

ON TRUTH, TRADITION, AND RESPECT IN JEWISH EDUCATION

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Our approach to Jewish education must undergo a profound change in order to assume its role as society's agent for transmitting Jewish values and beliefs. Our purpose is not to continue a given tradition, but rather to empower our students to build upon the past and help shape the future. This requires a greater use of extra-textual bodies of knowledge, a respectful attitude to our youth, and a formalizing of the field of informal Jewish education.

In the summer of 1992 I was asked to lead a group of American Jewish teenagers from Camp Ramah in Israel. As a young Israeli tour guide and Jewish educator, I was eager for the opportunity to present the Jewish homeland to these Jewish teens.

During our second visit to the Kotel—the Western Wall—I was approached by one of my group members, who simply stood by my side and shared a moment of reflection. When we started discussing some of the aspects of our trip, he shared his views of what he had seen so far. I was listening carefully, trying to appreciate a new world that looked at “my Israel” from a completely different perspective. Indeed, I believed very strongly that Israel is his as much as it is mine—by the virtue of Jewishness alone—yet at the same time I was still slightly overwhelmed by the fresh, unfamiliar spectrum of insights that he had presented to me.

The moment that followed will stay with me forever. The young teenager looked at me and

suddenly asked: “Have you ever been to the Kotel for the first time?” Quite baffled, I asked “What do you mean?” He continued, “I’ve been waiting many years for this moment, to come and see the Wall, but for you it had always been there. Have you ever seen it for the first time?”

I found myself at a loss for words. He was absolutely right. He had encapsulated a concept that was new to me; I had never been to the Kotel for the first time. I will never be to the Kotel for the first time. This young man, a Jew from the United States, has gone through an experience that is forever beyond my reach. There I was, an Israeli Jew, left only with my desire to try and experience this first time through his eyes. Right then and there I got a first glimpse into the potential beauty that lies within the concept of diversity. Sometimes, I thought to myself, a visitor to your home can be your best tour guide. At that moment, I met education eye to eye, grasping for a split second its captivating touch.

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This article examines the philosophies and practices that form the contemporary Jewish approach to education. My analysis of Jewish sources yielded the following key points:

- The reduction in American culture of being Jewish to a formulaic set of religious behaviors has robbed our community, and our

youth in particular, of the opportunity to encounter Judaism as a living, dynamic philosophy of life. In parallel fashion, the reduction of Tradition (with a capital “T”) to practices that rabbis decreed in the distant past robs our community and our youth of the opportunity to experience themselves as crucial voices within an ongoing living tradition (with a small “t”).

- We are not here to transmit or continue a given Tradition; we are here to engage in a passionate and knowledgeable exploration of the past for the betterment of our present and as a model for our future. We are here to build that tradition into what it can become in the next century. "We" is every Jew who is willing to learn and assume the responsibility of joining the eternal dialogue that shapes the Jewish milieu. Acknowledging the difference between the terms "Judaism"—an *abstract* point of reference that allows a certain sense of unity between Jews—and "Jewishness"—the *actual concept* that allows each Jew an individual approach to Jewish life and as part of the community—allows a much broader and flexible approach to our Jewish past Tradition and to the Jewish present traditioning. This article illustrates how such an approach diffuses some of the fear and apologetics that accompany contemporary encounters with Tradition.
- The concept of education must undergo a profound change if it is to assume its role as society's agent for the transmission of Jewish values and beliefs from one generation to another. Such a change requires the following four elements:
 1. A thorough examination of the differences between educating and teaching or instructing
 2. A deeper understanding of the extra-textual bodies of knowledge and their central role in Jewish educational settings
 3. A respectful approach to our youth, namely our obligation to listen to their views of Jewish life and their requests for more relevant models of education
 4. A thorough examination of the differences between past Jewish Tradition, present Jewish traditions, and the relationship between the two
- A close analysis of the concepts "formal" and "informal" reveals a need to put aside the artificial dichotomy between them, a

dichotomy that is taken as a given in the field of Jewish education today. By acknowledging the crucial role of informal philosophies and educational models in both informal and formal settings, this article argues in favor of formalizing the field of informal education, both philosophically and institutionally.

JEWISH EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION

Education has always been a fundamental value of the Jewish people. The need to know and to reveal profound meanings about life has led Jews—individuals and communities alike—on a passionate path, a mixture of wrestling and believing (hence the name *Yisrael*, which means wrestling with God; Genesis 32:29), and an admirable reliance on past wisdom as transmitted through tradition. The powerful image of the *wandering Jew* is surpassed only by that of the *wondering Jew*. Just as wonderment is derived from constant questioning and an insatiable thirst for knowledge and well-being, the very word "Torah" is derived from the verb *Hora'ah*—showing/presenting a way.

Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Shulchan Aruch* dictates: "[You must] appoint teachers in each and every city, and a city that does not have a teacher is to be excommunicated until it appoints a teacher. If it still does not [obey], it is [to be] destroyed, for the whole world does not exist but for the words that emanate from students' {lit. "toddlers who learn"} mouths" (*Yoreh De'ah* 245:12). Elsewhere, Karo claims that learning is even more sacred than prayer: "One is not allowed to talk in a House of Learning but only on [issues related to] Torah study. Even should one sneeze [in a House of Learning], you must not [stop from learning] to bless them, for the sacredness of a House of Learning exceeds that of a Synagogue" (*Yoreh De'ah* 246:17).

In a paradoxical manner, Jewish thought not only allows for critical thinking but actually encompasses the search for meaning at its very core. By attempting to find the challenges within Jewish life, one has already engaged in a deeply Jewish mind-set. It is within this

closed-circuit yet infinite Jewish conceptual frame that I explore the idea of education.

Yet when education enters our personal and professional arenas, we still stand baffled. For whereas education's conceptual value stands without challenge, its deeper purport and practical relevance to our daily lives remain unclear. As such, we Jews are no different from our surrounding culture: "Education has become rather like the kingdom of heaven in former times," says Peters (1973, p. 82). "It is both within us and amongst us, yet it also lies ahead. The elect possess it and hope to gather in those who are not yet saved. But what on earth it is, is seldom made clear."

Indeed, as suggested by H.A. Alexander (1985), some of the conceptual paradigms regarding education do cross religious, ethnic, and philosophical boundaries. Education, as a concept, cannot be appreciated fully from a solely Jewish perspective. One who looks at more recent accounts within a Jewish context will find them in agreement with Peters' sentiment: "One can talk easily of spiritual needs or of educational deficits in the abstract," notes Leonard Fein (1998, p. 113), "But when it come[s] down to cases, we are dealing with a community in which there is simply no prevailing consensus on the definitions of our spiritual needs or an appropriate curricula for our educational efforts." Elazar (1995, p. 91) asserts, "In a free society, the Jewish community cannot live within fixed boundaries confining all (or virtually all) of those born Jews and perforce encouraging them to organize to meet their communal needs." If indeed that is the case, how are we—academics and practitioners alike—to follow Arthur Green's (1987, p. 39) call to "transcend and become once again a spiritual wellspring that can provide nourishment for a people's life?"

In the tradition of the Nahuatl-speaking Aztec of Mexico, the ideal purpose of education is to "find one's face, find one's heart... a search for a 'foundation,' a truth, a support, a way of life and work through which one could express one's life" (Cajete, 1998, p. 35). Such a definition surely overlaps with many Jewish philosophies of education. Therefore, be-

cause one cannot perceive education from a purely Jewish angle, it may serve us better to explore Jewish thinking about education, relying on rich and diverse Jewish literature and traditions, yet without excluding education as a universal value.

An approach that focuses primarily on *academic* thinking also does not fully serve our purpose. At its core, education is an art of passion and love, a field that should not attempt to be objective, for there is nothing objective, about the human spirit. The Shema declares, "You shall *love* the Lord your G-d" (Deuteronomy 6:5), and not "You shall analyze the Lord your G-d." Eisner refers to education as "[more of] a fine art than an applied science" (quoted in Alexander, 1985, p. 28). Arthur Green, while asserting that "scholarship is not enough," defines Jewish learning as having a "devotional character" (1987, p. 28), whereas Joseph Schwab reminds us, "Real-life educational situations are too complex to be adequately captured within the confines of social scientific theory. Theory is abstract; it is a simplification of reality. Educational practice... must confront actual students and teachers in all of their complexity" (quoted in Alexander, 1985, p. 28).

Therefore, we need to articulate a coherent and substantial theory of the nature(s) and meaning(s) of education, its goals and development, without losing sight of our obligation to be pragmatic and above all hands-on and creative.

"THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM— ACQUIRE WISDOM" (PROVERBS 4:7)

"Education...encompasses a variety of ways in which the adult population transmits its traditions to its youth" (Aron, 1989, p. 32). Those traditions however, cannot merely manifest themselves in behavioral forms, i.e., coherent and well-defined individual and communal actions or activities. Tradition is a much broader concept that deals with a complex array of *individual* insights, *social/communal* norms, and, people's desire to identify on both levels. Traditions, therefore, deal with a rich and diverse culture. Aron's term "enculturation,"

which “depends upon authentic encounters with a culture in all its richness and complexity” (1989, p. 34), serves better to describe the fuller potential of a healthy educational process.

Throughout history the debate over Judaism’s meaning has touched every corner of Jewish living, starting with the minute practices of daily life, extending through the re-evaluation of Jewish social, political, and religious laws and institutions, and reaching the highest levels of Jewish philosophy, theology, and mysticism. Any attempt to enter an intelligent dialogue over the meaning of the contemporary Jewish milieu, and education’s role in it, can proceed only if “those engaged in it are knowledgeable about the diverse literature and learning of our people over time” (Dershowitz, 1996, p. 293). However, those engaged in such dialogue also need to understand that literature and learning are a result of a living entity called the Jewish people—an entity that has never been frozen in time, but has adapted to and adopted from the world *without compromising its uniqueness*.

JUDAISM DOESN’T TALK; JEWISH PEOPLE DO!

Absolutism vs. Relativism, Community vs. Individualism: Is There a Conflict?

Anyone experienced in Jewish educational circles knows Judaism is a term frequently used, but without much clarity. However, there is general agreement that, in the quest for such a meaning, Jewish sources play a central role.

The Torah opens by presenting the Divine as the primal and ultimate cause of creation, whereas Pirkei Avot features the Divine as the primal cause of Jewish life within creation’s “infinite confinements”: “Moses received Torah at Sinai” (1.1). Under such a premise, the Divine word—being ultimate—proclaims absolute sentiments and objectivity as its immediate attributes. G-d, the only conceivable ONE, is completely beyond the scopes of relativism, or subjectivity. The Jews, on their part, need to acknowledge the Divine and their *brit* (covenant) with G-d and act upon this covenant,

each according to his or her ability and while combining intellect and tradition, reason and emotions (Ibn Paquda, 1996, p. 26). These meditations and practices can, arguably, be referred to as Judaism.

Yet, while still acknowledging the absolute reign of the Divine, Jewish sources constantly remind us both of our own mortality (“you are a human and not a G-d”—Ezekiel 28:2,9) and our communal existence as a *Kehillah Kedoshah* (“You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”—Exodus 19:6). When we declare “Hear O Israel, The Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One,” we affirm both the communal aspect that is intrinsically embodied in Jewish life and G-d’s absolute Oneness. As social mortals, relativism is an immediate attribute to our collective search for meaning and the attempted journey toward the Divine source. Absolute notions, at most, are confined to the individual’s inner, intimate, and most sacred appreciation of the Divine. As noted by Lawrence Kushner (1993, p. 16), “All true theology must finally be personal.”

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik addresses the concept of individualism within a communal existence, noting that there are two types of *kedushah* (sanctity) in Jewish life: social sanctity, which means “that each individual Jew possesses *kedushah* because he or she is a member of the Jewish community,” and individual sanctity, which means that “the individual Jew is the direct recipient of *kedushah* according to his or her own unique personal endowments, efforts, and achievements.” Individual sanctity, he notes, “adds a personalistic element, a sanctification specific to the individual and unlike that found in anyone else” (Epstein, 1994, pp. 101–102).

In such a reality, the Jew is required to find balance; one part speaks to our collective psyche and soul, declaring “Blessed be HaShem, the G-d of Israel, the only one who is truly one...” (Ibn Paquda, 1996, p. 3). The other part empowers our uniqueness and particularity by saying that “The Divine wisdom has necessitated that G-d will create on the earth not angels, but human beings, of flesh and blood, who will have different forces of nature

colliding within them and different attributes in dispute" (Yehuda HaLevi, *The Kuzari*).

There is a definite tension between the word of the Divine absolute One and the communal, hence relativistic nature of its human echo. Eisen (1989, pp. 24–25) recognizes this tension: "All claims to truth do strike us as suspicious." While affirming relativism's positive role as a fundamental gate-keeper for the honest, seeking mind, Eisen does not overlook the uncomfortable challenges relativism presents to Jews who are educated in the secular world, as they try to weigh it against the absolute sentiments conveyed by Jewish Tradition: "A person committed to Judaism cannot help but be disturbed by this pervasive relativism," he writes, "for the Jewish tradition, despite the enormous diversity it contains, is united in the belief that (I quote Martin Buber, far from an Orthodox Jew!) 'there is truth and there are lies...there is right and [there is] wrong'" (Eisen, 1989, p. 25).

Our sources declare what has been profoundly experienced by Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers throughout the ages: There is an inverse relationship between one's experiential proximity to the Divine and one's ability to share an appreciation of that experience. The closer one gets to absolute truths, the less one can articulate, let alone share, one's findings: "Utter silence is your glorification," says Psalms (65:2), and "Silence will honor the wise" dictates the Palestinian Talmud (Pesachim 67b). When one tries to approach Judaism, therefore, one encounters a transparent yet firm wall, for Judaism cannot but echo through the Jewish people and their complex interactions with G-d. "The God I know," says Arthur Green (1991, p. 34), "is a Divinity that cannot act or be realized in the human world at all except through human actions."

When such human actions take place, when Jews interact, when they engage in dialogue, truths must become relative, for experience and knowledge shared are subject to challenge. That premise had led Jewish thinkers and leaders to declare that "the Torah speaks the language of humans," affirming individuals' articulations and understandings of the Torah as its focal and functional meanings.

The relativistic nature of the human quest for truth allows each Jew a new and potentially exciting encounter with Jewish Tradition. From this perspective one can acknowledge each Jew's inherently unique approach to Jewish life while recognizing uniqueness as complementary, not contradictory, to the Jewish communal aspect.

Fein (1998, p. 111) perceives Judaism as "the stories of the Jewish people, the stories we have received that are an amalgam of our texts and of the ways in which a hundred generations of Jews have lived...that incorporate an element that is passed on from generation to generation—call it, if you will, the mind or the soul or the spirit of the Jews." Living Jews, sharing their relative parts of the Divine with each other, are at the very core of Jewish evolution. Judaism in the abstract, therefore, cannot be the key to our contemporary challenge. It is the Jewish people, their stories, dynamics, and present dialogue that will open the door. For this reason, Chazan declares, "The narratives and lives of the Jewish people are an exciting arena in which ideologies get played out. For educators, Jews and their Jewishness are of great interest and relevance" (Personal communication, 1999).

Therefore, our educational efforts and conscious emphasis should be targeted at the people who breathe life into Judaism every day, the ones who think, speak, and live it. By shifting our focus toward real Jews instead of abstract Judaism, we allow a healthier and more positive understanding of the Jewish world and invite greater participation in its riches.

PLURALISM: DIVERSITY, RIVALRY, AND THE DANGER OF TIMIDITY

Any kind of a conceptual or practical monopoly is quite foreign to the American (and Jewish-American) way of life. Likewise, approaches that try to dictate a desirable Jewish lifestyle and identity are slowly becoming irrelevant from a community perspective. Elazar (1995, p. 161) points out that "[the] effort to impose community discipline failed because the voluntary character of American society means that, to survive, the congregation had

to bend more than the individuals." In that respect, the dilemma posed by Dov Rappel, an education professor at Bar-Ilan University, seems classic: "Do we need to educate for a homogeneous foundation in order to secure a people's existence, or should we primarily educate for an individual independence, diversity, and the ability to confront wide differences?" (Agassi & Rappel, 1979, p. 70).

Today's reality demands the articulation of means by which different Jewish needs can be accommodated. Jewish history has never known such an overwhelming and deep diversity as has existed in the last 150 years. Further, it is a modern phenomenon for Jews to challenge the core beliefs of Jewish life, without seeing such challenges as detrimental to Jewish identity. Here, again, such diversity should be seen in its correct and honest historical context and as a powerful standard for a meaningful educational process. In order to confront such a deep diversity and expose its positive potential, we first need to overcome two main obstacles that the diversity almost inevitably creates.

Diversity and Rivalry

Accompanying diversity is the fear that any given individual or group will lose something of value as a result of interaction with a different individual or group. In one of the summer camps I worked at, the director launched a program that brought together Jewish teens from moderately affiliated backgrounds with Orthodox teens from a nearby camp. While preparing for the program, before the Orthodox teens' arrival, some of the moderately affiliated campers shared a sense of fear, resentment, and defensiveness regarding the expected interaction. Some shared the feelings of not being "Jewish enough," while others worried or thought about negative confrontations that might accompany the encounter. Such fear should be addressed in the educational process, and an effort to present the virtues of the other side—the possibility of gaining something of value as a result of such interaction—should be introduced consciously and thoughtfully.

Using Simon Herman's terminology, one could call such feelings the fear of being "marked off." However, Herman (1989, p. 40) himself suggests that although "marking off is often accompanied by discriminatory action, this need not necessarily be so. An acceptance of, and respect for the differences between the groups which comprise it, is clearly of the essence in a truly democratic and pluralistic society."

The Danger of Timidity in the Face of Diversity and Pluralism

In many of the educational programs I have conducted, the prevailing response to the question, "What does being Jewish mean to you?" was, "It is a *feeling*." When I tried to push the participants further, many could not articulate or translate that feeling into a clear philosophy or even a practical commitment. However, many of them found much comfort in the terms "diversity" and "pluralism" as legitimizing their ambiguous notions and protecting them from any need to further explore these ambiguities: "I can feel whatever I want and no one can tell me I'm not Jewish" is one way of putting it. One of the potential limitations or hazards of diversity and pluralism is the collapse of any coherent conceptual or pragmatic frame that integrates different individual tendencies and allows their healthy communal implementation.

Our desire to accommodate a diverse community in a pluralistic reality should not lead us to fear any form of boundary making; there is a profound difference between seeing Jewish life, on the one hand, as consisting of many angles, thus allowing a fascinating and positive exploration of a rich and complex culture, and seeing Jewish life, on the other hand, as a complete abstract that relies solely on obscure and primeval matters of the heart. Being Jewish has a tremendous emotional value, yet such a value should not be used as an excuse for a lack of Jewish literacy, intellectual and emotional investment, or communal commitment. "Judaism is a feeling" may be meaningful only up to a point; after all, one can make a strong cup of tea or a weak one, but one cannot be taken

seriously merely by looking at a cup of hot water and declaring it to be tea based on feelings alone. This level of timidity—conceptually legitimized by the misinterpretation of diversity and pluralism—should be on our minds as an important objective to be dealt with by Jewish education.

ILLITERACY AS A POTENTIAL POSITIVE GATE TOWARD INVOLVEMENT

As educators, we need to acknowledge that lack of Jewish literacy and learning is not an exclusively modern phenomenon. Ezra, one of the leaders of the Jewish people after the return from the Babylonian empire in the 6th century BCE, used to appear every Monday and Thursday in the marketplace, conduct public Torah readings, and familiarize the people with the text and its crucial importance to their lives. Some of Judaism's most prominent literature came about as immediate responses to popular lack of knowledge: Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and *Guide to the Perplexed*, Aharon Zalhad's *Sefer Ha-Chinuch*, and Yosef Karo's *Shulchan Aruch* are a few examples.

Lack of knowledge, therefore, can also present a wealth of opportunities for *creativity* and potential *progress*. This awareness has crucial educational potential. By presenting a historically sound and honest picture of Jewish life, where lack of knowledge has always been a challenge, we diffuse some of the apologetics that many of our students use in their approach toward Jewish learning and present a venue where the mere acknowledgment of such ignorance can become a tremendously positive door for true and self-motivated learning.

One of the core roles of education is to allow one to view one's Jewish illiteracy as a *positive starting point*. Believing that any Jew can aspire for knowledge of Jewish tradition leads to a positive attitude and a desire to take part in such learning; in contrast, believing that Judaism lies solely in the hands of those who have the literary and practical knowledge leads to alienation, apologetics, and timidity.

W.C. Helmbold, in his introduction to Plato's *Gorgias*, cites the poet A.E. Housman, saying, "It may be... that the passion for truth is the faintest of human emotions (1985, p. 8). I beg to differ: I believe that a genuine thirst for knowledge is embodied in the human experience. I have seen countless teens (and adults) who wished for exciting and pleasurable learning opportunities, the kind that would expose them to the beauty of inner discoveries, and in conjunction with the wealth of accumulative wisdom passed from past generations and times.

According to the "Survey of Jewish Adolescents" conducted by the Adolescence Task Force of the Minneapolis Federation for Jewish Service's Continuity Commission, "Jewish adolescents report that they care deeply about being Jewish and about Jewish causes" (Herring & Leffert, 1997, p. 9). Similarly, a recent study of Jewish teens in the Boston area showed that close to 80 percent of the seventh- to ninth-graders responded that it is "very important/essential" to find meaning in life. However, only 36 percent of those seventh- to ninth-graders believed "finding meaning in life through Jewishness" to be "very important/essential," and only 35 percent of the tenth- to twelfth-graders found "Jewishness" to be the answer to their probing and deep questions (Saxe et al., in press).

Taking into account the ambivalence that may characterize adolescents' responses to such profound questions, these findings raise four important points:

1. Our youth have a definite desire to learn and a need to search for higher and deeper meaning in their lives.
2. The search for meaning, or the acknowledgment of its importance, starts at a relatively early age.
3. Jewishness is not seen as an obvious, immediate, or relevant tool in the search for a deeper and more meaningful way of life.
4. The older Jewish adolescents become, the greater their interest in finding meaning in life, yet the lesser their perception of Jewishness as a potential and relevant answer to their search.

The above findings present a clear and quite powerful reality: It is not students we are lacking, for their cry is surely there. "Are we really listening to their cry?" and "Are we responding in a sensitive and effective manner?" are two of the serious questions at hand.

Herring and Leffert (1997, p. 8) conclude, "Adult members of the Jewish community may not want to listen to adolescents' reports of Jewish feelings, their anticipated behaviors and their involvement in Jewish activities because it makes us uncomfortable or anxious about the Jewish future." This lack of comfort can be partially attributed to the fact that adults simply do not perceive youth as serious partners in the educational process. Most perceive a clear division between adults and teens, as each generation stands in the opposite corner of the "educational line." Adults educate, whereas the young are educated. Any other philosophy, which may present to the adults a more fluid division between the generations and their respective role in the educational process, will therefore be considered a challenge, if not a clear threat. Even under the current philosophy, while we may believe we are educating, in reality, we do little more than informing, training, and instructing. All of these are very far from the original intent of the term "education."

To further explore adults' anxiety or discomfort in the face of listening to the young, let us examine a common English translation of this verse from Proverbs 22:6: "Train a lad in the way he [she] ought to go..." This fascinating verse, the only one in the Bible to use the term *khinukh* in relation to people, presents a powerful challenge. Why not translate it as "Educate according to his [her] own way," as written in the original Hebrew? Could it be since "the way he or she ought to go" suggests that someone, namely the adult, knows the way and hence has the authority to "train" the young? Such an approach invests power in the adults' hands, keeping them most relevant and necessitating their active control of the act of "training up." However, training and educating are worlds apart!

In contrast, translating the verse as "according to his or her own way," which is truer

to the original Hebrew, suggests a much more independent road to be articulated by the young, with the adult empowering, listening, suggesting, warning, or supporting. The main role of adults is thus creating appropriate educational environments to support youth on their own way to becoming educated.

If the common English translation were accurate, there would have been no need to use the rare verb *khinukh*. The much more common root, *torah*—teach/instruct—would have served well. After all, the name of our *Torah* is derived from this root, and the Bible features many examples where the verb *moreh*—teach—is used. Why, then, *khinukh*?

The answer lies in the immediate connection between this verb and the following words, "according to his or her own way." Education embodies the inner search of each young person for deeper meanings, according to his or her own unique and special views. Moreover, it is a road to be taken by youth themselves. Therefore, the educational process should raise young people's awareness of their right to discover inner meanings, while adults empower their unique way toward that discovery.

The literal meaning of the verse in Proverbs 22:6 therefore demands that adults relinquish much of their power and re-invest it in youth. That is indeed a scary thought at first, since we, the adult world, cannot fathom, let alone accept, allowing our children to make autonomous decisions and follow their own way, passions, aspirations, and hopes. We may talk about it, suggest it as lip service, or even wish for it in our dreams. Yet we simply find it too troubling to grapple with as a genuine philosophy and a practical realization. The irony that arises here is both powerful and painful: For the sake of Judaism's future survival, we overlook the very ones who will determine that future, our own children. In such a case, with whose survival are we truly concerned?

The life-cycle seems to position each generation in the midst of two opposing world views. The middle generation sees the older generation as conservative and old-fashioned, perpetuating the need to rebel against it. At the same time, this middle generation comes to regard the younger generation as rebellious

against its wisdom, thus perpetuating a need to control the young, keep them in line, and "train them in the way they ought to go." Every middle generation seems to believe it can hold the rope on both ends, having just cause to rebel against the past generation and the moral legitimacy to govern the future generation. Indeed, as Kohelet 1:4 teaches us, "One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever." Each generation is engaged in such rebellious acts when young, but then tries to subdue the next generation once on the receiving end of the cry for independence.

Does the adult generation have all the answers to give the young, or do adults act out of a great fear, the fear of becoming irrelevant? I suggest that it is the fear of irrelevance that prevents adults from taking the necessary measures to allow an educational process based on teens finding their own way. The verse in Proverbs demands one of the most difficult and noble tasks ever to be performed by one human for another—the task of true and honest empowerment. We—the adult generation currently bestowing the educational act—must grow up and educate ourselves first, in order to lend our youth a mature, fearless, and trusting ear. Humility, patience, and courage are some of the most valuable attributes for which any educator should strive. Above all, we must understand that true education is not bestowed; it is shared! And for such an honest sharing to take place, we, the adults, need to be the first in line to exercise true respect.

The *Shulchan Aruch* instructs the Jewish teacher, "Your student's honor should be as dear to you as your own" (*Yoreh Deah*, 242:33). In the summer of 1995, I participated in a Jewish camp program called "Meet Your Educators"; some 150 Jewish teens listened and questioned a panel of four educators: three rabbis (Orthodox, Reform, and Reconstructionist) and myself. One of the questions came from a 17-year-old young woman. "After spending three weeks in this camp, I decided to start observing Jewish rituals a little more. I like the idea of lighting Shabbat candles, so I called my mother and shared my wishes to do so at home with her, once I return. My mother said she sent me

to camp to be with Jewish friends and learn, not to come back home too Jewish. She didn't sound too happy [about my wish to light Shabbat candles] and said she is sure I'll get over it by the time I'm back home." At this point, she looked at us and asked, "What can I possibly do?"

My heart went out to her. Here was a bright and committed Jewish young woman who found some deeper meanings in Jewishness and decided to act upon them, only to receive this response from someone with whom she wanted to share her feelings and practices—her mother. Further, what gave me the right to come between a mother and her daughter? Wasn't the mother entitled to her own opinion in her own house?

I happened to be the last panel member to respond to this young woman. As the others were talking to her, I tried to think about the role of mutual respect in dealing with the issue at hand: "When you go back home," I finally said, "sit with your mother and share with her your experiences in camp. Tell her about the thoughts and feelings you experienced and allow her a better glimpse into the world you were exposed to. Explain how your decision comes from your own desire to deepen your involvement in what you perceive to be a meaningful Jewish idea and practice. Allow her an entrance to your feelings. But tell your mother that, if she wishes, you will not light Shabbat candles at home, out of respect for her as your mother. However, don't be shy to make her aware that this respect for one's parent, which you exercise by not lighting the candles, is also a fundamental Jewish value. I will be very surprised if your mother asks you not to respect her anymore, out of fear of you becoming 'too Jewish.'"

Two months later, I received a beautiful letter from that young girl, saying that both she and her mother started lighting Shabbat candles together. She made it clear that "my mother could not look me in the eyes and answer my question about respecting her as a Jewish value.... I guess she realized how much I loved and respected her and decided that she can do something about it."

Such respect opens the door to a higher level of awareness of our youth, their needs and goals, while shaping a more trusting inter-generation platform for dialogue. This trust will emerge once both sides discover that they may actually have much in common and that Jewish life has much to say about their common concerns, passions, fears, and loves. Listening, though, is not enough. We must be ready to act upon the things our young wish for, and do so out of a deep understanding that this is the true nature of education: "according to his or her own way."

In all my years as an educator I have not yet met one young adult who did not respond warmly to the respectful gesture of a listening adult. I have not yet met a teen who did not want to increase his or her involvement and interest once given a true opportunity as an equal part of the educational process, based on mature and mutual responsibility. We do not lack eager, intelligent, and Jewishly inclined (if not involved) teens; what we truly lack is a sophisticated, open, and rich view of Jewish life and consequently Jewish education. Moreover, we are at a dire need for true, passionate, knowledgeable, and non-apologetic Jewish educators! Educators who can raise our people's awareness to how Jewish learning offers such opportunities. Educators who can serve as role models, showing by a living example how such engagements can lead to better, more fulfilled lives on all levels.

It is generally held that the central task of Jewish education is the creation of positive Jewish identity and commitment. Jewish education must transform this somewhat vague self-evident belief into a well-established, widely accepted, and coherent philosophy and curriculum, thus allowing a positive encounter with our own Jewish feelings, thoughts, and identities.

PAST TRADITION AND PRESENT TRADITIONING

Much like understanding the distinction between Judaism and Jews/Jewishness, we need to be aware of the important differentiation between the Jewish Tradition and the

present traditions of the Jewish world. "Tradition is perhaps the most pervasive term of authority in contemporary Jewish thought," notes Arnold Eisen (1992, p. 429) "and arguably the most problematic."

From my experience working with thousands of Jewish teens, I can safely say that most perceive Tradition as an anachronistic, past-oriented entity. Our youth, as do many of their parents, view tradition as fixed in the past, leaving many of them in a very alienating position of either studying the Tradition or staying out of Judaism. Many Jews today simply do not see themselves as active participants in that Tradition and definitely do not believe that their words, thoughts, and actions could ever count as Tradition. Such a view undoubtedly leads to a sense of void. For while Tradition plays a significant role in one's encounter with the Jewish past, it also brings about a tension that is not easily resolvable: "Jews, like other Americans, seem to want connection with their ancestors, while reserving the right to depart, however radically, from the paths which the ancestors walked" (Eisen, 1992, p. 430).

In contrast, "traditioning" (with a small 't') is a dynamic and vital component that accompanies Jewish Tradition; namely, Jews and their lives in the present—much as throughout history—are the shapers and makers of what is to become Tradition in the future! Therefore, Jewish education should present today's Jews with a mirror that shifts the focus to them, reaffirming their hold on and responsibility for Judaism in the present.

Such a broader concept of traditions encompasses the following elements.

Traditions Should Rely on our Past Tradition, Yet Aim to Face and Act upon the Challenges of the Present

Jewish Tradition does not solely consist of creeds and practices that were determined sometime in the past for the present generations to learn from, but actually is a mind-set that strives for an ongoing, dynamic, and needs-based adjustment, according to necessities of relevance and progress.

The Jewish people must realize, through education, that their role in shaping Jewish traditions is as crucial today as it has ever been in any other period in Jewish history. That is why this observation by Dershowitz (1996, p. 291) is truly troubling: "It is sadly remarkable that no group in America is less knowledgeable about its traditions, less literate in its language [and] less familiar with its own library than the Jews."

The problem, however, is far more complicated than mere ignorance or a lack of basic Jewish literacy. It is the way that American Jews perceive Judaism as a whole that is the core of the issue at hand. By conceiving Judaism mainly in anachronistic religious terms, large parts of the American Jewish community treat Judaism as nothing more than a "window" in an all-Western life philosophy that resembles "Windows 2000" software. In this view, Judaism becomes a segment in a person's much broader identity, a partial philosophy that promotes certain creeds and practices that are mostly ritually oriented. Far too many American Jews today engage their Jewishness in painfully limited and predictable points in time and space; for example, during Jewish holidays or life-cycle and rite of passage activities. Such an approach promotes a Jewishness based primarily on pre-set activities. For the most part, Judaism is perceived as a shallow (and subsequently quite fragile) shell of expected behaviors, often called religious or cultural, which are transmitted from one generation to the next, instead of being seen as a deep, open-minded, diverse, and-above all-positive way of being. It is, therefore, hardly surprising, as Elazar (1995, p. 39) observed, that "Jewish youth, once they began to lose interest in the ritual practices [of the synagogue], had nothing left to tie them to the Jewish community."

We, who are directly involved in the philosophical and methodological aspects of Jewish education, must first bravely confront and change a reality in which "so many young Jews remember their Judaism as "an old man saying no" (Dershowitz, 1996, p. 295).

The Jewish Tradition—complemented and enriched by present traditions—should there-

fore be seen as an inviting and ongoing mechanism that reflects our present lives, instead of a set of laws that echo from a distant and irrelevant past. Opening our youth's eyes to the fact that Jewish Tradition emerged from traditions that were created and recreated by Jews over time will enable them to see themselves as an integral part of the process.

The Fluidity and Flexibility of Traditioning, as Integral to a Coherent Tradition

Jewish literature and Tradition are shaped by life and are not solely shapers of life. Jewish Tradition encompasses shifting dynamics, turns, and turbulences as integrated in its historic formation. Take Maimonides for example. True, his place in the canon of Jewish Tradition is well established. Yet it is dishonest to present him and his road toward such recognition as free of the dynamics that are integral to any tradition in the making and without acknowledging the array of responses to his beliefs, including those who did not consider him part of the Jewish Tradition. Such historical honesty is crucial in order to allow our present audience an educated encounter with a much more vibrant and real tradition-shaping process.

We need to involve our students in the truly complex mechanism of tradition shaping, instead of presenting those traditions on a silver platter, as if they are a given that had always been this way. Understanding the fluidity that underlies the development of any tradition will allow literature and Tradition to be seen as representatives of a people's complex journey throughout history—to be naturally continued by the present generation—rather than a collection of codes from a locked and frozen past to be followed and obeyed by the present generation. Such an approach will also allow a "safe space" (Reisman, 1990) for critical analysis of those traditions, without the apologetics and fear that accompany it. Our youth must know that they are not only allowed but actually encouraged to exercise critical thinking over their past and its transmitted knowledge.

The formation of present Jewish traditions relies on a deep and meaningful understanding of past Jewish Tradition. Knowledge of and a fuller appreciation for our Tradition also help crystallize one's approach to life within the realms of the diverse Jewish world itself. Moreover, knowing the fuller scope of the Tradition does not necessitate agreeing with it all, but definitely sharpens one's ability to pinpoint and find those Jewish ideas and practices to agree with and to love. This process is also aided by comparing those Jewish ideas and practices to the ones we know of but disagree with. As educators, therefore, we also need to familiarize ourselves and our students with those parts of Jewish Tradition that do not necessarily meet our own taste, thus formulating a deep philosophical, practical, moral, and spiritual foundation that does not merely choose from our Tradition, but also adapts and adjusts to it in a respectful and intelligent manner.

These points are true sign posts toward a healthier educational process, for they may help in the realization of each individual's inherent right to be part of the Jewish world. Such a birthright does not negate the modern tendency toward Jewish self-identification that leans primarily on a cognitive choice but actually reinforces this tendency: Any Jew has the right to choose how he or she enters the Jewish world, knowing that this decision consists of investment in present Jewish life. Subsequently, such an awareness may promote the individual's inclination to partake in the evolving process of Judaism, voice one's ideas, and create a personal, immediate, and relevant connection to the Jewish community at large.

JEWISH EDUCATION—PUTTING TEXT IN CONTEXT

Toward a Better Symbiosis between the Textual and the Extra-Textual Bodies of Jewish Life

The rarely questioned reliance on literature and text-oriented activities as the appropriate and legitimate methods of learning and transmitting Jewish Tradition takes its devastating toll. True, the passionate love story between

the Jew and the written word is justly regarded as one of the main pillars of our pride and identity. Yet again, it requires a true and honest positioning in historical context.

The written word was the most evident tool of Jewish education before the 20th century and therefore functioned as the main form of transmitting knowledge and traditions. Today the situation is very different; our society is enriched by venues of communication and learning that can complement the textual dimension in splendid ways, allowing a much broader creativity and a sense of vitality than ever before. Therefore, it is no wonder that younger generations, born into this reality, perceive a two-dimensional black and white text-oriented world as lacking exciting potential. We should strive for a much richer presentation of our past, complemented by the extra-textual dimensions of our text-oriented Tradition. I do not negate the use of texts, yet advocate for better using them, as well as other educational tools, in the following way.

The Extra-Textual Dimensions of the Jewish Tradition Shapers and Makers

I have yet to meet one student who came out of a Sunday or Hebrew school who views Maimonides as a human being of flesh and blood, a person who had enjoyed life and wondered at its meaning. Yet, we know that Maimonides' greatness stemmed from his worldly views; his philosophical encounters and dialogues with the neo-Platonic and the Muslim worlds, his vast array of scientific interests, and his works as a physician all helped him articulate Judaism as an all-encompassing philosophy and view of life. However, our youth (and far too many adults) see Maimonides only as someone who studied himself to death—a brilliant yet grim, tedious, and quite intimidating man who was locked in his too-Jewish past world and who therefore would have nothing in common with their generation. Relying solely on mainstream approaches to text as the means to introduce Maimonides does not work. Maimonides, with all that he had contributed, has become irrelevant.

As educators, we stand at the bridge between the past and the future, functioning as the gate-keepers who determine who shall enter and who shall stay out. Furthermore, we decide how and in what ways those who enter shall be given information. Maimonides is completely in our hands. By being aware of the conceptual gaps that lie between Maimonides and our generation, commanding the necessary knowledge base to bridge those gaps, and mastering the creativity and courage needed for such a task, today's Jewish educator can add the missing dimensions of Maimonides' life and present him in a fuller, honest, and much more human form.

The educator's role here lies primarily in the need to fill in the gaps in Maimonides' *Mentschkeit*, his human side. We need to acknowledge the vast array of opportunities to tackle the extra-textual dimensions and use them as preliminary educational means toward a positive approach to the textual body of our Tradition.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's beautiful description of one of his childhood educational experiences serves us greatly here: "We cried when we learned of the sale of Joseph, and rejoiced in his ascendancy to power," he recalls. "There was a freshness, a vigor, a nearness which we felt in that drama" (Epstein, 1994, p. 128). His experiences led Soloveitchik to conclude, "As a matter of fact this is the only way to study [the Bible]. Intellectual analysis, while indispensable, will not suffice to uncover its spiritual kerygma. Only one who can read between the lines, who can experience the event and can establish communion with its characters can discover and fully comprehend the message."

Soloveitchik's point is true not only for biblical stories, but more broadly as an educational philosophy for every setting devoted to Jewish learning. Returning to Maimonides, our generation will benefit far more from seeing him as he engages in a passionate discussion with a student or puts a smile on a child's face than as a grim and painfully outdated figure. Let our youth have the opportunity to invite him into their world and its technologies. Let

us create an environment that opens such dialogue, with both sides presenting their worlds in a positive, curious, and non-apologetic manner. By not allowing our students to meet Maimonides face to face as a human being, a real man who was once a child, who played with his friends, laughed and cried—by eliminating this honest, rich, and vital dimension of his life from their educational scope—we deny respect both from them and from Maimonides.

I remember the profound impact a letter written by Maimonides to his brother had on me when I saw it in an exhibit in Haifa University. In this simple, loving letter from one brother to another, I saw a Maimonides who had a family, who was a brother, and who had written and talked about daily and mundane subjects. I remember the feeling of relief and warmth I experienced after becoming aware of the obvious, i.e., Maimonides was a real living person. And I remember sharing his pain while reading his letter of grief over his brother's death at sea. Seeing this side of Maimonides perpetuates his relevance to our daily lives, instead of keeping him high and above as someone who dealt solely with codified laws and orders of practice. A figure put on a pedestal deals only with issues put on a pedestal, and pedestals, as inspiring as they may be at times, do not promote an instantaneous, friendly, and ongoing relationship. By adopting a "back to the living people" approach, we encourage a deeper desire in students to understand who was that figure, thus complementing that figure's desire to communicate his or her writings and legacy.

I have a photograph in my room of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out and making a funny face. It encapsulates my belief that no matter how influential one may be in shaping universal thought, one is still a human who lives amid others. This picture functions as my own *silent educator* reminding me not to put anyone on a pedestal, where he or she might be beyond reach. Respect, yes, but elevation beyond criticism never. For this kind of elevation not only distances the people from the

person but actually promotes mediocrity and legitimizes a very partial involvement in the quest for wisdom and leadership.

Conceptual Bridging

Jewish knowledge is crucial to any Jewish educator for it opens vast venues of creativity in the educational process. As we try to present the relevance of the Jewish past to our lives today, we should seek to create a conceptual bridge over Jewish time and space. For example, by comparing the clay jars containing the Jewish Dead Sea Scrolls that were found in the Judean desert (15 BCE–10 CE) with the milk jars that were found in the Warsaw ghetto, containing numerous testimonies of fighters in the Jewish uprising, we powerfully demonstrate that a struggle for independence and leaving a legacy behind are Jewish values woven through time and space. Such cross-referencing presents the subject matter in a living, real, and relevant manner, allowing the student to ask, 'How would I have reacted as a Jew?' or 'What kind of a Jewish legacy do I wish to leave behind today for the next generations?'

Another example of such conceptual bridging—this time on the topic of human nature—is a comparison between the biblical verse from Genesis 6:5—"G-d saw how great was human's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time"—and Anne Frank's most famous line from her diary, "Despite everything, I still believe that humans are truly good at heart." Such conceptual bridging allows one to understand how different values cross space and time in Jewish life—both legitimizing one's personal response to them and proving them to be relevant to one's current life.

Reliance on a deeper understanding and a well-thought-out intellectual and emotional investment may require changing our conventional approach to the teachings of text. However, once we achieve the original goal of presenting the concept of Judaism as an open-minded philosophy, comprised of actively committed Jews, the student will start learning from love and a non-apologetic desire to par-

take in the ongoing process of Judaism in the making.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL JEWISH EDUCATION: AN UNNECESSARY DICHOTOMY BETWEEN INSEPARABLE TERMS

Schiff (1998, p. 108) asserts, "A constant change in education is equivalent to the educational process itself." Looking at the field of Jewish education today, one sees that openness to new ideas and the desire to become better are some of its strongest attributes.

Because of this flexibility in our field, an understanding is emerging about the relationship between informal and formal education; namely, a growing acknowledgment that informal educational philosophies, modules, and methods are valuable tools in the so-called formal setting (see Ackerman, 1986; Chazan, 1997; Israel, 1986; Reisman, 1979; Reisman, 1990).

It is ironic that the term "pedagogue"—today a synonym for teacher/educator in the formal sense of the word—is actually rooted in the Greek word "*Paidagogos*," which refers to one's ability to "activate [the student] by games and other activities" (Agassi & Rappel, 1979, p. 43). More and more educational institutions today use informal philosophies and methods as a necessary component of their educational endeavors. Further, it is often the more advanced and cutting-edge Jewish educational institutions that reflect a higher appreciation, reliance, and dependence on such informal modules and methods.

"We now pay more attention to informal education in the Jewish world," says Ackerman (1986, p. 3), "because we have a sense that formal education has fallen short of achieving its goals." Ackerman's goals, however, may be articulated and achieved better once a thorough conceptual and practical collaboration between formal and informal Jewish educational settings is established.

However, the integration of informal educational tools into formal settings is not enough. The change at hand needs to go far deeper and should first revise this formal-informal di-

chotomy while embracing the simple and beautiful word "education" as the epitome of our joint endeavors.

Informal Jewish education should formally enter and be acknowledged as a major component and strategy in the Jewish community. It is clear that informal methods can supply much more vibrant and relevant answers to some of today's pressing Jewish communal needs. Schoenfeld (1988) reminds us that in the context of Jewish identity and Jewish education, community leaders wish to find the best places and programs to put scarce resources. Dershowitz (1996, p. 294) goes even further, saying, "Forward-looking Jewish leaders are beginning to recognize our collective failure in educating Jews. They realize that Jewish learning must compete with other learning in the marketplace of ideas. To make Jewish learning truly competitive in a very crowded market, we must take advantage of every Jewish talent, experience, success, and resource."

The use of informal educational settings and methods, in conjunction with a formal and well-organized infrastructure, will answer the different and changing educational needs of a dynamic and diverse community. However, we—and especially those policymakers who look for pragmatic, practical, and measurable ways to assess Jewish progress—need to realize that it is not programs we are looking for nor projects. Rather, it is a change of mind-set we need to invest in that will emanate from the leaders and be transmitted to the rest of the community, seeing Judaism as an all-encompassing entity that can and should become relevant and sought after in any Jewish educational setting and on every topic.

To achieve these goals, we need top-level institutions that excel in formulating, articulating, and presenting the philosophies and cutting-edge methods of informal Jewish education. Informal Jewish education must become a profession formally taught in formal settings and in a formal manner. No paradox whatsoever lies in the above statement. In far too many circles the term "informal" is actually a synonym for "not serious," "amateur," "fun and games," or "last-moment solution." In

reality, informal education is the epitome of creative, ingenious, passionate, and fun learning. By learning the profession (and art) of informal Jewish education in an excellent formal setting, we not only encourage the change of mind-set toward a much more serious perception of the field but also elevate the entire profession to a higher standard and extend its impact on behalf of the contemporary Jewish community.

CONCLUSION

The sense of mediocrity that is often attached to Jewish education in the Jewish world today is one of our main maladies, keeping many intelligent, creative, and able professionals from the field: "No upwardly mobile American Jew would ever accept the quality of today's Jewish education in secular, elementary, high school or college classes in which they send their children," asserts Dershowitz (1996, p. 294), "but we continue to tolerate mediocrity in the Jewish schools to which we send out children."

Dershowitz does not show us the problem but rather one of its symptoms. After all, why would a Jew who perceives Judaism as an anachronistic entity that needs to be somewhat preserved out of respect and a shallow need for rites of passage exercise much effort in such an endeavor? Change the ways Jews perceive Judaism, present them with a positive, non-apologetic, and honest Jewishness, and the communal-institutional symptoms of the problem will soon change as well.

At the most essential level, the challenges facing Jewish education embody the question of how to live as Jews in the contemporary world. To retreat into "Judaism as a religion" is to undermine both the far richer dimensions of Jewish life and the vitality of our educational efforts. To make "continuity" and "Tradition" our bywords is to give up on the power of living and creating Jewish traditions for today's world.

The main challenges facing Jewish education are ones of courage and honesty. Do we, the educators, have the courage to be fully honest with ourselves and our youth about the

Jewishness that informs our lives? Settling for anything less—and especially a retreat into Judaism as (past) Tradition—is to provide Jewish education with an untenable weak base. Our only choice is to find the courage for a basic re-evaluation of our current modes of thinking and operating, followed by the honest willingness to integrate our conclusions into the field of Jewish education.

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On the day this essay was sealed for publication, my grandfather—Shalom Rabbiyof—had departed this world. At 101 years of age he was buried in Jerusalem, the city whose stones and stories he had echoed. This precious soul was a man of sensitivity and simple conduct. Via joy, humility and innocence he lit a candle of wisdom and true insight.

This essay—following his love to education and passion for learning—is in his honor, his pride in land, people and Torah and the grand Jewish value by which he had walked this earth: “Choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

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