

Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum, a spiritual leader at Moorabbin Hebrew Congregation in Victoria, Australia, wrote about this week's parsha:

In this week's Torah portion, which describes the living and traveling arrangements of the Jews during their journeys through the desert, there are two references to the effect that neighbors can have on each other. The first instance is of the tribe of Reuven, whose camp was adjacent to the tent of the wicked Korach. Unfortunately, some of the members of Reuven were negatively influenced by him and when the rebellion began, 250 Reuvenites sided with Korach, declared war on Moses, and ultimately perished. As Rashi comments, "*Woe to an evil person, woe to his neighbors.*" ([Bamidbar 3:29](#))

Later in the parsha we read about the 3 tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun, who merited to live next door to Moses's and Aaron's families. Those tribes were positively influenced by their neighbors and eventually became known for their Torah knowledge and spiritual accomplishments. **Proximity to greatness permanently influenced entire tribes.** In an almost inverse observation to his comment on the earlier verse, Rashi notes, "*Happy is a righteous person, happy is his neighbor.*" ([Bamidbar 3:39](#))

Recently, I have been contemplating the end of my four years as co-chair of The Toronto Heschel School Board, and when I read this Dvar Torah, the parallels between it and my experience at Heschel were striking.

In the 14 years I have been at the school as a parent, I have truly been blessed to be surrounded by good neighbors, and by this I mean the Heschel community of parents, educators, staff, fellow committee members and more recently board members and co-chairs. We often talk about the amazing community at Heschel, but I thought I would take this opportunity to talk about the specific lessons that I have learned from my interactions with different members and subgroups of these neighbors.

Through my children, I have learned how a community of fellow parents in a grade can become like family - not all whom you would choose or confide in, but where like family, the bonds that tie are strong. Over the years my sub communities have supported partners and children of parents who died, and families with parents or children who have had grave illnesses. We have cooked, carpoled, served meals and collected donations. We have attended funerals and shivas together. We have baked challah and prayed. We have also rejoiced at Bnei Mitzvahs, weddings, and reunited after each summer away with warm hugs and exclamations as we see our children sprout inches and sweat glands. In a few weeks I will attend a Shabbat dinner for students in my daughter's Heschel graduating class who attended CHAT together. As they now go off to university, it is the Heschel community that we turn back to, to celebrate with. My

children relate to their Heschel classmates and their parents with a familiarity and respect that is also reminiscent of family. And they have learned from watching their parents devote time and sweat to this community, that their school is important. And with so many adults paying attention and contributing to what they do every day, they feel proud and part of something greater.

From the committees I have been on, and events I have volunteered at, I have learned everything from face painting to setting a beautiful table for the welcome back waffle breakfast. I have learned that the details matter- whether in décor, or in how to thank a donor. I have learned that developing Table Talk as a means to reengage parents, boost morale and build more community works. I have learned that to get volunteers and donations, you need to make a personal ask. And that the more people you can get involved, the more beautiful and enriched the event can be. And also that sometimes a very small group of couple of people can pull off amazing and powerful programs

From the community of Heschel educators I continue to learn more everyday. With each concert, Ecoseder, Yom Hashoa ceremony, their incredibly intelligent pedagogical skills continue to reveal themselves. I am still discovering layers and aspects of integration I had not seen the first or even second time around a particular Unit for a grade my kids have passed through. I have learned about their dedication and deep concern for their students and how they will go above and beyond to reach a child.

From working closely with our Head of School, Greg, these last four years, I have learned the secrets behind writing the lyrics for an original Heschelian song, how learning poetry truly is the root of writing, and how having three perfectionists in the room is sometimes not the best mix. I have learned how much love, passion, and deep reflection and work goes into this outstanding curriculum and school. And perhaps most importantly, I have learned that truly, we can look to the Torah for guidance for our 2018 conundrums.

And from my work with this board, I have learned about dedication, commitment, perseverance and sweat. I have learned about respectful conversation and debate, and how this group of board members has their priorities ahead of them and egos left behind. I have learned that sometimes the co-chairs lead, and sometimes they follow. It has been truly a pleasure to be co-chair with you all making up this community.

And finally, what I have learned from my community of co-chairs; Russell Goldman taught me how end a meeting on time and keep appropriate boundaries to allow the school leadership to grow. Stephen Margles taught me how to think ahead, stay organized, keep your eye on the budget, and never come to a meeting without a pack of Mentos to share. And to my most recent sister in arms, Michelle Shulman: she has taught me that organization is overrated, as even without it she could single handedly pull off an 18<sup>th</sup> year gala and oversee the development and implementation of our first 2 amazingly successful annual campaigns. I could not have done this without you. We have shed sweat and tears of joy, schlepped nachas and laughed. We have had pedicures, “spa’ed” in salt water pools and walked our dogs reviewing our Heschel priorities. We have lost sleep and gained some wrinkles. We have been inspired and elevated. There is no doubt it has been worth it.

I am lucky that our family chose Heschel and I have spent these last 14 years surrounded and influenced by you, my neighbors. I have six more years in this neighborhood. And there is still much to be gained.