

# Torah at the Center

UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM  
VOLUME 14, No. 2 • WINTER 2011 • CHOREF 5771

## IN THIS ISSUE

## INCLUSION

INCLUSION	ENCOURAGING WORDS FROM OUR SAGES: A TEXT STUDY	2
INCLUSION	MORE THAN INCLUSION	3
INCLUSION	FEBRUARY IS JEWISH DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH	4
INCLUSION	A BETTER, BRIGHTER FUTURE BECAUSE OF YOU: THE SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION CONSULTING PROGRAM	5
INCLUSION	EVERY SOUL MATTERS	6
INCLUSION	ALL I EVER WANTED WAS TO BELONG	7
INCLUSION	LIFELONG LEARNING FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES	8
INCLUSION	OPEN THE GATES	9
INCLUSION	WHAT MAKES ME TIC	10
INCLUSION	TEEN MADRICHIM GUIDE THE WAY	11
INCLUSION	FROM THE SECULAR TO THE DIVINE: INCLUSION AND BELONGING AS CORE 21ST CENTURY VALUES	12
INCLUSION	ATTITUDES ARE THE MOST CHALLENGING BARRIERS	13
INCLUSION	EDUCATING DIVERSE LEARNERS	14
INCLUSION	GREAT EXPECTATIONS	15
INCLUSION	DIFFERENTIATION AND DeLeT	16
INCLUSION	AFFIRMING EVERY JEW AND JEWISH FAMILY THROUGH HEBREW ACQUISITION	17
INCLUSION	TOGETHER WE MAKE SUMMER SPECIAL	18
INCLUSION	MAKE SCHOOLS SAFE FOR ALL STUDENTS	19
INCLUSION	RESOURCES TO MAKE THE DREAM A REALITY	20
INCLUSION	<b>NATE NEWS</b>	21



Like many of the prophets in Jewish and human history, Moses was reluctant to accept his divine commission. However, the basis for his reluctance was unique. In his own words, he was “not a man of words.” He had a speech impediment, and he reasoned that he was ill-suited to be anyone’s spokesperson, especially God’s. Moses suffered from a disability. Initially, he was nearly defined by it. In this respect, Moses was not unique. Society has too often defined a person by her or his disability—a deaf person, a blind person, a lame person, a mute person. These monikers are sticky, sometimes stickier than the name parents give a child. They are also wrong—medically, psychologically, ethically, educationally and spiritually. This issue of *Torah at the Center* is intended to model its message of inclusion as a Jewish value.

Would we have let Moses into our early childhood program, our camp, our day school, our youth group, our Israel trip, our congregational school? Who are we excluding by action or inaction from the Jewish learning system? *Al cheit...* We are missing the mark when we fail to include every Jew who wishes to be part of the Jewish community because of any manner of disability. We have the opportunity and the obligation to learn about Jewish educational inclusion, and thankfully, we also have the teachers, those who have professional credentials, those who love family members with disabilities, the people with the disabilities themselves and God.

We owe special thanks to Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, who with her Torah, inspired this issue, a joint effort with the Committee for Access to Lifelong Jewish Education. Rabbi Landsberg founded the committee, which is co-chaired by three people who are deeply involved in inclusion: Rabbi Shira Joseph, a special education professional before entering the rabbinate and parent of a child with special needs; Lisa Friedman, a religious school co-director whose work demonstrates a commitment to engaging children and adults with special needs in Jewish education; and Shelly Christensen, a parent and author who is instrumental in leading Jewish community inclusion worldwide. Professionals and lay leaders from many areas of the Reform Movement are members of this committee, and readers will meet many of them in this issue of *Torah at the Center*.

When I first participated in a conference call with many of the authors in this issue, I was intimidated. I did not understand the language or the operating assumptions. I felt disadvantaged, but they enabled me to learn, and I hope they will have the same effect upon you. As Jewish educators, we can enable the disabled, and in so doing, we will be among the disciples of Aaron, who enabled Moses, first by being his mouthpiece, then by giving him the confidence to speak for himself, so that ultimately the man of no words became the man who, according to Jewish tradition, spoke the words that we now know as *Sefer D’varim* (The Book of Words, i.e., Deuteronomy.)

The *b’rachah* we can recite when we see a person with disabilities is: Praised are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who variegates creations. Thank God we are all different from each other. We all learn differently, some of us more differently than others. *Aleinu*: It is incumbent upon us to learn to differentiate our teaching.

In the spirit of *K’lal Yisrael*, an inclusive Jewish community,

  
Rabbi Jan Katzew, PhD, RJE

 UNION FOR  
REFORM JUDAISM  
האיחוד ליהדות רפורמית  
SERVING REFORM CONGREGATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA  
633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6778  
212.650.4110 • [www.urj.org/learning](http://www.urj.org/learning)



# Torah at the Center

## Encouraging Words from Our Sages: A Text Study

By Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D., Founder and Director , Maqom: A Place for the Spiritually Searching

The Talmud has something to teach us on just about every topic, and the inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities is no exception. We learn in the Babylonian Talmud that once there was a student who probably had ADD and that there was an extraordinary teacher who invested the time it took to patiently and caringly teach this student. Consider sharing the text below with your teaching staff as an introduction to a special needs workshop or with your school committee to start a discussion on inclusion.

*Rabbi Peridah had a pupil whom he taught his lesson four hundred times before the latter could master it. One day someone interrupted the lesson and asked Rabbi Peridah to do something as soon as the lesson was over. Rabbi Peridah continued to teach the student in the usual way, but the student could not grasp the lesson. Rabbi Peridah asked, "What's the matter?" The student answered, "From the moment that we were interrupted, I couldn't concentrate." Rabbi Peridah said, "Give me your attention, and I will teach you again." And so he taught the student another four hundred times. A Heavenly Voice issued forth and gave him a great reward. (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 54b)*

### Some Questions and Prompts for Discussion:

1. Share a situation in which you felt like Rabbi Peridah. Then share one in which you felt like his student.
2. How do you think Rabbi Peridah's dedication to this one student affected his other students? What can this text teach us about inclusion?
3. How do you, as a teacher, achieve the patience and concentration that it takes to teach the way Rabbi Peridah taught?
4. Imagine Rabbi's Peridah's student is in your classroom. What technologies or strategies could you use to help him today?
5. What do you think was the rabbi's "great reward"? When you are teaching students with learning disabilities, do you ever feel the sort of spiritual gratification that Rabbi Peridah must have felt?
6. Have you ever had a student with learning disabilities who was willing to put in the kind of work that Rabbi Peridah's student did? What role does motivation play in forging a relationship between teacher and student?
7. When you're faced with a student such as the one that Rabbi Peridah taught, how might this story help you teach him or her?

# Torah at the Center

## More than Inclusion

**By Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, Senior Advisor on Disability Issues, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Washington, D.C.**

Americans are alarmed at the unemployment rate of almost ten percent. We hear about this every day through the media. However, nowhere in any newspaper article, editorial, op-ed, talk show or TV news outlet is it ever mentioned what national disability rights groups have repeatedly voiced: 60% of Americans with disabilities between the ages of 18-65 who can work and want to work are unemployed or underemployed, recession or no recession.

As Jews we must understand and admit that we, too, discriminate by not demanding that Jews with disabilities have equal access not only to our synagogue's front doors, but also to all things Jewish, including jobs. We rightly worry about physical access to the bimah, but what about jobs *on* the bimah or elsewhere in the synagogue? What about jobs in Jewish organizations, Jewish social service agencies, Jewish schools or camps? The list goes on and on.

It would be impossible for the Jewish community to discriminate against Jews with disabilities seeking jobs if the job seekers presented outstanding resumes. But the only way that Jews with disabilities can build such resumes is by being offered a great Jewish education beginning at an early age and continuing through Jewish schools of higher learning.

Promoting inclusion of those with disabilities in Jewish studies educates and benefits all those in the classroom. Inclusion teaches through experience a fundamental principle of our faith—that we are all created in God's image, all of us, the abled and the differently abled.

We read in Genesis 1:27 that God created human beings in the divine image. The same point is more emphatically made in Exodus chapter four, where Moses refers to his own disability, his speech impairment. After Moses encounters God in the burning bush, God tells him to speak to Pharaoh on behalf of the enslaved Israelites. We read, "But Moses said to the Eternal, 'Please, O my lord, I have never been good with words... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' And the Eternal said to him, 'Who gives humans speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Eternal?'"

The deepest desire of the disability community is to have people see past the disability and acknowledge the person first. We must see past the disability and acknowledge the Jewish soul first. Furthermore, the Jewish community must realize that Jews with disabilities are a minority within a minority. In the public sphere, employers recruit minority applicants. It should be so in the Jewish world as well. We have to not only educate and train Jews with disabilities, but also recruit them for Jewish jobs.

As leaders of the Jewish community, we are all Jewish educators. So let's educate the larger Jewish community to understand that there are many Jews with disabilities who have great intellect or inspiring talent or a deep desire to aid the Jewish community in whatever way they can. We must all work for accessible lifelong Jewish education so these abilities are not wasted. Ultimately, these God-given talents—enhanced by Jewish education—will allow Jews with disabilities to lead our congregations, teach our children, help our communities function and inspire the whole Reform Movement.



# Torah at the Center

## February is Jewish Disability Awareness Month

By Shelly Christensen, MA, Inclusion Innovations, LLC., Minnetonka, Minnesota and Co-Chair, Union for Reform Judaism Committee for Access to Lifelong Jewish Education

*“Good intentions alone not accompanied by action are without value, as it is the action which makes the intentions so profound.”*  
—Chasidic Master Yehudi HaKadosh

Jewish Disability Awareness Month (JDAM) is February. The Jewish International Special Education Consortium, a 25-year old organization of professional leaders in the field of special education and inclusion took the lead in 2009 and promoted a month-long campaign to raise awareness about Jews living with disabilities and the Jewish values that support inclusion. Support for lifelong inclusion was gaining momentum, fueled in part by programs such as the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities and the Council for Jews with Special Needs in Phoenix. Many Jewish communities across North America wanted to respond to this actively growing concern. The mission of JDAM is to unite Jewish communities and organizations for the purpose of raising awareness and supporting meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities and their families in every aspect of Jewish life.

The number of congregations and communities recognizing Jewish Disability Awareness Month grows each year. Jews with disabilities and their families are no longer missing from the snapshot of Jewish life. JDAM promotes the idea that living a Jewish life is not dependent on one's ability but rather on one's desire to live Jewishly in the world. Many people who were once on the margins of Jewish life are now deeply involved in synagogues and Jewish institutions as members, professionals, volunteers, leaders, students and worshippers.

JDAM events can inspire, motivate and educate the community. Activities can be simple but very meaningful, such as including a statement on your website and printed materials inviting people to contact the synagogue if a special needs accommodation is needed to participate. That simple statement and commitment can open doors.

During Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month (and beyond!) you can:

- Use the Jewish Disability Awareness Month logo on your website and on all printed materials during February. (Obtain the logo by contacting the creator at [schristensen@jfcsmpls.org](mailto:schristensen@jfcsmpls.org).)
- Dedicate a Shabbat worship service to inclusion and the

contributions of children and adults who have disabilities.

- Participate in a community-wide disability awareness event, such as the showing of *Mary and Max*, *Praying with Lior* or *Autism the Musical*.
- Give a presentation at your congregation's February board meeting sharing stories about students with special needs and how inclusion benefits all students.
- Host an art exhibit or musical performance by an artist who has a disability.
- Do an environmental scan of your building, looking at accessibility of the sanctuary, bimah, education areas, parking and restrooms.
- Have religious school students create mezuzot to be placed at the appropriate height for people who use wheelchairs, and mark the occasion with a special ceremony.
- Invite a disability specialist, parent or person with a disability to give a *d'var Torah*.
- Focus Torah study on text that informs us of Jewish values for inclusion.
- Collaborate with other organizations in the community to host a conference presenting a variety of workshops to educate Jewish professionals and community members about aspects of living with disability.
- Create a pamphlet or online resource about inclusion etiquette with ideas about how to relate to someone with a disability.
- Since children and teens with disabilities are often targets for bullying, use JDAM as an opportunity to address the issue of bullying with youth group members as a NFTY program.
- Set the expectation that inclusion is part of the congregational culture and formalize it by starting an Inclusion or Access Committee in February, create the mission statement in March, do an assessment of all areas of the congregation throughout the spring and early summer, envision your inclusive congregation and write a strategic plan to start the new year.
- Above all, share your stories of success, the fruits of your work that give people hope that they can belong.

Find more resources and ideas from the Jewish Special Education International Consortium at [urj.org/life/community/disabilities](http://urj.org/life/community/disabilities).

# Torah at the Center

## A Better, Brighter Future Because of You: The Special Needs Education Consulting Program

By Rabbi Samuel K. Joseph, Ph.D., Professor of Jewish Education and Leadership Development, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, Ohio

“Why don’t you follow my child’s IEP?” “My child is diagnosed with ADHD.” “I give my child a vacation from his medications over the weekend.” “Don’t your teachers know how to handle a student with an auditory processing disorder?” “I am sure you will figure out how to help my child prepare for her bat mitzvah, even with her dyslexia.”

These are but a sampling of the statements that the local congregational educators hear as they speak with parents about how to make religious school and Hebrew school successful for all students, including those with special needs. What a challenge for all the stakeholders! The congregation, its staff, schools, teachers and *madrichim* and the students, parents and families all want a successful learning experience. But very few congregations and their schools are equipped with the know-how and the resources to support students with special needs. The very nature of a voluntary school and, for all intents and purposes, volunteer teachers creates a tremendous burden on all parties involved in teaching students with special learning needs.

The Cincinnati Jewish community wanted to address this issue. A little over two years ago, I was invited to a meeting to brainstorm what we could do to help all the congregational religious schools and Hebrew schools teach students with special needs. What we came up with looks like it will be a great success.

Quickly realizing that the congregations themselves did not have the resources to fund a specialist for each program, we talked about a program where the Jewish community as a whole would offer special education consulting services to each and every program. In this way, each school could get the help they needed, tailored to the specific child and classroom involved.

Here is what we tell the Jewish community: “Special Needs Education Consulting (SNEC) was created with the intention of making religious school a more successful experience for all students by incorporating information from schools’ Individual Education Plans (IEP) into religious school classrooms. Specialized instructor Alison Kahn, a certified special education teacher with a focus in learning disabilities, will be dedicated to training educators to read, interpret and incorporate IEP information as applicable into classrooms.”

The program is now in its second year. Six congregational programs are keeping the specialist very busy. The consulting services so far include: meeting individually and regularly with congregational educators to help them assess and plan for their needs; attending the monthly all-city Jewish Educators Council; working one-on-one with teachers who have students with special needs and teaching them strategies for success; visiting each of the schools while in session and observing various classrooms; making recommendations to educators as to how to help students with special needs. The community consultant is engaging in telephone conferences, emails and face-to-face meetings with all stakeholders.

The common theme that is emerging is how to incorporate a student’s IEP, developed in their full-time school, into the student’s classroom experience in religious school/Hebrew school. The goal is to take the success model from full-time school and try to use it in the congregational school. The consultant-specialist helps the stakeholders read and understand the IEP. Then, together, they look for ways to create the same successes in religious school/Hebrew school.

Students at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, are required in their second year to teach religious school/Hebrew school for that year. (Many continue to teach during their entire HUC tenure.) I bring experts in learning challenges and special needs, like the special needs community consultant, into the class I teach for these HUC student-teachers. It is extremely important that we help train our religious school/Hebrew school teachers how to be successful with all kinds of students. It is important that teachers know they have experts to help them succeed as teachers.

“For many years I have been involved with the education of children who are learning disadvantaged. These students will benefit from having a far better understanding of their heritage and what it truly means to be Jewish, which is so important in these challenging times.”

—Frances Schloss

*Donor funding for SNEC was granted through the Jewish Federation’s Milton and Frances Schloss Fund.*



# Torah at the Center

## Every Soul Matters

By Rabbi Fred Greene, Temple Beth Tikvah, Roswell, Georgia

At three years old, my daughter, Yael, stood in front of the mirror when she finally uttered her first independent sentence: “I see God.”

I was a rabbinical student at the time, but my wife and I did not typically go around the house talking about seeing God everywhere. We knew that it wasn’t Yael’s typical echolalia. Yael (who is now 12 years old) was embracing a connection—seeing God’s Presence in her own reflection—when she was just three, while many of us yearn for that same connection our whole lives. There is a teaching that suggests children have the ability to see angels. Their perspectives are simple and still unclouded by the challenges adults must face. I have always been enamored of Yael’s unclouded vision.

Yael has a diagnosis of High Functioning Autism. While my daughter is not defined by her diagnosis, she embraces it as something that makes her unique. Her autism, while challenging, is a significant part of who she is and how she sees the world. Her worldview reflects Maimonides’ teaching that when we see someone who is different, we should respond with “Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes people different” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot B’rachot* 10:12).

No person is created in vain. If we truly accept and internalize God’s Presence in our lives, then we have no choice but to treat every person with dignity and grace. If we don’t treat our students, our children or our neighbors with the dignity that is inherent in them, it is ultimately a reflection of how we feel about God and God’s Creation.

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson has written and taught extensively about inclusion in our Jewish communities. In addition to being an exceptional rabbi and teacher, he is the father of Jacob, a young man with autism. Rabbi Artson teaches that there is a “simple radical truth” that changes everything we do in our Jewish community. If we actually believe that everyone is created in God’s image, then there are no exceptions to this rule! If we are to take that seriously, he says, then we “need to make a radical re-ordering of communal initiatives.” (See his “Including

People with Special Needs” June 17, 2009 podcast on the podcast page for the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies of American Jewish University.)

In a presentation to Jewish education students, Rabbi Artson spoke of how he has approached leaders in Jewish agencies, synagogues and schools in our Jewish community to be more inclusive of our families with special needs. He paraphrased their responses: “We would love to include your child, but we just don’t have the resources...” Many parents of children with special needs have heard that said to them. Rabbi Artson, however, illuminated the perspective of the parent. What we actually hear is, “Your son is not worth our effort.”

As a father and as a rabbi, I think we can do better. We have segments of our community that feel very vulnerable. When these families are told that there is no place for their children—in the sanctuary (because they might be disruptive) or in the school (for a lack of resources), they often choose to leave with feelings of resentment and abandonment.

Jewish educators, clergy and communal leaders have a tremendous opportunity to let these individuals and families know that they are valued. The Reform Movement has always been at the forefront of inclusion for vulnerable populations. It is time to have our budgets reflect our values and begin to authentically welcome this vulnerable population that often sits in silence on the sidelines, assuming that there is no place for them.

Maimonides taught: “Every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah—regardless of whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability.” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah*, 10) We can serve these souls. It will take more effort and more resources, but the presence of these children teaches by example that every soul matters.

# Torah at the Center

## All I Ever Wanted Was to Belong

By Sharon Palay, Member, Bet Shalom Congregation, Minnetonka, Minnesota

I'm a human being and trying to follow my ancestral footsteps, but it's been hard because of my physical limitations. My name is Sharon. I am a Reform Jew born and raised in a small town in North Dakota. My mom took me to B'nai Israel Synagogue. I remember snuggling close to her, loving the bright and beautiful stained glass windows that lit up the whole sanctuary. I have cerebral palsy. I use a wheelchair. Sometimes people have a difficult time understanding what I say—and I do have a lot to say! To get into the synagogue my dad and uncle would carry me up the steps in my wheelchair. There were more stairs going up to the bimah. One Sukkot my mom took me up to the bimah. We stood under the chuppah and I saw the Torah for the first time. It would be the last time I would be close to the Torah scroll for many years.

I attended Ann Carlson Crippled Children Christian Boarding School in Jamestown. The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was years away, so there were no laws mandating education for children with disabilities. I learned how to live independently. Academics were not stressed, but the Christian religion was. As the only Jew, I sat in the hallway on Sunday mornings to wait for my peers to come back from church services. I felt very isolated. When I came home from school mom would teach me about being Jewish. We read stories about Jewish holidays. On rare occasions, I went to religious school. I felt like an outsider because I didn't know much about Judaism.

I was 27 when I moved to Minneapolis. I chose Minneapolis because it was a bigger Jewish community for me to join. I started my 14 year journey to find a synagogue. I would call synagogues to get information about joining. Gatekeepers answered phones at all the synagogues. "We can't help you," they all said.

In 2001, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis started the Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities. The program manager, Shelly, met with me. She was the first person to ask what my goals were for participating in the Jewish community. "All I've ever wanted was to belong," I replied. This was the beginning of my new life.

I wanted to join Bet Shalom Congregation because the new building was accessible. After meeting with Rabbi Norman Cohen, I decided to join. While still at the synagogue, I called to schedule a ride for the next Erev Shabbat services.

I was persistent. The staff at Bet Shalom was very supportive and welcoming, helping me achieve my Jewish goals. I attended services and started learning Hebrew. People started to see me around the synagogue and some would talk with me. It wasn't always easy, but once I found my Jewish home I didn't give up. Eventually I celebrated becoming a bat mitzvah. I read the first three verses of *B'reishit*, the *parashah* in which we read that each person is created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the Divine Image. That includes me and all other people who have disabilities.

What has changed for me? I finally practice my faith. I participate in physical fitness at the Sabes Jewish Community Center and volunteer at a class for young adults who have disabilities. I co-chair Bet Shalom's inclusion committee and attend Torah study classes. The first time I met Rabbi Cohen he asked me if my parents were alive. Both of them had died by then. I told the rabbi that I had never said *Kaddish* for them. It was a stunning realization for the rabbi and for me that one of the most important traditions in Judaism had been denied to me because of my disability. Now I say *Kaddish* for my parents and honor their memory.

Bet Shalom has given to me a place to call my own and to feel accepted for who I am. And I think I opened the eyes of my Jewish community to accept all kinds of people regardless of their physical, emotional and hidden disabilities.



# Torah at the Center

## Lifelong Learning for Adults with Disabilities

By Becca Hornstein, Executive Director, Council For Jews With Special Needs, Scottsdale, Arizona

A significant number of adults with disabilities currently over the age of 30 never attended Jewish schools or camps. There were no modified curricula, trained teachers or commitments to educate each child according to his ability. *B'nei mitzvah* accommodations were few and far between. These adults and their families stopped attending services because of the discomfort felt by everyone...and then they became invisible.

Today, most children with disabilities have the opportunity to attend religious school with the necessary modifications and support systems. After they become *b'nei mitzvah*, some of them may be able to continue their Jewish studies and participate in Jewish youth programs. However, a large percentage of those children find no adult classes or programs modified for their participation, and they lose their connection with the Jewish community.

For many adults with intellectual, developmental, emotional and behavioral disabilities, their limitations still make it difficult for them to participate in "typical" adult programs in their Jewish community. Creating opportunities for continuing Jewish studies and socialization with adults with disabilities *and* typical adults ensures their ongoing involvement with Judaism and the Jewish community. Adults with special needs and their extended families benefit from these programs, which often lead to new friendships and other social opportunities. Members of the Jewish community see adults with disabilities praying in their synagogues, celebrating holiday celebrations, dining in Jewish restaurants and volunteering at community events. In this way, "disability awareness" occurs in a quiet but effective manner.

Temple Chai in Phoenix, Arizona, in partnership with the Council For Jews With Special Needs, the disability resources agency for the local Jewish community, created Yad B'Yad and Keshet, two groups that provide continuing Jewish education tailored to the unique learning styles of men and women with mild to severe disabling conditions. Special education teachers prepare the discussion materials and activities to enable each participant to be engaged and successful. A sign language interpreter attends every class to assist several students. Community volunteers often join the participants in their Sunday gatherings, and new

connections form outside of the classes. The groups meet on alternate Sunday afternoons for two hours for study, discussion, related projects, music and art. The group instructors use art, music, cooking, drama, games and other multisensory approaches. Community outings to other congregations and Jewish sites supplement their usual activities.

In 2000, several Yad B'Yad members lobbied their instructors to help them prepare for the *b'nei mitzvah* celebrations they never had. With the guidance of Temple Chai's rabbi and cantor, the special education teachers developed a curriculum that was modified for the learning styles of each student. The focus was on Shabbat liturgy and participation in the service. All lessons were modified for readers and non-readers, for the members who used sign language, for those with poor retention and for those who learned primarily through rote memorization.

Yad B'Yad members met twice a month for two years to learn, to the best of their ability, basic Hebrew, Shabbat morning liturgy, songs and how to act on the bimah. Everything was interpreted in sign language. Each person was given a part to perform at the service, including writing a *d'rash* and delivering their own speeches of appreciation. Their enthusiasm and dedication to this task touched everyone as the date approached. In the process of preparing, the instructors discovered that a 40 year old woman with Down syndrome could read, a skill not previously displayed. On January 19, 2002, eight men and women stood on the bimah and celebrated becoming *b'nei mitzvah*!

After the *b'nei mitzvah* service and the parties that followed, the Yad B'Yad members insisted on digging deeper into their Jewish studies. In 2008, the group began an in-depth study of the stories in Genesis. They spent at least two classes talking about each story and illustrating it on large panels of muslin fabric. The group's goal was to form their own scroll to be unrolled and studied year after year as they review the stories of Genesis.

These were the invisible members of the Jewish community, and now they are eagerly following the mandate to study Torah. With the help of special educators, every congregation can offer this gift to men and women with disabilities and celebrate their commitment to Judaism.

# Torah at the Center

## Open Those Gates

By Rabbi Rebecca L. Dubowe, Temple Adat Elohim, Thousand Oaks, California

I was in my study when my assistant came running in, telling me to go straight to the hospital. When I arrived, the daughter of the patient gave me a pained look, showed me a hearing aid and complained it wasn't working. I realized the problem, changed the battery and put it back into the patient's ear. She just smiled and could not stop talking. Here I was, a rabbi who knew how to change hearing aid batteries!

A sense of humor is a valuable asset when it comes to living with deafness. I have to laugh when I think about some of my college/rabbinical school experiences. I explained to one professor with a thick mustache how difficult it was to read his lips, so he trimmed it. But he never understood that when he turned to write on the blackboard while continuing to speak, there was no way I could follow his lecture. I explained to another professor that I needed to sit up front and see his face at all times to be able to follow the lecture and take notes at the same time. Shortly after class was over, the professor suggested using a tape recorder in class or perhaps getting the notes in Braille!

Being a part of the Jewish community, celebrating the holidays and attending the synagogue were important to my family. This meant that I was the only deaf child at the Jewish sleep-away camp and dreaded the nighttime activities because I could neither see nor hear anything. It meant that I missed most of my rabbi's sermons (which wasn't so bad). I read and followed the prayer book on my own rather than with the congregation. However, becoming a bat mitzvah, which included chanting my Haftorah and speaking in front of the entire congregation, was a transforming experience.

Growing up, I did not know other deaf people because I was mainstreamed in all aspects of my life. My main identity was being Jewish. I discovered my deaf identity when I went to California State University, Northridge. The gate began to open, and I quickly learned how to sign and communicate with other deaf people who were just like me. I also met my beloved Michael, a nice Jewish deaf boy!

In our Jewish tradition, there is clear evidence that the rabbis and Jewish community struggled to search for ways to deal with those who were not within the norm of their society. Our tradition records specific cases about whether a deaf person was able to get married or act as a witness and whether or not it was permissible to turn on a hearing aid on Shabbat. The deaf were categorized as mute because the rabbis did not know that sign language was an authentic language. The reality remains that if one is not like the others for whatever reason, being accepted in the Jewish community is not easy. I'm afraid we have lost quite a few Jews with disabilities to other faith communities that have been accessible for many years.

People's reactions when they see a sign language interpreter, wheelchair, cane, seeing-eye dog or even a different gait enter the room make a difference. Remember, it is the ability that counts, not the disability! Instead people focus on what they think is missing: They cannot imagine what it would be like not to hear the birds sing, not to see the different colors of the rainbow or not to be able to climb a mountain.

In the *N'ilah* service, the closing service on Yom Kippur, we say, "Open the gates, open them wide. Open the gates, God, open the gates for all of us and for all Israel." As God's partners in this world, we must keep those gates open; keep them open for the many Jews with disabilities who have not been able to enter.



# Torah at the Center

## What Makes Me Tic

By Pamela Schuller, NFTY-GER Youth Programs Manager, Montclair, New Jersey

In first grade, I was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome by Maury Povitch. Well, not exactly by Maury Povitch. After watching an episode of his show about Tourette's, my mother put two and two together. My case of Tourette's started out mild but over time turned into a severe case. Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary movements and noises called "tics." Tourette's is often referred to as "the most common unknown disorder;" it is also known to be just as much of a social disorder as it is a neurological disorder. There is no hiding Tourette's. In fact, the more we try and hold the symptoms of Tourette's back, the worse it gets. Because of that, for the last eight years of my life I have let my Tourette's fly, choosing to educate others constantly along the way.

However, in my adolescence, during which my Tourette's symptoms were truly awful, messages of "not now" or "can you try and hold it back" were constantly being sent my way. I worked tirelessly to find a place where I could be myself. I loved my summers at the URJ Goldman Union Camp Institute (GUCI) where I had been going since the summer after third grade. I also loved my youth group experience. I was starting to feel connected to Reform Judaism, but my congregation was not feeling as connected to me. I will never deny the fact that I wasn't easy to have around. Severe Tourette's mixed with the general angst of being a teenager made for a difficult combination. Be that as it may, I needed more than anything to have a place support me and let me be me.

This particular congregation did the opposite, from quietly asking me to not attend services to making it very clear that having me in the youth group was extremely disruptive. Although the other youth stood up for me, a few board members of the congregation made sure that I did not feel included. My family and I left the congregation for good. I was left with only a feeling of uneasiness about being Jewish.

Over time, I ended up at an amazing boarding school that worked with me to accept Tourette syndrome. They also encouraged me to apply to be a counselor at Camp GUCI, despite my fears that my tics would get in the way of being a great counselor. I remember making it clear in my first

summer that I was excited to work with kids, but I would have no part in the Jewish aspects of programming. If I didn't know what I believed, how could I teach others? I often pulled aside a rabbi with whom I felt close to talk about how I could feel Jewish again, even if the other ten months out of the year I felt unwanted in the Jewish world. He helped me understand that I did feel Jewish; I just didn't always feel connected.

I ended up working at GUCI for seven summers. In my final summers there, I was the unit head for the two high school units on camp. I watched those kids question what they believed, talk about being bullied at home, being different and trying to fit in. I began to realize that instead of letting my childhood experience deter me from working with Jewish youth, it should be the very reason for choosing this career path. I understand what it feels like to crave a connection and to be excluded. I also understand what it feels like to be completely accepted and loved by my Jewish surroundings. Now I understand that in order for a congregation to be able to support a struggling congregant, they must be strong themselves.

I recently stepped into the position as the NFTY-GER (Garden Empire Region) youth programs manager. I want to make sure that every teen in this region feels like NFTY is a safe place for them to be themselves and love what makes them different, even if that means a little extra effort on my part. As a movement, there will always be times where we will be faced with congregants or participants who present a challenge. That should be the time we work together.

# Torah at the Center

## Teen Madrichim Guide the Way

By Deborah Gettes, Special Needs Education Specialist, Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education/Jewish Outreach Partnership, Melrose Park, Pennsylvania

*How do I ask the director to give the child some room to calm down before confronting the situation?*

*Is it okay to sacrifice learning time to change the child's behavior? For how long and how often?*

These thoughtful questions came not from experienced teachers but from teenagers who work in their synagogue school in the Teen Assistant Program (TAP), a program proudly sponsored by the Auerbach Central Agency. Approximately 20 teens participate in a full week of training during the summer. During this week, the teens learn about learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, autism, classroom management and teaching remedial Hebrew, among other topics. The teens must be recommended by the school director in their synagogue and go through an application process. They also attend eight monthly sessions during which they not only continue learning, but also share successes and frustrations with each other. Each teen is assigned to work in their synagogue school in a classroom with one or two students who have special needs. The teens work collaboratively to plan for their students. The teens also receive a national service award given by the sponsoring agency as well as the National Consortium of Special Education Consultants. In addition to the service award, the teens receive a stipend for attending the program.

The TAP program has made a difference to the classroom teachers, the students, their families and the teen participants. Letters of thanks have been received from the teens, their parents, the school directors, the teachers and the families who have a child who has special needs. The TAP program has had a tremendous impact on the Philadelphia five county area. The TAP program has run with a full complement for seven years. Sisters and brothers of former TAP teens eagerly await their time to apply to the TAP program. The TAP teens also establish long-lasting relationships with each other.

Since religious school teachers are often avocational teachers without formal training and the TAP teens receive specialized training, the teens are often a resource for the

teachers in the classes in which they assist. The teens eagerly share information from their training materials with the classroom teachers. Many of the teens establish relationships with the student who has special needs and their families. Teens attend their students' *b'nei mitzvah* services and remain friends even once the teens have gone off to college. The parents are extremely grateful for the help and support the TAP teens give their children.

An unanticipated outcome of this program is the profound effect the TAP program has on the teen participants. By participating in the TAP program, the teens have gotten more connected to their synagogue and Judaism. Many have become religious school teachers in synagogues near the colleges they attend.

This program has been replicated in other cities and could be replicated in more. The effort benefits the entire community. Allow me to conclude with a few words from teen participants about the program:

- The TAP program has made me a better person. I am using the skills we learned to teach the kids how to identify and differentiate the letters and to combine the syllables to read the words.
- Working with kids who have special needs was difficult. I eventually got the hang of it. I was able to calm them down and focus on the task at hand. This experience has meant a lot to me!
- I learned many different ways of communicating with a disabled child. One Sunday morning my "kid" had a temper tantrum. I took him outside so he would have a better chance to talk to me. When he was finished, he gave me a big hug. He always gives me a hug now. He has grown fond of me and likewise, I of him.
- This program has truly been one of the most amazing things I have ever done! I loved our in-depth discussions.
- It is a great feeling to know I am going to make a difference in a child's life!



## From the Secular to the Divine: Inclusion and Belonging as Core 21st Century Values

By Allan I. Bergman, President, HIGH IMPACT Mission-based Consulting and Training, Northbrook, Illinois

The Civil Rights Movement by and for individuals with disabilities and their families in the United States began in 1969 with the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania right-to-education class action law suit in federal district court. Only 41 years ago, children and youth with disabilities who were not toilet trained or could not speak and demonstrated inappropriate behaviors were deemed ineligible for and excluded from any public school education and often were placed in state institutions. The language used to describe these children and the stereotypes associated with them included terms such as crippled, deaf and dumb, crazy, mongoloid, idiot and moron.

Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams has documented the use of similar stigmatizing terminology in her authoritative review of Jewish text and traditional teachings and the emphasis on “purity” and *daat* (cognition or knowledge). The perceived lack of *daat* excluded individuals with mental illness, deafness, blindness and intellectual disabilities from Temple rituals. The exclusion of children with disabilities from Jewish religious education, activities and lifecycle events continued well into the twentieth century, and the movement toward inclusion in Jewish life has tended to either parallel or follow the advances in the secular world.

Since the PARC case, 26 additional right-to-education federal class action law suits were filed and won by the plaintiffs. Based upon the constitutional principles of equal protection, due process and liberty, these cases laid the foundation for the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The law guarantees a constitutional right to free, appropriate education to all children with disabilities. In 2008, public schools provided special education services to 11.16 percent of all students ages 6-17.

The landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on disability, states: “Individuals with disabilities continually encounter various forms of discrimination, including outright intentional exclusion, the discriminatory effects of architectural, transportation and communication barriers,

overprotecting rules and policies, failure to make modifications to existing facilities and practices, exclusionary qualification standards and criteria, segregation and relegation to lesser services, programs, activities, benefits, jobs or other opportunities.” The law then declares four goals for each individual living with a disability: equality of opportunity; independent living (having choices and control); economic self sufficiency; and full participation. Subsequent to the enactment of the ADA, the following definition of disability has been included in four federal laws: “Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to: live independently; enjoy self determination; make choices; contribute to society; pursue meaningful careers; and enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural and educational mainstream of American society.”

The federal government states that 20% of the population is protected under the ADA. Many components of our movement are exempt from the letter of the law because of the separation of Church and State; however, the moral imperative is clear in employment, access to services and accommodations. The biggest barriers we face are neither physical nor financial; they are attitudinal.

Increasingly, in response to the advances in access and participation within our society, children with disabilities and their families as well as adults with disabilities, are looking to their faith communities for acceptance, participation and inclusion to affirm a sense of personal value, worth and belonging in the House of God. Jewish tradition teaches us that each human life is sacred, including each individual with a disability, whether the person is born with the disability or acquires it through an injury, disease or as a result of aging.

The Reform Movement has made strides in recognizing the needs of individuals with disabilities during the past 25 years. The establishment of the Access to Lifelong Jewish Learning Committee puts the Reform Movement in a leadership position to demonstrate to ourselves and others that all God’s children are created *b’tzelem Elohim* and are welcome, included and accommodated in all aspects of Reform Jewish life.

# Torah at the Center

## Attitudes are the Most Challenging Barriers

By Rabbi Marc A. Gruber, Central Synagogue of Nassau County, Rockville Centre, New York

As the parents of two children, now young adults, with learning disabilities, my wife and I have spent decades battling with educational establishments. At times this included the synagogue where I served as rabbi. I hope our experiences help readers approach families in which a member is a person with a disability in more helpful and supportive ways.

Families in our congregations are often battle weary and want our synagogues to be a safe haven and a refuge of normalcy. Many of us in the professional leadership refer to our congregations as families; families with a person who has a disability would like a warm welcome. It is easy to make our buildings accessible; it is much harder to change our cultures and our attitudes. Sometimes well-meaning people do not understand the pain they cause.

I still feel sadness and pain (when these things happened I felt anger, too) as I recall events many years in the past. Some of the bitterest experiences were the result not of deliberate behavior, but of people acting out of ignorance and ingrained prejudice. When my youngest son was a pre-schooler, I know that some people considered him contagious. It is ironic because today as a twenty-year old, he is contagiously personable. Back in the day, when my little cutie was with me, often at synagogue, and some well-meaning person approached and spoke to him, he did not respond. He could not speak. When he tried, the other person found him unintelligible. My son could form the thoughts in his mind, but he could not make the muscles around his mouth create the sounds we recognize as words. After a few minutes, I told the well-intentioned individual who was drawn to my adorable child, "He can't respond. He has a disability." Invariably, the person stopped playing with him, mumbled something to me, and hurried away. I wanted to scream, "My son will not contaminate you." People with disabilities are not contagious; isolation from them will not protect anybody.

We want our congregations to be one place wherein we can recharge. We want to feel the renewal that Shabbat offers. Most congregations cannot provide every accommodation that a person with disabilities needs, but we want willing

partners who help us plan for the fullest participation in congregational life and activities.

Establish a disability awareness and inclusion team in your congregation. Steadily pursue a mission of inclusion, and start by deepening the understanding of members of your congregation. Participate in Jewish disabilities awareness month with a special service and other activities designed to raise awareness. Offer in-service training for your religious school staff about educating students with learning disabilities. Make certain that your clergy, other senior staff and lay leadership understand how to discuss provisions for inclusion. Create an atmosphere of understanding and engage a family in need of accommodations as a partner and not an adversary.

You can visibly and with empathy help people with disabilities feel like members. Our congregation is fairly accessible (we keep trying to be more inclusive), so a group home for adults living with cerebral palsy found us and regularly buses residents to services. One fellow, I will call him Jake, frequently shouts out loud. He only does this when we are silent or reading, not when we are singing. One evening during the silent prayer, Jake was particularly expressive. As I viewed the congregation from the bimah, I saw people growing angry and impatient. I descended the bimah and walked to Jake. I told Jake that I felt his frustration having so many thoughts and being unable to communicate them to others. I said that I wished I had a magic wand that would allow him to say what was in his soul. All the anger in our sanctuary quickly dissipated. Jake's outcries can be jarring, but they no longer evoke anger. The residents from this group home are welcome members of our worship community.

All of us can break through the isolation that often accompanies disabilities. Transforming our attitudes will allow us to do so; this work is ongoing. This is the effort that allows us to see God in all our members.



# Torah at the Center

## Educating Diverse Learners

**By Amy Gold, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Matthew King, Ed.D., Head of School; Rabbi Ellen Pildis, School Rabbi and Director of Jewish Studies; and David Rosenberg, Assistant to Head of School and Third Grade Teacher, The Rashi School, Dedham, Massachusetts**

In Judaism, the process of how we educate has never been taken for granted. As early as 64 C.E., Yehoshua ben Gamla was writing about best practices. Who should be teaching, and whom they should be teaching? How many students are appropriate per group? At what age should students travel to a central location or be educated locally? Thoughtful discussions appear throughout Jewish sources about how to discipline and inspire students. Some of our most compelling texts speak of different types of learners and teachers. *Hanoch lana'ar al pi darko*, "Teach the student according to his ways" (Proverbs 22:6), is a reminder that the teacher must know who the student is, how the student learns and what will inspire learning.

At Rashi, a 300-student K-8 school, we serve students with different learning styles and challenges through our commitment to differentiated instruction. All of our teachers receive extensive professional development in designing and implementing curriculum that is accessible and engaging to all students. Lessons and assessments are differentiated according to readiness, interest and learning profile. Our learning specialists work both in classrooms and resource centers, where they provide small group and one-on-one support. All instructional staff are observed and supervised each year by division heads or other instructional leaders.

Beginning in third grade, students are grouped according to readiness for math, Hebrew and reading. Learning specialists provide small group instruction to modify and adjust the pace of instruction as well as the curriculum and assignments. The profile of students in these small groups includes both students with diagnosed learning disabilities and students who are at risk. Students are often identified early and provided with small group instruction to provide additional exposure to concepts and opportunities for guided practice. Students seamlessly flow from learning support in the resource center back into the regular classroom.

Learning specialists' daily schedules maximize the time they spend supporting students in language arts, social studies and math. During writing or social studies lessons in elementary classrooms, lead teachers, assistant teachers and learning specialists work with students to support their processing and executive functioning skills. Learning

specialists break down tasks, monitor student progress and redirect and re-explain as needed to maximize students' time on task and achievement.

Learning specialists at Rashi also are available to students outside of classroom instructional time. They commonly meet with students before school, during lunch and after school. In these additional hours, they are able to provide homework support for long-range projects and writing assignments as well as targeted practice for reading fluency, reading comprehension, spelling and grammar. Our learning specialists use multi-sensory activities to help teach and reinforce concepts.

Lastly, we have an occupational therapist who works with students in kindergarten and first grade and consults with older students with sensory integration issues. Additionally, we contract with Gateways, a Boston-area provider of special education services for Jewish day schools, for speech and language pathologists to work with students and consult with classroom teachers about curricular content and materials.

Our use of technology allows us to reach students through multiple modalities. All classrooms are equipped with interactive white boards, which make it easier to pair visual and auditory instruction. Notes taken in class can be saved and brought up the next day or easily printed and distributed to students.

At Rashi, we do not believe that there is one right way to educate a child. We are committed to meeting children where they are and helping them achieve at the pace that is best for them. For these reasons, we use a varied approach to best meet the needs of our students and successfully educate all types of learners towards common learning goals. While teaching diverse learners can be tremendously satisfying, the work is intellectually challenging and can be emotionally draining. That is why it is imperative that schools that embrace this challenge have strong professional cultures with collegiality at the center. The days of teachers laboring in "splendid isolation" are long gone. This important work can only be done when the adults in the school are collaborating and learning together.

# Torah at the Center

## Great Expectations

By Jill Chaus, Member, United Jewish Center in Danbury, Connecticut

My 18 year old son, Aitan, lives with autism and learned about NFTY Northeast's December Institute. Inspired by his younger brother's experiences in NFTY and at Camp Eisner, Aitan anxiously wanted to participate. I made a plea to the NFTY Northeast Advisor, Rachel Mersky Woda, to accept Aitan into the program and offered to be available as needed. She was thrilled to learn I was also a social worker who works with people with disabilities and asked if I'd be willing to teach participants and staff about increasing our sensitivity to include people with disabilities. I was delighted. But preparing to go to Institute was difficult for me. I feared it would overwhelm Aitan, and I'd kick myself for setting him up to fail. Aitan was not nervous at all. He was only excited that he could finally be included. His confidence and positive attitude are what really drove me.

The truth is, once Aitan and I arrived, he taught all of us. Aitan attends a private school and requires an aide throughout the day. However, once he walked into the program, he was supported by a force greater than any of the professionals he has ever worked with. He was motivated by the desire to fit in, make friends and be accepted. I also saw the sensitivity and compassion of the young teens that strived to make him comfortable, without any instruction. Aitan spent his days attending the full program, slept in a bunk with 20 typical young teens and ate meals with the group. Whenever I would check in with him, he quietly would ask me to leave him alone because I was "cramping his style."

I facilitated groups about sensitivity and inclusion. I was surprised at how receptive the kids were. They were anxious to share their own stories of how they have either been touched by people who are disabled or felt discrimination toward their family members who are disabled. Some shared in what ways they were disabled and were relieved to talk about it in a safe environment.

As the week progressed I saw how apart from my sessions, the teens were experiencing Aitan and getting a hands-on education that came naturally. Aitan was fully, whole

heartedly accepted that week, even performing an original song in the talent show his last night of the Institute. (Visit [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search Aitan Harpaz to see video.) As he sang, you could hear a pin drop, and when he finished, all the kids jumped to their feet to applaud and cheer for him.

I was walking on cloud nine! I raised an amazing young man of whom I am incredibly proud. I took a risk bringing Aitan somewhere where they were not prepared for him but was rewarded with the best gift ever. I was given the confidence to know the limits are as high or as low as I set them. As parents, we naturally want to protect our children. We do not want to see them fail or be scrutinized or rejected. Mistakenly, many of us hold our own children back from their peers because of this fear. Doing this isolates us and our children. We feel different and rejected. In truth, much of this feeling is created by our own actions. We think they won't be accepted, but we don't often put them in situations that can prove otherwise.

Aitan has made many friends from the experience and he looks forward to attending future NFTY events. This is Aitan's senior year, which means that he is at the end of his NFTY experience. He will see his peers go off to college and get jobs. His social experiences with typical peers will decrease. It makes me sad because he is a late bloomer who is just finding his niche here at NFTY. He loves helping others who need more support than him, is a terrific advocate for himself and very kind and thoughtful of others. Perhaps he could be a liaison or a mentor to others coming in. In the end, he and I learned more than anything we could have ever taught: In the right environment he isn't that disabled after all. Thank you, NFTY Northeast, for an experience that will last a lifetime for our family.



# Torah at the Center

## Differentiation and DeLeT

By Robert E. Tornberg, Education Director, DeLeT, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, California

In his *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides discusses the laws of Torah study:

When a teacher is teaching, and the students do not understand, he should not be angry at them or become upset, but rather he should go over the material again and again—even many times—until they understand... Similarly, a student should not say, “I understand,” if he has not understood. He should ask again—many times, if necessary...

While Maimonides certainly didn't use the term, it does not require much extrapolation to see the concept of differentiation in his words. To put it simply, the teacher is required to do whatever it takes to ensure that all students learn—and the student must also take responsibility for this!

We in Jewish education can feel good that even 800 years ago Jewish educators were concerned with the needs of all learners. We must also admit, however, that our understanding of differentiation has advanced a great deal since the time Maimonides argued that we must repeat the lesson over and over again until the student understands.

The latest research regarding differentiation is presented most cogently by Diane Heacox (*Differentiated Instruction in the Regular Classroom*, 2002). She teaches that there are three processes that must be considered in reaching all learners. They are:

1. Differentiate the Content (What is taught and how it is taught)
2. Differentiate the Process (How the students learn the content)
3. Differentiate the Product (How the students will demonstrate their learning)

Each of these processes must be considered in great depth in order to implement them appropriately with students of any age—in order to meet Maimonides' goal of understanding for all students.

To this end, the DeLeT (Day School Leadership through Teaching) program, part of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at HUC in Los Angeles, is dedicated to preparing future day school teachers who are committed to differentiation and understand its concepts, processes and techniques.

Each of the DeLeT Fellows in our nine cohorts (to date) spends significant time understanding differentiation in a variety of ways. Courses that touch on this topic directly and indirectly include “Child Development and Learning,” “Meeting the Needs of All Learners,” “Differentiating Instruction” and “Diversity in Schools.” Additionally, in their “Teaching and Learning Seminar” students study Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, Mel Levine's “All Kinds of Minds” approach and how to conduct a formal child study in which their goal is to understand an individual child's social, emotional, spiritual and learning patterns and needs.

Each of the DeLeT Fellows also has the opportunity to spend a full year in an internship at a Jewish day school. Unlike the traditional student-teacher model, DeLeT Fellows participate in the full spectrum of work done by their mentor teachers. This includes working with the special needs staff at their schools, participating in child-study sessions, joining parent conferences and attending professional development sessions and faculty meetings—all opportunities to become sensitized to issues of differentiation as these issues arise organically.

Additionally, it should be noted that we in DeLeT are sensitive to the different needs of the Fellows as they go through our program. In short, we model differentiation as we teach them. Each of the students comes to us with unique learning profiles and very different backgrounds. Some have specific learning issues; others are Israelis whose abilities to write in English are a challenge. Some Fellows have graduated day schools and come with Hebrew skills and a significant knowledge of Judaica; others have no Hebrew background and know little of Jewish tradition. Because of our belief that we need a diverse group of teachers in our day schools, we have built in flexibility for the various needs of our Fellows and the results have been positive.

The *DeLeT Vision of a Jewish Day School Teacher* contains 14 ideas about the kind of teacher we want to see teaching in Jewish day schools. One description is “teachers who honor and accommodate the individuality of each student, thereby meeting the needs of all learners.” If all teachers in all schools met this goal, students would be happier and learn more, schools would be more humane and more effective and our society would be a better place to live.

# Torah at the Center

## Affirming Every Jew and Jewish Family through Hebrew Acquisition

By Rabbi Shira H. Joseph, M.Ed., Congregation Sha'aray Shalom, Hingham, Massachusetts and Co-Chair, Union for Reform Judaism Committee for Access to Lifelong Jewish Education

I have felt the pain of an adult son in mourning as he stood in front of his mother's grave mumbling the words of *Kaddish* and knowing that at this sacred moment, he was empty because he didn't know how to read the prayer. I have seen a child put her head down in the midst of class, ashamed because she couldn't participate in the Hebrew lesson. I have held dozens of hands of moms and dads who pleaded with me to help their child with challenges learn Hebrew so that the child might participate in the rites of bar and bat mitzvah like their other sons and daughters. I have sat with many Christian parents who want the key to unlock this sacred "code" of ours; without knowing the basic Hebrew prayers, they are unable to fully participate or help their children. Just as isolated, if not more so, is the adult Jew who never learned the basics of Hebrew literacy and now feels unable to even acquire letter recognition. These functional adults in every other aspect of their professional and family lives are embarrassed to even admit their illiteracy, let alone put themselves in a classroom to learn the basic *alef-bet*.

All of our synagogue members, young and old, who lack simple Hebrew letter recognition and knowledge of basic prayer words are excluded from full participation in Jewish life. Jewish inclusion is about meaningful participation in the life of the synagogue, and acquiring basic Hebrew literacy is an affirming process towards living a meaningful Jewish life. Over the decades, as both a special education teacher in a prior career and a mom of Shayna, a now 29-year-old daughter with Asperger's, I have become a believer in the power of Hebrew, our *lashon kodesh*, our Holy Tongue, which binds the Jewish people together and is each person's inheritance.

While I would not minimize the difficulty that some learners have with Hebrew acquisition, I have found that with varied teaching techniques almost all students can learn how to decode Hebrew. Many parents are afraid to have their children with disabilities begin the process of learning, citing

a number of reasons, including the difficulties that their children have with English reading, the number of stresses that their children face and the number of tutorial hours that their children have during the normal school year. These are real concerns which must be addressed. But it must also be said that simple Hebrew decoding might in fact stimulate other centers in the brain, creating new paths for transmission of information. Most importantly, this skill, which certainly takes work to acquire, will stay with children, help them become comfortable at services and live more participatory Jewish lives.

Over the years, I have developed a Hebrew marathon that achieves Hebrew letter acquisition in less than six hours of instruction. Through my special needs teacher's lens, I know that the best way for children and adults to access the Hebrew *alef-bet* is to use as many modalities as possible to accommodate a multitude of learning styles. For example, consider teaching Hebrew by making it hands-on, using food. It is a fun manipulative; the rewards are obvious. Gather a few foods that are particularly adaptable for creating letters, such as refrigerator bread sticks, plastic chocolate candy molds, spray cheese or tube frosting. Form these foods into Hebrew letters and have students identify each other's letters before eating. Inclusion is also about finding a way to include all members of a class. So, have students quite literally become the Hebrew letters by forming their bodies (several students may be necessary) into a Hebrew letter. Take digital photos and make an *alef-bet* chart of your students for your classroom.

By helping each and every child and adult engage in Hebrew acquisition, we not only include them in the life of the synagogue and the school, but also give them access to living Jewish lives. My daughter Shayna is proof: She chanted Torah when becoming a bat mitzvah, tutored other kids for Hebrew letter recognition and loves coming to services as a fully integrated member of the Jewish community.



# Torah at the Center

## Together We Make Summer Special

**By Lisa David, Associate Director, URJ Camps; Melissa Frey, Director, URJ Kutz Camp and Associate Director, NFTY; Steve Weitzman, Chair, Union for Reform Judaism Special Needs Camping Committee; and Samantha Dresser, Program Director, Mitzvah Corps at Kutz**

In November 2009 a resolution was passed at the URJ Biennial Convention calling for the expansion of special needs camping programs. And while we have seen remarkable success over the years, we know that making our communities more welcoming, accessible and appropriate for Jewish youth and teens with special needs is not just a dream, but a reality for the summer of 2011.

As we prepare to launch new and innovative special needs camping and Israel programs, it's of great value to note the success we have achieved over the past fifteen years as a leader in providing fully inclusive residential summer camp experiences for Jewish teens diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The Mitzvah Corps Program at Kutz Camp has provided hundreds of Jewish teens between the ages of 13 and 19 the opportunity to integrate into a mainstream Reform Jewish summer camp program. Because of the ongoing generous support of the Decker Memorial Foundation, the Mitzvah Corps Program welcomed 23 campers this past summer. The program's mission is to honor the unique characteristics of every camper and provide access to Jewish camping by creating individualized accommodations and modifications that allow each camper to succeed.

One of the highlights of our program is the peer mentorship component, as Mitzvah Corps campers participate in daily activities at Kutz accompanied by Mitzvah Corps mentors, teens who are interested in learning about living with ASD and gaining essential skills needed to help support the physical and emotional challenges of inclusion for special needs populations. Highly trained counselors and professional staff are also present and supporting campers at all times. The Kutz Camp provides a place where neuro-typical teens and teens with ASD come together, learn from each other and focus on their similarities rather than their differences. The benefit of this program is threefold:

1. Mitzvah Corps at Kutz provides a safe, nurturing camp experience for our teens with ASD.
2. This program begins valuable training for the next generation of compassionate young people who will choose to continue this valuable work.

3. Parents get the gift of their child participating in a mainstream summer camp environment that is steeped in Reform Jewish ethics and values.

In addition to the program at Kutz Camp, this summer will mark the second summer of a similar camping program at URJ Camp Newman, Camp Neshama (formerly named Camp Nefesh).

In 2011, we're offering two new programs. Israel in a Special Way is a 21-day full Israel travel program for teens ages 16-19 with diagnosed issues of attention that may include ADD/ADHD, Asperger's syndrome, social skills challenges, verbal or non-verbal learning disabilities and/or mild social or emotional concerns. The special Israel travel program will integrate adventure, spiritual and learning experiences. The intake, staffing, program and logistical arrangements will be managed by Summit Camp and Travel (known for its expertise in this area for over 40 years) together with NFTY in Israel.

In partnership with Top Bunk Counseling, URJ Eisner/Crane Lake Camps are offering a week-long Reform Jewish camping experience for campers with communication and social delays. Camp Chazak is designed to be both a Jewish recreational camp program and a therapeutic camp. The therapeutic program, designed by clinical psychologist Dr. Daniel Sorkin, is steeped in evidence-based clinical research involving use of camping, informal Jewish education and group therapy. Counselors are either trained professionals at the doctoral master's level or currently in training. Chazak campers are URJ Eisner and Crane Lake campers. They will be given the URJ camp experience, only with specialized resources that will enable them to be successful.

We firmly believe all youth should have the benefit of this valuable experience and take pride in our efforts to provide support and accommodations to those with special needs so that they, too, might enhance and enrich our camp communities. *Hinei mah tov u'mah na'im shevet achim gam yachad.* Behold how good and pleasant it is when all people live together as one. (Psalm 133)

*For more information, go to [urjcamps.org/programs/specialneeds](http://urjcamps.org/programs/specialneeds).*

# Torah at the Center

## Make School Safe for All Students

By Deborah Swerdlow, Legislative Assistant, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Washington, D.C.

In May 2009, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a shocking report about our nation's schools. The disturbing information wasn't about excessive class size or falling test scores. Rather, the report exposed "hundreds of cases of alleged abuse and death" related to the use of seclusion and restraint in public and private schools.

Among the incidents detailed was that of a West Virginia four-year-old with autism who suffered bruising and wet the bed after teachers restrained her in a chair "that resembled a 'miniature electric chair.'" The report also noted the case of an Illinois substitute teacher who restrained an eight-year-old boy with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) by strapping him to a chair with masking tape and taping his mouth shut.

As a result of the evidence uncovered, Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) introduced the Keeping All Students Safe Act (H.R. 4247), which would have established federal standards for the use of seclusion and restraints in schools. The bill passed the House of Representatives in March 2010, but it stalled in the Senate and never made it to the President's desk.

Why did a bill seeking to address such horrible practices fail? The case of the Keeping All Students Safe Act illustrates the nuances and difficulties of the legislative process. When it was first introduced in the House of Representatives, the bill faced opposition from interest groups, including some school administrators and private schools. They questioned the application of these rules to private schools as well as public, and the creation of a new federal mandate over practices that are currently regulated in 31 states—even though the GAO report found that some of these state laws do not require parental notification, do not prohibit the use of restraints that hinder a child's ability to breathe or are otherwise inadequate.

After the bill passed the House, Senators amended the bill to permit the use of seclusion and restraints, under certain circumstances, as part of a student with disabilities' Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This action split the

disability rights advocacy community between those who argued that permitting these practices in a student's IEP would legitimize them and others who felt that a flawed bill was better than no bill at all.

As the debate dragged on, the legislative clock kept ticking. The midterm elections and Thanksgiving holiday kept lawmakers at home, instead of negotiating in Washington, D.C. And when they did return to Capitol Hill, precious time was consumed by other pressing economic and foreign policy issues. Ultimately, the Keeping All Students Safe Act was unable to overcome the philosophical split among its supporters and too-short supply of legislative days.

We are taught in *Pirkei Avot* 2:4, "Do not separate yourself from the community." Seclusion is a form of separation, as is any other tactic that communicates to the rest of the class that a student is different in a negative way. Yet our tradition also teaches us of the utmost importance of saving a life. If a child is in imminent danger or endangering others, we have an obligation to protect everyone involved—even if it means restraining the child who presents the danger.

Our Jewish values are not meant to be applied only in synagogue or in our interactions with other Jews. They are principles to help guide all aspects of our lives, including when we ask ourselves: How can I make sure that the realities in my child's classroom, in Jewish day schools and in schools across my state and country reflect my values?

These are conversations that must take place in our families, our congregations, our day schools and the greater community. You can help spur that conversation by researching the rules in your state (visit the U.S. Department of Education website for details), urging your elected officials to create new regulations or improve existing ones and learning about positive behavior supports that can create an environment in which seclusion and restraints would not be needed. (The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs is another good resource.)

These conversations will help us create a *k'hilah k'doshah*, a holy community in which all people are valued and treated according to their fundamental dignity.



# Torah at the Center

## Resources to Make the Dream a Reality

By Lisa Friedman, Co-Director of Education, Temple Beth-El, Hillsborough, New Jersey and Co-Chair, Union for Reform Judaism Committee for Access to Lifelong Jewish Education

When I began my work at Temple Beth-El as the religious school special needs consultant, I found myself searching specifically for Jewish resources for the school and families. A decade later, there are many valuable Jewish special education resources available. Accommodating the unique needs of every learner is achievable. We have built a welcoming and inclusive program. Thankfully, we are not alone. Below you can find a list of resources. In addition to the programs highlighted in this issue, I've included descriptions of and contacts for successful programs within our movement's congregations. This list is by no means exhaustive, but each program can be a model, and the contacts can serve as resources and support.

**www.jsped.org** The Jewish Special Education International Consortium's site includes links and resources, including publications and organizational assessment tools, book lists, study guides, sermons and resources for Jewish Disability Awareness Month.

**urj.org/learning/teacheducate/specialneeds** The Union's special education site includes a place to submit questions to an expert, and links to other relevant articles and issues of *V'shinantam* and *Torah at the Center*, such as one including a bibliography of children's books about special needs.

**urj.org/life/community/disabilities** The Union's disabilities site includes publications, links, personal stories and a video about inclusion from congregation Bet Shalom in Minnetonka, Minnesota.

**rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuedr/jewishdisabilitymonth** The Religious Action Center's Jewish Disability Month resource page also includes a link to their disability rights page.

**www.matankids.org** Matan: The Gift of Jewish Learning for Every Child is a place for families and professionals to come together around Jewish special education. They also have a blog, **blog.matankids.org**, and a Facebook page, **www.facebook.com/MatanInc**, on which they publish ideas and links to articles.

**www.njcd.org** Yachad: The National Jewish Council for Disabilities is an agency of the Orthodox Union. Their site includes information about Our Way for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

**www.cjsn.org** Based out of Scottsdale, Arizona, the website of the Council For Jews With Special Needs houses articles, information about referrals, residences and workshops.

**www.includingsamuel.com** *Including Samuel* is a documentary film examining the educational and social inclusion of youth with disabilities.

**www.prayingwithlior.com** *Praying with Lior* is a documentary film chronicling the life of Lior Liebling, a boy with Down syndrome, as he prepares to become a bar mitzvah.

### A Sampling of Programs in Reform Congregations

Congregation B'nai Israel, Bridgeport, Connecticut, offers extensive programming for students with disabilities and learning issues in preschool and religious school, as well as a program for disabled adults and support within the congregation for a variety of disabilities. Contact: Ira J. Wise, RJE, Director of Education, 203.336.1858, **www.congregationbnaiisrael.org**.

Congregation Har Hashem, Boulder, Colorado, employs a learning resource advocate to integrate students with special needs. Contact: Katherine Schwartz, RJE, Director of Lifelong Learning, 303.499.7077, **www.harhashem.org**.

Temple Beth-El of Boca Raton, Florida, has a long history of including students of differing physical and learning abilities in their programs. Contact: Robin Eisenberg, RJE, Director of Jewish Learning and Living, 561.391.8900, **www.tbeboca.com**.

Temple Israel, St. Louis, Missouri, has a special needs consultant on staff who consults with classroom teachers to help them include all children in the activities of the school. Contact: Debbie Morosohk, Director of Education, 314.432.8077, **www.ti-stl.org**.

Temple Rodef Shalom, Falls Church, Virginia, employs a student support coordinator to facilitate appropriate religious education for all students and also participates in a community program of training *madrichim* to work with students with disabilities. Contact: Marsha Goldberg, Student Support Coordinator, **MGoldberg@templerodefshalom.org**.

Woodlands Community Temple, White Plains, New York, has a successful program within the religious school for students with disabilities. Contact: Dayle Fligel, Learning Specialist, 914.592.7070, **www.wct.org**.

Contact Lisa about her program at **lisang@aol.com** or 908.722.0674, x27.



# NATE NEWS

Winter 2011 • Vol. 52, Issue 2 National Association of Temple Educators אגודת המחנכים ליהדות רפורמית

## From the President

*Mindy B. Davids, RJE*



I recently sat in a meeting with my senior rabbi who relayed to the members of this task force that there was no more pressing issue at the synagogue than post *b'nei mitzvah* retention. Out of classes of around eighty students, we retain only an average of ten percent of our students. I, of course, already knew this most embarrassing fact. In my five years at Temple Shaaray Tefila in New York City, I have worked tirelessly to innovate, improve curriculum and create strong professional development experiences and a supportive environment for staff. In our lower school programs, I feel a sense of movement and great accomplishment. Parents and students seem happy and engaged. What goes so terribly wrong in middle school? I have many thoughts and know that changing this culture, especially in a community such as Manhattan, is an uphill battle. I know that I am not alone, but this fact doesn't really make me feel better on days when I stop in on our confirmation class of seven students.

Later on in the aforementioned meeting, the rabbi charged this task force to do whatever is necessary to tackle this problem head on. We shouldn't worry about finances or space challenges. We should bring the community into the conversation and listen. We should have high expectations and high standards for any programmatic response we undertake. He said we cannot afford not to improve this situation. I could not agree more. If we are not engaging students and families for a lifetime of Jewish living, what are we really doing?

While I have been working with a lay committee for two years to address the post-*b'nei mitzvah* problem in our congregation, I feel a renewed sense of hope as the movement begins to tackle this challenge through the work of the Joint Commission on Lifelong Jewish Learning and the commitments of the Union's president, Rabbi Eric Yoffie and chairman, Peter Weidhorn. There is likely not one solution to this very big problem. A successful program in one congregation in no way guarantees success in another. We know that cultures differ not only in our congregations but also in the greater communities in which they exist. We

know teens have unique needs, and no one program is going to work for everyone.

You should have all received the letter from Rabbi Yoffie and Peter Weidhorn outlining the many opportunities each and every congregation will have in the next year leading up to the 2011 North American Biennial Convention. There are many ways that congregations can pilot various programs and processes that will hopefully start us all on a path to increased teen engagement. For more information on how you can get involved in the Campaign for Teen Engagement, go to [urj.org/teen](http://urj.org/teen). Available to everyone immediately is the *Planning Guide for Teen Engagement*. This guide outlines ways for congregations to start the process of assessing their own culture and offerings and identifying ways to increase engagement.

At the NATE conference in Seattle, we will have the opportunity during one of the sessions to learn more about the work of the Joint Commission. Specifically, we will participate in an activity with Just Congregations that will engage us in conversation about our thoughts on teen engagement. I am thrilled that NATE will have a prominent and active voice in the direction taken by the movement.

There will also be a special summit program during the 2011 Biennial that will highlight all of the work being done in the area of teen engagement as well as the work of the Joint Commission's other two task forces, the goals of Reform Jewish education and day schools. It promises to be a very important event, and I encourage NATE members to be there on the ground floor of learning and action.

Teen engagement is and will continue to be at the forefront of our work as educators. I dream of a day when I will wake up and know that my teens regularly and meaningfully engage in our congregation and in Jewish life. This is the moment that we can all work together with the support of the movement to make a real difference.

**National Association  
of Temple Educators**

President, *Mindy B. Davids, RJE*  
First Vice-President, *Lisa Lieberman Barzilai, RJE*  
Vice-President of Finance,  
*Anne Berman-Waldorf, RJE*  
Vice-President, *Lisa J. Goldstein, RJE*  
Vice-President, *Deborah S. Niederman, RJE*

Vice-President, *Rabbi Laura Novak Winer, RJE*  
Vice-President, *Joan P. Carr, RJE*  
Membership Involvement Coordinator,  
*Lynda K. Gutcheon, RJE*  
Executive Director, *Rabbi Stanley T. Schickler, RJE*

## Funding NATE's Future—An Immediate Responsibility

By Anne Berman-Waldorf and Joy Wasserman, Chairs, Funding NATE's Future Task Force

NATE is financially healthy. We have a budget with spending priorities which reflect our mission, vision and values; our membership is stable; our conferences are well attended; we have a reserve account which can carry us through an emergency and our endowed funds continue to grow. We have reasons to be proud.

But this is not enough. As Jews, we are always looking simultaneously at the past, standing in the present and planning for the future. We know that our founders would be proud of the work we have done and of the financial stability we have achieved as an organization. We feel secure in our present, but we dream about what we can do not only for us but for those who will follow.

Since its inception, NATE has relied on dues, donations and revenue from conferences to carry us through each budget cycle. As we continue to mature financially, we realize that for NATE to continue to grow and develop and to serve the ever increasing needs of our membership, we need to expand beyond our tried and true revenue streams.

The Funding NATE's Future task force has been convened to think creatively about other means of funding for NATE's many programs and activities. The task force has been charged with exploring grants and planned giving, partnering with other "like" organizations, expanding our donor base and more. The list is limited only by our

creativity. We will reach out to other professional organizations for advice and look closely at what comes from NATE's strategic planning process for ideas and inspiration.

NATE recently received a "Small and Simple" grant from the Seattle Jewish Federation to allow members of the Seattle Jewish community to participate in the January 2011 conference. We are grateful to the Seattle Federation not only for the funding the grant provided but for believing in us and showing us that we have the skills and the tools to apply for and win grants. Now we know that there are other organizations and funders who will find the work of NATE exciting and innovative and will be proud to support our programs.

This is new to us. As educators, we are trained to teach and evaluate but not to fundraise and write grants. In addition to being teachers, we are learners, and providing a strong financial future for NATE is a tremendous motivator.

The Funding NATE's Future task force will work to find the resources to support the programs that the next generation of Jewish educators will need as they "stalk the stained glass jungles and tame the lions of Judah." From generation to generation, NATE's work will continue to grow.

*Please do not hesitate to be in touch with any thoughts or ideas you may have by writing Anne, [educator@bethchaim.org](mailto:educator@bethchaim.org) or Joy, [jwasserman@huc.edu](mailto:jwasserman@huc.edu).*

---

## Navigating Negotiations

By Yonni Wattenmaker, RJE, Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee

NATE's Executive Director, Rabbi Stan Schickler, began his December 7 webinar "Navigating Negotiations" with the text of *Pirkei Avot* 3:17. He tied this teaching to the essential elements of strong and successful negotiations. The ideals include a sense of value and appreciation on both parts, being a mensch, making reasonable requests based on knowledge of the institution's financial situation and advocating for the need for a professional educator in your setting.

Stan stressed that when it comes to benefits, educators should be treated like other members of the professional staff and that those benefits need to be an integral part of the contract. Benefits include a pension, long term disability, congregational membership, school tuition, vacation, health care, opportunities for professional growth, professional dues, days off, the ability to work at a synagogue-supported summer camp, leading an Israel trip or similar congregational experience, parental leave and personal leave during times of loss. Some additional benefits are a cell phone, day school tuition, sabbatical and a discretionary fund.

There are four core values to any contract: cost of living

expenses; the value of having the professional continue in his or her capacity; the value of the increased participation of that individual in the life of the organization; and the cost of replacing that professional. An attorney should always review a contract before it gets signed to ensure the needs of both parties are being met to the degree with which each side is comfortable. When beginning a new position, the educator may want to consider asking for moving expenses and about the cost of living in the new area, along with to whom would he or she report, the details of the performance review process and the job description. Questions regarding title, support staff and the culture of the institution are also critical ones to be explored.

NATE has a number of resources to support educators which can be accessed at [natenet.org](http://natenet.org). Those include a contract sampler, job descriptions, a guide to educator-congregational relations (the Blue Book) and educator evaluations. The website can be utilized at any time, and Stan is also available to all NATE members to assist in the negotiation process.

## Dr. Alan D. Bennet, RJE, 1927–2010, ז"ל

By Rabbi Stanley T. Schickler, RJE

It is extremely difficult to write this *azkarah* for Alan Bennett, and not just because of my own sense of grief and loss. In my dozen years serving as the Executive Director of NATE, Alan always wrote the *azkarah* when a past president passed away. Alan was a part of NATE from its very beginning, and he knew every past president. As sad as it is for me to write this, it is also an honor and a privilege.

The following Henry Kissinger quote applies to Alan Bennett's work, especially with regard to NATE: "The task of the leader is to get people from where they are to where they have not been." Alan has been described this way many times before: "As a founder and early president of NATE, Alan Bennett helped create the profession of temple educator while building the NATE conference into a major gathering of Jewish professionals." He was not just a founder and our seventh president in 1963 and 1964. He really was a singular figure in our history, indeed, during the entire 55 years of NATE's existence.

I had the good fortune of growing up in a NATE household. My father, Rolf Schickler, *alav hashalom*, was also one of the original founders of NATE and served as its thirteenth president in 1974 and 1975. My dad would come home and talk about the work he did for NATE and the people with whom he did it, people such as Heinz Warschauer, Jim Levbar and Phil Chapman, all of blessed memory. And he always talked about Alan Bennett, now too, of blessed memory, both the projects on which they were working and the things they did for enjoyment when they weren't meeting.

I always told Alan how lucky I felt to be able to ask him questions about the founding of NATE, the early days and even NATE's constitution. I would tease him that it was like today's Supreme Court justices being able to call up James Madison or Thomas Jefferson and ask them, "What did you actually mean when you wrote this?"

One of the early founders of Reform Judaism, Abraham Geiger, once wrote, "Draw from the past, live in the present, work for the future." Alan was a scholar, but one who was rooted in the practical. In the late 1980s, when it became clear that there was a need for an organization of retirees who wanted to maintain their connection with NATE, Alan almost single-handedly founded Ziknay NATE, our affiliate for retired educators.

In 2004, the URJ Press published Alan's history of NATE's first fifty years, *The Vision and the Will*. As in the Geiger quote above, Alan's mission was to record the past in a way

that would be meaningful for us in the present and for those who will come after us. Alan applied his usual rigorous standards of scholarship as he did in all of his projects, but this was clearly a labor of love.

A few years ago, he let me know that he was ready to tackle, as he put it, "his next NATE project." He asked whether he should work on the revision to *The Vision and the Will* or on an update of NATE's policy book. Because there really was a need to compile the revisions to our policy book, which had not been updated since 1998, I conveyed that we could really use this work and that it would help us keep track of the many changes that NATE has undergone. That was all I needed to say. Alan got to work, and a year later, he had finished the project, his last one for NATE.

Alan was always there, and now he is not, at least not physically. I will miss his no-nonsense style of candor, his thoughtfulness, his intellectual rigor and his sardonic sense of humor. I take solace, however, in the realization that he will always be a part of NATE. Indeed, Alan Bennett is inextricably sewn into the fabric of NATE. For the first 55 years of NATE's existence we sat at Alan's feet. From now on, we will stand on his mighty shoulders.

*Zecher tzaddik livrachah.*



# Torah at the Center

**The members of the Lifelong Learning Team  
are always available to you for consultation.**

Mira Angrist, *Hebrew*

Lisa Lieberman Barzilai, RJE, *Young Adults*

Joan Carr, RJE, *Education (Mitkadem)*

Rabbi Joan Glazer Farber, RJE, *Adult Learning*

Melanie Cole Goldberg, RJE, *Education (Assessment and Logic Models)*

Wendy Grinberg, RJE, *Adult Learning (Parent Education)*

Lisa Langer, RJE, *Education (Family Education)*

Alan Levin, Ph.D., *Education (Curriculum Development and Special Education)*

Jennifer Magalnick, RJE, *Early Engagement*

Marlene Myerson, RJE, *Education (CHAI and Mitkadem, Mentoring)*

Deborah Niederman, RJE, *Education (Online Teaching and Demographic Research)*

Cathy Rolland, *Early Engagement*

Rabbi Vicki Tuckman, *Education (Evaluation and Reflection)*

Jane West Walsh, Ed.D., RJE, *Day Schools*

Contact a Lifelong Learning specialist. [urj.org/about/contact/specialists](http://urj.org/about/contact/specialists)

CONNECT 

Rabbi Jan Katzew, PhD, RJE, Director of Lifelong Learning

Wendy Grinberg, RJE, Editor

© 2011

UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM

633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6778

Phone: 212.650.4110 • Fax : 212.650.4199 • [www.urj.org/learning](http://www.urj.org/learning)