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INTRODUCTION

It is my privilege and pleasure to serve as guest editor of this special issue of *Tradition* dedicated to new frontiers in Jewish education. Suffice it to say that prominent attention to this vital topic is long overdue for our readership. I salute our editor, Dr. Michael Shmidman, for his initiative in inviting me to undertake the challenge. I do hope he is not disappointed.

In conceiving this issue, a strategic decision was made to focus our attention upon research and application rather than pure reflection. Additionally, we strove to bring to *Tradition* the voices of scholars and practitioners not usually heard from its hallowed pages. A quick perusal of our table of contents will confirm our success.

Moreover, this publication is doubly significant. It is issued in collaboration with, and so launches, the “Azrieli Papers,” an ongoing colloquium dedicated to excellence in teaching, administration and research in Jewish education. A project of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University, the Azrieli Papers are supported by a generous gift from Henry and Golda Reena Rothman. We are indebted to them for their kindness and beneficence.

As will be evident from the pages that follow, we chose an expansive definition of Jewish education. This includes, but is not limited to, its formal and informal manifestations, if indeed such designations are still relevant to the contemporary experience. We see the classroom instructor and school administrator in a yeshiva day school or supplementary Hebrew school, alongside the pulpit rabbi, camp director, special needs instructor, community and family educator, early childhood teacher, youth leader and all related others, involved in a cognate enterprise. Our publications may occasionally provide greater valence for one or another subcategory of this professional community. Yet our focus will always be holistic, emphasizing that which is common among its members, rather than that which draws them apart.

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In her inspiring essay, Stern College Professor Peninnah Schram, award winning author and storyteller, undertakes a task that is both complex and manifold. She places the art of storytelling in the context of the Jewish oral tradition, while demonstrating her conversance with contemporary efforts to collect and catalogue this wealth of Jewish lore and tradition. Her sweep is global and encyclopedic: from the development of the Talmud, originally an exercise in oral learning, to the reflections, *derashot* and travelogues of medieval Jewish scholars and mystiques, from “*ma-asei*” attributed to Hasidic masters and religious scholars, to modern oral histories of the immigrant experience, the *Shoah* or the founding of Israel. Schram stops occasionally to evaluate her subject in light of general research into the role of oral culture, and to note that many such tales have been influenced by the contemporaneous host environment.

True to our earlier noted mission, she directs her essay to Jewish educators, defined as “anyone who is involved with students of any age and in any way.” As such, she provides an overview of storytelling as a tool for social and psychological development, for implanting a shared experience and for identifying with the norms and values of Jewish tradition and of those who have been its arbiters over the ages. Not content that her topic reside on an academic plane alone, she closes with practical suggestions for choosing appropriate material and implementing it effectively in the classroom, in the pulpit, in the summer camp or around the *Shabbat* table.

By contrast, Lawrence Schiffman, distinguished historian at New York University and internationally recognized expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, provides us with a proposal to revamp the means and the methods by which we teach *limudei kodesh*. Using the *Da’at Mikra* series as a frequent model, he argues for the inclusion of archeological research as a primary teaching aide, with particular reference to the study of *humash* and *nakh*. In his words, “the most significant argument for the inclusion of this material is that otherwise we may continue to teach false information where correct information is readily available.”

Schiffman appreciates the religious and methodological concerns that will inevitably be raised relative to both the provenance and the trajectory of much contemporary archeology. From the fear of heterodoxy to attacks on the integrity of the biblical narrative, from the development of curricular materials to effectively training educators at all levels he is far from naïve. On the contrary, he turns these arguments on their head, so that students who may soon find themselves on secular college

campuses whether here or in Israel be better prepared for the confrontational barrage that they may face.

He further considers the political ramifications for our students and teachers. In an international environment wherein the historicity of Jewish claims to the Land of Israel is regularly under attack, Schiffman suggests that archeology may be an important proxy for modern *hasbara*.

In his essay, Rabbi Jay Goldmintz sets his sights on nothing less than the nature of religious development during early adolescence. A Jewish educator of long experience and keen insight, he is troubled by our over-emphasis on the cognitive and behavioral, i.e., what our students know and what they do, with too little of our energy devoted to the affective domain, what they feel. In his apt words, “there is much talk about teaching texts and ideas, but not enough about teaching students.”

Setting his work against that of several classic theorists of moral, religious, and emotional development such as Erikson, Fowler, Hyde, Meissner and Piaget, Goldmintz examines the turmoil of adolescence as it often reflects itself upon patterns of religious faith among students at the typical American yeshiva high school. He notes that our Israeli colleagues may be further along in studying this phenomenon and in gathering best practices to help in response. In particular, he focuses upon *tefillah* as a flash point in this development, one which often echoes parental attitudes and practices as much as the influence of schools and their teachers. Clearly, the key is a holistic response that enlists the family and the school along with the congregational rabbi and youth director.

In their essay, Daniel Pollack and David Schnall explore the nature of education as a comparative value in American constitutional law and in Jewish tradition, seeking to establish its position as “a fundamental right.” Absent clear evidence from the language of the United States Constitution or from the intent of its Framers, the Supreme Court has generally allowed that determination to be made by the individual states. For its part, the centrality of Torah study as a religious norm notwithstanding, *halakha* does not posit a universal requirement that obligates public authorities to provide for each child. Rather the initiative in Jewish education is largely private, falling first upon the family and then upon the child himself when he reaches his majority.

Pollack and Schnall take the issue to its contemporary edge in regard to suspending or expelling students whose presence represents a threat to the safety and education of others. The courts have generally provided leeway for public schools to remove students from their classes for cause, subject to advance notice and due process. In those states

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where education is deemed a fundamental right, however, public authorities are obligated to provide an alternative educational setting for such students. The basis for depriving an education for cause is less clear in *halakha*, although mechanisms have been employed to justify such action under extreme circumstances. The essay concludes with an examination of rights, fundamental or otherwise, as elements in both traditions, finding that such constructs have a more natural home in American than Jewish legal culture.

Finally, although a bit outside both the academic style and structure of this publication, we have included as a supplement the recent ruling of the RCA *Bet Din* dealing with severance pay to a day school teacher. It serves as a fine example of the application of *halakha*, classic Jewish sources and values, to a very contemporary concern. The Court was called upon to balance the general role of teachers as employees as against their special status as conservators of *talmud Torah*. Similarly, in its finding the Court labored to meld compassion with formal legality in seeking to provide some benefit to the petitioner in question.

In sum, our hope in this eclectic outing is to draw from scholars and practitioners across the curriculum. We glean from the heuristic analysis of classic Jewish texts on their own terms and in comparative context, alongside the application of archeological finds as they support the study of Jewish tradition. We learn from a master of informal teaching methods and communication techniques, even as we join in the attempts of a gifted educator to understand and to help develop the religious and spiritual underpinnings of his students. The broad inter(post)disciplinary applications of the Jewish educational experience should be evident. We thank the editors of *Tradition* for this opportunity and invite reader comment, even as we look forward to many more such collaborative efforts.