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# THiNK

THE  
LOLA  
STEIN  
INSTITUTE  
JOURNAL

Conversation about Education, Ethics, and Our Children



## RITUALS, RECIPES, AND FREEDOM

CHAROSET RECIPES FROM AROUND THE WORLD / SCHOOL COMMUNITY SPIRIT MATTERS  
SEEING WHAT'S AROUND YOU IN GRADE 8 / CREATING THE SPACE FOR RESPECT  
THE SEDER AS A TEACHING METHOD IN GRADE 2 / PARENTS AND TEACHERS WHO LEARN



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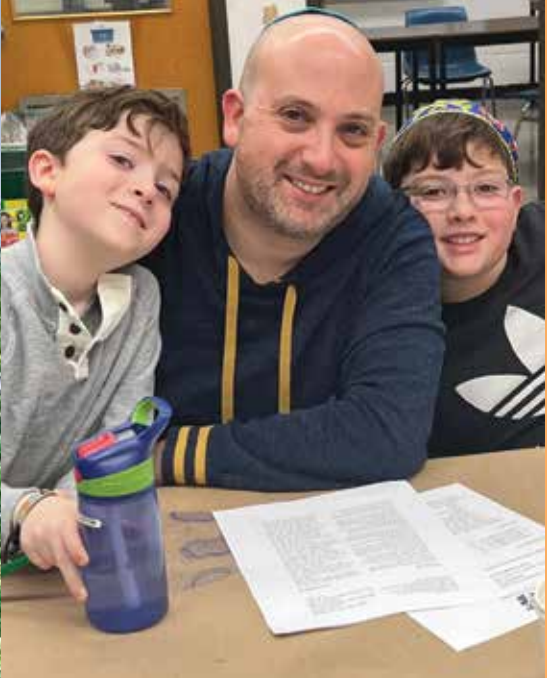
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Lola Stein z”l was an early female pharmacist in South Africa, but her special talent was in hospitality and friendship. She cared for family and friends, at home and abroad, individually, uniquely, and lovingly. We honour her memory in a way that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



Image courtesy of Judith Leitner, My Voice My Lens.



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# Charoset as a Blueprint for Jewish Life

What holds us together? What makes everything work? As we approach Pesach 5783, *charoset* speaks volumes. It's a mixture eaten during the Seder—after the story text of the Haggadah but before the festive meal. Its ingredients and their metaphors vary, depending from where it hails but, taken together, the how, why, and what of *charoset* craft a blueprint for Jewish life.

In his introduction to *Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History*, Greg Beiles, Head of The Toronto Heschel School and Director of The Lola Stein Institute, explains why we look back:

Perhaps the most significant historical event in Jewish consciousness is the Exodus from Egypt... Remarkably, at the very moment that this historical episode is recounted, the Torah states, "In the future, your child will ask, 'What is this to you?'"

Note that the text does not say your child will ask you "What happened?"... Rather, the child asks, "What does this mean to you? Why is it significant? Why does it matter?" The response of the text—"God took us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and signs and wonders"—indicates clearly that this is a theological matter, not a historical one. It is not simply a statement about what happened; it is an affirmation of the significance this holds for a people founded on a theology of freedom.

Our task as Jewish parents, educators, publishers, writers, and teachers of history is not merely to recount what happened... Rather, the task is to ensure that our story has meaning.<sup>1</sup>

*Charoset* offers up a lot of meaning. Whoever thought it could suggest a code for Judaism's enduring strength? Not I.

Yet this traditionally scheduled, make-your-own, eclectic mixture reflects Jewish life.

Notably, eating *charoset* is not accompanied by a blessing in the Haggadah (unlike eating *maror* or *matzah*). In the Talmud, it is a matter of debate whether *charoset* is even obligatory. Yet who could imagine a Seder without *charoset*?

Eating *charoset* is a *minhag*—a word which means "tradition" or "practice." It's a *minhag* we hold fast to, one which binds us, even though it's not compulsory. Depending on where we live, the tradition has many variations—different ingredients, different flavours, different ways of preparation. Some are welcome on the tongue, others are uncomfortable in the mouth; it's sensorial. From this are we to infer that appreciating freedom requires more than words? Is this where we see that an evolving tradition matters and that Jewish continuity may hinge on innovation and adaptation? Several millennia after our Egyptian exodus, deference to time, place, community, and individuality still binds our unity—Yemen, Poland, Israel, so many recipes.

*Minhag hamakom* means "custom of the place." It's the ethic that, wherever we are within the circle of Torah, we agree to abide by our hosts' observance of Jewish practice. The principle may be challenging to those who prefer predictability and precision in their habits. Nonetheless, with centuries of rabbinic support, *minhag hamakom* governs Jewish communal practice. Adaptation and cooperation matter and the sweet, sour, smooth, or crunchy variations of *charoset* model both.

How to diffuse dissonance and relax into joy is another Jewish survival skill. With its neighbourhood-friendly, "make your own" spirit, and comparable to how chemical binding agents do their job, *charoset* disperses what may be problematic in the turning from angst to celebration and connects the elements that help make the shift. *Charoset* mollifies our bitterness and crystallizes our memories as we move forward to celebrate; it is a bridge to our future.

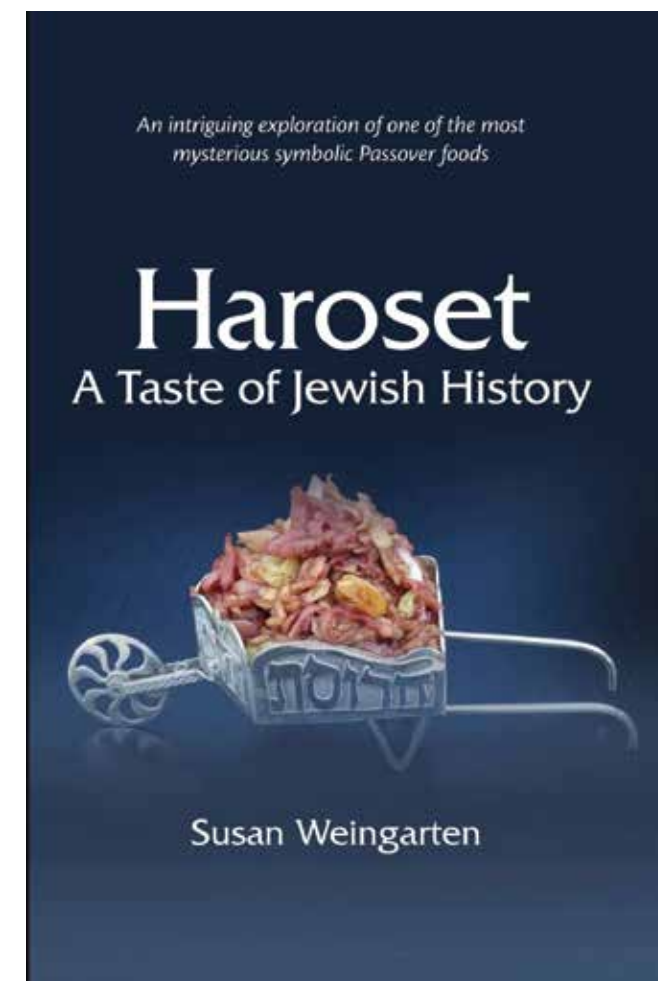
Are there other binding agents that fortify us? Can we see them at work? Might even the habit to dwell among vast numbers of metaphors and interpretations in Jewish life be a survival skill itself? Professor Susan Weingarten writes that, in some communities, *charoset* replicates the mortar while, in others, it represents the bricks.<sup>2</sup> Some communities want to remember sweetness, others to invoke the discomfort of the times. Weingarten wrote a fascinating book called, *Haroset: A Taste of Jewish History*. I can't recommend it enough. She sifts through ingredients and processes, their similarities and differences, mysteries and artistry. She adds mesmerizing dimensions to our story; we are the people of the book, but we are also much more.

In this issue of THINK, contributors identify various sources of strength that benefit our children's Jewish growth and education. Two discuss how using everyday circumstances can be used to our best advantage. In *Awe and Wonder*, Greg Beiles reminds us how the Jewish thread grew thick when it absorbed cultural enrichment from the cosmopolitan surroundings of the Ottoman Empire. In the Learning Studio, Dvora Goodman explains how education also flourishes when care is given and attention paid to the community milieu in which the students learn.

The Jewish people have held together using resourcefulness to reframe their lives in different places. Learning to see what's in front of you and using it wisely is a precious capability. Yarden Bourlas describes a Heschel Junior High art project that trains students in focus and ingenuity. With a particular purpose in mind, they examine their whereabouts intensively and discover what they had not seen before. Chen Tannenbaum nurtures Grade 8 students in intellectual and emotional environments; pursuing democratic ideals, they learn to craft space for dissent and watch it dovetail with individuality and difference. Dani Plant, in her new column, *Jewish Food for Thought*, shares how Seder traditions and deliciously diverse *charoset* recipes exemplify the creativity and commitment that her family have lived.

Another survival skill revealed by *charoset* is how exquisitely beautiful or profoundly poetic a ritual can become when reworked repeatedly over time. The concentric yet billowing layers of Judaic meaning are awesome to behold. Weingarten explains that Talmudic legal text discussed *charoset* texture and taste, which informed later rabbinical thoughts on how to use and make it; rabbis then developed *midrashic* (interpretive) texts, symbols, and allegories; and ultimately their interpretations of their interpretations became study points for legal analysis.<sup>3</sup> At the bottom is a custom—the intention to remember.

Good school curriculum also spirals as students re-examine themes with increasing complexity and widening relevance over the years. Herbs planted in Grade 1 begin a sensorial interdisciplinary learning process as older children



harvest, dry, and return a crop for Grade 1 to incorporate in their Havdalah kits. In Grade 2, Seder traditions from across the world teach students that we are many people, yet we are one; balancing similarity with difference is the Jewish way. The spiral also captures parents and teachers; when students see their parents willing to struggle with skills, and teachers see their colleagues importing new techniques into their classrooms, the learning deepens all the way down and all the way forward. At the bottom is a custom—the intention to learn.

The annual Pesach focus on slavery and freedom offers much to ponder. Meredith Landy liberates children from peer pressure. In *Good Books*, Tziporah Cohen and Gail Baker recommend readings that inspire flexibility and courage.

In the crevices of Pesach customs, we come upon surprises. The inventive and purposeful character of *charoset* is essential to the Seder, which is itself essential to us.

Pam

It is a traditionally scheduled, make-your-own, and eclectic mixture that reflects Jewish life.

<sup>1</sup> Greg Beiles et al., *Northern Lights: A Canadian Jewish History* (Toronto: The Lola Stein Institute and The Canadian Jewish News, 2020), p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Weingarten, *Haroset: A Taste of Jewish History* (New York: Toby Press, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.



# Lessons from the Ottoman Empire

BY GREG BEILES

The word “assimilation” is an alarm bell for those of us who care about the future and continuity of the Jewish people. When we think about “assimilating” into the surrounding culture, we think about losing our language, traditions, and soon after that our identity and sense of peoplehood. We worry that by adopting the sense of identity of those around us, as 19th-century and 20th-century Jewish-Germans naively did, we may lose our sense of communal identity altogether. Yet we don’t want to separate ourselves entirely from the world, either. How can we be in relationship with the world around us without assimilating into it?

Fortunately, the word “assimilation” has another meaning as well—it can mean “taking in,” absorbing what is around us, rather than being absorbed into it. Look up “assimilation” in a thesaurus and you find synonyms having to do with digestive processes: “consumption,” “digestion,” “ingestion,” “soaking up.” In a recipe book, “assimilate” might appear like this: “carefully assimilate cloves, onion, and garlic into your sauce by simmering over low heat...” This may be the kind of assimilation that characterized the experience of Jewish communities living in the Ottoman Empire—an Islamic empire that lasted for over 500 years and stretched across the Caucasus, the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeastern Europe.

The Jewish experience in the Ottoman Empire began in 1492, the same year King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain sponsored the history-shaping voyages of Christopher Columbus. Ferdinand and Isabella sent Columbus off and simultaneously evicted the Jewish people from Spain, where they had lived for over a millennium. Jews fled eastward, many resettling in lands controlled by the Muslim-ruled Ottoman Empire. Sultan Bayzeid II who welcomed the Jewish refugees famously said, “How can you call [Spanish king] Ferdinand a wise ruler, he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine!” Jews living in Ottoman lands were known as “Sephardim” (Sephardic) from the Hebrew word for Spain, *Sepharad*. Jews who identify as Sephardic today trace their ancestry to the many lands once under Ottoman rule, including Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Tunisia, and Egypt.

Much has been written about the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. These differences—cultural, linguistic, and even religious—relate to the very different histories of the lands in which they lived. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, Western Europe experienced radical religious, political, and cultural revolutions—the Inquisition, the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment. Caught up in the upheaval of European history, Jews living

## Holding fast to core traditions, cultural context can strengthen our Jewish way.

in Western European nations were variously persecuted, ghettoized, and eventually invited to become citizens of newly formed European states. In the early 1800s, when Napoleon offered Jews civic emancipation across his conquered lands, many readily accepted citizenship even where it meant abandoning traditional Jewish practices. Jews in Western Europe began the process of assimilating into Western culture—a process that has continued unabated across the Western world.

Meanwhile, in the East, the dominance and relative stability of the Ottoman Empire for over 500 years produced a different climate. Although Jews, along with Christians, had a lower status than Muslims, they were generally integrated into the mosaic of Ottoman society. In many cities of the empire, notably Salonika (now in Greece), Sarajevo (now in Bosnia), and Istanbul (Turkey), Jews, Eastern-Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims interacted far more peacefully than in conflict-ridden Western Europe. Churches, synagogues, and mosques existed side by side, and Jews, Christians, and Muslims would interact comfortably in the streets and marketplaces. Centuries of persecution in Europe resulted in an impulse to assimilate “into” European society once the gates of the ghettos were opened. The conditions of the Ottoman Empire produced a very different kind of “assimilation”: it was an assimilation of elements of the surrounding culture, not an assimilation into it.

Rather than being absorbed into the majority culture, the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire “digested” what it offered and integrated it into Jewish practice. Evidence of this reveals itself through Jewish dress, food, and music in countries that once comprised the Ottoman Empire. As in variations of a theme, Sephardic Jews, unlike their Ashkenazi brethren, tended to retain a more traditional Jewish religious outlook. Whereas Ashkenazi Jewry mirrored schismatic European ideologies to produce diverse secular and religious Jewish streams—for example, Chassidic, Zionist, Bundist, Reform—Sephardic Jews to this day often define themselves simply as “mesorati”—meaning “traditional.”

A “traditional” Judaism that nevertheless expresses considerable diversity is one which “assimilates” its surroundings rather than assimilating into them. Perhaps relative freedom facilitates this. Philosopher Franz Rosenzweig observes this characteristic when he describes how Judaism “constantly assimilates itself outwardly in order again and again to set itself apart inwardly.”<sup>1</sup> It is not a matter of separating oneself from the outside world, as if one could even do this. Rather, it means standing in the stream of the world, as a method of refining one’s own inner identity. This kind of “assimilation” of the outer to learn about and refine the inner is a way of Jewish learning, a Jewish pedagogy.

For the past three centuries, the history of Western Jewry has been a tug-of-war between utter exclusion and utter assimilation. The history of Sephardic Jewry offers us a method for the refinement of Jewish identity through a digestion of what the world has to offer. In my own practice of teaching *tefillah* (prayer), I have integrated methods from yogic breathing, tai chi, and Qigong to enhance the recitation of the traditional *Shacharit* (morning) liturgy. We can learn more about ourselves when we interact with, learn from, and even adopt/adapt teachings of others and other cultures. When we make sure to hold fast to our core traditions and texts, we can explore and use our social and cultural context to sharpen, refine, and strengthen our own Jewish way, and not lose ourselves in the process.

<sup>1</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 427.

Greg Beiles is Head of The Toronto Heschel School and Director of The Lola Stein Institute.





# Not the Four Questions

## SCHWAB'S FOUR CORNERS IN GOOD EDUCATION

BY DVORA GOODMAN

Professional educators typically think about the interaction of three elements when learning takes place and speak about the triangle of learner, teacher, and subject matter. In graduate school, I came across a different framework, one that has stayed relevant in both my personal and professional life.

Professor Joseph Schwab (1909–1988) added a fourth corner to the learning paradigm: good education requires a quadrangle of four “commonplaces” of equal rank. His addition was the socio-cultural milieu in which the child is learning.<sup>1</sup> I like this model because the triangle gives little if any attention to parents, friends, and school community and, to my mind, the absence is critically significant. Schwab makes explicit the implicit role played by the broader physical and behavioural environment in which a child is learning.

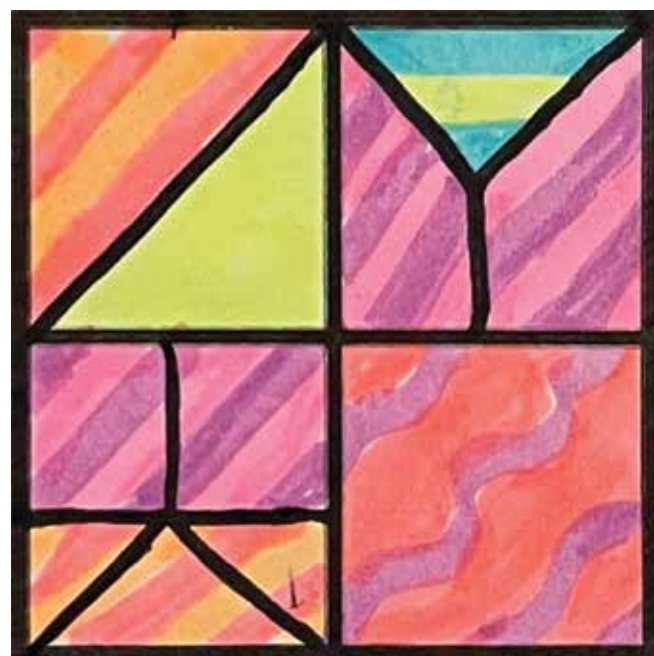
Author and researcher Debbie Pushor explains that Schwab’s four-cornered paradigm simply stretches the triangle into a square. Without foregoing the three elements that education has traditionally addressed, she writes: “Each ‘vital factor’ is attended to when the work of teachers and schools is done relationally and situated in the midst of families and communities. Children, parents and families, educators and schools are all strengthened in this new plotline.”<sup>2</sup>

Attention to the four elements feels especially significant to me because I write this article as the parent of one current Heschel student and two Heschel graduates, and as a professional member of The Lola Stein Institute team. I both experience and overlook the Heschel scenario. In my opinion, our community readily acknowledges our school’s attention to three of Schwab’s commonplaces, but I am not sure if it fully appreciates the instrumental role played by the fourth. I suggest it’s time to highlight the utility of milieu in our Heschelian approach and to celebrate school’s pluralism, activism, and soul in action.

The following is my take on Schwab’s four corners at The Toronto Heschel School.

### The Learner

The learner is well in hand. Children are the heart of Toronto Heschel education, and teachers seek familiarity with the heart of every child: What makes each unique, where could they benefit from a challenge or use support, what might each child contribute to the class? The curriculum incorporates multiple styles of learning that expand a child’s explorations and meet differentiated needs. The educational methodology sees students learn experientially, which means the children actively engage in their learning and systematically encounter each curricular theme from multiple vantage points, whether in science, drama, art, writing, mathematics, or debate. Over the years, my children have benefited from this whole child mindset and from teachers who understood its importance and who got to know each child as an individual. My children felt seen and recognized, and were very much “at home” in their learning environment.



### The Teacher

Toronto Heschel teachers epitomize what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel described as “Text-People.” They stretch to reach new heights in their teaching and provide the best learning for their students. They are creative professionals, dedicated to their craft, and devoted to their students; they love to collaborate and set high expectations for themselves and their students. The Lola Stein Teacher Performance and Learning Studio that launched earlier this school year solidifies the school’s support for teachers offering mentorships, personal study, opportunities for advanced professional development, and certification in integrated Jewish education. Heschel teachers experience Judaism as a continually evolving resource for universal values and human creativity, of how to think in a Jewish way and how to teach Jewish thinking.

### The Subject Matter

Much has been written in this journal about subject matter taught at Toronto Heschel. To encapsulate, I can attest that Heschel’s educational approach results in academic content that is enriched and enhanced; it pervasively integrates universal knowledge with Jewish teaching, Jewish responsibility, and Jewish standards of scholastic excellence, and follows carefully the inspirational footsteps of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Through guided exploration and independent scrutiny, subject matter reveals itself to the children in multiple dimensions, for their critical understanding and their creative reflection. Using a Jewish lens for morality, purpose, and interpretation, class focus is trained on social-emotional skills and commitment to academic disciplines. No matter the topic, the subject at hand is how to educate children to be engaged Jewish citizens in the 21st century.

### The Milieu

Social milieu is Professor Schwab’s fourth element for good education. It’s also one of the essential target points that keeps Toronto Heschel unique. The school’s mission is to welcome the widest diversity of Jewish practice, welcoming children from all Jewish expressions with inclusive, egalitarian warmth. It’s not as easy a foray into hospitality as it sounds.

Active intentional pluralism informs the custom of our community—our *minhag hamakom*; that is, our agreed set of values, how we care for each other and support this particular approach to Jewish education. All school community participants—staff, students, and parents—are accountable to our *minhag*; it is this accountability that guards our special identity.

Welcoming diverse practice, while pursuing a common way, requires the creativity that is our school hallmark. Yes, everyone is sometimes uncomfortable, but it’s for the good



of all. It seems to me that the best way to achieve the essential relaxed vibe—the vibe that is us—is for parents to join in and actively support what’s going on at school. Given that our children are imprinted with the impact of our actions, let’s remember that their education includes what they see us doing as they watch us moving around their school community. Shouldn’t our children observe us collaborating in their school’s mission? Could they know that we volunteer in the garden? Might they watch us helping to celebrate festivals, events, and cherish their teachers? Do we happily shoulder responsibilities for *kashrut* or egalitarian practice as a matter of course? Our children learn critical lessons when we actively support their school community. It does mean taking the school’s approach into our home lives, as in arranging parties so all classmates can attend and asking what food needs would be welcomed on a playdate.

My vote is to nurture and rejoice in our milieu. It’s rewarding and reassuring that community spirit—volunteerism and pluralism—crafts the fourth commonplace, and completes a quadrangle of learners, teachers, topics, and social context. It’s who we are as Toronto Heschel, and it’s time we articulated this accomplishment in the educational terms it merits.

1 Thomas W. Roby IV, “Joseph Schwab (1909–1988): Education and Career, Scholarly Work, The Practical, Legacy,” Education Encyclopedia—State University.com, retrieved February 16, 2023, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2401/Schwab-Joseph-1909-1988.html>.

2 Debbie Pushor, “The Situation of Parents in the Curricular Commonplaces: A Place of Equal Rank?,” *LEARNing Landscapes Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2009), p. 152, <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v2i2.300>.

**Dvora Goodman** is Coordinator of The Lola Stein Institute. She works as a Jewish education consultant in a variety of settings.



# The Lola Stein Teachers Performance and Learning Studio

BY THE STUDIO TEAM

We remain focused on our core competency—the methodology of instruction for an integrated Jewish curriculum. Participant teachers will be learning specific Toronto Heschel techniques and how to perform their understanding of them in a well-designed Jewish school program geared to elicit the artist/scientist/thinker in each child.

Experienced THS teachers are contributing their expertise through active involvement with the Studio as it explores the art and science of Jewish teaching and learning. They are open to learning, and excited about their results.

We are finding the greatest success when we engage talented teachers with a thoughtful curriculum that is conveyed to them by an experienced mentor. Yarden Bourlas teaches the art component of the school's internationally recognized interdisciplinary curriculum, The Beautiful Triangle, which integrates mathematics and visual arts, and which was originally developed by Greg Beiles and Daphne Helfand. Recently, Greg praised the current Grade 7 students' geometrically inspired drawings, saying, "It's really amazing what you are able to bring out from your students in their artwork." Yarden humbly answered, "I'm working with an amazing curriculum and mentor; it makes success come easy."

## The Toronto Heschel Curriculum Library

The web-based Toronto Heschel Curriculum Library is building its collection of the school's original educational programs. The Library is a readily available resource for classroom use and is steadily growing into an extensive archive of Toronto Heschel's quarter century of research-informed education. The Studio has been uploading curriculum to a robust third-party software solution and securing a well-organized pathway for the school's educational needs over the years to come.

## The Lola Stein Teacher Learning and Certification Program

The Studio has initiated a professional accreditation process to certify teachers in integrated Jewish education, a skill set not customarily taught in teacher education. Two courses are now underway:

1. My Voice Through My Jewish Lens, developed and taught by Judith Leitner, a founder of The Toronto Heschel School and its Director of Integrated Arts for 25 years.
2. Text and Context, an advanced course for veteran teachers and school leaders, developed and taught by Rabbanit Rachael Turkienicz, also a Toronto Heschel School founder and a long-term mentor.

A full catalogue of professional advancement courses is evolving. Three additional courses will be launched in August 2023.

## Teacher Mentorship

The Hebrew Focus Group has grown large and is highly productive under the lead mentorship of Maya Lazovski, Edna Sharet, and Greg Beiles. We are mentoring 15 teachers to improve their skills for teaching Hebrew language through integration with drama and other immersion language techniques. The 15 teachers are divided into two groups: teachers in Grades 2 and under and teachers in Grades 3 and above. We are studying the Focus Group model as a paradigm that may prove effective for advancing other skill sets.

# Parents Showing They're Happy to Learn

BY MICHELLE LANDY-SHAVIM

I took a class in Israel in my early twenties where the course started with an explanation of the rabbinic methods of interpretation, known by the acronym PARDES:

**Pshat:** The most obvious and simple meaning of a text.

**Remez:** The allegorical or symbolic meaning beyond the literal sense.

**Derash:** The comparative meaning, looking at similar occurrences of a word.

**Sod:** The esoteric and mystical meaning, often used in the Kabbalah.

The Hebrew word *pardes* generally translates to English as orchard, but in rabbinic terms, it is often used as a metaphor for the divine secrets we learn from Torah study. The Toronto Heschel School principal, Moreh Alan Rusonik, used this same explanation to begin teaching this year's cohort of Heschel students who will be participating in the Canadian National Bible Contest, also known as Chidon Hatanach Canada. The contest is open to all students in Grades 5 to 8.

I took the opportunity to learn with my child when Moreh Alan invited parents to join the Chidon group for a review session on certain chapters of Bereisheet (The Book of Genesis). First we read the *pshat* (see above!) and then we reviewed the literal meaning of the text with our children, some of us revisiting stories we knew, others engaging with the stories for the first time. We all saw that some meanings seemed easily apparent at first blush but there were also questions that the Torah does not explicitly answer.

Amazing as it may sound, I found it quite a struggle to focus singularly on the plain meaning of the text. Normally, the superficial is the easiest, yes? Well, actually, it isn't. Keeping focused on the plain wording on the page is one of the challenges that comes with learning for Chidon. The

stories and legends that our tradition has taught many of us over the years and that we might call on to help us to answer questions raised in a specific piece of text are unavailable when you restrict yourself to the *pshat*. I recalled the words of Rabbi A.J. Heschel who wrote in his text *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*: "Do not think that the task of the plain-sense interpreters was simple! The path of the *pshat* is one on which the wise may walk without fear, but the naïve can stumble on it." Staying within the *pshat* framework doesn't preclude us from looking for meaning; but we must find the meaning in words we see written in the text and we cannot look elsewhere for answers. The review session included questions about the whole chapter but we were studying *pshat*. The rules were that we only had these words to use. Not easy.

As Jewish parents with a vital connection to our traditions, we found the family session to be a wonderful moment with our children. Personally joining them in their prep for a school contest let us play out, demonstrate, and prove that we, their adult parents, are still very happy to learn—that learning is a lifelong practice. They see that we think it's valuable and that we will spend a whole evening learning with them. And perhaps most importantly, they see that what they are learning is compelling and interesting to the people they love. What we learned in the *pshat* review our children will probably remember fondly for years to come, but how we learned—all of us together!—they will remember forever.

**Michelle Landy-Shavim** is a Heschel parent of three students. She is a lawyer specialist in Consumer Protection and fascinated by all things bureaucratic in the educational sector.





# RITUALS AND PRACTICES THAT TEACH





# Learning through Havdalah in Grade 1

BY HEIDI FRIEDMAN & LISA SHEPS

On a Monday morning in November, Grade 1 students enter their classroom, blinds closed, lights off. They stand holding hands in a learning circle, and begin their first Havdalah experience as a class. Their ears hear the blessings recited. Their hands bask in the warm glow of the braided candle, and they see their faces reflecting in their fingernails. As they pass the spice jar around, the aroma of spices wafts into their noses, and after the flame is extinguished by dipping it quickly into a cup of grape juice, they taste the sweet juice as the cup is passed around. The children are experiencing the beauty and sanctity of Havdalah in a multisensory way.

On Shabbat, the work stopped and God rested. God made a *shinui*, a change. Havdalah highlights this shift and, through a multi-layered approach, the Grade 1 students explore how the ceremony differentiates the sanctity of the Shabbat from the regularity of work during the week, the metamorphosis from *kodesh* to *chol*.

In Chumash class, the children learn the actual *mela-cha* (work) done by God during creation, and they see that each aspect of creation leads to and combines with the next. Candlelight reminds that light from Day 1 makes flowers grow; water on Day 2 nurtures the plants. Land and vegetation emerge on Day 3, and the seasons appear on Day 4. The bees who make honey in their wax appear on Day 5, and on Day 6 people harvest the wax, fabricate the candle, and recite Havdalah blessings as the creative process restarts in a new week. Celebrating Havdalah in this way symbolizes the phenomena of creation and rest.

During the semester, through layers of learning, the Grade 1 students enact the *mitzvot* of Havdalah. Their first experience is through their senses in the dimly lit classroom, but as the weeks pass, they engage with this simple ceremony through a range of integrated subjects, including Chumash text, science, visual art, *Ivrit* (Hebrew), mindfulness, and self-regulation. Immersion in interdisciplinary learning reflects the theory of multiple intelligence; it means that teachers are guiding important ideas through a variety of cognitive channels, enabling concepts and experiences to resonate with students in ways that are particularly best for each.

Mindfulness training is one example with slowly paced experiences that help each child to develop important skills in self-regulation. Carefully holding a cup of grape juice to the light, they watch the liquid move and how slow and steady they must be to preserve it; tasting tiny droplets on their tongue slows the urge to consume the whole drink in one gulp. They observe the flickering candlelight in the darkened room as it casts shadows yet illuminates their classmates' faces. Closing their eyes and taking a deep breath, they inhale the aroma of spices such as clove, cinnamon, and nutmeg, allowing the warmth to travel deep inside them to awaken their *neshama*, their soul.

We engage students' scientific and artistic minds through an analysis of the miracle of matter. To think like young scientists, they assess evidence and observe how materials change when used for Havdalah. They explore the impact that different factors, such as temperature, submersion in water, agitation, and movement, have on the physical states of certain materials, which they watch metamorphose from solid to liquid to gas. For example, they see the wax dripping as a flame melts it. Later their eyes widen as they dip two wicks into molten beeswax and then solidify them with a plunge into cold water. With care and tenacity, they twist and intertwine the two wicks into one beautiful Havdalah candle.

Learning more about physical matter, students close their eyes and receive a piece of clay in their hands. They knead and feel the material and suggest hypotheses about what it may be, where it came from, how it might respond if they roll or squish it in their hands. Opening their eyes, the students evaluate the properties of this marvellous material, and discuss what might happen if it were left outside or in water overnight. They craft their ball of clay into a *kiddush* cup, glaze and fire it in the kiln, later observing how the final artwork differs from its raw state. The cups add to their growing collection of ritual objects for Havdalah.

At Heschel the curriculum is a spiral. The learning builds over time in a very intentional way. How it connects from one grade to the next is integral to a child's development. For example, steadily the spiral takes students deeper into

We engage students' scientific and artistic minds through an analysis of the miracle of matter.

understanding plants: first they use them, then they harvest, then they plant. In June, Grade 1 students select herbs for their Havdalah *besamim* (spice) jars from the Grade 2 classroom's spice cabinet. They discover that their spices were planted a year prior by students who are now in Grade 3 and harvested by their Grade 2 friends during the past autumn's Sukkot season. The children peek over their next horizon and get excited about the upcoming activities; they see that they too will plant and harvest.

Through Grade 1, the students are becoming increasingly proficient in Hebrew; they can read the blessings by themselves and recite them confidently for the Havdalah ceremony. They make trays to hold their collection of Havdalah objects and decorate them with the printed blessings surrounded by vibrant mosaics they designed using the patterning skills learned in their mathematics program.

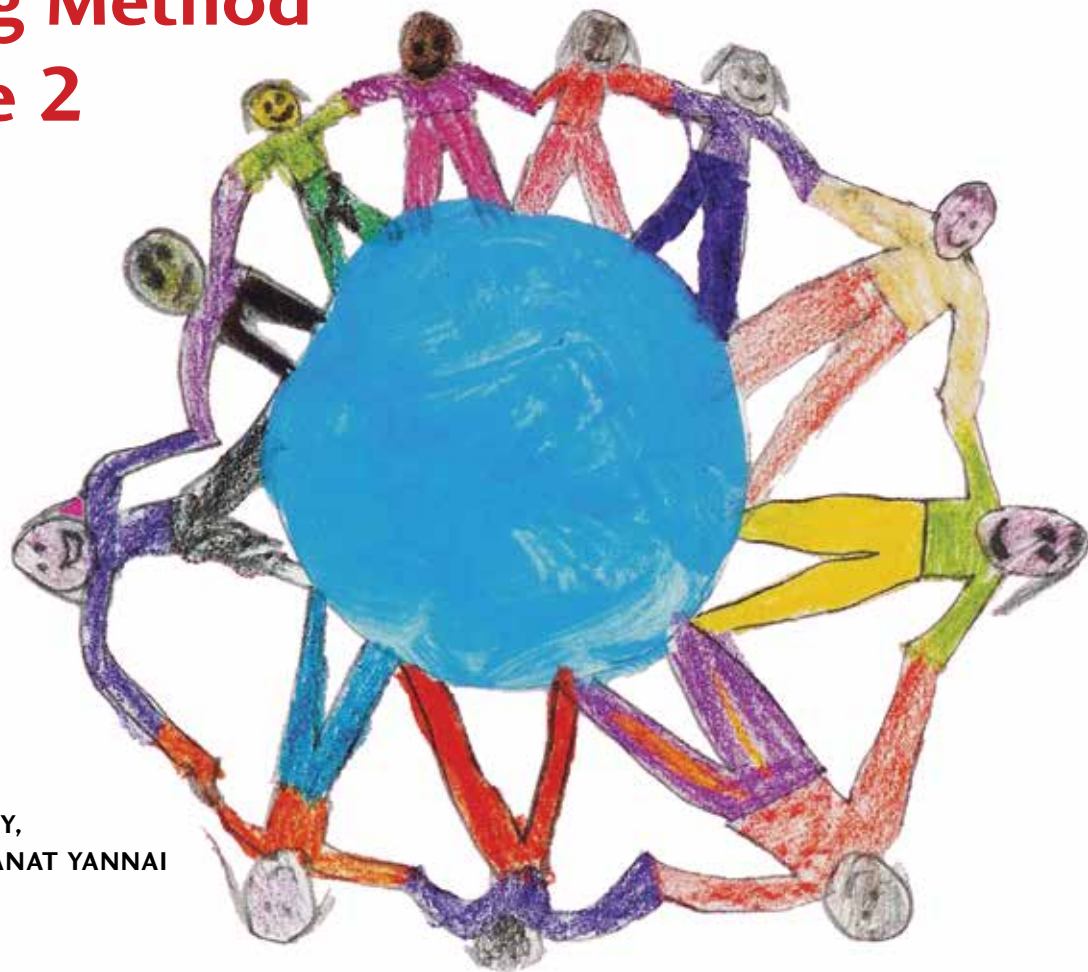
This Grade 1 Havdalah immersion equips students to lead the end-of-Shabbat ritual independently. When the children take their Havdalah kits home, they carry more than beautiful objects. Their kit gives tangible form to a synthesis of learning that they can share with pride; each object has played a role in creating the whole. They have studied the ceremony and its meanings through a carefully constructed interdisciplinary and multisensory whole-child curriculum plan. Watching the process transpire, we see another *shinui*; young children emerging as stewards of their Jewish identities, a metamorphosis that is truly miraculous.

**Heidi Friedman** is the Director of Student Support and Teacher Mentoring. She works closely with new and veteran teachers on program development and implementation of Heschel teaching practices. Heidi works with teachers and families, and coordinates external providers, ensuring children's learning and social/emotional needs are met in the classroom. **Lisa Sheps** teaches visual art at The Toronto Heschel School. Trained as an architect, Lisa then received her Master of Teaching. She wove together her past experiences with her additional training by conducting research on art-integrated education. She recently completed the Teacher Leadership Program through Brandeis University and the Legacy Heritage Foundation.





# The Seder as a Teaching Method in Grade 2



BY LISA SHEPS  
WITH GALIT BABITSKY,  
SARI HERSON, AND ANAT YANNAI

There is beauty in the balancing of diversity and similarity, and it is core to the Jewish way. The Jewish ethic of *minhag hamakom*, respect for the custom of the place, reveals itself in this balance. As such, the Seder is a perfect learning moment for Grade 2 children to launch their journey in this enduring Jewish approach.

It's a very strong and important message for young students to learn that regional Jewish cultures may differ from one another, and that nonetheless they do align and merge into a unified expression of the Jewish people. Seven- and eight-year-old students at Toronto Heschel learn this for themselves through a close, cross-curricular, and experiential examination of Pesach (Passover) traditions from around the world. They learn that there is a world of diverse Jewish communities that annually hold Seders and retell the Exodus story wherever they are. The children dive into unique traditions and absorb the idea that we are bound together by shared values, the understanding that we are all flesh and blood, all cherishing Judaism, even as we are defined by

diverse manners and traditions that uniquely characterize who we are.

Families across the Jewish world convene on Pesach, retelling the Exodus story in their different languages and traditions. The Seder offers a wonderful opportunity for big picture thinking and big ideas. Children in Grade 2 can grasp how the common practice of annually holding a Seder with its plate of ritual foods and the story of how the formerly enslaved Israelites moved towards freedom connects us as one Jewish people. The narrative is colourful, offering great opportunities for mnemonics for young students as they explore their Jewish traditions through the symbols of the Seder: *karpas*, the green vegetable, connects them to spring, tears, and new life; the four children—the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the quiet—represent not just personalities they may share but also skill sets they may have.

Our students come to appreciate that families in different countries come together to tell the Pesach story, but do so in their own particular ways, depending on where they live.

The Seder offers a wonderful opportunity for big picture thinking and big ideas.

The children learn that when Jewish families move away from their first homes, they bring their customs with them wherever they go. All Jewish expressions are equally important, valid, and worthy of being shared, even as the tunes of the songs and recipes for the *charoset* vary. For example, in the arid, subtropical, and desert climates of Yemen where palm trees grow readily, *charoset* becomes a mixture of dates with figs, sesame seeds, ginger, and coriander—ingredients that are indigenous to the land and familiar to its inhabitants. For Egyptian *charoset*, dates and raisins are heated in a sugary syrup for a sweet, sticky paste that is a reminder of the grout between the bricks that the Israelites used for building. The Ashkenazi or Eastern European way is a *charoset* that uses apples that are native to Eastern Europe and North America.

Making *charoset* provides many learning opportunities in Grade 2. Students practise collaborative teamwork as they chop, measure, and mix ingredients to prepare recipes from around the world. They use their Hebrew-language skills to isolate words in recipes and identify the fruit and nuts; their growing understanding of fractions helps them decipher the proper proportions for each ingredient; and their mindful attention to cooperation and kindness ensures effective group work.

The notion of sharing the Pesach celebration is as important as the sharing of new recipes. The Grade 2 children take their learning into the school corridors, delivering their various *charoset* concoctions to all grades and ensuring that the whole Heschel School community experiences the diversity of Jewish ritual and tradition. They are gratified that their productivity forms part of each grade's Seder prior to Pesach and each child experiences exactly how it feels and how it works to have their personal Jewish expression reflected in the food of the holiday.

Grade 2 students learn that we dip our vegetable or *karpas* into salty water or vinegar twice on Pesach, and that, in different Jewish homes, the vegetable may vary. While parsley, cilantro, and celery appear on most Seder plates, the children are told how sometimes potatoes have been substituted for *karpas*, demonstrating tenacity and ingenuity to keep a tradition alive even during tough times.

As the students work through their study of each section of the Hagaddah, they learn about many Pesach traditions from around the world. They recreate Moroccan and Italian customs to cover the Seder plate with a beautiful scarf, then sing and clap as the plate is brought to the table. Before it is set down, the tradition is to hold the plate on the head of a child and rotate it for all to see. How clear is that message that all this learning belongs in the head of everyone at the table!

The students learn that Hungarian Jews place special objects on the Seder table: jewels to remember the precious gifts given by the Egyptians to *B'nei Yisrael* (the Israelites) in their hope to stop the plagues. The students discover that in some Sephardic homes the Seder table is set with a single long-stemmed green onion for each person, who, during the Dayenu chorus, uses it to gently whip the wrist of the guest sitting beside him or her, letting the soft slapping leaves conjure sounds of the whips of slave masters. Families in Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq cluster the onions in a bunch and pass the onion bunch along as each guest "whips" another. The ritual takes place during Dayenu because it is the song of miracles with a chorus whose meaning emphasizes, "It would have been enough for us." The children sing to witness their freedom from the lash of oppression.

The Maggid section of the Hagaddah begins with the recitation of Ha Lachma Anya, עניא לחמא הא, in which we sing, "Now we are slaves, next year may we be free." Our students learn that in some Sephardic traditions, the children walk around the table holding *matzah* over their shoulders while singing this song or singing the Four Questions, as an active reminder of time spent in slavery. We also share with them that in North America, Rabbi A.J. Heschel's daughter, Susannah Heschel, began a practice to include a fresh orange on the Seder plate, symbolizing that *all* people deserve freedom and inclusion, no matter who they are, who they love, what they look like, or what they do.<sup>1</sup>

During the retelling of the Exodus narrative, the Seder becomes a catalyst for our children to learn their own Jewish story and appreciate how differences and similarities become intertwined. Investigating these practices reveals the diverse characters and interpretative histories of Jewish communities that have evolved over many centuries across the globe. At the same time, the explorations highlight how core commitments fuse us as a people, no matter how they may be expressed. The interplay of similarity and difference is a profound lesson for young children to experience at their Seder tables.

When we embolden students with this appreciation at a young age, it can become a mindset that pervades other areas of their lives. We are nurturing inclusive, empathetic citizens, replete with self-knowledge and strong Jewish identity—what better way than by sharing stories, food, and culture.

<sup>1</sup> "Susannah Heschel Explains the Orange," Haggadot.com, retrieved February 10, 2023, from <https://www.haggadot.com/clip/susannah-heschel-explains-orange>.



# Learning to Look and Finding Shin

BY YARDEN BOURLAS

וְהָא תְּנִינָא: שְׂבָעָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרָאוּ קֹדֶם שֶׁנִּבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: תּוֹרָה, וּתְשׁוּבָה, וְגֵן עֵדֶן, וְגִיהֶנֶם וְכֶסֶף הַכְּבוֹד, וּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וּשְׁמוֹ שֶׁל מָשִׁיחַ

Wasn't it taught in a *baraita*: Seven phenomena were created before the world was created, and they are: Torah, and repentance, and the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, and the Throne of Glory, and the Temple, and the name of Messiah.

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת פסחים, דף נ"ד עמוד א

It's impossible to conceive of Judaism as separate from the Hebrew language. According to this Talmudic teaching, Torah was created even before our world. Our language is that fundamental. Jewish scholars and students dwell on words, digging into text in search of meaning, like miners who feel there is always more gold hidden just out of sight. From a Jewish perspective, words are alive, each sourced from three letters. They are like plants with *shoreshim* (roots) that sprout myriad implications and subtle nuances. Words are so powerful that God uses them to speak the entirety of creation into being, first light and darkness, earth and sky, plants and animals, and then humanity itself.

But, Hebrew letters, called *Otiyot*, are not simply practical tools for communication. They possess mystical aspects that point out the holiness permeating everyday life. In *The Book of Letters: A Mystical Alphabet*, Lawrence Kushner writes:

The *Otiyot* are more than just the signs for sounds. They are symbols whose shape and name, placement in the alphabet, and words they begin, put them each at the center of a unique spiritual constellation. They are themselves holy. They are vessels carrying within the light of the Boundless One.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Kushner draws our attention to the idea that the *Otiyot* carry spiritual meaning. And, as associations and relationships form between them, constellations, or networks, of meaning take shape. We combine *Otiyot* to name our loved ones, to mark the passing of years, and to identify our sacred objects, like a Torah cover, or the bags carrying our tefillin and tallit.

Our students at Toronto Heschel benefit immensely when they realize the power that is held in words and letters. Engaging with the sacredness of the *Otiyot* is a way for young people to bring meaning and holiness into their lives; the capacity for this interaction is a vital skill in a world where meaning seems to be an ever-scarce resource. The Grade 8 photography project, *Finding Shin*, aims to attune students to Hebrew letters hiding in plain sight all around them. They connect to their Jewish identity through the mystery of learning how to look. The much celebrated art critic, John Berger, wrote, "We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice."<sup>2</sup>

*Finding Shin* is a project that I co-developed with Toronto Heschel School founder and long-time director and teacher of integrated arts, Judith Leitner. Judy is a devoted photographer who recognizes photography as a way to shift our perspective so that beauty and meaning suddenly appear where there was none before. Any photographer will tell you that a certain hidden magic exists within some pictures, but to find it, one has to take the time that is needed to see a little deeper.

The idea of *Finding Shin* came to Judy as she was looking through the many photos she has taken over the years. She noticed the form of the Hebrew letter *Shin* ש reappearing. There was a *Shin* created by the forking of a tree branch emerging from the snow; a *Shin* formed in shadows cast by three tall buildings over Ground Zero in a photo from a hotel room window in New York City; a *Shin* made in midair by an adolescent skateboarder with legs and arms pointing skyward. After noticing her first few *Shinim*, Judy began to see them everywhere. Words like *Shalom* (wholeness) and *Shadai* (another name for God) came to her mind each time she discovered *Shin* in one of her photos. The process has helped Judy to make meaning by creating this dialogue with what she sees around her.

The Grade 8 *Finding Shin* project happens each year as we prepare for Tu Bishvat, the holiday when we celebrate the lengthening of daylight, the sap beginning to rise in the trees, and the first fruits of the season. We use the moment to refresh and renew our connection to the earth and to trees. And it's in this spirit and at this time of year that I invite Judy in to speak with my Grade 8 class. She primes the students with photography basics and teaches them about light and shadows, reflections, perspective, and framing. Equipped with their new techniques and a camera, the students go outside, into the gradually brightening January light, to take pictures.

Later, when we encourage the students to look intensively into what they've captured, Hebrew letters reveal themselves in the images. One student discovers a *Lamed* ל articulated in a crack in ice formed by a puddle; another discovers a *Samech* ס shaped by a bird's nest long abandoned. We invite students to think of this as a communication with nature and to ask themselves what their captured image is telling them. Their "looking" becomes like the listening role in a conversation. We are asking them not to take anything for granted but to notice and interpret what they can see before and around them. A spontaneous discussion erupts as they brainstorm for words that begin with the letters they have found. This opens a "dialogue" with their environment and an interaction begins.

Ultimately, the students produce a collage of images that is displayed during Toronto Heschel's Tu Bishvat celebration and thereby shares their conversation with the wider school community. It's exciting to watch students discover hidden connections between *Otiyot*, their natural world, and themselves, and in doing so become attuned to how the process of searching can bring meaning into focus. Here, the intentional pursuit is to identify ancient, mystical, and enduring Hebrew letters—something already accepted as relevant and important—and they easily keep their goals in mind as they examine and evaluate what is before them. The investigation helps them see their environment more acutely, which is a valid end in itself.

But, we can also admit that when students practise how to think creatively in pursuit of goals, open their imaginations to discovery, and reflect personally on a particular mission, a lot of learning is happening in the process. Learning how to look, how to notice, and how to find surprising answers will enhance their experience and enrich their lives, and by doing so, add to the lives of those around them. Training their eyes to dialogue with their world, the *Finding Shin* project empowers students to suffuse their life with meaning. It's a conversation that we hope will be lifelong.

1 Lawrence Kushner, *The Book of Letters: A Mystical Alphabet* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1990), p. 71.

2 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008), p. 6.

Yarden Bourlas teaches Grade 8 science and art and oversees The Toronto Heschel School environmental program. Her Master of Education specialization was student self-regulation.

Image courtesy of Judith Leitner, My Voice My Lens.

We ask them not to take anything for granted,  
but to notice and interpret what they see.



# Creating Space for Expression and Respect

BY CHEN TANNENBAUM DOMANOVITZ

In Grade 8 at Toronto Heschel, the students learn the Talmudic story “The Oven of Akhnai.” In this story, Rabbi Eliezer holds to his own opinion in front of the other Sages and continues to call on every supportive resource he can find to persuade his peers. Despite his view being a minority opinion, the lesson of the Talmud is that his fellow Sages were forbidden to keep him quiet; his truth is necessary to hear. The Talmud, in fact, is a place where a lot of different opinions are expressed and given voice.

Class discussion about this story inevitably makes its way to the question of why this is so. Why is it so important for Rabbi Eliezer to continue his argument, even after his friends and colleagues disagree with him? Why does the Talmud make it so important that his differing opinion be heard? After all, it is but a minority opinion, and the class has already learned that the majority rules.

The answer lies with the democratic principle of pluralism. “The Oven of Akhnai” allows us to, once again, impress upon our students how important a full range of opinions is to a democratic society.

But what is pluralism? Israeli philosopher Professor Avi Sagi claims that the pluralist position is based on the argument that there is no common standard for comparing between different values, and therefore we cannot rank them into good or bad—for every “good” there is a self or internal value.<sup>2</sup> The pluralistic stance demands us to allow a place of expression for the varying values, perceptions, and traditions within the public sphere.

For different people, cultures, traditions, and societies, the notion of what is “good” will vary in the same way that societies and their members distinguish themselves from one another.

## The Place Where We Are Right

by Yehudah Amichai

From the place where we are right  
Flowers will never grow  
In the spring.

The place where we are right  
Is hard and trampled  
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves  
Dig up the world  
Like a mole, a plow.  
And a whisper will be heard in the place  
Where the ruined  
House once stood.<sup>1</sup>

The pluralistic claim is not that we allow varied expressions because we know what is good and are willing to “suffer” a different good. Rather, the stance of pluralism requires us to allow all cultures and traditions to exist and flourish within the public sphere. The reach for pluralism is our conviction that even though definitions of what is “good” may differ from our own, they are worthy because they are meaningful and important to others.

According to the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, the identity of a person is shaped by the recognition that he or she either earns or doesn’t earn from others. A lack of recognition, or an incorrect identification or acknowledgment may be a form of oppression; it can create a sense of inferiority by implying that the unrecognized identity is one that is “worth” less.<sup>3</sup> An injury to the identity of a person is an injury to his or her dignity.<sup>4</sup> The claim to this kind of respect is inherent in a democratic society. From this, if every person deserves respect, then everyone’s identity deserves equal recognition.

Israeli philosophers Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit argue that when recognition of a person is whole and full of meaning, it simultaneously acknowledges the value of his or her culture, because a person’s culture forms part of his or her identity. We need to give people the space to express the culture of their group in order for their identity as an individual to become whole.<sup>5</sup>

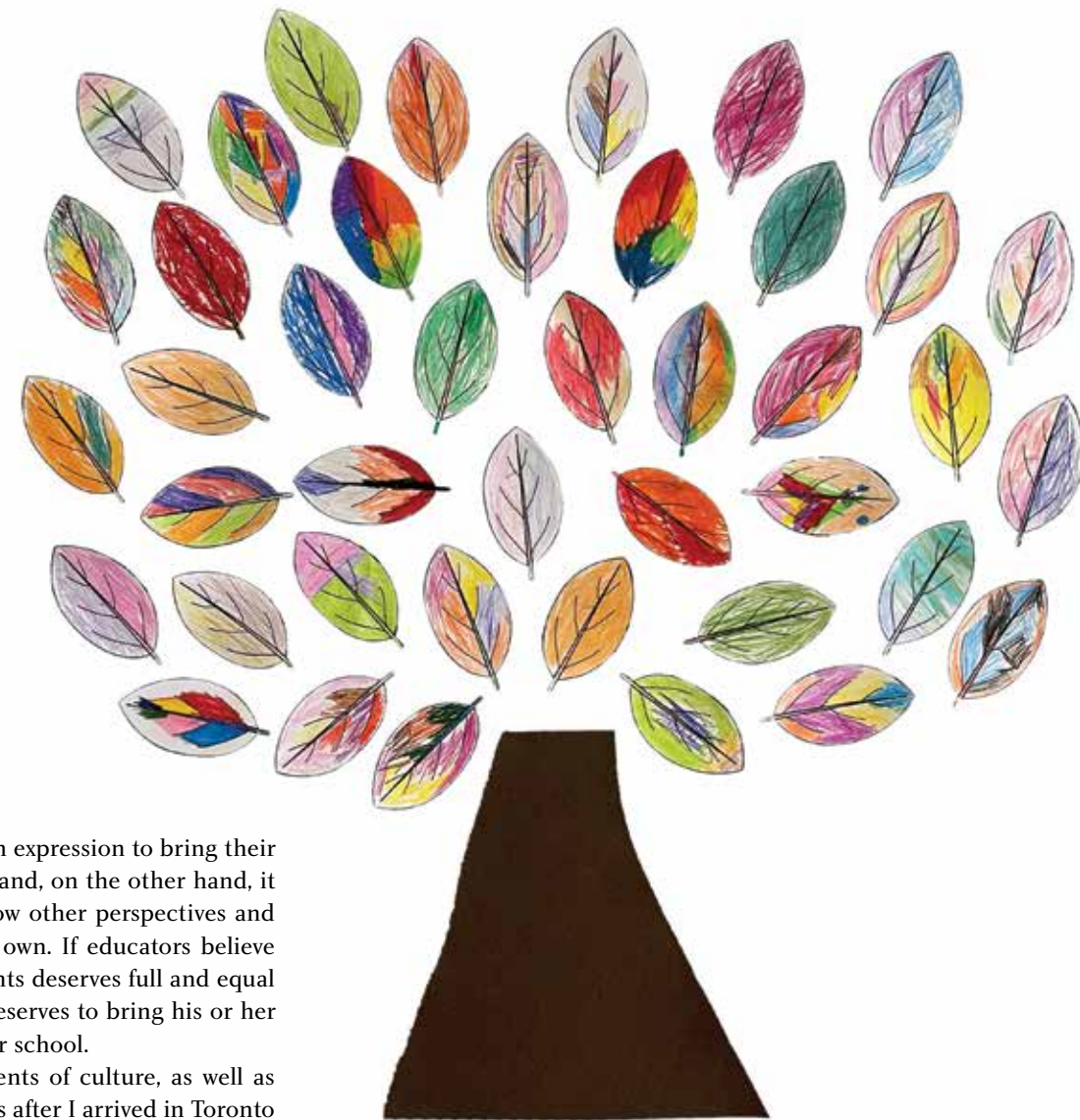
At Toronto Heschel, we offer our students opportunities to meet cultures and traditions that are different from their own. For example, in the prayer framework of Junior High, every student participates in an Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist *minyan* (prayer group). On the one hand, this allows students from the various Jewish

Why does the Talmud  
make it so important  
that the differing  
opinion be heard?

denominations or modes of Jewish expression to bring their full identity with them to school, and, on the other hand, it enables all students to get to know other perspectives and traditions that may not be their own. If educators believe that each of our individual students deserves full and equal recognition, then each student deserves to bring his or her culture to the public sphere of our school.

One of the important ingredients of culture, as well as identity, is language. A few months after I arrived in Toronto with my family, my eldest son was asked to make a presentation in front of his class. Because his English was still weak, he prepared his presentation in Hebrew, and then, with the help of his ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, he translated the writing into English. Before he was to present, he wanted to delete all of the Hebrew text from his slideshow, but his teacher told him: “Don’t erase your language, your culture. It is who you are.” This attitude is what allows my children to grow up in Toronto and feel free to speak Hebrew outside their school, in their neighbourhood, and in the supermarket. They can grow up here without their identity as Israelis being regarded as less than others; they are immigrants, they are Israeli. There’s nothing about which they should feel awkward.

Yehudah Amichai wrote: “The place where we are right is hard and trampled.” The pluralistic society—look at the core of its name—is a society that enables and encourages multiple opinions and many ways of thinking. Doubts (and loves) make the world stretch. Yes, we may be following a particular direction, but there is also a clear and sharp perception that doubts are necessary. There are other opinions, other traditions, other cultures.



Only in a world that is soft and open can new opinions and perspectives bloom. Just as we plant flowers in spring, we must nurture our children’s identities to be fresh, whole, and welcome. Only in a place where we meet different identities and cultures can there be opportunities for doubt and growth. Meeting someone else’s sense of the “good” requires us to reflect and rediscover our own.

1 Yehuda Amichai, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, edited by Robert Alter (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2015).

2 שניא, א. 1999. “על המתחים בין דתים לחילונים – בין שית זכויות לשית זהות.” עין טובה – דוח-שיח ופולמוס בתרבות ישראל, ספר היובל לטובה אילן. הוצאת הקיבוץ המאוחד ונאמני תורה ועבודה. עמ’ 408–430.

3 Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 25–73.

4 קמיר, א. 2005. “על פרשת דרכי כבוד – ישראל בין מגמות של הדרת כבוד (honor), כבוד סגולי (dignity) הילת כבוד (glory) וכבוד-מחיה (respect).” תרבות דמוקרטית, 239–169:9.

5 מרגלית, א. וחלברשל, מ. 1998. “ליברליזם וחובות לתרבות.” בתוך: מאוסטר, מ., שניא, א. ושמיר, ר. (עורכים) רב תרבותיות במדינה דמוקרטית ויהודית (עמ’ 93–105). תל אביב: הוצאת רמות – אוניברסיטת תל אביב.

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# לתת את האפשרות להיות

## מאת חן טננבאום דומנוביץ

מִן הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁבּוֹ אָנוּ צוֹדְקִים,  
לֹא יִצְמָחוּ לְעוֹלָם  
פְּרָחִים בְּאֲבִיב.

הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁבּוֹ אָנוּ צוֹדְקִים,  
הוא רָמוֹס וְקֶשֶׁה  
כְּמוֹ חֶצֶר.

אֲבָל סִפְקוֹת וְאַהֲבוֹת עוֹשִׂים  
אֶת הָעוֹלָם לְתַחוּם  
כְּמוֹ הַחֶפְרָפֶרֶת, כְּמוֹ חֲרִישׁ.  
וְלַחֲיָשָׁה תִּשְׁמַע בַּמָּקוֹם  
שֶׁבּוֹ הִיָּה הַבֵּית  
אֲשֶׁר נִחְרַב. (יהודה עמיחי)



בכיתה ח' התלמידים והתלמידות ב"השל" לומדים את סיפור תנורו של עכנאי, שבו רבי אליעזר עומד על דעתו מול כל החכמים האחרים ומתעקש להשמיע אותה. למרות שהוא בדעת מיעוט, המסר של התלמוד הוא שאסור לחכמים האחרים להשתיק אותו, וכי האמת שלו חייבת להישמע. בדין שמתנהל בכיתה בעקבות הסיפור עולה לעתים השאלה "למה?". למה כל כך חשוב לרבי אליעזר להמשיך ולהשמיע את דעתו, ויותר מזה, למה כל כך חשוב לתלמוד שדעתו תישמע – זו הרי דעת מיעוט, וכבר למדנו שהרוב קובע.

הסיפור התלמודי הזה מאפשר לנו להציג, שוב, בפני התלמידים והתלמידות עקרון חשוב בחברות דמוקרטיות – פלורליזם. אבל מה הוא פלורליזם? הפילוסוף הישראלי פרופ' אבי שגיא טוען כי העמדה הפלורליסטית נשענת על הטענה שאין אמת מידה משותפת להשוואה בין ערכים שונים ולכן לא ניתן לדרגם לטובים ולרעים – לכל ה"טובים" יש ערך עצמי או פנימי. לבני אדם שונים, לתרבויות, למסורות ולחברות שונות, יש "טובים" שונים, שכן בני אדם וחברות שונים זה מזה. הגישה הפלורליסטית דורשת מאיתנו לתת מקום ביטוי לערכים, תפיסות ומסורות שונות בתוך המרחב הציבורי. התביעה הפלורליסטית היא לאפשר ביטוי כזה, לא משום שאנחנו יודעים מה טוב, אבל מוכנים "לסבול" טוב אחר, אלא כי אנחנו מאמינים שיש "טובים" שהם אחרים משלנו והם בכל זאת משמעותיים וחשובים לאחרים. התפיסה הפלורליסטית מחייבת אותנו לאפשר לכל התרבויות והמסורות להתקיים ולפרוח בתוך המרחב הציבורי.

על פי הפילוסוף הקנדי צ'רלס טיילור (royalty), זהותו של אדם מעוצבת על ידי ההכרה שהוא זוכה – או לא זוכה – לה מצד האחרים. חוסר הכרה, או הכרה לא נכונה יכולים להוות סוג של דיכוי או ליצור אצל האדם תחושת נחיתות, תחושה שזהותו היא זהות ש"שווה" פחות. פגיעה בזהותו של אדם היא פגיעה בכבודו הסגולי (dignity). הזכות לכבוד מסוג זה היא בסיסית ואינהרנטית בחברות דמוקרטיות. מכאן שאם כל בני האדם זכאים לכבוד, הרי שכולם זכאים גם להכרה שווה בזהותם. הפילוסופים הישראלים משה הלברטל ואבישי מרגלית טוענים כי הכרה באדם כישות שלמה ומלאה משמעה גם הכרה בערך של תרבותו, מכיוון שתרבותו של אדם היא חלק מזהותו. לבני אדם יש זכות לתרבות – לקיים ולחגוג את תרבותם במרחב הציבורי. חשיבותה של התרבות הייחודית לכל קבוצה היא במשמעות העמוקה והרחבה שתכניה מעניקים לחברים באותה קבוצה.

ב"השל" אנחנו מבקשים ליצור עבור התלמידים והתלמידות הזדמנויות שונות להיפגש עם תרבויות ומסורות שונות משלהם. למשל, במסגרת התפילה בחטיבת הביניים כל תלמיד ותלמידה משתתפים במניין אורתודוקסי, מניין קונסרבטיבי, מניין רפורמי ומניין של היהדות המתחדשת. המפגש הזה עם המסורות השונות מאפשר לתלמידים, מצד אחד, להביא את מלוא הזהות שלהם לבית הספר, ומצד שני מאפשר לתלמידים להכיר תפיסות ומסורות שונות משלהם. כאנשי ונשות חינוך אנחנו מאמינים שכל התלמידים והתלמידות שלנו זכאים להכרה שלמה ושווה ולכן הם זכאים להביא את תרבותם למרכז המרחב הציבורי בבית הספר.

אחד המרכיבים החשובים של תרבות, ומתוך כך גם של זהות, הוא שפה. כמה חודשים לאחר שהגעתי עם משפחתי לטורונטו, בני הגדול נדרש להציג מצגת מול הכיתה שלו. מכיוון שהאנגלית שלו היתה עוד חלשה הוא הכין את המצגת בעברית ואז, בעזרת מורת ה ESL שלו, תרגם את הכתוב לאנגלית. לפני ההצגה לכיתה הוא רצה למחוק מהמצגת את כל הטקסט בעברית. המורה שלו אמרה לו: "אל תמחק את השפה שלך, את התרבות שלך. זה מי שאתה". גישה כזו היא שמאפשרת לילדיי לגדול בטורונטו ולהרגיש חופשיים לדבר בעברית בחצר בית הספר, בשכונה, בסופרמרקט. הם יכולים לגדול כאן מבלי לחוש שזהותם הישראלית היא זהות ששווה פחות, כזו שמתביישים בה.

יהודה עמיחי כתב: "הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁבּוֹ אָנוּ צוֹדְקִים, הוא רָמוֹס וְקֶשֶׁה" – חברה פלורליסטית, מעצם שמה, היא חברה שמאפשרת ומעודדת ריבוי דעות ומחשבה, כי סִפְקוֹת (וְאַהֲבוֹת) עוֹשִׂים אֶת הָעוֹלָם לְתַחוּם. כן, ישנה דרך שלאורה הולכים, אבל ישנה תפיסה ברורה וחדה כי ספקות הם הכרחיים – ישנן עוד דעות, עוד מסורות, עוד תרבויות. רק בעולם תחוח ולא במקום רמוס וקשה, תוכלנה הדעות והתפיסות הללו להמשיך לפרוח ולשגשג במרחב הציבורי. רק במקום שבו צומחים פרחים באביב – יוכלו תלמידים ותלמידות לפתח זהות שלמה ושווה. רק במקום שבו יש מפגש עם זהויות ותרבויות שונות יש אפשרות לספקות ולצמיחה, כי המפגש עם "טוב" של מישוהו אחר מחייב אותנו תמיד לשוב להרהר ולדון ב"טוב" שלנו.

1 שגיא, א. 1999. "על המתחים בין דתים לחילונים – בין שיח זכויות לשיח זהות". עין טובה – דוח-שיח ופולמוס בתרבות ישראל, ספר היובל לטובה אילן. הוצאת הקיבוץ המאוחד ונאמני תורה ועבודה. עמ' 408–430.

2 Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 25-73.

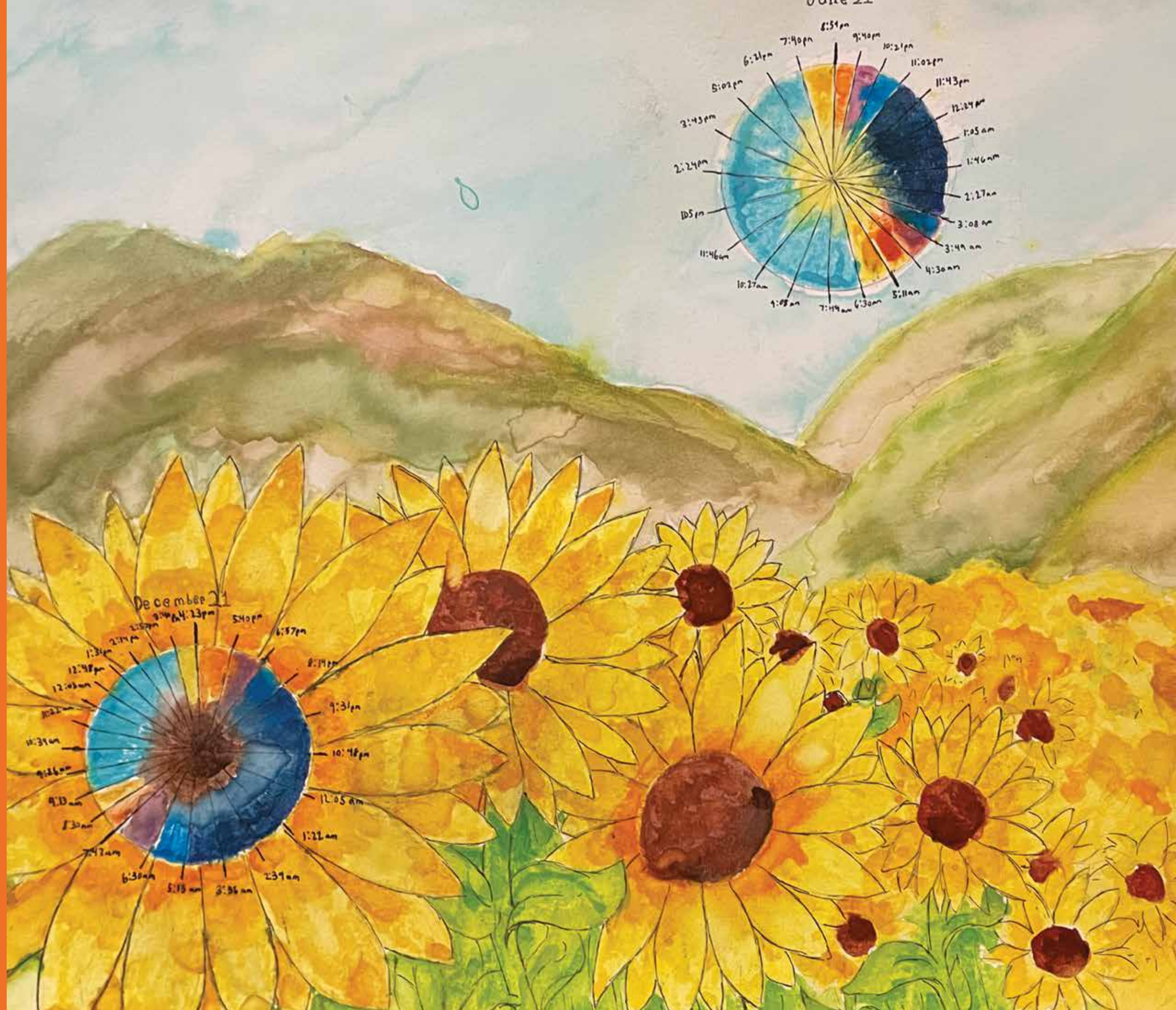
3 קמיר, א. 2005. "על פרשת דרכי כבוד – ישראל בין מגמות של חדרת כבוד (honor), כבוד סגולי (dignity) הילת כבוד (glory) וכבוד-מחיה (respect)". תרבות דמוקרטית, 169:9–239.

4 מרגלית, א. והלברטל, מ. 1998. "ליברליזם והזכות לתרבות". בתוך: מאוטנר, מ., שגיא, א. ושמיר, ר. (עורכים) רב תרבותיות במדינה דמוקרטית ויהודית (עמ' 93–105). תל אביב: הוצאת רמות – אוניברסיטת תל אביב.





# RECIPES AND CHOICES FOR LEARNING





I like that Heschel respects all Jewish traditions, teaches about the many different ways, and doesn't tell families what to do.

## Parenting and Jewish Schools

A PRESENTATION IN THREE GENERATIONS:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH DOBA GOODMAN BY DAUGHTER DVORA GOODMAN,  
ILLUSTRATED BY GRANDDAUGHTER MIRA EMERSON

The declaration of the *Shema* prayer is well-appreciated as being central to Judaism: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." Taken from the Torah's book of Devarim (Deuteronomy 6:4–9), the prayer continues:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. And you shall teach them diligently to your children. And you shall discuss them when you sit in your house, and when you travel on the road, and when you lie down and when you rise.

It follows that teaching our children well is fundamental to being Jewish parents. The instruction is to teach them about the traditions, history, and language of Judaism and all that forms part of their world. It means deep Jewish learning and high standards of excellence in universal knowledge.

The *Shema* prescribes the responsibility to parents who, today, often outsource the assignment to schools. Yet, if parents are partnering with a Jewish school to raise their Jewish child, the question of how to define roles does arise: What is the role of teachers at school and what is the role of parents at home?

I recently sat down with my mother and asked her how this partnership question played out for our family in terms of Jewish learning when she and my father looked for a day school for me back in the early 1980s.

**Q: Why did you choose to send your children to a Jewish day school?** Your dad and I both attended Jewish day schools as children and wanted ours to do so too. We knew that we would teach our children about how to live Judaism through our home practices, and so we sought a school that would provide a solid foundation in Jewish history and tradition, literacy in Jewish texts and sources, and an ease with the Hebrew language.

**Q: You raised us in an observant household, yet sent us to a secular Zionist school. Why this unusual decision?** In the early 1980s, Toronto Jewish day schools divided themselves between different Jewish community stances: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or secular. We wanted a school to provide Jewish learning as a complement to who we were and there wasn't one that matched exactly what we were doing at home. Even though our lifestyle was Shabbat observant, with a kosher home and synagogue participation, we chose a day school that avoided religion as an obligation but included tradition as something of great importance in Jewish life. We wanted our children's feelings about being Jewish to be comfortable, natural, and strong. We didn't want a school that promoted a vision of Jewish observance at odds with ours nor one that would teach its particular way of being Jewish as being the "right" way.

Our stand as parents was that our Jewish lifestyle reflected our personal choices even if they differed from the

practices of our children's friends. We planned to talk with our children when they were older about why we made our choices and convey that they would make their own choices as they grew up.

**Q: Back in the 1980s, the language of pluralism didn't exist in the Toronto Jewish day school landscape. Would things have been different had the option for pluralism been present?** I would have been a natural for an academically motivated school like Heschel with Jewish priorities being Hebrew literacy, a good grounding in text sources, and a sense of belonging to a non-homogenous Jewish group. I like that it respects all Jewish traditions, teaches about the many different ways, and doesn't tell families what to do.

I think I was coming to this non-judgmental preference as a contrast to my own Jewish education. Growing up in Montreal, my parents sent me to a school that matched the modern Orthodox lifestyle we practised at home, even though most students did not come from observant homes. What resulted was that my fellow students often rejected what was being taught at school, even going so far as ridiculing Jewish practices.

Their negative attitudes towards Judaism upset me, and I attributed some of this to the fact that Jewish practice was taught as something you have to do even if your family chose not to. Twenty or so years later, my husband and I wanted the opposite and sent our children to a non-religious school to avoid all triggers for antipathy to Jewish life. We wanted Jewish life to be something our children would love.

### Getting Back to Me

After talking with my mother, who had sought to complement a Jewish-centred family life, I started wondering what happens at a pluralistic school like Heschel when parents arrive with less of a foundation in Jewish practice. I imagined that Heschel-style pluralism works like a welcome mat and invites them to feel comfortable, explore, and make their own choices for their families.

Then I realized that, while true, it is not a laissez-faire situation. The warm Heschel welcome assumes reciprocity: diverse Jewish expressions are welcomed into an accepted shared practice. Just as commitment flows from the school to respect home practices as private, Heschel parents accept how Jewish observance and priorities work at the school. In both directions the messaging is wholehearted, not simply tolerant.

The method works for me and my family. What happens at school is simply the Heschelian way, not necessarily the best way, or the only way. I value Heschel's approach in providing solid academics along with a spiritual, and, dare I say, religious program while deferring to the individuality of each family's path. To me, a family's experience of Jewish spirituality in an open school culture of Jewish togetherness invites students and their parents to take their futures wherever they want.



# How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You

A PASSION FOR CHAROSET

BY DANI PLANT



Growing up with Russian Jewish parents was like living in a constant episode of *Seinfeld*, but with more borscht and guilt. My mother would constantly remind me that “in Latvia, you should just be grateful for the food on your plate!” while simultaneously pushing seconds of her homemade pierogies down my throat.

In Latvia my parents could not practise Judaism so we would combine different holiday traditions into one. To stay connected to their roots, they collected and melded Jewish bits and pieces wherever they could. If not for these holiday mash-ups, we would not have my mother’s famous Rosh Hashanah/Shavuot apple-cheese-blintz cake. The recipe sums up how Jewish holidays looked at our house and why, from a young age, I knew our traditions looked very different from those of my Canadian Jewish peers.

All this changed at the Seder table. Pesach was a revelation. It was where it became clear to me that Jewish food is nothing without the rituals and traditions to which it attaches. My sister was married when I was very young and, as far back as I can remember, I was privileged to sit at the Seder table with her new family. Our Seder was led first by my brother-in-law’s late grandfather, Sam Sable, then later by his late father, Martin Sable. At the Seder table my connection to Judaism solidified and meaning entered religion; I began to understand where I came from and who I was. Today, I feel genuinely blessed to be able to pass on these traditions to my own children. It is one of the gifts I am most proud to give them.

Seder food was my entree to Jewish rituals and traditions, and to the conversations about morals and ethics that make



My mom’s recipe was always sweet; a symbolic reminder that in every difficult situation a sweet lesson could be found.

our people unique and beautiful. Although the Seder is about order and tradition, one area lends itself to some creativity: *charoset*. At this particular table, guests brought their own *charoset* to share, all made differently but within a single heterogeneous culture built upon generations of hardship, sacrifice, and a deep current of love.

My mom’s recipe was always sweet; a symbolic reminder that in every difficult situation a sweet lesson could be found. During times of grief or illness, I have been able to tap into mom’s lessons of sweetness, finding it in the embrace of a dear friend or the patience to heal over time. The *charoset* always felt like the part of us that is “in repair,” truly exemplifying the meaning of bittersweet.

To me, *charoset* was simply a mixture of chopped apples, walnuts, cinnamon, and wine used during the Seder to remind us of the hard labour of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt. (And no, the irony of hard labour is not lost on me, given how most moms feel about the cleaning and cooking in the weeks before Pesach.)

My assumption that *charoset* was all about chunky apples and sweetness proved incorrect. Only the Ashkenazi recipe fits that profile. As this underrated chutney led me across the Jewish globe, a *charoset* recipe book began to evolve in my imagination that started to look like a Benetton ad from the 1990s: diverse and authentic to its roots.

A fellow parent explained to me that “Israeli *charoset*” is a cross between Ashkenazi and Sephardi recipes. It mixes the apples and walnuts of Eastern European *charoset* with the bananas, raisins, almonds, and pistachios that show up in many Sephardi or Mizrahi versions. It brings to mind the type of personal relationships I cherish most: when two things, equally meaningful, combine to create something unexpectedly magical.

Initially the *charoset* recipe most intriguing to me was

the Italian variation with its authentic use of native Italian ingredients such as chestnuts, pine nuts, and Marsala wine, rather than the regular sweet Manischewitz. Then I met the Persian *charoset* that diverted completely from everything I knew about *charoset*; it’s more of a relish that brings sweetness through an untraditional orange marmalade, uses the tartness of apple cider vinegar to cut that sweetness, and adds warmth and intense heat with cayenne pepper, cinnamon, and fresh ginger.

At this point in my *charoset* exploration I had seen *charoset* in the form of chutneys, pastes, and relishes, but then I met the Iraqi and Moroccan *charosets*. Both contain pulverized nuts and fruit bound together with thick syrup. While Iraqi *charoset* shows preference for date syrup (dates boiled down to a sweet syrup called *halek* or *silan*), the Moroccan recipe uses prunes for depth of flavour. Both arrive on the Seder table rolled into bite-sized balls.

Regardless of which type your family prefers, *charoset* is a staple and the unsung hero of the Pesach Seder plate. It’s the glue that holds the *matzah* and *maror* together, the yin to the horseradish’s yang, the apple to the cinnamon’s stick. There’s no denying its irresistible appeal. It is essentially the duct tape of Jewish cuisine—it can fix anything, even the taste of *matzah* on day six of Pesach. This may have something to do with the secret ingredient that makes every *charoset* recipe truly shine: love (and a healthy dose of wine).

This spring when you are in your kitchen preparing your own *charoset*, if you do find yourself overwhelmed, just remember the words of our ancestors: “This too shall pass... over.”

**Dani Plant** is a Heschel parent of two students. She has a culinary skills certificate from the George Brown School of Culinary Arts, and loves spending time experimenting in the kitchen.



So here you have it!  
A selection of Pesach-approved  
*charoset* recipes to feed your  
curiosity throughout the holiday.  
Whether you are a traditionalist  
or a modernist, prefer sweet or  
savory, smooth or chunky, east  
or west, there is a *charoset* for you.  
—Dani Plant



### Ashkenazi Charoset

3 medium Gala or Fuji apples peeled, cored, and finely diced  
1 ½ cups walnut halves or pieces coarsely chopped  
½ cup Manischewitz or sweet red wine  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp white or brown sugar  
**Directions:** Put all ingredients into a bowl and mix. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.

### Sephardic Charoset

2 cups pitted dates chopped  
1 banana chopped  
½ cup raisins  
¼ cup sweet red wine  
3 tbsp date syrup (*silan*) or honey  
½ cup walnut pieces  
½ cup unsalted shelled pistachios chopped  
½ cup almond pieces  
2 tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp allspice  
½ tsp ground ginger  
1 tsp cloves  
**Directions:** Put all ingredients into a blender or food processor and pulse until a chunky chutney consistency is formed. This can also be done by hand. Transfer into a bowl, cover, and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.

### Israeli Charoset

2 ½ cups Granny Smith apples (about 4 apples) chopped  
1 banana chopped  
½ cup raisins  
½ cup almond pieces  
¼ cup pistachios chopped  
¼ cup pecan pieces  
¼ cup red wine  
2 tbsp orange juice  
½ tsp cinnamon  
**Directions:** Put all ingredients into a bowl, mix, cover, and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.

### Italian Charoset

3 cups apple chopped (about 5 apples)  
2 cups boiled chestnuts peeled and chopped  
½ cup walnut pieces  
½ cup pitted dates chopped  
½ cup dried apricots chopped  
½ cup raisins  
1 small banana  
1 small seedless orange  
½ tsp cinnamon  
½ tsp cloves  
1 pear chopped  
¼ cup dried figs chopped  
¼ cup pine nuts  
½ cup Marsala wine  
**Directions:** Put all ingredients into a blender or food processor and pulse until a smooth paste is formed. Transfer into a bowl, cover, and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.

### Persian Charoset

1 cup dried apricots chopped  
1 cup chopped dates  
½ cup raisins  
1 cup shelled pistachio nuts chopped  
1 cup almonds chopped  
2 Granny Smith apples peeled, cored, and chopped  
⅔ cup sweet red wine  
¼ cup apple cider vinegar  
2 tsp fresh orange peel grated  
2 tsp finely chopped fresh ginger  
½ tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp cayenne pepper  
¾ cup orange marmalade  
**Directions:** Put all ingredients into a blender or food processor and pulse until a smooth paste is formed. Transfer into a bowl, cover, and refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.



### Moroccan Charoset Balls

2 cups dried prunes pitted  
1 cup pitted dates  
¼ cup raisins  
2 tsp cinnamon  
½ cup almonds  
½ cup honey  
2 tbsp sweet red wine (or grape juice)  
1 cup finely ground almond flour halved and ½ cup set aside  
**Directions:** Put all ingredients (except for ½ cup almond flour) into a food processor or blender and pulse until a smooth paste is formed. Once paste is formed, wet hands (mixture will be sticky) and roll into bite-sized balls. Once balls are formed, roll in reserved almond flour. Refrigerate balls for at least 4 hours (overnight is better) until set.

### Iraqi Charoset Balls

1 cup almonds  
2 cups walnuts  
½ cup date syrup (*silan*)  
**Directions:** Put nuts into a food processor or blender and pulse until completely finely chopped (almost to nut dust), slowly add date syrup until all comes together. Roll into balls. Refrigerate balls for a minimum of 4 hours before serving. Can be garnished with pomegranate seeds or syrup or can be made into dessert truffles by covering in chocolate.





# Another Freedom

HELPING OUR CHILDREN FEEL BEAUTIFUL

BY MEREDITH HERMAN LANDY

Sometimes we find the littlest things tell us so much. With Pesach on the horizon, the *charoset* that we eat at our Seders is one such example. It comes with multiple layers of meaning and reference. My research tells me that the word “*charoset*” derives from the Hebrew word “*cheres*,” which means clay, and evokes the hard work done by the Israelites while they were enslaved in Egypt. However, various sources connect the ingredients in *charoset*—wine and fruit—to the love and joy of the Song of Songs, evoking celebration and freedom. Rabba Sara Hurwitz describes *charoset* as a dual symbol of harshness and hope.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting on this, I am reminded of how psychologically and emotionally layered the Pesach deliverance story and the ongoing struggle for freedom really are.

As a psychologist and mother, I have been asked by thoughtful parents how they might support their children in developing a positive body image. It’s a crucial issue to consider, especially as research findings continue to show that the comparisons people make between their own bodies and the bodies of others are powerful, and that they make these

comparisons when looking at magazines, watching television, and browsing on social media.<sup>2</sup> Therapists and parents alike increasingly recognize the impact that externally set beauty standards can have on child development. Pesach offers a time for thought about how we can engage our children in finding their own sense of self-determination in how they feel about themselves.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, writing about Pesach, noted that freedom begins with what we teach our children.<sup>3</sup> In this spirit, we might mentor them to appreciate beauty in all its forms, unlimited and unencumbered by societal pressure towards arbitrary standards. We can share with them our personal appreciation of the beautifully vast and multidimensional diversity that comprises our world.

When we nurture a broad-minded concept of physical beauty, we are encouraging children to feel comfortable with their own appearance. To do this, we can overtly admire the various physical attributes of people who look different from one another. The concept of *B’tzelem Elohim*, that we are all made in the Divine Image (Genesis 1:26–27), can

teach children that part of what makes them beautiful is the uniqueness of their appearance. We can also cultivate their appreciation for variation in nature. For example, we can talk about how incredible it is that there are so many different families of butterflies, each distinct with their own mesmerizing colours and intricate patterns. Our tradition instils our sense of awe through the blessings we say when we encounter a beautiful tree, animal, or person.

It also works to expand a child’s concept of beauty by using the word “beautiful” to refer to things other than physical appearance, such as ideas, works of art, and acts of kindness. Highlighting and admiring remarkable contributions made through impactful ideas, loving gestures, and deeds of courage demonstrate that what we do in the world is the most praiseworthy and the results of those contributions are the most enduring. Describing life-cycle events such as births, weddings, and even funerals as beautiful teaches children how we treasure our lives and precious milestones. When we continually revisit the stories of individuals who lived their lives well, we communicate that much more matters in life than how we look.

Meanwhile, the way we eat at home creates a culture that links inextricably to our children’s developing body images. The joy of food can foster a constructive relationship with eating that is free of indicators that favour restrictive eating and fad diets.<sup>4</sup> The association of food with positive experiences and emotions is an important part of developing a healthy relationship with eating. We can spread positive messages while celebrating holidays and enjoying festive foods, such as *sufganiyot* on Chanukah and cheesecake on Shavuot. When we encourage children to explore the full variety of foods that their families enjoy, we are communicating that eating is a normal, healthy, and joyful part of life. Through a focus on pleasure instead of restriction, children develop the confidence to trust their own bodies’ hunger and satiety cues, and let those prompts guide their eating.

How we interact personally with our children about their bodies is formative. There are many ways in which we directly shape our child’s body image. Are we critical of how they look or dress? Do we disregard their insecurities? Do we compare them to others? Do we comment on their weight? Children want their parents to think they are beautiful. It is powerful for children to be told this by their parents directly so they are not left wondering. Simple statements such as “I love you exactly as you are” or “I love everything about you” go a long way in helping children believe that they do not

need to change anything about themselves in order to feel our love for them.

Encouraging children to feel good in their clothing supports their developing sense of self-worth. When we draw their attention to the connection between the clothing they are wearing and how they feel in it, we are helping them to consider the impact that their clothing may have on their sense of ease in the moment, and we are communicating that everyone deserves to feel good about themselves. We can do this with statements such as “That outfit is so sophisticated. How are you feeling about wearing it to your *bat mitzvah*?” or “Fun shoes! Do they put you in the mood to celebrate?” By introducing children to style as an expression of themselves and a way to prepare for a special occasion, we help them develop a positive relationship with their bodies. Learning to connect how they present themselves with how they feel is a valuable lesson and skill that can help them weather changes their bodies will undergo during their life, be it puberty, pregnancy, age, illness, or injury.

We live in exciting times. While we still encounter seemingly endless images of unrealistic beauty standards, lately we also see heartening counterexamples that celebrate true beauty. I sense an emerging appreciation for authentic beauty, a turning away from stereotypes that constrain and towards more human and natural depictions. On Pesach we contemplate the harsh words of slavery and the sweetness of redemption; if we are intentional about the messages we send to the children in our lives—how we define beauty, how we speak, our relationship to food—we can empower them to break free from narrow standards and celebrate themselves as the beautiful individuals they are.

*Chag sameach!*

1 Rabba Sara Hurwitz, “*Charoseth: Harshness and Hope*,” The Shalom Centre, retrieved February 14, 2023, <https://theshalomcenter.org/purim-to-pesach/charoseth-harshness-and-hope>.

2 Federica Pedalino and Anne-Linda Camerini, “Instagram Use and Body Dissatisfaction: The Mediating Role of Upward Social Comparison with Peers and Influencers among Young Females,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2022), p. 1543. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8834897/>.

3 Jonathan Sacks, “Passover Tells Us: Teach Your Children Well,” April 17, 2011, The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, <https://www.rabbisacks.org/archive/passover-tells-us-teach-your-children-well/>.

4 Kathryn Graff Low et al., “Internalization of the Thin Ideal, Weight and Body Image Concerns,” *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2003), pp. 81–90, <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2003.31.1.81>.

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There are many ways in which parents directly shape a child’s body image.



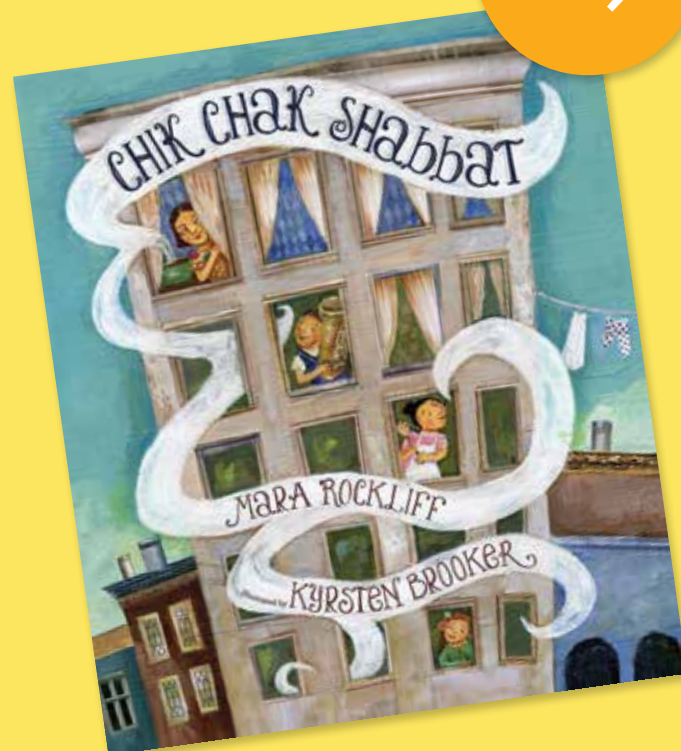
# Good Books

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM

BY GAIL BAKER & TZIPORAH COHEN

*Chik Chak Shabbat*, by Mara Rockliff and illustrated by Kyrsten Brooker (Candlewick Press, 2014)

Cholent! Its yummy smell permeates every week on Shabbat day, from Goldie Simcha's stove in apartment 5-A throughout the building, where a diverse cast of residents follows it to join Goldie at her table for lunch. Goldie tells the gathering about her grandmother's Shabbat preparations, all done "busy-busy, hurry-hurry...chik chak!" Her guests debate which ingredient makes her cholent so delicious. Is it the tomatoes or the barley? The potatoes or the beans? But Goldie insists that the taste of cholent is not in the individual components, but the combination. One Saturday, however, no delicious aroma spreads throughout the building, as Goldie was too sick the day before to get the cholent on the stove. Her neighbours come to the rescue chik chak, bringing potato curry, Korean barley tea, pizza, and beans and rice—foods from their own cultures—to Goldie's table, where she declares that it tastes "exactly like Shabbat." The message is one that goes beyond tolerance to inclusion, for the better of all involved.

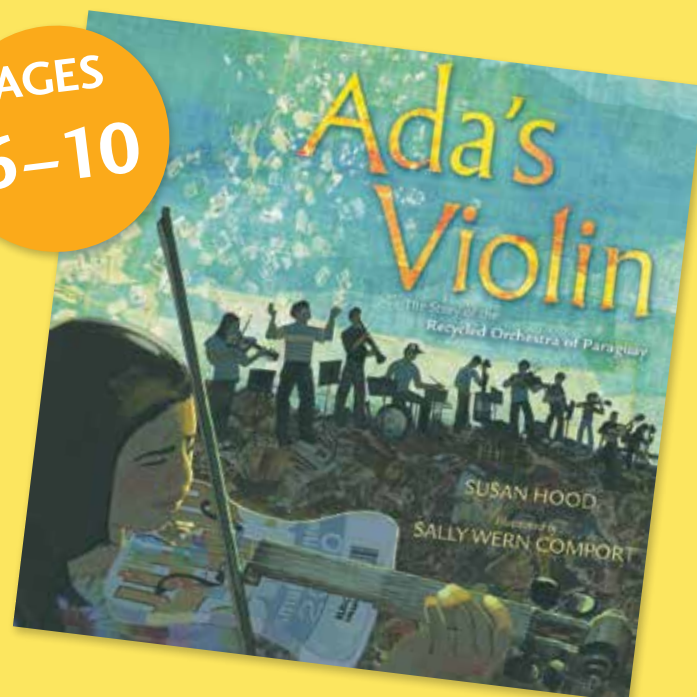


AGES  
3-7

*Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay*, by Susan Hood and illustrated by Sally Wern Comport (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016)

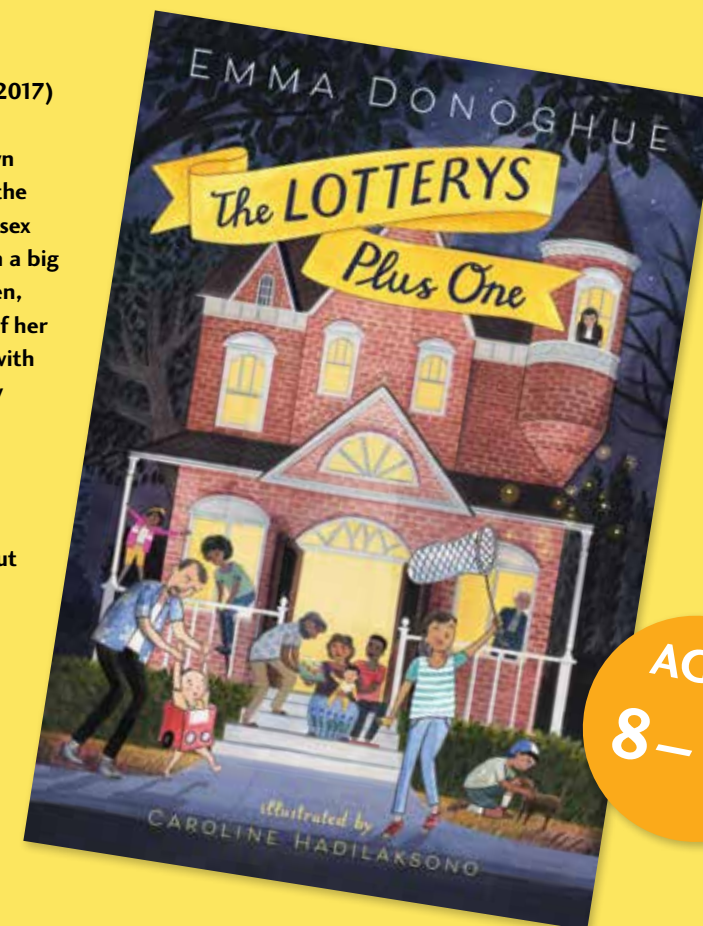
From the opening lines and collage illustrations that evoke recycled materials, we are drawn into this captivating and remarkable non-fiction story of the recycled orchestra of Paraguay. Ada and her family live beside a landfill. Most people in this impoverished community scrape by as they comb through the trash looking for materials to sell. When music teacher Favio Chavez comes to town to give the community's children music lessons, there are not enough instruments to go around. He enlists community members to make instruments from materials found in the dump, and after much experimentation, the recycled orchestra is born. "With her violin, Ada could close her eyes and imagine a different life." Word of this Recycled Orchestra spreads and soon they are invited to give concerts nationally and internationally, with money earned returning to the community to build safer homes. Through this innovative endeavour, the children in this narrative find hope and build their resilience.

AGES  
6-10



*The Lottery's Plus One*, by Emma Donoghue and illustrated by Caroline Hadilaksono (HarperCollins Publishers, 2017)

The first full-length novel (336 pages) for children by well-known novelist Emma Donoghue delights the reader with the story of the Lotterys, an eclectic, multi-racial family consisting of two same-sex couples, seven kids, and a variety of pets who all live together in a big Victorian house in Toronto. Sumac, the fifth of the seven children, loves everything about her family, chaos and all. But then one of her grandfathers, recently diagnosed with dementia, comes to live with them, and suddenly the house feels crowded. Gramps is grumpy and disapproving of the family's diversity and environmentally conscious lifestyle, and finds much to complain about. For her part, Sumac is ungracious about giving up her bedroom for her grandfather and resistant to the other changes that the family must make to adapt to the elderly man's needs. It's a story about differences, commonalities, and the compromises we must all make to live together successfully in today's world.



AGES  
8-12

AGES  
10-12



*A Place at the Table*, by Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan (Clarion Books, 2020)

A collaboration by two authors, one Muslim and the other Jewish, inspires the main characters in this unique story. Sixth graders Sara, a Muslim girl whose parents emigrated from Pakistan, and Elizabeth, a Jewish girl whose mother emigrated from Great Britain, find themselves in an after-school cooking class taught by Sara's mother. Sara, an angry and reluctant participant who wishes she could be back in her small Islamic school, endures racism from her classmates, while Elizabeth struggles with changing friendships, her father's frequent travels, and her mother's depression. Eventually the girls bond, entering a cooking contest where they create a new dessert by combining ingredients from both of their heritages. Sara and Elizabeth discover that in their friendship they can both maintain their individual identities and also create something new, just like in their new recipe.

Gail Baker is an educator, mother, and grandmother. She co-founded The Toronto Heschel School in 1996 and retired in 2014 as Head of 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.



# INSPIRING CURIOSITY



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