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THINK

THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children

HOLDING TRUE

THE PARTICULAR COMMITMENT OF ALAN RUSONIK, NEW HEAD AT TORONTO HESCHEL SCHOOL / PRAISE THAT HELPS NOT HINDERS / HEBREW AS THE ZIONIST GIFT TO WORLD JEWRY / THE GARDEN, THE RABBI, AND THE SKILL TO DIG / THE MESOPOTAMIAN INNOVATION THAT ENDURES / DECISIONS ARE THE STUFF OF LIFE BY DR. ROBYN JACOBSON

THINK THE LOLA STEIN INSTITUTE JOURNAL

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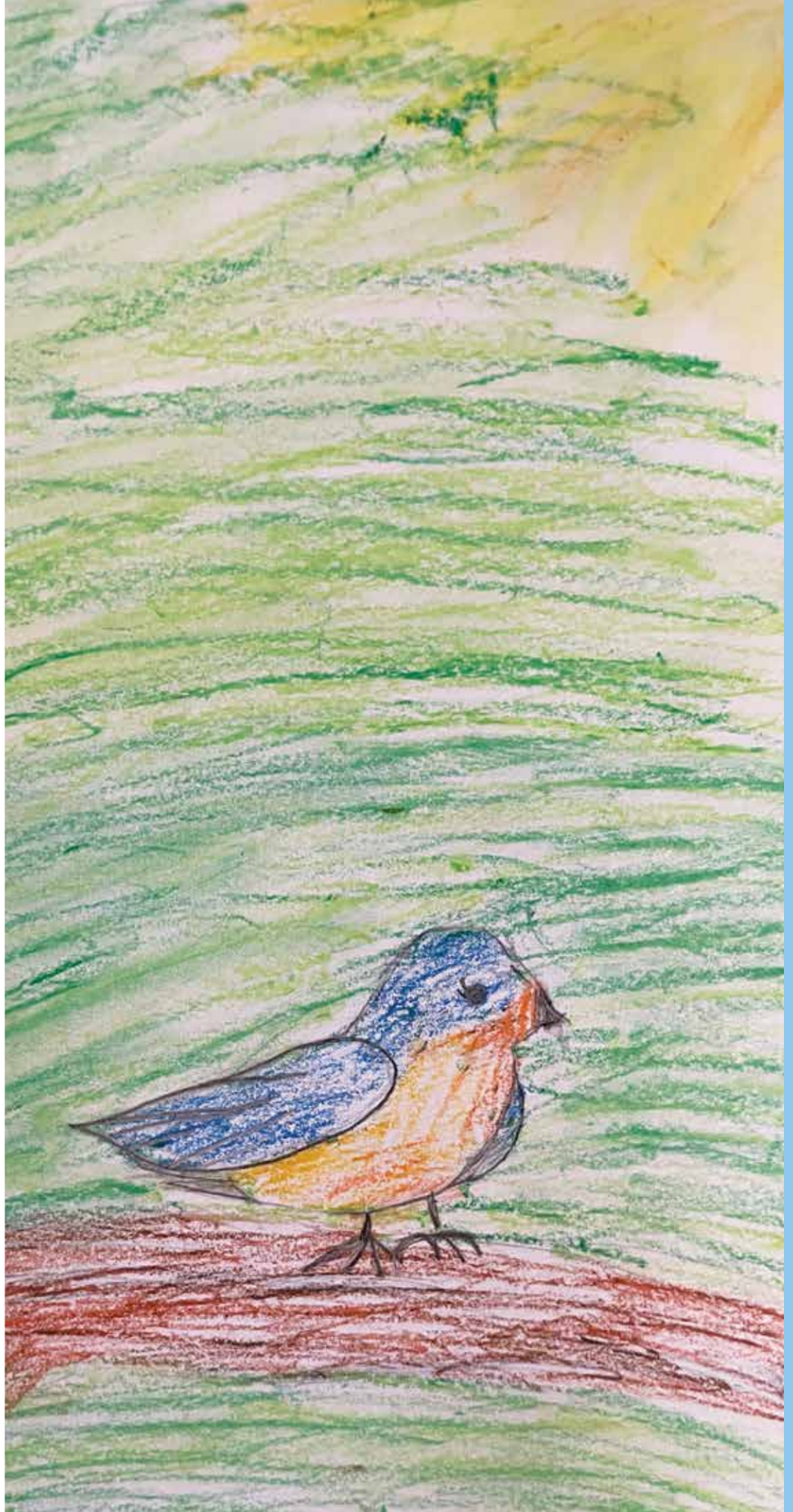
LSI PUBLICATIONS

Lola Stein z"l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. We honour her memory in a way that also reaches out to many. We lovingly remember Mannie Stein z"l whose enthusiasm and support for our work with children is gratefully acknowledged.



COLUMNS:
HOLDING TRUE

SPECIAL FEATURE:
ON TASK

OUR SAGES TELL US:
MOVING FORWARD

Take Your Children Seriously

Thinking about the tumult that abounds today, I wondered how THINK might help readers with solidarity and fortitude, and the Hebrew phrase "Yashar Koach" came to mind.

Yashar Koach is a salute, a greeting that leans into the future with respect and encouragement, as when a Torah reader leaves the bima and we say "Yashar Koach," acknowledging that the reading was meaningful and we wish it to be repeated.

Encouragement sounds simple and easy but as our writers explain in this issue of THINK, sometimes it feels like it's going against the grain. We have to be thoughtful about what it is our words are advocating. We must blend faith and action.

When Moses descended Mount Sinai carrying stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, he found the Israelites dancing around the Golden Calf and he threw down the tablets, smashing them into pieces. The sages of the Talmud wrote that God appreciated this dramatic move with a response to Moses' action akin to saying "Yashar Koach," meaning "More power to you" or "Keep up the good work." How could shattering the law be a positive?

The sage Resh Lakish, reportedly a highwayman turned Talmud scholar, knew all about keeping people on mission: Yes, Moses could have raised the tablets high and called for due respect, but instead, he used a dramatic act to shock the Israelites back into consciousness; smashing the tablets clarified how precious they were. Moses' goal was to *encourage*—in other words, to give his people the *courage* to stay on track, remember who they were and what they were all about (Shabbat 87a). And he had to be brave enough himself to do so.

How do we act with courage? How do we respond in a way that furthers our goals? How do we embolden our children along the Jewish journey, especially when it involves hard work, commitment, perseverance? What is the courage they must muster? When and how do we say "Yashar Koach"? Maybe the drama of our times is shocking us into a new consciousness. What can Jewish parents and educators do to guide our children towards a meaningful and strong Jewish future?

We look to first principles. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously said that Judaism is a leap of action, not a leap of faith. Joan Garson expresses appreciation for parents who enroll children in Jewish day school. Robyn Jacobson notes the mindfulness inherent in making good decisions and the attention that deliberation requires. There are many actions to bolster, many things to do.

Judaism has mitzvot (commandments) with which to feel a connection to God, a language to speak, 5,785 years of history to draw from, texts in which to find wisdom and traditions in which to find comfort. We have a Jewish diaspora and a sovereign State of Israel to cherish and protect. It's not that we need to search out what there is to do; it's rather that we contemplate how we attend to our children's actions and reactions.

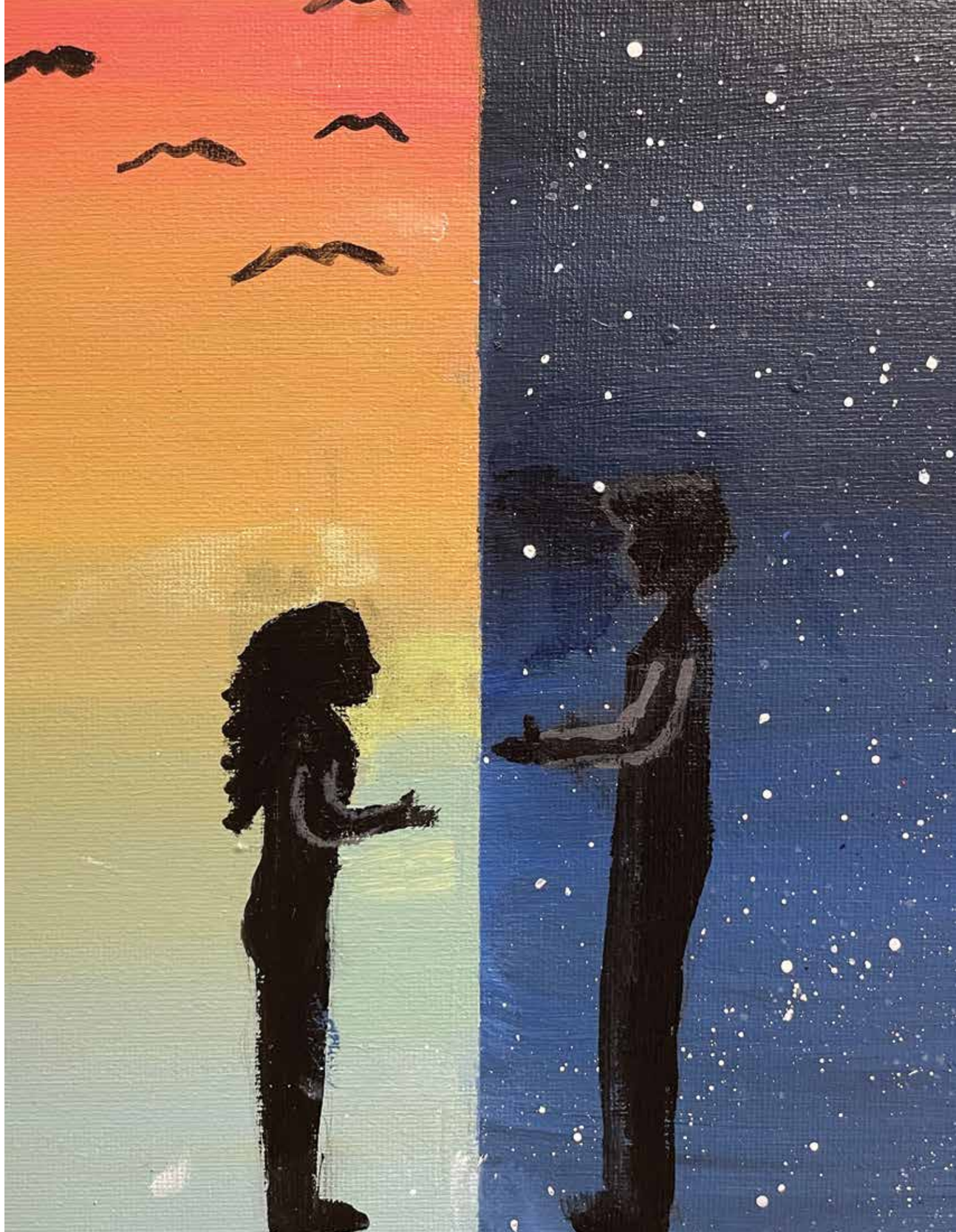
In our newest column, ONWARD WE GO, Alan Rusonik, Head of The Toronto Heschel School, emphasizes his personal responsibility for the delivery of strong Jewish learning and academic excellence in a warm school community. In AWE & WONDER, Dr. Greg Beiles, President of The Lola Stein Institute, presents how Hebrew language learning merges ancient biblical voices with contemporary innovative exchanges, resulting in an authentic Jewish operating culture that crosses time and place. Lola Stein Coordinator Dvora Goodman, in THE LEARNING CENTRE, shares specific Junior High experiences at Toronto Heschel that structure student participation and foster initiative in young adults.

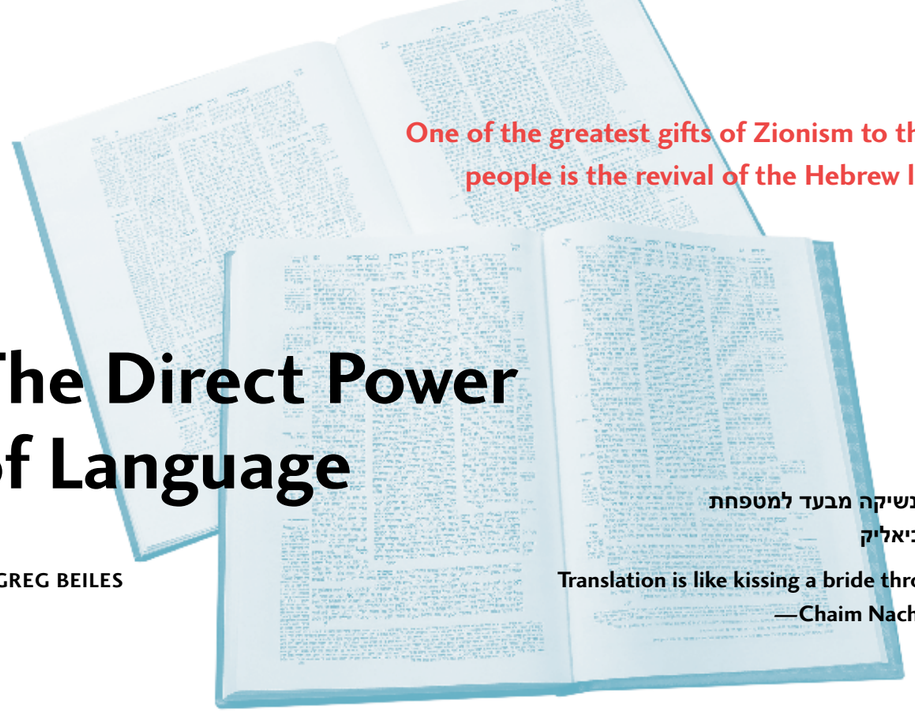
"Yashar Koach" leans into the future with respect and encouragement.

Stacie Goldin conjures up a beautiful metaphor: she compares delving into ancient text for wisdom to physically unearthing what is good for growth in a garden. Her paradigm underscores the gratification in each. Heidi Friedman smashes the tablets of expected praise and returns with intentionally crafted instructions that support student progress; her goal is the child's journey forward, not simply one particular moment of success. Lisa Sheps' Grade 5 curriculum reveals how the multi-dimensional nature of progress shows up when ancient civilizations are compared one to the other.

When our children leap forward, we say "More power to you!" Let's take their progress seriously.

Pam





One of the greatest gifts of Zionism to the Jewish people is the revival of the Hebrew language.

The Direct Power of Language

תרגום כמו נשיקה מבעד למטפחת
חיים נחמן ביאליק

Translation is like kissing a bride through a veil.
—Chaim Nachman Bialik

BY GREG BEILES

In the early days of the new Jewish Yishuv, an appeal to teachers was written as a letter to the editor:

> I do not know if ever, among a nation of the nations of the world, a small group of people was entrusted with such a great responsibility for one of the most precious treasures of any nation, wherever it is a nation, as the responsibility entrusted to the distinguished teachers in our schools and kindergartens.[1]
>
> אין אני יודע אם מעולם, בקרב אומה מאומות העולם, היתה מוטלת על חבורה קטנה של אנשים אחריות כל-כך גדולה באחד האוצרות היותר יקרים לכל אומה, באשר היא אומה, כאחריות המוטלת על יחידי הסגולה, המורים והמורות בבתי-הספר וגני-הילדים שלנו.[2]

What is this precious treasure? Why does responsibility for it fall on the shoulders of teachers of young children in schools and kindergartens?

The treasure spoken of is the Hebrew language. The responsibility urged is to teach it with care and precision to the children of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. The author of the letter was none other than Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, the Zionist linguist and journalist who is considered to be the father of the modern Hebrew language.

In Theodore Herzel's dream of a Jewish homeland, Jews would speak German, a language of cultured Europe. Eliezer Ben-Yehudah imagined that a Jewish homeland would nurture a revival of Hebrew as the living language of the Jewish people.

Ben-Yehudah concurred with Ahad Ha'am who believed that the fullest expression of Jewish peoplehood required not merely political autonomy—"a state of Jews"—but a Jewish cultural renaissance for "a Jewish state." For this, Ben-Yehudah passionately believed that a Jewish language—Hebrew—would be essential.

A people needs their language. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a people as

> a body of persons that are united by a common culture, tradition, or sense of kinship, that typically have common language, institutions, and beliefs, and that often constitute a politically organized group.

One might say that for 2,000 years in the diaspora, the Jewish people survived, and very often thrived, without at least two of these key elements—political organization and common language. Or did we?

When it comes to language, Ashkenazi Jewry across Europe shared Yiddish. Ladino was spoken by the post-Inquisition Spanish diaspora. Judeo-Arabic was spoken by Jews throughout Arabic-speaking countries. These languages were all "ethnolects," variants of dominant languages in lands where Jews lived. They were all different from one another yet retained one commonality: the underlying presence of Hebrew. What differentiated Yiddish from German, Ladino from Spanish, and Judeo-Arabic from Arabic was the presence in each of Hebrew linguistic forms, whether it was vocabulary, syntax, or grammar. And, all the while, Hebrew remained the language of communal gathering for prayer and study of religious literature across Jewish communities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and, later, the Americas.

The revival of Hebrew in the modern State of Israel was not a phoenix risen from the ashes. It was the re-establishing a language whose thread led back to the Bible, traversed the woof and warp of Mishnah, Talmud, medieval philosophy and poetry, and persisted in the diverse ethnolects of the Jewish diaspora.

When Jewish children learn Hebrew, as Eliezer Ben-Yehudah ardently desired, they retain a hold of this sinewed thread and weave it into their consciousness as members of the Jewish people. With Hebrew deep in the operating system of their minds and souls, they produce the future cloth of Jewish song, literature, and culture.

This is not merely a poetic or romantic notion. This is what language does. Language shapes the very way we think. Language shapes our culture, our sense of self, our identity. Empirical evidence from linguistics and psychology increasingly supports an intuition that language shapes consciousness, culture, and identity.[3]

Hebrew weaves into their consciousness as members of the Jewish people.

This intuition, now supported by science, is fully present in ancient Jewish teachings. The biblical paradigm that God created reality through speech—"And God said…"—is expounded on thoroughly in Jewish mystical texts such as Sefer Hayetzirah, where the alef bet is depicted as the building blocks of creation. The primacy of speech in Jewish ethics—avoiding *lashon hara* (the evil tongue)—acknowledges the power of language to generate thoughts and feelings. The modern Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig contrasts two kinds of thinking: "grammatical," Platonic thinking, in which words are mere expressions (after-thoughts) of ideas, and "speech-thinking," in which dialogue between interlocutors produce ideas.[4] The latter, reflects a more Jewish mode—think rabbinic dialogue and discourse.

Language becomes the language of a people when it is spoken by people for people: not merely to convey instructions—"do this," "hand me that"—but to convey, discuss, and develop feelings, thoughts, and concepts. A language becomes the language of a people when it is the language of conversation and relationship. Prayer—the expression of a relationship with God—is the spiritual source of relational language. For language to find its fullest expression, such language must also live in the day-to-day interactions of human beings.

Modern Hebrew need hardly be a *hillul* (desecration) of *lashon hakodesh* (sacred language), nor a replacement for it; rather, it can be a continuance of its thread—the *kodesh* (sacred) brought to the *chol* (the regular) through songs, poems, daily colloquial expressions, even slang.

To teach Hebrew as a language of relationship means recognizing that Hebrew language instruction goes far beyond classroom lessons of grammar and vocabulary, and even beyond using Hebrew as the instructional language (though this is essential). Hebrew is not a subject to be taught but a language through which to interact and relate.

In Israel this happens as a matter of course. In the diaspora, it is a more nuanced challenge. In the diaspora, Hebrew cannot be the sole language of relation. Nevertheless, it should be fully present and vibrant. This means building a school culture where the Hebrew language is seen as essential, with at least equal status to the dominant diaspora language. It means interacting daily with students in Hebrew. It means, wherever feasible, building the very foundation of student-teacher relationships through the Hebrew language. Schools should seek to hire Israeli teachers whose שפת אם (mother tongue) is Hebrew. These teachers must have both the desire and the discipline not only to teach in Hebrew but also to relate with their students through their mother tongue. From a language acquisition perspective, the natural desire to connect and form bonds is one of the greatest motivators to learn. But more than this, when Hebrew is the shared language of both Jewish content (Tanakh, tefillah, etc.) and the teaching relationships, the language roots the teachings in the mind, heart, and soul simultaneously. Through language, the teaching is brought close: כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ—"for the word is very close to you, in your mouths and in your hearts" (Deuteronomy 30:14).

One of the greatest gifts of Zionism to the Jewish people is the revival of the Hebrew language. We owe it to our children that they too receive this gift and the bounty it provides.

1 Translation by author.

2 מתוך "החלום ושברו: מבחר כתבים בענייני לשון", ההדיר ראובן סיון, ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק 1978

From Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *The Dream and Its Fulfilment: Selected Writings on Linguistics* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1978).

3 Lera Boroditsky, "How Language Shapes Thought," *Scientific American*, February 1, 2011, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-language-shapes-thought/,

4 Franz Rosenzweig, *Franz Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking,"* edited and translated by Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli, 1st ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 87.

Dr. Greg Beiles is the President of The Lola Stein Institute and served as Head of School at The Toronto Heschel School from 2014 to 2024.

Why I Am Excited to Lead This Particular School

BY ALAN RUSONIK

In his speech, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," Rabbi Heschel is quoted as saying:

> The Hebrew term for education means not only to train but also to dedicate, to consecrate. And to consecrate the child must be our goal, difficult as it may be. The survival of the Jewish people is our basic concern. But what kind of survival, we must continually ask, and for what purpose?

Heschel's statement emphasizes that education in the Jewish tradition is not merely about teaching skills but about inspiring and dedicating our children to lead a life of purpose. The survival of the Jewish people depends on a profound and unique approach to education. This, at its core, is The Toronto Heschel School. And this can only be accomplished if we uphold and maintain high academic standards.

While this is the third article that I am writing for THINK magazine, it is my first as Head of School. I am sharing why I am excited to lead this particular school.

1. **Preparing Children to Be Tomorrow's Adults**
The Toronto Heschel School is dedicated to the Jewish children of today and to shaping the Jewish community of tomorrow. It delivers the gifts of academic rigour, lifelong love of learning, commitment to social justice, and deep Jewish identity, all of which equip students to lead meaningful lives and to make a positive impact as they grow up. Leading a school with such a clear and noble mission is incredibly moving and motivating and aligns with my own educational philosophy.

2. **Embracing a Unique Educational Philosophy**
The Toronto Heschel School stands out because of its innovative approach to education. Unlike other schools, we integrate Jewish teachings into a rigorous academic curriculum—creating an internally blended and holistic learning environment. This extraordinary merging fosters intellectual growth and develops in each student strong ethical and moral principles. I am excited to lead a school that nurtures the whole child—body and soul—preparing students to be thoughtful, compassionate, and engaged members of their communities.

3. **Commitment to Excellence in Jewish Education**
The Toronto Heschel School's dedication to Jewish education is unparalleled. In teaching Hebrew fluency and connection to ancient Jewish text, it immerses students in the rich tapestry of Jewish history, culture, and tradition. Its students form a strong Jewish identity and a lifelong love for their heritage. Leading a school like this is an honour and a responsibility I eagerly embrace.

The school sets ambitious goals for students and faculty, generating a culture of academic excellence and growth.

4. **Innovative and Progressive Teaching Methods**
The Toronto Heschel School is renowned for its progressive and innovative teaching methods. It adheres to its commitment to critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving; its methodologies include experiential and interdisciplinary learning. Leading a school that embraces forward-thinking educational practices, I can contribute to an environment where students are inspired to explore, inquire, and innovate.

5. **High Academic Standards**
One of the hallmarks of The Toronto Heschel School is its unwavering commitment to excellence and high academic standards. The school sets ambitious goals for both its students and faculty, generating a culture of academic excellence and growth. This dedication means that Heschel students reach for their full potential, well-prepared for the demands of higher education and beyond. I am thrilled to be part of a community that values academic rigour.

6. **A Collaborative and Supportive Community**
The feel for community at The Toronto Heschel School is truly special. The collaborative spirit among faculty, staff, students, and parents conjures up a supportive nurturing atmosphere. This strong sense of togetherness ensures that every student feels valued and cared for in their educational journey. I am excited to lead a school where collaboration and mutual respect are foundational principles.

One of my favourite rabbinic commentary reflects on Exodus 32:16, as Moshe comes down from Mount Sinai carrying the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. There is an interesting verse that describes the tablets:

> וְהַלֻּחֹת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הֵמָּה וְהַמִּכְתָּב מִכְתַּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חָרוּת עַל־הַלֻּחֹת׃

"And the tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d, engraved upon the tablets."

Our sages suggest a play on words in the interpretation of this verse. In Mishna Pirkei Avot 6:2, they state:

> אַל תִּקְרֵא חָרוּת אֶלָּא חֵרוּת, שֶׁאֵין לְךָ בֶּן חוֹרִין אֶלָּא מִי שֶׁעוֹסֵק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה

"Read not *haruth* [graven] but *heruth* [freedom]. For there is no free person but one that occupies themselves with the study of the Torah."

They are proposing the word "graven" be read as "freedom." In doing so, they present a profound Jewish concept that we can find true freedom in the words of Torah.

Rabbi Heschel emphasizes that, in the Jewish tradition, education is about inspiring and dedicating our children to lead a life of purpose.

This is our educational goal at The Toronto Heschel School. It is what we want for all of our children, for their own sake and for the sake of the Jewish people. At our school, we are forging ahead with a particular and exceptional educational program committed to academic excellence and spiritual growth. I am grateful for those who came before me and set out this vision. I intend to be worthy of being its caretaker with dedication and integrity. May I inspire future generations to uphold and further this mission, ensuring that our values and principles endure and flourish for years to come.

Alan Rusonik is Head of School at The Toronto Heschel School. He is happy to be back in Toronto after many years as an educational leader in the USA.

Heschel Junior High is small and personal. Each student is seen and heard, a core factor to maturation.

Participation Grows the Junior High Student

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Conversations about leadership are everywhere this year—Olympic teams, politicians in the United States and Canada, as well as ongoing challenges in Israel. But how do leaders emerge? It seems to me that they develop over the course of years in varying ways. I posit that quality leaders emerge through authentic community engagement from a young age. As my youngest child entered Junior High this year, the prospect of the leadership learning on tap for him at Toronto Heschel was top of mind. Because his siblings preceded him there, I can share a little of what's in store for him.

Active Participation Builds Responsibility

Children who attend regular prayer services are in truth functioning in a natural leadership training program. This may apply to synagogues as well as to schools. Beginning in Junior Kindergarten, daily *tefillot* (prayer services) at Toronto Heschel offer increasing levels of engagement and stewardship to all students.

1. There is an evolution of exposure: In shul, attendees see different kinds of leadership, from paid professionals such as rabbis and cantors, to volunteer gabbais (caretakers of the prayers who direct the flow of the service), Torah readers, and board members. In school, young students first see older students and teachers take on roles in the prayer service.
2. There is an evolution of participation: By the time they reach Jewish adulthood at their Bnei Mitzvah, without even realizing it, they have reached a new level in their community. The roles range from leading a simple prayer such as *Adon Olam* to reading Torah or having an *aliyah*. Their simple decision to be there, their presence as part of the *minyan*, functions as an ingredient of leadership to others.
3. There is an evolution in understanding the whole of community. Leadership comes in all dimensions. Take your role seriously—whatever that role is. Resolute participation is essential for the community to function and being a good member of the people is the primary task. Whether shouldering the role as Shaliach Tzibur (the leader of prayer), gabbai, or simply holding up the Torah, all jobs are appreciated with a handshake and a "Yashar Koach!" or "More power to you!"

Shared Responsibility Breeds Collaboration

In high-functioning classrooms, everyone in the room has a role to play daily. At Heschel these roles rotate and manifest in job charts. Beginning early, students take turns, holding doors for their classmates, watering the plants, writing on the board. These small things help children see themselves as contributing members of a small community. As they mature and reach Junior High, opportunities that can make a real impact on the school appear outside of the classroom, through roles on committees such as the student council, environment, Israel affairs, *tarbut* (culture), and more.

Learning to Advocate, Argue, and Align

Public speaking is a critically important skill for an adult to master. The Heschel Junior High takes this very seriously. Last year I observed this as a volunteer coach on the Junior High debate team. Over three months, 14 students met weekly to practise their speaking skills and learn how to organize their thoughts for advocacy. I watched these young people begin to master expression, articulation, argument, and teamwork. In the end, four teams of two students each competed at the Toronto Jewish Day Schools Debate Tournament. One earned first place. One of these winning debaters argued through the final rounds even though English was his second language. It was a testament to his strength and his teammate's support. For me, the best part of the experience was not the win, although of course that was fun, but rather watching teams spur their peers forward with feedback after each debate.

Initiative Grows in a Fertile Bed

The flowering of initiative reveals a lot. Two Junior High initiatives blossomed unexpectedly last year. Both demonstrated the students' familiarity with the school culture and a keen desire to add value to it.

At Heschel, the Yom Hashoa (Holocaust Memorial Day) Commemoration is led by the Grade 8 students. The event is a culmination of their learning about the history and impact of the Holocaust. Last year, I was struck by the sophistication of what they said and did, but what stood out most was a creative dance that was performed during the school program; it was a dance wholly crafted and polished by 15 or so students during their recess or other free time. These students saw an opportunity to contribute something unexpected to the commemoration service; they brought their artistry and initiative to bear in an appropriate way, and the contribution was spellbinding.

Every June, the Heschel School community comes together for an end-of-year picnic in the large green field outside the school. It is traditionally the same: families bring blankets and food and set up on the lawn; kids run around with kites and have fun in free play. Last year, one of the Junior High committees conjured up a brand new picnic activity—a carnival with games and prizes. It was a success and great fun was had by all, but the real joy was that it was an out-of-the box initiative dreamed up and set up by the Junior High.

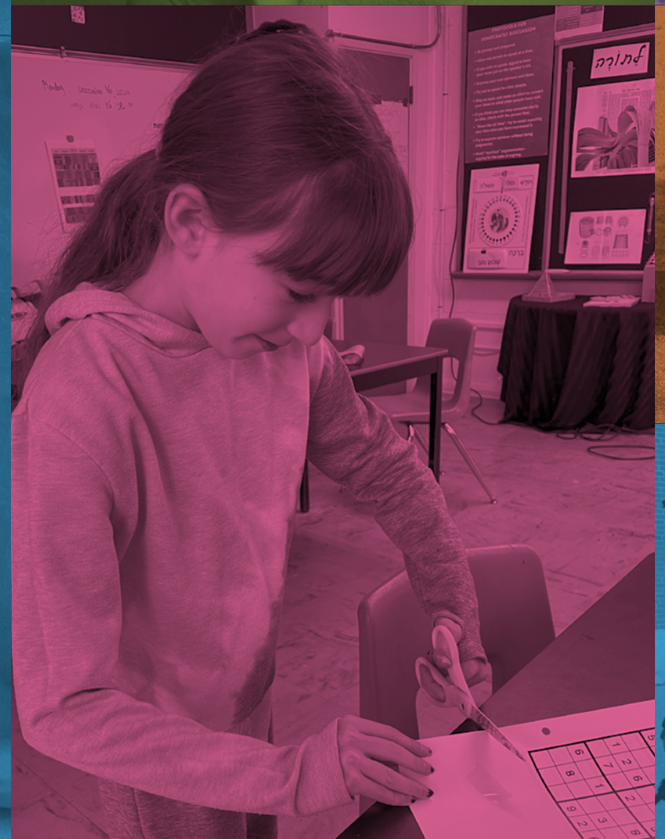
The size of the Heschel Junior High is small, precious, and personal. It couldn't be better for its age group; its dimensions enable each student to be seen and be heard, which is a core factor to young teenagers' maturation. Because the program specifically requires the participation of all students and no one can slip between the cracks or hide in the wings, students are basically coached all year long to explore their capabilities, challenge their reservations, and grow comfortable in their skin. There are many, many ways for every student to participate in the Junior High community, and all roles matter. It's very Jewish and very Heschelian. I look forward to seeing my own son rise to the occasion and grow in his own way.

Dvora Goodman is Coordinator of The Lola Stein Institute. She works as an educational consultant in a variety of settings.

SPECIAL FEATURE

ON TASK

"The way to purify the self is to avoid dwelling upon the self and to concentrate upon the task."
Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*



The goal is to foster critical and independent thinking.

Challenging Praise

WHY IT'S BEST NOT TO SAY "GOOD JOB, YOU ARE SO SMART!"

BY HEIDI FRIEDMAN

Two scenarios:

A Grade 2 student has just completed a water-colour painting of Day 3 of Creation, the introduction of landforms and vegetation. He eagerly shares his art with the teacher, who looks, and says: "Great job, Sam, wonderful work, what a beautiful painting—you are an artist!"

Grade 3 students write poems about the living and non-living organisms in an ecosystem with the requirement to include evocative adjectives and adverbs. A class member reads her poem aloud and hears the teacher say: "Excellent poem, you are so smart."

In both scenarios, the teachers praise with a compliment. When experts tell teachers to compliment students, intuitively, the affirmations above makes sense. One child is told he is an artist; the other that she is smart. Don't these pronouncements convince the children that they are an artist, or smart? Won't believing these attributions increase a child's confidence to tackle challenges in the future? As adults, many of us wish we had received more praise as a child. What could possibly be wrong with praising a student? A lot!

To understand the problems in congratulations or commendation, we look at the purpose of praise. What are teachers trying to do when they give a compliment to a student? Who does it benefit? What effect does praise have over time on its recipient? How then should we express admiration or approval of our students?

Research finds that positive reinforcement wrongly delivered can impede performance; children can feel pressured to maintain a level of success that motivates them to avoid challenging tasks because they are afraid to fail. It can lead them to protect their image as, for example, an artist or a smart student. Additionally, praise reduces a child's interest in the task itself.[1]

For 10 years, psychologist Carol Dweck studied the effects of praise on students in a dozen New York City schools. In her influential study of 400 Grade 5 students, she asked students to complete a series of IQ puzzles. Once the puzzles were completed, she randomly praised individual children either for *intelligence* ("You must be smart at this") or for *effort* ("You must have worked really hard"). In the second round of her experiment, the students could choose either an easy test just like the first or a test that would be more difficult than the first, but during which they would learn a lot. Dweck found that 90% of the children who had been praised for *effort* chose the *harder* set of puzzles, while the majority of those praised for *intelligence* chose the *easy* test. The so-called "smart" kids took the cop-out! Dweck wrote in her summary:

> When we praise children for their intelligence, we tell them that this is the name of the game. Look smart, don't risk making mistakes.[2]

Another pitfall is that this kind of praise discourages self-directed learning. The verbal reward—"good job!"—drives the child towards the pleasure they receive from the affirmation instead of towards what they are doing. It also removes any framework the child can use in making future assessments independently about the quality of their work. Alfie Kohn, a leading expert in human behaviour, education, and parenting, writes:

> Praise, at least as commonly practiced, is a way of using and perpetuating children's dependence on us. It gets them to conform to our wishes irrespective of what those wishes are. It sustains a dependence on *our* evaluations, *our* decisions about what is good and bad, rather than helping them to begin to form their own judgements. It leads them to measure their worth in terms of what will lead us to smile and offer positive words they crave.[3]

Kohn offers two principles to measure praise: the principles of *self-determination* and *intrinsic motivation*:

> With every comment we make—and specifically with every compliment we give—we need to ask whether we are helping that individual to feel a sense of control over his life. Are we encouraging him to make his own judgments about what constitutes a good performance (or a desirable action)? Or, are we attempting to manipulate his behaviour by getting him to think about whether he has met our criteria?
>
> The principle of *intrinsic motivation* requires us to ask: "Are our comments creating the conditions for the person we are praising to become more deeply involved in what she is doing? Or are they turning the task into something she does to win our approval?"[4]

At The Toronto Heschel School, we think very intentionally about how we motivate and encourage our children. We praise the actions, not the person. Our teachers deliver specific feedback on the effort and the process involved in the task at hand, offering observations and questions. Our goal is to keep students motivated, intrinsically interested in their work, and able to reflect productively on their own efforts. It is easy and quick to say "good job, beautiful work," but we don't take the quick and easy route.

Returning to the two scenarios above, what would the research recommend? For the Grade 2 student who painted the landscape, a teacher might say: "Can you describe the landforms you created? I see large mountains, why did you make them so big? I see they are green, yellow and brown—why did you choose this combination of colours?"

For the Grade 3 student who shared the ecosystem poem, incorporating different parts of speech, the teacher might say: "You worked so hard to include the adjectives and adverbs in your poem! You redrafted it three times to make sure all the coastal organisms were described fully and poetically. This final version really brings alive your ecosystem."

We praise the actions, not the person.

In the first scenario the teacher is asking the student to think critically and explain his artwork; the implicit message is that the student's choices matter. Perhaps during the conversation the child realizes there is something to add to the painting in which case the feedback has enabled not only the opportunity for the student to think more deeply but also to elevate his work.

In the second scenario, the teacher praises the effort—it is evident that the poem was revised several times and the teacher acknowledges this process. The message validates the child's determination as the reworking has made the poem strong.

Praise, as a barrage of compliments, is cheap and easy. Thoughtful feedback is skilled. Next time you are about to say to a child "Good job, you are so smart!"—stop and think of an alternative declaration. Say something that will foster motivation and build your child's thinking skills so that achievement flows.

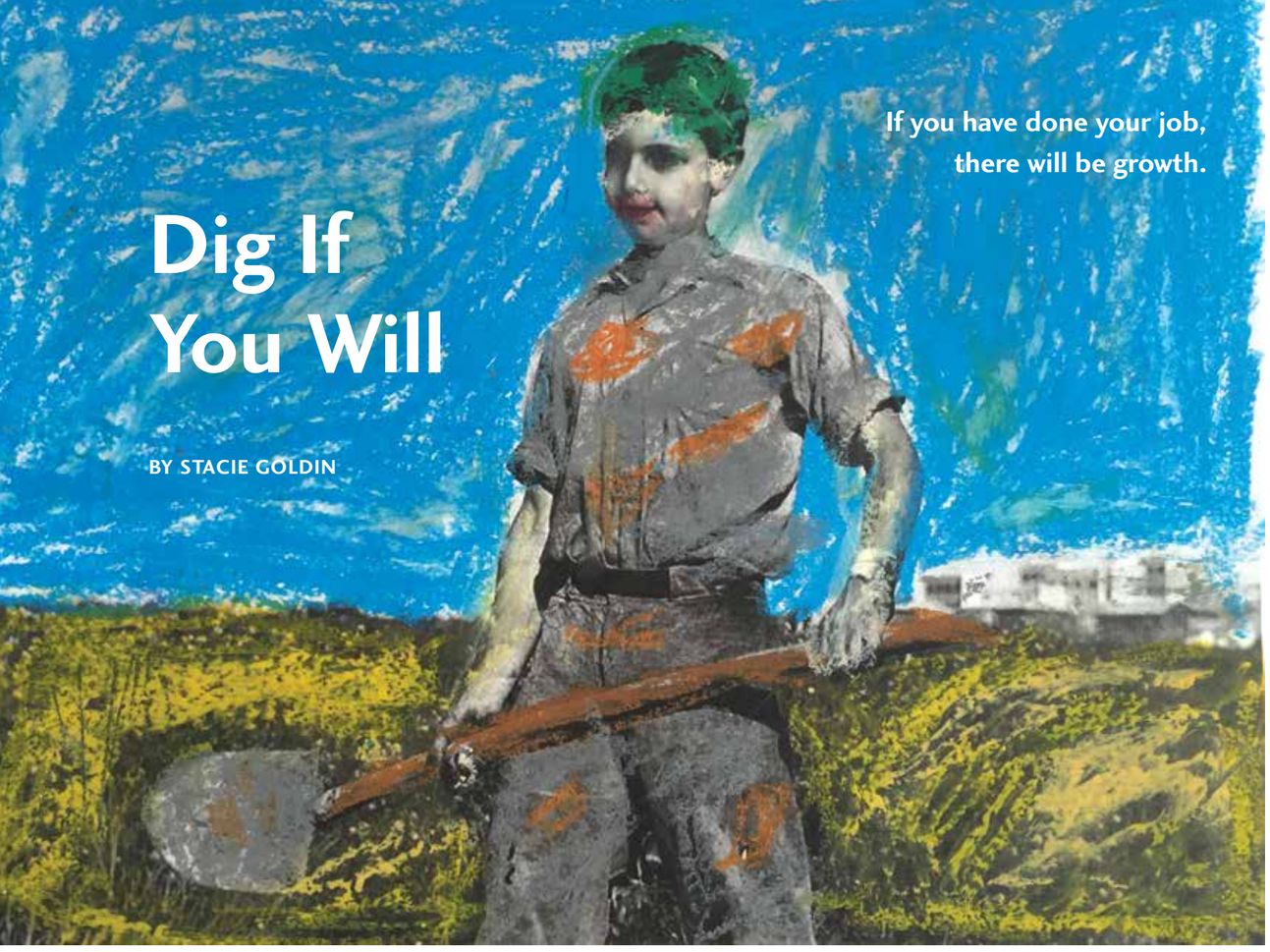
1 Po Bronson, "How Not to Talk to Your Kids," *New York Magazine*, February 9, 2007, https://nymag.com/news/features/27840/.

2 Carol S. Dweck, *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000).

3 Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes* (New York: HarperOne, 2018).

4 Ibid.

Heidi Friedman is the Director of Teacher Training and Mentorship & Lead Program Coordinator at The Lola Stein Institute and The Toronto Heschel School. She oversees teacher training, facilitates a teacher mentoring program, and develops innovative curriculum.



Dig If You Will

BY STACIE GOLDIN

It's a beautiful, warm Shabbat morning in autumn. On your way to shul you feel the soft breeze that holds just a note of the cooler weather that you know will be on its way in a few weeks' time. Your mind drifts to your garden and how the days of tending your flower beds will soon come to a halt as the ground hardens and plants fall into their deep winter slumber.

You join the shul service and listen attentively to the rabbi's *drash*, which is always wrapped meticulously and meaningfully in a d'var Torah, a piece of Torah from the week's *parsha* (portion). You can't help but notice a distinct digging motion of the rabbi's right hand, which thrusts periodically as if into the soil of the text. As you listen to the rabbi's words you are amazed how they weave the fabric of the text into the tapestry of everyday life and you wonder how long it must have taken this expert *darshan* to create such a relevant, deep-yet-simple, essay.

The time and effort that it takes a rabbi to dig deep into the text, find just the best angle and pull the right words to produce a masterful moment is palpable to those who are transfixed by words. It occurs to you that this action of "digging deep" into the Torah is ITSELF how "meaning" and "connection" emerge; the process of delving, exploring, and interpreting is the invisible thread that weaves human connection from ancient words.

It isn't a coincidence that the root of the word *drash* and the verb *lidrosh* in relation to "seeking" in the Torah also has the sense of "digging." The parallels between digging into Torah and digging into a garden are rich and deep in meaning. The words of the text are like the soil that gardeners sift through their fingers.

Whether you are probing Torah or cultivating your first garden, you must have a significant amount of learning on hand in advance. For example, Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:21 says that a person must be of a certain age and have a specific knowledge base before they embark on learning about the Garden of Mysticism. They must have some background knowledge acquired through learning scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, being married, having a career, and being at least 40 years old.

Similarly, in advance of a garden project, to make something grow, you need to know what you are planting, what kind of sunlight it needs, which soil conditions are best, and how often to water it. You need to be able to differentiate between a weed to be pulled and the early sprouts of the plants you intend to nurture and grow.

> The rabbinic sage Ben Bag Bag wrote of the Torah: "Turn it over again and again, for all is contained within it." (Pirkei Avot 5:22)

Likewise, a garden is an endless source of learning and exploration. We turn soil over and over again to discover its composition and structure. So, too, we dig into the elements of Torah, researching, wondering, noticing. We know that if we turn the text over again and again with respect and curiosity, we will find something that is worth looking for.

The gardener has a reason to get into the garden beds—the desire to harvest. The seeker delves deep into Torah hunting for an insight or lesson. Rabbis who give a d'var Torah on Shabbat in shul open the text and immerse themselves in it, preparing themselves with a clear intention to learn.

In the garden, with our background knowledge, our respect for the ecosystem we are entering, and a clear intention, we are ready to get our hands dirty. As we don our gardening gloves, armed with our tools, we look for obstructions in the bed; some are close to the surface, others are deep down and might impede the new growth. Perhaps there is a deep root system from an unrelenting old burdock that challenges us to think of options that will assist in its removal or permit us to work around it, hoping that our sweet little tomato plant roots will wend their way among the steadfast dock roots, and eventually they will all learn to live in harmony.

This action of "digging deep" into the Torah is how "meaning" and "connection" emerge.

When we *drash* in the Torah, the elements we find are the linguistics of words and their science that help us navigate questions and obstacles that obscure our understanding. Looking through the lens of linguistics propels the student to find some words that relate and make sense and others that stick out and need some resolution. Etymology, the roots of words, and poetry, the art of expression, assist the journey of discovery. In gardening we can seek experts to help us; in Torah, as the probing goes deeper and more learning is uncovered, we turn to colleagues and friends in *chaveruta* as a process for discovery.

Once the planting is done, or the time spent seeking a particular lesson in Torah is coming to an end, there is an amount of "trusting the process" that must occur. If you have done your job, there will be growth. We don't want to simply ask artificial intelligence (AI) to find us the answer by speaking into our mini-computers. We can indeed open an app and place a grocery order that arrives at our doorstep an hour later, but we build a deeper connection to our food and to the process of growing that food if we dig into the earth ourselves, nurturing our environment and watching it ripen from seed. Learning and finding the meaning that lies behind the search arrive when we truly, fully engage and allow it to come.

Eitz Chaim, the Tree of Life, is a synonym for Torah. In synagogue, during the Torah service, we recite:

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותומכיה מאשר

Eitz chayim hi lamachazikim bah, v'tom'cheha m'ushar.

This passage says that one who delves into Torah, who holds fast to it and upholds it, is happy, pleasant, and peaceful. The satisfaction, calm, and sense of connection that we feel upon creating or appreciating a d'var Torah combines exhilaration, inner peace, exhaustion, and excitement.

Just as when we eat the fruits of our labours from the garden, when we study Torah we feel a sense of "bliss"—a state of joyful calm that leaves one feeling alert, aware, and fully mindful.

In a world where you can get almost anything with the touch of a few buttons, we have our jobs cut out for us as educators, caregivers, and parents. Knowing that connection and meaning are authentically created through digging in, we must work to encourage and inspire our younger generation to do as such and not succumb to the tantalizing pull of "quick and easy."

The best thing we can do for them (and for ourselves) is to draw awareness to the feeling of inner peace and happiness that is rewarded to us through the meaningful connection derived from digging in—whether it be in Torah, in the garden, on in creating an artistic masterpiece or practising a musical instrument. This feeling becomes the impetus for repeat interaction and perhaps it will drive us to dig even deeper the next time.

Stacie Goldin is the Environmental Coordinator at Toronto Heschel and Program Developer at The Lola Stein Institute.

The Force of Innovation

WHAT IT TAKES TO GO FORWARD

BY LISA SHEPS

When our Grade 5 students encounter Mesopotamia, they usually do not realize how the study of ancient civilizations will teach them about themselves. The name Mesopotamia derives from the Greek words *mesos* (middle) and *potamos* (river). It was the land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Both are named in Genesis 2:10–14 as flowing into the Garden of Eden.

As we study Mesopotamia, one big picture concept to explore is the notion of innovation. In that place and at that time there was a lot of inventiveness and transformation; the people figured out how to use wheels for transportation, how to manage water to stabilize agriculture, and how to exploit gravity for ramps, pulleys and the construction of tall buildings. The ancient Hebrews in Mesopotamia added a new dimension to creativity. Their teachings pondered the why and how of tangible developments and asked "Should we care if people die accidentally when building tall towers?" "What do we say about the treatment of animals?" "Are wars important to us or should we avoid them?"

Avram and Sarai were the original Jewish innovators.

At Toronto Heschel we lead our students to integrate ideas across the disciplines and we teach the history of ancient civilizations in tandem with studies of ethics and moral standards. In twinning these, the combined forces that propel a civilization forward become visible. Students see that the process of invention is iterative, non-linear, and that it bears the collective authorship of time, place, materials, and ideas.

Grade 5 students compare and contrast ancient Jewish text alongside those of other Mesopotamian cultures; they find similarities and differences. They discover that many of our beloved Jewish ideas and ideals were not necessarily original to us, but evolved over time. The students connect Jewish civilization with Mesopotamian cultures, now extinct.

Our study of ancient civilizations reveals how making progress required focus on the unknown, and the intent to improve life. What the Hebrews contributed was the search for meaning. In the Torah text *Parashat Lechkh Lekhah*, Avram and Sarai left Ur Kasdim on the banks of the Euphrates River and travelled to the unknown; they listened to God's voice saying *"Lechkh Lekhah"* (לֶךְ לְךָ)—"Go to yourself." Such was the journey of our foundational Jewish ancestors; they forged a new path, a new religion, and a new way of living. They were the original Jewish innovators.

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, another Mesopotamian opus passed down orally and finally recorded in cuneiform on tablets, the students recognize similarities to the Torah. Both feature a character shaped from the earth itself, who received the breath of life through the nostrils. Both describe a flood that wiped out people who lived disreputable lives, sparing only the wildlife and a single righteous family. A crafty serpent figures in each as does an idyllic space, a Garden of Eden, where "uncivilized" humans co-existed peacefully with nature until they received "civilized" knowledge and learned shame and humility.

The literal and thematic connections between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Torah are easy to spot. Yet closer examination reveals that the overlap sits on the surface and beneath the similarities lie great differences. The morals and ethics found in the Torah are absent from *Gilgamesh*. For example, the two narratives contend with the notion of human dominance over nature. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* heralds the primacy of humanity over nature, taming the beast, and "civilizing" the wild. Gilgamesh, as ruler, orders the construction of ever higher city walls to testify to and solidify his dominion over nature, gravity, and his subjects.

The comparable Torah story is the Tower of Babel with its message of human frailty and ethical practice. The tower was built to show off human accomplishment and reach heavenward with disrespect for God, and the rabbis commented that its builders were so far from an ethical perspective that they wept more bitterly for a fallen brick than a fallen peer. The upshot of the failed Babel project was that God imposed countless diverse languages

on the world to prevent future collusion in wrongheaded plans. Ethical rules and practices became perhaps the most iconic innovation of the Jewish people whose Torah offers a body of law and ethics with rules to govern a principled civilization: to live within nature, respect all God's creations, and treat others with justice and compassion.

Students learn about polytheism and monotheism. As they read the *Gilgamesh* text with its pantheon of gods, they examine idols found in Mesopotamian archaeological sites. They also read a rabbinic story about Avram's refusal to sell idols in his father's shop and his challenge to customers who worshipped carvings that had been fashioned that morning.

Monotheism in the face of polytheism was a new idea and it differentiated the Hebrews from their neighbours throughout the Tanach (Jewish Scriptures): Avram and Sarai set themselves apart, following God's instructions to journey from their homes; King David stood apart, heeding God's call despite great odds; and through idol worship, King Solomon caused his own demise and the division of the Kingdom of Israel. The Book of Kings is full of Judaean leaders, some adopted the polytheistic values of other nations and fell, and some maintained the Hebrew covenant with God as One and stayed strong.

Many innovations pushed ancient civilization forward: a base-60 number system; the birth of agrarian life; large brick ziggurats and temples. Understanding the forces of advancement in Grade 5 includes these accomplishments as well as the story of the path blazed by Avram and Sarai in Mesopotamia. There was also a lot going on that either helped or hindered resilient social order. Many civilizations appeared then disappeared. The ancient Hebrews endured exile, persecution, a Shoah, and live today. How they innovated was probably a big help.

Lisa Sheps is the Director of Curriculum Innovation and Mentorship at The Lola Stein Institute and The Toronto Heschel School. She develops integrated curriculum projects, co-facilitates a teacher-mentorship program, and leads teaching training workshops.

MOVING FORWARD

"I would like to suggest as a goal of Jewish education that every Jew become a representative of the Jewish spirit...aware that Judaism is an answer to the ultimate problems of human existence and not merely a way of handling observances. The philosophy of Jewish education ought to formulate what insights to set forth from and about our tradition...showing us how to adjust and express these insights so that they may become a part of the personality of every pupil." Abraham Joshua Heschel (1953)
The Spirit of Jewish Education

Guardian of the people of Israel forever. (Grade 8 graduation mural 2023)

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions…

BY DR. ROBYN JACOBSON

In this challenging time when it is hard to discern unfiltered information and unsubstantiated data, and deep emotion crosses our thresholds, THINK reached out to Dr. Robyn Jacobson to reflect on the anatomy of a decision.

It is estimated that an adult makes 35,000 decisions every day.[1] Many of these choices require little thought as we automate the many small selections that arise in our day-to-day lives—setting an alarm, brushing our teeth, showering, eating, driving, and so on. However, less instinctive decisions often cause stress and anxiety: How can I fix a scheduling problem? Which candidate should I support? Where should I live? Which news feed do I trust? How do I respond to a conflict?

Some of us can make decisions about important matters easily and quickly. Some of us have difficulty even in minor everyday selections. Why is this? Is it a matter of inadequate information or expertise? Is it a lack of confidence in our ability to make decisions? Is it perfectionism and not wanting to be "wrong"? Are we people-pleasers and fear disapproval? Or are we perhaps unclear about methods to use in decision-making?

Problematically, the inability to decide can deliver up as many unwanted consequences as those stemming from unfortunate choices. Failure to decide lets the status quo continue, allowing either circumstances, time, or a third-party to determine what happens in our lives. While abstaining from a decision is one way to reach an outcome, it may not deliver satisfactory solutions. Failure to decide removes agency; it takes away the power one has to determine the appropriate solution and can also breed a sense of disempowerment, which invites a variety of negative feelings.

Acquiring the tools needed for decision-making can be a big help. Identifying a method and following a process can help build confidence, highlight the need for some research where information feels insufficient, and create an opportunity for self-reflection. Having such a method and process enables us to focus on the decision to be made and make the task feel less insurmountable.

Our decision-making can be improved by using the following five-phase process:

1. **Determine what you have to decide:**
   Clearly identify the problem that has to be solved, eliminating other peripheral issues from your consideration.

2. **Gather relevant information:**
   You may realize that more information is needed to answer the question you have identified. This may include asking other people, doing research, checking online sources.

3. **Assess the information, taking into account personal knowledge, preferences, and biases:**
   It is important to acknowledge that our partialities can affect our judgment; however, adhering to our values can make the choice clearer.

4. **Determine the best decision:**
   Accept that there may be many options. Compare the pros and cons, as well as the impact, of each. Then make the decision. Know that others could decide differently in the same circumstances, as a result of an assessment of their information.

5. **Commit to your choice and communicate it to the relevant parties:**
   Own your decision and stand by it after you have gone through a thoughtful decision-making process.

The length of time spent on each of these phases of the decision-making process should be relative to the importance of the decision to be made, the urgency it carries, and the impact it will have. For example, when deciding where to go on vacation next year, you likely have plenty of time to gather information: google the places you are interested in, chat with friends who have been there, compare prices, assess the options, and then choose your place. If you are responding to a fire, you move swiftly through this same process and take the action needed to keep everyone safe. Sometimes there is a demand for speed and sometimes there is the luxury of reflection.

Sometimes the outcome of the decision you are making does not carry significant impact (e.g., painting the walls in your office mist white or cloud white). In these situations, if you cannot come to a decision, you could just flip a coin! Some people report that their true preference is illuminated when they do this as you get a "gut response" by feeling happy or disappointed when you see the result of the coin toss.

Decision-making can be difficult in times of uncertainty—financial, social, antisemitism, war—when fear, desperation, or despondency can affect sensibilities. Yet decisions must still be made. Following the five phases outlined above can work in these situations. It is important to be kind to yourself, take the time needed (if available), consult with others, and when you are ready…make a decision.

Once you have made the choice, live with the decision and try not to constantly question whether it was right or wrong; part of decision-making is accepting that it is the best decision you could have made in the circumstances. As Dr. Phil McGraw has put it: "Sometimes you make the right decision, sometimes you make the decision right."

What can we do when we feel we have made a "wrong" decision, or perhaps could have, in the circumstances, made a better decision? If the consequences are great, it may be best to make the decision right (even if this involves costs, apologies, and even some embarrassment). When a decision cannot be changed, it is necessary to assess where you find yourself, look for the positives around you, learn from the mistake, and determine to move forward.

Recognizing the endless decisions we make, it is inevitable that some will be wrong. High-powered decision-makers recognize that the occasional error in decisions is acceptable when they are making many decisions quickly and efficiently. It is not possible, or desirable, to use time-consuming processes and deliberations for every decision. Considering the approximately 35,000 decisions an adult makes every day, it is obvious that decision fatigue[2] would set in if more of these decisions were not made instinctively, impulsively, or with little thought. Decision-making skills develop and improve with practice. The more decisions you make, the better you will become at making decisions.

Struggles with decision-making may be rooted in childhood experiences, perhaps where there was limited opportunity to make choices. This could be because of growing up with parents who made all the decisions or because of a fear of failure arising from developing alongside authority figures who criticized what they saw as "bad" decisions. Personal history is often worth considering because our past may positively influence who we are today, or it may have a negative influence.

As parents and guardians, it is important that we encourage our children to develop decision-making skills from an early age.[3] The questions we ask should be age appropriate and between two permissible outcomes. We cannot ask a three-year-old child which doctor to see; but we can ask: Would you like to wear the red shirt or the yellow shirt? Would you like to go to the park or swim? Do you want to play with your Lego or read a book? Early decision-making opportunities like these will begin to nurture valuable life skills in children and build their confidence in making personal choices as they grow. We do want them to create the life they choose and we can support this learning by role-modelling how we make our own decisions and our reactions to our own mistakes. We also must help our children to understand that sometimes there is no choice and no decision is possible. To quote Nelson Mandela: "May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears."

1 Psychology and Neuroscience, "Basis for 'We Make 35,000 Decisions a Day,'" accessed August 18, 2024, https://psychology.stackexchange.com/questions/17182/basis-for-we-make-35-000-decisions-a-day-statistic.

2 Shreya Dutta, "Decision Fatigue–Have You Fallen Prey to It?," Vantage Circle, July 18, 2024, https://www.vantagecircle.com/en/blog/decision-fatigue/.

3 Gia Miller, "Helping Kids Make Decisions," Child Mind Institute, accessed August 19, 2024, https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-make-decisions/.

Robyn Jacobson (B.Com., LLB, LLM, C.Med., Ph.D.) is a Conflict Management Consultant focusing on the education sector. Her background is law, university teaching, and educational management. She was the Executive Director of The Toronto Heschel School for five years.

A Vote of Thanks

BY JOAN GARSON

On behalf of the generations of Toronto Jews not yet born, I am writing to honour parents who are choosing to send their kids to Jewish day schools today.

This is a challenging time to be Jewish in Toronto and across the diaspora. I watch with distress and sadness the antagonism we are seeing, and the attempts we are all making to understand, manage, and respond. I am hoping that anxiety will not replace joy in the Jewish diaspora identity. We face attacks on Jews (now including on their solidarity with and love for Israel) not seen since the last days of antisemitism in Toronto, which in my own experience ended in the 1970s. I believe the way to respond to this moment is to shore up Jewish community, participation, and learning, and I see that Jewish day schools provide all three.

For me, with respect to community, the sense of belonging to a Jewish community offers an antidote to the confusion and isolation I experience when seeing the changes in my world; I am part of a chain of history. Not isolated from my people, I belong; my family is part of something larger, shaped by its beliefs, heritage, and the experiences of those who preceded us. I am reassured to remember that throughout the generations, and now, difficulties and demands affected Jews, and they found the courage and capacity to move forward.

With respect to participation, I believe it offers more: if I engage, I turn the moment into one that shapes my Jewish identity (and that of my family) purposefully. Through my actions I breathe life into my community and it breathes life into me. I add my voice to the voice of the Jewish people.

Where I grew up, in the small Jewish community of Halifax, Nova Scotia, we experienced joy (which we retain to this day) through our shared Jewish experiences. The lives of our Jewish family were the foundation we built on, around the dinner table and at family gatherings. Synagogue and the Jewish calendar informed and structured our communal life, even though our Jewish learning was limited. There were no Jewish day schools and we found much of our Jewish community spirit at summer camp. The sense of belonging and identity we acquired at Camp Kadimah stood us in good stead throughout the year, enabling us to generate commitment to Jewish continuity, through the generations, despite our position as a very small minority in a larger community.

Each step that enables today's Jewish children to respond with confidence and knowledge will resonate in Jewish families to come.

I honour parents who are choosing to send their kids to Jewish day schools today.

Yes, the data tells us that Jewish summer camp is profound in its contribution to Jewish continuity, but I see that the same joyous immersive benefit can be provided all year long by day schools—with the additional benefit of Jewish literacy and learning. And learning makes the difference, especially today.

I believe that at this time of challenge, Jewish learning offers most of all. I simply cannot list all of the ways it is adding meaning and provides purpose to me, or what will resonate from my own renewed study, but I intuit that by becoming more literate in my Judaism, I will gain access to wisdom, methods, and content that have been tested through thousands of years across the world. And I see how important this is for Jewish children; Jewish literacy is more than (but includes) acquiring information. The ultimate goal of Jewish learning is something beyond a response to today, beyond even understanding more deeply the community of which I am a part; Jewish learning offers answers to the ultimate questions of meaning that we face as human beings.

Given the demands of the present moment, how lucky are Jewish children in Toronto today to be able to attend Jewish day schools all year long. How lucky to have parents who send them. There are many reasons for the choices people make, and in Toronto we are blessed by a rich range of alternatives, including a wide selection of day schools.

It is important to look ahead right now and fashion a vision for the future of Jewish diaspora life. It is this vision that leads me to thank day school parents not only on behalf of their own children, but on behalf of the next generations. Each step that enables today's Jewish children to respond with confidence and knowledge to the challenges they face, and to delight in their Jewish future rather than walking away from their identity, will resonate in Jewish families to come.

Thank you parents of day school children, on behalf of your grandkids and great-grandkids. You are making such important decisions!

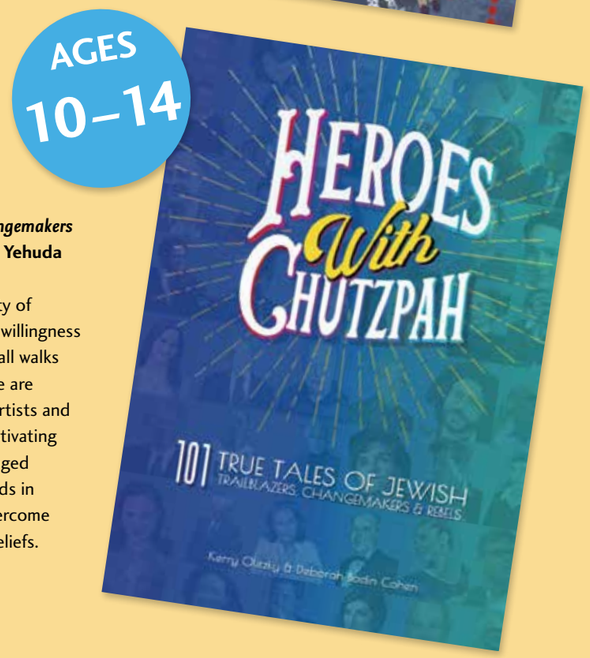
Joan Garson received the Order of Canada this summer recognizing a career-long devotion to Jewish community service in Canada and Israel. She is serving a third year as a community director on The Toronto Heschel School board.

Good Books

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

BY GAIL BAKER & TZIPORAH COHEN

***Red and Green and Blue and White*, by Lee Wind and illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky (Levine Querido, 2021)**
This story, inspired by true events, illustrates the power of solidarity when confronted with intolerance. Young Isaac proudly displays his blue and white Chanukiah in his family's living room window and enjoys his view of his friend Teresa's sparkling red and green Christmas lights across the street. One night someone throws a rock through Isaac's living room window in an act of hatred, his family courageously decides to put the Chanukiah back up the next night. Teresa responds by putting up a drawing of a Chanukiah in her own window, and before long, homes and businesses throughout the town follow suit. A myriad of emotion is captured by Zelinsky's drawings, which illuminate the essence of the story and reinforce the theme of coexistence and friendship.



***Heroes with Chutzpah: 101 True Tales of Jewish Trailblazers, Changemakers & Rebels*, by Kerry Olitzky and Deborah Bodin Cohen (Ben Yehuda Press, 2024)**
This inspirational collection of stories illuminates the possibility of creating change. Each short biography describes courage and willingness to act for the greater good. Readers meet Jewish heroes from all walks of life, religious backgrounds, abilities, and time periods. There are sports heroes, science changemakers, social justice warriors, artists and politicians, and more, from famous to lesser known. These captivating stories, each one page in length, will keep this age group engaged and motivated. The compelling illustrations anchor young minds in these narratives. True to the book's title, these 101 heroes overcome a multitude of barriers to stand up for their core values and beliefs.

***The Prince of Steel Pier*, by Stacy Nockowitz (Kar-Ben Publishing, 2022)**
In this National Jewish Book Award winner, Joey must choose between what he craves and what he feels is right, discovering that, in the end, they are the same thing. Thirteen-year-old Jewish Joey spends his summers at his grandparents' aging hotel on New Jersey's Atlantic City boardwalk in this delightful novel set in the 1970s. He and his brothers provide unpaid labour in the hotel dining room and try to have a little fun. Meanwhile, Joey wants money to buy a camera, and a chance to prove he's not the overly sensitive kid his family perceives him to be. So when Artie, a local mobster boss, takes an interest in him, Joey accepts a job chaperoning Artie's teenage daughter for the summer. Ignoring his internal alarms, Joey becomes more involved with Artie and his thugs, until a final demand puts his own family at risk.

***Safiyyah's War*, by Hiba Noor Khan (HarperCollins Publishers, 2023)**
This book is inspired by the true story of how the Grand Mosque of Paris saved hundreds of Jews after the Nazi occupation of France in 1940. Map-loving Saffiyeh has grown up surrounded by the beautiful walls, courtyards, and roofs of the Grand Mosque of Paris, where her father works as an assistant to the imam. But Paris is changing as the Nazis occupy the city: Saffiyeh's best friend flees to the country, her family's Jewish neighbours are attacked, and her father has secretive meetings in his office. Saffiyeh learns that her father is helping to forge fake Muslim identity papers for Jews, and hiding Jews in the mosque on their way to safety. Once it becomes too dangerous for her father, Saffiyeh assumes the role of messenger, delivering documents throughout the city. When Nazi soldiers make a surprise visit to the mosque, Saffiyeh courageously uses her knowledge of maps to guide their latest "guests" to the next leg of their journey.

Gail Baker co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996, serving as Head of School from 2001 to 2014. Gail is now a grandparent at the school.
Tziporah Cohen is a psychiatrist and children's author, and a former Toronto Heschel parent. Her newest picture books are *Afikomen* (Groundwood Books) and *City Beet* (Sleeping Bear Press), both published in March 2023.

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