

From Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law, ed. A. Mintz and L. Schiffman. Published by The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, New York. Article appears here by permission of the author.

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Teaching Spirituality in Day Schools and Yeshiva High Schools

Moshe Sokolow

*The man of faith is 'insanely' committed to and 'madly' in
love with God.*

The Rav¹

BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE

This paper will deal with the form that curriculum and instruction for spirituality may take. For this purpose, I have adopted the Orthodox Forum's definition of spirituality as a blend of, and balance between, a relationship with God and halakhic observance.

I shall first raise six points about the educational process in general and then relate them, individually, to spirituality. In

¹ Joseph B. Soloveitchik: *The Lonely Man of Faith*, (Northdale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), pp. 61-2.

conclusion, I will present a model lesson, which will illustrate some of the proposed theoretical points.

1. Mission and Vision
2. Commonplaces and Eccentricities of the Curriculum
3. Tuition: The Virtues, Vices, & Vicissitudes of Teaching
4. תוכנית הלימוד: Soul-based Learning: Spiritual Intelligence and the Learner
5. Service Learning: Spirituality in the "Flesh"
6. Spirituality and Community
7. A Sample Lesson

PROLOGUE

The universal maxim, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," has an obverse: "If everyone is fixing it, it must be broke." What is "broke" in the contemporary Jewish education of the spirit? Is the problem that we are teaching spirituality improperly, insufficiently, or that we aren't teaching it at all? Is the solution, then, more spirituality, better spirituality, or just any spirituality?

We have a lot to be grateful for in contemporary Jewish education. New day schools are opening and the existing ones keep growing. Many of our classrooms are cyber-ready (and some of our teachers, too), and any day now Bar Ilan University will release a CD-ROM making the totality of Torah accessible from every personal computer. Most teachers earn a living wage, receive life insurance and health benefits, and are eligible for pension programs. Administrators, increasingly, earn six-figure salaries. Tuition is high by nearly any standard (Dalton and Choate are still more expensive), but such enterprising projects as George Hanau's day school scholarship endowment and the experience of the SAMIS Foundation in Seattle (subsidizing day school tuition) offer a promise of relief just over the horizon.

Our children now regularly supplement their elementary and secondary education with a year – or even two – in Israel. They attend prestigious colleges and universities and are accepted to the leading graduate and professional schools. In ever-increasing numbers, they are joining the ranks of business as both financial

technicians and entrepreneurs with a significant concomitant increase in their contributions – of both human and financial resources – to charitable Jewish institutions and causes.

And could a litany of our accomplishments be complete without reference to our many acts of personal and communal hesed? We may be underrepresented in the kiruv movement, worldwide, but we are the rof minyan and rov binyan of such noteworthy enterprises as Yachad and Camp HASC.

And what of politics? We may have lost the eminence we once had in the Conference of Presidents, but have we not become a force to be reckoned with, a potential spoiler, in Israeli and Middle Eastern politics? Are our voices not heard, even solicited, by the movers and shakers on the domestic scene? Was not Senator Lieberman a voice – our voice – of conscience crying out in a wilderness of crass immorality and lewdness?

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Why, in the face of these accomplishments, is there such breast-beating over spirituality? It is because we are educating a generation of children who lack the time-honored traditional trappings of spiritual values or concern.

Disgruntled elementary school students bemoan their fate as their parents plan yet *another* trip to Israel for the summer. Middle school students compete over Bar and Bat Mizvah celebrations for which the term lavish is ineffectual. Ambivalence over parental authority, ever an outward hallmark of adolescence, has deteriorated into frequent disregard for all heteronomous authority whether parental, pedagogic, or rabbinic. Parents who suffer their children's disobedience toward themselves, and sometimes even abet their disobedience towards others – e.g. teachers, now look up in abject surprise when those children turn out to have no fear of God.

Self-centeredness, marked by insensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others, is on constant display in school, at home and in the public thoroughfare. And, sad to say, the latent culture of alcohol and drugs has pierced the veil of communal denial and is putting "talmidim at risk" center stage.

Finally, if I may be permitted a modicum of universalism in an otherwise highly particularistic presentation: What are the students and graduates of our day schools contributing towards eradicating the evils of slavery, poverty, war, racism, sexism, inequality, and hunger that regularly plague our planet – inhabited, as it happens to be, by creatures created in a *zelem E-lohim* fundamentally no different from our own? And if they do not actively search for a cure for these ills, do they, at least, bemoan them?

Paradoxically, failure to do so can be attributed to the kind of education we most often take for granted and tend to regard as exemplary, rather than unwholesome.

This refusal to take responsibility and hence to grieve and mourn for the pain we as a community have inflicted represents ... the limitations of an education grounded primarily in critical rationality, study, and the exchange and analysis of information.²

As enunciated by Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the main principle of ḥasidic teaching is:

...that a person must not consider it sufficient that he has firmly placed his intellect into the service of God. A connection made with the intellect alone is not a lasting connection. A person can subject his whole intellect to spiritual searching and can come to know with complete clarity of mind that he must serve only God in his every single thought, word, or action. And yet his heart and his whole body may still be very far away from this reality.³

As eager as we are to pull onto and speed ahead on the

² David E. Purpel, "Moral Outrage and Education," in *Education, Information, and Transformation*, ed. Jeffrey Kane (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 69.

³ Kalonymus Shapira, *A Student's Obligation*, trans. Micha Odenheimer (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991), p. 17.

information superhighway; as much as we delight in extolling the virtue of the "computer smarts" our children obtain; as convinced as we are that the key to their professional and economic success lies in technological sophistication, there is a danger that we are shortchanging them spiritually in the process.

Although new technologies offer previously unimagined power and information, they may also deflect our consideration of the larger questions of who we are, what we are doing, and why... The argument does not follow that teaching children to meet the requirements of the technological future in any way serves their educational interests. They might be far better served, practically and soulfully, by teaching them to approach the world with wonder and a sense of reverence, even though such dispositions may seem cognitively superfluous....⁴

Or, as Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:

Mankind will not perish from want of information, but only for want of appreciation.⁵

The problem seems to be that people who recognize the importance of the mind, and even of the body, do not grant the same recognition to the spirit. Howard Gardner, explorer of Multiple Intelligences, ruefully acknowledges his own shortcomings in this regard, stating:

Many people, including me, do not grant the same ontological status to the transcendent or the spiritual as we do, say, to the mathematical or the musical... The vast majority of scholars in the cognitive and biological sciences turn away from ques-

⁴ Kane, p. 208.

⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), p. 46.

tions of a spiritual nature, hence consigning this realm chiefly to the true believers and to the quacks.⁶

Being, as we believe we are, true believers, who yet value the “cognitive and biological sciences,” we are obliged to challenge Gardner’s assertion. This we shall do in Part Two, as we explore the “cognitive” and “affective” dimensions of the curriculum. First, however, a word about the role that spirituality assumes – or fails to assume – in our day schools’ visions.

PART ONE: THE “VISION” THING

A school’s vision (alternatively, its philosophy, mission, or goal statement) is its reply to the perennial questions of *מאין באת ולאן אתה הולך* (whence and whither)? It reflects a school’s educational philosophy and indicates what courses of study, programs, and activities it plans to conduct in order to educate its students. Among the issues addressed in such statements are:

- What was the school designed to do?
- Is there a distinct body of knowledge that all students must acquire in order to be considered culturally literate?
- Are children blank slates to be written upon, lumps of clay to be molded, wild animals to be tamed, or unique spirits to be nurtured?
- How do you define the role of teachers: subject matter experts, facilitators of learning, disciplinarians, pseudo-parents, part-time counselors, educational leaders or followers of state mandates?
- Who owns schools? Who is accountable to whom and for what? Do schools have “clients”? Are students and their parents the clients, are the students the products of schools, or are the stu-

⁶ Gardner in Kane, p. 118. In *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), Gardner substantially changed the concept of intelligence, expanding it to include diverse abilities. Initially he spoke of seven intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. He has since added two others: naturalistic and spiritual.

dents workers who are being managed by teachers to produce knowledge?

I have examined several mission statements in search of the role that spirituality plays in day school education. While laying no claim to comprehensiveness (I merely visited some school web sites), I found the verbatim term “spiritual” in only one school’s philosophy (Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway). It reads as follows:

It is the role of both the teacher and parent to cooperate, to guide, and assist in the development of the whole child, academically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

The school defines the spiritual component in terms of the following objectives:

- To develop sound moral principles and enthusiasm within the context of an Orthodox Jewish life; to motivate our students
 - to learn and love Torah
 - to observe rituals and *mizvot*
 - to be charitable and respectful

On the other hand, another school (Netivot HaTorah, Toronto), equally “committed to addressing the needs of the whole child,” itemizes those needs as: “social, emotional, physical, and intellectual,” clearly, if inadvertently, omitting the spiritual.

A second school (Maayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls, Teaneck, New Jersey), while not actually using the “S” word, cites as its first objective:

⁷ Frank Siccone, *The Power to Lead* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), p. 2. On the ostensible distinction between “mission,” “vision,” and “goal” statements, see John Hoyle, et. al., *Skills for Successful 21st Century School Leaders* (Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1998), pp. 2, 38.

- To foster the development of a Torah personality
- whose life decisions are guided by the values and traditions of a halachically committed community
 - who strives to build a personal relationship with God through fulfillment of *mizvot*, study, and reflection
 - who is committed to acting with integrity, compassion, and respect in her relationships with people
 - whose general conduct is informed by *ahavat Hashem* and *yirat shamayim*

Several additional schools utilize what may be called “euphemisms” for spirituality, such as:

- an appreciation of the wonder of the world He created (Torah Academy of Bergen County, Teaneck, New Jersey);
- to achieve the love of God and humankind and be imbued with the joy found in these relationships (Fuchs Bet Sefer Miztrachi, Cleveland, Ohio);
- promote *ahavat Hashem*....and allegiance to halakha (Kushner Yeshiva High School, Livingston, New Jersey).

If yeshiva day schools indeed aspire to inspire their students – even if only by inference – how do they prepare appropriate courses of study for that objective? That is the function of curriculum development.

PART TWO: THE CURRICULUM OF SPIRITUALITY: COGNITION AND AFFECT

And if you shall ask, How shall the fear of God bring a person to this high level of achieving eternal life – after all it seems more worthy that intellectual comprehension will do this – Solomon in Ecclesiastes has already explained this and said that only fear of God is the cause of immortality....

R. Yosef Albo: *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 3:7

It has been customary, if not *de rigueur*, these past forty plus years to address educational concerns on two fronts: the “cognitive” and the “affective.” The former designates what the student is supposed to know, the latter, what the students is supposed to become. To the extent that we are well served by these designations and distinctions (as they create, for example, a pedagogical *lingua franca*), we would be advised to delineate our quest for an education of the spirit in these common terms. In the specific case of spirituality, the terminological vocabulary of the “affect” is equal to the task. The following taxonomy of affective goals for *limudei kodesh* cites behaviors and attitudes that are consistent with the definitions of spirituality that are implicit in such day school mission statements as we perused at the end of Part One.

The student will:

- 1.31 believe in the Creator of the universe and its Conductor, Who selected the nation of Israel, gave them His Torah, selected the land of Israel and gave it to His nation.
- 1.32 wish to order his lifestyle according to the Torah
- 1.33 aspire to worship God wholeheartedly
- 1.331 observe *mizvot* regularly
- 1.332 observe *mizvot* elegantly
- 1.333 be prepared, at all times, to correct his behavior and examine his ideas, in light of the Torah
- 1.334 attempt to achieve the fear and love of God, and the love of all His creatures, and the love of Israel
- 1.34 wish to engage in Torah study regularly
- 1.35 attempt to reveal the Torah’s outlook on social and natural phenomena, and relate to them according to that outlook
- 1.36 attempt to fulfill his obligations in defense of the State, and in the preservation of its existence and complexion in the spirit of the Torah.⁸

⁸ Ministry of Education of The State of Israel, The National-Religious Stream, *The Affective Goals of Teaching Bible* (undated; my translation).

in textual terms, rather than the standard “cognitive” and “affective” goals of Bloom’s “Taxonomy.” Ask a fourth-grade day school teacher for his curriculum and he invariably answers: “ספר שמוח” and “ספר דודאי”.

The Paideia Proposal

The *Paideia* group, headed by Mortimer Adler, creator and editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, advanced an alternative model of curriculum development. Advocating a revamping of public education, the group devised its own curricular structure – one intrinsically more compatible with traditional day-school education. According to the *Paideia* model, one stipulates the “organized knowledge” to be acquired, the “intellectual skills” of acquisition and analysis, and the “enlarged understanding of ideas and values” to be derived from the application of those skills to that body of knowledge.¹⁴

Applying the *Paideia* corollary to Schwab, a curriculum deliberation on education for spirituality within day schools would encourage the commonplaces (as delineated just above) to direct their remarks to:

- Which subject matter already part of the traditional curriculum offers the greatest potential for spiritual development?
- Which learning skills have to be cultivated and refined to make that subject matter accessible and malleable?
- What are the spiritual values that the students should discover, deliberate and internalize in the course of their encounter with these texts and themes?

The actual deliberations – led by the experienced curriculum designer – and the ongoing follow-up – led by the head of school and master teachers – will provide the optimal situation in which the desirable values of spirituality can be infused into the traditional curriculum.

¹⁴ Mortimer Adler: *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

PART THREE: TUITION; THE VIRTUES, VICES, AND VICISSITUDES OF TEACHING

The crucible in which every curriculum is tested is the classroom and the watchman who can open or seal the portals of education before every change and innovation is the teacher. Masterful teaching has rescued many a flawed curriculum from disaster, and poor pedagogy has consigned more than one great idea to oblivion.

What qualifies teaching as adequate, and what distinguishes teaching as great? The answer – cast in terms borrowed from last year’s Forum on the “Brisker” method – is that teaching melds the גורא and the תפצא, the persona and the subject matter. Neither consummate pedagogy nor academic expertise is complete without the other (although opinions differ sharply on which, alone, is preferable).

Teacher training tries to accommodate both these virtues by combining formal education in the subject matter area with training and practice in pedagogy and methodology. In traditional disciplines, the prescription is readily filled. A B.A. in English, plus credits in education or certification from a teachers’ college will equal a licensed English teacher. Continuing teacher education (or in-service training) will contribute to the teacher’s remaining current in the field and aware of changing or developing standards of assessment and qualification.

Beyond Adequacy

A licensed English teacher need not be a published novelist, need never have written an original short story, nor composed original verse. A licensed English teacher need not even speak English as a mother tongue. A licensed English teacher certainly need not embody any – let alone all – of the qualities and characteristics esteemed in English literature. Hardened cynics, even misanthropes, can teach romantic verse (albeit, perhaps, not well).

On the other hand, identification with one’s subject matter is one way of cutting the exceptional teachers from the pack. A teacher of French who has never visited France, a teacher of music who attends no concerts, a teacher of Talmud who has no personal דר

מקיף, may be adequate. A civics teacher who volunteers in an election campaign, an art teacher who frequents galleries, and a ״מורה״ teacher who subscribes to *B.A.R.* (and *Megadim*, of course), have the potential for mastery. Their personal interest in the subjects they teach and their passion for their disciplines communicate themselves to their students, who are charged and inspired by their example.

Training to Teach Spirituality

What are the personal and professional prerequisites for the adequate teaching of spirituality (or is "adequate spirituality" an oxymoron)? Can one train to be a teacher of spirituality?

The theory of teacher training best suited for the preparation of teachers of spirituality is that of Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.¹⁵ Rather than undertaking two independent (consecutive or simultaneous) preparations, one each in subject matter and pedagogy, he has advocated a synthesis of the two, which he has called: "Pedagogic Content Knowledge." In this construct, aspiring teachers study aspects of the disciplines they plan to teach that have been selected because they allow for a presentation and discussion that exemplify and facilitate their classroom implementation.

In other words, we have to teach teachers as we want them to teach their students. If our ultimate goal is to have students derive spiritual values through their analysis of classical texts, then we have to insure that their teachers are capable both of analyzing those texts and extrapolating those values as well as presenting that analysis in a pedagogically proven format likely to produce comparable results in their students.

A Dialogue between Teacher Trainers

The key to successful training and successful teaching is reflection. The training of our teachers of spirituality (alternatively: our teachers of Jewish and general studies who will inculcate spiritual values in

their students) will include their participation in a dialogue on the balance we seek to achieve between the spiritual experience and halakhic observance.

To facilitate this dialogue, we shall expose them to several of the operative definitions we have encountered among those modern and contemporary writers who have addressed the relationship between spirituality and *halakhah*: Aryeh Kaplan, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Joseph Soloveitchik. To provide an educational *nafka-minah*, we shall relate their comments to the use of *taamei ha-mizvot* as a pedagogical foil for the study and stimulus of *halakhah* based upon a definitive pedagogical statement on this issue by Moshe Ahrend.

Aryeh Kaplan:

The main benefit of the commandments is mainly in the realm of the spiritual. Observance of the commandments is ultimately the means through which a person brings himself close to God. As such, they are like nourishment to the soul. They strengthen man's soul, and at the same time, fortify him spiritually.¹⁶

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS

Mizvot can become spiritually fortifying only as automatic responses, not as considered responses. Discussions of *taamei ha-mizvot*, then, should either be eliminated or, at least, postponed until their performance is ingrained to the point of habit.

After the level of spiritual fortification is reached, students can be instructed in the rationales of *mizvot* (Kaplan: "a great many mundane benefits") for the purpose of either reinforcement or as a *kiruv* tool to broach *mizvot* to those who are not on a comparable spiritual level.

¹⁵ See, inter, alia., Lee Shulman, "Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform," *Harvard Educational Review* 57:1 (February, 1987).

¹⁶ Aryeh Kaplan, *Love and the Commandments* (1973), 11.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz:

The first mark of the religion of *halakhah* is its realism. It perceives man as he is in reality and confronts him with this reality – with the actual conditions of his existence rather than the “vision” of another existence.... It precludes the possibility of man shirking his duties by entertaining illusions of attaining a higher level of being.... Halakic religion has no flair for the episodic excursions from the routine of everyday life, for the evanescent moments of solemnity.... [T]he *mizvot* require observance out of a sense of duty and discipline, not ecstatic enthusiasm or fervor, which may embellish one’s life but do not tell how to conduct it.¹⁷

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS

While Kaplan sees *mizvot* in the service of spirituality, Leibowitz sees them as divine dictates whose main – if not exclusive – purpose lies in their performance. Although they disagree on whether *mizvot* lie above or below the spiritual horizon (Leibowitz: “The fundamental and endearing elements of human existence are in life’s prose, not in its poetry”), Leibowitz would agree to the postponement or elimination of discussions on *taamei ha-mizvot* because faith is a value decision and cannot be reached as a logical conclusion.

Abraham Joshua Heschel:

It is not only important what a person does; it is *equally* and even more important what a person *is*. Spiritually speaking, what he does is a minimum of what he is. Deeds are outpourings, they are not the essence of the self. Deeds reflect or refine but they remain functions. They are not the substance of the inner life. Hence it is the inner life that is the problem for us, Jewish educators, and particularly the inner life of the Jewish

¹⁷ Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 12–3.

child. On the other hand, we must never forget that in Judaism we answer God’s will in deeds. God asks for the heart, but the heart is often a lonely voice in the market place of living, oppressed with uncertainty in its own twilight. God asks for faith and the heart is not sure of its faith. It is good, therefore, that there is a dawn of decision for the night of the heart, deeds to objectify faith, definite forms to verify belief.¹⁸

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS

Just as a book cannot be told from its cover, a student’s spirituality cannot be judged entirely by his performance of *mizvot*. On the other hand, a claim to spirituality must rest on a minimum standard of observance. In Heschel’s scheme, *taamei ha-mizvot* have the status of *le-khatilah* since they serve as a fulcrum for the translation of spiritual desire into objective religious reality.

Joseph B. Soloveitchik:

Most of all I learned [from my mother] that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent, warmth to *mizvot*. I learned from her the most important thing in life – to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting on my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.¹⁹

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS

Taamei ha-mizvot, to the Rav, seek to apprise us and to repeatedly remind us, that behind every commandment is a benign commander whose instructions are intended to draw us nearer to Him and

¹⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel: *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1966), p. 232.

¹⁹ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne,” *Tradition* 17:2 (1978), 76–7.

cement our relationship. The pedagogical conclusion to draw from the Rav's reminiscence is the importance of teachers as role models – a point to which we shall next pay minute attention.

Moshe Ahrend:

Above all else it is vital that we project the *mizvot* of the Torah as *mizvot* of God and emphasize their legal and heteronomic character. They are neither rituals nor customs nor traditions; they are laws that the Supreme Legislator has imposed upon us, commanded us to observe, and by which He has sanctified us. Our obligation towards them does not depend either upon our consent or our comprehension, and we are commanded to fulfil them, not to analyze or internalize them. Moreover, even when we “comprehend” a *mizvah*, its intentions and reasons, or we believe we comprehend it, this comprehension has no “legal” status and we are forbidden to draw halakic conclusions from what appears to us to be the source or objective of a *mizvah*....

Mizvot are a symmetrical mesh of transcendent instructions that come to weave a tapestry of *kedushah*, which has the capacity to elevate man precisely at the time when he is caught in the maelstrom of profane life and subjected to desires and passions that threaten to cause him to deteriorate and be demolished.²⁰

In advocating restraint in the use of *taamei ha-mizvot*, Ahrend cautions us not to exaggerate the importance of reason as though there actually were a sufficient answer to each and every question our students might pose. If everything were susceptible to rational analysis, he asks, what would be the purview of faith? His advice:

²⁰ Moshe Ahrend, “*Taamei ha-Mizvot: Their Essence and their Place in Religious Education*,” *Itturim* (Jerusalem: 1986): 81–3 (my translation). Reprinted in Ahrend, *Hinukh Yehudi be-Hevrah Petuḥah* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1995).

make *mizvot* “reasonable” by means of *Midrash* and *Aggadah*, which conform to the students’ levels of understanding, rather than philosophy, which often just increases their perplexity.

The Teacher as Role Model

Teaching for spirituality imposes certain prerequisites on both personality and pedagogy. Here is what Heschel advocated:

What we need more than anything else is not *textbooks* but *textpeople*. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read; the text that they will never forget. The modern teacher, while not wearing a snowy beard, is a link in the chain of a tradition. He is the intermediary between the past and the present as well. Yet he is also the creator of the future of our people. He must teach the pupils to evaluate the past in order to clarify their future.²¹

The Rav put it this way when describing one of the dominant spiritual influences in his life – his *melamed*:

However, besides teaching the *yeled zekunim* discipline, the *av zaken* teaches him something else – the romance of *yahadut*. He teaches the child how to experience and feel *yahadut*. *Yahadut* is not only discipline. Yes, we start with that, to discipline the child on all levels, on the physical level, on the social level, on the emotional level, and on the intellectual level. Above all, he teaches the child how to experience *yahadut*, how to feel *yahadut*. That is what my *melamed* taught me.²²

The point has not been lost on contemporary educators either:

²¹ Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 237.

²² Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “The Future of Jewish Education in America,” May 28, 1975. Cited from Aaron Rakeffet: *The Rav* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1999), vol. II, p. 178.

Soulful education, because it does not remain within the confines of logical empirical science, depends on living people. Its lessons cannot be found in books, computer programs, or floppy disks; they are not reducible to information that in some way can be processed.²³

PART FOUR: תכונות הנפש "SOUL-BASED" LEARNING: SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE LEARNER

Children, we constantly hear, have no need and nary an opportunity today to use their imaginations. Radio replaced storytelling but, at least, left something to be depicted by the mind's eye. Television and video have curtailed, if not eliminated, the need for imagination. The images they generate that have taken over our consciousness are not of our choosing and, often, are antithetical to the values we want to inculcate. Most egregious – for this context – is that they ceaselessly hawk the crassest materialism.

It would appear, then, that a strategy to counter the materialistic urge would involve the retrofitting of the imagination through a technique called "Guided Imagery" – "eduspeak" for visualization – that can activate the spiritual potential within a student.

Guided imagery is simply picturing an object or a set of events in the mind's eye.... One way is to have students close their eyes and imagine a story as it is being read or told. This can be done in language arts or even history as students can see themselves as people in a certain historical period or event. In science, students can also visualize activities, such as the water cycle, after they have studied the cycle. By visualizing becoming the water and going through evaporation and condensation, the students connect their inner life with abstract subject matter.

One of the most creative ways of using guided imagery is to have students visualize a set of events (e.g., going underwater or into space) and then write stories about what they

saw. They can also draw pictures. Many visualizations use symbols from nature, such as the sun, mountains, and water, to help in the process of personal integration and nourishment of the soul.²⁴

Another technique used successfully to nourish the soul is keeping a journal – already part of the curriculum of some schools that employ whole language instruction. Students can be instructed, or encouraged, to keep daily journals in which they record their most private feelings and desires. From these diaries, they can subsequently withdraw ideas and material for compositions and essays. There has even been an experiment with recording dreams for discussion. Students who participated in this experiment credited it with enhancing their creativity.

The Arts would seem to offer the greatest potential for inculcating spirituality, yet they have traditionally been the poor relatives – if not actually the orphans – of the day school curriculum. Music, drama, and the visual and plastic arts can contribute to the development of the soul.

Experiential Learning and the Child

The educational philosophy of John Dewey and Ralph Tyler stressed the importance of integrating learning experiences into the curriculum to provide a framework for learning. These educators, as well as Piaget, Coleman, and Kolb, have long urged teachers to teach through experiences. Dewey maintained that learning is a by-product of social activities and that all curricula must be generated out of social situations, based on organized principles, but founded on the twin pillars of the capacity of the child and the demands of the environment. Tyler, too, maintained it is what the student does that he learns, not what the teacher does.

²³ Kane, p. 208.

²⁴ John P. Miller: "Education and the Soul," in *Education, Information, and Transformation*, ed. Jeffrey Kane, p. 215.

The Romance of *Yahadut*

The Rav, too, understood the value of experiential learning, describing it as the transmission of cultural experience from the preceding generation to the succeeding one:

A Jew is not only supposed to know what *yahadut* stands for and to have knowledge of *yahadut*; he is also called upon to experience *yahadut*, to live it, and somehow to engage in a romance with the Almighty. Knowing about *yahadut* is not enough; it is a norm to be implemented and experienced. It is to be lived and enjoyed. It is a great drama which the *yeled zekunim* must act out after observing the *av zaken*.

Studying the *Torah she-baal peh*, the Oral Tradition, and complying with its precepts are the greatest pleasures a person can have. It is an exciting and romantic adventure. It is the most cleansing and purging experience a human being can experience. The *av zaken* teaches the *yeled zekunim* how to live and feel *yahadut*.²⁵

PART FIVE: SERVICE LEARNING; SPIRITUALITY IN THE FLESH

David Elkind, has written,

Young people believe that by expressing a value they are working toward its realization.... If it is not realized once it [has been] expressed, then it must be someone else's fault. And that someone else usually happens to be the corrupt adults over thirty. It is only when young people engage in meaningful work that they begin to differentiate between the expression of an ideal and the hard work necessary to bring it to fruition.²⁶

²⁵ Soloveitchik, pp. 177-8.

²⁶ David Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place To Go: Teenagers in Crisis* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984), p. 41.

To be effective, spiritual values have to be internalized. To internalize a value, one first has to experience it. The lessons of spirituality have to be practiced. If, as we postulate, the minimum of spirituality is the deferment of material gratification and the abnegation of self, then the way to achieve practice and experience in spiritual values is through the performance of gratuitous acts of loving-kindness – what the jargon currently calls “service learning.”

To properly inculcate spirituality, we have to chart a course of both study and practice that will accompany students throughout twelve years of formal schooling, exposing them to spiritual ideas and values via the formal curriculum and through co- and extra-curricular activities. From early childhood through high school, students have to experience and practice sacrifice as the most basic step on the road to spirituality. If their supreme value is money, they have to make financial sacrifice; if it is time, they have to preoccupy themselves; if it is freedom, they must submit to the will of another; and if it is self, they must relinquish their own satisfaction.

This can be accomplished via the type of activities known in our schools as *hesed* projects: from performing in old age homes, to visiting the hospitalized and homebound, to donating new and used clothing, to preparing and serving meals for the homeless and the indigent, to providing tutoring for those with learning disabilities and companionship to those with special needs. These are but a sampling of what our students need to do on a regular and ongoing basis – all without thinking that it has to be “fun.”

Won't this experience be superficial? Won't the spirituality it produces be only skin-deep? David Elkind's advice cited above is confirmed by the folk wisdom enshrined in the *Sefer ha-Hinukh*: “*כי תעשה מצוותי ושמרתם את עצמכם, ואז תהיה לכם חיים ושלום*” (actions impact on attitudes; *passim*).

Won't these activities “steal” time away from studies? Yes, they will; but it is justifiable, even necessary. R. Aharon Lichtenstein, in an address to the Educators Council of America some 15 years ago, told the following story that transpired shortly after his *aliyah*. He observed several *Hareidi* youngsters discussing whether – according

to the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* – a secular Jew whose car was stuck was entitled to their help.

I wrote a letter to the Rav at that time and I told him of the incident. I ended with the comment: Children of that age in our camp would not have known the *Gemara*. But they would have helped him. The feeling which I had then was: Why, *Ribbono shel Olam*, must this be our choice? Can't we find children who are going to help him and know the *Gemara*? Do we have to choose? I hope not; I believe not. If forced to choose, however, I would have no doubts where my loyalties lie; I prefer that they know less *Gemara*, but help him.²⁷

Effects of Service Learning on Youth

The effects of service learning on our students go well beyond basic training for spirituality. Based on twenty years of teaching community service in the classroom and a review of research in the field, Conrad and Hedin (1989) hypothesized that well-designed community service programs would have a positive effect on youth in the following areas:²⁸

PERSONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Self-esteem
- Personal efficacy (sense of worth and competence)
- Ego and moral development
- Exploration of new roles, identities, and interests
- Willingness to take risks, accept new challenges

²⁷ Aharon Lichtenstein: "Developing a Torah Personality," lecture 24; Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (<http://www.etzion.org.il>).

²⁸ The following examples are drawn from Conrad and Hedin, *High School Community Service: A Review of Research and Programs* (Washington DC: December, 1989). Additional material on service learning can be obtained from the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- Revised and reinforced values and beliefs
- Taking responsibility for, accepting consequences of own actions

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC LEARNING

- Basic academic skills (expressing ideas, reading, calculating)
- Higher-level thinking skills (open-mindedness, problem solving, critical thinking)
- Content and skills directly related to service experiences
- Skills in learning from experience (to observe, ask questions, apply knowledge)
- Motivation to learn and retention of knowledge
- Insight, judgment, understanding – the nuances that can't be explained in a book or lecture but are often the most important things of all to know

SOCIAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Social responsibility, concern for the welfare of others
- Political efficacy
- Civic participation
- Knowledge and exploration of service-related careers
- Understanding and appreciation of, and ability to relate to, people from a wider range of backgrounds and life situations

PART SIX: SPIRITUALITY AND COMMUNITY; IT TAKES TWO (AT LEAST) TO SPIRITUALIZE

There are dangers in spirituality. Unregulated spirituality can deteriorate into a self-centered free-for-all that finds its realization on Tibetan mountaintops and its fulfillment in "kosher" sex. The wide proliferation of *faux* Kabbalah testifies to both the popular thirst for spiritual enlightenment as well as how easy it is to slake that thirst without providing real nourishment to the soul.

From *The Jerusalem Post* (2/20/2000) comes the following description of "The Living Waters Weekend," a "Jewish Renewal Retreat" offered to congregants by co-rabbis Philip and Shoni Labowitz of Temple Adath Or in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida:

Optional sunrise walk and meditation. Musical workshop service at the ocean. Guided conscious eating at breakfast. Water exercises for body toning. Yoga with Kabbalah. Outdoor games, time for massage. Sacred gathering for men and women. Poetry readings and music. *Havdalah* ritual on the beach. Sunrise co-ed *mikvah* ritual in the ocean. Breakfast celebration with new affirmation. Kabbalistic meditation. Sacred sharing ceremony.

A greater, if more subtle danger lies in the extreme individuation of the spiritual experience. As Charles Liebman has cautioned (in that very *Jerusalem Post* article):

Spiritualist Judaism is a serious problem because it releases Jews from obligations which devolve from the organized Jewish discipline, and consequently weakens their commitment to collectives, such as the Jewish people.

He cites the quest for spiritual Judaism as an example of a shift from "ethnic Judaism" that values community and solidarity, to "privatized religion" that emphasizes personal fulfillment. He charges: "Spirituality is not the answer to the Jewish problem in America; it is the problem."

I am confident that Professor Liebman would concur that spirituality is dangerous when it substitutes for religion, not when it complements it. Setting aside, momentarily, the question of whether there exists spirituality entirely free of formal religion, we can still discuss the role in the educational process of the existential quest to which we referred earlier in citing the observations of Howard Gardner. In the words of another educator:

We need to shake off the narrow notion that "spiritual" questions are always about angels or ethers or must include the word *God*. Spiritual questions are the kind that we, and our students, ask every day of our lives as we yearn to connect with the largeness of life:

- Does my life have meaning and purpose?
- Do I have gifts that the world wants and needs?
- Whom and what can I trust?
- How can I rise above my fears?
- How do I deal with suffering, my own and that of my family and friends?
- How does one maintain hope?
- What about death?²⁹

The questions we hear our students ask are: "Is this on the test?" or: "Will there be extra credit?" but the existential questions are the ones that, at moments at which their egos are caught off guard, pierce their veils of indifference and apathy, and utter, through clenched teeth, a cry of anxiety or despair.

Spirituality in a Community of Service

To teach spirituality successfully, the children cannot be the only ones participating. If we do not promote a collective spiritual ethic, we will be spinning our spiritual wheels in a futile exercise. Our schools need to become the focal point of spiritual communities in which teachers reinforce the formal lessons delivered in the classrooms during after-school activities, rabbis validate them in the synagogue, neighbors in the market and the workplace, and parents, at home, incessantly.

Without this support system, we will be creating spiritual schoolchildren whose experience with spirituality – like their experiences with a goodly portion of our curricula – is limited to the *dalet amot* of the *beit ha-medrash* and is not readily transferable to "real life."

In this respect, it is somewhat akin to *tefillah*. No matter how many times we teach the relevant *simanim* in the *Mishnah Berurah*; how frequently, or successfully, we emphasize the prohibitions against conversation during *tefillah*; how much time we allocate

²⁹ Parker J. Palmer, "Evoking the Spirit in Public Education," *Educational Leadership* 56:4 (1998–1999): 6–8.

to meditation before and concentration during *tefillah*, one visit to a run-of-the-mill *Shabbat* service in a run-of-the-mill Orthodox synagogue will undo whatever spiritual good the school may have accomplished.

The quandary of materialism, too, demands redress. As the Rav noted in a 1968 address to the R.C.A.:

The problem with the American Jew is that he is not sensitive to Torah values. He must understand that human happiness does not depend upon comfort. The American Jew follows a philosophy which equates religion with making Jewish life more comfortable and convenient. It enables the Jew to have more pleasure in life. This de-emphasizes Judaism's spiritual values. What the rabbi should do is somehow expose the Jew to proper Torah Judaism. This cannot be accomplished by preaching and sermonizing. Many times, as I know from my own experience, they accomplish precisely the opposite.³⁰

PART SEVEN: A SAMPLE LESSON EXTRAPOLATING "WONDER" FROM THE MUNDANE

How does one create a school culture that nurtures wonder at creation, love of God and mankind, and allegiance to *halakhah* – separately, let alone simultaneously? In a 1969 address to students at Y.U., the Rav gave us an example drawn from his personal experience:

I remember that I was grown up when I went to Danzig. I saw the [Baltic] sea for the first time, and it made a tremendous impression upon me. From afar, it looked like a blue forest. I was used to forests from Russia. When I drew closer and saw that it was the sea, I was overwhelmed. I made the benediction of "Blessed be He who wrought creation," which is recited when "one sees mountains, hills, seas, rivers, and deserts." This blessing came from the depths of my heart. It was one of the greatest religious experiences I have ever had.³¹

³⁰ Rakeffet, vol. II, p. 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

Through a personal narrative, the Rav has pointed to a simple, yet effective way to transform the mundane and material into the sublime and spiritual: a *berakhah*. The drawback to utilizing his anecdote as a paradigm, however, is the implicit requirement that the recitation of the *berakhah* be preceded by a relatively extraordinary experience. The argument could be made that such an event could trigger a spiritual reaction all by itself, rendering the *berakhah* superfluous. Can we provide comparable stimulation for even a blasé student who will never greet nature with a sense of wonder? Can we "inspire" routine experiences and activities with the same spiritual significance?

Abraham Joshua Heschel – in an essay on "Jewish Education" that calls, explicitly, for "a survey of its spiritual aspects" – advises us on just how this can be done:

At all religious schools, pupils are taught the benediction to be said before drinking a beverage. It is taught as a custom, as a practice. But how many teachers attempt to convey the grand mastery and spiritual profundity contained in these three Hebrew words – "Everything came into being by His word"? It is unfair and unfortunate that we ignore, or fail to communicate the spiritual substance of our tradition.³²

By following Heschel's advice and the Rav's example; by inviting God's presence into every nook and cranny of our lives – from a glass of water to the great sea – we can aspire to regain for Him the primacy He seems to have recently surrendered.

Educating for Informed Choice

In discussing the "cognitive" dimension of spirituality (see above, Part Two), I postulated that the relationship to the divine that we wish to cultivate is manifest in the exercise of free will and the capacity for informed choice. The subject we have chosen to illustrate the education for informed choice is *Parshanut ha-Mikra*. We have

³² Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 234.

chosen it because it is the area we know most thoroughly, as well as the curricular area present in all schools throughout the greatest part of a student's primary and secondary education. The specific text we have chosen consists of the commentaries of Rashi and Rashbam to Yaakov's dream (*Bereishit* 28:10 ff.). The methodological point we shall try to make is that *Parshanut* (and, similarly, every subject in *limudei kodesh*) can be utilized to inculcate and promote the capacity for informed choice. The pedagogical point we shall try to make is that spirituality can be found wherever we wish to give it entry.

A participant in an Internet exchange for Jewish educators ("LookJed") concerning "Spirituality in Teaching" offered the following prescription for spiritual validation:

A good way to test yourself is to examine: do you always tend to find the same message (or small group of messages) in all texts or does each *sugya* present something (at least somewhat) new? Does the *Gemara*, in your reading, come out fashioned in your image, or do you (at least sometimes) come out of the *sugya* with new spiritual insights – and sometimes at the expense of long-cherished presuppositions? Differently put – in a conflict between you and the text (do these conflicts ever arise), does one side or the other always win?

The test for spirituality in teaching (who tends to win, the text or the reader?) is utilized to great pedagogical effect by Uriel Simon in an essay that focuses on the role of *Tanakh* and *Parshanut ha-Mikra* in religious education:

The *pashtan*, attentively listening to the text and striving for objectivity, is bewildered at what he sees as the confident subjectivism of the *darshan*. He is inclined to thrust at him the words of Rabbi Ishmael to his colleague Rabbi Eliezer: "You are saying to Scripture, 'Be silent while I make a *derash*!'" The *darshan*, on the other hand, seeking to give voice to the verses out of an intimate relationship with them, fears that there is nothing in the *pashtan's* objectivism but spiritual indiffer-

ence and lack of creativity. He would incline to identify with the response uttered by Rabbi Eliezer: "You are a mountain palm!" (whose fruit is so meager that it may not be brought as *bikkurim*).

Yet, woe to the *pashtan* who completely effaces himself before the text, and woe to the *darshan* who completely silences it. The former would deplete his *peshat* interpretations of all living meaning, and the latter would drain his *derashot* of their status as an interpretation of Scripture....

It is the glory of *peshat* interpreters that they shun arbitrary interpretation and stand guard against pressing spiritual demands which are apt to twist the line of truth. But this is also their weak point: they insist on the truth at the price of diminishing their message. The *darshan* may never rest content with merely interpreting the words of the text; he must dare to make it speak out. When he does it well, he becomes a partner in the creative process. "Even that which a veteran student will one day teach in the presence of his rabbi has already been said to Moses at Sinai."³³

For the reasons outlined by Simon, "the fact that Rashi's commentary has earned him preeminence among Torah interpreters attests to the great educational and spiritual significance that generations of Jews have attached to the *derashot* that became the possession of all thanks to their inclusion in his commentary."³⁴ Moreover, he adds, "whoever compares the Torah commentary of Rashi... to the exclusively *peshat* commentaries of Rashbam and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, senses at once the contrast between the abundance of thought and feeling in the former over against the dry mundaneness of the latter."³⁵

I should like to challenge that assertion and offer, in its stead, the proposition that spirituality is, to paraphrase the Kotzker (and,

³³ Uriel Simon, "The Religious Significance of the *Peshat*," *Tradition* 23:2 (1988): 41–2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 45.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 44.

obviously, Heschel), “the attempt to let God in, particularly where there is some question about whether He belongs.” The verse that exemplifies this quest is, “אֵין יֵשׁ אֱ-לֹהִים בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֵין לֵא דִיעוּתָא” and the exegetical disagreement between Rashi and Rashbam over the interpretation of Yaakov’s dream, the context in which it appears, is the substance of the lesson I choose to present.

The Synopsis, According to Each *Parshan*

According to Rashi’s aggadic interpretation, Yaakov, who had already reached Haran, was on his way back to Yerushalayim (to pray there) when God brought *Har ha-Moriah* to intercept him at Luz. In order to constrain him to remain overnight, God caused the sun to set prematurely. Yaakov collected several stones, which he placed about his head and went to sleep. In his dream – during which God compressed the entire Land of Israel beneath him – he saw angels first ascending, and then descending, a ladder. When he awoke, he discovered that God had fused the several stones together into one.

According to Rashbam, however, Yaakov, on his way to Haran, stopped at an anonymous site outside Luz when he ran out of daylight for travelling. There he went to sleep on only as much ground as his body occupied. In his dream he saw angels going up and down a ladder in no particular sequence and when he awoke the single stone he had placed beneath his head was still there.

The respective interpretations of these two *parshanim* are as different as can be. Rashi sees every element in the narrative framework of the dream as a supernatural contrivance designed to stick Yaakov in that holy place at that designated time. Rashbam, on the other hand, sees only the casual, even random, meandering of a man who gets stuck at a place not of his own choosing, where he cautiously beds down for the night. With respect to the dream itself, Rashi sees it as beginning with the sequential changing of the heavenly guard, continuing with the compression of the land on which he slept, and culminating in the fusion of the selected stones. Rashbam denies absolute sequence, and, hence, significance, to the

movements of the angels, and declines to accommodate either the compression of the earth or the fusion of the sundry stones.³⁶

The Pedagogic and Exegetical Reconciliation

These two interpretations illustrate two diametrically opposite treatments of a Biblical narrative. On the one hand, they belong to two eminently, and almost equally, respected authorities and, as such, should be given equal consideration and regarded as equally valid. On the other hand, however, our students usually demand that all differences be resolved in favor of one interpretation or the other.

Our pedagogic challenge is to persuade them that:

- (a) Their differences are the result of distinct methods of interpretation;
- (b) As long as each is consistent with its own method it is as valid as the other;
- (c) In spite of their mutual validity, teachers and students, alike, are entitled to express a preference for one over the other;
- (d) Such preference should not be arbitrary, but should be argued on the basis of linguistic, literary, or thematic merit.

The normative methodological and pedagogical conclusion would be that Rashi’s interpretation, as usual, is suffused with spiritual significance whereas that of Rashbam is, as usual, so matter-of-fact as to be devoid of spiritual import. In fact, the opposite here is true. Consider: the challenge of religious education is NOT to recognize God when you encounter moving mountains, unnatural sunsets, and stones that fuse together. The challenge is to recognize the divine in the ordinary; the spiritual in the mundane.

Rashi would have God hit Yaakov *Avinu* over the head, as it

³⁶ This constitutes an excellent exercise for advanced students. Have them: (a) read the commentaries of Rashi and Rashbam; (b) paint a composite picture of the narrative according to each one; (c) and then draw the appropriate conclusions regarding their respective treatments of the text.

were, in an attempt to coerce him into spiritual recognition whereas Rashbam would have that sublime realization dawn upon him, gradually, as he moves from one scene and verse to the next. I submit that Rashbam's interpretation offers the greater grist for the mill of spirituality precisely because it depicts Yaakov as an "Everyman," rather than a "Superman."

Like Yaakov, our students must be challenged and equipped to see spirituality rather than superficiality.

CONCLUSION

We have endeavored to present a holistic educational strategy for teaching spirituality in day schools and yeshiva high schools. Beginning with the role spirituality plays in the articulation of a day school's vision, we moved to the curriculum development process, to the characteristics of teaching and teacher training and then, to assumptions that we may make about the process of learning spirituality.

Having dealt with the formal, structural aspects, we moved to the substantive ones. First, we presented a suggestion for a service learning project to promote the experiential dimension of spirituality and recommended that it be allocated a communal, participatory component as well. The dangers of spirituality were noted, with the suggestion that it not be divorced from the normative, collective Jewish religious experience, by increasing and reinforcing interaction with parents and community.

Finally, we provided a sample lesson based upon a reasonably standard piece of Jewish Studies material, focusing on the exegesis of Yaakov's dream. In it, we utilized several of the principles we earlier advocated, particularly the presentation of spirituality as education for informed choice.

We close with a particularly felicitous description by Leon Roth of the interpretive process. It encapsulates what we have been trying to say:

It is ultimately the determining of an ideal of life, the establishing of a preference among possible ends. It is the ordering

of types of action in an ascending and descending scale of better and worse, an ordering that shapes the kind of life we choose to live.... Interpretation thus becomes the gateway to life, and in this wide sense is synonymous with education.³⁷

³⁷ Leon Roth, "Some Reflections on the Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Montefiore Lectures* (London: 1956), pp. 20-1.