As day school educators, we strive to engage our students in experiencing Torah: accessing the words in Hebrew and understanding them, placing the events in context, connecting with the characters, creating a meaningful whole that applies to their lives. This year our third and fourth grade classes are engaging in this work through the creation of large-scale interpretive art. Third graders are concentrating on texts about Yaakov, while fourth graders study the story of the exodus.

The students begin by considering the whole story in context, then pull apart the Hebrew text. They identify the Hebrew roots as well as familiar vocabulary, and begin to build meaning. At this point their Judaics teacher, Rabbi Sarah Rensin, encourages students to discuss the larger themes in the story. Third graders felt that parashat Toldot, the Jacob and Esau story, was about relationship, while fourth graders saw the beginning of parashat Shmot being about family. From here, the students brainstormed how they could show their understanding in a visual manner. They worked in groups on different elements of the story, and created the pieces of the bulletin board. Each board includes creative writing, and is made through a collaborative process, based upon a deep exploration of the text and student ownership of the work.



What is relationship?

In this first foray into creating Torah art, the students chose the symbol of a house to

structure parashat Toldot, using the windows to show different moments in the story. In the clouds, they wrote their thoughts about the nature of positive relationships, and they created a visual family tree. Here are a fourth grader's reflections on family.

- Family is love. It is a group of generations, companions, friends, people who appreciate each other.
- Family is the reason we're alive. Family is people who love each other and will always be there for each other.
- Family is life. Family is people that care for you. Family is love in the world around you.
- Family is someone you love in your heart. Family is someone you would follow to the end of the earth.



What are angels? Do you believe in God?

The third graders connected deeply with Yaakov's awesome dream. They learned about different views of angels and articulated their own 8- and 9-year-old beliefs about God.



Love and jealousy

The students explored the complex relationships in Yaakov's life. They even learned about mandrakes, familiar to some of them from the Harry Potter series, and wrote poems about their power. Here's one example by a third grader.

Once I found a Mandrake in the ground. It had green leaves purple flowers and yellow berries. It said if I eat a berry I can Fly Mandrake I have a happy poem	Exciting And True I have a happy poem So I'll tell it to you I Can Make You go Crazy But I can Also make you Sleep I'm a Mandrake
---	---



What is family?

The fourth graders captured the beginning of parashat Shmot with this dramatic portrayal of bnei Yisrael (with their own faces and a notebook containing each student's thoughts about the importance of family) preparing to go down to Egypt, zipline and all, accompanied by the shields of the tribes.



The Nile

This board uses the technique of a 3D pyramid triptych and a flowing Nile River. The students decided to translate this part of the story word for word, and put the Hebrew text and their translation in an envelope on the board.

This approach to Torah study, which begins with traditional text analysis, moves into identifying and writing about themes and culminates in students sharing their collective understanding of the text in artistic fashion, deepens comprehension and connection. Our students built an understanding from the word level up in a collaborative way, and now "own" that text. The Torah's narrative has become their own story, and will hopefully be a touchpoint in their Jewish journeys for many years to come.

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## JORDAN HERSKOWITZ

Director of Student Life & Arts Department Chair

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## FLORA YAVELBERG

Judaic Studies Chair

Golda Och Academy, West Orange, New Jersey

# THE TALLIT PROJECT: INFUSING ART WITH TEFILLAH



At our Eric F. Ross Upper School Campus, students are embracing the newly expanded and renovated art room, which debuted last fall. Art teacher Bethanie Watson now has the ability to work on a variety of different mediums with students, ranging from painting to printmaking to pastel and pottery. One of the most popular places in the school building, the art room has become an innovative and interactive space for both middle and high school students to explore their creativity.

Golda Och Academy has had a long history of infusing art into tefillah, most notably in our 6th grade Tallit Project, which has been running for more than a decade. Throughout the year, students work on designing and crafting their own tallitot. In the art room, student's research traditional Jewish symbols and utilize them alongside more personalized design choices to create a tallit that is both visually pleasing and reflective of their personality. The process for this artistic portion of the tallitot takes several class periods. It begins with the research and planning, creating a full color sketch, and designing using paint, fabric markers, or other materials.

With the help of their Judaics teachers, students research a text or quote that speaks to them, which they put on the atarah, the neck band. Often this quote comes from their bar/bat mitzvah Torah portion. They decorate the entire tallit in their art class, and tie the tzitzit in Judaics classes, learning the symbolism involved in the numbers of knots. The students study the texts from the Torah about tzitzit that appear in the Shema, as well as texts related to receiving Torah, as they are about to begin wearing their tallitot and in anticipation of becoming bnei mitzvah.

Around Shavuot, our sixth graders have a special tallit ceremony where the children show their tallitot to their parents and put them on for the first time for Shacharit. It's an exciting moment for our students to be able to pray for the first time with their tallitot. Following the service, parents and students separate into groups for a study session. Students teach their findings from the text and ask questions to stimulate discussion.

Thanks to the strong interdisciplinary work between the arts and Judaics departments, the sixth grade Tallit Project remains one of the highlights of the year for our students, combining Jewish study with hands-on artwork and performance.

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HILLEL  
BRODER

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AARON  
ROLLER

# THE YESHIVA POETRY SOCIETY

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## A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL FOR JEWISH SLAM POETRY

In 2013, a YouTube video of a young man in a yarmulke performing slam poetry went viral, clocking close to 400,000 views within a month. It opens, “There’s someone I know who’s slow to commend and quick to condescend.” Ethan Metzger’s counterintuitive poem is a whirl of internal rhymes and pronounced rhythms addressing institutional brainwashing, positive parenting, Jewish identity, and emotional maturity—a grand synthesis of typical slam poetry tropes.

The video was recorded as Metzger competed in the Bronx Youth Poetry Slam, a qualifying competition for a citywide slam competition. But he initially crafted and refined his poem for a modest but popular extracurricular activity: a yeshiva poetry slam, organized under the umbrella of the Yeshiva Poetry Society (YPS) and hosted by SAR High School that spring.

YPS is a program that hosts regular poetry slams on Jewish themes in a variety of poetic forms across a wide swath of secondary day schools in the greater New York metropolitan area. Created to fill a gap in the Modern Orthodox educational environment by providing an extracurricular activity for creatively inclined students, YPS was launched during the 2010-11 school year. The first slam was attended by twenty students from four schools, and the program has grown in size and popularity. There are now an average of five competitive poetry slams a year with close to eighty poets from ten area day schools at each competition. YPS's success has enabled the creation, performance and even publication of thousands of Jewish poems.

With such a cultural boom, YPS has also come to realize its usefulness for the greater project of Jewish education and the particular projects of Jewish artistic, rhetorical, experiential, spiritual and contemplative education. In what follows, we distill goals for Jewish performance poetry through the broader lens of performance poetry pedagogy.

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## JEWISH SLAM POETRY: CONTEXTS AND GOALS

A critical goal for performance poetry is to create a safe space for personal expression—in this case, within Modern Orthodox high schools. The importance of holding these slams on school grounds, often in the middle of the school day, cannot be overstated. While YPS and the schools hosting slams do not explicitly encourage subversive or provocative topics, students often express a subtle critique of cultural and even religious norms and values. YPS slams have played host to poems about religious doubt, eating disorders, the dissolution of intense friendships, and teenage romantic angst, topics sometimes addressed in Modern Orthodox high schools but often not given center-stage for personal narrative and public sharing.

We argue, however, that the outcome of such a subversion is entirely positive, and for at least two reasons: students' struggles and complex identities are validated through a shared community of art and discourse, and students develop and refine their religious and cultural values through the performance of their inner challenges. We have found that students achieve a key goal of Jewish education: relating personal experiences to Jewish texts and traditions in an articulate form and rhetorical forum.

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## JEWISH POETRY AS JEWISH COMMUNITY

In the past, day school might have seemed like the wrong place to express a fraught and critical personal view, and the lack of an outlet for personal ideas and emotions (challenging or otherwise) may have lead students to feel stifled, isolated and searching for alternative avenues for expression. By giving voice to the full range of ideas and emotions that students are struggling with, a poetry slam creates a space that validates students' experiences that are rarely aired within the formal confines of a high school.

For artistically inclined and linguistically mature adolescents, high

school in general, and Modern Orthodox school even more, can be a lonely place. Therefore, the gathering of students that occurs during the slams provides not simply a forum for competition; it offers them a community of peers. At our slams, to foster such a sense of a shared artistic community, we explicitly frame the "society" of YPS as fundamentally supportive and kind, a practice for transforming the slam space of poets working through life challenges into a "healing space."

Over the course of the year, consistent slams, social lunches, and a robust online presence (Facebook group, webpage, online journal) ensure the continued contact and genuine admiration among poets across the entire spectrum of yeshiva high school education. And perhaps most importantly, the slam poets whom we have interviewed acknowledge the importance of an "affirming poetry community" that allows them to express subtle cultural critique without needing to apologize or justify their complex identity struggles.

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## JEWISH POETRY AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Beyond making room for a shared Jewish poetry community, YPS insists on challenging students to use their Jewish knowledge and religious experiences as inspiration for their work. We believe that it is insufficient for schools to teach Bible and Talmud as one part of a dual curriculum and then teaching Robert Frost and Shakespeare later in the afternoon. Through tackling the interplay between Jewish education and literary strategies, students see the connections and the values of both streams in their own lives. For example, through slams with themes like "Masking," which was held near the holiday of Purim, or "The Stranger," which challenged students to discuss the obligation to love the stranger in light of the US immigration debate, Jewish student poets opened up to the complexity of their Jewish identities as performative, layered, and consisting of multiple and often irreconcilable traditions.

In addition, YPS's pedagogy offers a useful tool for experiential Jewish education. We embrace the history of the form and dialect of the spoken arts as one that follows the vernacular tradition of prayers, sermons and spirituals. At least once a year, we require that students write their work in the form of a prayer (such as a ghazal, piyyut or tehillah) or patterned after a biblical model, thus relating their personal experiences to their traditions through intentional, even spiritual speech.

As both a founder and team coach, I (Hillel) often realize this end by starting my students with a familiar biblical, siddur, or rabbinic text and challenging them to then translate the text in English verse, with an eye for broken lines and fresh, personalized diction. Writing their midrash, their kavvanah, of a classic text in verse often frees students from the constraints of prose and conventions of grammar, allowing for the vocalization of fresh, catchy and memorable cadences and phrases.

Such a writing practice, though in service of eventual performance, acknowledges as well the development of theology and maturation of God perspective in adolescence. Prayer, for example, becomes less of a way to bend God's will to one's own and more of a method to express thoughts, feelings, questions and even confessions with explanations. The deliberately crafted poetic practice of each student—their pleas to God, their personalized Tanakh poems—become the critical and overlooked work of prayer journaling, of writing their own kavvanot, intentions, into the unforgiving ritual of their daily, mandated prayer routine, as well as an expression of the complexity of a biblical character, chapter, or verse.

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## JEWISH POETRY AS PUBLIC SERMON

Jewish performance poetry highlights the expected and exercised but often untaught skill of public speaking within a variety of Jewish settings. Call it the scripted *dvar Torah* or the extemporaneous speech on a *shabbaton*—the essential skill of relating personal experience to a great textual and cultural tradition through a compelling rhetorical performance is a lifelong practice in a variety of Jewish settings.

Here as well, Jewish poetry slams offer the students training in public performance and rhetorical planning. To cite one example: in the first-ever high school sermon slam on the topic of *tzedek*, co-hosted by SAR High School and Jewish Public Media, students' righteous protests constructed in free-wheeling verse transcended the conventional *dvar Torah* or formulaic pulpit sermon. They were, in their best form, prophets preaching, protesting, and even mourning, as "amanuenses of current times ... offering poetic renderings ... of their permanent place in history" (Cynthia Biggs-El, "Spreading the Indigenous Gospel of Rap Music and Spoken Word Poetry").

---

## CONCLUSIONS

Performance poetry pedagogy offers an important intervention in Jewish arts education, and Jewish education, generally speaking. When students are challenged to produce and perform original poems, they discover a distinctly Jewish community of artistic rhetors, articulate personalized critiques and expressions of their tradition, and exercise public performance in a reflective and rhetorical manner.

At the nexus of varying educational traditions and pedagogies, Jewish slam poetry offers new inroads into areas beyond its marginal scope: personalized and articulated experiential and contemplative education around the *siddur* and Bible; institutional, yet holistic integrity of expression and personality, beyond the often bifurcated integration of curriculum; and, perhaps most ambitiously, birthing a new community—and generation—of religious poets.

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## Examples of Poems from Yeshiva Poetry Society

### My Parents Brainwashed Me

By Ethan Metzger

---

There is someone I know who is slow to commend  
But quick to condescend  
Who is reluctant to lend a hand  
but quick to point and laugh at those who need one  
One day I was in school, in class  
Explaining my Judaism  
When this person has the audacity to exclaim,  
"You know you're only Jewish because your parents  
force you to be.  
I mean, it's all fake. You don't pray to God because you  
want to,  
You pray to God because your parents made you think  
you have to.  
You don't keep any of the laws of your own free will,  
Your parents just made you feel guilty if you didn't keep  
them."  
My classmates smirk.  
"Your parents brainwashed you your whole life,  
Made you think you were doing God's work,  
But they were just imposing restriction upon restriction;  
You don't have any real conviction of your own.  
You don't really know anything about anything."  
A silence swept over the class and  
I could sense all my friends look at me  
As to how angry I am.  
I felt like this (unintelligible) went after me  
And more importantly, my parents.

"Excuse me?" I thought, "My parents brainwashed me?"  
I had to think of a response, but  
The more I thought, the more I realized  
That this student actually had a very valid argument.  
I thought to myself,  
"You're absolutely right. My parents did brainwash me.  
From the time I entered this world, my parents brain-  
washed me.  
As early as I can remember, my parents were brain-  
washing me  
To have respect for other people, for their belongings,  
for myself.  
When I was little, they corrupted me into thinking that  
I need to treat everyone else how I would want to be  
treated,  
No matter what.  
My parents programmed me to believe that  
I should stand up for someone if that person were being  
picked on  
And that I shouldn't be a bystander if  
I could stop bullying from taking place.  
My parents brainwashed me?  
Yeah. My father twisted my infant brain in such a horrific  
way  
That he made me value my integrity, and  
To make matters even worse,  
He led by example.

And my mom? She incessantly told me as a child  
Again and again and again to 'do the best you can'  
And that idea has become so ingrained in my mind  
That I don't define success as whether I get an A,  
But whether I gave it my all.  
My parents perverted my way of thinking.  
Caused me to believe I need to be accepting of other  
people and their beliefs.  
They contaminated my childhood with models and  
actions about  
Love and Faith and Character, and  
Yes, Religion, too.  
And I'm sorry for you that your parents  
Really didn't infect your DNA with any of these ideals."  
But, I didn't say any of that.  
Because my parents also polluted my conscience  
Into believing that I shouldn't judge someone until  
I walked a mile in their shoes  
Which makes me think that God must run marathons  
each day.  
Quite frankly, I don't have the stamina for that.  
But here's what I did say,  
"You can call it brainwashing if you want.  
That's fine.  
I call it: Teaching."

To Those Who Chose  
Between Emunah and Apathy  
By Shira Levy

You would not recognize me,  
bent over a Talmud like it has a secret I am entitled to.  
I'm afraid of what you would say if I told you  
you were cheated out of something you deserved.  
But your father and those men were trying to preserve  
a religion that hadn't made room for our position.  
A letter to a generation of girls who would not recognize  
this one, I will call you Sara.  
Dear Sara,  
I don't know if I am more afraid of you searching and not  
finding any trace of femininity,  
or finding your own reflection in me.  
Our disparity both saddens me and comforts me,  
and I feel like I owe you some sort of apology.  
My dear Sara,  
You are a mother to me in all the ways that don't matter.  
I do not look like you, or act like you,  
I will not fill the roles you are accustomed to.  
Sara, I still think of you.  
Every time I open an untouched Gemara  
I see the prints your longing eyes left all over its virgin  
spine.  
How sad it is to see a book stand taller than the girl who  
cannot reach it.  
How sad it is to see a lover who cannot be courted by  
the one who loves it  
Sara,  
I want you to be proud of who I am allowed to be.  
I did not fight for this right,  
it was handed to me.  
But these beit midrash walls are calling to me.  
In so many ways I am making up for your lost time.  
So Sara,  
If you are still looking,  
you will find me with a spine stiffer than my book.  
Pouring all this femininity into a chakira tree.  
My makom in this beit midrash is the only nafka mina  
between you and me.  
And Sara,  
I'm sorry.  
Because these days leaders like Rabbi Brovender will say  
that "in our modern orthodox community, the alterna-  
tive to advanced Talmud Torah is  
not Emunah, but apathy."  
And you were denied the right to intellectual honesty.  
Sara hear this apology:  
I am working towards everything they didn't let you be.

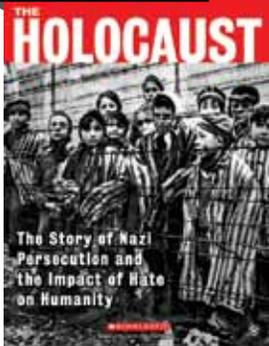
Biur  
By Moses Bibi

I wrote confessions on pieces of pita  
I collected the pride  
The guilt  
The insecurity  
Poured a little lighter fluid for good measure  
Struck a match on my fingertips  
The bread burned  
Sparks skipped again and again  
And I felt  
Every one of them  
I may not have been a slave in Egypt  
But I felt just as repressed  
Every time I looked in a mirror  
I saw something that my mom didn't raise me to be  
I saw someone who threw away more

More than his aspirations  
More than his friends  
More than his family  
I saw someone who threw away god  
I saw that boy who lost himself the first time he forgot  
to put on tefillin  
Acquainted the kid who cared more about his gemora  
grades than what college he was gonna get into  
Barely recognizing how absent I'd already let myself  
become  
I developed habits  
So I burned them  
Not for the first time  
But god willing for the last



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OFRA  
BACKENROTH



Ismail Shammout,  
*Where to*, 1953

# EXPLORING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES THROUGH VISUAL CULTURE

“Art is the most effective mode of communications that exists.” John Dewey

Due to their expressive nature and the possibility of multiple interpretations, works of art allow for conversation from a variety of points of view, experiences and different ways of learning. Contemporary artists often address social, religious, political and cultural issues, providing a framework for exploring challenging and difficult subjects.

At the Davidson School of JTS, we offer a class dedicated to the integration of the arts into Jewish education, titled “The Arts and Culture as a Window to Israeli Society.” Participants explore different forms of art and their significance in teaching various social topics that are crucial for understanding Israeli society. The course strives to educate future teachers on the importance of the arts in education and examines ways to help their students make deeper connections through studying art. The leading question is, How can works of arts be placed in the center of the curriculum to become a conduit for issue-based education about Israel and its social and political issues?

In issues-based education, participants strive for an understanding of multiple meanings within an artwork. Building an art-centered curriculum focused on current social issues in Israeli society expands pre-service teachers’ expectations of the functions of art in the classroom and allows them to create safe space for conversations about difficult topics and issues. In discussing challenging contemporary artworks that attract their interest, students learn to rethink their assumptions about art and consequently about the issues presented in the work.

Often, sections of artworks are presented in a way that allows students to form hypotheses about their meaning before seeing the whole. This gives students a chance to focus on describing what they see instead of jumping to conclusions too fast. At other times, two visuals are presented to allow students to compare and contrast the works of art, prompting conversations about a given issue. In some instances, students are exposed to a few works of art; they have to choose those that best fit the topic and explain their selection.

Indeed, one of the main goals of the course is to teach students how to look at a work of art, to dissect it into details, describe it and only then explore its meaning and its relevance to the topic. Researchers teach us that learning with and through the arts encourages imaginative, metaphoric, and creative thinking as well as cultural awareness. The visuals chosen for the course are all responses to social and political issues, and consequently they challenge the students to interact with both the art and the message in order to create multidisciplinary units of learning.

Not all artworks are suitable for this purpose. The works presented during the course are carefully chosen as aids for provoking difficult conversations about political issues. The visuals selected are relevant to universal issues and were not all created specifically in the Israeli context. They are not necessarily known works of art by famous artists; however, they are all recently produced, tightly connected to the topic, and explicit but not simplistic in their treatment. Additionally, the works of art allow for multiple responses and ambiguities and contain enough details to encourage conversation and emotional empathy.

For example, in a lesson dedicated to uprooting and resettlement, students look at a slide presentation of six visuals that deal with the topic of emigration and immigration. The issue of refugees is of course extremely pressing worldwide as well as in Israel. Students are asked to choose two images that most resonate with their own experience or thinking about the topic and, in a follow-up session, they look for appropriate texts that connect with the visuals.

One student chose to focus on the first image. “The painting of the books and suitcases are dark, uninviting. The books are empty, which is unusual. Maybe to show us there is nothing to remember or maybe that the traveler will fill the books in the future. The pile of suitcases and books give the feeling they were just dropped off a few minutes ago, they are still in transit, or about to leave. Anyone who has moved knows the one thing you wish you could take with you is your book collection, but that is not possible many times. Maybe that is why the books are on the floor; they are not going with the traveler.”

The second visual the student chose was *Where to?* “It is so literal it is painful. A father who, by the look on his face, seems to have lost everything, is wandering with three young children. It is obvious by the name of the piece that he doesn’t know where to go; he probably lost his home during the war and is now alone, maybe his wife died? The child seems as though he is asking his father a question, one that the father doesn’t want to answer. The other child is sitting on his shoulder looking distressed, as if he is crying or in pain. The third boy is walking behind them, looking down in anguish. The whole scene is so dramatic, full of the deepest sadness imaginable. The colors here are brighter, but the dead tree in the background gives a sense this is the desert, with no prospect of life nearby.”

The student proceeded to compare the two paintings. “They are similar in the sense they are both dealing with leaving home. The one with the suitcases implies there was time to pack; the traveler has decided what to take. In the other painting, they are going aimlessly, taking nothing with them. They are lost in the world. In the first painting, we see only still objects; they can only hint at what their owner feels and thinks. The other has four characters that are revealing their emotions very clearly.”

Another student chose to focus on the group of sculptures and highlighted their impact. “The image is so powerful. Who are these faceless, body-less travelers? My gut tells me they are survivors of the Holocaust, marching out of the camps, trying to get to Palestine/Israel. The way the coats have been frozen in time evokes a sense of perpetual movement. Notice the coat on the far right. It is as if you can see the would-be person bending his knee as he lifts his leg to take another step. Yet, we do not know really where they are going to, only that they are on the move. Is that us, the Jewish people, for centuries on the move from place to place?”

One student explained that Raeda Saadeh’s photorealistic combination of a person and an imaginative object is the most striking and memorable visual. “The single woman with the concrete block trapping her leg, appeared to be amputated, pulled me to wonder about the conditions of the piece’s subject. It shook me. The photo plays upon the conventions of ‘modeling’ gesture but by distorting them ever so slightly makes the image something deeply abject and unsettling. In many ways, this piece recalled to me some of the work of Cindy Sherman, who also experiments with the themes of gender and subject-hood. The unrelenting bleakness of the subject’s expression, coupled with the dramatic lighting and curiously open door (which begs the viewer to wonder what beckons beyond) continues to linger in my mind, enshrouded in dark mystery.”

In the following session the students read their chosen texts connected with the topic of the visuals. The first text that they chose were the opening verses from the Bible portion *Lekh lekha* (Genesis 12:1-2) in which Abraham was commanded to leave his home. The journey of Abraham, the father of both the Jewish and Muslim worlds, was selected at the suggestion of one student as a prototype to invoke dialogue about what uprooting means to different societies. What would it have felt like for Abraham to be uprooted from his home and go to a place unknown? How is the experience of Jewish and Palestinians similar or different? What new understandings of each other might we come to in sharing stories in this way?

The visuals in this session served as a powerful entry point and as emotional starting points for the students not only to observe and interpret art but also to move from the visual to the texts and to discussion about current social and political issues. The study of the social and political contexts of art production is important in understanding the arts in relation to history and culture. Through this experience the students learn not only how to describe and analyze art but also that art has embedded meaning, that artists take a stand about real-life events, and that art expresses a point of view. With the facilitation of an instructor, the students have the ability to explore the artist’s point of view, deepen their knowledge about the topic, and formulate their own point of view about difficult issues.



Ofra Zimbalista, *Three Coats and a Travel Trunk*, 2000



Raeda Saadeh, *Self-Portrait*, 2003



Meir Pichhadze, *Books and Luggage*

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DAVID  
MOSS

# INTEGRATING THE ARTS AND JEWISH LEARNING



Can the visual arts redefine and ignite a new approach to learning Jewish texts, ideas and history?

That's the goal of the newly established Teacher Institute for the Arts (TIA), which opened in 2015 in the United States. The TIA was created and is generously funded and overseen by a national Jewish foundation, one dedicated to raising the quality of Jewish education in schools. The foundation has retained my services as well as my staff at Kol HaOt ([www.kolhaot.com](http://www.kolhaot.com))—a Jerusalem-based organization, whose mission is to integrate Jewish texts and values with the arts—to direct the Institute. Our TIA team believes our approach is an extremely powerful way to cultivate creativity, and to enhance and deepen Jewish learning.

Eight US schools have been participating in the TIA initiative and already have begun intensively integrating the arts into their respective schools'

Jewish curricula. These programs are always built around creative, project-based learning, but with a difference. They never come with a preconceived project in mind. Neither I, nor the institution, nor the kids have any idea what project they are going to undertake. It's essential to this process that the kids are brought through the entire process of making real art, from identifying a challenge, a problem, a text, or an issue that *matters to them*, to presentation of a final work of art.

Participants are guided through the entire creative process that any artist typically undergoes and are thus highly empowered: identifying the problem/need; creative problem-solving to come up with a fresh, unique idea; the design process; gathering materials, implementation and presentation of the final project. The goal is to draw on the process of artistic creation to educate and inspire authentic Jewish values through traditional Jewish texts.

Since originally all art was ritual art, it's important to include ritual in the process. This may be an initiation ritual, a prayer, a meditation, a dedication, or a consecration. This is an important factor in moving these artistic experiences beyond "projects" to more engaging, meaningful and elevating experiences.

---

## CONTENT

Themes have varied from texts such as Lecha Dodi, the Amidah or the Book of Jonah, to values like tzedakah or preventing leshon hara, to enhancing meaningful prayer and fostering chesed. The commonality is that every artistic/educational/Jewish project has a clearly defined goal that drives the entire creative process.

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## SELECTING A PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE

The work always begins with a free discussion of the challenges that students see in their lives. Some students focus on a general theme, such as, How can davening be less boring and more meaningful? Others, on a physical need: How can a room be transformed from a gym to a synagogue and back daily? Another approach is to concentrate on a text: How to make the Amidah prayer something we can relate to personally? Or a value: How can help ourselves act with more kindness toward each other?

---

## TEXT STUDY

Each project has a serious text-study component. Participants confront, engage and mine appropriate texts for better comprehension, as well as for images and ideas. The texts are carefully chosen to become the focus for the entire project, and each project can be understood to be an artistic reworking in very different form of a classical Jewish text.

---

## CREATIVE PROCESS

Once the challenge has been clearly defined, we use a special technique of group problem-solving to spur creative, out-of-the-box thinking. My assumption is that all people are creative and that creativity can be sparked, fostered and released. I have honed an efficient, powerful creative problem-solving methodology, known as “synectics,” and effectively utilize it in Jewish educational settings. A typical synectics session takes about an hour and begins with careful problem definition, moves through problem expansion and contraction into a fantasy stage where the problem is deliberately abandoned only to create a rich, evocative pool of metaphorical ideas and images, which are then used to solve the problem in an efficient, practical and always surprising way. Participants bond through this process and realize that their own creative efforts have brought something beautiful and meaningful into existence out of nothing.

---

## DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND PRESENTATION

Once the group is satisfied that they have a brilliant, surprising and unique idea, they move on to physical design. They figure out what materials, tools,

equipment they need, then set out a work plan. They work as teams, pairs, and/or individuals to do the hands-on construction of the project, learning important real-life skills of cooperation, encouragement and mutual support.

Finally, the completed work is presented in a thoughtfully worked out celebratory group demonstration to the entire institution.

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## EXAMPLE: A PRAYER SPACE IN THE DANCE PAVILION AT A RAMAH CAMP

The problem presented was how to create a meaningful, personal and intimate prayer space in a large, vacuous dance hall. The texts chosen were the seven daily psalms. The whole eidah (age group) began by studying these psalms with their text teachers. The night before the activity day, long bolts of muslin were ceremonially placed in dying vats with original kavvanot (prayers), so that this was the opening, preparatory act being done *leshem kedushat mekom hatefillah* (for the sake of the holiness of the place of prayer).

The next day, groups were divided into seven. Each group then studied one of the daily psalms and discussed how to express its essence visually. Six groups created tall, narrow panels (8'x30") using felt collage on the dyed muslin. A phrase from each psalm was done in uniform lettering in the same position at the bottom of each panel.

The seventh group repainted the holy ark, based on the psalm for Shabbat. Three panels were hung on each side of the ark along the eastern wall, so that the days read from right to left. Plain muslin panels hung over each collage as a cover. These panels were each attached to pulleys and cords running across the entire ceiling and down the opposite wall.





The benches were all repainted in colors echoing the panels. The notion of a *makom kavua*, a fixed, intimate, personal prayer spot, was explained, and each camper imprinted his/her handprints on a spot on one bench. During normal use of the room as a dance room, all the panels remain covered and the ark is turned toward the wall.

Before services begin each morning, the ark is faced forward, and the cover for the psalm of that day of the week is raised. On Shabbat, all six covers are raised, exposing the entire work of art at once. The covers drape across the ceiling and create a beautiful space by becoming a six-fold canopy for the Sabbath services.

This method of Judaic project-based learning that I've developed and honed over decades serves two main educational goals. By synthesizing Judaic learning and art it opens students up to new ways of understanding, integrating and internalizing Jewish texts, ideas and values. By taking students through the *entire* art-making process, this methodology seamlessly integrates skills such as analysis, close textual reading, metaphorical thinking, planning, design, spatial visualization, project management, practical interaction with the physical world, and manual dexterity and communication, in order to palpably model and embody how real creativity works in any human endeavor.

As my experience has proven, project-based learning that harnesses the magic of the arts is an effective way for formal and informal Jewish institutions to meet the manifold educational challenges of the 21st century.



## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON The Shoah and Jewish Identity – Challenges in Jewish Education



**December 26–29, 2016 • 26–29 Kislev 5777 • Yad Vashem, Jerusalem**

The International School for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem will hold a global conference on **teaching the Shoah to the younger generation in formal/informal Jewish education.**

The conference will address the challenges of teaching the Shoah to different age groups, the impact of the Shoah on Jewish identity, antisemitism and more – in order to **create a vision that will ensure the legacy of the Shoah for future generations.**

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For further info: [www.yadvashem.org/conference2016.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/conference2016.asp)

## Reshet RAVSAK: What We've Learned

### Debra Shaffer Seeman, Network Weaver

In the final Reshet Roundup, it's time to share some of the secrets of network weaving at RAVSAK and a number of powerful lessons that we've learned over the years.

Putting the techniques of network weaving into action in your own school can have a significant impact as well.

Network weaving is an approach to building community. It is, at its core, a deep investment in relationships. At RAVSAK, the work entails fostering strategic introductions, sustaining professional development, empowering member-directed collaboration, enabling members to share resources, tracking trends and participation, and adjusting course when needed to fulfill the goals of the field and RAVSAK. In layman's terms, we connect people to one another and support them in deepening their own work by empowering them to share and collaborate with colleagues from around the world. This work has the potential to strengthen, support and improve the learning of all members of the day school community.

RAVSAK's goals for network weaving included serving as a clearinghouse for its member schools and creating a space for peers to exchange innovative ideas. In addition, we sought to encourage multischool collaborations, reduce duplication of efforts, encourage discussion of current publications, identify challenges and trends in the field, and function as a resource for professional development. RAVSAK met and exceeded each of those goals, with 100% of member schools joining the Reshet groups.

Network weaving is a full-time job, requiring the cultivation of partnerships with all members of your organization. Here are some tricks of the trade that can help your organization build communities filled with deep connections.

### Start Out As The Connector

Familiarize yourself with your community and its subgroups. Ask each person whether they have experiences they'd be willing to share and where they're looking for support. Now share that information with the group and invite them to connect with one another, providing the initial structures through which they can start to build those relationships. Give them access to one another and follow up with those folks to learn what connections have been made. Is there more that you can do to foster those connections? Did you notice that there are many folks in the group who are looking for support in a particular area and individuals who have experiences they'd be willing to share? If so, invite them to arrange times when they can get together. If you have the support structure, offer to handle the logistics. Encourage the group to share their learning back out with the larger network. Find ways to archive that information for future access. Once the members of your network personally experience the power of these self-directed working groups, they'll start to create them for their own purposes.

### Introductions Are Crucial

Introduce people to one another generously and then follow up. Since we are all more likely to connect with someone new if a third person we trust invites us both for a cup of coffee, use that and other personal approaches when making introductions. The initial investment of time is steep, but I promise that it's worth it. What if you're located far away from one another? Join each other by video and enjoy your cup of coffee together! When you're the person making the introductions, be sure to explain where you imagine the overlap lies, making room for your coffee drinking colleagues to explore that and many other possibilities. Ask your colleagues to circle back to you a week or two after the introduction. That check-in will give you a sense of whether to connect them to additional colleagues. It's also a wonderful time to empower them to take the ball into their court and invite their own connections into the conversation.

### Show Them You Noticed

Show people that you're paying attention and appreciate them. The pace of work at schools is notorious for moving faster than the speed of light; it's our job to model the human touch. If someone signs up for a program and doesn't attend, reach out to see that everything's alright. When they share something for the first time, give them encouragement. If they tell you about a project they're working on, let them know when you learn about someone doing similar work. This is what relationships are built upon. You'll get responses like, "Thank you for checking in. I truly appreciate your extra effort and can't wait to listen to the recording and talk to my colleagues about it!"

### Small Groups, Huge Potential

Healthy relationships are the cornerstone of productive networks. One of the most effective ways to foster them is to give people opportunities to do meaningful work together. We have found that ongoing groups with seven to ten participants have been the most successful in building relationships, providing collegial support, and creating opportunities for collaborative work. These smaller groups make room for participants to share their experiences and expertise, while preventing them from fading into the background. This size allows participants to distribute the workload evenly without overburdening any one individual. Allowing people to opt in is a great way to ensure commitment. The more focused the goal of the group, the more likely school-based participants are to take ownership. These groups have been among the most fun and successful network weaving adventures.

### Identify And Empower Others To Lead

Decentralized leadership has gained more prominence in recent years alongside the rise of student-centered education. Network weaving is a proven strategy to implement decentralized leadership, one that empowers people at every level to organize and work with their colleagues. Decentralized does not mean chaotic. It requires even more coordination between an organization's stakeholders. The network weaver can help to identify the right people to take initiative and support their efforts to rally interest. Central to the role of network weavers is the understanding that people do not work in isolation. They create structures that enable others to connect, lead, learn from one another and share that learning back with the group.

### Provide Multiple Formats For Sharing

Ensuring that multiple modalities for learning exist and then sharing the lessons learned are an important aspect of the network weaver's work. At RAVSAK, there have been close to one hundred learning opportunities for lay and professional leaders over the past few years. We've helped network members to organize in-person regional and national gatherings, international book clubs, peer learning groups, synchronous and asynchronous working groups, listserv conversations, webinars and Jewish text study. In order to capture the learning and invite other network members into the conversation, we have provided online password protected archives for thousands of leaders at the 137 member schools. These include thousands of listserv conversations, school leadership material, and downloadable webinars. Each of these resources has functionality for network members to comment and continue the conversation asynchronously. Additionally, a RAVSAK member directory enables decentralized communication and connections.

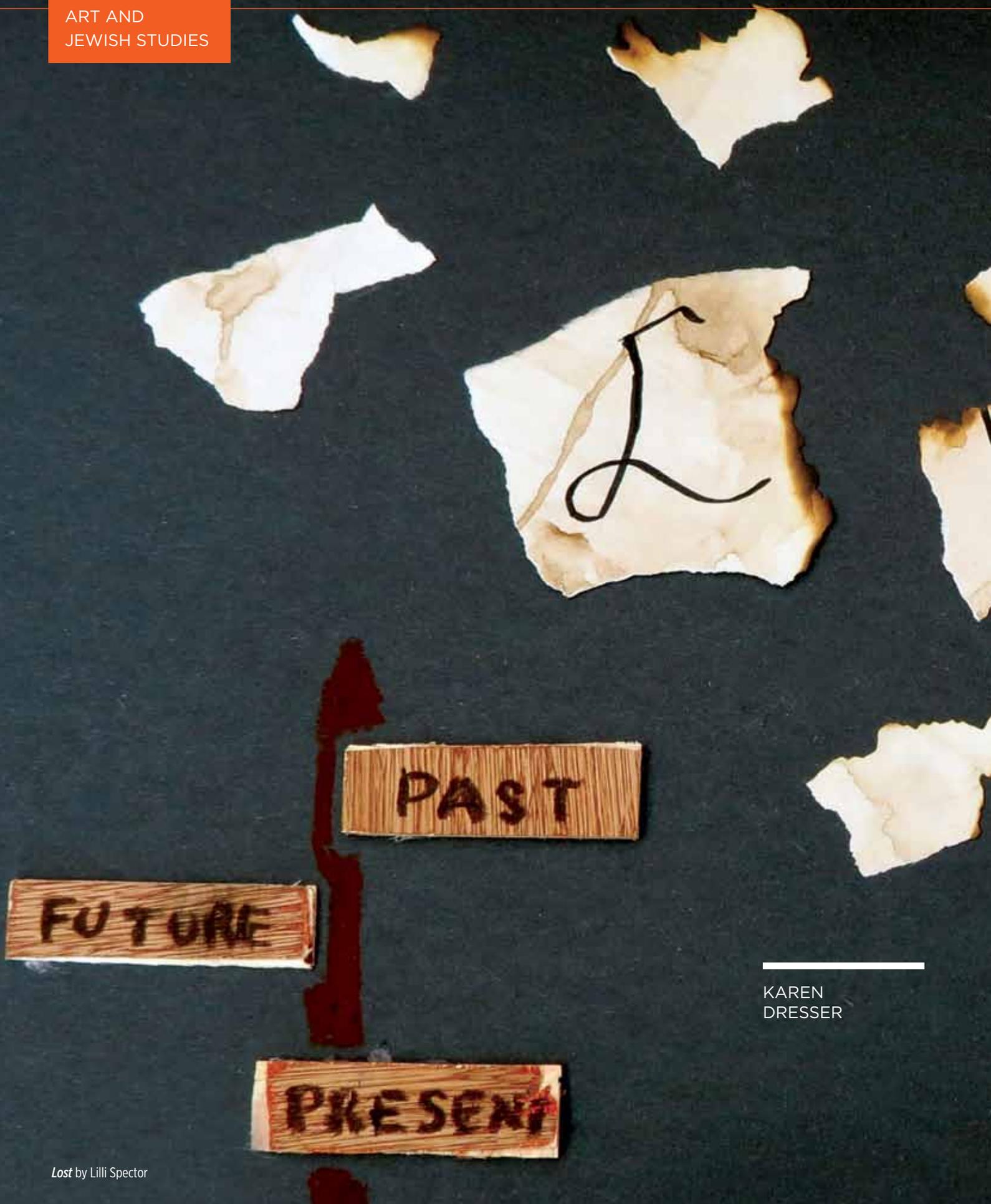
### Time + Support = Growth

A critical lesson in network weaving is that networks, just like organizations, grow, develop and have changing needs over time. The support that they require in their earliest stages is quite different than the support required once they have entered more mature stages of development. Through trial and error, mistakes and modifications, and a steep learning curve, RAVSAK continues to escort its networks through this growth process. It's critical to remember that a network consists of individuals who come together for specific reasons and goals. Just as some networks generate offshoots, others naturally close as their goals have been fulfilled. It's important to focus on the attainment of goals, rather than the existence of the networks themselves, as markers of success.

### Build Bridges

In addition to the range of activities and learning going on within a network, the network weaver can help to open doors to vital opportunities beyond the group's initial reach. Building these bridges to individuals and organizations outside the network's boundaries provides tremendous potential for future endeavors. This kind of cross-pollination has the potential to break down institutional silos and introduce members to new and creative ways to approach their own work.

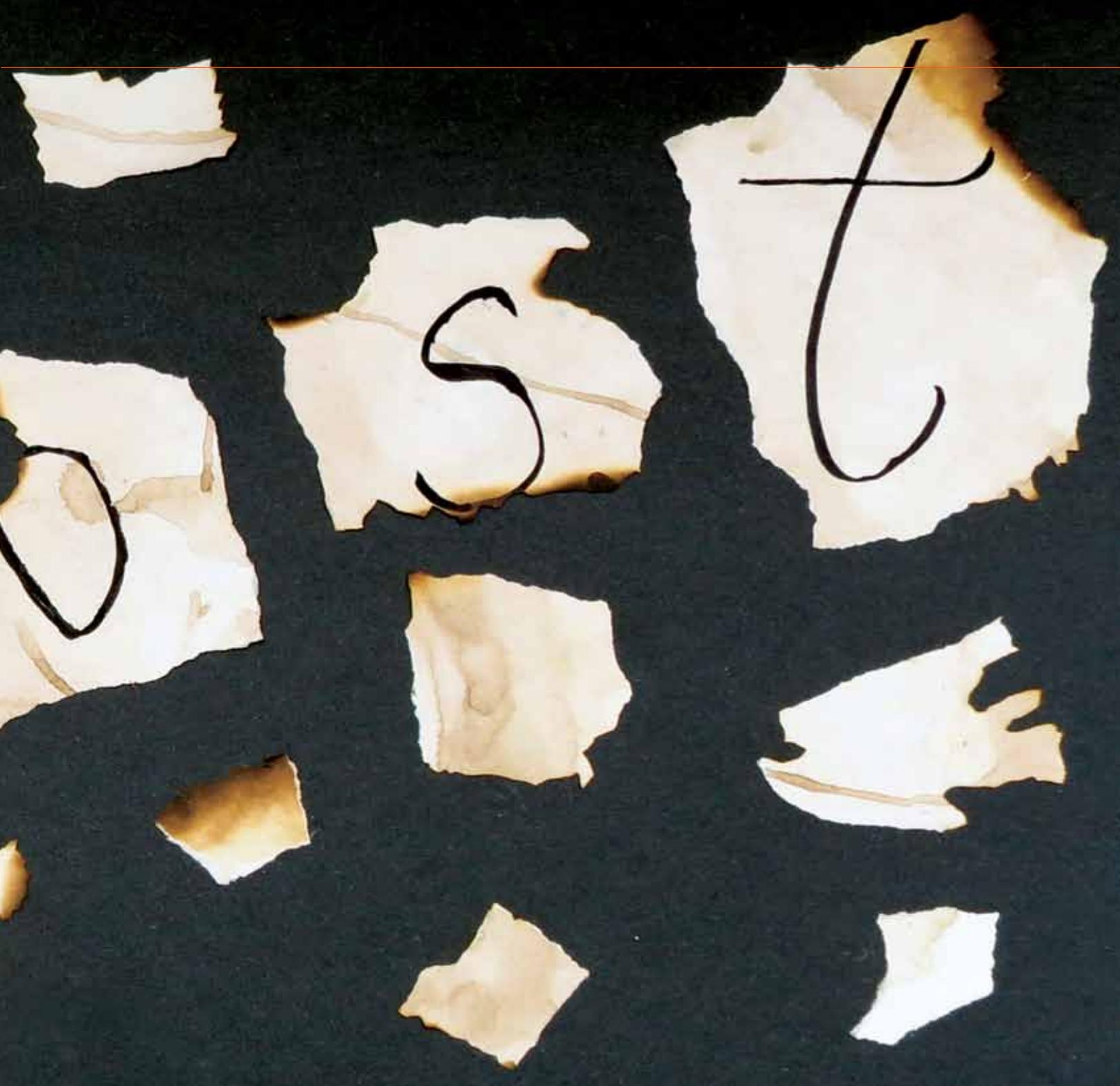
It has been my honor to work with colleagues at RAVSAK and in the field for the past few years. As RAVSAK transitions to join four other day school organizations, the networking portfolio will absolutely remain and grow. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with you as we partner with even more schools from the Jewish day school world.



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KAREN  
DRESSER

*Lost* by Lilli Spector



# SPIRITUAL HEALING OF MEMORIES THROUGH ART

HOLOCAUST IMAGERY AND THEOLOGY



*I Just Don't Love You Anymore* by Ruth Stern

Memory is fickle. Some painful moments in our lives—a childhood transition from one school to another, teenage love relationships—become dimmer as the years pass. But memories such as physical abuse or the death of a parent can reappear continually in the mind. Holocaust historian Saul Friedlander notes that when memories surface, we may be able to reconcile events, bring closure or establish some sense of healing, as did some Holocaust survivors. Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane suggests that when any kind of rupture occurs, causing difficult memories, one's sense of well-being seems to be torn apart. But, he contends, sensory stimulation through the arts is one path toward spiritual healing and wholeness of memories.

Our students sometimes suffer traumas and setbacks that cause disintegrations in their lives: personal or familial events, or even reactions to global atrocities. We can guide students in a Jewish way by designing lessons that allow them to address memories and brokenness. We can offer spiritual comfort when questions of “where is/was God?” are raised.

Students in my Holocaust Imagery class make personal inquiries about post-Holocaust theology's notions of God in conversations with their painful life events after reading sections from Cohn-Sherbock's *Holocaust Theology: A Reader*. They share personal beliefs about God, and engage each other's opinions following each reading. After group discussion, students write two-page personal opinion responses to post-Holocaust theological

questions such as “Can we still believe in a God who acts in our world?” or “Can a religious ceremony without reference to God still be considered spiritual?” Response papers allow for openings through which students' own inconsistencies, angsts and interactions with familial, societal, cultural and philosophical strata can be examined and questioned.

Further interrogation occurs when the arts are used as a creative response not only to texts, but to students' life experiences. Creative activities bring out layers of memories: upsets in daily life, family stories, physical injuries, acts of bullying or loneliness. The grief that students keep hidden under the masks they present to teachers and even friends often surfaces and manifest in student poetry or art. This can be a moment of intense pain and catharsis, and in the moment of uncovering, teacher and student arrive at a pivotal point in the educational process where students can be encouraged to heed sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's command to “[face] the other as a face, not a mask, and [face] one's own bare face in the process.”

Rambam Health Care (Haifa) professionals Rachel Ettun, Michael Schultz and Gil Bar-Sela use the arts in the process of spiritual healing. Their study was conducted with arts-based spiritual care (chaplaincy) in hospitals; their “model of arts-based spiritual care bridges the experience of the caesura to a renewed sense of meaning, or spiritual reorientation, that can be discovered within the reality of illness. Additionally, the ambiguity and playfulness inherent to creative expression strengthen the patient's flexibility and resilience.” The study shows that persons experiencing spiritual pain through illness can be guided to interpret traditional Jewish texts against the events of their own lives, followed by art-making, resulting in a freely chosen step towards healing *and* becoming part of the Jewish tradition. This methodology is equally at home in our text-based classrooms.

One text/creative writing strategy I created is the study of Psalm 88, which presents words of intense human grief, and is the only biblical psalm that offers no hope at the end. Students read this moving psalm along with post-Holocaust theological writings, survivor testimonies, artists' eyewitness accounts of life in the camps, and 21st century artists' interpretations of the Nazi years. They further examine what it means to be a Jew after the Shoah. Through student poetry and art-making, personal meaning is made of philosophical questions brought to light by material studied. Many students engage their own life stories as they create ways in which they can write or paint in hopes of healing their own wounds.

## The Color Blue (excerpt)

Gilly Blais

When I was a little girl, I loved the color blue.  
 ... in your skies ... in my little sister's eyes;  
 in my favorite summer dress ...  
 when I got a little older ...  
 I found blue in my bruises – the ones he gave to me.  
 You let me drown in my blues ...  
 turned your back on my bruises,  
 then turned your back on my blues ...  
 I was lost, and when I asked for direction,  
 the sound of your silence rang loudly in my ears ...  
 I took a left.  
 Then another ... and another,  
 until I ended up right back where I started,  
 drowning in my blues ...  
 Where were you all those times he whispered,  
 “The blues ain't nothing but a color, baby.”  
 Now, I hate the color blue.

## A New Psalm 88 (excerpt)

Elizabeth Evdokimov

When I was two years old I truly believed in You  
But where were You when I needed You?  
Why did You let him go when I begged You not to?

...  
I loved him with all my heart,  
So did my mother

...  
I have only a few memories, and photos of perfect family

...  
I still have hope that he is somewhere out there,  
That it was not his body...

Screaming: After Psalm 88 (excerpt)

Elizabeth Ballin

So I will scream, cry out when the sun goes down  
Send my prayers to You with a thousand dollar stamp I can't afford  
I will run on a treadmill to your ear and whisper cries every step of the way

...  
You broke me down God, You afflicted me  
I called to you each day, You just didn't meet me halfway.

...  
Here I am God, Your daughter  
I'm asking why You rejected me, afflicted me...

## Helpless (excerpt of a performance piece based on Psalm 88)

Tali Freidman

Man: Hello? (Walks towards the shadowy figure whose face is hidden in the corner of the room)

(Shadowy Figure puts face down)

Man: Answer me! I know you are here. I can feel your presence...

(Shadowy Figure turns around soundlessly)

Man: I am miserable [wipes tears from eyes, sniffing]. I keep coming to you. I keep praising you. I keep putting all my faith in you, but it's like you aren't even here!

(Shadowy Figure leaves room)

Man: Why does everyone believe in you and all of your "capabilities," when all you're capable of is making innocents suffer? ... Come here and listen to me. All I want is your understanding. I want your compassion—I beg of you to hear me ... fix me... for I am broken.

(Shadowy Figure peeks head in room with cloak covering face)

Man: Please, come here!...Take responsibility for what you have done to me—to everyone ... Why won't you show your face to me?...You are destroying everything I stand for and you are isolating me from others and myself.

(Shadowy Figure turns off the lights in the room as Man sits alone, helpless and crying)

Another strategy I developed that works hand-in-hand with excerpts from Holocaust theologies is based on artist Ruth Liberman, a child of survivors. She painted German words she hated on large boxes, shot them at a firing range, and found healing in the act of destroying the words. As I introduce Liberman's work to students, I ask them to consider a difficult or traumatic event in their lives, to identify words causing or contributing to their sadness, then to create their own Hated Words art. They describe their

experience in an artist statement, relating how artmaking and destruction of hated words helped them towards spiritual healing. Finally, they intersect the experience and artwork to a post-Holocaust theologian previously studied. In the artist statement below (excerpts), Mei Lin Kallman relates her artistic rendition of "dramatic" to painful experiences at her former school:

I hate drama and try to stay away from it. In my previous school, gossip was a big deal. Because I was so caught up in the idea of fitting in, I didn't realize that I was basing popularity on rumors. Before I knew it, I became the subject of the rumors. I had to have closure with this word. Destroying ["dramatic"] gave me a sense of comfort and serenity, and through this art, I realize that it's all in the past and the events can't hurt me anymore.

I paint[ed] her tears over the word. It shows that after you cry it out, the word becomes obsolete and washed away and the events don't really matter anymore. I can relate to [survivor] Alexander Donat's piece "The Holocaust and Human Perplexity" about not fighting hard enough and not standing up for [one]self. He questions the reality, "How had it all come to pass?" and I could ask myself the same thing. Why didn't I stand up for myself? Why didn't I fight back? Donat goes on to say, "We were bitter to the point of self-flagellation, profoundly ashamed of ourselves, and of the misfortunes we had endured. And all those feelings intensified our sense of being abandoned alike by God and man." I had become ashamed of myself because I started to believe the rumors. I believed that I was nothing and started to hate myself because of petty, untrue gossip. After destroying this word, I have come to terms with who I am. I will handle similar situations better, as this word made me stronger. Never again!

Art inquiry that questions theologies of God, self, lived experiences and the world can lead students to consider educational philosopher Maxine Greene's examination of mind "as a mode of taking action, of attending [through which] an encounter with a work of art can open windows ... outwards to alternative visions of the world ... to break with the sense that reality is petrified." This allows student creativity in the Holocaust Imagery class to move beyond a static place of anger, fear or sadness to a place of fluidity where questions may uncover painful memories, and where theological artmaking has the possibility to bring healing that includes students' interior hopes for reintegration into spiritual wholeness.

When students integrate their own remembered stories with understandings of God, theological inquiry, and survivor testimonies, they are able to respond in theologically creative ways, despite occasionally declaring agnostic tendencies. The classroom becomes a sacred space for them to dispel fears and create new understandings of themselves in relation to God and the world. They feel safe enough to step out of their own conventions and conformities and create daring and boundary-crossing art and writing through a theological and artistic encounter with God in which their painful memories can find transformation and healing.

## To Learn More

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Life in Fragments: Essays in Post-Modern Morality*.

Cohn-Sherbock, Dan, Ed. *Holocaust Theology: A Reader*.

Ettun, Rachel, Schultz, Michael and Bar-Sela, Gil. "Transforming Pain into Beauty: On Art, Healing, and Care for the Spirit."

Fishbane, Michael. "Ethics and Sacred Attunement."

Freidlander, Saul. "Trauma, Transference, and 'Working Through' in Writing the History of the Shoah."

Greene, Maxine. "The Art of Being Present: Educating for Aesthetic Encounters."

Liberman, Ruth. "Matters of Interpretation: One Artist's Commentary." In *Absence/Presence: Critical Essays on the Artistic Memory of the Holocaust*.

ILANA  
BENSONGABRIEL  
GOLDSTEIN

# STARTING WITH ART

## AN APPROACH TO REVITALIZE JEWISH STUDY

Someone has covered a wooden gallery floor at the Yeshiva University Museum (YUM) with plastic sheeting and a long roll of canvas. A group of Jewish day school teachers, dressed in aprons and shoe covers, fidget on the side before grabbing brushes and paint cans. They are instructed to do whatever they feel with the paint and the canvas—pour, splatter, drizzle—to create a final product that reflects their movements. The allusion to Jackson Pollock is not subtle, nor is it intended to be. The teachers will, in fact, take a trip to New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art to view Pollock’s *Autumn Rhythm*. What is less predictable, however, is the connection between painting and the teachers’ next activity—text study of 2 Samuel chapter 6: David’s dancing with the Ark and Michal’s rebuke.



For the past four years, YUM has incubated a new initiative, entitled “Re-Imagining Jewish Education through Art,” to deepen and enhance the learning of traditional Hebrew texts. The objective is to create sustainable teams of teachers committed to fostering students’ imaginative capacities to appreciate the aesthetic value of these texts. The program is modelled on the work of Lincoln Center Education (LCE).

A group of ninth grade students from SAR High School in the Bronx begins by creating original two- and three-dimensional artwork from small wooden shapes. They share their work in a classroom gallery and reflect on their own creations and the creations of their peers. After engaging in the creative process, coupled with experiencing the freedom to express original insights about their own art in a student gallery, the students then respond to a painting by Tobi Kahn and to a sculpture by David Palumbo. The workshop culminates in a “Text as Art” session that approached the Ashrei prayer as artwork. Students select five English words from a pile on a classroom table and incorporate them into a poem about coming home. After sharing their original poems, the students learn that all the words had been translated from the original Ashrei prayer. The final lesson of the day is a consideration of the Jewish prayer as an art form, much like the museum paintings and sculptures.

LCE utilizes ten “capacities for imaginative thinking,” which include noticing deeply, embodying, posing questions, and living with ambiguity. Re-Imagining uses these same capacities to enrich learning of traditional Jewish texts, encouraging appreciation of their beauty and aesthetic character. At the same time, it encourages the use of textual approaches—careful reading and analysis, reverence and spiritual value, historical context and awareness—to develop and deepen an appreciation of art.

The approach “begins with each individual’s innate ability to respond to works of art—processes that can heighten perception, ignite out-of-the-box thinking, and challenge preconceived notions” (LCE). This methodology is based on the writings of the educational philosopher Maxine Greene, who stated, “People who know the joy and strain of working with a medium are in a position to respond to the work of a professional artist in that medium.” For this reason, participants in the teachers’ activity enacted Pollock’s method before entering a museum to engage with his completed work of art.

The second, and arguably more challenging, part of the Re-Imagining process is translating these same experiential lessons to the realm of text study. The teacher must be creative in devising an activity that allows the students to enter into the “medium” of the text topic. In a tenth grade classroom, a Re-Imagining lead educator instructs students to each assume



a pose that one might observe during tefillah in a synagogue. It's easy to imagine the scene—the person who likes to lean against the wall, the one who sways back and forth, the one who rests head on hand. This activity was an introduction to the study of a Talmud text about how to attain the proper kavvanah (concentration) during prayer. As in the Pollock lesson described above, the experience was enacted before engaging with the “work of art”—in this case, Jewish text.

Another lead educator in the program devised an introductory lesson for the study of a biblical Psalm using a ubiquitous medium of the 21st century—the cellphone. Students were asked to compose an urgent text message in response to being suddenly “unfriended” by their closest friend. The students’ terse words expressed every emotion from anger to love, frustration to resignation. Only then did they study the opening words of Psalm 13: “How long, O Lord, will You ignore me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” The teacher explains: “In this technique, we learn about the art piece by initially working with the medium itself. By deeply noticing our own responses to this process, we begin to enter the mind of both the artist and the art itself, always through our own prism. This allows for what I term a ‘back door entry’ into each work, one that deepens and broadens our understanding of both ourselves and others around us, developing, deepening and sharpening so many of our skills in the process.”

Unlike other art/text programs where students turn to artistic expression as an outcome or response to reflective text study, in this program they engage with art first and the art experience is then intertwined with the careful appreciation and intensive experience of traditional in-depth text study. Teachers have discovered that their students’ capacities for creating and observing art transfer exquisitely to the study of biblical and rabbinic texts.

This method has enabled elementary school students at Beit Rabban Day School in Manhattan understand and verbalize complex and abstract notions. In a second-grade Chumash class, students are tasked with creating a portfolio of works around the days of creation. The Re-Imagining methodology has raised the level of discourse in the classroom by giving students

tools to understand how ideas and abstract concepts are shown in static pieces of art. For instance, in teaching the symbolism of light and darkness, works by Gentileschi and Rembrandt have shown students how the abstract is made concrete. Among preadolescent students, for whom the level of cognitive abstraction is limited, and for whom the vocabulary and wherewithal to speak about these topics is still at a nascent phase, this form of pedagogy offers critical developmental support.

The students’ engagement with art opens up their capacity for textual interpretation. In a course on English literature and art appreciation at Torah Academy of Bergen County, students examined the use of color and the repetition of motifs in art, with an emphasis on what is seen and what remains unseen, as a lead-up to the study of the theme of blindness in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*. Then they explored this theme in the biblical stories of Jacob and of Balaam with Judaic studies teachers. Students created independent projects combining text and image, including a digital animation comparing hubris and blindness to threats and weakness, as seen in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and the Balak-Balaam narrative. In a class studying the book of Jeremiah at Ramaz High School, the examination of an artwork from various angles trains the students to do the same with text. They remember the actual text better when the lesson is accompanied by an immersive creative activity.

When participating in lessons inspired by the Re-Imagining teaching and learning approach, students of all ages and skill levels feel energized and intrigued by visual art, Bible and rabbinic texts. They are open to new ways of thinking and feel validated as they look at things differently. They experience beauty in their own creative process and in the works of art they experience and consider, both visual artworks in museums and the rich heritage of traditional text study. They remember the texts and content better because they are engaged in creative work and thought. All students can be given a role to play. Re-Imagining trains teachers to inspire students to experience beauty and to think creatively and carefully. Students are then inspired by a process of careful consideration, experimentation, and discovery of aesthetic power.

YEHUDAH  
KATZ

# SINGING TOGETHER

In our role as educators we are constantly searching for ways to engage our students in the learning process, to offer them tools for their personal growth both as individuals and as members of society.

Our educational approach must include music. The ultimate goal, which reaches beyond the school years, must be for us to “sing together.” Over two centuries ago, the Vilna Gaon, whose teachings emphasized Jewish study and scholarship, said that peace and redemption can only come through *achdut Yisrael*, unity of the Jewish people. According to the Vilna Gaon, the only way for us to achieve *achdut* is by singing together.

The unique way that people process music opens up new pathways to understanding. Beyond the words of a song, which attract the listeners and connect them to the message, there is an additional power inherent in a melody which can access deeper parts of our minds and hearts. What can this power do for us? Music allows us to experience ourselves first and foremost as members of this large orchestra called *klal Yisrael*. Can we play together? Are we listening to each other? Can I appreciate the harmony which you bring to the arena?

The “power of music” is more than a cliché.

**Music is healing.** Music brings us to a place of caring and a willingness to share; a place beyond the limits of language. This is an exemplary way of expressing *ahavat Yisrael*, love for my fellow Jew.

**Music is bridging.** Careful listening to music can serve as a gateway for learning how to listen to each other in a more complete way that goes beyond words. Deep listening is an important skill in building empathy. Even more so today, with texting as the preferred method of communication among youth, the kind of listening that music education develops is vital for cultivating healthy relationships among peers.

**Music brings us together.** Music serves as a vehicle for uniting people who may otherwise have very different mindsets and opinions. This for example, is one of the lessons we learn from harmony. Two people can sing two totally different notes and yet sound perfect together. This is the key to creating *achdut Yisrael*, Jewish unity.

When learning is combined with music, the student’s experience is branded onto his/her heart to remain there as a source of joy,

connection and knowledge for future growth. When we learn to truly listen, we hear both the surface information and the deeper underlying meaning of the melody. Thus, I listen both to others, and more importantly, to myself. If I learn how to properly and humbly love myself, this gives me a basis for learning to love and care about you. *Ve’ahavta lere’acha kamocho, Ani Hashem*—You should love your friend like yourself, I am God: I must first learn how to love myself so that I can appreciate what loving is about and how it feels. Then I can properly teach myself how to love you. Music and listening offer us the chance to open ourselves up to the application of this critical Jewish teaching.

So how does one begin to introduce these deep concepts of learning life’s lessons through music?

Following are some workshop ideas and techniques which promote the goals of internalizing Judaism through music, creating harmony, understanding “the other” and bridging the gaps which exist in Jewish society.

- Offer students the tools to express themselves by composing a new song together. Engage in a process to encourage listening to one another. This promotes trust and the ability to work together as a team. Examine Jewish sources regarding the topic of the lyrics which the students are using for their new song. Allow them to express their feelings on the topic and share their personal reactions to the sources.
- Use Jewish life and ritual specifically to teach listening skills. Why am I commanded to “listen” to the shofar? Why is this basic God-given miracle of hearing such an important force in my life? What is the importance of hearing a friend? What is the difference between hearing words and hearing sounds? Once again, students explore resonant sources, including quotes from Tanakh such as “be silent and hear” (Devarim 27:9) and “Shema Yisrael” (Devarim 6:4). The use of melodies and singing together are great triggers to get students thinking about what they just “heard.”
- The study of music can also help students recognize the importance of being a part of something greater than themselves, being a part of the “klal,” the Jewish community in general. And it can be a great tool to develop connections with the concept of a Jewish homeland, the Land of Israel. For example, in the study of the works of accomplished Israeli composers, students can come to appreciate the composers’ love for their homeland, the expression of their Jewish identity found in their lyrics and their views of Israeli lifestyle and culture.

When I started to sing in professional musical ensembles I was blessed to learn from a seasoned veteran Hollywood musician. He taught me that the key to playing in a band is to know that “less is more.” In other words, sacrifice yourself for the good of the whole. May we all be blessed to share this important lesson with our students using music as the teaching tool for the lessons of Jewish life.



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REBECCA  
FRIEDMAN-CHARRY

SARA  
BECKERMAN

# HANUKKAH IN 4D

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## BRINGING THE ISRAEL MUSEUM TO THE MIDDLE SCHOOL RABBINICS CLASSROOM

What do you remember more:

- What you saw at your last museum visit or the book you were reading the day you went to that museum?
- The chapter on Ancient Egypt in your World History textbook or your trip to the Egyptian wing of a museum?
- The picture, painting, or collage you last created or the last email you typed?



Most likely, you recall information gathered from your interaction with art more than you recall information learned from reading alone. Certainly, for many adolescents in our text classes, this is the case. Yet many of our teachers, citing our shared value of tradition, are planning lessons based solely on exploring texts in hevruta study and in lectures. Even many students who appear engaged in the moment of reading a particular text will only recall the most basic information when the class activity focuses too heavily on this style.

We aim to share a model of blending aesthetics and Jewish studies which can be applied in any day school—we call it the 4D model. Bringing in art and aesthetics adds a third dimension to traditional text study. The fourth dimension comes with the addition of experiential education, which makes the learning intensely authentic, engaging and memorable. The 4D model of Jewish education aims to blend what is most effective in formal classroom learning with what is most impactful in experiential education. The name is partly inspired by the 4D theater experience offered at many zoos and theme parks. 4D education is also inspired by time travel, as it's represented in science fiction.

The 4D model's application to Jewish education is exemplified by the Hanukkah unit studied in Schechter School of Long Island's 8th grade rabbinics classes. Students had a compelling experience of travel in (virtual) space and through history to examine hanukkiyot from throughout the Jewish Diaspora and contemporary Israel. This experience complemented the class's traditional study of eight sugyot from Masekhet Shabbat, covering such topics as where to place the hanukkiyah, which oil to use, and what to do in times of danger. It also fit in nicely to the school's Global Jewish Story Initiative, in which teachers are encouraged to weave non-Ashkenazic texts and traditions into the classroom experience.

Twice during their three-week unit of study, the students travelled virtually to the Israel Museum through an interactive Skype visit. The museum educator described how artists throughout the world and Jewish history have incorporated aspects of local aesthetics, architecture and symbolism into the design of their hanukkiyot, now found in the museum's collection. For example, where Jews were living under Islamic rule, hanukkiyot featured domes and crescents. Hanukkiyot featured symbols such as seashells, eagles and hearts when that sign held significance in the local culture or political leadership. Hanukkiyot had stands if they had to be placed on tables indoors during times it was unsafe to display Jewish observance, but had hooks for hanging if it was safe to place it in the window or even outdoors, publicly labelling a Jewish residence.

Each student chose a particular hanukkiyah from the collection in order to more closely analyze the artist's decisions. Often the student's selection reflected his or her family's ethnic background, providing another portal for engagement with the Global Jewish Story. All the students matched the hanukkiyah of their choice with a passage from the Gemara that it exemplified. Here are some passages they chose:

תנו רבנן: נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ. אם היה דר בעלייה - מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לרשות הרבים. ובשעת הסכנה - מניחה על שלחנו, ודיו. (מסכת שבת דף כ"א עמוד ב)

Our Rabbis taught: It is a mitzvah to place the hanukkah lamp by the opening to the house outside. If one lives in an upstairs residence, one places it in a window facing the public domain. In a time of danger (in which there were decrees against Jewish observance), one places it on his table, and that's enough. (Shabbat 21b)

אמר רבה: נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה בטפח הסמוכה לפתח. והיא מנח ליה? רב אחא בריה דרבא אמר: מימין, רב שמואל מדפתי אמר: משמאל. והילכתא - משמאל, כדי שתהא נר חנוכה משמאל ומזוזה מימין. (מסכת שבת דף כ"ב עמוד א)

Rabbah said: It is a mitzvah to place the hanukkah lamp in the handbreadth (3-4 inches) next to the opening of the house. How does one place it? Rav Aha son of Rava said: from the right side; Rav Shmuel from Difti said: from the left side. The law is from the left so that the hanukkah lamp will be on the left and the mezuzah on the right. (Shabbat 22a)

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: כל השמנים כולן יפין לנר, ושמן זית מן המובחר. (מסכת שבת דף כ"ב עמוד א)

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: all oils are fit for lighting the hanukkiyah, but olive oil is the most choice.

The final project for the unit had the students pretending the Israel Museum had hired them to write the museum catalog entry for a hanukkiyah, which included a description of the architecture (in the style of churches, mosques or other iconic structures), symbolism and other artistic decisions of the artist in addition to their select Talmudic quote.

While many printed the hanukkiyot on an average 2D color printer, some students chose to use the school's 3D printer to recreate the museum exhibit themselves, bringing our study of global Jewish historical artifacts to life in the 21st century rabbinics classroom. The students' work is on display for parents at their end-of-year siyyum Project Showcase.

Talya Weiss Ben Ami of the Israel Museum's Education Department worked very closely with us, a classroom teacher and project leader, as we designed the unit of study. Upon hearing our desire to have the diversity of artifacts match the diversity of our student body, Talya immediately recommended that the students see pictures of French and Spanish hanukkiyot that are modeled after the architecture of cathedrals alongside Moroccan and Algerian hanukkiyot that are modeled after mosques. She prepared a slideshow with close-ups of many of the hanukkiyot the class would study alongside the buildings that inspired the artists. With two screens set up—one for the PowerPoint and one for the Skype feed—the students sensed they were about to do something very exciting.

The recipe for successful 4D education is replicable and leaves the students with enduring meaning and understanding. Combine traditional text study, an exploration of artistic works that engages the senses, and a compelling scenario that prompts reflection and stimulates the imagination of a budding text scholar intrigued by the visual world. Using technology and a dash of projected images, craftily infuse the text lessons with visual images of the objects explored on the tour to solidify formation of new text-based concepts and make deeper connections. Always give time for personal self-guided exploration of select artifacts by giving students digital access to such tools as PowerPoint, Google museum tours and web galleries. Create a 4D experience in your classroom and send your students time-traveling, learning and building lasting memories.

Are you interested in taking your students on a virtual tour of the Israel Museum? Email Nava, [navas@imj.org.il](mailto:navas@imj.org.il) to inquire about tour themes and museum "admission" fees.

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# INNOVATIVE WAYS THAT VISUAL ART CAN DEEPEN JUDAIC LEARNING IN HIGH SCHOOLS

CHANI  
NEWMAN



Paper cut by the author

The visual arts are an excellent medium for maintaining and deepening high school students' interest in Judaic studies. Art produced by the students themselves will make Judaic material more meaningful and memorable to them, as it requires the application of both independence and creativity. Frequently, teachers assign art projects as assessment of learned material: posters, dioramas, illustration-laden book reports, and the like. But art has great potential to develop student abilities even more deeply.

Art in the classroom does not just have to reflect what students have learned or the content of the curriculum. Art can also *create* that learning. Teachers can give an assignment for students to create their own piece of art illustrating a passage studied. This is most effective with biblical texts, as they often contain subtle detail and visual imagery. Students are forced to consider details that might have passed them by when reading the words for conceptual understanding. After creating the art, students might answer questions concerning new insights they gained about the text from trying to illustrate it.

This encourages skills building: students identify and distinguish details in the verses and use textual analysis. Very astute or artistic students may also notice an overall visual impression of a scene which yields further questions, predictions and research of possible answers. For most such assignments, art teachers may use their discretion to choose what media they deem an appropriate match for the subject matter.

For example, students can be asked to paint the world as they imagine it based on the first three verses in Bereishit. Upon deciding how to depict the background and coloring of the scene, a student might notice for the first time that the world was initially dark and not just *tohu vavohu*. A student would also be forced to consider what *tohu vavohu* means.

A teacher can assign different students to depict the text according to different commentaries. For example, one student or group of students is assigned to render the verses according to Ramban's idea that the world started with primeval matter which was then formed into real items. Another student or group could be asked to illustrate Rashi's notion of light and darkness as interspersed with each other prior to the establishment of day and night.

Such an assignment could be given regarding the giving of the Torah as well. Depicting the scene according to the peshat could lead students to notice the imposing nature of the event, as

opposed to the rosy scene often envisioned by preschoolers. This can lead to meaningful lessons about why that is the case, as well as yield a deeper understanding of how the Jewish people must have felt approaching the scene on that day. Students may include a rendering of the well-known midrash about Har Sinai blossoming. They might get creative in depicting the shofar getting progressively louder, or the famous comment by Rashi that the Jewish people stood *ke-ish echad be-lev echad*, as one person with one heart.

Teaching about the Mishkan (Tabernacle) is perfect material for incorporating art with Judaism. It is a challenge to figure out how to teach such subject matter which seems rather dry and technical, but visualizing it can make it more meaningful. While it would be a bit much to expect any high school student to create a thorough painting of the Mishkan and its vessels, an alternate version of this model could be used for this topic. There are currently a few books that illustrate the Mishkan and its vessels in intricate detail. Certainly such illustrations are necessary to properly understand the chapters describing the Mishkan.

But as pieces of art, any page of those books can be examined visually to enhance student appreciation for the Mishkan. Rather than studying the material solely through the words of a text, students can gain an entirely new perspective on the Mishkan by learning what it actually looked like. Each student can choose or be assigned a particular vessel or segment of the Mishkan to study. They would then analyze the illustration of it and note either questions or impressions they glean from their observations. One student may be struck by the gleam of all the gold in the vessels. Another may be perplexed by the colors embroidered in the curtains, or the images of the cherubim. A third may realize the stark feel one would get upon entering the courtyard whose curtains were entirely white.

The student would then study commentaries interpreting the significance of their item. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in particular has a thorough and interesting interpretation of the Mishkan which is very in tune with its visual impressions. Teachers might select appropriate passages from this lengthy commentary.

In all these projects, students of art can be encouraged to utilize the elements of color, line, size and composition to portray or interpret the passage as meaningfully as possible.

This model would more naturally be assigned to an art class where students are already producing realistic images, and in such a case there could be collaboration between Judaic studies and art teachers. An art teacher who knows a given class is studying Mount Sinai in Chumash, for example, could assign the project described above at that time. However, any Tanakh class could have this assignment as one of a few assessment options from which to choose.



*Psalm 137* by Moshe Zvi Berger HaLevi

An alternative model requires more abstract but also more creative thinking. Students of art know that art can be symbolic. An image can stand for an idea, and abstract forms can communicate emotions. This is apparent from the work of various abstract artists, whose work might be studied by an art class in conjunction with this Judaic studies curriculum (though the Judaic curriculum is not dependent on an in-depth study of modern art). For example, Wassily Kandinsky used abstract forms and colors to communicate human emotions, ideas and spirituality. In his drip paintings, Jackson Pollock used the process of how he placed the paint on the canvas to express his inner troubled mind. Marc Rothko's "sectionals," his paintings of soft-edged shapes made of shimmering color, were meant to be universal statements about the human condition. It is possible to apply these methods and others to Judaic content.

As part of a unit on symbolic or abstract art, an art class can join forces with a Judaic studies class to stretch the students' abilities to visually represent their learning. Students might begin by studying works of artists such as those mentioned above and/or Moshe Tzvi Halevi Berger, who created a separate piece of art corresponding to each of the 150 Psalms. His work utilizes Jewish and general symbols, color and shape to represent themes and messages in each Psalm.

After analyzing his work, students can either select conceptual passages of their choice or be assigned a passage to illustrate. I offer two examples I myself did as an art student in Stern College.

In the first, I painted a visual rendering of the Rashi that states that God created the world first

with His trait of Din, harsh justice, and then changed to using Rachamim, mercy (Bereishit 1:1). I illustrated this using principles of design I had learned. The top of the painting was dark, with black and red colors intermixed, as these colors typically symbolize Din. They appeared in small, straight lines to represent the original state of the world, which was more distant in the past. In art, things in the distance appear smaller. The straight form also represented Din. As the painting developed downward, the lines gradually transitioned into whitish-pinkish curvy lines. By the bottom of the painting, the lines were larger, appearing closer to the viewer and thus representing the latter period of creation, with mercy. The colors and softer, round forms of the lines represented mercy as well.

In the second example, I created a colored paper cut with four panels, each representing a different season according to Judaism. I used what I knew about the major holidays and tone of each season to construct the panels. Each used different shapes and groups of colors to communicate the feel of that time in addition to forms of holiday items compatible with that season. In the resulting piece, each panel has small images or pieces of the colored paper which cause each panel to lead into the next. This communicates the cycle and interconnectedness of the Jewish year.

These two models described provide rich opportunities to develop students' thinking skills as well as to endear both fields of study to them. They illustrate the deep understanding of both Judaic material and art skills that can be developed and displayed through merging art and Torah studies.





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MICHAL BERGMAN

# A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PAINTINGS AND JEWISH TEXTS

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## ART AS DIALOGUE

Art is an additional mode of interpreting Jewish texts and practices. Beyond that, it expands and enriches the dialogue between students and ideas. An artistic source can be seen as an additional commentary, a link in the chain of commentaries on a specific topic.

Art requires of us that we pause and respond to the question, “What does this say to me?” In many ways this is the same challenge we face when learning texts. The moment a work of art leaves the artist it takes on a life of its own, arousing a multiplicity of interpretations in different observers.

In the following article I will not relate to visual works of art in an academic-historical fashion; instead, I respond to them in a dialogic-humanistic way, in the context of Jewish studies. In other words, just as the human spirit, ideas and moods on a range of issues are expressed in source texts in general, and more specifically in Jewish sources, so too they can be found in works of art.

Judith Leister, *Self Portrait*, Holland, 1630.  
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA.



*Isaac Blesses Jacob*—Govert Flinck, Holland, 1638, Rijksmuseum collection, Amsterdam, Holland



*Isaac Blessing Jacob*—Gioachino Assereto, Italy 1640, Hermitage Museum Collection, Saint Petersburg, Russia

## DRAMATIC MOMENTS IN THE HOME OF ISAAC AND REBECCA—SWITCHING THE BLESSING OF THE FIRST BORN

It is well known that countless works of art have been inspired by the Bible. A work of art is not a substitute for learning the text, but it definitely provides an additional mode—or better yet, modes—of interpretation.

Let's look for a moment at one of the most dramatic moments in the family of our forefathers, the moment in which the blind Isaac gives the blessing to Jacob instead of to Esau (Genesis 27). Behind this act stands the mother Rebecca, and Jacob's arms are covered with fur to make him seem hairy. Isaac senses that something is not right, and he says, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

This is a moment of high drama—will Isaac uncover the deceit? Will Esau enter before the blessing is given to Jacob? Will Jacob succeed in carrying out the impersonation his mother has imposed upon him?

These questions relate to the overt script, but, as in any great work, questions arise as to the motives of the characters and the complex connections between them. How could Rebecca take the initiative to change the order of the blessings between her two sons, and what motivates her to do so? What relationships are exposed in Isaac's family between parents and their children, between husband and wife, and between the brothers themselves?

The story of the exchange of the birthright provides many and varied possibilities for discussion with children of different ages, fundamental questions that are raised here about the characters, as well as questions of morality, justice, good and evil, family relations and even human blindness. Was Isaac the only one who was blind in the family drama?

The Midrash, medieval and contemporary commentators, and many works of art interpret these moments. We will focus upon two works of art from the Baroque period that offer differing interpretations.

Even though both artists base their work on the same verses, each one chooses to present the drama from a different angle. Gioachino Assereto's painting shows Jacob unsure of how to deal with Isaac's suspicions, and Rebecca instructing him to be quiet. She in fact is the central figure in the painting. Jacob is dependent on his mother, who is dominant. His father has a look of nobility, concentrating on giving the blessing. The variations of light and shadow add drama and tension, compounded by the artist depicting Esau standing in the shadows.

In contrast, Govert Flinck chose to place Rebecca in the background, while Jacob's expectation is at the center of the drama, as expressed in his gaze toward the unseeing Isaac. Jacob is focused here on his father, while his mother seems tense and worried but is not as dominant as she is in the Italian painting. Isaac appears in all his weakness—not a noble figure but an ill, frail and old man. While the Italian artist chose to present the drama in all its power and aggressiveness, the Dutch painter presents an

apparently innocent pose. If we did not know what was happening behind the scenes we would not know that we were witnessing a tense drama. He chose to portray a feigned innocence, with Isaac's weak and tired figure as a pawn in the hands of his family members.

These paintings provide multiple possibilities for discussion and interpretation. But first and foremost, they provide students with an encounter with the creative variety of the human spirit, and with the way that cultural riches develop layer upon layer: work done by one is an inspiration for those who follow.

Responding to these two works of art requires time for observation, comparing and exploring the connection between the observer and the painting. We can probe the artist's choices and interpretive approach. Which of the paintings seems more loyal to the original text, and why? What did the artist choose to show and what did he choose to omit? What feelings do the characters portray, and what are their relationships—are they covert or overt? Is there mystery here, tension, compassion, joy or feigned innocence? What is the artist trying to tell us?

All these are important questions, but in my opinion we should begin with the foundational questions: what does this painting say to me, and what captures my attention? For the purpose of art is to generate dialogue. If we want to nurture not only the students' interpretive understanding, but also their understanding and appreciation for the variety of artistic creation, making room for this dialogue—immediate and beyond words—is critical.

Until now I have ignored the archetypal Christian interpretation that underlies much of the art created in the West. I might add a few words then about the theological-historic context of many of the works of art that describe biblical scenes. The blessing of the firstborn was also interpreted archetypally: the biological first-born, Israel in the flesh, is replaced by his younger and better brother, the spiritual Israel—i.e., the Christian faith.

The question of how to present this and at what age is a complex one. I prefer not to ignore the historic context in which a work of art was created, but I think that doing so is appropriate for students only in high school. In any case, the historical and cultural background does not replace the centrality of dialogue between observer and art. Rather, it adds an additional layer.

## A SINGLE PERSON IS CREATED

Therefore a single person is created ... to tell of the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, that man stamps many coins with one seal, and each is like the other, but the King, King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, stamps every man with the seal of Adam and not one of them is like his fellow. (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5)

This famous mishnah is an introduction to the study of the uniqueness and importance of the individual, of the wonder of Creation and the creation of man, and of the relationship between body and spirit in Jewish sources. Aside from studying and discussing the text, we can look at

those sitting in the room and observe that indeed we are all human beings but each one of us is uniquely stamped.

Another way to understand the text and to connect the worlds of verbal and visual creation is to look at a variety of artists' self-portraits. We can also encourage the children to look at their own unique features and to draw their own portraits—giving artistic expression to the mishnaic saying “Therefore a single person is created.”

From among the many available portraits I choose to bring those painted by women artists—both because women artists are under-recognized, and because doing so gives the concept *Adam*—which in Hebrew is masculine though it refers to both male and female—its expanded meaning. Presentation of female self-portraits thus affects students' understanding of the text and of art in one stroke.

## ART IN A WORLD OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

These examples can be used in any personal-dialogic context for learning Jewish sources. Since art is an expression of humanism and pluralism, this approach is of utmost importance in an educational system whose students have varied Jewish identities. It invites human beings into dialogue with one another, and with the cultural riches beyond our world in the here and now. Art is an expression of artists' identities, values and beliefs, of the way they experience and understands the world, the way in which they dream and the ways

in which they, as people and artists, see their place in the world.

Very young children can already engage in a personal dialogue with works of art. Through this dialogue they come to understand human diversity and the beauty of multiple voices: the special way artists choose to present themselves, to draw trees, or to understand the story of Adam and Eve. This special dialogue between the observer and a work of art provides a context in which individuality, freedom, the forces of creation, art and imagination can all emerge.

This was beautifully captured by philosopher Eulàlia Bosch (in her book *The Pleasure of Beholding*):

Artists see what most people miss. ... Art provides the sense that reality—even if it seems familiar as we perceive it through our day-to-day lives—can always surprise us. This is a feeling that the world in which we live can always be a mystery to us, in which every new real work of art can expand our vision and deepen our understanding.

Caterina van Hemessen, *Self-Portrait*, Flanders 1548, Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland.



Berthe Morisot, *Self-Portrait*, France 1885, Musée Marmottan, Paris, France.



Anna Bilińska-Bohdanowiczowa, *Self-Portrait*, Poland 1887, National Museum, Krakow, Poland.



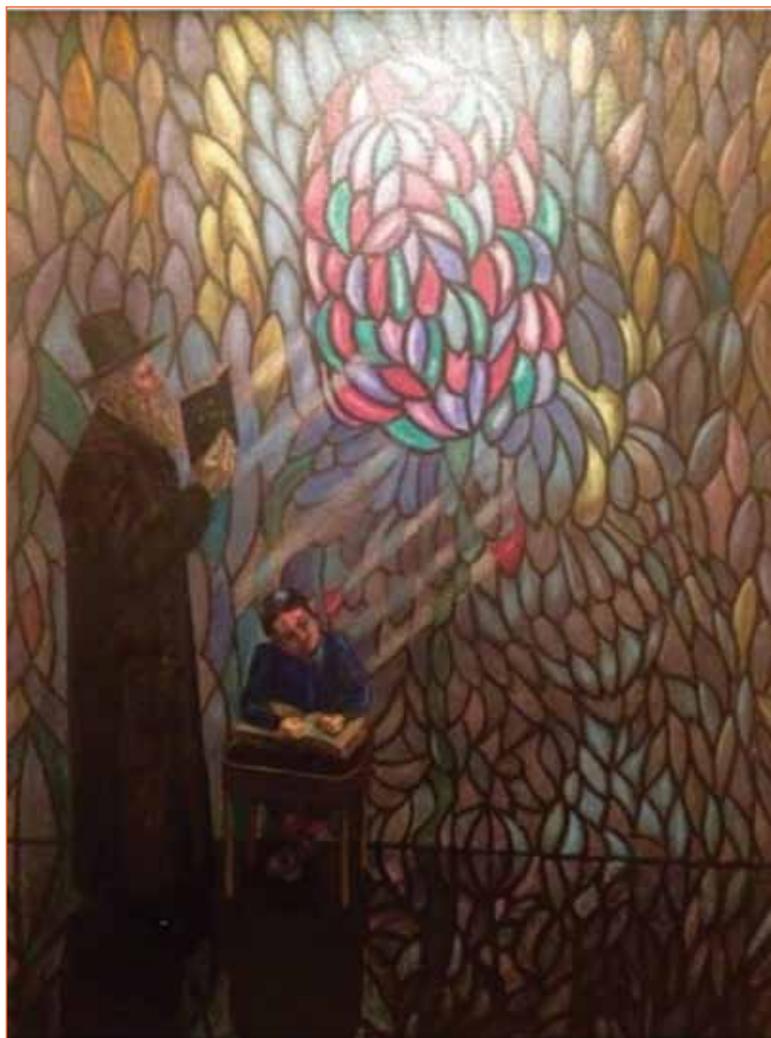
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CHERYL  
KLEINMAN-KHALOU

# THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF AESTHETIC ART

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## ELEMENTARY EDUCATION



Much attention has been given to the “whole child” approach to learning, as each child has a unique blend of cognitive, sensory, social, emotional, physical and creative abilities. As Jewish educators, we are privileged to take that concept a step further. We are called upon to teach the “whole spiritual child.” Young children exist in a state of mind that is reminiscent of the spiritual bliss we knew as pure souls in Hashem’s heavenly kingdom. From a Jewish perspective, we must sustain that bliss as well as facilitate aesthetic artistic reasoning in order to engage the whole spiritual child. We begin with digging deeper by igniting that heavenly spark when teaching in the classroom.

Charles B. Kleinman, *Seeds of Knowledge*

Aesthetic-artistic reasoning skills are based upon our ability to discern and make judgments within the context of a sensory-based artistic experience. When combining spiritual thought with an aesthetic perception, we are connecting multiple senses while stimulating intellectual capability along with deep emotion and appreciation. Thoughtful teaching strategies help transform art into an experience with opportunities to explore and discover new ideas. We seek to stimulate a dialogue between teacher and student that will inspire free-thinking and a deeper connection to Hashem.

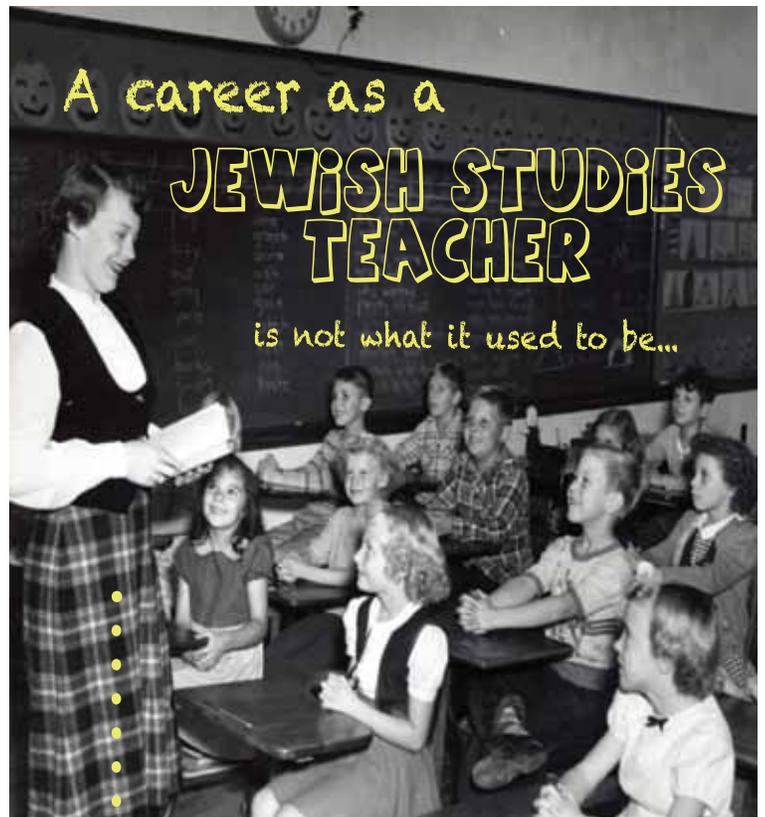
A method of encouraging aesthetic reasoning begins by presenting a piece of artwork, such as "Seeds of Knowledge" painted by my father, a lifelong artist and art educator. I clearly remember myself as a child being mesmerized by the painting's beauty and the glorious colors that seemed to dance off of the canvas. In order to encourage a similar response in the classroom I first ask my students to share their thoughts regarding the painting, documenting their impressions as a conversational reference point. We discuss the different sensory based elements in the painting along with the Judaic components. Eventually, we explore further, using our imaginations to hear, move and feel what we sense to exist in the art. While asking thought-provoking, open-ended questions, my immediate goals are to connect the students with a sense of God and self-worth, alongside aesthetic appreciation.

Since the role of art in Jewish education has the potential to bring children closer to God, we must guide them to appreciate and access the layers of beauty in all Judaic art forms such as in painting, sculpture, music and dance. While creating our own artistic experiences and utilizing aesthetic reasoning skills, we invoke an emotional response. Art represents what emotion looks like. Music is what emotion sounds like. Drama is what emotion feels like, and dance shows us how emotion moves. Aesthetic art appreciation is, therefore, a harmonious extension of the spiritual world. By encouraging young children to envision God's extraordinary world, we enable them to think abstractly and emotionally at the same time and foster a higher level of appreciation for true beauty.

Nothing engages a child's natural curiosity more than enticing their vivid imaginations. Our responsibility as early childhood educators is to make the information presented not simply committed to memory, but experienced in a heartfelt way. A famous quotation runs, "Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel." A passion for learning is built by fostering individual interests and joy. The ramifications will prove astounding as social-emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development is increased. Our window of opportunity lies in early childhood development, as we encounter eager young minds ready to soak up information.

Since children are innately capable, our aim is to help shape a generation of compassionate and creative thinkers, who can understand deeper meanings while forging a connection to God that will leave a lifelong spiritual imprint. To ensure that young students comprehend these abstract concepts in a way that is tangible and enjoyable, lesson plans should never be bound to a dull routine or single layer standard. Every classroom needs to blossom and evolve with new ideas in order to enhance Jewish identity, aesthetic appreciation, and multiple learning styles. As teachers, we must find new ways to reach our students and open the gateways to learning for each individual child.

At the inception of God's creation of the universe, we discover the abstractly beautiful concept of darkness to light. We quickly learn that in God's endless world there are infinite possibilities to explore. For example, we learn that the simple planting of a seed, and the genetics that lie within each one, represent the beginning of all creation. Using aesthetic reasoning in my adulthood brought



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Pardes Center for Jewish Educators

me to the profound realization that the “seeds” in my father’s painting stemmed from a tree representing the Tree of Life. My father’s artistic license allowed for seeds, leaves and colors to be visually intertwined. To his aesthetic, it was all indicative of God’s educational wisdom and ethereal uniqueness. From my perspective, his painting became a perfect reflection of aesthetic beauty and Torah learning combined. A student in my class of three-year olds used his newly born aesthetic reasoning skills to suggest that the painting depicted “a Hashem, a baby Moses and a burning bush.” Another student reflected, “They are God’s rainbow leaves and they are dancing.” Yet another opinion: “Look Morah, there are purple angels flying!” Along with other imaginative suggestions expressed by the children, we colored our own “rainbow leaves” and threw them up in the air to watch them dance. We pretended to fly like “purple” angels, and read a story about Moses and the burning bush. We concluded with the experience of moving like seeds in the wind to Vivaldi’s “The Four Seasons: Spring.” The result was a layer upon layer of sensory learning.

Although we see art through a spiritual lens, we are also required to use our reasoning skills to formulate an opinion. These components relate to an immediate connection with the heart and soul, while the student’s intellect seeks to identify and form an opinion while recognizing creative expression. This abstract yet aesthetically pleasing way of thinking is the gateway to transformative thought and self-discovery. Therefore, within the “spiritual heart of aesthetic art,” we discover our own unique and enlightened perspectives. Again, just as in Genesis, we begin with a blank canvas and discover the creation of all things. As Jewish educators, we have the ability to facilitate artistic aesthetic reasoning alongside a Torah perspective. We are undeniably privileged to follow along God’s path in this way. We are the planters of seeds in the garden of early childhood education. With patience and compassion for their tender age, and awareness of their potential for lifelong learning, we cultivate them with knowledge, water them with lovingkindness, and proudly watch them take root and grow.

## LESSON PLAN EXAMPLE

### Questions to ask yourself in class preparation

- As an educator are you enthusiastic and spiritually motivated?
- How can you lead others to become more inspired?
- Do you encourage the sharing of ideas and work collaboratively with others?
- Are you utilizing the same “cookie cutter” projects and songs each year?
- Are you willing to enhance existing curriculum with aesthetic-artistic reasoning?
- How many songs are taught without exploring the deeper meaning?
- Are you able to access your own spiritual heart?

## CONCEPTUALIZE DIGGING DEEPER AND EXPLORE THE “SPIRITUAL HEART” OF THE SONG

By the ages of three or four, most Jewish preschool children sing the following simple and short song: “The Shabbat Angels Are Peeking Through My Window.” A teacher should begin to build a lesson plan that inspires aesthetic-artistic reasoning. Questions to consider asking children for individual and group discussion:

- Why do you think angels peek through the window on Shabbat?
- What do these angels they look like?
- What does heaven look like?
- What do angels do in heaven?
- Why do you think they visit us on on Shabbat?
- How many are there?
- What do they sound like? Do they sing? Whisper? Talk?
- Do they fly? Dance? Float?

- How do you think they worship Hashem?
- How do you think Hashem makes angels?
- What mitzvot can we do to create an angel?
- Do angels have names?

## EXPOSURE TO THE FINE ARTS CAN ENHANCE EARLY CHILDHOOD APPRECIATION OF AESTHETIC BEAUTY

**Musical Component.** Listen to various classical musical selections (voice, opera, cantorial, flute, harp, violin, etc.)

- Students decide what sounds represent the voices of angels.
- Discuss the different types of singing and music they heard.
- Allow them to vocalize their own “angel” sounds, with singing, speaking, bells, musical instruments for each other.
- How did that music make them feel? Happy? Silly? How about “angelic”?

**Visual Component.** Look at angel art in multiple forms (artists such as Chagall, Michelangelo, paintings, sculpture, etc.).

- What color choices were made by the artist?
- Why is it beautiful to you?
- How does this painting make you feel?
- Does it look different than your idea of an angel?

**Physical Component.** Let’s dance, fly, float, walk like an angel. Be creative! Scarves, ribbons, fabric can become wings. Create a world that angels live in.

- How can we pretend to be Shabbat angels?
- What do angels like to eat?
- Where do they like to sleep?
- Should we have an angel dance contest?
- What kinds of music should we dance to?

**Artistic Component.** Display drawings, paintings, clay, or sculpture in an area to be appreciated. Have each child show their work to the class for discussion. Compare their artistic expression to the artwork they saw in the visual component.

- Should we create 3D angels that can hang from the classroom ceiling?
- Can we draw or paint what an angel world looks like?
- What colors should we use to make your angels?

**Social/Emotional Component.** Create a mitzvah window. When a child does a mitzvah at school, they “create” an angel that gets attached to the window to happily “peek in” for everyone to see.

- How do we feel when pretending to fly like angels?
- Should we invite other classes to observe and share our “angelic” discoveries?
- How do we feel when do help/share with others?
- Why do mitzvot make Hashem happy?

**Abstract Component.** Compare and contrast similarities or differences in observations and/or in child friendly graph form.

- How are all of your painted angels / scenes different or the same?
- How are they the same or different from other artwork we have observed?
- Why are the angels happy? Do they ever feel sad?
- Do angels have different voices / sounds?

**Direct Judaic component.** Identify Jewish themes in the song (example) “Lighting candles” and “going to shul.” Explore these actions and bring them to life. Light Shabbat candles with the class, and walk to the “shul” or prayer area in your school. Discuss the reasons why we do these things for Hashem.

- Why do we light candles on Shabbat?
- What are we doing at shul?
- Why do these actions make angels and Hashem happy?

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CHARLIE  
SCHWARTZ

# A JEWISH DESIGN LAB FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

I am captivated by the idea of remix. Not just the musical definition, of sampling disparate musical tracks and recontextualizing them with new backbeats and vocals to create entirely new songs. Rather, the broader idea of remix: innovation deriving not from enigmatic strokes of genius but from the skillful copying and combining of pre-existing ideas into new creations. As Kohelet put it, “There is nothing new under the sun.”





This innovative approach is at the heart of the Brandeis Design Lab, which teaches Design Thinking to high school students and educators across the Boston Jewish community. Scratch the surface of the Design Lab's approach and you'll find influences from community based organizing, project based learning, service based learning and even shop class—a remix. But it is also something new, something powerful, a way to engage high school students in deep Jewish learning with their hearts, minds and hands.

At its core, the Design Lab brings together cohorts of high school students to solve a real world design challenge facing a local Jewish organization using a modified version of the Design Thinking process. (Design Thinking, also known as Human Centered Design, is a problem-solving framework used to capture the process of design firms like IDEO and Stanford's d.school. Check out [designkit.org](http://designkit.org) and [dschool.stanford.edu](http://dschool.stanford.edu) for more information and specifics for each stage of the process.) Past challenges have included transforming a dilapidated cemetery chapel into a dual use educational space/genizah sorting area, building a Reggio Emilia inspired playground that is steeped in Jewish values, and redesigning a prayer space in an assisted living facility to better meet the needs of its residents.

Design Lab challenges must meet five main criteria:

1. The challenge must be awesome.
2. The challenge must be feasible within the timeframe and skills we have available.
3. There needs to be authentic Jewish learning incorporated into the challenge.

4. The partner organization needs to understand the ranges of what the final product might be.
5. There needs to be a physical building element to the challenge.

As used by the Design Lab, Design Thinking follows three main stages, with each stage containing several supplements:

1. Explore: Listen | Empathize | Learn | Frame
2. Prototype: Imagine | Brainstorm | Focus | Plan
3. Make: Build | Test | Iterate | Sustain

The Explore stage has the Design Labers deeply immerse themselves in the challenge at hand. As part of listening and empathizing, we conduct interviews and observations of users and key stakeholders and learn from experts in whatever field we're working in, including professional designers and architects, while studying Jewish texts and ideas that might provide insight into the challenge at hand. In this first stage, participants are asked to listen deeply to those with radically different life experiences and empathize, to try to understand the lived experience of another person, through their interviews.

For the playground project, Design Labers interviewed parents, children and staff to get a deeper sense of the needs of the school. They watched videos and read articles on playground design and the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia and did text learning around Jewish ideas and values that are age appropriate for preschoolers. Similarly, during the cemetery project, Design Labers spoke to cemetery staff as well as clergy and recent mourners to get a deeper understanding of the space. This was followed by text learning around

Jewish ideas of death and mourning. This activity pushes many of our Design Labers into their adolescent zones of proximal development—that is, it challenges them to think and learn in ways that are just within reach with proper support and scaffolding.

During the Explore stage, participants are asked to collect “data,” including ideas, quotes, images and inspirations as well as insights they have gleaned from interviews and observations. From this “data,” students develop their understanding of the users’ needs. Their insights often have deep impact on the framing of the challenge. During the cemetery chapel project, a Design Laber realized that the goal of the cemetery staff was to humanize the space. This led to the construction of a participatory chalk mural, where visitors write their hopes and dreams for their lives. Interviews with parents and staff directed the team working on the playground project to integrate Jewish values within the playground. This insight informed the students’ plans and shaped the playground features, such as a balance beam that toddlers need to take turns on in order to embody ideals of derekh erez. For the prayer space, the Design Labers realized that the residents wanted the space to feel like a synagogue, not just in its physical structure, but also in its communal, multigenerational nature. This led to the development of a volunteer program to get more children and families to the prayer space for Shabbat services.

From Explore, the Design Lab moves into the Prototype stage, developing ideas and solutions for the challenge at hand, always checking to make sure they line up with the actual needs



expressed and getting feedback from the users and stakeholders. It is at this stage that we frequently bring in skilled builders, often local community members, to provide expertise in guiding the Design Labers in their work. Whenever possible, participants make full size mockups of the physical object that will be made. These models are then tested by stakeholders and users to see if the size, scale and functionality works. From the prototype, Design Labers begin building, often with the help of skilled staff, the actual solutions to the challenge.

Finally, the importance of the Make stage cannot be overstated. Building real solutions to the design challenges is what makes the learning in the Design Lab authentic. Actually constructing the projects that they researched, designed and prototyped brings participants' Jewish text learning to life and provides them with an enduring sense of accomplishment. The students create something that will exist in the real world, that they can visit later on, and that others will use and draw benefit from.

The Brandeis Design Lab provides an innovative educational experience to engage high school students in the Jewish community, teaching both meaningful Jewish content and a skill set to serve students throughout their lives. The Design Lab approach is without a doubt a remix of several older educational trends along with the rise of Design Thinking in the educational world. It is an approach based in empathy, creativity, learning and making that can continue to be used and remixed in a variety of educational settings—maybe even yours.



Contact Lisa Micley, Program Director  
978.450.0435 | LMicley@TheVHS.org  
OnlineJudaicStudies.org



The Online Judaic Studies Consortium (OJSC) was developed by The Virtual High School and is sponsored through a grant from The AVI CHAI Foundation.



The RAVSAK Artists' Beit Midrash inspires elementary, middle and high school students to creatively engage with Jewish text and ideas, to challenge the traditional definitions of Jewish art, and to push the boundaries of their own potential. 845 students from 35 day schools around the world were inspired to study texts on the theme of love, create artwork and craft artist statements that emerged from their learning. Students creatively interpreted biblical stories and rabbinic passages, visually explored love of family, friends, Judaism and God, and integrated their creativity and learning through thoughtful written reflections.

Mazal tov to the winners in each category! To learn more about the program and read the winners' artist statements visit [www.ravsak.org/programs/artists-beit-midrash](http://www.ravsak.org/programs/artists-beit-midrash).

The RAVSAK Artists' Beit Midrash is made possible through the generosity of Ann Bennett & Family.

DRAWING & PAINTING



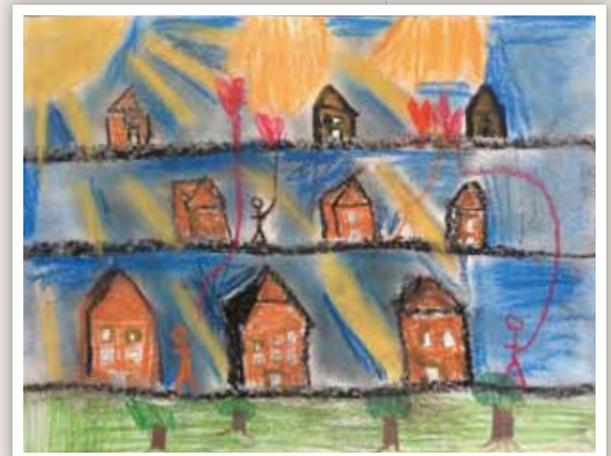
1

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

- 1st Place | Eve Young**  
Brandeis School of San Francisco, CA
- 2nd Place | Rachel Ichel**  
Shalom School, Sacramento, CA
- 3rd Place | Lev Cohen**  
Brandeis School of San Francisco, CA



2



3



2



1

MIDDLE SCHOOL

**1st Place | Mya Bodnick**  
Arthur I. Meyer Jewish Academy,  
Palm Beach Gardens, CA

**2nd Place | Taya Kol**  
The Emery/Weiner School, Houston, TX

**3rd Place | Jerome DelMoro**  
Ezra Academy, Forest Hills, NY

HIGH SCHOOL

**1st Place | Dasi Sessel**  
Rohr Bais Chaya Academy, Tamarac, FL

**2nd Place | Abigail Thurmond**  
Milken Community Schools, Los Angeles, CA

**3rd Place | Michael Gonzales**  
Donna Klein Jewish Academy,  
Boca Raton, FL



3



1

3



2



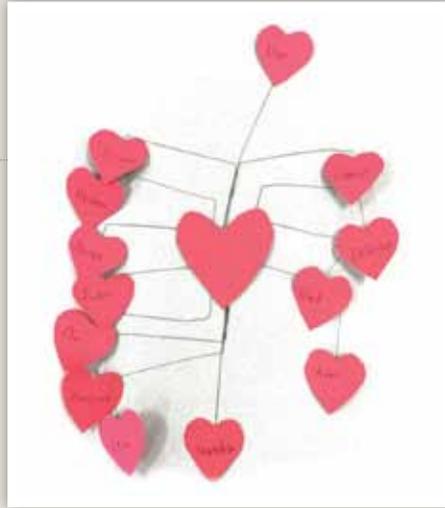
## SCULPTURE AND MIXED MEDIA

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**1st Place | Alex Amid**  
Adelson Educational Campus,  
Las Vegas, NV

**2nd Place | Joey Fried**  
Akiva School, Nashville, TN

**3rd Place | Ainsley Resig**  
Syracuse Hebrew Day School, Syracuse, NY



1



2



1



2

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

**1st Place | Jillian Barry**  
The Emery/Weiner School, Houston, TX

**2nd Place | Benjamin Coverler**  
The Emery/Weiner School, Houston, TX

**3rd Place | Talia Byrnes**  
Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA



1



2

### HIGH SCHOOL

**1st Place | Gabi Rosengarten**  
King David High School, Vancouver, BC

**2nd Place | Brooke Simtob**  
Frankel Jewish Academy, West Bloomfield, MI

**3rd Place | Meir Lazar**  
Yeshiva High School, Boca Raton, FL



3



1



3



2



3



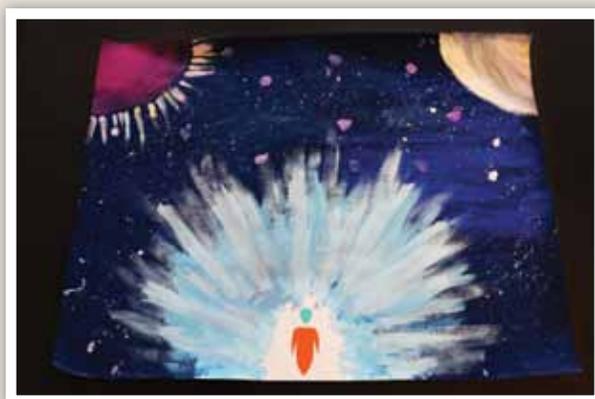
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MIDDLE SCHOOL

**1st Place | Roy Ad**  
Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD

**2nd Place | Joshua Ehrlich**  
The Brandeis School of San Francisco, CA

**3rd Place | Shoshi Walder**  
Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD



Drawing and Painting, Middle School  
**Hannah Steinberg**, JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School, Watertown, MA



Drawing and Painting, High School  
**Sara Khambalia**, Yeshiva High School, Boca Raton, FL



Drawing and Painting, High School  
**Alliyah Farahi**, Milken Community Schools, Los Angeles, CA



Drawing and Painting, Elementary School  
**Student**, Emanuel School, Sydney, NSW

HIGH SCHOOL

**1st Place | Yael Elrom**

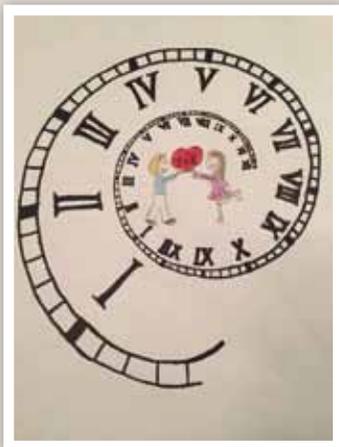
Frankel Jewish Academy, West Bloomfield, MI

**2nd Place | Chen Etzion**

Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD

**3rd Place | Hadas Elazar-Mittelman**

Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD



Drawing and Painting, Middle School  
**Joya Terdiman**,  
 The Brandeis School of San Francisco, CA



Sculpture and Mixed Media, High School  
**Eden Levy**, David Posnack  
 Jewish Day School, Davie, FL



Sculpture and Mixed Media, Middle School  
**Samantha Gelberg**,  
 Arthur I. Meyer  
 Jewish Academy,  
 Palm Beach Gardens, FL



Drawing and Painting, Elementary School  
**Baila Becker**, Madison Jewish Community  
 Day School, Madison, WI



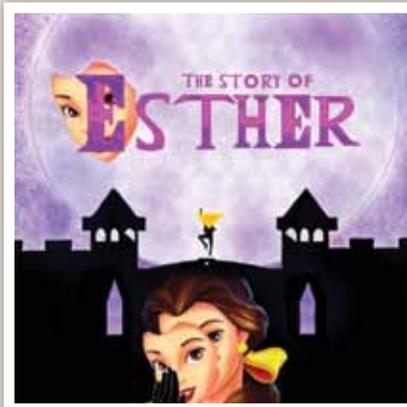
Sculpture and Mixed Media, Middle School  
**Madison Sallop**, Austin Jewish Academy, Austin, TX



Sculpture and Mixed Media, Elementary School  
**Noam Rabinovitz**, Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor, MI



Photography and Digital Art, Middle School  
**Naya Shacham**, Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School,  
 St. Louis, MO



Photography and Digital Art, High School  
**Rachel Constant**, King David High School,  
 Vancouver, BC

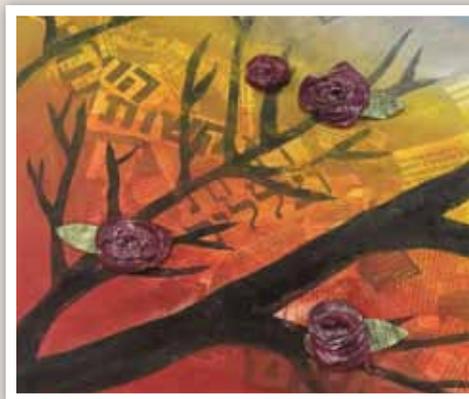


Sculpture and Mixed Media, Elementary School  
**Cole Strosberg**, Akiva School, Nashville, TN

RAVSAK STAFF PICKS



Drawing and Painting, High School  
**Ashley Klein**, Donna Klein Jewish Academy, Boca Raton, FL



Sculpture and Mixed Media, High School  
**Galit Benalloun**, Scheck Hillel Community School, Miami, FL



Drawing and Painting, Middle School  
**Samuel Shvartsman**, Silver Academy, Harrisburg, PA



Drawing and Painting, Elementary School  
**Eden Singer and Talia Willner**, Perelman Jewish Day School-Stern Campus, Wynnewood, PA



Sculpture and Mixed Media, Elementary School  
**Lanna Harper Antebi**, Contra Costa Jewish Day School, Lafayette, CA



Drawing and Painting, Elementary School  
**Zahra Slutchuk**, Gray Academy of Jewish Education, Winnipeg, MB



Drawing and Painting, Elementary School  
**Daniel Trumer**, Kadima Day School, West Hills, CA

## RAVSAK JUDAIC ART CONTEST



Sculpture and Mixed Media, Middle School  
**Iliana Beloborodov**, JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School, Watertown, MA



Sculpture and Mixed Media,  
Elementary School  
**Sophie Citron**,  
Carmel Academy,  
Greenwich, CT



Sculpture and Mixed Media, Elementary School  
**Elias Michan**, San Diego Jewish Academy, San Diego, CA



Sculpture and Mixed  
Media, Middle School  
**Naomi Kuropatwa**,  
The Epstein School,  
Sandy Springs, GA

We are deeply grateful to the twenty artists and art teachers from Jewish day schools who served as judges in the first round of the competition.

For the final round, a panel of nine esteemed artists selected the winners. You can learn more about the judges on the RAVSAK website.



Aviva Bloom



Ezra Benus



Merav Ezer



Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik



Jennifer Bayer



Marc Tasman



Melissa Taub



Shai Zurim



Yona Verwer

# RAVSAK: A RETROSPECTIVE



## Jonathan Woocher

President, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah

I remember first encountering RAVSAK when Fradle Freidenreich, JESNA's associate executive director, came into my office to tell me that we had to give a helping hand to a small group of day school directors who were forming a network of their schools, many in smaller Jewish communities and often the only day school in town. These schools lacked connection to any denominational structure, so they resolved to help themselves as best they could with few resources and little visibility beyond their own communities (and sometimes, even within them).

To say that RAVSAK has grown in the close to thirty years since I first came across it is an understatement of monumental proportions. What began de facto as a network of professionals meeting once a year became an association of schools, with a board of volunteer leaders and a growing array of support services and innovative programs, and is now poised to be a linchpin of a fieldwide organization that will bring together all of the forces working to strengthen day schools as centers of Jewish educational excellence outside the haredi community.

In this new configuration, the values that have animated RAVSAK throughout its life will remain critical: inclusiveness and diversity, Jewish seriousness coupled with creativity and attentiveness to the wider world, mutual support and grassroots leadership. It takes courage to give up something demonstrably successful this decision. This is only the latest in many Lech Lecha moments for RAVSAK, times when it ventured beyond the familiar in order to pursue a vision and a promise still somewhat indistinct, but visible there on the horizon.

That JESNA was able to play some small part in launching RAVSAK on its journey is a source of institutional pride. That all of us now have the opportunity to help it and its colleague organizations take the next steps on this sacred journey is a privilege that carries with it as well a joyous responsibility.



## Susan Cook

Retired Head of School, B'nai Shalom Jewish Day School, Greensboro, NC; RAVSAK President 1993-95

In the early days, RAVSAK's leadership was a small but dedicated group of volunteers, working with guidance from JESNA. I remember my first conference, in Boston, surrounded by educators who were looking for meaningful support to strengthen their community schools. After the first day, I felt like we had found a home in RAVSAK. A lively and pioneering spirit prevailed. We joined forces with a small but eager network of community schools determined to become a dynamic force in the world of Jewish day schools.

Our board meetings were held in member's homes around the country.

## In the beginning...

**On July 15, 1980**, the Association of Jewish Communal Day Schools sent out a letter to colleagues in likeminded schools throughout the United States, telling them about the results of a conference held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in June by educators from eight different communities. As an outgrowth of that meeting, three papers were developed for approval by the boards of day schools interested in the new organization. The papers delineated rationale, philosophy and objectives of the AJCDS and defined membership and services. Noting that the creation of a new national organization is "a formidable undertaking," the group set member fees of \$100 per school and 50 cents per student and noted that it was receiving support from the American Association for Jewish Education.

Fast forward to 1987. Having held several successful conferences, and with the encouragement of the Jewish Education Services of North America (JESNA), a group of thirteen educators met to draft documents that would allow for the creation of an incorporated, tax-exempt organization to be known as The Jewish Community Day School Network (JCDSN), with a handwritten translation and abbreviation in Hebrew: *Reshet Batei Sefer Kehilati'im* (RVS"K). Thus was RAVSAK born.

The JCDSN network, as it was known, was comprised of "Jewish community day schools which are not affiliated with a particular Jewish denominational movement" and which were committed to "the acknowledgement of the validity of all major streams of Jewish thought and the incorporation of this principle into their curricula." It was further noted that this implies "that there are many possible options for the expression of Judaism." Other guiding principles of the organization were the appreciation and advocacy for the value concept of Klal Yisrael and the promotion of participation in Jewish community life. Dialogue and exchange of ideas, and a willingness to learn from each other, as well as "striving to develop a program which fosters appreciation of

## TIMELINE

! Association of Jewish Communal Day Schools

1980

Cincinnati Conference  
10 Attendees

1981

1982

1983

1984

A NETWORK IS BORN!

JEWISH COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL

the commonalities and differences in Jewish life” rounded out the organization’s founding values.

An executive committee structure was established, consisting of a chair, secretary/treasurer, and coordinators for Communications, Networking, Resource Gathering, Events Planning and Outreach. Policies were promulgated regarding kashrut at all events, the prohibition of any business or other activities on Shabbat and the establishment of an annual conference to coincide with a major educational conference. A newsletter for all member schools was created.

Issues that have come to define RAVSAK surfaced early: the insistence on a “clear cut trans-ideological and pluralistic approach” to Jewish education and the question of the membership of the organization. “Is it for schools or principals, professional leaders or all of the above?” In 1987, it was decided that the organization was “a fellowship of principals,” although the matter was left open for further discussion.

By the end of the decade, the JCDSN had published two issues of its newsletter, had begun to use the name RAVSAK and had announced “a new vehicle for sharing ideas across our network, RAVSAK Schools Update.”

I remember one meeting in a cramped hotel room—because we didn’t need an entire conference room! Our size did not reflect our enthusiasm, however. We knew that our movement had the potential to flourish, as day schools in farflung cities were reimagining their schools’ mission and embracing the diverse needs of their stakeholders.

We were committed to a yearly conference, a biannual newsletter and an active outreach program. A grant by the Jim Joseph Foundation was awarded to RAVSAK to develop a Shabbat curriculum reflecting a diversity of observance while grounding students in a deep understanding of its laws and customs and the central role it plays in our people’s story. Conference attendance grew yearly and always included visits to member schools. It was at the conference in Greensboro, NC, where Marc Kramer began to make his “mark.” Marc was a born storyteller, and his good sense and wisdom was already apparent. I doubt any of us were surprised that he would eventually lead RAVSAK.

To this day, I take great pride in counting myself as one of the early pioneers of an exemplary organization which gave voice to schools like mine seeking to embrace the rich and diverse Jewish community.

### Dr. Larry Kutler



Head of School, Talmud Torah/Herzliah, Montreal;  
RAVSAK President 1997-99

Looking back and reflecting on RAVSAK is an endeavor that can easily lend itself to nostalgia. The days that young heads of school sat on the lawn at Hofstra University during the CAJE conferences and conjured up a network whereby we could share

issues and challenges are distant. The small conferences of eight to twelve people remain cherished memories. Our membership was our board, and the executive committee formed the strategic plans and guided the fledgling network. Ada Michaels was our first executive director, who visited many of the schools on her own dime. Marc Kramer was a newly minted professional when he took over the helm and navigated the seas of Jewish educational politics and charted a course for the fledgling institution.

But it is not the talents, sincerity and boldness of the founders that prompt this reminiscence. It is the direction we go in and the potential that lies ahead. We are poised to contribute something great to another generation of educators, and I am hopeful that this new organization will broaden the imaginations, reach down deep to deliver the gifts of Jewish education and resonate with our clients.

When the kings of Israel were anointed, they would be taken down to the Gihon spring. This was done for symbolic reasons, so that the reign would endure as long as the spring flowed (1 Kings 1:32-35). As it was with kings, so it is with Jewish organizations. As the Gemarah in Keritot 5b-6a explains, symbols are important not only for what will be, but for what might be.

of Jewish  
Day Schools



NEWSLETTER OF  
THE JEWISH COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL NETWORK  
VOLUME 2 — NO. 2

Aligned with The Jewish Education Society of North America

West Palm Beach Conference  
31 Attendees

37 Schools

Orlando Conference

1985

1986

1987

1988

1989

New York City Conference  
27 Attendees

Jewish Community Day School Network incorporates

Boston Conference

NETWORK (JCDSN)

# RAVSAK: A RETROSPECTIVE

Permit me a moment to say thank you to all of the presidents, the lay leaders and the professionals that guided RAVSAK. Thank you Ada, thank you Marc! All of us have been enriched; my hope is that what might be, will be astonishing!



## Karen Feller

**Retired Head of School, Donna Klein Jewish Academy, Boca Raton, Florida; RAVSAK President 1999-2001**

In 1993, in my first headship in a Jewish day school, I was alone, and lost. I found RAVSAK. What would I have done without RAVSAK?

As those of us in the early years in the 90s realized, what would RAVSAK do without a leader? Right within our small group, maybe 30 schools, there was only one who could develop our fledgling organization with strength, insight, foresight, passion and vision for a great today and tomorrow for Jewish education, Marc Kramer. Our organizational meetings took place around kitchen tables, first in the home of our part-time director Ada Michaels, may she rest in peace, and then in Marc's tiny apartment in Manhattan, where we planned the yearly conference, wrote bylaws and a mission statement, and developed strategies for the future, deciding what we wanted RAVSAK to be.

Marc helped me become a successful head of a Jewish day school; he has been a friend, a mentor, a teacher. His brilliance, and commitment to the success of the heads of Jewish day schools, and his love of Judaism and pluralistic Jewish day schools, led to the creation of Project Sulam. With very little background in Judaism, I asked him one day, how can I be a leader of a Jewish day school? I believed there were others like me.

He took this seriously, and by the following summer, with funding RAVSAK received from AVI CHAI, 18 heads and principals along with mentors studied for two weeks at Brandeis and continued our studies for two years. I was a changed person and leader. I have never stopped studying. After all these years, experiences, learning and dear friends, the best thing that has happened is that I have been able to give back. Trained to coach new heads through the HOS PEP program, all my years of experience along with the other four coaches is not lost.



## Zena Sulkes PhD

**Retired Head of School, Jewish Academy of Orlando; RAVSAK President 2001-03**

I became head of school in Orlando in July of 1995. I immediately contacted RAVSAK to become involved. I had previously been President of NATE (now Association of Reform Jewish Educators) and knew the value of a support group of like-minded colleagues.

At that time RAVSAK could best have been described as a "Mom and Pop"

## The second decade

**By 1990**, there were 38 JCDSN schools. Per capita dues had increased to \$1.25, and there was lots of discussion about outreach and public relations. The format and timing of the newsletter was a matter of fiscal concern, even though JESNA was paying the mailing costs. Other issues were the affiliation of denominational schools and the need to revise by-laws and to create an information packet for outreach purposes. The conference and its nature, location and participation preoccupied the Executive Committee.

"RAVSAK goes international" was the headline in the 1990 newsletter, as the interdenominational Toronto Bialik Hebrew Day School was welcomed into the network. The newsletter featured an article about marketing, and the conference included speakers on marketing and advertising, teacher certification and Bible curriculum. As the network grew, it became apparent that the volunteer leadership, themselves heads of schools, could not do all the work of the nascent organization. Ada Michaels, a recently retired head of school, was hired as an administrative consultant.

Soon the conference began to include board development workshops among its offerings and attracted lay leaders. Dov Bear, the JCDSN traveling teddy, visited 2nd grade classrooms in member schools to keep schools in touch with one another and to give children a chance to learn about the network. The newsletter included professional and curricular development articles and urged members to call one another on the telephone about school-related matters.

In 1997, the network decided to "commit RAVSAK to long term thinking" by undertaking a strategic planning process to "sort out what is really important to RAVSAK, focusing

San Mateo, CA  
San Francisco, CA  
La Jolla, CA  
El Cerrito, CA

## TIMELINE



San Francisco Conference

1990



Miami Beach Conference

1991

1992



Greensboro Conference  
18 Attendees

1993



28 Schools

1994



Las Vegas Conference

on pragmatic implementation.” The plan was to include goals and actions plans for serving as an advocate and support for schools, providing development opportunities for heads of schools, teachers and lay leaders, networking, technology, special education, outreach, public relations and the conference. The executive committee structure was revised to include regional coordinators as well as a staff liaison coordinator.

By the end of the year, the Executive Committee had received approval from the membership for a new mission statement: “The Jewish Community Day School Network is an association of Jewish Community Day schools committed to providing superior education in intensive, pluralistic Jewish learning environments. The Network is a forum for sharing resources, ideas and solutions, enabling the members to draw strength from the diversity and experience of one another to achieve their goals.”

The network, it declared, “will serve as an advocate and support for its constituencies; provide development opportunities for heads of school, teachers and lay leadership; compile and distribute relevant information on topics such as administration, curriculum, budgeting and finance, fundraising, and recruitment; create and distribute a resource directory; present the yearly conference on topics generated by the member schools; share employment information and needs,” and finally, “study and pray together to constitute ourselves as a learning community.”

At the end of the century, there were 60 member schools. Ada Michaels was promoted to executive director, and RAVSAK was ready for the 21st century.

organization. In addition to our responsibilities as heads of community day schools, we handful of executive committee members were responsible for the organization. We were the “lay leaders” of RAVSAK, with no paid employees. One of those lay leaders was Dr. Marc Kramer, the youngest member of our group vested in the concept that we could become a wonderful professional organization. Shortly thereafter, we became very wise and recognizing Marc’s incredible talents matched with his Jewish neshamah, we engaged him part time as our professional director. When shortly thereafter I became president of RAVSAK and worked very closely with Marc, I truly became aware of how fortunate the organization was to have him.

While respecting our individual identities and philosophies, RAVSAK and the four partner agencies now move from “strength to strength” and join our individual groups into one voice for Jewish day schools. Just as a simple, copied 2-4 page newsletter that shared RAVSAK news is now *HaYidion*, a professional educational journal of the highest quality, may the new organization continue to grow and prosper as the address for North America’s finest day schools. Let us remember our humble beginnings, and give credit for our success to those upon whose shoulders we stand. Kol hakavod, Dr. Marc Kramer, and may you personally continue to go from “strength to strength.”



### Dr. Michael Berger

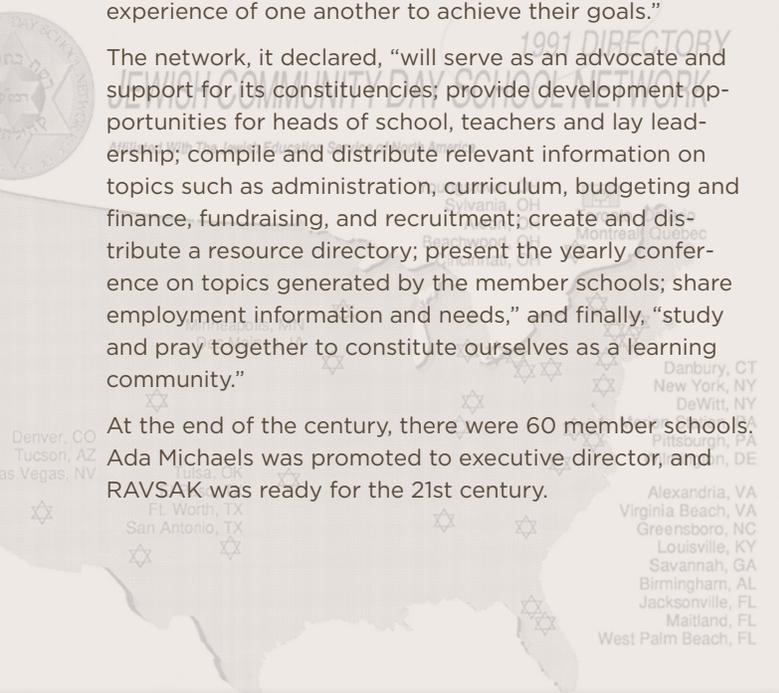
Program Officer, AVI CHAI; Professor, Emory University

“Ambitious. But does it pass the giggle test?”

These were some of the initial reactions to RAVSAK’s concept of a training institute for educational leaders of community day schools who wanted to lead their schools Jewishly, but lacked significant Judaic background. It was the early 2000s, and The AVI CHAI Foundation shared RAVSAK’s concern about professional leadership in this rapidly growing field. We both wanted Jewish schools, not merely schools for Jews. But could effective administrators and their schools be transformed through a mere program?

With a 2003 AVI CHAI planning grant, RAVSAK convened a meeting of educators and experts in adult learning to clarify the need and brainstorm its components: a solid curriculum; a lived experience of Jewish practice, prayer, and Shabbat; mentors; cohort-building; and an action plan back at one’s school. From that meeting sprung Project Sulam (=ladder), a yearlong program bookended by two intensive, immersive 11-day sessions of Jewish learning and living.

In 2005, 18 courageous day school leaders took up residence in Brandeis’s dorms and became students, learning from engaging teachers and inspiring mentors about Jewish holidays and rituals, classic texts and ethics, prayer and practice. The experience was transformative, and many went back to their schools feeling like authentic Jewish leaders for the first time. A “phase 2” was added to enable select leaders to extend their learning, bringing lay and professional colleagues with



# RAVSAK: A RETROSPECTIVE

them to enhance their schools' Jewish mission further. Three more cohorts would follow, and alumni shabbatonim kept the flame burning.

Looking back on Sulam, we don't giggle—we beam with pride.



## Tzivia Garfinkel

Head of Jewish Studies, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago

The night that Jacob lies down with a stone for a pillow, he dreams. And, in his dream a “sulam” / ladder appears with angels who are ascending and descending. That dream sequence comes to mind when I think of Project Sulam, a program in which a group of diverse day school leaders were invited to reach higher and higher in our Jewish learning and living. Mentors and new administrators climbed that sulam together by taking part in a program filled with learners' minyans, text study, Shabbat meals, divrei Torah, field trips, walks to Riverside Park to welcome Shabbat, debates “leshem shamayim,” shabbatonim, storytelling and friendship.

I remember the first meal that we shared when we focused on saying brachot before and after we ate. Netilat yadaim and HaMotzi were short and sweet, with the regular brachah formula, and we quickly became proficient. But then there was Birkat HaMazon with its extended set of brachot, different tunes, multisyllabic words, Sephardic and Ashkenazic pronunciations! This was a Sulam challenge in which we had to climb the rungs with care. With each delicious meal, Birkat HaMazon became a theme song for us as we sang through, blessing after blessing, with Jerry Isaak-Shapiro adding his favorite HaRachaman for the welfare of Israeli soldiers.

In my mind, Sulam was the ultimate grown-up Jewish camp experience (sans sports, thankfully!), in which we were immersed on a daily basis in exceptionally well-planned activities that enriched everyone, with the special attention that the RAVSAK team is known for. And the Sulam beat goes on: I recently received a note from the head of Judaic studies at my former mentee's school, with a request to explore future plans for Jewish learning.



## Dean Goldfein

Head of School, Contra Costa Jewish Day School, Lafayette, California

RAVSAK was introduced to me through the people I met in the late 90s as I began my journey as a Jewish day school Leader. Thanks to Chaim Heller, my boss at then Brandeis Hillel Day School, San Francisco campus, I headed to the N. E. Miles Jewish Day School in Birmingham, Alabama, for a gathering of fifty Jewish communal professionals who worked in schools similar to ours.

I was met at the airport by the husband of the host school's head, who ferried

## The third decade

**By the winter of 2000** RAVSAK had more than 70 member schools, and within a year had become the second largest Jewish school organization in North America. Ada Michaels, who helped transition the Jewish Community Day School Network from a grassroots effort to a professional organization, retired. The office moved to New York and Marc Kramer was hired as executive director. Key goals were to expand RAVSAK's membership to include all non-denominational Jewish day schools in North America, offer more service consultation to schools and become a recognized presence in the constellation of Jewish educational organizations.

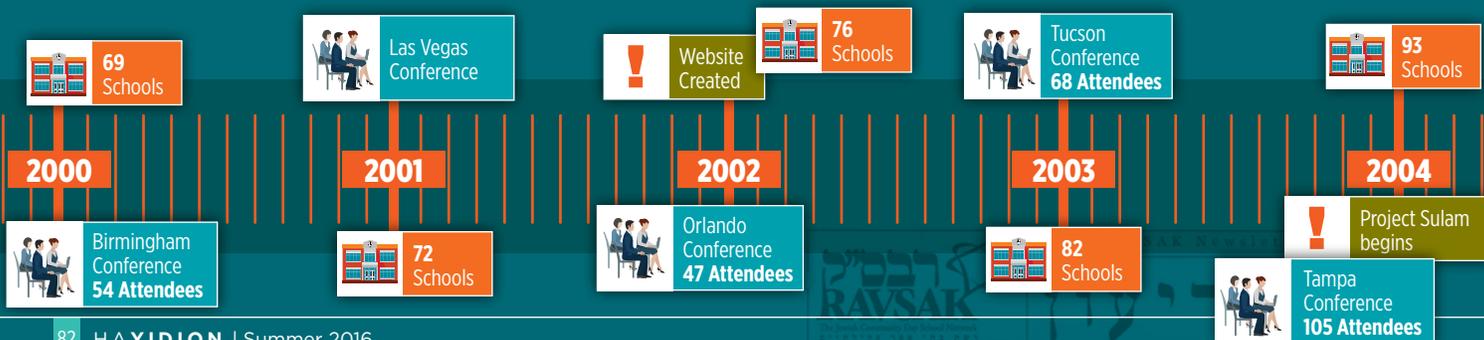


A cultural shift was also occurring. Federations, which had once rejected day school education as “un-American,” now proudly called their local day schools the “jewels in the crown” of their community achievement. By the end of 2003 the percentage of Jewish children attending Jewish day schools was higher than it had ever been, and day school was identified as the medium of hope for a North American Jewish future.



RAVSAK received increased recognition and funding from philanthropic institutions, enabling the organization to create new professional development programs for heads of school and Judaic studies professionals and to increase the efficiency of its own operations. With the support of the AVI CHAI Foundation, Project Sulam was launched for heads who were established educational leaders but who lacked a meaningful Judaic studies background. New student programs included the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT), a blended middle school program in Jewish history with several university partners.

## TIMELINE



In 2005 *HaYidion*, RAVSAK's erstwhile newsletter, fast becoming a professional journal, appeared in a new color magazine format. As it evolved to include themed topics of educational significance written by respected contributors, its audience extended far beyond RAVSAK's schools to many other Jewish networks and organizations.



By 2006 there were 108 RAVSAK schools and the annual conference attracted 180 attendees. In 2007, RAVSAK sponsored a joint conference with PARDES,

the Reform day school network. NAAJHS, the North American Association of Jewish High Schools, decided to move its programs, most notably Moot Beit Din, under the RAVSAK umbrella. RAVSAK was named one of the 50 most creative and effective organizations in the country by 21/64, a nonprofit consulting division of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

With RAVSAK's growth and commitment to leadership came a decision to change the governance model. Based upon a strategic plan developed by the executive committee, RAVSAK members voted at the 2010 conference to create a new national board composed of philanthropic lay leaders and two school heads. Arnee Winshall was named the founding chair. The board's charge was to refine and advance RAVSAK's vision on a global level.



The 2010 conference attracted over 500 attendees and was the first joint conference between RAVSAK, YU, Pardes and Schechter. RAVSAK's ten-year report of January 2010 reported that there were 120 member schools and that "the growth in RAVSAK reflects the change and maturation of the North American Jewish community."

me and a participant from Canada to the opening dinner at their home. I was welcomed to the event like a long lost family relative. The next three days were intensive and outstanding, featuring sessions on curriculum, governance and enrollment, conversations on how to address the plethora of challenges community schools face. All this done in a positive context that the rewards of this difficult work were many and that RAVSAK was there for those willing to join in and build.

As the founding head of school where I still serve, I leaned heavily and often on RAVSAK for expertise, encouragement and education. These threads merged for me when I was fortunate to be in the first cohort of Project Sulam. There, with the wise guidance of my mentor Mariashi Groner, I grew immeasurably into my role as a Jewish leader for our community.

RAVSAK's original group was a volunteer venture. Over the years, under Marc's inspired leadership and the superb staff that joined him, I saw RAVSAK grow to serve a much wider range of individuals and schools through their consultation and many program services. The personal touch and deep respect for the diversity of Jewish life that greeted me in Birmingham nearly two decades ago remains at the heart of RAVSAK, and for that I am very appreciative.



## Arnee Winshall

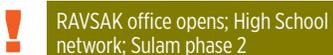
**RAVSAK Board Chair, 2010-2013**

A few years after I and others founded JCDS, Boston's first pluralistic school, we needed to search for a new head. I heard about a day school network and decided to go to their conference. Once there, I thought, "Wow! Look at all these schools! The topics they discuss, the people we can interact with, the resources we can share!"

Walt and I got involved. We found Marc really engaging and began to participate in panels at conferences. At JCDS we were trying to do intentional pluralism, even before we knew about RAVSAK, and exploring what would it mean to do serious Judaic study and reflect a diverse population. At RAVSAK, we met people who were similarly engaged in these issues. We saw the challenges involved and wondered how we could serve the day school world more powerfully.

Then Marc told me that the executive committee was doing strategic planning and visioning, and asked me to facilitate one of the sessions. I came to New York and we looked at the process of shifting to a lay board, including benefits, challenges and structure. At the end of the process, Marc asked if I would chair this board. I said no. Marc got Yossi Prager of AVI CHAI to call me, who said either find someone we have confidence in or you do it, because we want to invest in this organization. So I said yes.

One big challenge was preserving RAVSAK's culture during this wonderful period of growth, when the number of member schools doubled. How were we going to position RAVSAK, as a grassroots and school leader-based organization, to fulfill its vision while maintaining its values and culture and its heimish small



2005

2006

2007

2008

2009



# RAVSAK: A RETROSPECTIVE

community feel? How could we scale up and raise funds to accomplish an ambitious vision while preserving our identity and members' loyalty?

The other challenge was building a board. It was hard to make funders see the impact on current Jewish life and the future that community day schools were having. It was hard to get them to understand that day schools don't necessarily have to serve the majority of the population, but that the population they do serve is so critical to the Jewish future.

Through *HaYidion* and all of its activities, RAVSAK has led the way in engaging with sticky complicated issues and giving others, both in day schools and far beyond, the context and the tools for engaging with them. They impact Jewish life and the world we're in, and the world we're creating.



## Dr. Darin Katz

Academic Dean, Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

My most meaningful RAVSAK memory centers on attending my first North American Jewish Day School Conference in 2013 in Washington, DC. I had just started my current job six months before and I was excited to see how this conference compared to others I had attended in the past. My first impression was that everyone seemed to know each other from the moment they arrived at the hotel (except me that is)! It was then that I realized how RAVSAK provided many meaningful opportunities for its members to interact throughout the year, creating smaller communities within our larger one. I met dozens of fellow day school educators at that conference from schools around the country. Each session or workshop I went to was more intriguing than the last. I remember attending a workshop on technology integration in the classroom followed by one on making tefillah more meaningful for students.

Relatively new to Jewish day school education at the time, the 2013 NAJDSC showed me that educational excellence framed with a Jewish lens was not only possible, but my calling. The combination of workshops offered at the 2013 NAJDSC and others that followed was very powerful for me and reinforced the amazing responsibility we have as Jewish day school educators. Thank you for everything, RAVSAK! I look forward to what the future holds for community day schools in your new venture.

## The fourth decade

**In 2010**, RAVSAK proudly proclaimed that it was "the fastest growing network of Jewish day schools in North America. Attending to the leadership and management needs of over 120 schools serving nearly 30,000 students, we stand at the cutting edge of Jewish day school education and leadership." It declared that in the years ahead, "RAVSAK will transform Jewish life in North America and beyond by strengthening community day schools, encouraging religious purposefulness, and fostering authentic Jewish pluralism. We will invest new generations of Jews in a commitment to lifelong learning, an understanding of the vibrancy inherent in diversity, a deep attachment to Israel, a celebration of the richness in Jewish culture, and a vision of a world made better through acts of *chesed* and *zedakah*."

RAVSAK's lay board recognized the need for board expansion and philanthropic development to support the growing organization. In 2012, a business plan was drawn up to "reflect a more strategic approach to serving the field effectively, at a time of limited resources." The outgrowth of extensive research, the plan prioritized areas of focus and identified needed resources.

RAVSAK continued to serve schools through consultancy and programming. Teachers of Jewish history were connected to leading scholars through Re/Presenting the Jewish Past; middle school students worked with graduate students in a virtual environment in the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT); students learned about social issues and philanthropic leadership through Project ROPE; and Sulam, Moot Beit Din and JCAT enriched school leaders, high schoolers and middle schoolers through serious scholarship and shared experiences.



RAVSAK developed new programs: Judaic Art and Hebrew Poetry contests for students, and HoSPEP, which paired experienced heads of school with new heads in highly successful mentorships. RAVSAK Reshet (network) centers were created to focus on topics of

## TIMELINE





interest to a variety of constituents, utilizing digital communications to forge meaningful connections among geographically diverse communities. Sulam developed into an ambitious alumni program and piloted Sulam 2.0 to address board governance. *HaYidion* saw record readership.

In 2013, RAVSAK moved into a larger office in midtown Manhattan to accommodate its growing staff and programming. A little more than a year later, Dr. Idana Goldberg was appointed as co-executive director. RAVSAK consulting and support services were in high demand.

The AVI CHAI Foundation became a major RAVSAK donor. In 2015, membership in RAVSAK reached an all-time high of 138 schools. Funding to sustain RAVSAK as an independent entity, however, was not forthcoming, and despite growth and advancement the organization struggled to meet the development goals specified in its business plan.

In the Spring of 2015, RAVSAK joined with its colleagues at SDSN, PARDES, PEJE and YUSP to explore ways that we could serve the day school field more effectively and to determine whether one combined Jewish day school organization made sense for the field. The RAVSAK board wrestled for many months over the question of whether to join the merged entity, ultimately deciding in January 2016 that joining was the right decision for RAVSAK and more importantly for our schools. In the summer of 2016, RAVSAK will end its 36th year and will become part of a new organization, dedicated to serving Jewish day schools in powerful and sustainable ways.



## Larry Kligman

Head of School, Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School, Northridge, California

The pilot program of RAVSAK's Head of School Professional Excellence Project coincided with my first year as head of school. The project met my needs at a very important time, when I was crafting my vision of leadership and sharpening my focus on Heschel's short-and long-term goals. I had the privilege of working with a coach who has truly been a gift in terms of how she listened, asked meaningful questions, and helped me design my priorities. I appreciate that my coach never directly gave me the answers I often sought, but rather helped me arrive at my own decisions, a technique I now use with my staff and which I find to be useful in cultivating new thinking and innovative ideas.

My experience with RAVSAK's leadership community helped to increase my Judaic learning and involvement. Also, the connections that Heschel staff and I have been able to make with the Jewish day school community through conferences and workshops have helped us tremendously to craft and execute our strategic goals, as well as to continue to focus on providing valuable professional development. RAVSAK has been a tremendous source of information and inspiration and we are grateful for the guidance.



## Danielle Keystone-Adler

Co-President, Paul Penna DJDS Board of Directors, Toronto

I truly believe that RAVSAK, and the support we have received from several talented individuals, is the single reason that our board is functioning with more strength than ever before. Marc Kramer is enormously generous and professional. Bringing him to Toronto to run a board retreat was the turning point for us. Marc taught us in very clear terms about governance, our board obligations, and the relationship between the board and our employee. RAVSAK also gave us Betty Winn and we could not be more grateful! Betty works with our principal and our leadership to help us through individual situations when the lines blur and we find ourselves in grey areas. She is candid and confident. She calls each of us out when we need to be called out. She provides guidance, support and invaluable advice.

The third and final resource that I have enjoyed very much is the RAVSAK Reshet for board presidents. It has allowed me to be in touch with and to seek the advice of colleagues and counterparts from across the continent. Every question that comes up from every member of the Reshet has been important and valuable. It is a rare and wonderful resource that I hope will continue in some new form. We thank RAVSAK for its invaluable contributions to our school and to the wider Jewish day school community. We look forward to the new and improved resources that the unified JDS agency will offer.

Philadelphia Conference NAJDSC  
1000 Attendees

139 Schools

2015

2016

Hebrew Badge Project; Technion Challenge

136 Schools

## For the past half dozen years,

members of RAVSAK's leadership team have sat together, sleeves rolled up and elbows on the table, engaged in the holy work of supporting and enhancing a Jewish day school education. A typical conversation has not been just a meeting of the minds—it has been a vibrant, passionate discourse on the many details of what makes a day school program great. And that involves many different and sometimes difficult explorations. It entails listening and reflecting on the varied ways in which we appeal to and support a pluralistic community of learners.

Our meetings have been full of exuberant encouragement and praise for the active engagement of our Jewish community day school students, of all ages. We have laughed aloud, we have learned wholeheartedly, we have shared with pride and consternation, and we have even cried together.

We have never forgotten the distinguished responsibility and honor of building upon the amazing foresight of those who founded and nurtured such an essential network. And we have admired and reveled in the thoughtful, intelligent and deeply insightful leadership of the professionals of the RAVSAK organization who have pushed us all to be the best we could be, mindful of the constituents we were meant to serve.



Rebekah M.  
Farber  
Chair  
Encino, CA



Uri L. Benhamron  
Miami, FL



Ann Bennett  
Fairfax, VA



Lisa Breslau  
Sacramento, CA



Dr. N. Shira  
Brown  
Williamsville, NY



Dr. Barbara Davis  
Syracuse, NY

Over these years, we have grown together, and our bonds to each other have grown strong. We have developed deep trust and respect for our colleagues, lay and staff, around the table. We are more than just a brain trust—we are all friends.

And we have done all these things with gratitude and joy for the many benefits of our partnership with all of you. You—the leaders, the learners, the teachers, the mentors and the supporters—are the reason we have been so committed to this sacred mission of educating our children for a strong Jewish future.

RAVSAK's Board of Directors wishes to thank you all for the many years of serving together, in partnership, and with such passion and aspiration for the future of the Jewish People. Now, as we embark on the next leg of our journey in the field of Jewish education, we may wear different hats, but we will continue to champion a precious legacy that we have been so blessed to call our own. We wish you all much mazal.

## *Chazak, chazak ve-nitchazek!*

In friendship,

### **RAVSAK's Board of Directors**



Cass Gottlieb  
Baltimore, MD



Matthew  
Heilicher  
Minneapolis, MN



Zipora Schorr  
Baltimore, MD



Joseph Steiner  
Toronto, ON



Beni Surpin  
San Diego, CA



Arnee R. Winshall  
Weston, MA



Lesley Zafran  
Boca Raton, FL

We thank your leadership, inspiration, and support of each of us, and of Jewish Community Day School education these many years.

**Sharon Pollin, JCDS New Orleans**



It is an honor and a privilege to have worked with Marc, Idana, and the RAVSAK team. We look forward to NewOrg, and the role that RAVSAK schools will continue to play in securing the Jewish Future.

**Jonathan Cannon**



Todah Rabbah to RAVSAK for all you have done to support and advance Jewish day school education.

**The Staff and Students From Denver Jewish Day School**



CJDS wants to thank RAVSAK for creating beautiful journals for our Jewish community. Yasher Koach to the entire RAVSAK staff and may you continue to go from strength to greater strength.

**Judy Finkelstein-Taff and the entire CJDS community**



Thank you Marc Kramer, Idana Goldberg, and the incredible staff of RAVSAK for your incredible commitment to Jewish Education.

**Shira and Marc Brown**

Thank you for your friendship and guidance. Rockland Jewish Academy is proud to be a RAVSAK partner.

**From the RJA and RJAF Boards and Community**



Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School joined RAVSAK in the 1990s. The early leaders grew a network with an unwavering commitment to the future, always believing in the “possible.”

תודה רבה

**The Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School Community**



We deeply appreciate our 16-year association with RAVSAK and Dr. Marc Kramer, who created a powerful Jewish education community from which we all built greatness.

Thank you,

**Dr. Bruce Powell, Head of School  
Jeff Levine, Board President**



Todah Rabah to Marc Kramer and RAVSAK for your support. Through programs like HoSPEP, Sulam, and Moot Beit Din, you have helped us grow as professionals, educators, and lay leaders.

**The Staff and Students from Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy**



Our deep gratitude to the board, staff, and community at RAVSAK. Together, we have made our Jewish future brighter.

Todah Rabah!

**The Board, Staff, and Students of Shalom School, Sacramento, CA**



Thank you Arnee for your visionary leadership in strengthening Jewish Day Schools around the country. We are grateful for Arnee and RAVSAK's generosity in helping JCDS thrive as Boston's pluralistic Jewish Day School.

**JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School**



With appreciation to Marc Kramer, Betty Winn, and Cooki Levy for their wise and caring support. RAVSAK has truly made a difference for our school.

**Paul Penna DJDS**



HBHA thanks RAVSAK for creating a network for independent Jewish day schools. The Sulam experience has deeply influenced our daily lives, and the work of Marc Kramer and RAVSAK has been essential to our school's growth.

**HBHA Staff and Faculty**



RAVSAK,

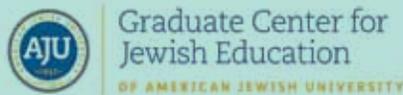
Todah rabah, mazal tov, and kol ha'kavod!  
Thank You from the Students, Families, Faculty,  
Staff, and Board of Governors of

**Scheck Hillel Community School (eHillel.org)**



We applaud RAVSAK leadership for creating the dynamic playground of ideas that is HaYidion. It has been a privilege to lead and learn with practitioners, scholars, and lay leaders who care deeply about Jewish education.

**Dr. Miriam Heller Stern, Dean**



We are proud of Marc Kramer and the entire RAVSAK team for all they've done to ensure a vibrant Jewish future!

**Jeff, Matan, Rinat, and Merav Kramer-Richard**

RAVSAK's Project Sulam provided us with meaningful connections to other Jewish educators. We are forever grateful for the depth of Jewish knowledge and practice that we gained through your thoughtful mentoring.

With heartfelt thanks,

**Nina Wand, Susan Yurow, Melissa Lebowitz**

Lay leaders, professional leaders, faculty, and students have valued our relationships with RAVSAK and the variety of stimulating learning opportunities and programs we have experienced. Thank you, RAVSAK, for your many years of dedicated leadership.

**Bialik Hebrew Day School**



With deep appreciation of RAVSAK and Marc Kramer for your leadership in strengthening Jewish community day schools. WE LOVE JCAT!!

**Dr. Peg Sandel and the Brandeis Marin community**



Portland Jewish Academy is grateful for your partnership in helping us raise menschen, and for the support, education, and collegiality we have felt as members of RAVSAK. Yasher Koach and Todah Rabah.

**PJA Board, Faculty, and Families**



Thanks, RAVSAK, for leading us on our journey with pluralism...we are strong because of you.

**Cheryl Maayan, Head of School, and the entire Mirowitz Community**



Todah Rabah to Marc Kramer and our many friends at RAVSAK for your valued work. We look forward to our continued partnership and a bright future.

**The Staff, Faculty, and Board of Trustees at Seattle Jewish Community School**



Thank you for supporting Jewish education over the years.

May you go from strength to strength.

**The Staff and Students from Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor**



The Weber School celebrates the work of RAVSAK and the leadership of Dr. Marc Kramer for strengthening so many Jewish schools and educators, as well as the field of Jewish education.

**Rabbi Ed Harwitz, Head of School**



Mazal Tov to RAVSAK for its years of service to Jewish community day schools.

**Elaine and Joseph Steiner**

Thank you for all you have done on behalf of Jewish day school education.

**The Faculty and Students of The Epstein School**



RAVSAK has provided CESJDS with many invaluable tools to help advance its mission, and has done tremendous work to keep Jewish day schools thriving. We are eternally grateful!

**The Staff and Students from Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School**



Thank you for your support, guidance, wisdom and direction through the decades.

It has been an honor to be a part of RAVSAK's legacy.

**The Faculty, Staff, Students, and Leadership of The Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle**



Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital thanks RAVSAK for its leadership and partnership in strengthening the Jewish future. Your "client" is better because of you! May you go from strength to strength.

**Naomi Reem, Board of Trustees, Administration, and Faculty of JPDS-NC**



RAVSAK evolved because of the need for its voice in Jewish education, a voice that for decades has given powerful direction to its schools. The N.E. Miles Jewish Day School is deeply grateful for many years of RAVSAK support.

**NEMJDS**



Yasher koach and todah rabah RAVSAK. We looked to you from our founding days for collegiality, inspiration, perspective, and leadership. Your commitment to excellence and integrity strengthened our community school.

**With all respect from CCJDS students, teachers, staff and families.**



Akiva School thanks RAVSAK, the incredible HoSPEP program, Cooki Levy, Marc Kramer, and the entire RAVSAK staff for their support and inspiration throughout the years.

**Jennifer Fraenkel, Head of School**



Dr. Idana Goldberg — Doing something well requires understanding, communication, tireless energy, and passion. You are a tremendous force for Jewish education and your devotion to RAVSAK was remarkable, bringing improvement and change. You are amazing.

**Toba and Bob Goldberg**

Heschel is fortunate to have the comprehensive support of RAVSAK, which facilitated valuable connections for our community. From coaching to conferences to networking, Heschel has made tremendous progress in curriculum, innovation, and professional development.

**Larry Kligman, Head of School**

**HESCHEL**

*“We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience.” — John Dewey*

Thank you RAVSAK for HaYidion and your ongoing contribution to reflecting on teaching and learning in Jewish Day Schools.

**The Rosov Consulting Team**



RAVSAK — Thank you for being the supporting voice for Jewish education in North America for so many years.

**David Posnack Jewish Day School**



Kinneret Day School salutes Dr. Marc Kramer for his continued dedication to Jewish education.

**Asher Abramovitz, Principal**



Dear Marc, Idana, Elliott, Robin and team—  
Thanks for your unconditional support, thought leadership, and ability to push us to strive to be the best...the faculty and staff of Carmel Academy is eternally grateful.

**Nora Anderson  
Evan R. Levy  
David Messer**



VTT has benefitted from the collective wisdom of the professionals at RAVSAK. Through RAVSAK's innovative programming, VTT has become a stronger and more vibrant institution grounded in Jewish values. Our gratitude to the entire RAVSAK team.

**Vancouver Talmud Torah**



Sulam has been a highlight of my day school experience. I will always be grateful to Marc and Elliott for their kindness and expertise. RAVSAK has been an indelible force that touched many lives.

**Jill Kessler  
Pardes Jewish Day School**



The DKJA community extends its deepest gratitude and appreciation to RAVSAK for the invaluable contributions it has made to Jewish day school education. Thank you for the immense gifts you have given to today's learners and tomorrow's leaders.

**Kol Hakavod!**



Thank you, RAVSAK, for your years of leadership and support.

With gratitude,

**Rabbi Marc Baker and Gann Academy:  
The New Jewish High School of Greater Boston**



We have been so enriched by RAVSAK. We share a deep appreciation for teacher preparation, induction, and ongoing learning. We're delighted that many DeLeT alumni are teaching in day schools.

In gratitude,

**DeLeT at Brandeis University and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion**



The Deans and Staff of HoSPEP salute Dr. Marc Kramer, a visionary who, modeling Jewish leadership with courage and dedication, has inspired and will continue to influence the future of Jewish education and people.

**Karen, Bruce, Lynn, Elliott, Betty, Cooki**



It has been a personal and professional blessing to have sojourned with RAVSAK and Dr. Marc Kramer over the years. If one ever wonders if one can really change the world, they did!

**Dr. Bruce Powell  
de Toledo High School**



# RAVSAK thanks our colleagues

at PARDES, PEJE, Schechter, and YUSP for their collaboration. We appreciate all they have done to strengthen the Jewish day school field and look forward to joining together in service of an even stronger and better future.

Technion – Israel Institute of Technology thanks RAVSAK for their partnership in launching the Technion Jewish Day School Challenge and encouraging day school students around the world to demonstrate their scientific ingenuity.



My timing (otherwise known as dumb blind luck) was impeccable. I had just come back to the States from my two years as a Mandel Jerusalem Fellow and found myself at The Agnon School in Cleveland. My inheritance included some unbelievably talented and dedicated faculty and administrative staff (many of whom—more luck!—are still with us); and a board and a broader community prepared to support a pretty ambitious agenda. Off to the side was another support to me and to the school and far more importantly, to the larger Jewish day school field. I discovered that last—and essential—part of my professional armament at the first RAVSAK conference I attended just a year into the position.

I don't know how many schools were represented in 2004, but I distinctly remember a tone and an ethos that permeated every dvar Torah and each workshop and conversation. I also remember being made to feel right at home, among colleagues who were both instant teachers and instant friends. An environment that inculcates that kind of genuine acceptance within a context of substance—of Jewish gravitas—doesn't just happen. It's designed to happen, by mindful planning and often by sheer, stubborn force of will. That's where Marc came in.

This isn't meant to be a paean to one person, but it's a little difficult (read: impossible) to do right by RAVSAK without singling Marc out for special treatment. The strength of RAVSAK lies (I prefer present tense, at least for a while) in a philosophy of genuine Jewish pluralism and in the willingness of all of its participants to respectfully and enthusiastically listen to, daven with and learn from each other. It of course takes an absurdly small and overworked staff in those days (which eventually morphed into a larger and still overworked staff). With all that, it still takes someone meshugga le-davar (lose translation: certifiable) about the small details (anyone ever—ever—go hungry at a RAVSAK program?) and the big picture. It takes someone keen on laying a foundation of ahavat Yisrael and ahavat Tzion—of love of the Jewish People

and of the Jewish Land. For all that and for so much more: Marc, thank you.

At the risk of doing wrong to any one individual, it's a pleasure and an honor to say how much Elliott and Robin also mean (still, present tense) to RAVSAK and to all of us. Menschlichkeit and professional and thoroughly kind—and like Marc, always seeing what we do through the broadest, most inclusive of Jewish lenses.

RAVSAK also provided me with the kavod of working within Sulam, of learning from every school I visited and from every colleague with whom I was privileged to work. And then there are my fellow mentors, who for me formed an inner circle of friendship and encouragement. Fierce intellect, beautiful dedication to am Yisrael, and the genuine respect that allows for disagreement; those sessions that were co-facilitated by mentors who, at times, had staked out starkly different positions, were and remain our People's best antidote to the sinat chinam that still plagues us. Once again, that just does not happen by itself. It's molded and encouraged and nurtured be-kavanah.

The conferences were extraordinary opportunities to share and to learn; HaYidion developed into a class act of its own, showcasing some of the best thinking in the field; and the outreach and support given to the field from RAVSAK's professional team continues to ripple out for the good of all of our students and families and communities. I remain optimistic (an occupational hazard) about our future, and the seeds that RAVSAK has planted will no doubt yield fruit in the years ahead, in ways that we can't even imagine. Like I said, I was just lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and be part of the journey.

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**Jerry D. Isaak-Shapiro**

Head of School

Joseph and Florence Mandel Jewish Day School

Kadimah Academy thanks RAVSAK for its support, encouragement, and guidance.

**Kadimah Board and staff**

Mazal Tov on a job exceedingly well done. The day school field has been so enriched by all that you have accomplished.

**Josh and Judy Elkin**

Yasher koach to RAVSAK on all of your wonderful accomplishments. To Marc Kramer, for sharing your wisdom. To Arnee Winshall, for your vision. To Idana Goldberg and Lesley Zafran, for your collegiality in building Reshet Board.

**Alex Sagan, Co-Chair, Reshet Board**

Thanking the RAVSAK leadership and the entire RAVSAK community for their guidance, support, and encouragement. It will remain a source of inspiration for Ezra Academy for years to come.

**Melanie Waynik**

*“The strength you’ve shared with me [...] Thank you for that, and thank you for preparing me For love itself, and friendship, its co-agent.”*  
—Kenneth Koch

With gratitude from the entire community at

**The Brandeis School of San Francisco**

Thank you to my colleagues for your passion for Jewish education, commitment to excellence, and for making RAVSAK an organization to be proud of and a great place to work.

With appreciation and in friendship,

**Dr. Idana Goldberg**

With deepest admiration for Marc, who welcomed me as a partner, inspires me with his thoughtful leadership, is a model of compassion and integrity, and has profoundly changed the Jewish world. I deeply treasure our friendship.

**Dr. Idana Goldberg**

To the incomparable RAVSAK team, with thanks for all that you do for Jewish day school education. It has been a great honor to be your colleague but a greater honor still to be your friend.

With great respect and fondness,

**Dr. Marc N. Kramer**

In appreciation of Dr. Idana Goldberg for her extraordinary vision, leadership, partnership, and chutzpah. You are an inspirational teacher, a multi-talented leader, and wonderful friend.

**Dr. Marc N. Kramer**

Being one of the few Schechter Schools with a high school, RAVSAK broadened our students’ horizons. Thank you, RAVSAK!

**Dr. Cindy Dolgin, Head of School  
Janet Hakim, President**

Dr. Marc Kramer—Thank you for all of your support, guidance, leadership, and knowledge. You helped me be the best I could be!

**Pam Lott, past president of the Jewish Day School  
of the Lehigh Valley**

RAVSAK has been an incredible resource, guide, and partner. With gratitude to Marc, Idana, and the rest of the fantastic team. Thank you, and looking forward to the next chapter.

**Beit Rabban Day School**

In memory of Ada Michaels, z’l, RAVSAK’s first Executive Director and in honor of Dr. Marc Kramer, RAVSAK’s chief navigator.

**Dr. Laurence Kutler**

In heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Marc Kramer for his generous guidance and vision in supporting the work of the Menachem Education Foundation.

May you continue to go from strength to strength in reinvigorating the future of Jewish education.

**Zalman Shneur**

In tribute for your work to strengthen our schools and communities.

**Abraham Joshua Heschel School**

As a RAVSAK member since 1993, I thank Marc Kramer and his team for supporting the professional and lay leadership of our schools, and for influencing the Jewish learning and living within our communities.

With eternal gratefulness,

**Karen Feller**

With appreciation for RAVSAK's lay and professional leadership, Lesley Zafran and Marc Kramer, for your guidance and support.

**Tama Tamarkin  
JDS of the Lehigh Valley**

Words can not adequately express the thanks needed for the wonderful gifts that great mentors share.

Thank you, Jerry Isaak-Shapiro.

**Anonymous**

Thank you for creating this incredible learning community for Luria Academy and schools nationwide.

**Luria Academy of Brooklyn**

To Marc and the RAVSAK Staff—  
Thank you for all of your support and guidance through the years to enrich my learning both professionally and personally.

With deep gratitude,

**Betty Winn**

Hidden Sparks salutes RAVSAK and its visionary leaders, Marc and Idana. True leaders in the field, you have always extended a collaborative hand to partner with Hidden Sparks and others to better the field. Kol hakavod and yiyashar kochachem!

**Debbie Niderberg, Elizabeth Fox, Sara Diamant,  
and the Hidden Sparks Team**

To my wonderful Sulam colleagues and the leaders at RAVSAK for continually inspiring and challenging me to be better.

**Jill Spielman Shoshany**

We schools in small communities were leaves without a tree before RAVSAK. Thanks to all at RAVSAK, especially Dr. Marc Kramer, whose leadership for so many decades has been unprecedented.

**Lynn W. Raviv, N.E. Miles Jewish Day School,  
Birmingham, AL**

To my wonderful colleagues and friends who embraced me when I became Head of Milken Community High School and from whom I learned so much, I will treasure you always!

**Rennie Wrubel**

“The good accomplished yesterday has not disappeared. The good that you need to do today is much easier to do when you have yesterday’s good to support it.” The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l  
Thank you for everything!

**Mariashi Groner**

RAVSAK has given so much to the Jewish day school community across the US. It is with pride and love I wish you continued success in the next journey. May you continue from strength to strength.

**Dr. Lee Binder**

Thank you to my friends at RAVSAK. It has been wonderful to work with you. I am inspired by your dedication, wisdom, creativity, and sense of humor. My best wishes for what comes next. Hatzlachah rabbah!  
Sincerely,

**Sharon Eagan**

Thanks to the hundreds of writers, those affiliated with day schools and outside professionals, who have contributed your ideas, projects and expertise to *HaYidion*. We are so grateful for your hard work, dedication, and willingness to give to the field.  
Bekhavod,

**Dr. Barbara Davis and Dr. Elliott Rabin**

A special thanks to Dr. Robert Chazan, Shaya Klechevsky, Arielle Levites, and Yona Shemtov for being the driving force behind RePre, a critical day school program for Jewish history.  
Gratefully yours,

**Dr. Marc Kramer**

## RAVSAK celebrates our major supporters

for their unwavering commitment to empowering day schools and ensuring a vibrant Jewish future. Your investment in RAVSAK has allowed us to foster stronger Jewish leaders and educators and originate creative approaches to Jewish education.

Today rabbah to all who have served on HaYidion’s editorial board. By giving of your wisdom and experience, with generosity and humor, you have had a decisive impact on the journal’s shape, direction and quality.  
With esteem and friendship,

**Dr. Elliott Rabin, editor**

JCHS is proud to partner with RAVSAK to ensure a vibrant Jewish future.

**JCHS of the Bay**

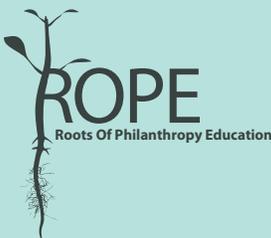
Keshet salutes RAVSAK, and the visionary leadership of Dr. Marc Kramer and Dr. Idana Goldberg, for their outstanding service to the Jewish day school community and for embracing inclusion. Kol hakavod on your extraordinary contributions to Jewish life!

**Keshet**

# Thank you

to all the people in our schools who have participated in

**RAVSAK** programs over the years.



אברהם היו יהיה לגוי גדול ועצום ונברכו בו כל גויי הארץ. כי ידעתיו למען אשר  
יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו  
דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט למען הביא ה' על אברהם את אשר דבר עליו.

*Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of God, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that God may bring upon Abraham that which God hath spoken of him. (Genesis 18:18-19)*

Dear Marc and Idana,

We are the group of people who have been privileged to work with you at RAVSAK, the folks who see you in between the meetings and before your second cup of coffee. We have heard your genuine compassion for people and are aware of the ways in which you include us in decisions that impact our lives. We recognize your intelligence and wit, your kindness and ability to see the forest for the trees. We value your deep commitment to your own Jewish lives and to the Jewish people. When you conduct tough conversations with respect, your tone of voice makes an impact. When you schedule meetings around your children's big life moments, we learned from your example. We're the ones who noticed when you took out the garbage and stuffed envelopes, both taking care of your staff and acting as one of us.

As you've held us to your impeccable standards and believed in our potential, we've risen to the occasion, becoming stronger versions of ourselves along the way. Seemingly simple gestures of support, a shoulder to lean on, a listening ear, a "pick me up" fruit platter, asking a colleague to lend us a hand, these were all noticed. Your sensitivity to differences among groups, individuals and organizations exemplifies the way every Jewish professional and educator needs to act. The deep and creative thinking you do about what pluralistic Jewish education requires to be successful and the ability to propose a solution to a specific concern and follow it through to the end have inspired each of us in countless ways. You are two of the smartest, most passionate, Jewishly committed and hard-working leaders we have ever had the honor to encounter in our work lives. Even beyond your tremendous educational legacy, know that you have built a generous and caring organization filled with professionals who act with consummate *mentschlichkeit* towards one another because you've taught us that is the way we do business at RAVSAK.

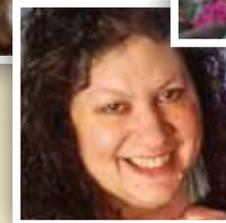
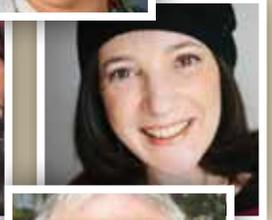
We respect you.

We are inspired by you.

We are proud to be associated with you and will miss what we have built together.

For all of this and so much more, we thank you both.

Wishing each of you continued success as you go from strength to strength,



**Lisa Chandler**

**Sharon Eagan**

**Robin Feldman**

**Cooki Levy**

**Tzali Perlow**

**Elliott Rabin**

**Marla Rottenstreich**

**Debra Shaffer Seeman**

**Amy Shroyer**

**Yael Steiner**

FROM THE  
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS



MARC N. KRAMER



IDANA GOLDBERG

# FROM PRIDE IN THE PAST TO EXCITEMENT FOR THE FUTURE

RAVSAK, like Jewish community day schools themselves, has been an exciting if imperfect experiment—an attempt to define and actualize surprisingly complex ideas like “excellence,” “community” and “pluralism” in ways that ultimately enrich the lives of students, support serious Jewish teaching and learning, and strengthen the Jewish community. We have focused on the challenges that face schools that operate independent of a single Jewish perspective, and have made a mission out of helping them tune divergent voices into nuanced harmonies. We have built programs that support leaders and leadership, teachers and teaching, students and study, each with Jewish learning at center stage. We have offered thought leadership and advanced field building. Like all good experimenters, we have been energized by curiosity and have tried to learn from both success and failure.

RAVSAK has been both vehicle and venue for the further development of the ideals of Jewish pluralism. We have been, like the schools we have proudly served, a laboratory for Jewish life in which diversity is understood as an asset and sacred study a constant unifier. We have tried over the years in word and deed to demonstrate that the Jewish community is at its best when it blends the American credo of *e pluribus unum* with the Jewish value of *klal Yisrael* into a passionate need to “do Jewish” and to do it together with Jews of all stripes. Almost 20 years ago Marc wrote that the thing that he found most challenging yet most invigorating about Jewish education is how to engage with all sorts of Jews in non-hierarchical and non-coercive ways; now two decades later, we both remain convinced that the key to success lies in mastering this challenge.

As we look back, we take great pride in many things we at RAVSAK have done. We have grown from a small, loosely connected grassroots initiative into an international network of schools and school leaders. From our earliest conferences to the vibrancy of our online Reshet RAVSAK, we have been honored to help connect and network so many people dedicated to

Jewish education. We have developed programs that prioritized and promoted serious Jewish learning while simultaneously advancing personal growth, professional growth, and leadership development. Project Sulam for us will always be a standout not only for its reach and impact, but for the deep relationships that began there. Of course, programs like Re/Presenting the Jewish Past and Sulam 2.0 have greatly advanced the field, and the early impact of HoSPEP is simply tremendous.

The growth of this publication, *HaYidion*, from a mimeographed newsletter into the field-read it has become today, is something that gives us a great sense of satisfaction. So, too, do we take special pride in our move into direct student programs. Wherever we go, we meet people who tell us how much Moot Beit Din, JCAT, Artists’ Beit Midrash and the Hebrew Poetry Contest have meant to them or to their children. It has been a thrill and an honor to be a part of all of these important endeavors, and we are pleased to know that many of these programs will continue into the future.

While we are unquestionably, and we hope understandably, sad to say goodbye to “RAVSAK” qua RAVSAK, at the same time we are deeply satisfied that the value of unity that we have advanced will carry forward into NewOrg. We believe that there is an honest and earnest commitment to serving different kinds of Jewish day schools, *al pi darko* (each according to its path), and that by providing supports and services from under one roof, we can do so with greater efficiencies and lasting, positive impact. To date, we have heard many say that NewOrg feels exciting because we are bringing together schools *despite* their differences; we look forward to hearing that the excitement stems from our being together *because* of our differences.

Our heartfelt thanks to our colleagues at RAVSAK, to all of those who have sat on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors, to our donors, to our member schools, and most of all, to our wonderful families. May we all continue to go *me-chayil el-chayil*.

# American Jewish University

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**RAVSAK**

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