think
THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL
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inside this issue:

MISSION CONTROL GAIL BAKER

THE NEW BRAINPOWER

EDUCATION AND NEUROSCIENCE HELP STUDENTS REACH THEIR POTENTIAL WHILE HAVING FUN IN THE CLASSROOM

The best educators want their students to absorb the learning that is intended. We look to discoveries in neuroscience that explain how the brain functions and how children learn, and we reconfigure our educational processes accordingly.

Research shows that a child's ability to self-regulate (to control his own behaviour) is more closely connected to academic achievement than any other school-based skill. Neuroscience also helps us understand that a supportive and trusting environment is essential when a young child sets out to learn. These two windows into cognitive development offer transformative instruction for early childhood education.

Research shows a child's ability to self-regulate is more connected to academic achievement than any other school based skill

Focussed attention, memory and self-regulation require a child to control impulsiveness and to exert self-discipline. He must be able to stop and think before reacting to a situation. We know the brain's prefrontal cortex plays a crucial role in developing memory and control of

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THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE

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think THE LOLA STEIN JOURNAL

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THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE

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Gail Baker is Co-Founder and Director of The Lola Stein Institute and Co-Founder and Head of The Toronto Heschel School. Gail nurtures a career long passion for reaching and teaching to the essential individuality in each child. Her parallel commitment is to encourage and refine the unique talents of each teacher on her team and beyond.

Greg Beiles is the Director of Curriculum and Training at The Lola Stein Institute and Vice Principal, Curriculum at The Toronto Heschel School. Greg believes children are active builders of knowledge and empathy, and that a child's perspective is shaped more by how learning is structured than by the specific content at hand.

Pam Medjuck Stein is Co-Founder and Chair of The Lola Stein Institute and a founding board member of The Toronto Heschel School. Her eldest three children are alumni, with the fourth now in grade six. She has collaborated on The Toronto Heschel team since 1996.

GUESTS CONTRIBUTORS

Karen Chisvin is the co-founder, with Maggie Doswell, of Ellipsis Creative Development Inc. She is an alumni parent and past Board Chair of The Toronto Heschel School.

Dr. Sharon Freifeld is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto. An expert in cognitive neuroscience and occupational therapy, she is Co-Investigator on the Children's Stroke Program, Hospital For Sick Children and a parent at The Toronto Heschel School.

Avee Helfand attended Associated Hebrew Schools, the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto (CHAT), McGill University (B.A.) and Queens University (B.Ed.). An environmentalist, social activist and educator, he has been teaching at The Toronto Heschel School since 2004.

Rabbi Joe Kanofsky earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Boston University. He was ordained at the Rabbinical College of America where he was a Wexner Fellow. From 2001-2004 he was Director of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Poland and currently serves as Rabbi of Kehillat Shaarei Torah in Toronto.

Jennifer Kolari is a therapist helping children, teens and families for 20 years. She's also a sought-after speaker with schools, agencies and organizations across North America. Her first book, *Connected Parenting*, was published in 2009 by the Penguin Group. She has appeared in *Today's Parent* and *Canadian Family*, on Canada AM, Breakfast Television, and CBC's Steven and Chris.

Yuliya Magri graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in Psychology and Drama. She joined the Lola Stein Institute to work on its First Annual Symposium. Yuliya writes and performs poetry in English and Russian. Her interests combine the arts and creative education.

Drew Rothman studied philosophy, education and science, at Concordia University and SUNY Potsdam before making Toronto home. This is his fifth year teaching at The Toronto Heschel School.

Marlee Pinsker Virskin has taught at The Toronto Heschel School since 1996, telling stories and writing always. Her stories have appeared in collections and her own anthology, In the *Days of Sand and Stars*. Marlee believes stories are vehicles for reflection, giving the reader a private space to ponder larger issues.

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inhibition, and yet this part of the brain can disconnect under stress. It becomes clear that if we make learning pleasant, even joyful, we can be more confident that students will sustain the focus and attention necessary for self-regulation and academic achievement.

Joyful learning does not discourage children from effort. Indeed it's the opposite. Optimal lasting learning occurs when a class atmosphere is conducive to playfulness and motivation. I observed such an atmosphere recently in a Junior Kindergarten classroom at The Toronto Heschel School. I was immediately impressed to see a roomful of four-year-olds in earnest discussion. These small children were working avidly in pairs, in *chevruta*, and their teachers were all the way across the room!

The children had just listened to the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers and were retelling the tale to each other. In each pair the speaking child held a picture of a mouth and the listening child held a picture of two ears. The teachers had earlier instructed the class that, "ears listen and don't talk" and that "mouths speak." Only when the speaking child finished her narration could the listener ask questions. Then the pictures changed hands and the roles reversed.

The storytellers produced much chatter and dramatic hand motions throughout the classroom while their classmates remained wholly absorbed. They were able to sit, sustain attention and remember the story — an amazing feat for a room full of four-year-olds.

The teachers had studied "Tools of the Mind," an approach to early childhood education that recognizes that children become successful learners when they possess the foundational tools for learning: focussed attention, memory and self-regulation. *For more information, see the book, Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education.*

In our JK classroom that day, the children viewed pictures of mouths and ears to remind and focus them on the process in which they were engaged. Next, they used the pictures during group discussion at "circle time." Eventually, the pictures were withdrawn altogether as the practice of mindful dialogue became an entrenched habit.

In another practice that develops self-regulation and memory, the JK students engage in "mature dramatic play" that can span hours or days. After teaching the same story of Joseph and his brothers, for instance, the teacher might suggest that the children choose a character, then plan and act out the story. With their teacher's help, the children learn to organize their thoughts and map out their dramatization and roles. The play won't work if the children act impulsively in character. They must use self-discipline. A child playing the father, Jacob,

They were able to sit, sustain attention and remember the story - an amazing feat for a roomful of four-year-olds.

cannot suddenly choose not to give his son Joseph the many-coloured coat. The teacher's focus is on their planning and self-regulation.

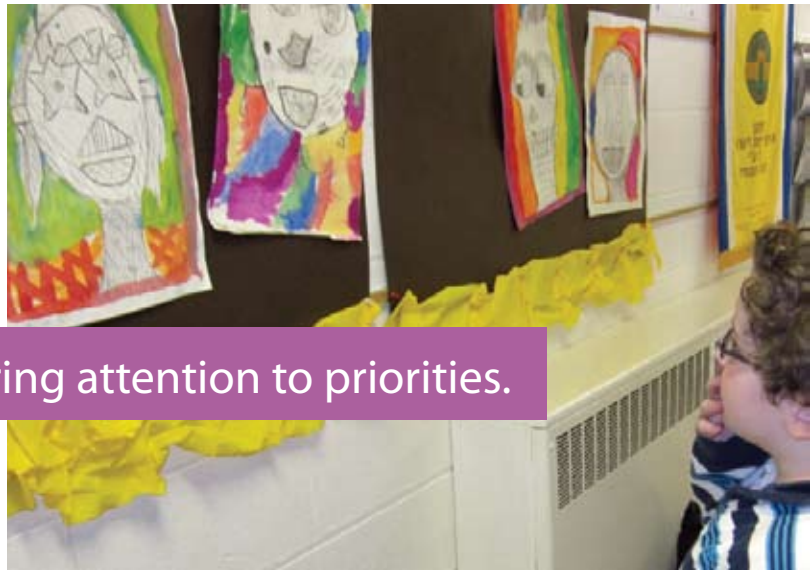
As they enact roles and complex situations in imaginary play, the children practice controlling their own behaviour, remembering their roles and those of their friends. The teacher does not direct the scenario but acts as a scaffold to the learning process. She first reminds her students of their roles and provides support. Then she steadily removes support as the learners assume more responsibility for their tasks.

When the play extends over several days, a child may assume different roles. This practices cognitive flexibility and helps the child learn to switch perspectives, adjust to change and shift focus. Children who learn to maintain focus can work in a noisy area or play at home while a baby cries in the next room. If we want our children to grow up to be thoughtful and creative problem solvers, they must be first able to manage their emotions, sustain attention and persevere through challenge.

We know that being able to attend, focus and remember may not come easily for our 21st-century child who is bombarded constantly with visual stimuli and loud noises. With their bold colours, flashing lights and rapidly changing scenes, television and computers train children for reactive learning, where stress and pressure impair judgement and a positive outlook. We prefer children to have the cognitive and emotional tools to become responsive learners; to be able to keep their bearings and solve problems creatively and gracefully as challenges come their way. Neuropsychology and neuroeducation have much to offer and we, as educators, are ready to learn.

OUR FOCUS IS **ATTENTION**

The comfort of strong community ties is a happy byproduct of 5770 years of Judaism. A supportive community grew from Abraham and Sarah's pursuit of ethical monotheism, even though team spirit and really having a great time never topped their list of priorities. Their focus on good deeds and truth generated a people renowned for caring for each other and laughing together. Their story provides sound instruction on how to build a warm and productive learning community.



The best education demands unwavering attention to priorities.

Whether inviting a university student for *Shabbat* or rescuing passengers at Entebbe, catering to the bereaved during *shiva* or helping someone in need across the street, the high minded pursuits of our ancestors lead us to care for each other. Supportiveness and good will emerge because Jews pay attention to *mitzvot*, the laws that guide our deeds so that we walk the talk.

The same, almost magical, byproduct appears when a school pays attention to its central mission; educational standards and ethical practice. A methodically honed educational programme can develop such strong school spirit that some people might mistake warm community for a pre-eminent school goal. Truthfully, it is the happy residue, a welcome result that comes with good values and good work. Strong community grows from strong focus. The best education demands unwavering attention to priorities.

This issue of *think* looks at "focussed attention," its depth and breadth. Gail Baker explains how a child's self-control underpins his progress and Dr. Sharon Friefeld, professor of neurophysiology at U of T, describes the brain functions that are fundamental to paying attention. Junior high teacher Drew Rothman tells how he turns on his students' focus using the gratification of discovery and the motivational glue that is relevance.

Greg Beiles continues his discussion of "What It Means to Think." In Part Two, he presents Jewish thinking as a multidimensional approach that attends simultaneously to a variety of goals; the cognitive, the pragmatic and the conceptual. Author and teacher, Marlee Pinsker Virskin illustrates how a school focus on *Middot* (Jewish virtues) alerts children to live a positive and Jewish lifestyle, consciously and daily. Environmentalist and teacher, Avee Helfand, reminds us that Jewish teachings and psychology both highlight nature as a valuable context, topic and catalyst for the peace of mind and soulfulness that are so helpful to good learning.

We also look at methods and attitudes of a few thinkers whose focus bears fruit. Rabbi Joe Kanofsky reflects on ten years of study with a truly inspired teacher, Prof. Elie Wiesel. Karen Chisvin, a veteran school volunteer and parent leader, suggests that everyone wins when parents engage mindfully and responsively in their child's school community. Author and therapist Jennifer Kolari shares how successful parents guide their families to balanced values. We also present Yuliya Magri, our 2009 summer intern, whose personal experience awakened her concern for creativity in education and led her from Russia to The Lola Stein Institute and beyond.

We hope you enjoy all this attention to attention. As my mother told me, "You may not always be able to make a happy child good, but you can make a good child happy."

THE thinking BEHIND The Lola Stein Institute

Our first spotlight shines on Gail Baker whose educational leadership has raised the bar for Jewish day schools in Toronto. Gail is Head of The Toronto Heschel School which she co-founded in 1996, and Director of The Lola Stein Institute.

think: *What role does research play at your school?*

Gail Baker: Research allows us to emulate teaching methodologies that have proven successful. Our focus on educational research makes us distinct as a Jewish day school in Toronto. We track expertise to find trustworthy new directions that are based on objectively designed studies with controlled fields of students and we keep our practice congruent with the latest empirical findings. Our teaching methods are informed by neuro-psychological discoveries in emotional and cognitive development and we continually train our teachers in advanced technique. To be a research-based school is a rigorous and dynamic process. The way we teach is as important as what we teach. For example, research has proven that physical exercise and sport are biologically critical to fully develop a young brain, in that exercise enhances cognitive ability as well as general well-being. We see physical fitness as an educational essential and present an intensified gym curriculum which includes karate, calisthenics, fitness and sport. The students love it and it's good for them.

think: *The Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation is directing over a billion dollars to making schools smaller. Why do you think a low pupil-to-teacher ratio is desirable?*

Gail Baker: The learning process is very personal. A low pupil-to-teacher ratio enables educators to understand each student's learning needs on a more individual basis. A low ratio also helps teachers know the parents personally which makes parent and teacher communication more meaningful. We started small and intend to keep it close and personal. I think the best school is a tightly knit team dedicated to educating children.

think: *Brain-based research has revealed the advantages of arts-based techniques. What lead you to connect learning and the arts?*

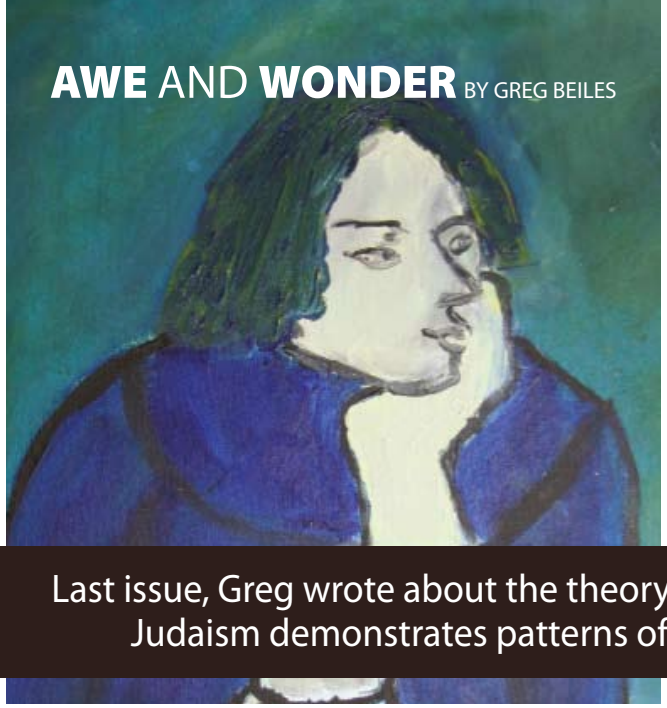
Gail Baker: Brain-based research shows that selective use of the arts heightens understanding of the sciences and mathematics, and advances creative thought and creative writing skills. The arts have broad educational application. With theatre and music in my background, I knew that emotion and imagination brought scripts to life. I knew that communication and performance were as critical to a playwright's message as was the script itself. Twenty-five years ago I discovered that children could grasp literacy skills through certain types of songs and through dramatizing poetry. A few years later I went to graduate school to study learning and the arts and those courses propelled me to further exploration.

think: *What skill sets do students need to be active participants in the workplace and society? What do you hear about your graduates?*

Gail Baker: In the twenty-first century workplace young people need skills for creative problem solving, collaboration and critical thinking. Our graduates understand the value of taking initiative and of active participation in society. They understand themselves as Jews, which is crucial as their identity is the lens through which they view the world. We intend our graduates to show up to high school engaged in their work, asking relevant questions and participating in thoughtful dialogue, and happily, this is what we hear from the high schools.

think: *Where are you leading your school now?*

Gail Baker: Like most people, teachers and students achieve success best when they are fully engaged in their work. When work has meaning and purpose it becomes captivating and inspires the motivation and self-direction that excellence requires. My team is now examining our school's practices for purpose and self-direction. We are looking at everything from the type of homework assigned to how we relay our assessments of progress. We want our teachers and students to be fascinated by the challenges, gratified by their accomplishments and energized to work even harder.



JEWISH THINKING

SECOND IN A SERIES ON **WAYS OF THINKING**

Last issue, Greg wrote about the theory of multiple intelligences. He now discusses how Judaism demonstrates patterns of thinking that are valuable for all educators.

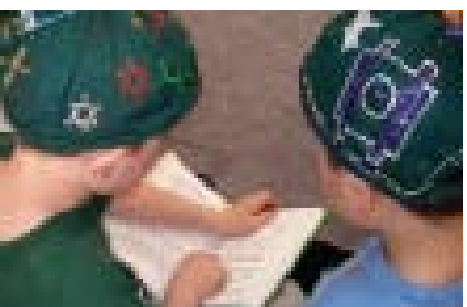
A.J. Heschel wrote that Judaism is "not just a way of living but a way of thinking"[1]. It is a particular way of understanding, learning, and reasoning that goes beyond the observance of Jewish practices. Several dimensions of Jewish thinking are relevant to education.

The biblical phrase *na'aseh venishmah* embodies one aspect of Jewish thinking. The phrase literally means "we will do, and then we will hear", but to many commentators it means "we will do, and then we will understand". When God begins to read the words of the Torah to the people they exclaim, "everything that God has said, we will do, and then we will understand – *na'aseh vishmah*" (Exodus 24:7).

To the modern ear this doesn't sound like thinking at all. Do before you think! Who condones that? Yet so much learning occurs exactly this way.

Infants and young children persistently experiment, repeatedly trying things out until patterns emerge and recur. Eventually they learn that cylindrical blocks fit in circular, not square, holes. A caregiver's response to an infant's early gestures and sounds teaches the infant to learn language.[2]

Doing and then understanding is central to the openness of Jewish thinking. To answer the persistent question, "what are the reasons behind the commandments, the *mitzvot*?", Heschel says we need not expect to understand why we do a particular *mitzvah* before we try it out. "To say that the precepts have meaning," Heschel writes, "is less accurate than to say that they are sources of emergent meaning."[3]



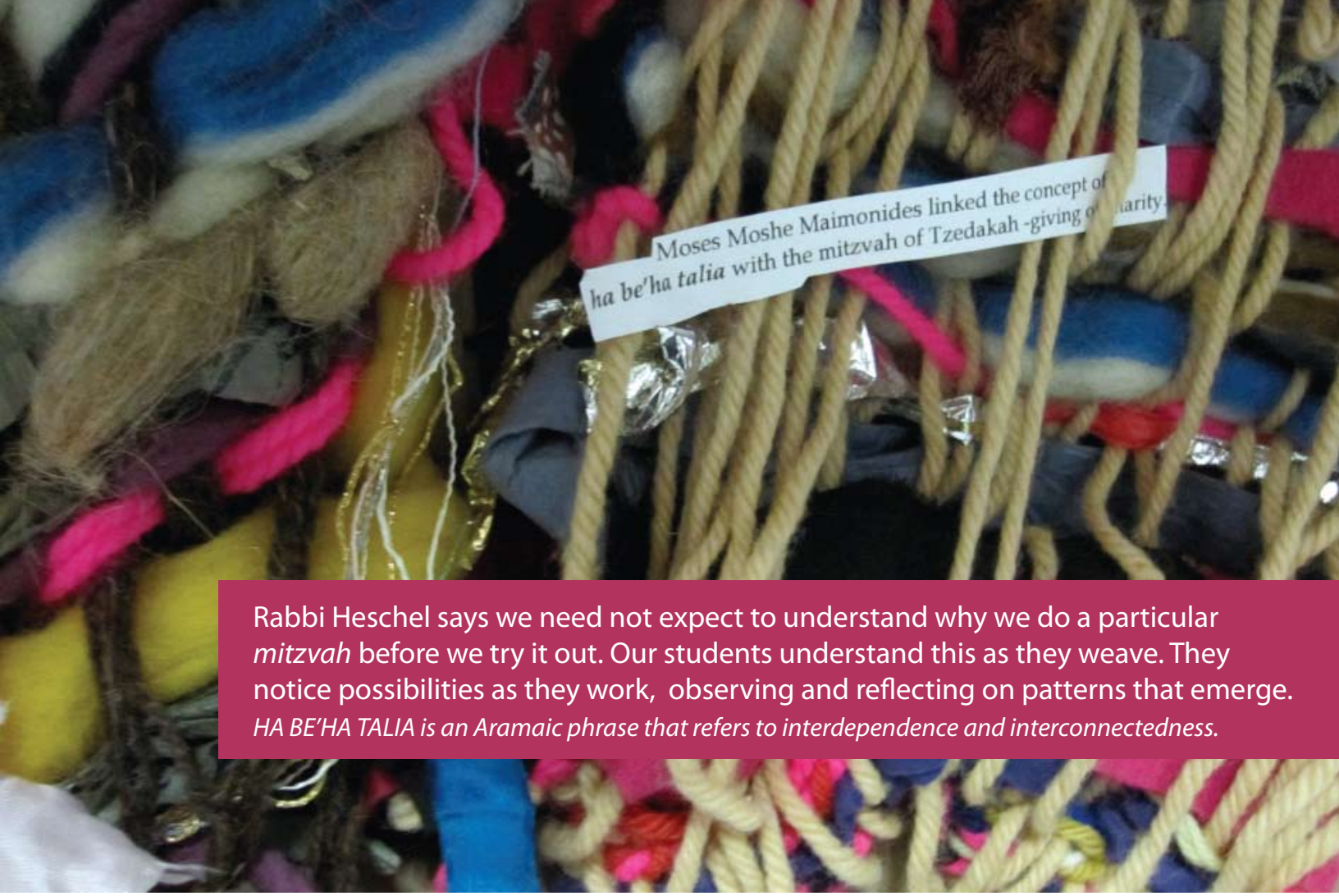
We implement this approach to learning in our Grade 6 Mishnah/Tikkun Olam programme. Reading Pirkei Avot, students learn *middot*, principles of positive behavior. They then try out the *middot* for a week or two, and keep a journal of their thoughts and observations. Through the process, students discover new things about themselves, about others, and about the positive power of *middot*. The learning occurs by first doing, then reflecting.

Another dimension of Jewish thinking veers the opposite way. In the Talmud (Kiddushin 40b), rabbis debate whether study or doing good deeds comes first. They conclude that study has priority, as study leads to good deeds through mental and spiritual preparation.

The classic film, "The Karate Kid" offers a good analogy. The old master, Mister Miyagi, puts his protégé, Daniel, through a series of activities – painting a fence, sanding a deck, balancing on a boat. Daniel complies, mystified how the chores relate to karate. Finally Mr. Miyagi shows him how each activity, when done with focus and coordination, prepares Daniel for the karate katas and sparring to come.

Mr. Miyagi's pedagogy is exemplary. It operates at multiple levels simultaneously. It has a practical element – a fence gets painted, and the mindfulness ingrained through learning to paint carefully is useful in karate katas. The skill also instills mental, physical and emotional self-discipline.

Likewise, Jewish study also operates at multiple levels. Whether it is decoding a difficult text, learning to chant Torah, engaging in rabbinic style debate, or committing to derekh eretz (positive behaviour), Jewish thinking skills and orientations serve leadership, social relations, and study habits. On yet a further level, Jewish study skills instill mental, emotional, interpersonal, and even kinesthetic self-discipline.



Rabbi Heschel says we need not expect to understand why we do a particular *mitzvah* before we try it out. Our students understand this as they weave. They notice possibilities as they work, observing and reflecting on patterns that emerge.
HA BE'HA TALIA is an Aramaic phrase that refers to interdependence and interconnectedness.

At The Toronto Heschel School, we expand this approach to learning beyond the Jewish curriculum. We train students to solve math problems through critical thinking, not rote procedure. The right answer is only the "pragmatic" level of the learning process. Significant, long-lasting learning results when students answer using methods that sharpen mental reflexes and analytic skill. The process comes full circle when students apply the critical thinking learned in math class to an integrated, hands-on project in social and environmental studies, such as a measured analysis of student attitudes towards diversity or conducting a school wide energy audit.

A third dimension of Jewish thinking emerges from the contradictory nature of the two discussed above: Do and then learn; learn and then do. How can both be Jewish thinking? Dualities abound in the Mishna and Talmud. One rabbi says X, another says Y.

Alternate, even contradictory, perspectives is another essential element of Jewish thinking. The recognition that a world of discussion and interpretation lies between any two points of view is core to Jewish text study. It is also fundamental for ethics, in that it trains us to appreciate the possibility of multiple points of view in any situation. The Jewish philosopher, Emmanual Levinas writes that the alternate positions taken by rabbis in the Talmud "reflects two positions between which thought somehow oscillates eternally."[4]

Our students practice this way of thinking during weekly Civics classes. They use democratic decision-making processes to debate and determine class tzedakah projects. Students learn to listen closely to each others' points of view and engage in respectful debate. They discover that sometimes it is possible to bridge or reconcile differences. Other times, they must agree to disagree. Students practice cognitive flexibility as they exercise their capacity to shift perspective, contextualize, and consider another's point of view, while maintaining their own. These skills cultivate the kind of thinking necessary to maintain one's own identity while respecting others.

When we see our students actively and deeply engaged in text based Judaic study, we witness the growth of cognitive processes and techniques for self-discipline which transfer across the school curriculum. The wisdom of thousands of years of thinking has much to contribute to contemporary education.

1. Heschel, Abraham Joshua. 1996. The moment at Sinai. In Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, edited by Susannah Heschel. New York: Noonday Press. p. 16.
2. Vygotsky, Lev. 1986. Thought and language, translated by Alex Kozulin. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
3. Heschel, Abraham Joshua. 1996. No time for neutrality. In Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity. p. 77
4. Levinas, Emmanuel. 1990 Difficult Freedom, translated by Sean Hand, Baltimore John Hopkins Univercity Press. p. 64

A growing body of evidence links mental, physical and spiritual health to a child's relationship with nature

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

BY AVEE HALFAND

When I was ten years old, my father took my sister and me camping in Algonquin Park. We went to buy a tent and I remember the three of us crawling in together to see if we fit. We were so excited to all be in there together. That camping experience marks the beginning of my lifelong love of nature. It instilled in me a sense of belonging to the world around me. I gained confidence and felt calm whenever I found myself outdoors.

My childhood was filled with afternoons roaming through woods, climbing trees, exploring neighborhoods, and playing in parks. This is not often the case for kids today. Children remain indoors thanks to busy schedules, fewer open spaces, fear for safety, and the allure of computers, electronic games, and television. These societal and cultural changes take a toll on our children and how they understand and participate in the world around them.

On a recent class hike a classroom troublemaker became a leader outdoors. His demeanor changed from agitated and disruptive to focussed and respectful.

A growing body of evidence links mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to a child's relationship with nature. A 2001 U.S. study, "Attention Restoration Theory" (Faber Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan), suggests that contact with nature could help improve a child's ability to focus. In his 2005 bestseller *Last Child in the Woods*, author Richard Louv coined the term "nature deficit disorder," which describes a wide range of behavioral problems that might arise when children spend less time outdoors.

As a teacher and environmental educator, I see first-hand the effect of a natural outdoor setting on children. On a recent class hike through Moore Park Ravine to the Don Valley Brick Works, a classroom troublemaker became a leader outdoors. His demeanor changed from agitated and disruptive to focussed and respectful. I have also led numerous outdoor classes in our school field where a struggling writer blooms, and a young scientist discovers something in the garden that had eluded him in a textbook.

Many teachers take their students outside to learn. While not formally trained as environmental educators, they know the value in conducting a history or art class outdoors. They see a schoolyard, a garden, a park, or nearby woods as potential learning environments, where they and their students discover wholeness and comfort. Teachers document their students' shifts toward positive behavior that emerge during and after exposure to a makeshift outdoor classroom or natural setting.

When children are closer to nature it is not only their focus that benefits. Natural settings also ignite curiosity and a sense of wonder. As Abraham Joshua Heschel said in *God in Search of Man*, "The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living."

I recall a recent fall stroll through our teaching garden with a junior kindergarten class. One student, who typically is quite disruptive, stopped by a cluster of large sunflowers and seemed perplexed. His expression became one of pure delight and awe. He was astounded by the sunflowers' splendor and magnificence. He stood contemplating in peace for a few minutes before rejoining the group. The natural experience of a garden served this child's sense of calm and focus.

Great rabbis discuss the importance of our connection to the earth. Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav had a custom of going outdoors for prayer each day, to be alone with "the trees, the grass, and all growing things (Maggid Sichot, 48)." Maimonides' son, Rabbi

Avee Helfand leads
The Toronto Heschel School
Environmental Camp,
an outdoor grade 6 experience
where students and teachers
learn and play together.

Thank you Camp George.

Abraham ben Moses, also understood the human need to connect with nature. He often found himself yearning to be surrounded by nature's beauty. "In order to serve God, one needs access to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature, such as the contemplation of flower-decorated meadows, majestic mountains, and flowing rivers for all these are essential to the spiritual development of even the holiest people (R. Abraham ben Moses, 1186-1237)."

Research indicates that one of the best antidotes to a stressful lifestyle is to spend time in natural settings. Children who spend time outdoors are likely to emerge happier, healthier, more creative, more cooperative and much more focussed.

Children need many unscripted, exploratory and adventure-filled hours to discover the wonders in their own backyards and neighborhoods. They need the beauty of the stars in the night sky or watching a chickadee on a warm summer's day. Let's take it outside!

Tending the Toronto Heschel School garden is a year-long pursuit.

LEGACY OF AN INSPIRED TEACHER

MY 10 YEARS with ELIE WIESEL

BY RABBI JOE KANOFSKY

Professor Wiesel's obvious passion for teaching is bound up with his passion for learning.

Elie Wiesel's teaching still informs every class I teach, every lecture I give and every exchange with a student, nearly a quarter-century after I entered his classroom. I was privileged to spend ten years in his seminar room at Boston University, first as an undergraduate, awestruck in the presence of the new Nobel Laureate, then as a graduate student finding my own voice, and lastly as a doctoral advisee on my way to becoming a teacher in my own right. By simply being in the presence of this great teacher, I learned so much by osmosis, absorbing his outlook and his passion for teaching and students, but perhaps a few outstanding points can be distilled.

My notes from those first experiences in the Boston University classroom show I was clearly in awe. After all, I was among the youngest students in the class, and we were encouraged, even expected to voice an opinion in this seminar before a professor of international celebrity status. He even got to throw out the first pitch at a Red Sox World Series game! It all seemed overwhelming.

His eyes and his smile, though, quickly began to affect my perception of how the class worked and of Professor Wiesel as a teacher. As his public persona was so serious, "prophetic," in the words of more than one journalist, I was surprised and moved seeing the warmth and affection with which he gazed on us, fixing his intensity on each student who spoke. He telegraphed the value that each opinion, every student's thought, was valuable to the discussion. What I tell people to this day, and which surprises most, is how easily he smiles, how alight his eyes are when speaking with students. The enjoyment and deep satisfaction he takes in teaching could not be more palpable.

"If you have a good question, who needs an answer?" he would say and quote a 19th-century rabbi in Yiddish, "One does not die from a question!"

After my graduate studies I studied in a traditional yeshiva, like that which nourished Professor Wiesel's intellect and soul as a child, where I came to understand questions more deeply. An answer can be found, a "teretz" as it's called in Talmudic scholarship. The greater challenge is to develop a learned question, one that accounts for all facets and permutations of an issue. In fact, a reliable sign of Talmudic prowess is to develop questions, rather than answers.

Professor Wiesel's obvious passion for teaching must, to my mind, be bound up inextricably with his passion for learning. Over 10 years in his classroom, I saw he was genuinely excited and moved by a new text he hadn't seen; a new work by a familiar author; or perhaps most of all, revisiting an "old

friend" in literature through the eyes of students, two generations his junior. The thirst for learning; reading something new to illuminate what is already known; the confidence that each text read in class; each encounter with students will generate new and provocative insight, have all, thankfully, been absorbed into my consciousness. I am a better teacher for being his student.

Each opinion, every student's thought, was valuable to the discussion.

One could hardly be an effective teacher without deep regard and even affection for one's students. Professor Wiesel is from a generation and a world that speaks of affection, even loving regard for students, without a trace of irony or subtext. Each of the 11 years I heard his public lectures at Boston University he acknowledged his students. "This year," he would say, bringing a smile to the face of veteran students, "my students are the best I have ever had. I say that every year, and every year it's true."

If a teacher of the calibre and experience of Elie Wiesel can carry himself with such a graceful humility around students, what responsibility does that impose upon the rest of us? Even as the author of 50 books, and a recipient of so many honors, awards, and honorary degrees, humility was wholly genuine for my professor, because for him it was always about the learning and not about the teacher.

If Elie Wiesel can carry himself with such a graceful humility around students, what responsibility does that impose upon the rest of us?

We delighted in his stories of personal encounters and easy familiarity with the authors we were studying, whether it was his frequent citation of Malraux, or his accounts of cups of tea with Golda Meir, his last phone call with Primo Levi, or his case of mistaken identity on a flight to Israel with Andre Schwarz-Bart. We always wondered at the beginning of the semester, which frequently featured a biblical reading, whether he would tell us of his encounter with the author!

I haven't become a writer, because Professor Wiesel taught that you should only become a writer if you must, if you have no other choice. I did become a teacher (and a rabbi, although he cautioned me that a rabbi bears a weighty responsibility for the souls of his congregants) because I feel responsible and privileged to pass on what I received from my teacher: the passion for reading and study, the love of questions and concern for the humanity of another.

The Lola Stein Institute AROUND THE WORLD

MARCH 2010

Judith Leitner presents "Case Studies of Best Practices in Mainstream Arts Education" at The Expanding the Role and Impact of Arts in Jewish Education conference, sponsored by JESNA and The Lippman Kanfer Institute, New York City.

APRIL 2010

Judith Leitner presents the teacher training workshop "Artful Thinking and Thinking About Yom Ha'Atzma'ut" at Colegio Estrella Toledano Ibn Gabirol, the Jewish day school in Madrid, Spain.

JUNE 2010

An interview with Ellen Kessler appears in *Today's Parent*.

JULY 2010

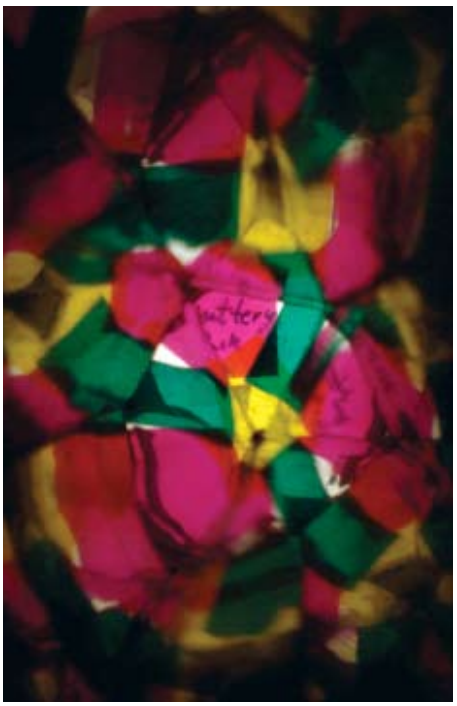
Greg Beiles presents "What contemporary Jewish education can learn from Levinas" at the *Readings of "Difficult Freedom" Conférence* in Toulouse, France, sponsored by La Société Internationale de Recherche Emmanuel Levinas
(SIREL, Paris) and the North American Levinas Society.

'I'M JUST NOT GOOD AT MATH & SCIENCE'

THE **SCIENCE** OF A **NEW APPROACH**

BY DREW ROTHMAN

Sometimes students take me aside and confide that they are "just not good at math and science." I shouldn't expect too much from them, they tell me. As a junior high math and science teacher, this is my favourite challenge.



Their feelings ring true to me. I felt the same way in junior high. I found mathematics abstract and disconnected from the real world. Science dealt in reality, but was too boring to keep my interest. I was turned off.

As a teacher now, I want my students' experience to be different. I will not allow the same barriers to engagement I experienced to go up in my classroom. So I push myself to make math and science meaningful to my skeptical students.

I aim to captivate students' attention, and maintain their focus. Given the preteen mindset and the range of abilities in each class, this "engage and hold" entry process is key. Four techniques work for me.

> In junior high, I found mathematics abstract and disconnected from the real world… I want my students' experience to be different.

DISCOVERY-BASED LEARNING

When I came to The Toronto Heschel School I found that junior high math centred on the query, "What is the story?" This small question became my most effective tool to render abstract ideas tangible. I saw how students engage best when they are the ones who suggest examples to explain a day's lesson.

Before each unit I ask students to think about what the numbers I present could possibly be used for or could mean. What can they discover about these numbers? I ask the class first to estimate an application of the numbers and then to calculate. Only after these two steps do I introduce the abstract theoretical lesson. Theory interests them if they see how it applies. One study of positive and negative integers culminated in a stock market exercise where students tracked stocks over a week, engrossed in integers.

In wanting their students to be successful, science teachers frequently do them a disservice by revealing too much too quickly. Many teachers teach curricular material first and conclude with an experiment to reinforce the lesson. This is the mistake. Science class should generate curiosity. Discovery-based learning does this well. It rewards students' intuition and gratifies them with a sense of control over what they are learning.

I remember how my own teacher read electrical theory aloud from a textbook and then demonstrated magnetic fields using a battery, wire and compass. If she had reversed the order and shown the experiment first, I would have had to think for myself, figure out the cause and the effect and call upon my existing knowledge to explain why the compass moved.

When students make a discovery during a class experiment and have an "AHA!" moment of their very own, real learning is in the room. The teacher can then reinforce the lesson with theory.

DYNAMIC CONVERSATIONS

After an experiment, students need to digest the discovery. Questions flow and the class tries to make sense of what it has

seen. I distribute worksheets questioning why the experiment unfolded as it did and invite students' theories. In open forum, the class discusses whether theories their peers have offered explain what we all saw. The free flowing conversation somehow binds the class to focus on understanding exactly what discovery they have made. I simply guide the conversation and jot down their theories on the blackboard. My board notes provide structure and become a study guide but the dynamism comes from the class itself.

When students make discoveries during an experiment… real learning is in the room.

HI-TECH FLASH

Technological tools can add depth to science class and a little hi-tech flash. Once students this age are familiar with a general idea, it's sometimes a battle to keep them captivated long enough for enriched learning. After a recent lesson on the retrograde motion of Mars, I used the smart board to show students a PowerPoint presentation and a few applets (http://www.astro.illinois.edu/projects/data/Retrograde/). They click to the technology. It's their modus operandi, and the visual presentation does widen their understanding.

A FUN SEND OFF

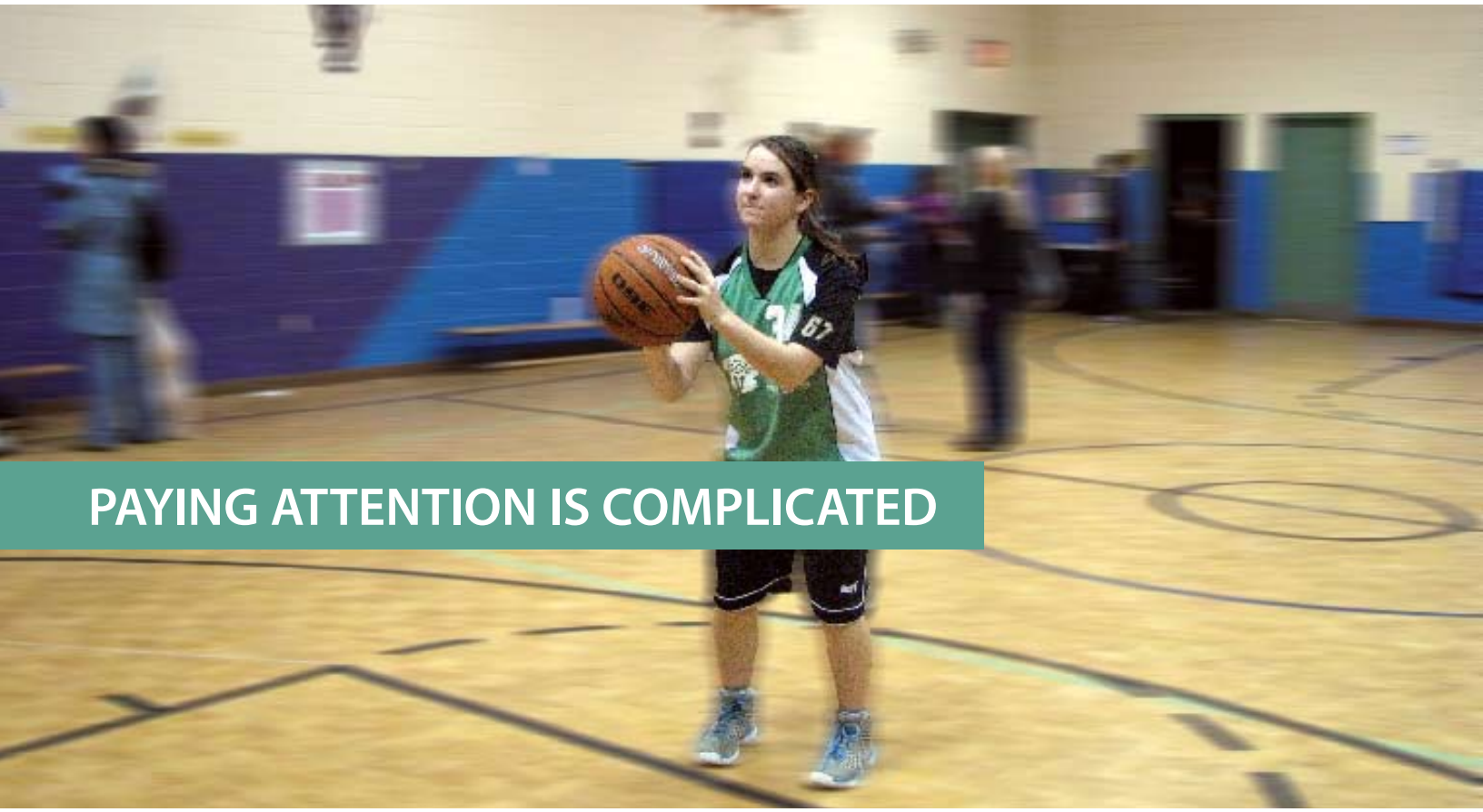
I like to complete a unit with a fun hands-on long-term assignment that requires recall of concepts taught. I call it a practical culminating activity. In the unit on electricity we manufacture wind generators using balsa wood, cardboard and motors. Students create the generators however they think most effective. From blade design to sails that turn the generator into the wind, they rely on their wits and prior knowledge and they experience the relationship between magnetism and electricity personally and completely.

The wind generators are a practical application of science just as "What's the story?" applies numbers from math class to real life situations. Both make learning meaningful to students. I orient my students to look around. They can discover the world by themselves. I just help their mastery of skills with a little focus.

FEATURED ARTICLE

BY DR. SHARON FRIEFELD & PAM MEDJUCK STEIN

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF A CHILD'S BRAIN



PAYING ATTENTION IS COMPLICATED

Neuro-education applies knowledge of the brain to education. Outstanding researchers in neuroscience, psychology and education collaborate in this multidisciplinary pursuit at the Dana Foundation, and a new scientific journal, *Mind, Brain and Education*, reaches an integrated community of academics and professionals. One important inquiry asks what it means neurologically for a child to pay attention.

There is skill in *Zitz Fleisch*, Yiddish for the ability to sit still for a long time, to persevere. Some days we have more *Zitz Fleisch* than others. School children develop *Zitz Fleisch* over time. To our knowledge, there are no published studies examining the neurophysiological underpinnings of *Zitz Fleisch*. However, new methods to study brain activity, called functional imaging, allow scientists to investigate the relationship between how the brain works and attention.

President Obama spoke to American children on their first day of school in 2009. He told to them to "pay attention to their teachers and to pay attention in class." What was he expecting them to do? What does it mean to a child when someone asks them to pay attention?

Attention is not a single skill.

Attention is not a single skill. Michael Posner, a world leader in the science of human attention, maps attention in specific neural networks and regions of the brain. His images reveal attention as a set of processes within "an interconnected network." Posner divides attention into three interconnected attention networks including: the orienting system, the alerting system and the executive control system.

The first step is to notice. The orienting network of attention starts up during the first year of life, and, like a spotlight, moves our attention to vivid awareness of something in our environment (a bright mobile, a familiar voice). In *The Philosophical Baby*, Alison Gopnik explains that, "infant and very young children have abundant cholinergic transmitters, which turn on attention and make them more attentive." Their curiosity is all about discovery and they experience everything at once.

The alerting network of attention is responsible for maintaining alert arousal to process information. As this system develops children become better at sustaining their attention to focus. The initial learning of new skills demands sustained attention until the skill becomes automatic. As learning becomes more complex, greater demands are required to concentrate for longer periods of time.

To advance cognition and emotional growth, we must improve attention, through challenge and practice

A three-year-old needs sustained attention to bounce a large ball, but at twelve the action may be automatic, done without thinking and not fruitful for development. Practicing to throw perfect baskets would profit the twelve year old's attentional capacities, if the skill was not yet mastered. Demands on students must always increase.

As children learn new actions and skills, their brains replace less efficient networks with new connections. Norman Doidge, in *The Brain That Changes Itself*, describes attentional networks as "plastic," having an inherent capacity to change. He explains that effortful attention and active focus result in the "growth" of new brain circuits. Circuitry alters in response to external events, such as positive reinforcement, novel and varied experiences in learning, repetition and practice.

Over time, children become much better at controlling what they bring to conscious attention and what they are able to ignore, a process referred to as selective inhibition. Selective inhibition is required to withhold an impulsive response, and to decide right from wrong and act accordingly. Messages that switch on the inhibitory transmitters are coordinated between the prefrontal and frontal lobes and other parts of the attentional networks in the brain.

Educators can study and apply these findings in the classroom.

These regions are also responsible for controlling attention to self-correct errors, to set goals and plan actions. Posner calls these processes "executive control of attention." They shape the development of cognition and emotional control, which are also affected by events in our immediate environment and by how we feel inside. Given that the frontal region only approaches full function around 25 years of age, this maturation factor speaks volumes about a young person's physiological need for adult guidance.

While neural network proficiency does depend on neurobiology (maturity, genetics), it is also strongly influenced by practice and the challenges a child experiences. To advance cognition and emotional growth, we must sustain and improve our control of attention through escalated challenge and disciplined practice. Attentional processes assist with socialization, deep thinking, athletic skills and playing a musical instrument. Reciprocally, the practicing involved in musical or athletic prowess builds better attentional skills.

Neurobiologists are gaining clarity on how the brain changes and how we can influence that change. Neuro-educators are researching how a child's potential can transform through practice, experience and exposure. Educators can study and apply these findings in the classroom. The research is complex because we must control so many factors (age, type of attention, personality, genetic makeup, etc.) if we are to causally relate experience to changes in the brain. Nonetheless, the work is going forward steadily with fascinating results.

something to **think** about

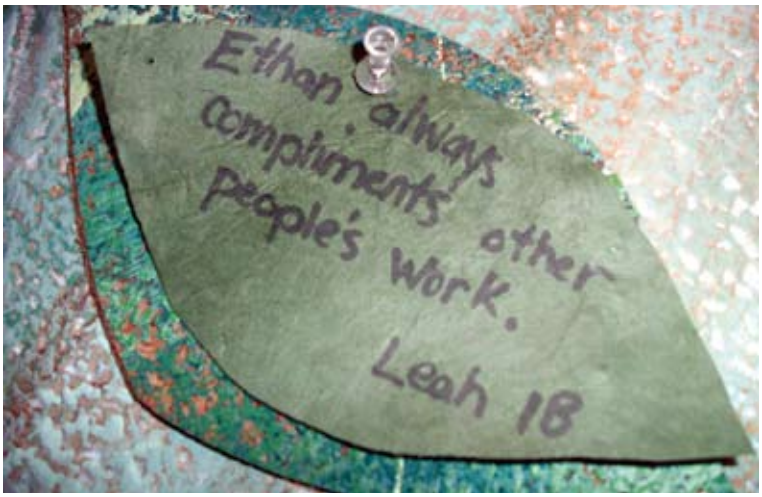
- Consider the following tasks: if you're seated and reading this article, stop reading for a moment and feel the seat against your back. Now listen to the noises around you. Stop for a second. Now look around and search for something blue. These three tasks demand different types of attention in response to different internal or environmental stimuli.

- In one Dana Foundation study of children, researchers found that engagement and repeated practice in the arts strengthened the executive attention network. A student's interest in the performing arts led to high motivation that produced sustained attention and, in turn, this training of attention improved other areas of thinking and problem solving. This evidence seems to reflect the point of view taken in arts based education, which emerged from more intuitive beginnings.

FOCUS ON GOOD DEEDS

BY MARLEE PINSKER VIRSKIN

Even the youngest students can notice their actions and the deeds of others



I stopped at the school entrance today as a class of young students streamed outside. One student held the door, and as each went through, I heard an emphatic "Thank you, Sarah!" It was a small moment of appreciation, and it made me smile.

Little moments like this offer a glimpse into how we teach Jewish values at The Toronto Heschel School. We value the small acts of kindness and consideration that comprise ethical behaviour according to Jewish tradition. It is a small thing for a child to hold a door for others and be thanked for doing so, but it indicates much.

Our curriculum guides students to understand *middot*, the virtues learned from Jewish text study. While some are common to the Jewish community and the culture around us, we teach with a conscious focus on the Jewish *middot* and we demonstrate that ethical and loving behaviour is incumbent upon us as Jews. We want students to develop a deep and clear awareness of Jewish virtues and *Derekh Eretz*.

At The Toronto Heschel School, we teach the Jewish roots of best behaviour. We do this in ways both secular and religious. We permeate our curriculum and daily behaviour with mindful awareness of Jewish values. We act well towards other people, towards God, and even towards ourselves. Students learn that many universal values are also the values rooted in Judaism, such as honesty, integrity, consideration for others, good government, caring for people less fortunate than ourselves, and caring for the environment.

Students in Grade 4 study the prayer Yishtabach and discuss how we worship God through our deeds, not just our words. The prayer says that one way we worship God is through creating good government. Students then examine local and national government structures and evaluate whether they meet the prayer's criteria for using power towards good government. A junior high student council enables students to learn to build a good government for themselves. To the regular roster we add a Minister of *Tikkun Olam* and formalize the council's attention to ethical behaviour and repair of the world.

Small actions import Jewish learning into the kinds of personal discussion and reflection that affect behaviour and lead to growth and change. Our newsletter includes a brief focus on *middot* chosen from the weekly Torah portion. In Bereshit, for example, we study the lines, "All the earth was chaotic, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters." (Gen.1:2) We come to understand it is a Jewish *middah* to maintain a calm and pleasant demeanor, even during tumultuous times.

We suggest students learn to be a source of calm. One early years class decided that being a source of calm was important to others, that we should think before speaking, and speak in a quiet voice. When a child urges others to refrain from getting excited about some perceived wrong, he is practising this *middah*.

When early years classes learn about the rainbow that God placed in the sky, we study the lines, "And God said this is a sign of the covenant that I make between me and between you" (Gen. 9:12). These words reflect the *middah*, "love and honour each other" and remind us that it is important to show signs of respect.

Students toss around ideas and suggest ways their actions might reflect this type of understanding. How do we show love and respect? One class decided we should face someone when speaking with him or her; show the person talking that you are listening; hold doors for each other; use respectful body language and tone of voice; and begin each day with a polite greeting to those with whom we live and learn.

The *Mitzvah* Tree is a display that helps to focus the attention of the community while valuing the *middot*. The Tree celebrates twice. Each leaf recognizes a good deed done by a student. Each leaf also acknowledges the student who noticed the good deed being done.

A *Mitzvah* Tree, filled with beautifully decorated leaves, adorns the central hall of The Toronto Heschel School. This display helps to focus the attention of the community while valuing the *middot*. Each leaf tells of good deeds, the *middot* that our students have noticed others practicing around them. When one child sees another performing a *mitzvah* or practicing a *middah*, she reports it to her teacher and a new leaf goes on the tree saying, "Rebecca saw Nate helping Noah with his ski jacket zipper." The leaf celebrates Nate's kindness and Rebecca's recognition of it.

Praying with our feet. A grade 8 project integrating civil rights, history and Jewish ethics through visual art and creative writing.

LUCK OF THE DRAW

BY YULIYA MAGRI

All the children wore the same uniform, down to their underwear. On the surface, this Soviet ex-military base — my home for my first 13 years of life — appeared to have extraordinary order, focus and routine. Cotton fields from dawn 'til noon, factory from noon 'til dusk, and Soviet Communist party meetings in between. It was worlds away from 21st-century Toronto.

Still, waters run deep. Beneath the ordered surface, with most adults working full-day shifts, my town's true culture was its large population of unsupervised children, dosed heavily with poverty. Almost entirely, child-raising fell to the schools. This may not sound like the beginning of a fairytale with a happy ending, but before writing one, don't we need to first imagine?

By chance, my school happened to pilot an enhanced arts program. The goal was to focus on the development of creative and artistic skills as a way to engage young children. The highlight of the program drew almost everyone in town. It was during a monthly recital in a local theatre that we took off our identical uniforms, got dressed up in costumes, and presented an array of skits.

Without a doubt, this early experience influenced my later work, creating original performances and poetry, but far more profoundly, it planted in me something less concrete and much more valuable: curiosity and a small glimpse into the world of possibility.

CREATIVITY AT SCHOOL CANNOT BE LEFT TO CHANCE

This glimmer burgeoned into an urge to explore life beyond matching uniforms and limited world views. With the first applause I felt confidence in my creative ability and a surprising sense of importance. A relentless work ethic was born along with an inextinguishable drive for innovation. Truthfully, all this came from drama class and performance — in a factory town.

I experienced first-hand what happens when school curriculum fosters creativity. In our fast-changing world, we cannot fathom what society will look like when children, now in first grade, ultimately graduate. Having crossed continents, political systems and cultures in my 20-something years, I know that to learn integrity, hope, freedom, imagination and creativity is just as important to growing up as reading, math and history. To really do their job well, schools have to teach it all.

The benefits of an integrated arts approach are as monumental for children at The Toronto Heschel School today as they were for me in Soviet Russia. Heschel and The Lola Stein Institute are among the few educational institutions that understand this, but the journey that brought me here to see all this was neither direct nor intentional.

As a second year Drama major at one of America's top universities, I caught myself wondering about the building blocks of creativity. Are we born creative or can creativity be taught? What encourages or kills it? Most of my peers followed a very specific course of study – acting, directing, playwriting. I opted for an additional major in psychology, hoping to decipher the alchemy of creativity.

> Focus is a funny thing. If you keep it too narrow, you might miss things. If you open too wide, you never move forward. My advisors warned me, "Yuliya, be careful not to lose focus."

In psychology I remained stuck. While it dug deep into human potential, the research into creativity seemed too abstract for me. How do you teach creativity? I urgently wanted to know how it was taught to real students in real schools.

Upon graduation I received some prestigious research offers, but that was not what I wanted. When I came across The Lola Stein Institute job posting, I knew I had finally found a place that uses research to influence real change.

I was right. Gail Baker and Greg Beiles implement the latest research in psychology and creativity. Their work, however, reaches far beyond creativity in the arts. By integrating the arts into all academic disciplines, these educators open students to inventive thinking in all areas of study, areas not usually associated with the arts. The children learn that thinking creatively is a habit of mind.

During the First Annual Lola Stein Symposium, I was amazed by the number of educators — all enthusiasts of creative education — who came to share their ideas and learn together. I had a chance to exchange a few words with Professor Howard Gardner and confirm my desire to seek graduate educational opportunities in schools that share my passion.

Anyone who observes a child engaged in a creative process will see the joy derived from making something new, or from seeing something familiar in a new light. Indeed, creative accomplishments provide some of the greatest sources of pleasure for children and adults alike. Still, institutes like The Toronto Heschel School are rare. Too few schools make the effort to implement the research and discoveries. Too few unlock the arts' potential to excite creativity, affect self-esteem, and enhance learning across the curriculum. Too often vision and inspiration remain low priorities.

I am leaving the Lola Stein Institute to pursue graduate studies. My plan is to learn to design effective arts-in-education initiatives. I will carry what I have learned here to other students and schools. I will work hard so that children's potential is not left to a chance encounter, as mine was, with something that happens to catch their fancy. I will teach my future students to go beyond reading fairy tales and to create their own. Thank you Lola Stein for showing me what can be done.

Yulia continues her studies this fall at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We wish her well.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

BY JENNIFER KOLARI

BALANCE IN THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD

We want our children to be happy and successful, but sometimes these goals work against each other. In pursuit of happiness, we might shield our children from disappointment and failure. But being overly protective can give children a false sense of reality which might hinder their achievements later in life. Meanwhile, in pursuit of success, we might invite stress into our children's lives. Whether at school or hockey practice, pushing them too hard makes it more about pleasing their parents and less about the joy of doing what they love, regardless of the outcome. What can we do to balance these goals? How do we cultivate children who are both happy and accomplished?

Confusion in how to nurture happy and successful children does not condemn us as bad parents. Society often measures success in dollars and happiness in material possessions, but we can reject these weights and measures in favour of our own. Let's teach our children how to decide what's important so they can grow into confident, grounded adults.

Without struggle, children are left vulnerable, too easily overwhelmed and forever dependent. Think about watching your child master a new skill, like skating. It can be terrifying to see your child wobble unsteadily onto cold, hard ice for the first time. Our instinct might be to lend a stable arm of support, to keep him from falling. But, unless we allow our children to stand up on their own two feet, they will never progress. It might take weeks of painful falls, but, if they are to learn, they need us to let go.

We cannot starve our children of the sustenance provided by challenge. Instead, we must let children try, fail and then cope with the natural consequences of their failures.

The key is not to avoid challenge but to learn to deal with it. Children who venture into unknown waters may swallow the odd mouthful, but ultimately, they learn to swim better than those still crouched in the boat. When we enable children to fully experience the winning and the losing sides of life, we give them the gift of balance. What we can do is be there for them as they struggle. This is where strong family connection comes in to play. Unconditional love and positive reinforcement breed positive attitudes.

A child needs to be able to self-assess and self-motivate. The learning curve for these skills depends directly on child and parent interactions at home. To promote independent thought, resilience and self-assurance in their kids, parents should respond with balance and love to their children's feelings and experiences. This path leads more predictably to both happiness and success.

TIPS TO HELP **GUIDE YOUR CHILDREN**
THROUGH LIFE'S UPS AND **DOWNS** WITH **BALANCE AND HONESTY**

1. Know your child and love the one you're with
Pay attention to your child's aptitudes and passions, and work to understand who your child really is. Show unconditional acceptance of her strengths and challenges. When a child sees her true reflection in your eyes, she begins to know herself and self-knowledge is the platform from which she prepares to risk the trials and tribulations that will teach and strengthen her.

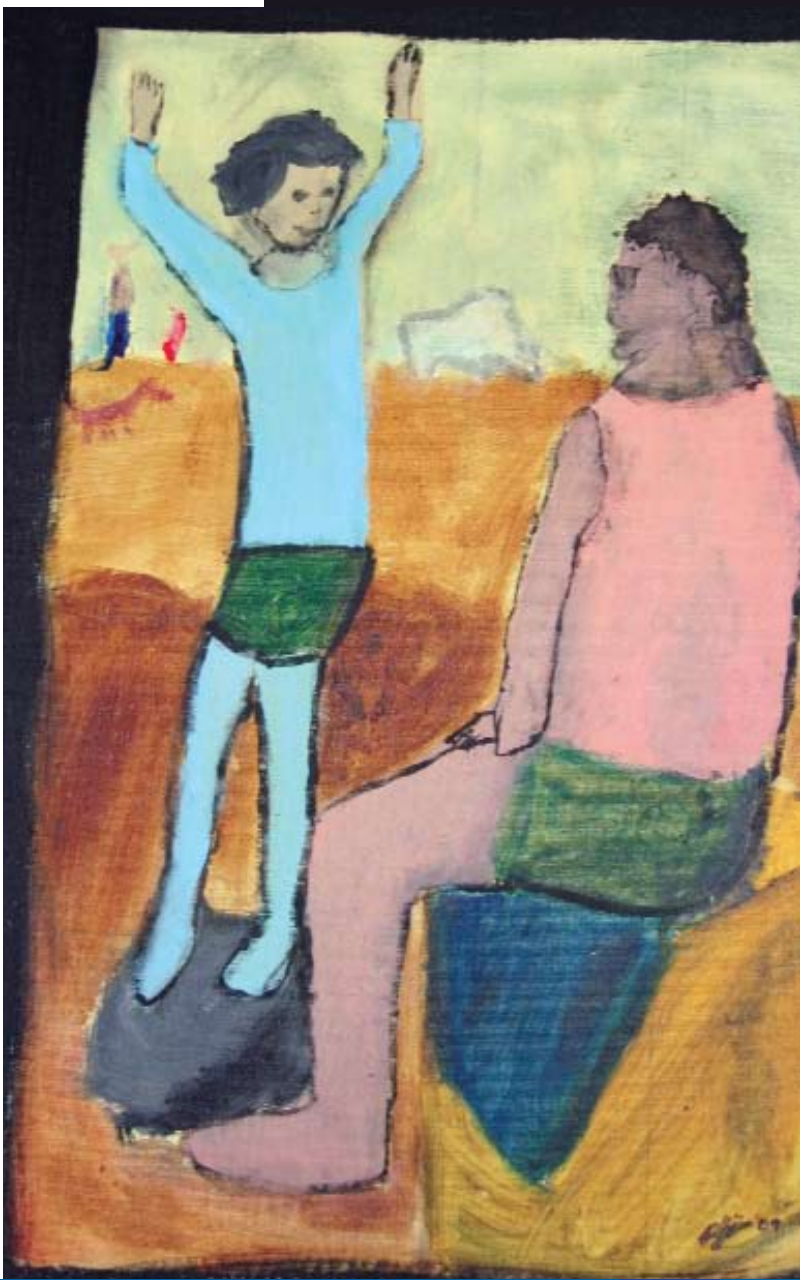
2. Show yourself and encourage emotional ownership
Let your child see that you are also an imperfect human being who can be irreverent, mistaken, sad or frustrated. As he observes you expressing and surviving the same gamut of feelings that he has, he will connect to you and recognize his own power to overcome adversity. If you own your emotions, he'll become more honest in his expressions and efforts.

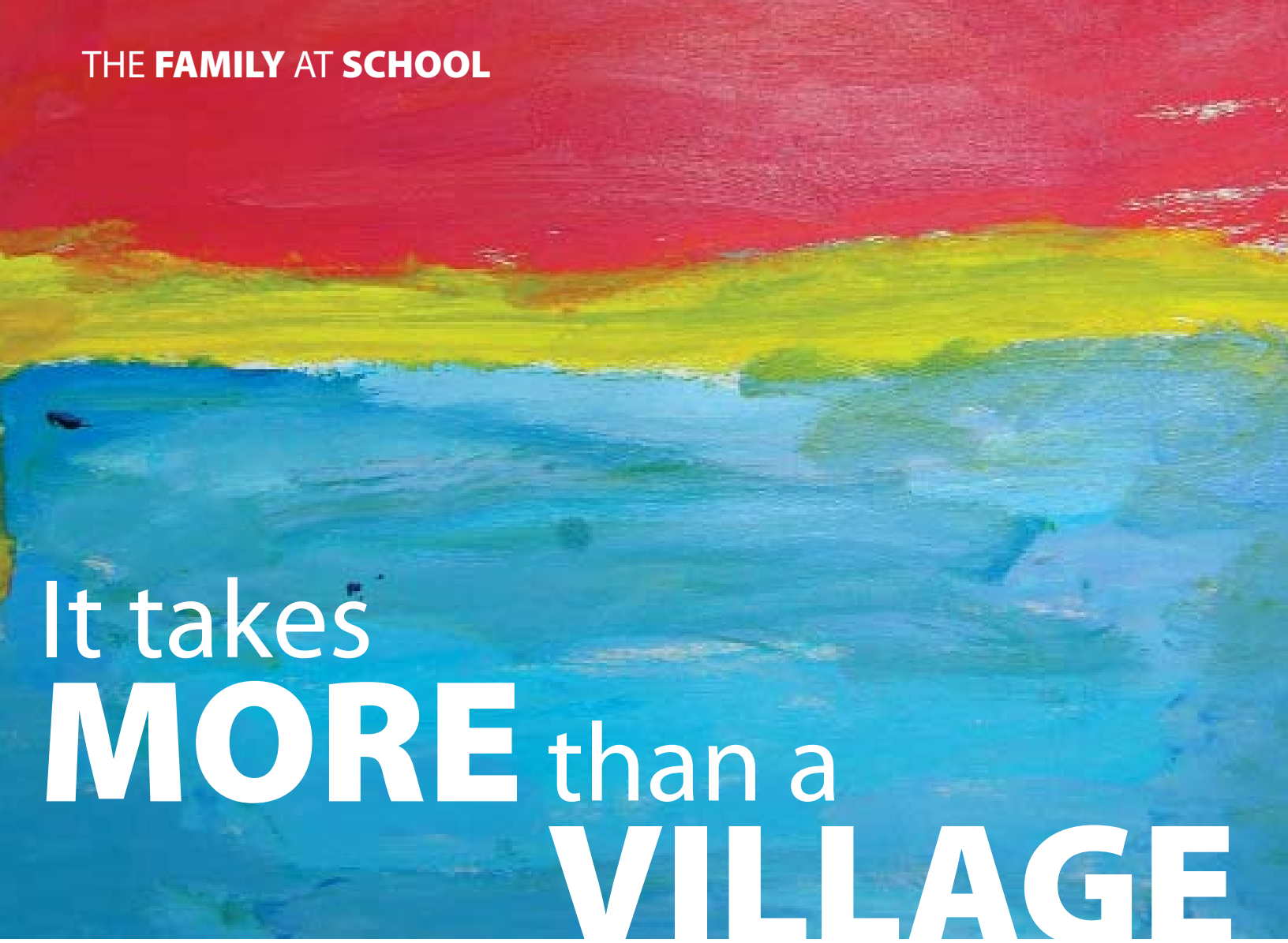
3. Praise effort over outcome, avoid rewards
Encourage diligence. Compliment your child on her efforts and encourage her to measure herself against her own achievements. Material rewards focus on outcome alone and can backfire, rendering a child more likely to give up when increased effort is required. A child accustomed to material rewards thinks, "What's the point in trying if I can't get a prize?". Instead, help your child set personal goals. Gratification comes with personal achievement.

4. Don't be a fixer: let there be mistakes
If your child is upset or angry, do not rush to mend the situation. Listen as he expresses his feelings, acknowledge that it's okay to feel that way sometimes and then have a conversation about solving the problem constructively. If he procrastinates in a school assignment to the last minute and loses marks for tardiness or incompletion, do not interfere. The negative result received is a clear consequence of his actions, and nicely demonstrates cause and effect, which is the best way for him to learn.

5. Start in neutral and avoid punishment
An open, neutral demeanor on hearing of your child's errors does not preclude instructive consequences. When your child does something wrong, listen to her point of view before you discipline and then select disciplinary consequences that are a natural result of actions at issue. This is the most effective way to correct behavior. Yelling and punishing will lead the child to focus more on your behavior than her own.

WORK TO UNDERSTAND WHO YOUR CHILD REALLY IS.





It takes MORE than a VILLAGE

BY KAREN CHISVIN

PARENT PARTICIPATION AT SCHOOL REQUIRES US TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION

The Jewish tradition has many practices that help focus our attention. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks discusses focussed attention in the context of the *kavana* of prayer in his essay in the *Koren Sacks Siddur* (Sacks, 2009). He writes that focussed attention involves levels of intention, understanding, contextual awareness, and affirmation; all ways of thinking and behaving that require practice. I apply the same levels of *kavana* to participation in the school community.

The first level is intention, the choice that underlies the decision to focus. When the choice is static, it is a subject matter, not a practice and we call it a "focus of attention." Once parents choose a particular school, the focus of our attention can become dull and stale if we continue to see in the school only what we saw from the outside looking in, and refrain from integrating any deeper understanding.

On the other hand, the action of "focusing our attention" is a dynamic practice. If parents review and renew their intentions through, as Sacks says, understanding, awareness and affirmation, we can foster an engagement with our child's school and some very valuable consequences result. All aspects of the school become strengthened. This has certainly been my experience at The Toronto Heschel School.

Parents who volunteer their time come to understand the depth and breadth of what is going on. One mother could better comprehend integration in curriculum after spending the day with a class in a conservation area and hearing the children discuss biology, environmental and Jewish ethics, and Canadian history during the single outing. One grandfather came in to build a raised garden and witnessed the elementary math computing that went into its layout. We see parents

painting murals on the walls, coaching teams and participating in performances, and we then appreciate the collectivity that makes the community hum.

As parents who participate we become more aware of ourselves and our community. We learn for ourselves, share our ideas, and create a forum in which to model our values to our children. For example, some parents wanted to extend classroom learning and take *Tikkun Olam* into school wide practice. So the Chevrah Committee created *Mitzvah* Day, annually encouraging school families to perform community service related *Mitzvot* together. These early *Mitzvah* Day leaders could not see how their modelling would reach beyond their own children to the entire Toronto community.

Through our effort, we demonstrate to our children what matters to us, and how hard we all have to work to maintain and strengthen the important elements in our lives. It is a golden opportunity to affirm our values.

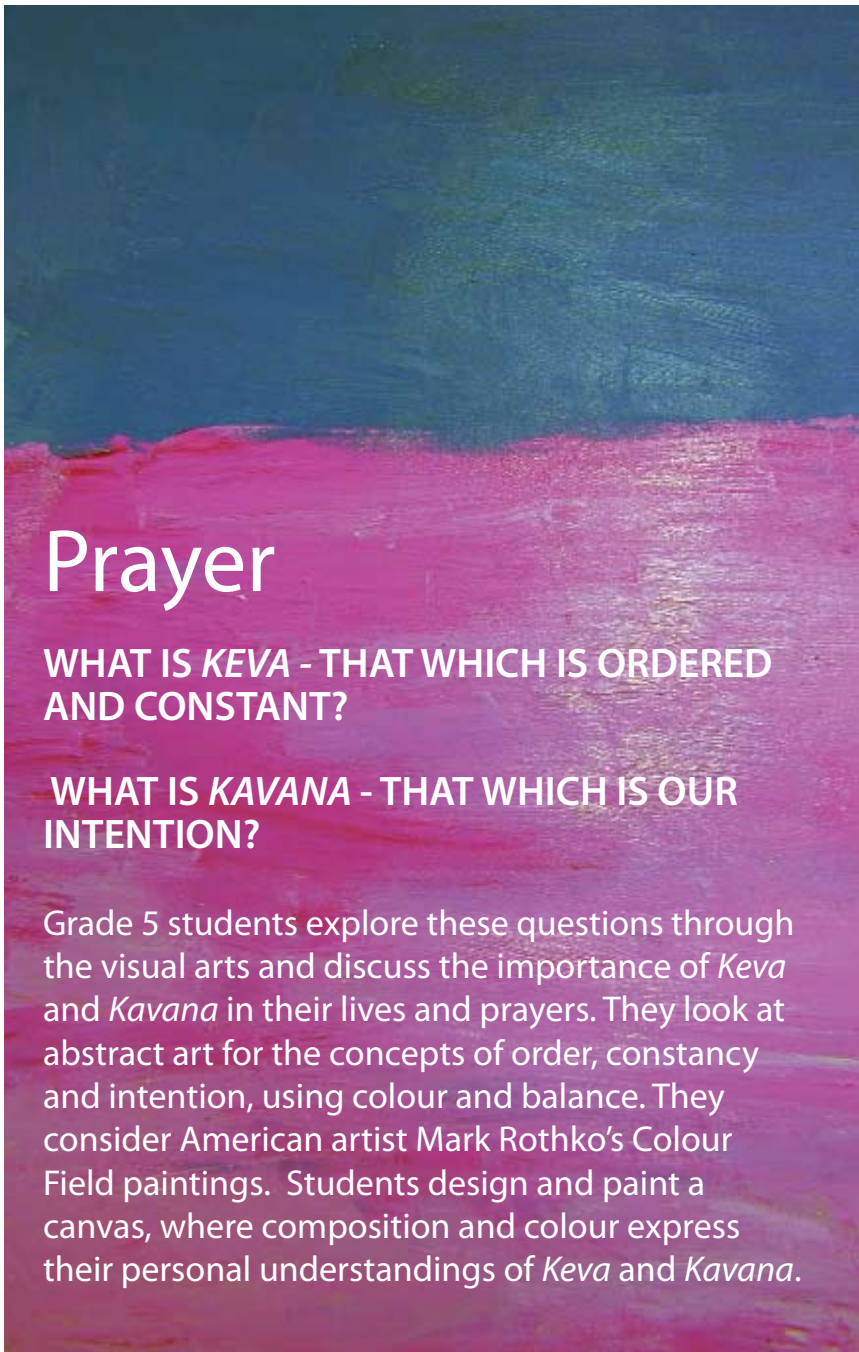
The Toronto Heschel School was, and remains, very important to me and my family on two levels. When we enrolled our first child it was the first day school in Toronto where children could develop Jewish values in a pluralistic setting. It also enabled my children to be schooled in an advanced interdisciplinary curriculum which the other Jewish schools did not. These distinctions meant a lot to me and so I was very enthusiastic to do what I could to build and support the school.

While the entire development process reinforced my own values, I recognize that the commitment is needed but not always easy. From previous community experience, I understood how much hard work goes into creating and developing an organization. I felt that I needed to take on my share of the work, to show others how much needed to be done, and how the burden is lighter when everyone takes part. Many of us have had our hands tugged in the school hallways – "let's go!" – while finishing a conversation with another parent about planning the next program, classroom visit, or holiday celebration. When our kids come first, so does the school.

My experience of personal growth and the evidence of communal strength at my chidren's school are not that surprising. Daniel Levitin, musician turned McGill neurology professor, comments, "something special happens when a group starts to sing together – something extraordinary from a cognitive perspective... a sort of group consciousness emerges in which no single member of the group can be said to know the song, but the group itself does" (Levitin, *The World in Six Songs*, 2008). Evolutionary anthropologist, Emma Cohen, suggests that shared goals help trigger an elevated mood and greater altruism (cited in Why do workout buddies make exercising more addictive? A. Hitchinson, *The Globe & Mail*, Jan.10, 2010). Author Daniel Siegel explains how the functions and characteristics of our brains both require and cause us to desire to work with others and to become more linked to them (Siegel, *The Mindful Brain*, 2007).

Some twelve years after I registered my first child at The Toronto Heschel School, some of my closest friends are Heschel parents. For those of us who are alumni, we speak frequently of the school and its influence on our families. We continue to share in each other's *simchas* and sorrows. We continue to spread the word about the school.

Rabbi Sacks renders the Hebrew word "Shema" to mean listen, hear, reflect, understand, internalize and respond in action. He places *kavana* at the heart of devotional practice. We may not all pray, but we can all focus our attention.



Prayer

WHAT IS *KEVA* - THAT WHICH IS ORDERED AND CONSTANT?

WHAT IS *KAVANA* - THAT WHICH IS OUR INTENTION?

Grade 5 students explore these questions through the visual arts and discuss the importance of *Keva* and *Kavana* in their lives and prayers. They look at abstract art for the concepts of order, constancy and intention, using colour and balance. They consider American artist Mark Rothko's Colour Field paintings. Students design and paint a canvas, where composition and colour express their personal understandings of *Keva* and *Kavana*.

DELVING DEEPER REACHING HIGHER
SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE

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LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in S.Africa who cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely and lovingly. We honor her memory, sharing our passion for learning at home and afar.

LOLA AND MANNIE STEIN