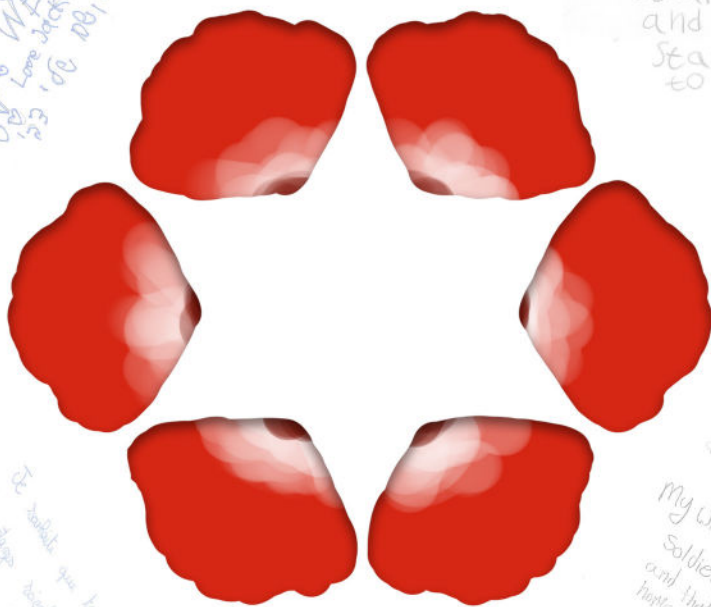


# Until the Day Breaks and the Shadows Flee Away



## Directions In Jewish Education After October 7

Edited by: Howard Deitcher, Alex Pomson,  
Hana Dorsman and Assaf Gamzou



Ministry for Diaspora Affairs  
and Combating Antisemitism

UnitEd

## **Until the Day Breaks and the Shadows Flee Away**

### **Directions in Jewish Education After October 7**

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## ***Partner Organizations for the Mission***

### **Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism**

The Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism is responsible for four main areas: connection with the Diaspora, combating antisemitism, countering the delegitimization of the State of Israel, and regulating Bedouin settlement in the Negev. The main goal in working with Diaspora Jews is strengthening their Jewish identity and their connection to the State of Israel. The ministry promotes, among other things, formal and informal educational projects in the Diaspora, in full partnership with Jewish organizations worldwide. Since October 7, the ministry has been working even more on strengthening the resilience of Jewish communities in the Diaspora, to ensure meaningful and secure Jewish lives for them.

### **UnitEd**

UnitEd, in cooperation with the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, works to strengthen Jewish identity, connection to Jewish communities and the state of Israel through empowering Jewish Day Schools. UnitEd operates globally – working in more than 40 countries around the world. This global perspective allows us to promote strategic projects, working in entire regions and internationally to address broad Jewish educational needs. Among its operations: Professional development for educators, content and curriculum

development, holistic school processes, teacher placement and more. Most importantly perhaps, all of UnitEd's projects are carried out in partnership with local and community organizations – the schools, foundations, networks, and educators on the ground.

UnitEd's work exemplifies the significance that the State of Israel sees in Jewish education, and the shared responsibility and unbreakable bond between Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

## **The World Zionist Organization's (WZO) Department of Education**

The World Zionist Organization's (WZO) Department of Education collaborates with Jewish day schools worldwide in order to enrich and strengthen their engagement with Israel and the Jewish people. The department operates through five key axes:

- 1 | **Morim Shlichim Unit:** This flagship project comprises approximately 300 highly qualified Israeli educators who, as staff members in schools, serve as role models and convey the message of Zionist education and an unmediated connection to Israel.
- 2 | **Israeli Classroom:** Creating an immersive learning environment that fosters a deeper understanding of Israel.
- 3 | **Curricula in Israel Education:** Developing and implementing comprehensive curricula focused on Israel education.
- 4 | **Worldwide Educational Projects:** Facilitating educational initiatives and programs that promote Jewish unity and interconnectedness with Israel at the core.
- 5 | **Developing Educational Leadership:** Nurturing and empowering educational leaders in development of Jewish identity.

## **The Pincus Fund for Jewish Education in the Diaspora**

Commencing operations in 1977, the Pincus Fund for Jewish Education provides start-up support for creative educational projects in the Diaspora. The Pincus Fund focuses exclusively on Jewish education and, more specifically, on Jewish educators and educational leadership as a key instrument to enrich Jewish life and impact the future trajectory of the Jewish people.

The Fund's mission and primary objective is to maximize the effectiveness of the Jewish educator, at all levels and in all forms in which Jewish education is delivered, with an

understanding of the importance that Jewish education holds as a means to contribute and ensure Jewish continuity and the strength and vibrancy of Jewish communities.

To date, the Pincus Fund has invested in hundreds of organizations to address changing needs in the Jewish world through a range of Jewish education initiatives. The Fund works exclusively in countries outside of the USA, wherever there is organized Jewish life and community.

## **The Koret Center for Jewish Civilization**

The Koret Center for Jewish Civilization is a collaboration between Tel Aviv University, ANU - the Museum of the Jewish People, and the Koret Foundation working to strengthen the capacity of Jewish Peoplehood education, connections between global Jewish communities and Israel, and to advance the concept of the Jewish people as a distinct living civilization. The Center aims to increase cohesion among the Jewish people, and promote renewal, education, and research in Jewish Civilization as a global asset inspiring Jews and non-Jews alike .



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## ***Foreward***

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In the aftermath of the events of October 7th, UnitEd, in partnership with the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Antisemitism, along with the World Zionist Organization, the Pincus Fund, and the Koret Center, initiated and carried out a global educational leadership mission. This mission brought together leaders and educators from around the world to assess and respond to the impact of these events on Jewish education. This book is one result of this collaborative effort.

This book aims to capture a pivotal moment in Jewish history, the immediate reactions to it, and the larger shifts that may already be identifiable. It seeks to provide insights and perspectives that will help guide Jewish education in the coming years, reflecting on how the field can adapt in the face of new challenges.

The book is divided into three main sections:

- Looking back in order to look forward: Key trends in formal Jewish education before October 7, 2023
- Short essays by mission members about their experiences in Israel and the ways what they experienced had impact on how they see future directions for formal Jewish education globally.

- Post October 7th – A new paradigm for global Jewish education – directions for UnitEd's educational work in the coming years.

Bringing together these contributions, we hope to advance a broad understanding of the condition of formal Jewish education in the Diaspora and how it might remain resilient and vibrant in the face of upheaval.

**Hana Dorsman, Ceo**

**Assaf Gamzou, Director of Education**  
UnitEd

## ***Words From the Minister***

Dear Readers,

On the day of Simchat Torah 5784, October 7, 2023, a tough war opened not only against the State of Israel, but against the entire Jewish people. Jewish communities in Europe, in North America, and across the world found themselves under severe attack in the streets, the Metro, and on university campuses.

In the face of this attack, Jewish young people had two alternatives: run away from their Jewish identity and the need to cope with the complexity it brings or embrace it vigorously, deepening it and fighting for it.

To ensure that our young people fight for their Jewish identities, we must help them strengthen their connection to their people's heritage and values, and as a result be prepared for the battle over our people's eternal values and the righteous path of our national movement -- Zionism. Education is the most important tool we have to achieve that, and to ensure the continuation of the Jewish existence and the resilience of the Jewish state.

In these times, we find ourselves with an opportunity to rethink and outline a new path in Jewish education across the world. The Global Jewish Education Leadership Mission that came to Israel in January 2024, led by the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism and UnitEd, together with the World Zionist Organization's education department, the Pincus

Fund, and Koret Center, addressed those very questions. The book published following those engagements is an important source to reflect on and understand the historic moment we are in. The book invites us to renew our commitment for quality Jewish education and strengthening the connection to Israel.

We must continue to invest in education to ensure that all Jewish children receive the tools and values that will enable them to continue carrying the Jewish torch with pride. Together, we can face the challenges and secure the future of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

**Amichai Chikli**

Minister for Diaspora Affairs  
and Combating Antisemitism

# Looking Back to Look Forward

Jewish Education  
before October 7



## ***Looking Back to Look Forward***

Dr. Alex Pomson

*Principal and managing director of Rosou Consulting, Israel, USA*



### **A Historic Moment for Jewish Day Schools**

More young people are currently attending Jewish day schools than are participating in any other form of Jewish education in the Diaspora. Worldwide, in Jewish communities outside Israel, approximately 400,000 children aged three to eighteen attend schools that provide a dual curriculum of Jewish and general studies.

For decades, this pattern has been the case across the Southern Hemisphere, for example, in Australia, Argentina, and South Africa, where between half and three-quarters of school-age Jewish children continue to be enrolled in all-day Jewish schools. Since the start of the current century, this has also been the case in Europe's largest Jewish communities: today in France about 40 percent of Jewish children under the age of eighteen attend Jewish schools, and in the United Kingdom, 65 percent. This phenomenon has now been replicated in North America, albeit in smaller proportions: recent censuses have established that about 292,000 young people currently attend Jewish day schools (17.5 percent of the school-age population), while only 141,000 attend supplementary schools (8.5 percent of the school-age population), the next largest setting for Jewish education (The Jewish Education Project 2023).

This seems like remarkable affirmation for a model of Jewish education often viewed as attractive only to those highly committed to Jewish life and accessible only to the wealthy or to those who rely on financial handouts. Historically, Jewish day schools catered to

a small minority; they were seen as training grounds for the future leadership of the Jewish community, its “priesthood,” as a noteworthy advocate put it 1948. Alternatively, they were viewed as a recipe for “isolation and segregation,” as a strong critic expressed it in the same period (Dushkin 1948; Grossman 1945). Why else would parents choose to withdraw their children from cost-free public or state schools for a private and parochial alternative?

How, then, did Jewish day schools become the preeminent providers of Jewish education in the Diaspora? What have been the main challenges faced by schools during recent years, and what have been the main sources of contention and attention within these schools? This chapter tells the story of these developments as they relate to the decade prior to 2023. Although the consequences for world Jewry of the events of October 7, 2023, are not yet known, this chapter treats that dreadful day as a potential watershed for Jewish day school education as explored in a later section of this volume.

This chapter also treats the Jewish day school as a singular global phenomenon. While recognizing that the context for and content of Jewish day school education vary in different counties, certain generalizations apply to the great majority of schools: most are incorporated as private institutions, although not in Montreal, Canada, or in some European countries, such as Finland and the United Kingdom, where they are publicly funded. Almost all day schools enroll only young people raised as Jews, but if they are publicly funded, some are required to include non-Jewish students. A few schools, for example, in the United States and Argentina, also choose to enroll non-Jewish students for various ideological or pragmatic reasons. Finally, day schools generally have much smaller student enrollments than do neighboring public schools; in the United States, for example, more than a third of schools have fewer than one hundred students. Yet, in a handful of countries, you can find day schools with thousands of students.

## **Growth That Hides Decline**

During the second half of the twentieth century, day schools expanded in many parts of the world, appealing to populations beyond the fervently Orthodox to whom they had historically appealed, a trend that in the United States peaked around the turn of the current century. Today, day schools’ relative preeminence is a consequence of three phenomena: the demographic growth of haredi (fervently Orthodox) communities, declining demand for afterschool or supplementary Jewish education, and the growing discomfort of Jewish parents with expressions of antisemitism in public school settings.

Data from the United Kingdom and the United States over the last couple of decades attest to growth in the number of students in Jewish schools, and at the same time to a flatlining

or decline (other than during the COVID years, a phenomenon discussed below) in both the absolute and relative numbers of students in “mainstream” (a British term), Modern Orthodox, and liberal day schools. Although ultra-Orthodox Jews make up a minority of most, if not all Diaspora Jewish communities, their birthrates exceed those of their less fervently Orthodox coreligionists, and they make up a growing proportion of day school students. As a result, today, about two-thirds of students in Jewish schools in both the United States and the United Kingdom are enrolled in strictly Orthodox schools (Horup, Lessof, and Boyd 2021; Besser 2020).

If, at best, demand for day school education outside the haredi sector is stable, the apparent appeal of these schools is due to the relative decline in afterschool or supplementary education, historically the preference for families who eschewed enrolling their children in parochial Jewish settings for the school day. A recent study has estimated that enrollment in the afterschool sector in the United States has declined precipitously in the last twenty years, from 230,000 in 2006–2007 to 135,087 in 2019–2020. This is a trajectory that mirrors what occurred in the United Kingdom, where until the mid-1980s, half of Jewish children in full or part-time education attended so-called “Cheder” or Hebrew Classes, while today fewer than 10 percent do (Mendelsson 2008). These trends do not necessarily mean that families are opting for day schools instead of supplementary school, although that does seem to be the case in the United Kingdom; it may just mean that supplementary school enrollment has contracted at a much faster rate than enrollment in liberal day schools.

Last, most visibly in France, but also elsewhere, as attested by anecdotal evidence from countries as diverse as Chile and Ireland, growing expressions of antisemitism and anti-Israelism in public education spaces have resulted in families’ flight from the public sector to the parochial Jewish sector. This seems to be one of the main reasons behind the increase in enrollment in Jewish schools in France from 16 percent of school-age Jews in 1986 to approximately 40 percent today. Indeed, a recent report estimated that over the past decade, about 2,000 students a year have transferred from French public schools to Jewish day schools due to a general decline in public education and fears of violence and antisemitism (Touati-Wachsstock 2023).

## **Struggling with Sustainability**

The current preeminence of the day school is, then, in part an illusion. While bolstered by the impressive growth of day schools around the turn of the century, today, the preeminence of day school education reflects, to a fair degree, the diminished appeal of the alternatives. In fact, over the last decade, communities around the world have become concerned about the long-term sustainability of the day school enterprise and have devoted ever more time to addressing

this challenge. The source of this problem is rarely the educational quality of what schools have to offer; generally, day schools today offer a higher quality product than ever before—they're better equipped, teachers are better trained, and the education they offer is more child centered. The real challenge is that Jewish day schools everywhere are squeezed by two broad sociocultural forces. On the one hand, among the non-Orthodox, delayed family formation, intermarriage, and declining birthrates have resulted in a shallower pool from which to recruit. The non-Orthodox marketplace includes fewer and fewer families who intuitively perceive the value of what day schools have to offer. On the other hand, among the ultra-Orthodox there has been an expansion in family numbers that is not financially sustainable. Across the Orthodox sector, more and more families simply cannot afford to keep all of their children in schools even when they want to (Rosov Consulting 2017).

These pressures have resulted in three trends: the merger or downsizing of day schools; a proliferation of alternative tuition initiatives; and the exploration of cost-saving measures, including the emergence of no-frills models of education.

### Mergers and Downsizing

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Over the last three years, Buenos Aires—a city with a long pedigree of day school education, and where about half of all Jewish children attend Jewish schools—has seen the managed closure of three long-established schools, with students transferring to much-expanded competitors. In different corners of the United States—in Minnesota, Massachusetts, and California—community Federations have sought to, and, in some cases, have succeeded in facilitating the merger of geographically proximate liberal day schools. In Melbourne, Australia, where the proportion of Jewish children in day schools has recently declined, for the first time in decades, below 60 percent, community leaders recently released a thought paper proposing the merger of some of the community's schools (Jewish Education Foundation 2022). Prior to October 2023, these trends fostered expectation of a downsized and more compact day school landscape worldwide.

### Alternative Tuition Initiatives

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A different strategy in the face of these challenges has been to develop ways to make day school tuition more bearable. Tuition at private schools is generally estimated to have increased by about 20 percent over the five years from 2012 (Warwick-Ching 2017). The idea has therefore been to make tuition competitive with private non-Jewish alternatives, recognizing that schools

are never going to be able to compete on cost with the public system. In the United States, where these efforts have proliferated most, there has been a shift in recent years away from school-level solutions for the first child in a family or for younger-age students, to multischool or community-level initiatives. For example, in Toronto, Seattle, and Chicago, initiatives supported by major local foundations have offered tuition discounting or ceilings for middle-income families, general freezes, and rollbacks for special populations (Adler and Perla 2020). Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools reports that in recent years more than a billion dollars has been invested in school or community endowments that support these initiatives. UJA Federation of Toronto's two-hundred-million-dollar Generations Trust underwriting tuition relief for elementary school students is a field leader (UJA Federation of Greater Toronto).

### Lowering Costs

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Downsizing and alternative tuition models reflect the recognition that schools have diminished appeal (what is often called “perceived value”) to liberal Jews; to increase their appeal they must either combine into a smaller number of more robust institutions that offer a superior range of services, or they must continue to offer a full range of services at a lower price. A third trend, most commonly concentrated in the Orthodox sector, where families are already inclined to send their children to Jewish schools, goes in a different direction. It aspires to offer a low-cost, no-frills product. A decade ago, this proposition attracted a lot of attention with initiatives to cut back on schools' wage bills by providing blended learning, outsourcing general studies to the publicly funded system, and offering a schooling model with few specialty educational supports or services (Affordable Jewish Education Project). These experiments do not seem to have gained traction even while they continue to have appeal and have resulted in the creation of a couple of schools that prioritize offering day school education at the lowest possible cost (Yeshivat He'atid; Westchester Torah Academy).

### Lessons from COVID: The Special Appeal of Jewish Day Schools

Important insights about how to enhance the appeal of day schools to those who otherwise perceive them as not worth the expense have come unexpectedly from phenomena associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, research conducted with day school students and parents during the course of the pandemic has profound implications for Jewish schools as they wrestle with the ripple effects of October 7 and the possible influx of families in flight from experiences of antisemitism in non-Jewish schools.

In November 2020, nine months into the pandemic, Prizmah reported a 43 percent increase in enrollment at non-Orthodox schools in North America from 2019–2020 to 2020–2021. This increase came following a decade of steady erosion in the number of students enrolled in this particular sector. Rosov Consulting conducted a qualitative research study in partnership with Prizmah of 114 families at twenty-three different schools who had transferred to a day school since start of the pandemic (Prizmah 2021). More than three-quarters of those families indicated that they now intended to keep their children in a Jewish school, as they subsequently did. These interviews generated a series of insights of lasting significance, two of which stand out:

### **“Getting” Jewish Day School Education**

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As discussed above, the recruitment challenge for non-Orthodox schools is often assumed to come down to making schools more financially accessible. While this is not an insignificant matter, the study made clear that a larger part of the recruitment challenge is convincing people that it is actually worth paying tuition, enhancing, that is, the perceived value of day school education in their eyes. Clearly, there is nothing quite like experiencing a school for oneself, as happened for these transfer families; you don’t really appreciate a day school education until you experience it, “you don’t get it until you get it.” The key is to help parents experience from the inside what’s being offered. Although this sounds like an insurmountable challenge, there are ways to give prospective parents even the briefest tastes of the day school experience through open houses, shadowing experiences, and parent get-togethers.

### **The surprising reach of schools**

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Perhaps the most unexpected finding of the COVID study was that all the transfer families had previous contact with their new day school. To put it simply, when the pandemic hit, the parents did not have to do a Google search to find their local day school. This finding suggests that Jewish day schools are addressing a wider audience than is typically assumed. Indeed, this finding prompts the suggestion that schools should be much more active in attempting to engage members of this audience by, for example, offering afterschool programming to a broader public or, more modestly, by renting out space to community organizations. Some members of the audience they reach could yet become day school converts.

## Experiencing Community at School

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Two additional research projects conducted during the course of the pandemic, with day school students in Argentina, the United Kingdom, and additional European countries also yielded significant findings. These studies, funded by the Wohl and Pears Foundation in the United Kingdom, and by the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the Jim Joseph Foundation, sought to document and deconstruct the challenges students faced during this period. They revealed the special strengths and social emotional benefits of day school education. The schools where students responded to the pandemic with the highest levels of resilience were those that invested in nurturing a sense of community among students; that were organized with the intent of cementing the relationships between children, their parents, and their extended families; and that in good times and bad were designed to serve as sites of multigenerational community, truly as extensions of students' homes. These findings—brought into view by the stresses of the pandemic—do not speak to time-limited phenomena, rather, they underline the capacities of Jewish day schools to cultivate community for young people and for their families (Pomson and Aharon 2021; Miller and Pomson 2022). These capacities were of special value during the pandemic, but as research sponsored by UnitEd has shown, in the period both before and after the pandemic as well, these are the qualities most valued by day school students (Rosov Consulting 2023a).

## Day Schools as Engines of Community

The community-building potential of the Jewish day school, both within and beyond schools, has been at the center of an important initiative over the last decade whose ripple effects are yet unknown. Educating for Impact (EFI) was originally seeded by the Lauder Foundation, a body that has supported the creation and development of Jewish day schools in Central and Eastern Europe since 1987. Between 2016 and 2022, the foundation joined forces with four additional philanthropies and with Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, inspired by a vision of Jewish schools as the primary vehicles that enable Jewish communities to survive and thrive (Educating for Impact). In its original conception, EFI employed a two-stage change process. First, in a one-year strategy-building phase, it brought together school and communal leaders to craft a vision for their communities centered on three clearly stated behavioral outcomes: typically, in the domains of Jewish religious engagement, Jewish social/communal engagement, and hesed. The strategy-building phase also included an articulation of the school's role as the main catalyst for achieving that communal vision. Subsequently, during a three-year implementation phase, schools developed systems, structures, and programs

designed to realize these outcomes among families and in the local Jewish community outside the school.

At this time, EFI has worked with nineteen schools in seventeen European countries. Unfortunately, its story has not been well documented in the public domain. Internal evaluation data collected by Rosov Consulting in five participating communities on behalf of the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs does indicate the extent to which schools have become engines of community vitality beyond the students who sit in their classrooms. These outcomes include: day school families now becoming more involved in community life; the school facilitating a sense of shared community among disparate subpopulations where it did not exist previously; and, in multiple instances, community members coming into schools for events when they didn't previously think they belonged. These outcomes are consistent with a study of day schools in the United States conducted shortly before COVID, where ethnographic site-based research made vivid how in smaller communities, Jewish day schools serve as "antidotes to polarization," anchors of community," and "seedbeds of leadership" for the Jewish communities beyond their walls (Pomson and Wertheimer 2022). It is not coincidental that the Lauder Foundation, inspired by its experience with EFI, is launching a pilot initiative, the Lauder Impact Initiative, with communities in the United States set to replicate some of the community-building effects seen in Europe.

### **The Proliferation and Globalization of Professional Development for Day School Educators**

Data on the factors that contribute to quality day school education have not changed since a similar review of the day school field in North America five years ago. If anything, during this period, ethnographic research of a varied sample of day schools has only affirmed these verities (Pomson and Wertheimer 2022): In good schools one can find leaders of vision; investment in the continuous development of staff and of volunteers; blended, personalized, or differentiated learning that enables children to grow at their own pace; access to current learning technologies; positively engaged families; careful attention and assessment of children's progress; and strong supports for children with special needs, making it possible to be inclusive and to expect high educational standards (Rosov Consulting 2017).



## Proliferation

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Professional and leadership development is key to unlocking many of these features, and over the last ten years, the day school professional development field has changed profoundly. It has become ever more congested and profoundly globalized. Organizations that started out as providers of adult learning have now entered the marketplace to also function as providers of professional development, such as the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America and Machon Hadar (now Hadar). In a related development, providers to other sectors of Jewish education now offer their services specifically to day schools or to day school educators as part of multisector cohorts, for example, M2, the Jewish Studio Project, and the Institute of Jewish Spirituality.

These trends speak to a series of important conceptual reorientations in the field: in Jewish contexts, the work of the Jewish schoolteacher seems to be ever less specialized; it is rarely grounded in what Lee Shulman conceived as a distinct body of pedagogical content knowledge. In many day schools, the Jewish educator is no longer a specialist. At the same time, day school Jewish educators carry an ever-broadening burden of responsibilities that not only include the cultivation of literacy (the major part of their original remit), but also the nurture of Jewish identity and social-emotional well-being (about more of which below). Increasingly diverse providers of professional development to day schools are addressing these ever-broadening professional learning needs.

Ironically, while the providers of professional development continue to proliferate, a North American study of Jewish educators from all sectors (formal, informal, communal, etc.) shows a mixed picture in terms of the access day school educators have to professional development and in the financial support those educators receive from employers to participate in professional development. Among day school educators, 48.5 percent reported participating in more than eight hours a year of professional development and 31 percent said they receive a professional development stipend, compared, respectively, to 46 percent and 38 percent across the field of Jewish education as a whole (CASJE 2021a). Evidently, there is a mismatch between supply and demand.

## Globalization

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If professional development for day school teachers was once offered by local institutions to nearby schools, today the marketplace is transformed. Teachers are participating in programs with peers from across the world. The London School of Jewish Studies now runs a master's

program for students from South Africa, not just from the United Kingdom; M2's Senior Educators Cohort started out serving participants in the United States; it now includes participants from multiple countries. The online Master's degree in Jewish Education at Hebrew University typically includes students from numerous countries in its English-speaking and Spanish-speaking cohorts. The Legacy Heritage Fund's Teacher Institute for day school teachers includes participants from the United States alongside those from South Africa and Australia. Finally, UnitEd and Herzog College have just launched Herzog United Fellows, a cohort program for day school heads that includes participants from more than ten different countries.

These trends are not trivial. They speak to an increasingly globalized day school landscape, a compelling instance of Thomas Friedman's "flat world" (Friedman 2005). Employing English as a shared language, the many programs mentioned here operate with an assumption that participants come with shared experiences and shared interests. The cultural and organizational particularities associated with their location are a secondary matter. These developments have only become possible because of the increased normalization and sophistication of online distance learning technologies. But the global appeal of these programs reflects a more fundamental shift toward seeing day schools everywhere as part of a shared endeavor.

This proliferation of professional development opportunities for day school teachers coincides with (and might be responding to) the steady decline of preservice Jewish teacher education. Thirty years ago, in North America, more than a dozen institutions prepared and helped certify educators for Jewish schools. Although precise numbers are hard to come by, it is well known that far fewer such opportunities exist today; demand for these programs has cratered (CASJE 2021b). In Australia, preservice teacher education programs in Melbourne and Sydney have folded. Only in the United Kingdom does this sector seem to be robust, perhaps stronger than ever, with increasing numbers of ultra-Orthodox educators getting certified. This phenomenon is partly a consequence of evolving government certification requirements, as well as the professionalization of the schools in which the graduates of these programs work. There is no question that a thorough analysis of the landscape is needed to better document a marketplace that continues to be volatile.

### **Perennial Issues: Phenomena of Continuing Importance**

While the marketplace for day school professional development has radically changed over the last decade, other important features of the field have changed less. The following issues are perennial concerns, reflecting special stresses associated with central elements in the broader mission of the Jewish day school sector.

## Leadership Retention—Challenged Like Everyone Else

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In North America, where data are firmest, a series of studies over the last ten years have repeatedly attested to the relatively short tenure of heads of school, with the majority serving for fewer than five years (Ravsak 2015; Kidron, Greenberg and Schneider 2016; Epstein 2023). It's a similar picture in the United Kingdom, where just one of the current heads of mainstream secondary schools has been in position for more than five years. In other countries, tenure for heads of school seems more stable. A 2021 study conducted on behalf of the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and UnitEd, including forty-eight Jewish day schools in Latin America, France, and other parts of Europe, found that only 27 percent of heads had been in position for five years or fewer.

It is hard to know how to interpret these patterns. There isn't consensus among scholars of school leadership about optimal tenure length. Data from the National Association of Independent Schools suggest that tenure in independent schools in North America is generally in line with the situation in Jewish schools; in fact, independent schools are also largely aligned with other noneducational sectors (Epstein 2016). Nevertheless, even if Jewish day schools are not outliers in this respect, they are probably unusual in terms of the small pool of candidates from which they can recruit, a challenge that is even more acute in smaller communities or in locations where there is only one Jewish school. Such challenges are further compounded in sectors of the community where it is still expected that a head of school be a man. A recent study for Prizmah found that just 22 percent of Orthodox schools in North America are currently headed by women, compared to 54 percent of non-Orthodox Jewish day schools (Prizmah, in press). These statistics attest to a serious constraint in addressing the leadership recruitment challenge.

## Hebrew—Running Hard in Order to Stand Still

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Every Jewish day school devotes time to Hebrew instruction, whether as a language of communication, as the historic language of Jewish prayer and text, or some mix of the two. How much time they devote differs enormously, with some conducting all of their Judaic instruction in Hebrew, others assigning a widely varying number of classes each week to Hebrew, and still others making Hebrew optional above a certain age level (Pomson and Wertheimer 2017).

The methodologies and resources available for teaching Hebrew seem to perpetually expand, with new products continually being offered to the day school market. In recent years, the Proficiency Method has been particularly popular, as have resources that employ blended

learning methodologies, even while many schools still place the burden of responsibility for Hebrew instruction on teacher shlichim working on time-limited contracts around the world. No matter how much this field advances, it seems that educators, parents, and students continue to be disappointed with what is accomplished. In UnitEd's 2021 study of forty-eight schools worldwide, a sample of more than two-hundred Jewish educators identified "teaching Hebrew language" as the topic about which they most need professional development. In a 2023 study of attitudes to Hebrew across nine day schools in Toronto, a community where commitment to Hebrew-language learning is especially high among schools and families, barely half of parents were satisfied with their children's experience with either Modern or Classical Hebrew. And this is in a context where day school Hebrew outcomes are relatively strong.

The sense is that in most places Hebrew simply isn't important enough, whether to the providers or consumers of Jewish day school education. No doubt, those involved are committed to the idea of doing better, but they're less ready to take the steps needed to actually improve things and address the costs involved.

### Israel Education—A Slow-Moving Reorientation

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Jewish day schools have long sought to cultivate a positive relationship to Israel among their students, generally prioritizing an emotional connection to Israel over an intellectual appreciation of the country (Pomson, Wertheimer, and Hachohen Wolf 2014). In recent years, their efforts have been slowly shifting in response to pressures from past and present students who, under the banner of "you never told me," have criticized the uncritical orientation of schools' efforts and their failure to prepare graduates for the anti-Israel assault on campus (Davis and Alexander, 2024). Change has been a long time coming in part because of the lack of specialist Israel educators in schools, and because taking Israel education more seriously, not least giving it more time on the curriculum, requires adjusting long-established priorities. While these changes slowly take root, and while schools continue to be hamstrung by the lack of both curriculum time and specialist Israel educators, an accumulating body of research indicates that they are having their greatest impact on students' connection to and understanding of Israel by means of operating educational programs in Israel for their students (Miller and Pomson, 2024). These short-term Israel Experience programs have proven to be especially powerful by virtue of bringing already-formed cohorts of young people to Israel at a formative age (Rosov Consulting 2023b). The challenge and opportunity for schools now is to better integrate such programs into the school curriculum and to negotiate responsibility for these programs with the Zionist youth movements that traditionally delivered them and that continue to do so in many countries.

## **New Tasks for the Twenty-First Century**

Jewish day schools are both mission-driven and market-sensitive institutions. Schools were established in order to advance Jewish and educational goals, but they can only advance those goals if they deliver a product that satisfies their customers. No matter how admirable their goals, they would go out of business if they lost touch with their markets. This, as alluded to above, is surely part of what is holding back Hebrew education in day schools.

In recent years, market forces and innovative educational thinking have aligned in ways that have seen schools introduce cutting-edge educational practices and reorient their programs to better serve the needs of students and parents. They're providing what parents want and what educational research suggests is good for young people.

### **Twenty-First Century Learning**

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Although some of the first Jewish day schools in Europe had a strong vocational orientation, and facilitated the integration of Jewish immigrants into their host societies, the dominant educational model in Jewish schools was content focused and text based, reflecting long-standing traditions in Jewish education. Schools did a poor job of serving students with special learning needs or special gifts. In recent decades, this has changed, everywhere. Today, day schools are often able to compete with the best state or independent schools, in fact, they have to, otherwise they'll lose their customers. Many boast maker spaces (collaborative work spaces for making, learning, exploring, and sharing); they have resources and know-how to enable blended learning (learning that combines online educational materials and opportunities with classroom-based methods); and they include growing spaces and gardens where students can develop hands-on skills that deepen their understanding of the natural environment. These are the kinds of resources, it is commonly agreed, that are needed to provide young people with twenty-first-century skills such as analytical reasoning, complex problem solving, and teamwork, skills that enable people to be flexible and adaptable in different roles or in different career fields.

### **Caring for Souls**

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Alongside modernizing their practices for teaching and learning, schools are giving much more attention to meeting the social and emotional needs of students. They have increasingly

embraced a tenet of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) that links social and emotional competence with academic achievement. A recent study suggests that this may be the way in which contemporary day schools depart most radically from schools of even a generation ago (Pomson and Wertheimer 2022). Recognizing what many characterize as a mental health pandemic among young people, schools have expanded the range of psychological services they offer in-house; they are also taking on educational practices that give students greater voice, opportunities to work through conflict, and safe spaces to express their emotions. The stresses created by the COVID-19 pandemic have probably accelerated these efforts, while also confirming how far schools have come, with Jewish day schools exceeding expectations in their capacity to meet the emotional and academic needs of students during this period. In North America, the range of resources available to schools and the intensity of discussion among school professionals about these matters indicate how important this issue has become for Jewish schools (Menachem Education Foundation; Consortium of Jewish Day Schools; Prizmah Mental Health Blog). Increasing numbers of providers (such as Gateways, Sulam, and Shefa) are helping them continually raise their game in these respects, whether through meeting the diverse learning styles of all students, better serving students with special learning needs, or addressing students' emotional needs. As noted above, while these activities are somewhat fueled by business considerations, they also surely stem from the Jewish values central to the mission of schools.

### Helping Parents

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A last—and related—development worth observing is the extent to which schools have been expanding the services they offer parents. Scholars and educators agree that it may be harder to raise children today than ever before due to the invasion of social media and other forms of technology into the lives of young people (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018). Parents of school-aged children tend to be acutely anxious about their children's physical and mental well-being, and Jewish schools cannot evade or ignore the needs of parents. While the first order of business for schools is to educate children, they have increasingly become one-stop shops for families, too. Some schools have created parenting institutes, which offer programs “designed to support parents, give them access to information, and help guide them in raising their children” (Pressman Academy). Others are staffing up with specialists whose task is to help parents help their children. And yet others are simply devoting much more time to engaging with the increasing numbers of parents who seek counsel about child-rearing issues. Historically, these were not roles that schools played for families, but they have become necessary functions if schools are to be effective in playing more conventional child-focused roles.

## **Conclusion: Looking Back to Look Forward**

It is far from clear how the events of October 7 and their aftermath will disrupt or intensify the trends described here. This question is discussed in a later section of this volume. What is clear is that the Jewish day school, perhaps the most venerable vehicle for Jewish education in the Diaspora, has continued to evolve in response to challenges and opportunities while impelled by the responsibility of preparing young Jewish people for life in their families, communities, and the broader society. Knowing where this sector has travelled over the last few years will help in planning for what lies ahead.

# **Global Jewish Education Leaders Mission**



## ***Contributors***

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## ***Israel Education in the Diaspora Post October 7***

Oued Aurech

*Director for Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries at UnitEd, Israel*

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### **The Crisis**

On October 7, an atrocity occurred that shook the State of Israel and the entire Jewish world. The events uncovered gaps in the relationship between Israel and the international community and with human rights organizations, and undermined the sense of personal security and the concept that Israel is a safe haven for the Jewish people. The sense of belonging and national security was hurt, and the trust in the most powerful army, the body that is supposed to be a forceful shield, broke. The experience of helplessness was hard, and the crisis opened old and deep wounds.

### **Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation requires a honest processing of the trauma as part of recovery. We must acknowledge the spiritual scars that the tragedy has left and cope with them bravely. We must face the depths of the harsh experience directly and process it as an inseparable part of the path to recovery. The central endeavour is to rehabilitate the deep connection to the State of Israel, and renew the emotional and valuable bond with the state through re-educating its values, heritage, and eternal destiny. We must invest in long-term education processes that will produce fruits in the future.

## **The EIER Model**

The EIER model (Event, Interpretation, Emotion, Reaction) is an effective tool for coping with situations of stress and crisis. The model guides us to identify the specific event, to understand our interpretation of it, to experience the emotions involved in it, and to respond in an educated and appropriate manner. Using this model enables the students to understand that their interpretations of the events affect their emotions and reactions, and that way they can develop mental resilience and manage their reactions more effectively.

## **Knowledge**

Knowledge is a central tool in coping with crises. It is important to understand the historical background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict accurately, as grounded in historical fact. Many are confused or lack information regarding the particulars of the conflict, and knowing the full history is therefore essential. Precise and fact-based lesson plans can provide a firm infrastructure of facts and data, so that students can move on to the interpretation stage, the emotional experience, and the coping that comes from the strong base of an accurate understanding of the events.

## **Coping Emotionally and Socially**

Along with knowledge, it is important to develop in students the ability to distinguish between good and bad and to see the light within the darkness. The way we perceive reality greatly determines our emotional reaction towards it. If we are able to see reality through a lens of possibilities of cooperation, understanding, and opportunities for progress, we could cultivate hope, optimism, and a will for a positive action. The school must be a safe and objective space to present all the facts and the range of perspectives in an honest and accurate manner.

## **Strengthening a Sense of Belonging and Peoplehood**

Beyond the personal emotions and specific conflicts, it is important to feel part of a global peoplehood. We must strengthen the sense of belonging to the Jewish people and to the State of Israel via educational activities. Recognizing the existence of darkness and evil, and at the same time exposing the students to values of love, giving, and sacrifice, can develop a new generation with hope and determination to achieve peace.

## **Conclusion**

Education post-October 7 needs to incorporate coping with the crisis directly, psychological and communal rehabilitation, and imparting knowledge and values that motivate cooperation and hope. We must process the trauma as part of recovery, educate for values and a deep connection to the State of Israel, and provide accurate and fact-based information on the conflict. Using the EIER model combined with knowledge, interpretation, and coping emotionally, we can strengthen the mental and communal resilience and prepare the next generation to cope with the complex reality.



## ***Maintaining Our Jewish Pride in the Face of Adversity***

Nechama Bendet

*Co-chair of the Australian Council of Jewish Day Schools, Australia*

The global Jewish Education Leadership mission had a profound impact on me and the way I view Jewish education in the Diaspora. I am deeply grateful to the organisers, and for the opportunity to have participated in this life-changing experience.

Fifty to sixty percent of Jewish children attend Jewish schools in Australia, and our Jewish day schools are the jewel in the crown of our community.

The mission helped me understand that the atrocities of October 7 and its aftermath, including the wave of antisemitism that swept through the world, is a watershed moment for our community, highlighting the critical and transformative role of Jewish education.

I saw the power of education. The power of an UNWRA education to create a hatred so all- prevailing that 3,500 terrorists breached our borders to commit the most horrific atrocities, knowing they might die but not caring because their hatred of Jews is so overwhelming. And I saw the power of a beautiful Jewish education in Ofakim to heal and restore, to provide children who have seen what no one should ever see the resilience, strength, and impetus to live a full and meaningful life as upstanding and proud Jews and Israelis.

The key lessons I learnt are:

- 1 | Visiting Israel to bear witness and to lend a hand at this time is critical.  
| Sometimes in life we just need to show up and this is one of those times.

- 2 | In the face of adversity, Israelis have come together in an incredible display of unity to support each other. This is a defining lesson we must take back to our schools and communities.
- 3 | I no longer see the Jewish world as being divided into Israel and the Diaspora. We are a people intrinsically linked. We have a shared past and a shared future. Being Jewish means you never stand alone.
- 4 | Antisemitism is a global Jewish event that needs a global response. It's for all of us to solve. And one of the most effective ways of protecting our children from the scourge of antisemitism is through a Jewish education. We don't need to teach our children what to think but we do need to teach them how to think: how to apply critical thought to navigate right and wrong and to distinguish between legitimate social discourse and what lies beyond it. We need to teach them about our history, culture, traditions, and values, so they can form a strong sense of their Jewish identity and feel proud of the role they play as the next precious link in the chain of our glorious 5,000-year story. Antisemites seek to dehumanise Jews and cancel us out; the most effective response to this is to ensure our youth are well educated, knowledgeable and informed, invested in Jewish life, and passionate about our right to exist.
- 5 | We can't let the immense tragedy of October 7 and the other devastating events in our history define us. We need to teach our children what happened, mourn for the terrible losses we endured, advocate for the safe return of our hostages, and stand united with our brothers and sisters in Israel and our heroic IDF. But we must also give our children hope, instil pride in all that we have achieved, and inspire them to live full and proud lives as Jews, contributing positively to their local communities and to the world around them.

## ***Conscripted By And to Life***

Yael Bendat-Appell

*Vice president of Jewish Education and Engagement at UJA Federation of Toronto, Canada*

Visiting Israel during a time of active war meant that we were confronted with a society that was not only experiencing ongoing collective and individual trauma, but was functioning in a distorted reality. In great part, this was due to the absence of large numbers of people, mostly men, now conscripted to battle—and, relatedly, due to gaping holes in crucial societal infrastructure. Our visit focused on many of the country's responses to these realities.

In an effort to boil down the rich and complex experience of our trip to a few key takeaways, here are three themes that emerged.

- 1 | **Israeli Civil Empowerment and Agency** - In their dogged determination to live life, not to be defined by tragedy, and to continue into the future—**Israelis have a high sense of empowerment and agency**. We met and heard from countless individuals who, despite navigating their own trauma, were crystal clear in their ability to see the needs of the people around them and to respond accordingly. Not one of them waited for an invitation from a government official or ministry representative to take action; they mustered their own strength and skills to fill the gaps they saw all around them. We heard from young educators in Jerusalem creating entire schools for displaced children, and from seasoned educators in Ofakim immediately turning their schools into food distribution centers and into places for children to gather in the aftermath of their town's personal

trauma. We saw educators committed to ensuring that displaced children and parents have the tools to protect themselves and their children from potential dangers like sexual abuse while they live in hotels. And, we learned about Jerusalem mothers who, in addition to doing their own day's work and caring for their own families, do the laundry of the displaced people in their city's hotels. Regular citizens feel a deep sense of responsibility and agency in stepping up to influence the trajectory of their communities.

- 2 | **Israeli Thriving** - Beyond the Israeli determination not to be defined by the massacre of 10/7; **Israelis are committed not just to live, but to thrive.** In addition to the commitment to strengthen civil infrastructures in the ways described above, the country's documentation and memorialization of October 7 is seen through numerous public art installations, music and prayer, and by cultural institutions like museums and libraries redesigning entire curricula to ensure that they are responsibly adapting to the new reality. The Herculean volunteer efforts and infrastructure to return the hostages can be seen all over the country, but nowhere more than a Tel Aviv high-tech company's offices where the Missing Families Forum was abuzz with activity and determination as it mobilizes every resource possible to achieve their single goal: to Bring Them Home Now. Even the main message conveyed to us by Sarit Zussman, the mother of fallen soldier Ben Zussman z'l, was how essential it is to restore the nation's children's sense of hope—that children must once again believe in good endings to stories. This is not a country that is wallowing in (what would be appropriate) despair; this is a country facing its future through a lens of thriving, contributing, creating, and unrelinquished hope.
- 3 | **Israeli women were often the central players rewriting this stage of the country's history** - The women we encountered were working fiercely on behalf of Israeli society and its children, inhabiting their own forms of leadership in numerous areas—education, advocacy, activism, culture, politics, and family life. It is clear that while many men are conscripted into literal battle, the women heroes of Israel are conscripted in countless ways to ensure life and the future. Their leadership was breathtaking.

## Until the Day Breaks and the Shadows Flee Away

What are the implications of this visit and these lessons learned for global educators?

- We must double down on showcasing the humanity of Israelis, especially in response to the tremendous forces actively working to dehumanize them.
- Mifgash is essential, now more than ever.
- We must empower our own communities—both our leaders and educators—to respond to, and meet, the changing needs of our time as Jews and Zionists, but also our students and lay people to develop a sense of responsibility and agency to contribute and co-create.
- We should challenge ourselves as educators to feel conscripted by and for Am Yisrael and to explicitly reprioritize the framework of Jewish peoplehood.

## ***Jewish Education in the Aftermath of October 7***

Rabbi Scot A. Berman

*Director of English-Speaking Countries for UnitEd, Israel*

The Massacre of October 7 and the ensuing Swords of Iron war against Hamas has proven to be a watershed event for the Jewish people in Israel and around the world. The question for Jewish educators is, In what ways have these events changed what and how we teach—especially in relationship to Israel? Below I outline, in extremely broad strokes, what I see as a sea change requiring responses by educators and communal leaders. These conclusions were reached through conversations with educators from the United States, the UK, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, as well as dialogue with colleagues, research, and personal reflection.

- 1 | **Israel Education** - Overall, Jewish day schools succeed in creating a Zionist spirit in their schools and among their students. As one important indicator, day schools often have significant percentages of their graduates who make Aliya. However, many students are insufficiently knowledgeable about modern Israel. The luxury of ignorance is no longer tolerable. Students are being challenged over their commitments and must have greater understanding of modern Israeli history and current events to support their positions on Zionism and Israel. This is especially important in preparation for the time they leave the four walls of their day school environment.

- 2 | **Peoplehood** – This is a moment in history to capitalize on the common destiny of Jews across the globe. The war in Israel and the anti-Israelism and antisemitism in the Diaspora bring into sharp focus our common cause as one people. Aside from victimization, this is an opportunity to draw upon what binds the Jewish people together in heritage, religion, character, and destiny.
- 3 | **Resilience** – The resilience of the Jewish people expressed through endless volunteerism, activism, and contributions in the face of this crisis was and is nothing short of extraordinary. In capitalizing on this unique Jewish quality, this response must be noted, celebrated, and encouraged for the long term.
- 4 | **Heroism** – The acts of heroism among common people as well as soldiers on the front lines prove inspirational. This, too, needs to be noted, celebrated, and emulated.
- 5 | **The Vulnerability of the State of Israel** – The events of Oct. 7 have broken the myth that Israel is invincible. Dealing with an Israel that is vulnerable against its enemies is a subject educators must be prepared to address.
- 6 | **In-Reach** – There is a significant minority of Jews who identify with the Palestinian cause or at least sympathize with it. Educators and community leaders need to grapple with how best we address and relate to Jews who take up positions that appear as anti-Israel.

These are critical areas requiring deep attention from Jewish educators and policymakers. Some, like peoplehood, resilience, and heroism, represent the silver lining that has arisen in response to and in the aftermath of this crisis. Others, such as Israel education, the vulnerability of the State of Israel, and in-reach, represent challenges that we ignore at our own peril. Addressing all of them seriously is critical for sustaining a healthy Jewish ecosystem.

## ***Jewish Day Schools***

The Heart of the Jewish Future

Paul Bernstein

*Founding CEO of Prigmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools, USA, Canada*



When my children were growing up in London, their Jewish day school had no external sign identifying itself. The walls were anonymous, tall and unwelcoming, a stark contrast to the warmth of all that happens inside. This kind of “disguise” has long been the experience of many Jewish communities outside of North America, as they balanced their safety against their communal pride.

Moving to New York in 2011, my family entered a new normal. North American Jewish schools generally stand open and proud. Security is an important feature, but historically school leaders were more worried about school shootings than the direct targeting of Jews. Since the Tree of Life synagogue shooting and subsequent attacks on the Jewish community, and ever more in light of the rise of incidents after October 7, places where Jews gather now feel threatened as never before.

This recent explosion of blatant antisemitism triggers unprecedented questions for North America’s Jews. Intimidation of Jewish students on college campuses sets up a dangerous and slippery slope toward public acceptance of violence against and hatred of Jews. Stories emerging from secular public and private K-12 schools may be less severe—for now—but are no less unsettling to Jewish families.

In this moment of uncertainty and fear, Jewish day schools remain a haven—a home for students and families where educators excel at engaging students in a vibrant education, a



loving community, and a place they can thrive and grow. A positive connection to Israel remains central to the missions of day schools and a key component of building a strong Jewish identity.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z”l placed day schools at the heart of Jewish survival: “Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers.” When asked about the effort that resulted in a doubling of day school enrollment in Britain beginning in the 1990s, Rabbi Sacks said, “We turned from a community proud of its past to a community immensely proud of its future.”

As we turn to the future, building Jewish identity, connection, and pride is essential to combating antisemitism and fear. How will the new reality of Jewish life post-October 7 change our hopes or expectations for our schools? How ambitious can we be around enrollment, affordability, leadership, and supporting educators in our schools, knowing that they are holding so much?

We are witnessing enrollment growth across the North American day school field. Sixty percent of schools responding to a spring 2024 Prizmah survey report a growth in enrollment for the next school year because of the current climate. A recent Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) survey about attitudes around the war found that 38 percent of parents of students at secular independent schools are considering switching to a Jewish school—some will move because of antisemitism, while others are seeking community and connection to Jewish life.

We learned during COVID that even for families who previously did not consider day schools, very soon after joining day school communities, parents feel a deep appreciation of the joy and excellence. Families that switched to Jewish day schools because of the pandemic reported that they “fell in love” with the quality, strength of community, passion, values, and care for the whole child that are markers of great Jewish schools.

JFNA’s study demonstrates a “surge” in interest in Jewish life and participation. Jews’ survival for millennia was built on placing the education of our children at the core, and in the face of current threats, the need for and benefit of investing in schools remains paramount. Whereas for many years, Jewish day school enrollment in North America, particularly in the United States, has lagged behind enrollment in the rest of the world, we may be entering a new phase of American Jewish life, with day school at its heart.

In addition to campaigns directly seeking to drive increased **enrollment**, the success of this endeavor rests on investing in the key drivers of success in our schools—**excellence**, **affordability**, and **talent**—to set a path toward a new kind of Jewish future. Andres Spokoyny, CEO of the Jewish Funders Network, wrote:

## Global Jewish Education Leaders Mission

“The hostility of the environment is driving Jews closer to their communities. This constitutes a historic opportunity; funders need to seize this moment by supporting Jewish communal organizations that give people Jewish and Zionist education and a sense of community.”

I am reminded of one of the heroes we met on the Global Jewish Education Leadership Solidarity Mission in Israel, less than four months after the start of the war, Sarit Zussman. Sarit’s son, Ben Zussman z”l, was killed in combat in December 2023. Her eulogy at Ben’s funeral has touched the souls and inspired many with her emphatic call of “Am Yisrael Chai.” She shared with our group the letter that Ben wrote on the way to his army base for the worst case scenario that he did not return. “How can you go on?” we asked her, “How do you face each day?” Her reply cut straight to our hearts as parents, Jews, and of course, leaders dedicated to Jewish education. “I’m a teacher,” she told us, “every day I face the future in my classroom, and I have to have hope.”

Supporting Jewish day schools—a quintessential act of hope—generates a lifetime’s return on investment. Day school alumni become camp leaders, prominent pro-Israel voices on campus, professional and lay leaders across our community, as well as meaningful contributors in their professions and leaders in the wider community. There is no greater need right now than investing in a Jewish future where educated thinkers and leaders have the tools and skills they need to overcome all obstacles and continue to thrive.

## ***We Are Not the Same***

Dr. Erica Brown

*Vice provost for Values and Leadership at Yeshiva University, USA*

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“Real teaching,” writes Joseph McDonald in **Teaching: Making Sense of an Uncertain Craft**, “happens inside a wild triangle of relations—among teacher, students, subject—and the points of this triangle shift continuously.” We are in the midst of a world-shaping moment in Jewish history, a “wild triangle,” and an inflection point that we have yet to comprehend. It demands something unexpected of us as educators. It is hard to know how to rise to a moment that is both deflating and incomprehensible.

Many of us cannot remember our last normal day. It was probably October 6. We are not the same people we were before October 7. I am not the same person. As an educator, this sense of disequilibrium has challenged my objectives in the classroom. If teaching is foundational to my identity, and my identity is shifting because fundamental assumptions I’ve made about the world have been questioned, then how can I teach?

It is still too early to apprehend how we have changed as a nation and as individuals; this will be the work of many years to come. And it will only begin in earnest once the fog of war has lifted. It will involve understanding more about what factually happened as we clear the debris of heartache and the bias of the media. It will involve dissipating political minefields, processing trauma, internalizing the deep wounds of antisemitism, and asking ourselves how we can love a universe again when we feel profoundly betrayed by it.

Other developments more positive in nature will also have to be examined in the work

we do as educators. We will have to find ways to hold on to the unity this war has generated in Israel and across the globe. We must rethink the Israel/diaspora divide that occupied academics and journalists that now seems false, a synthetic creation that disappeared when we were under attack. We will have to name and try to preserve the thousand small kindnesses that surfaced every day of this war that have affirmed the inherent goodness of Israeli society. We cannot afford to squander these gifts that took a war to bring to our attention.

McDonald confesses that inside the continuously shifting triangle of teaching, he remains “chronically unsure of what to teach and how to teach it” but has developed an eye for what he calls “productive linkage.” We don’t have to have all the answers to make productive linkages; connecting our students to relevant ideas and to each other may be the most redemptive work we can do as professionals right now.

There is also something liberating about leaning into this uncertainty. Imagine, for a moment, a science teacher in an elementary school. A storm begins to brew outdoors; the teacher realizes that she is losing the attention of her students to the heavy rain beating on the classroom window. Instead of exerting authority to pull them back, she bends into the moment, invites the class to move to the window, and begins a science lesson on the weather. That evening, as she reflects on how different her lesson plan was from what actually happened, she realizes that the initial loss of control helped her teach both more relevantly and more authentically. She is oddly exhilarated.

We are in that storm. We need to take our students to that window and talk about the storm. As Jewish educators, we are always teaching for uncertainty but not always as aware of it. We, too, may look back on these many months one day in a more peaceable future and realize that instead of skirting uncertainty, we embraced it and brought it into the space. Our vulnerability turned into our strength and taught us how to teach.

## ***Israel Education Just Can't Be the Same After October 7***

Dr. David Bryfman

*CEO of The Jewish Education Project, USA*



On our recent educator mission to Israel there was not a person with whom we met who did not suggest that Israel was in a completely different place after October 7. Whether their terms of reference were “not since ‘73” or “not since ‘48,” is beside the point, in either case reflecting the depth and magnitude of the rupture brought about by events of the Black Shabbat and its aftermath on Israeli society.

The key question facing me and my colleagues after our incredibly important mission of international Jewish educators, is **how much does Israel education, or indeed Jewish education, need to change as a result of October 7?**

For educators conditioned to teaching Israel through historic moments, the change will be a relatively simple one, adding 2023 to the long list of once-a-decade wars that Israel fought in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 1991, and 2006. On a more principled level, many Jewish educators will contend that the events of October 7 are just another piece of the tumultuous journey of the Jewish people. I could imagine, and rightly so, that many educators will subsequently invest even further time and resources educating Jews about such important topics as the origins of antisemitism, the history of Zionism, and contemporary Israeli politics and society.

While both approaches are understandable and even admirable, neither addresses my understanding of October 7 and its already visible impact on Israel and Jewish education.

To be clear, it might be that many of these trends predated October 7, but the events of this day pulled back the curtain, making it plain for all to see the deficiencies of Israel education—or perhaps more accurately, an Israel education designed and implemented for twentieth-century Jews and not the realities of the twenty-first century.

On one day several of my own foundational principles of Israel and Israel education were challenged, if not shattered. Here are just a few:

- Israel is a safe haven for the Jewish people.
- Never Again means Never Again.
- The world understands that all terrorism is evil—even when it is perpetrated against Jews.

Once these and other foundations are shattered, or at least come into serious question, for me, it is an imperative that Israel education, as a subset of Jewish education, must also evolve in significant ways. For Jewish education to remain relevant in the world today, educators must confront the task of asking ourselves for what world we are educating our children. In that regard, Jewish educators around the globe must consider adopting core principles and values that underlie all of their work related to Israel and Jewish education:

- 1 | As much as it is important, as Jews, to stand up for the rights of all humanity, this should never be at the expense of the Jewish people advocating for ourselves.
- 2 | The Jewish people is an extended family, and we will never be at peace until we are all free in our homes. #bringthemhomenow
- 3 | We will not rid the world of antisemitism, but we must never sit idly by when this evil is expressed or experienced.
- 4 | As much as it is important to feel pride and express joy in being Jewish, it must also be our duty to know more about being Jewish and our connections to Israel.
- 5 | Irrespective of politics and ideologies, we must continue, as educators, to grapple with the inconvertible fact that there is another people with claims to much of the same land as the Jewish people.

## **Until the Day Breaks and the Shadows Flee Away**

How much Israel education needs to change for you and your educational setting will depend on how you respond to these principles. In a post-October 7 world, Jewish educators avoiding or refusing to even be challenged by these principles would be another strategic failure for the Jewish people.

## ***My Personal Reflections***

Geoff Cohen

*Director of Jewish Identity and Community at the Herglia School in Cape Town, South Africa*

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October 7 was a day that changed the world as we have come to know it. This catastrophic event not only changed everything for Israelis but also for Jews worldwide. This was not an Israeli Event; it was a Jewish Event.

Within days, instead of the world condemning Hamas for their sheer barbaric, monstrous, and genocidal massacre of our people, we started to witness the largest antisemitic uprising since the Holocaust. Indeed, because of social media, I think it became even more widespread than during the Holocaust, as in countries where they had felt safe Jews suddenly found themselves the target of blatant and often violent antisemitic behavior. New York, London, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto, Los Angeles, Montreal, Dublin, Glasgow, and, of course, right here in our own backyard in Cape Town, cities where Jews flourished and felt they belonged, became cesspools of Jew hatred that hasn't been seen since the 1930s and 1940s. After our brothers and sisters in Israel had been murdered, mutilated, raped, burnt, and beheaded the world refused to believe or just did not care. Why? Simply because they are Jews and Jews don't matter.

The world has now shown its true colors.

1,200 Israelis were massacred on October 7 and over 230 hostages taken into Gaza. Today there are still 136 hostages in the tunnels of Gaza, including men, women, the elderly, infants, and bodies. And then, to top it all, our minister of foreign affairs makes a call to the



head of Hamas, Ishmail Haniyeh, and takes a trip to Iran to gloat with the very people who are calling for the annihilation of Israel and the Jewish people.

Our president stood smiling and chuckling with his ministers, wearing kaffiyeh scarves and declaring to the world where their loyalties lay. What a disappointment he has turned out to be.

But that, too, was not enough, for shortly after, South Africa took Israel to the International Criminal Court, accusing it of genocide when the very charter of Hamas calls for the genocide of the Jewish people. The irony is insane. South Africa, our country, had the ultimate temerity to take Israel to the International Court of Justice when the situation in South Africa is in such dire straits. What a travesty that our morally corrupt ANC government should have the audacity to do this.

Once again, our government has chosen the wrong side and will be judged accordingly as time unfolds.

At the conference, we were asked the following question: Where did you start your journey that brought you here today?

My journey started on October 7 shortly after the world became aware of the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas. I attended an emergency meeting with our chairperson together with the Board of Deputies and CSO (community security organization) to plan how to keep our children safe, knowing already that the pro-Hamas and pro-Palestinian hatred would surface once again. Any event that takes place in Israel reverberates around the world and the Israel and Jew haters in Cape Town are always quick to take advantage of the situation.

And so started our plan to keep our pupils safe and to find ways of dealing with the situation and the outrage, fear, and distress that was felt by our community.

We all agreed that we would keep our thoughts, our feelings, and our determination to keep our community safe within the school community and its stakeholders. We would try not to publish our anger and our solidarity with Israel. This caused problems of its own as many of our stakeholders and alumni around the world did not feel that we had shown our commitment and our solidarity with Israel strongly enough.

What they didn't understand was the enormous pressure that we as a school had to face, with threats in the Provincial Legislature to deregister our school. Horrific rhetoric was shouted from loudhailers at pro-Palestinian rallies saying that our school was recruiting IDF soldiers to murder Palestinian babies in Gaza.

The way things are twisted by these people is astounding and further enhances my feelings of anger and frustration and my strong desire to do something more than just wear an Israeli "dog tag" around my neck. I felt torn between the need to keep our children safe at all costs and my need to do something tangible.

During the mission to Israel, we spoke about the Jewish story and the Jewish narrative. The Jewish narrative is very much about being an oppressed people who have gone through wars, exile, disasters, pogroms, and the Holocaust. We shouldn't perpetuate or react to this narrative. We need to stand strong, resolute in our belief that we have the right to a Jewish state, the right to be Zionists, and the right to practice our religion safely.

We need to reconstruct our narrative. We must seize the opportunity to change this narrative. We need to stop being so focused on our tragedies.

The mission to Israel gave me the opportunity to express my solidarity. It presented me with the opportunity to see for myself, to stand on the sites of the massacre of civilians. It gave me the opportunity to interact with colleagues from twelve countries, to understand the issues that they are dealing with, and to hold conversations that helped me gain perspective of how the Jewish world was dealing with the war.

I arrived in Israel feeling a deep sense of loneliness and isolation as a Cape Town Jew at the tip of Africa. I felt that as a South African Jew, I was being let down and betrayed by an ANC government that had shown its loyalty to the Palestinian people and to Hamas itself. I expressed my feelings many times to the group during the mission and felt supported and heard by my colleagues. Did it change my feelings and outlook? Not really. I still feel that we are in a very different arena from most Western countries whose governments publicly support Israel and its right to defend itself and indeed to exist as a Jewish state.

The most important lesson I learned while on the mission was our task as educators to lead calmly and assuredly, to stand tall and resolute and without fear in our support and solidarity with Israel and to be a beacon of light in our small community in Cape Town. We as educators have the task to ensure that our pupils are taught the history of the Jewish people, of our Jewish civilization, to know and understand the historical facts of both biblical and modern Israel, to teach our children how to stand up for Israel, how to argue the case for Israel with those people who oppose us and create their own facts. At the same time, we have to ensure that our pupils understand that alongside us in Israel, are people who have a genuine need to feel safe and secure and lead normal happy lives. Israeli Arabs, Bedouins, Druze, Muslims, Christians, and many Palestinians have the desire to live side by side with Israeli Jews in a thriving country in peace and prosperity.

Finally, we have to continue to teach our children to be proud Jews, moral and upright global citizens who understand their role in society and who can make a valuable contribution to the world at large.

## Thursday 8 February

I feel betrayed and angered at the stupidity and recklessness of the three ex-Herzlian pupils who have trashed their school, fabricated facts, and endangered the lives of our children, staff, and parents. It is so sad to witness how these young adults have become so twisted in their ideology that they cannot hear, or do not want to hear, the actual facts.

I have no issue with their support for a better life for the Palestinian people. I, too, wish for a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict so that Jews and Palestinians can live side by side together in peace and security. I do have issues with their support for a terrorist organization that has in their manifesto/charter the complete annihilation of Israel and the Jewish people.

How do these kids not see what Hamas did in their invasion of Israel? Is the murder, rape, mutilation, and destruction forgotten, ignored, or not believed? How can anyone with any sense of morality not be horrified by the inhumanity of Hamas on October 7?

Did we fail as educators in teaching these kids the basic tenets of respect, morality, dignity, and empathy?

Did their parents fail to bring them up as upstanding individuals of whom they can be proud?

Do they think that they will be spared from the antisemitic rhetoric and the spewing of hatred toward Jews?

I don't have the answers to these questions and I guess I never will. But my determination to continue doing what I do as a Jewish educator has not wavered, in fact, it has only strengthened.

AM ISRAEL CHAI

## ***Beyond the Realms of Confusion and Despair***

Three Reflections on Jewish Education Post-October 7

Professor Daniel Fainstein

*Dean of Jewish Studies of the Hebraica University in Mexico City, Mexico*

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### **1 | Even if confused, as educational leaders we don't have the right to be silent**

We find ourselves in a state of vertigo and confusion, grappling to comprehend the events of October 7 and their profound significance. The perspective and distance necessary to determine whether this marks a new epoch in Jewish history or the history of the State of Israel elude us. Uncertainty prevails as we contemplate whether this is a singular event or part of a continuum of wars and conflicts that have unfolded since the establishment of the State of Israel. Amid tears and pain, we confront the aftermath of a cunning and cruel attack that has once again placed our vulnerability at the forefront of our collective consciousness.

In the very state conceived to eradicate Jewish vulnerability, we now grapple with a poignant paradox—vulnerability persists. This extends beyond Israel, touching numerous diaspora communities amid a troubling surge in hate speech and antisemitism. An existential sense of fragility, abandonment, and loneliness pervades our collective consciousness.

Simultaneously, a profound and potent kinship emerges—a sense of Klal Israel, embodying the "covenant of destiny" binding Israel with the diaspora. Are we bewildered because we nurtured an illusory world view, a simplistic optimism shattered by the weight of history? How were we blinded to the multiple latent disruptive processes quietly germinating over time? These questions linger, challenging us to reevaluate our perspectives and confront

the complex realities shaping our world.

Indeed, this painful situation serves as a wake-up call, jolting us from the realm of wishful thinking.

The current challenges underscore not only the failure of leadership and those in positions of authority at various levels but also highlight extraordinary manifestations of leadership emerging from the grassroots of society and communities. This dichotomy prompts a reevaluation of our expectations and calls for a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the evolving landscape of global affairs.

We are perplexed trying to piece together the puzzle of our world.

We must first construct our own narrative of what happened and what it means for our lives before we can propose narratives for our colleagues and students.

This narrative evolves through a dialogue woven from our individual experiences, perceptions, and insights, together with conversations among colleagues and friends. Personally, embarking on a mission to Israel with an exceptional group of colleagues from diverse countries played a pivotal role in shaping and articulating my narrative.

As educational leaders we do not have the right to remain indifferent or paralyzed. There is great expectation in our educational communities.

Our legitimacy as leaders will be tested in this hour according to our responses.

We must articulate a vision that, although provisional and fragmented, allows us to guide and orient our communities and institutions in these uncertain and turbulent times.

## **2 | We must develop a long-range perspective to better understand the present, without falling into despair or false optimism**

Cultivating a long-range perspective is essential for a more nuanced and profound understanding of the present. This approach enables us to transcend the immediate challenges and fluctuations, offering a broader context within which to interpret and evaluate current events. By adopting a historical lens that spans centuries and millennia, we gain insight into the enduring patterns, complexities, and resilience inherent in the Jewish experience.

This long-range perspective serves as a counterbalance to the extremes of despair and false optimism. It encourages a realistic and measured assessment of the current situation, recognizing that history unfolds through a series of ebbs and flows, setbacks and advancements. Through this lens, we can better navigate the challenges of the present with a sense of perspective and a deeper appreciation for the enduring spirit of the Jewish people.

### 3 | Educating for resilience and dignity

Thirty years ago, the philosopher of education Israel Scheffler defined the goals of Jewish education from the perspective of the student:

“To initiate the Jewish child into the culture, history, and spiritual heritage of the Jewish people; **to assist the child in understanding and confronting the truth about Jewish history, identity, and existence to enhance their dignity as a Jew**; and to enable them to accept and be creative within the Jewish dimension of their life.”

I believe that these objectives carry a greater urgency today than ever before and should permeate every aspect of our educational institution's curriculum.

Confronting the truth about Jewish existence involves addressing historical challenges, including periods of persecution, discrimination, and diaspora. It also encompasses understanding the contemporary issues facing the Jewish community, such as antisemitism and geopolitical tensions. This knowledge equips the child to navigate the complexities of the world while maintaining a strong and dignified sense of self. Amid confusion and pain, a clear path eludes us, yet we trust that, as educators, each of us holds a pivotal role in navigating this challenging moment. While the way forward may be uncertain, we place our confidence in the significance of making substantial contributions during these trying times.

The book of Deuteronomy contains the empowering message, "Be strong and resolute, be not in fear or in dread of them; for the Lord your God Himself marches with you: He will not fail you or forsake you" (31:6).

This timeless encouragement from Moses to Joshua imparts resilience and fortitude. It transcends temporal boundaries, inspiring strength in facing challenges. The profound assurance that God's presence is unwavering reinforces the call to steadfastness. This enduring message, encapsulated in these words, serves as a timeless beacon of courage, echoing through generations.

## ***Reflections In The 2024 Global Education Convening***

January 2024

Dr. Gil Graff

*Executive director of BJE: Builders of Jewish Education, USA*

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The Global Jewish Education Leadership Solidarity Mission of January 29 to February 1, 2024, left me reflecting on the still unresolved challenge articulated more than 125 years ago by Ahad Ha'Am. Writing soon after the First Zionist Congress (1897), Ahad Ha'Am observed that Herzl's Zionism—born of antisemitism—looked to remedy the situation of individual Jews. More organic, and more compelling, in Ahad Ha'Am's view, was the spiritual crisis of Judaism at the close of the nineteenth century.

Living at a tipping point in the erosion of traditional Jewish norms among Eastern European Jews (including those migrating to Western countries), Ahad Ha'Am imagined that, even without a state, a “good sized settlement of Jews working without hindrance in every branch of civilization” in the Land of Israel would (somehow) give expression to the “spirit of Judaism.” That spirit would radiate from the center to the communities of the Diaspora, “to inspire them with new life and to preserve the over-all unity of our people” (“The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem” 1897, 267). Herzl's dream of world powers recognizing Jewish national aspirations was realized in remarkable fashion. (Albeit, antisemitism has not disappeared with the establishment of a Jewish state, and October 7 and its aftermath underscore that Israel is, after seventy-five years, neither self-reliant nor entirely successful in ensuring the security of its citizens.) What, however, of Ahad Ha'Am's vision of resolving what he saw as the spiritual crisis of Judaism?

Interestingly, one of the challenges I have regularly encountered in my education-focused visits to Israel is the quest (under one name or another), in Israel, to identify and nurture **toda'ah yehudit**. What does “Jewish consciousness” mean, and how does one educate toward it? What, for example, is the Jewish ethos toward which **mamlachti** schools might (could or should) educate? Notwithstanding the revival of Hebrew and the flowering of Hebrew literature, magnificent music, and artistic creativity, the spiritual malaise to which Ahad Ha'Am pointed presents a continuing challenge.

In a variety of ways, the issue of Jewish identity and meaning for contemporary Jewry emerged in the context of the Global Education mission. Apart from initiatives “on the ground” in Israel (from the Hebrew State Education Council, Manor Centre/The One Hundred Initiative, to Mabua and Keren Appelbaum’s “pop up” school, to the Koret Center for Jewish Civilization), reference was made to the impact on the Jewish consciousness of shlichim as they encounter other Jewish communities. Those shlichim, in turn, provide or enrich a dimension of the Jewish consciousness of those abroad with whom they interact. The problem to which Ahad Ha'Am pointed will not be solved in isolation, and the cure will not flow in one direction from a central address: it is a global Jewish challenge.

Micah Goodman comments that “Judaism is the Jews’ ongoing conversation.” He observes that “one precondition for joining any conversation is a basic familiarity with its context. If we want to engage in a political debate, we must be familiar with the political context; and if we want to engage in scientific debate, we must understand something about the science. And in order to join the intergenerational conversation about Judaism, Jews need to be familiar with its contents” (Goodman 2020, 90–91). The starting point of Jewish cultural vitality is Jewish education (which is, itself, multidimensional). Absent Jewish education, one wonders how long the sense of ‘areivut, mutual responsibility—so palpable in the aftermath of October 7—will persist.

The Global Education Convening was a reminder of the value of interaction among and between Jews living in diverse communities, in furthering the conversation to which Goodman refers. Ahad Ha'Am would surely approve of a gathering of Jewish educators from eleven countries outside Israel, joined by Israeli educators, convened in Jerusalem by Israel-based educational entities to discuss contemporary questions of Jewish education and identity. His contribution to the conversation continues to challenge us, as we near the second quarter of the twenty-first century.



## ***Birthing Educational Leaders***

Dr. Joanne Greenaway

*Chief executive of London School of Jewish Studies, UK*

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As my teacher Rabbi Sacks zt'l frequently said, "Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope." Educators, as we saw repeatedly during our mission, are people of hope. They are people who not only look to the future but build it through the students they inspire and the hope that they instil in them. The educational leaders we spoke to epitomised the Israeli spirit of resilience and determination but also the positivity to look beyond their current trauma to focus on building the future.

That future of Jewish engagement must be one of positive identity that is constructed not by dwelling on antisemitism, but on fostering a love for the Jewish people in Israel and around the world. As we were told by Zohar Raviv, director of Birthright, "We cannot sustain the Jewish body on a diet of tragedies." October 7 was an interruption to our story; it is not the story. We have learnt that the Holocaust was not a strong basis for a positive Jewish identity. Instead, we need an understanding of our proud history, our vibrant present, and a belief in our shared destiny.

It is our teachers and educators who strengthen Jewish engagement and connection to Israel through transmitting this history and tradition, Jewish pride and sense of peoplehood.

LSJS, the London School of Jewish Studies (formerly Jews College), the organisation I am privileged to lead, has focussed for 170 years on building educational leaders. We run teacher

training programmes which include formal professional qualifications, teacher development initiatives, and degrees in Jewish education. I see every day how dedicated these teachers are to our people's future.

The experience of meeting so many inspiring individuals in Israel cemented my resolve as to the critical value of teachers in our community and the importance of doubling down to invest in them and support them as the absolute leaders and guardians of our community's future.

Since October 7 many of us have felt overwhelmed. One key takeaway from the mission is that, whilst there is plenty to do, from advocacy online, to political lobbying, to fighting antisemitism, that is not our role. Our role in birthing inspiring educational leaders is just as, if not more, critical to safeguarding the future security of our community.

There is nothing more powerful than instilling a love of the Jewish people in the next generation. To do that we need to recruit well, particularly those with leadership qualities that are often developed through years of youth movement involvement; we need to provide them with professional pedagogical skills to be effective and we need to support them and nurture them as much as we possibly can. Above all, we need to create a cultural shift whereby we honour our teachers and educators for the critical role that they play.

## ***My heart is in the East but I'm in the farthest West***

Post Oct 7th educational changes needed in both Israel and civic education

Dr. Dan Held

*Chief program officer at UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Canada*

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For the first three months after October 7, one of my children had trouble sleeping. An astute, self-aware young child, she articulated that she was scared for Israel. Her grandparents, who live in Israel, were with us on October 7. She saw the early days of the war through their eyes and was worried for them when they returned home. At school she became attached to Niva, who came to Toronto seeking safe harbour and was in my daughter's class until she returned to Israel in December. She knew Niva was coming to Toronto for safety and was afraid when she returned to Israel. And, each day, as my daughter walked to the school bus, she passed "missing persons" posters with the pictures of the hostages. My daughter was afraid of the war in Israel, of kidnappings, and of what would be for the country she loves so dearly.

In the early months of the war I wrote about the ways in which we will need to rethink Israel education. For the last quarter century our focus of Israel education has been on building an attachment to Israel. We place an emphasis on the *mifgash*, we bring *shinshinim* into our schools and *shlichim* into our camps, and we help children "hug and wrestle." These play a significant role in centering our community's engagement with Israel—and my daughter is a success story of this education. She loves Israel and is concerned for it.

Post-October 7, however, we need to marry these affective goals of with two other sets of goals: knowledge and empowerment. We need to cultivate a generation of young Jews who know Israel, its history, characters, and story. For too many young Jews, their attachment to Israel

is built on a love for the people, without the scaffolding of knowing the history and story. In a similar vein, we must build a community that is Israel empowered—that can act on their knowledge and love of Israel. Action can manifest in many ways: speaking Hebrew, traveling to Israel, reading Israeli news and literature, or advocating on Israel's behalf.

In the early days of the war, my sense was that we need to re-envision our Israel education goals to balance knowing, valuing, and doing.

In the months since, however, the locus of my daughter's concern has shifted from Israel to Toronto. Encampments at the universities; Palestinian protests in Jewish neighborhoods, including outside synagogues; gunshots fired at a day school and three synagogues' windows smashed have led to a dramatically different climate in our local community. In the months after October 7, reported hate crimes escalated by more than 200 percent.

Growing up, I saw antisemitism as the challenge of another age. It was the narrative of our parents and grandparents who immigrated from other countries or the story of Toronto's Christi Pits Antisemitic Riots in 1933. Antisemitism wasn't our story. We lived in the cultural mosaic borne of Canada's national policy of multiculturalism. Our city was Toronto the Good, where crime rates were low and hate crimes even lower.

Today, however, we need to change not only our Israel education, but our civic education. We need to equip a community to be resilient in the face of hate. On Sunday, Toronto's Jewish community will hold its 55th annual Walk with Israel. I remember walking when I was a child and I'm proud to walk with my children today. This year, however, my children will be walking through a large counter protest. The "Walk against Israel" is planning to block our route, call us genocidal occupiers, and compare us to Nazis. They will shout, they will chant, they will spout out venom. My children will see the signs, hear the chants, and wonder what multiculturalism means in today's fractured world. At an event that should be a celebration of Jewish pride, they will be confronted by those who hate us.

In the early days after October 7, I my thoughts were about the ways we would need to retool Israel education for a post-October 7 world, to create a generation of children who know Israel, who love Israel, and who are empowered to act for Israel. That work is critical. Today, however, as the hatred that was once isolated to the Middle East has spilled onto our streets at home, I realize that we need to also retool our civic education, enabling Jewish children to make sense of growing up in a society where hatred too often trumps tolerance and where our opponents will try to marginalize their identities and values. It's the coupling of these two change projects that will create the resilient Diaspora we need in a post-October 7 world.

## ***Learning to Find the Words When "There Are No Words/ Ein Milim/אין מילים"***

Dr. Miriam Heller Stern

*Director of the School of Education at HUC Los Angeles, USA*



**בארץ הלוהטת הזאת המילים צריכות להיות צל**

**In this fiery-hot land, words are supposed to provide shade**

**- Yehuda Amichai, "Shir Ahava"**

My daughter is in fourth grade at a Jewish day school in Los Angeles. The other day she had a vocabulary test of one hundred Hebrew words. Memorizing them accurately was an impressive feat.

I am American, and a graduate of such a school, which was the foundation for a lifetime of Jewish learning. I have a wide and deep Hebrew and Jewish vocabulary that I began accumulating from the time I was a child. And yet, when I spent time visiting with colleagues and family in Israel in January 2024, I found myself unable to find the right words—in any language—to process the profound depth and complexity of what I encountered. What's the word for when you feel shattered, yet somehow whole at the same time? Full of resolve and yet nauseatingly empty in the pit of your stomach? How do you describe the experience of a visceral despair buoyed by unyielding hope? Exhausted and determined to persist? We kept trying to make sense and create order but found ourselves just needing to be present: listening, absorbing, processing.

There are those who will argue forcefully for the urgency of teaching more history and more facts as a bulwark against antisemitism and Israel's opponents and enemies. Certainly, having a Jewish knowledge base and the discernment to navigate today's media terrain is essential.

But when it feels like our world has been upended, we also need to teach how to courageously navigate through the parts that schools don't always know how to teach: how to hold the trauma, the loss, the paradoxes, the confusion, the other. How do we create the containers for these very human and raw experiences?

A phrase I hear frequently from my North American colleagues and friends as they return from Israel and are asked to describe the experience is, "There are no words." After offering that initial caveat, they spill over with a deluge of words: conflicting words, colorful, textured, emotional words. Their words are punctuated not by passive periods—only question marks, exclamation points, and ellipses that trail off, unfinished, paused without conclusion.

We need to learn "languages" for expressing what is happening to us, what we hope to achieve, and who we know we are as a people. I traveled to Israel with a delegation of academic colleagues and lay leaders from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion to spend quality time with our Israeli colleagues, students, and alumni. We are accustomed to academic political discourses, historical lectures, and expert briefings. In contrast, I was struck by how prayer, stories, poetry, photography, and art emerged as the best tools to communicate the emotional valence of the lived experiences and yearnings we needed to understand. Images, metaphors, and personal narratives helped us access realities that were new and sometimes mind-bending and heart-wrenching. Look around Israel and you will see a proliferation of art installations, music, symbols, and personal truth-telling that insist on being seen and provide a pathway to resilience.

What is educationally essential at this moment in history? We need to give learners of all ages opportunities to weave creative expression into the process of sense-making. We need practice curating our word lists into tools for healing, strength, understanding, and advocacy. We can learn to write *piyyutim* (poetic prayers), document the stories of October 7, sing *nigunim* (melodies that unite and center us), interpret the various messages of visual art, engage in art therapy and creative writing, just to name a few examples. Memory and creativity are essential skills of Jewish history. Let us not retreat into a curriculum of only fear and defense, lest we forget the strategies that empowered us to persist throughout the generations beyond all expectations.

## ***But We Must Find the Words, Because Aside From Words, There is Almost Nothing***

Erica B. Herszkowich

*General director of the Martín Buber School in Buenos Aires, Argentina*

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This epigraph came back to me during the journey back to Jerusalem from the South of Israel, where we witnessed the sinister effects of what happened on October 7. Over and over again, the words repeated in my mind like a litany, although I couldn't remember where I had taken them from.

Perhaps because silence stunned my inner self, filled with the images of the horror that erupted in Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Or maybe because the desolation of the Nova event, a festival supposed to celebrate life, left no space in memory.

Or perhaps due to the emotion that enveloped me when recalling the account of the director of Ofakim, who took charge of her educational community: Which of her students was dead? Who was kidnapped? Who had lost family members? And how to transform a story of death into one of heroism, life, and overcoming?

And suddenly, as the images began to settle, I remembered that the epigraph is from Linda Olsson's novel *Sonata for Miriam*. It describes the grieving process of a father who lost his daughter. It is, indeed, a story of pain and depression. But it is also a tale of rebirth and a gradual return to the colors of life. Perhaps we still lack the right words and the optimal distance to analyze the consequences of October 7 because we are in the midst of the grieving process. But we will find the words. We will find paths that lead from pain to hope and rebirth. That has been the only option for the Jewish people: heirs and narrators of a story with highs

and lows, with hills and deserts, with whites, blacks, many shades, and an abundance of versions but always, always, a story of life, music, flavors, and overcoming.

To move in that direction, I think we must set some starting points, as a form of dialogical encounter between:

- Professional and personal perspectives. An objective analysis cannot be neutral. We are deeply involved personally and professionally.
- The local and the global. We belong to Jewish institutions that are part of community frameworks that are part of a global Jewish community, sharing dreams, and facing common problems. Isolating ourselves in the solitude of our communities impoverishes us.
- History and the present. Comparing the events of October 7 with parameters from other tragic moments in the history of the Jewish people seems, at least, risky.
- The common past and the shared destiny. The tragedies of our people cannot be the core of Jewish education. Our tragedies cannot constitute the central part of our identity.
- The center and the periphery. Each of the world's Jewish communities is both the center and the periphery at the same time. We must create better ties for the Jewish social fabric to be stronger. This means being able to talk to each other and respect differences. We should speak of Jewish identities in the plural and not in the singular.
- Israel and the Jewish communities around the world: What should be the link between Israel and the Diaspora? And among Jewish communities themselves? We must revisit those links and nurture them to flourish, without certainties. Unilateralism impoverishes us. Diversity and breadth, on the contrary, strengthen us. Am Israel Chai.



## ***The Leader of the Future: The Humble Hero***

"Don't be so humble, you're not that great." - Golda Meir

Rabbi Craig Kaceu

*Educational director of the Pincus Fund, South Africa*

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The world today has been described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), demanding a different approach to leadership. One of the leadership skills needed in such an environment is the ability to manage complexity and paradox. People attempt to avoid the anxiety created in an ever-changing environment by searching for like-minded views and opinions. Aided by social media and the divisive rhetoric of contemporary politics, we live in a world that has become more binary and conflictual. Our world is fast losing the ability to grapple with nuance, hear opinions that differ from ours, and hold moderate and more inclusive views. The echo chambers ruled by likes or bot attacks have removed complexity, leaving forceful voices and crowd behavior to control the discourse. Now, more than ever, we need leaders who are confident to be bold in the VUCA world while also humble enough to hear various voices and opinions, leaders who are comfortable with the ambiguity of AND rather than either/or.

Confidence is a wonderful trait. It empowers people to interact socially even among strangers and it enables them to express their opinions and be heard. Leaders with confidence are better able to make decisions and convey these to others. Ideas conveyed with confidence energize people with contagious passion and optimism. A confident leader motivates those around them, giving them a sense of security. That said, we have all experienced the overconfident leader, or, worse yet, the arrogant leader. There is little as unpleasant as working

for an arrogant leader, which manifests in power plays, bullying, manipulation, and self-serving aggrandizement.

Humility is the trait that serves to balance, or better yet, dance with confidence. Humility is an endearing trait that can make confident people that much more believable. It fosters curiosity and a desire to learn from others. Humble leaders acknowledge the whole team. The beauty of humility is that it clothes a person in self-awareness, authenticity, and the ability to reflect or just be themselves. In groups, it allows for ideas to filter through and more learning to take place. That said, extreme humility has a negative side; humility that borders on self-effacement causes a person to be seen as a spineless pushover. Such people are reluctant to contribute their ideas and tend to go with the strongest voice.

The uncertainty in the wake of October 7, much like the COVID-19 pandemic, caught leaders in situations they could not plan for, full of unfolding uncertainty and risk. It is in these situations that humble heroes stepped forward, exuding confidence, as was witnessed when we met with school leaders in Ofakim, working in teams, remaining open to suggestions from colleagues. It is also this type of leadership that will be needed to overcome the divisive conversations of a pre-October 7 Israel or those that undermine the changes needed in a mamlachti school system that turns liberal world views and Jewish values into oppositional either/or concepts, instead of embracing the power of AND. It is also this leadership quality that will enrich Israel education and the ability to have deep and brave conversations. In fact, most binary issues have underlying tensions that are pregnant with values that need to be understood to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The Jewish world needs confident and humble heroes who will boldly embrace complexity and model an openness to grappling with difficult issues, seeking to understand the other view as clearly as one's own. Only when I am able to do this, will someone be willing to fully understand my view, and then together, we can follow the wisdom and power of AND, a different perspective from that which contributed to bringing us to our current crossroads.

## ***Educating With Positivity to Overcome Adversity***

Rabbi David Meyer

*CEO of PaJeS, UK*



The events of October 7 shook Jews across the world, with impacts far beyond the borders of Israel. In fact, the horrors of 7/10 triggered an attack on the Jewish people across the world on three fronts.

The first was the barbaric attack on Israel perpetrated by Hamas, and the horrors are clear for all to see. Our nation has suffered antisemitic attacks for thousands of years, and in that regard, every one of us is the descendant of a “survivor.” However, this time it is different. For the first time in 2,000 years, we have our own homeland and our own army bravely fighting to counter this terror, protect our land, and, please G-d, ensure our future.

Sadly, we have also witnessed a shocking increase in antisemitism across the world, with thousands participating in marches of hatred and vocalizing genocidal chants. These marches have emboldened antisemitism and legitimized racist rhetoric.

The one-sided approach that has manifested itself among some politicians, in the press, and especially in universities, has exacerbated the situation. They have failed in their duty to uphold the values of a democratic society and have propagated a narrative where good has been turned into evil and evil into good.

This leads to the third, perhaps the most challenging aspect of our time. The impact of these attacks on our community is significant, and just about every Jew around the world is suffering from depression as they contemplate the troubling events in Israel and around the

world. As educators, our duty must be to consider the impact on our youth. How do we ensure our children can feel protected and safe despite the horrific rhetoric? How can we educate from a perspective of positivity and not fear? How do we ensure we instill love and pride in our nation, our religion, and our homeland?

Despite, or perhaps because of the manifestation of antisemitism, we have also seen a resurgence, in some areas of our community of previously Jewishly detached people reengaging with their religion. From time immemorial, we have seen a similar response to antisemitism. Interestingly, this is one of the reasons we eat an egg at the Passover Seder, as unlike any other food, an egg gets harder when placed into boiling water, so, too, the Jewish people become stronger through adversity.

However, it is important that we do not allow the hatred of others to define us. Judaism is our lives, and rather than a burden, it is actually the fuel that gives our lives meaning. Our challenge is to give our children insight into the beauty and wonder of our religion, to appreciate that we have a legacy to be proud of, and that not only will these challenges not defeat us, they will not define us. We will overcome adversity while retaining our unity, our morality, our beliefs, and while ensuring that we are a true light unto the nations.

It is heartbreaking to see that the youth of today end their prayers with the song of "Acheinu," a plea to G-d to protect us in times of trouble and especially bring home our brothers and sisters held captive and protect those fighting a war for our survival. Let us look forward to the time when we can turn from these times of sorrow to times of inspiration where together we will sing the words of "Ani Maamin" and our belief in a brighter future.

## ***The Big Idea for Jewish Education***

A Mission-Driven Indight

Dr. Rona Milch Nouick

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Throughout days of visits, meetings, and discussion, I was overwhelmed—but not as I expected, by sadness. There was loss, devastation, and gripping evidence of cruelty. But as we considered Jewish identity and Jewish education, what I experienced consistently was greatness, grandeur, resilience, heroism, and connection. I experienced a powerful epiphany about Jewish education, Jewish leadership, and Jewish identity building. We have been thinking too small. We need to embrace the “bigness” of the Jewish experience, the depth and impact of our story, the extraordinary nature, power, culture, and character of Jews as a people.

Mission activities confirmed this growing insight. Sarit Zusman, whose son Ben was killed in Gaza, shared the uplifting letter he wrote his parents before his death. Ben’s optimism, commitment, maturity, and yes, pride and happiness were extraordinary, especially knowing his parents would be reading it only if he perished. Sarit, no less impressive, gave voice to the strength of Jewish belief and belonging. It has become the custom for people to line the road to the funeral of the fallen. Sarit said, “I saw the flags and thought, straighten your back, raise your chin, and be proud to be a Jew, because we are fighting evil and we are good.” She admits her sadness, her brokenness, but closed with the “big” statement—“We break and we fall, but we stand.”

In Ofakim, previously “a city of people” now renamed as “a city of heroes,” local high school students toured the neighborhood attacked on October 7 with us. Practicing their

English, at each place a citizen fell, they shared the story of the person lost. A tall, athletic teen shared the story of his brother-in-law. Tears ran down his face as he explained how he is trying to be there for his small nieces, to help in his brother-in-law's absence. Another teen walking with me said that if he were a parent, he would not allow his child to have a phone, because he would want to protect his child from the images Hamas has been circulating. Responsibility, courage, and community permeated our visit, amplified by the dedication of the Ofakim educators who helped the city survive against all odds.

At the Center for the Hostage Families, Dr. Zohar Raviv, the international vice president of education for Taglit-Birthright Israel, further convinced me that we need to think and act bigger. From his call for pedagogy that goes beyond binary discourse, to his compelling plea to understand that the Jewish event was not what happened to us on October 7, but rather what happened and is happening since. "We cannot sustain a healthy Jewish body on a diet of tragedies," he explained. Perhaps the most powerful of Dr. Raviv's big ideas was the mandate to move from being storytellers to storybearers, those who have a stake, a vested interest, those who see the story as their own.

During the mission, I thought frequently of a visit to an Israeli farm years ago. The young farm owner couple hired troubled Israeli teens exclusively, many who had failed in school settings. The teens had to build their own shelters and contribute to all farm operations. One teen who was in charge of two flocks of sheep, and by all reports, was doing an amazing job, was asked how after failing in school he could be so successful. In broken English, he answered, "School was too small for me. Here it is big. If I don't care for the sheep, they will die."

My lesson learned from this young man, and from experiences on the mission, is that Jewish education and Jewish identity building must be big, meaningful, and it must matter. We need every lesson, every setting, every educator to be infused with the greatness of the Jewish story. We need our classrooms to display the Jewish timeline around the ceiling of the room, demonstrating the grandeur of Jewish life across centuries. We need every learning task and activity to connect to this greatness—we learn the aleph-bet so we can read the Torah for our Bar/Bat Mitzvah, but also to access the language that Jews have used to celebrate, converse, think, and debate through the ages. We need to learn about the modern State of Israel as it belongs in a story arc that begins with Avraham Avinu. If we are to be relevant and impactful for today's and tomorrow's Jews, we need to be proud storybearers, owning and sharing our place in this big, phenomenal, amazing Jewish story that is still being written.

## ***Experiences and Insights in the Glow of the Furnace***

The Global Jewish Education Leadership Solidarity Mission

Dr. Alex Pomson

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### **A Mission in the Midst of Grief**

In a famous psychological model, the Swiss American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (2014) depicted the process that patients with terminal illness go through as they come to terms with their own deaths. She subsequently applied the model to grieving friends and family and to those who experience any kind of personal loss. Kübler-Ross insisted that the stages she depicted—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—were neither linear nor inevitable; they mutate over time. Although the model has been critiqued for its lack of empirical grounding, it retains great appeal for conveying the ebb and flow of responses to trauma and the emotional processes along which people travel as they come to terms with trauma.

Just under four months after the dreadful events of October 7, 2023, a group of twenty-five Jewish day school leaders from eleven countries came together in Israel with Israel-based educators for a four-day program: The Global Jewish Education Leadership Solidarity Mission. At the start of the mission, both visitors and Israeli participants were still in the midst of a grieving and meaning-making process; many were angry, some depressed, and maybe a few had arrived at acceptance.

This chapter documents their experiences in the country, their responses to those experiences, and then seeks to derive from their responses potential implications for the field of endeavor they share: Jewish day school education. To be clear, these implications are

tentative at best, and are liable to mutate over the coming months in response to changing events and as the grieving process continues to evolve.

## **Getting Bearings**

The mission's schedule included three key components: first, it provided opportunities for participants to witness with their own eyes sites where some of the terrible events of October 7 took place: in Ofakim, Kfar Azza, and at the site of the Nova Festival. Second, it included opportunities to meet with individuals who either had experienced these events or were at the forefront of responses to them. This included meeting with educators in Jerusalem who were working with children and families displaced from Israel's northern region and visiting the pop-up school they have created; spending a morning with educators and students in Ofakim and accompanying them to sites of terror in their neighborhood; meeting with family members of some of the 136 hostages still being held captive in Gaza, and visiting Kikar Ha-chatufim (Hostages Square) in Tel Aviv; meeting with the parent of a fallen soldier; talking with educators from across Israel; visiting the ANU Museum and learning about its response to the present moment; and hearing from senior civil servants and politicians about their responses to these events as well as the surge of antisemitism worldwide. The schedule crucially provided time for group members to reflect individually and collectively about what they were seeing and hearing, and to share their emerging ideas with one another both at the start and end of each day, and at the start and end of the program as a whole. Participants stayed at a Jerusalem hotel where they shared the space with displaced families from Israel's north, who by this time had been living out of suitcases for many months. Encounters with uprooted children and adults in the hallways, elevator, and lobby proved to be an important part of coming to understand Israel at this time.

The reflections that follow derive from conversations with the mission participants in the course of these experiences, from statements participants made or wrote as part of the program's reflection components, and from field notes recorded over the course of the four days. The identities of individual participants are disguised, but where they are quoted, an effort has been made to preserve their words.



## Making Meaning

Reflecting the trajectory of the meaning-making process, the participants' responses can be viewed as playing out along five continua: from solidarity to identity; between confusion and clarity; from crisis to opportunity; from institutional leadership to inspirational leadership; and from isolation to integration.

### From Solidarity to Identity

The participants came to Israel with a deep desire to express solidarity with Israelis. Most had long-standing personal and professional relationships with Israel and Israelis; some have children living in the country. They simply wanted to be together with actual and metaphorical family during a time of pain. They also wanted to see for themselves what it is like in Israel right now, to see whether the streets are full, and to feel the mood of the country. Some expressed concern about what they would find. Many had never been in Israel during a time of war, and none had been in the country after such traumatic events. They did not know how fragile Israel might be. Finally, they wanted to show that they cared. As one participant expressed on the first day, he was not sure if he was engaged in *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) or *nichum aveilim* (comforting mourners). Either way, he wanted his presence to convey his concern.

The underlying sentiment behind all these emotions was that of coming from afar to learn, show support, and offer love. This was part of the force behind a strongly expressed sentiment at the start of the mission: a commitment to bear witness, and not just for themselves but on behalf of others in their communities. Before heading to the Gaza Envelope on the second day, the participant tasked with sharing an opening thought for the day expressed this commitment well: "It is our task to bear witness in any way we can, and to share that with the world."

By definition, the witness is not the victim. Witnesses see things from a different vantage point. They do not suffer, they observe suffering. Of course, bearing witness can be hard in itself. The verb to bear conveys that a weight must be carried. Standing amid awful scenes of destruction, one participant explained that he didn't want to take photos but felt that he must so that others could also see. Another was deeply ambivalent about entering a house whose occupants had been murdered, and that had been turned by the victims' families into a site of testimony. He entered so others would know what he had seen. This is what it meant to fulfill the responsibilities of the witness.

Over the course of four days, however, something changed. Being present at these sites, sharing space in unexpected ways with the displaced, coming close to the still-glowing furnace that is Israel today, participants expressed a sense of having been changed. It was

not just that they now understood, or had seen with their own eyes; they had become part of something. Having entered a simulation at Kikar Ha-chatufim of the tunnels in which hostages are being held in Gaza, and knowing full well that this simulation came nowhere near the real thing, a participant emerged wiping tears from her eyes. She was further moved by seeing police officers who had just been through the same experience responding in the same way. What was previously part of others' experience was now part of hers. Solidarity was mutating into identity. On the final day, one participant gave expression to this shift: "We are all displaced," she said. Having come from afar to express support, group members found they themselves had been supported. As one participant wrote at the program's end: "Seeing Israeli people dealing with life, post-Oct 7, has been healing for me in an unexpected way. I've now seen living proof that Am Israel Chai." She had been a witness and had become a participant.

## Between Confusion and Clarity

Many things in Israel since the dawn of October 7 have defied logic or expectations. Many Israelis have been living with deep confusion and a loss of trust in public institutions. At various moments during the mission, participants expressed similar confusion about things they saw or heard. This sentiment was initially expressed during the group's first meeting, in this instance, with Karen Applebaum, an educator who, together with her peers, had created a pop-up school for displaced children in a nearby educational institution. Participants were shocked: "Where was the Ministry of Education? How could you just go and start a new school? Who's paying you?" In Ofakim, after hearing stories about heroic but ill-equipped locals who took on the terrorists who had invaded their quiet neighborhood, participants asked (as Israelis had on October 7), "Where was the army?" "How could this happen?" Sitting in Tel Aviv at the headquarters of the campaign for the release of hostages, in a large space provided by a private company, they asked again: "Why do private individuals have to do this, what happened to the government?" By the end of the trip, participants stopped asking these questions. The situation had become familiar, although still inexplicable: public systems had broken down and the space had been filled by incredibly vigorous civil society organizations. In the best cases, government was playing catch up.

A different kind of confusion was prompted by an emotionally wrenching meeting with Sarit Zussman, the mother of fallen soldier Ben Zussman. Sarit told Ben's story and inspired the group by telling them about a letter he wrote to his family in the event he was killed. He had instructed them not to despair but to celebrate his life. His mother now talked of her pride that young people like her son, good people, had taken up the fight against evil, and how we must ensure that we see this fight through to the end. In follow-up questions, one

participant expressed what was confusing to many in the room: “Why are you not angry?” “How can you not be?” Sarit responded that anger was not constructive. It was not healthy. It would make a necessary fight meaningless.

There was confusion again in Ofakim. Outside the houses of residents who had fallen in battle, families had erected mini shrines with information about those who had been killed. There were small containers in which to place memorial candles. In some cases, people had pinned prayers or inspirational poems. Outside one home, a family had pinned “Mizmor letodah,” Psalm 100, a song of thanks. A participant gasped, “Thanks for what? A person was killed here!”

It is unlikely that participants resolved the confusion created by these incidents. But lacking complete clarity does not mean that these experiences remained meaningless. Those who live in the liminal space between confusion and clarity often find grounding in “faith,” a readiness to see meaning within uncertainty. In these instances, participants found their moorings through the faith inspired by brave, bold, and optimistic individuals. The following day, after returning from Ofakim, the previously bemused participant wrote a reflection: “מי כעמך ישראל” (who is like your people, Israel!) Ofakim, built by refugees into a flourishing and loving community. Attacked by nonhumans worshiping only hatred and destruction. Their response - מזמור לתורה - a prayer of thanks and belief in our future.” Confusion had given way to faith.

## From Crisis to Opportunity

In a slide show that introduced the story of how they had responded to the events of October 7, school leaders in Ofakim framed their efforts as a move *mi-mashber le-hizdamnut* (from crisis to opportunity). The Hebrew words convey a meaning lacking in English. *Mashber*—the word for crisis—also means a birthstool: the most terrible moments have the capacity to birth something new, something better, even. Mission participants encountered this mindset among many with whom they met: among the founders of the Jerusalem pop-up school who saw the chance to create a new, more inclusive approach to Jewish education; among members of the Arab community with whom they met in Sderot who had seen and facilitated a new spirit of coexistence between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews since October 7; and in a presentation at the ANU Museum that argued for the healthy consequences of seeing how the troughs of Jewish history are often followed by better times. This gritty spirit was given the most powerful expression in Ofakim, and it made a deep impression on the group.

Ofakim is something of a backwater; it was originally founded as a development town that first housed new immigrants from North Africa and then the Former Soviet Union. Before

October 7, the town's tag line had been Ofakim, Ir Shel Anashim (Ofakim, city of people)—about as bland a slogan as one might imagine. Following the events of October 7, and the extraordinary bravery displayed by ordinary residents, the town's leadership quickly launched a new slogan, Ofakim, Ir Shel Giborim (Ofakim, city of heroes). These words were emblazoned on a giant work of public art, on the water bottles handed out to visitors, and on banners around town; they were everywhere. The town had been reborn; its residents had acquired a new and much more compelling identity.

This effort to seize this moment was reflected in how the mission spent part of its morning in the town. We were taken on a guided tour of the neighborhood most affected by the events of October 7. Our guides were students from the high school who took turns at each location where someone had died resisting the terrorist incursion to tell us, in English, about the individuals who fell. Their English teacher had taken this sad episode and turned it into an opportunity to build the self-esteem of his charges, and the mission participants were profoundly moved. As individuals who spend so much time with young people, they were thrilled to hear directly from these young people and to connect with them. The school leaders of Ofakim gave the most vivid expression to the opportunities birthed by crisis. Back in Jerusalem, one participant wrote the following reflection: "The main impact from the first two days of the Mission is the strength I saw in the educators we met at Ofakim. Dealing with sensitivity, professionalism, respect, and dedication, even though the educators themselves were in crisis, gives food for thought about the role of education especially in times of crisis and distress, and part of this impact we saw in the students who accompanied us."

It is worth noting that the move from crisis to opportunity is not without its problems. As one participant expressed it, it seems almost cynical to seek out opportunity in the midst of trauma. She did not doubt that crisis calls for bold action, but to view such a terrible time as an opportunity is uncomfortable. It risks being insensitive to the trauma people experience. How, for example, can one view the plight of the hostages as an opportunity? It's hard to move forward while this matter remains an open wound. From this perspective, not every crisis is an occasion for opportunity.

## **From Institutional Leadership to Inspirational Leadership**

Mission participants included experienced educational leaders from diaspora Jewish communities and from Israel. They lead central agencies and boards in their communities or as part of multinational organizations, they are seasoned providers of professional development to schools, and some lead or have led major Jewish schools. They are accomplished, often seasoned institutional leaders. While they appreciated the opportunity to connect with and hear from

regular Israelis at this time, they especially relished learning how their professional peers have responded to this moment. This was why they found their time with educators in Jerusalem and Ofakim so meaningful; these encounters brought into focus the difference between competent institutional leadership and inspirational leadership.

In her reflections the morning after visiting sites in the South, one participant found special relevance in insights of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on the previous week's Torah portion. Rabbi Sacks argued that a leader's first duty is to be an agent of hope. Seeing the world exactly as it is, they do not give up the belief that it could be otherwise, and are ready to act with others to make it so. "Look down at the difficulties and you can give way to despair. The only way to sustain energies, individual or collective, is to turn our gaze up towards the far horizon of hope." This, Rabbi Sacks proposes, is the work of leadership.

These were the traits that resonated with many in the group as a result of meeting with educational leaders in Ofakim. The leaders with whom we met were all women; giberot (f) not giborim (m), they reminded us. They moved the group with stories of how, on October 7, they first checked that their own families were safe, and then threw themselves into responding to death and dislocation in their school communities. This was impressive enough, but more than that was their determination not just to restore but to exceed what was there before, to lead a process of renewal. Establishing what they called a minhelet tekumah (a rebirth headquarters), they were determined to remake their community as a magnet. These were astonishing words at a moment when, as one of the leaders explained, local parents are so traumatized they don't want to let their children out of their sight. The educators must rebuild trust first before they can build a better future.

One of these women offered a profound insight into how she found the strength to play this leadership role. She described how she was able to draw on what she had learned twenty years previously, much earlier in her career, when working in Tel Aviv, when tens of her students were killed in a terror attack on the Dolphinarium nightclub. She didn't use precisely these words, one of the mission participants did, but she conveyed how many years later, she could draw on muscle memory to find a way to see beyond the awfulness of the present moment. She modeled how inspirational leadership is not just a role, it is a way of approaching the world that is deep in the fiber of our beings.

Coming to the end of the mission, participants took inspiration from these women in their own resolution not to be defined by the worst of these times. It was their job, too, to help those for whom they were responsible to look forward with hope. One wrote: "Our tragedies are an interruption to the Jewish timeline. They're essential to understanding who we are, but it can't be the main story we pass on to our children." Or as another expressed it, "When trust is broken, despair is pervasive, there is still hope. We have a choice to write the next exciting Jewish chapter, and our students will be the creators."

## From Isolation to Integration

A kind of alchemy occurred over the course of four days. Educators who came to Israel to be with, learn from, and show support to Israel and Israelis also found how much they shared with one another. In a concluding exercise in which they were asked to share in no more than thirty words an insight they gained from their time in Israel, almost half the participants focused on the sense they gained of shared identity and purpose with the other members of the mission no matter how different the particulars of their circumstances.

Two processes were at work here. First, a process, fostered by both structured and informal conversations among members of the group, that enabled them to become familiar with and close to their peers, fellow leaders of diaspora Jewish education. As one participant wrote: “[I have discovered] the commonality of all our people in every corner of the diaspora. Interacting with individuals from across the globe has taken away the feeling of isolation that I have felt as a South African Jew.”

This outcome was not surprising given the composition of the group and the intense experiences in which they participated together during the mission. What was more unexpected was the extent to which these educational leaders also saw their lives and work intertwined with those of peers and people in Israel. For some, this was a pragmatic matter of partnering more effectively during challenging times. As one participant wrote, “The Diasporas and the State of Israel ought to join forces to strengthen each other and thus strengthen Jewish Zionist education using the local and global power of the Jewish communities.” Or in the words of another: “To me, the most impressive thing is the power inherent in the partnership, the joining of hands and the solidarity of Jewish leaders from Israel and the world, and especially educational leaders. This Mission and the relationships that will continue in its wake instills hope for the future of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.”

Some participants went beyond reflecting on the potential of partnership to seeing the relationship between Israel and the diaspora in a new light. One person argued that differences between the experiences of Jews in Israel and in the diaspora were only a question of degree, or what he called “volume”: “The gap between Israel and the Diaspora is in volume, not substance. We face similar problems—universal/particular, shared values, government trust, response to hate—but in different ‘volumes’ due to circumstances.” Another participant arrived at a related conclusion: “The Jewish and Israeli stories are intertwined. We cannot separate them. The amalgam that our neighbors make is not a mistake. It must be strengthened.”

This is not the place to probe how far such ideas depart from classical strands of Zionist thought that celebrated the creation of a new and different Jew in Israel and that negated the value of Jewish life in the diaspora. Those ideas have long fallen out of fashion, but it is striking to see how the events of October 7 in Israel and their consequences around the

world have fostered a sense of shared fate and shared experience. For mission participants, this sense was only intensified by what they found in Israel, not disrupted. The participants may have come from afar, but they ended up feeling more intertwined with Israel than ever before.

## **From Reflection to Action: Implications for Diaspora Jewish Education**

Wherever participants found themselves in relation to the five continua depicted here, they left the country both charged and recharged. None left the country unmoved. To have come to Israel and then return home having only served as a witness would have risked the critique of voyeurism. It would have meant observing someone else's pain without being changed in some way, no matter how well intentioned one's presence.

It is too soon to know how the participants will translate their understandings and emotions into actions. One of the last exercises in which they participated asked them to write a commitment to themselves about something they would say and do differently as a result of their time in Israel. They were not asked to share these statements with others; these statements served as memos to themselves. We must wait to see what was birthed by this experience.

In the meantime, this final section will suggest some possible directions, teasing out implications from the insights and reactions collected here.

## **New narratives of Israel education**

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Over the last fifteen years, the field of Israel education has seen two dominant narratives, one that centers complexity and the challenge of connecting to an Israel characterized as an occupier, and another more upbeat narrative that centers Israel as Start-Up Nation and as a model of resilience (Isresilience). The events of October 7, and their aftermath in Israel and around the world, make it critical to forge new narratives that make sense of Israel's fragility and its intertwined fate with diaspora communities. The crisis-opportunity continuum points toward a narrative of the "Start Again Nation," a narrative that would speak both to those who have wrestled with Israel's complexity and to those who celebrate its capacity to innovate.

## **Recentring Jewish peoplehood**

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In recent years, the concept of Jewish peoplehood and the practices of Jewish peoplehood education have offered a neat means for connecting diaspora Jews with Israel, without upsetting those uncomfortable with centering Israel at the heart of the contemporary Jewish story. Israel education has been domesticated as a special case of Jewish peoplehood education. The sense of shared fate and shared purpose, the move from solidarity to identity suggests that it is time to revisit some of the operating assumptions of Jewish peoplehood education. Israelis and diaspora Jews share more than we imagined.

## **Birthing inspirational educational leaders**

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Mission participants experienced and affirmed the transformational potential of inspirational educational leaders. Leaders of this kind cultivate hope in difficult times. The question now is how can many more such individuals be nurtured globally and in Israel? How can capable institutional leaders be helped to become inspirational leaders? The months since October 7 have engendered educational heroes whose stories call for study. Can their stories help shape a template for a global leadership development effort in the field of Jewish education?

## **Building a global community of Jewish educational leaders**

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Educational research has long documented the lonely work of school leadership. Mission participants made clear their deep appreciation for an opportunity to be with and learn from one another and from Israeli educational leaders. Israeli leaders celebrated the opportunity to learn from their international peers. These dynamics were at the heart of the isolation to integration continuum. As Jewish and as educational leaders, these individuals face many of the same challenges. The present moment has underlined the potential benefits in more closely networking with one another in a more continuous fashion.



## ***A New Jewish World- and the Role of Education***

Rabbi Ricky Seeff

*Director of the South African Board of Jewish Education, South Africa*

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My solidarity trip to Israel after the October 7 invasion and massacre (with the incredible assistance of UnitEd, Pincus Fund, WZO, and the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism) exposed me to an Israel I had never seen. My Israel was a place of a strong and resolute government. A place of joy and vibrancy. A place that, while always complex, was a refuge and oasis for Jewish life.

The Israel that greeted me was one writhing with trauma. A place where the government is growing increasingly isolated from the people they serve, and civil society is responding and intervening remarkably to governmental shortcomings. I saw an Israel grappling with displaced communities (some of whom, in their hundreds, were in our hotel in Jerusalem), grieving families, anxious citizens, and a nation consumed by war and loss. I also saw an Israel that has to contend with terrorists in Gaza and keyboard fanatics and antisemites rearing their heads around the globe.

Although that is what I saw, I understood something different. I understood that beneath the frailty was a nation grappling with identity, a nation that was trying to reformulate itself and its ideologies, a nation that is forced to confront itself after having been violently confronted by its enemies. Israel

and the Jewish people are, in fact, starting to chart their next great chapter. A nation grappling with issues that, when resolved, will push us only higher: issues of Jewish identity versus

Israeli identity; issues of Jewish peoplehood and the interconnectedness of Jews around the world (Are the Diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews really disconnected?) This war has proven that our distance is only geographical, and that anti-Zionism is antisemitism. Perhaps the war has pushed us all from the extremes to somewhere in the centre? Perhaps the war will make us talk to each other instead of hate each other like many did on October 6.

I also understood that education is the key to resolving this complex web of thoughts. It is in our classrooms and homes that Jewish values, Jewish identity, and Jewish unity are taught and modelled. Education is more than academics and more than university entrance exams and degrees. It is about inculcating values. As a global Jewish people, in Israel and Diaspora, and as Jewish educators, we have the responsibility and power to unite with the singular goal of instilling proud Jewish identity through the medium of Jewish knowledge and dialogue.

It is a valid question to ask: What occurs when an event so catastrophic and so cataclysmic occurs to one of the smallest countries and one of the smallest people on earth? One would assume that it spells doom or certain collapse. That is the expected outcome—but not when dealing with the State of Israel of the Jewish people. A history of abuse, tyranny, expulsion, and genocide has bred an equal and opposite measure of resilience, fortitude, and strength. The Jewish will to survive and fight for our values has become a defining characteristic of our statistically insignificant nation. We will rise again. Bruised and battered, carrying our losses, but with a renewed commitment to bearing the torch of Jewish pride for generations to come.

## ***Jewish Education in the Wake of October 7***

Insights from UnitEd France Desk

Dr. Eliezer Schilt

*Director for Frenchspeaking countries for UnitEd, Israel*

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A year following the Yom Kippur War, a symposium convened by French Jewish intellectuals deliberated upon the theme of "Israel's Solitude" in response to the spontaneous discourse that emerged in November 1973. In 2024, philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy is poised to release an essay bearing the same title. Six months after October 7, this subject once again surfaces prominently, prompting reflection on its implications for Jewish educational institutions.

At UnitEd, we occupy a vantage point for observing the tumults impacting the Jewish educational landscape in the Diaspora. Within Jewish schools in France and French-speaking regions, the initial shock has yielded to a desire to return to normalcy, albeit with persistent vigilance toward Israel and local security apprehensions. The surge in antisemitic incidents in France, quadrupling between 2022 and 2023, coupled with the protracted duration and ramifications of the conflict, compounds the sense of unease.

In a global survey conducted by M<sup>2</sup> in collaboration with UnitEd, over seventy French-speaking educators responded in November 2023, identifying the dilemma between "loneliness and belonging" as one of the foremost challenges of the moment.

Interrogating the aftermath of October 7, numerous school principals, heads of Jewish and Hebrew studies, and teachers observed a palpable questioning of Jewish identity among students of all ages, and at times, their parents. These inquiries range from simple ponderings such as "What does it mean to be Jewish?" to more profound doubts encapsulated

in queries like "Do I wish to retain my Jewish identity?"—doubts often stoked by surrounding manifestations of hostility.

Confronted with escalating apprehension and uncertainty among students, exacerbated by a shaken conviction that Israel yet serves as the safe haven of the Jewish people, the imperative of the hour is to engage actively with young Jews. Collective mobilization is essential: school principals, teachers, educators, and parents alike must all join forces. It is incumbent upon us to recognize that throughout its history, the Jewish people has derived resilience from one central tenet: education—"And you shall tell your son" (Exodus 13:8).

In this vein, it falls upon our shoulders, particularly at Lamorim-UnitEd, to equip schools with the necessary resources. A historic challenge demands a commensurate response. Our mission entails harnessing innovative tools and forging effective partnerships to facilitate an understanding of current events at all levels—factual, spiritual, communal, and beyond. This includes elucidating the contemporary plight through the prism of our tradition and history, drawing upon the insights of scholars and thinkers, devising innovative pedagogical approaches to captivate student interest, fostering dialogue, furnishing rebuttals to attacks, and proffering tangible acts of solidarity and mutual support. The ongoing pilot program, conducted in six high schools, is grounded in comprehensive data analysis. It involves various initiatives such as deploying youth ambassadors to address inquiries from high school students, broadcasting an interactive card game, engaging specialists (e.g., psychologists, historians) for intervention, and developing educational materials pertinent to recent events.

More than ever, to foster a sense of belonging within the global Jewish community, the most effective medium is learning Hebrew. We must utilize all available resources and strategies to enhance the acquisition and proficiency of this language.

Our endeavor is to exhaust all avenues to fortify the identity of students and their families, nurturing within them a sense of pride in their Jewish heritage.

## **"Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Ba-Zeh"**

Repair and Educate, Mission of an Entire People

Jo Toledano

*Leadership Renewal senior consultant at Praxis International in Paris, France*

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We can imagine that Judah, who vouched for his brother's return, as demanded by the viceroy of Egypt as proof of the family's honesty, first secured Benjamin's agreement. "Arevim zeh ba-ze" guarantors for each other. In a way, the contract of responsibility is conditional on a reciprocal agreement between the guarantor and the guaranteed. Coming home, but also sharing the road ahead together.

### **The Impact of the October 7 Pogrom on Education**

From January 29 to February 1, 2024, we were summoned by the cruelest collective tragedy to befall Israel since 1948. We were presented with the facts and discussed them with each other and with members of Israeli society, visiting memorials and meeting witnesses. Mourning and distress. Acts of heroism. Resilience. A wound still open in the Jewish body in Israel and around the world. Many questions.

This is the project we are opening up between Israeli educators and Jews of the Diaspora. We need to update the modalities of reparation through educational processes, and update how we teach mutual responsibility by taking into account the heartbreak.

The meeting with the hostages' families was the most Jewish moment of the seminar, because it brought us back to the *raison d'être* of our personal and professional commitments.

Our responsibility is based solely on the contract that has always stipulated that the Jewish people has a duty to save each and every one of its members.

Of course, the collapse of the feeling of trust is immediately counterbalanced by the massive movement of identification with the destiny of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. And even if we are persuaded that Israel is militarily a Goliath, we now know that Israel is still David, a delicate and fragile poet, threatened by a diabolical coalition of the Arab Muslim world and all those who make the Palestinians absolute victims.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

The Jewish people, their certainties shaken, are seeking to get back to basics. To focus on the question of how to be Jewish today. Internal barriers are breaking down, rendering obsolete the quarrels between religious and secular, Zionist and non-Zionist. Each with his or her own background, all we need to do is get along and make ourselves heard, understood, respected, and, once again, admired. Everything has to be rebuilt.

The centrality of Israel in the transmission of Jewish identity has been shaken, but so what? The question is not to think about what we'll have to do in five or ten years' time, but to know what we're doing today. Commitments can't wait. Let's not give in to the temptation to suspend or slow down educational action—quite the contrary! Decision-makers and players in Jewish education in Europe, America, Australia, and South Africa, let's take the risk of anticipating, through experimentation, responses to the challenges that the new reality imposes on us. While continuing to support the families and staff of our educational systems, let's value the commitment to repair and pass on. As guarantors of the perpetuity of the Jewish people, let us not shirk our duty to stand up to our students. Let us initiate and share programs of education for peace and inclusion, and immediately train the new generation for full and committed citizenship.

As for our identity, let's pursue the noblest of our educational endeavors, to make Hebrew the universal Jewish language. Speaking, reading, and writing in Hebrew to improve communication and share emotions and knowledge between Jews across borders and cultures. It's possible everywhere, and at very low cost.

Let's resume the exchange of educational ambassadors on a large scale. Let's invest in the circulation, for periods of voluntary service, of teachers, educators, animators, authors, trainers, and artists, between the educational systems of Israel and the Diaspora. Since October, more than 25,000 Jews have visited Israel for volunteer periods, and as many Israelis have carried out missions to displaced civilian populations. Platforms and partnership spaces exist. Let's use them!

## ***Unity, Kindness and Heroism***

### Lessons for Jewish Identity Education

Daniel Tysman

*Leader of World ORT's Education department, UK*

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The mission provided an extraordinarily close-up view of how Israelis are living through and responding to their ongoing trauma. We were persistently challenged to reflect, respond, and share our thoughts, making it feel like an event of historic significance for the entire Jewish people. The main impression made on me was that we all have a huge and pressing obligation to respond. Examples of unity, kindness, and heroism that we witnessed gave me optimism that educators responsible for Jewish identity can use this momentous time to rethink and rebuild.

Spontaneous expressions of unity in response to shared grief can be a foundation for systematically building a new, deeper, more intentional version of Jewish peoplehood. The kindness shown to displaced families and the outpouring of support for the loved ones of the victims and hostages showed us a different and better way to respond to cruelty. Visiting the sites of tragedy and meeting people whose lives have been torn apart also exposed stories of individual heroism.

Elie Wiesel wrote that whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness. The narrative and language that we use as educators to retell the story of this tragedy have the potential to reinvigorate Jewish pride. The ORT network reaches a hugely diverse student population across almost thirty countries. One unifying feature is that our schools share a sense of belonging to a global Jewish family. Their educational programs emphasize our collective history.

In the wake of the events of 7/10 our connection to this supportive network helped us

to navigate the dark months that followed. The heartache of colleagues, relatives, and friends has left us emotionally drained. The representation of the war across all forms of media and new expressions of antisemitism have contributed to a sense of insecurity and uncertainty that has tested our resilience.

For all of us responsible for building confident Jewish identities and positive connections to Israel, the Jewish educators' mission came at a critical time.

We had been asking ourselves how to reassure young people whose media feeds portray Zionists as the perpetrators of evil. What level of responsibility should they assume to promote a narrative that counters hate? How do we prepare them for the transition to university campuses where they are likely to encounter hostility toward Israel?

In the short term, we need measures to address the specific challenges, to find some order in the chaos, to look out for each other's well-being, and to provide a level of security that makes us all feel safe. Over the coming months, we are going to be conducting a strategic review of Israel education across the international ORT network, leading our school leaders and educators to transform our approach to building Jewish identity in terms of peoplehood and forming relationships with Israel.

The social entrepreneurs we met during the mission taught us that above all, it's important to respond to a need with action, and that having a clarity of mission can overcome obstacles and lead to impactful change.



## ***Reflections about Identity and Solidarity following the mission to Israel***

Dr. Efrat Tzadik

*Researcher of migrant women in Brussels, Belgium*

January 2024

So, what am I anyway?  
What kind of a Jew am I if I don't do anything Jewish?  
And do I know the books?  
Those that are collecting dust in grandfather's attic?  
Or maybe I know just a few of the nearest ones?  
I don't know and don't feel I belong.  
It's archaic, it's unacceptable anymore.  
Israel? Oh come on, you can live elsewhere.  
Perhaps New York or Portugal, or maybe just somewhere with no community.  
And then that Saturday came. October 7. Silence mixed with a lot of noise.  
And the question of identity is there.  
A giant white elephant in the room.  
And without thinking, and with no discussion, and without judging  
That sense of belonging held an important place.  
I'm Jewish whether I'm here or there.  
Just like in the past Israel is my home.

My homeland.

And we must fight for it

Because what will happen if...

A mass induction both domestic and foreign.

Each as they see fit.

People return and others donate.

I belong. I am part.

And this belonging is identity.

It's the force that drives us to act.

And the Jewish Bookcase opens, those same dusty books

And empowering songs repeat "Al Tira Israel" (Israel don't fear), "Lemaan Achai Ve'Reai" (for my brethren and friends), and "Am Israel Chai".

And also a prayer for the safety of the soldiers that calls out to the heavens,

And Bialik's poem "In the City of Slaughter" and songs and links to Jews and to Israelis.

And connect.

To Identity, to belonging to something big, strong, and tremendous.

What happened?

In the past Jewish Identity had one steadfast meaning and that is arranging your Jewish life according to Jewish law practice. Even if there were differences, these shaped their identity based on identical Jewish ethos and myths. This meaning established their orientation in the world, how they relate to themselves and their destiny, and how they relate to their fellow man. Since the 19th century different groups of secular and religious people started to form. And you had to pick where to belong. Judaism by its very nature evolves and changes and allows the individual to choose for themselves from the ray of shared values, beliefs, roles, and rituals. Defining one's self became one's choice. For many, Judaism today is an individual matter. Private. We choose what to take and where to place ourselves.

And when we grew distant from the essence, many young adults don't see the need to learn Hebrew or connect in one way or another to the State of Israel.

On Saturday October 7 a new situation emerged that led us to rethink in regard to identity. In regards to Israel's place in our lives. Israeli Arabs, Bedouins, Israeli Jews, heroes or volunteers, and Jews of the world. Who am I and how do I relate to Israel?

We wanted to be part, to belong.

Suddenly we forcefully chose where to belong. In fact, it was chosen for us. Whether

## Until the Day Breaks and the Shadows Flee Away

said privately or in rallies... And the scalding we wanted to get rid of so much - returns to us. Bringing us back to the frame we wanted to runaway from.

And the Jewish bookcase opens and hymns and songs and prayers rise, Hafrashat Challah (dough offering) and pleas rise, whether I'm religious or not... Because only in this place of essence a connection is created, and an identity is created.

Jewish identity by choice.

# Post-October 7

A New Paradigm for  
Global Jewish Education

## **Post-October 7**

### A New Paradigm for Global Jewish Education

Rabbi Dr. Howard Deitcher, Hana Dorsman, Assaf Gamzou

*Faculty member of The Hebrew University's Melton Center for Jewish Education,  
CEO of UnitEd, and UnitEd's director of Education, Israel*

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Thomas Kuhn, in his classic book "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", coined the term "paradigm shift" to describe a fundamental change in the basic assumptions and concepts within a particular scientific discipline, which occurs when existing paradigms are replaced by new ones. Kuhn's work has had a significant impact on the philosophy of science and has been widely discussed and debated in various academic fields.

Drawing on Kuhn's writings, various psychologists and sociologists suggested a more nuanced phenomenon that they labelled "Paradigm Collapse". This development can be defined as a fundamental and often sudden breakdown or disintegration of a prevailing conceptual framework, belief system, or way of understanding the world. It occurs when new evidence, discoveries, or societal shifts challenge the core principles and assumptions upon which the existing paradigm is based, leading to its eventual abandonment or radical revision. This collapse may involve a profound re-evaluation of established norms, theories, or practices, paving the way for the emergence of alternative perspectives or paradigms. Ultimately, paradigm collapse represents a transformative moment in human understanding, reshaping intellectual, scientific, or cultural landscapes. It seems abundantly clear that the earthshaking events of October 7th, 2023 caused a paradigm collapse in Jewish life in general, and Jewish education in particular. Over the course of the 4-day Mission for Global Jewish Education Leaders in January 2024, these vision-driven leaders wrestled with this paradigm

collapse and its implications for Jewish education worldwide. This Mission was sponsored by The Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Antisemitism, UnitEd, the World Zionist Organization, the Pincus Fund, and the Koret Center, and brought together 32 esteemed Jewish educators from twelve countries, highlighting the significance of cross-cultural learning and collaboration. These educators underscored the importance of learning about other communities' accomplishments and challenges, and thereby forming a robust global network that will play a crucial role in strengthening Jewish identity and continuity. The Mission was titled: "In the Wake of The Swords of Iron War: Exploring New Questions, Dilemmas, and Opportunities for Jewish Education", and attempted to attain a deeper understanding of the paradigm collapse, and possible strategies to imagine new directions

The forum unanimously agreed that the need for fresh, innovative educational approaches to strengthen students' Jewish identity is more urgent than ever. These new paradigms can help address emerging challenges. There was a shared belief that UnitEd is uniquely positioned to tackle these challenges, and the existing infrastructures it has developed are both effective and impactful. At the same time, these educators emphasized the importance of reimagining the content, pedagogical approaches, and change processes that were in place prior to October 7th. In the following pages, we provide a brief overview of UnitEd's mission, goals, and current activities, before delving into key areas inspired by the diverse range of activities, discussions, and inquiries from our January Mission. These areas are closely aligned with UnitEd's mission and ongoing initiatives within the Jewish community, and we are poised to invest in these areas, with the goal of significantly impacting the field.

UnitEd was initially founded as a joint venture between the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Anti-Semitism and the Center for Education Technology (CET for short). After a few years, it moved to Herzog College, and currently stands on its own, as a separate NGO, in a direct partnership with the Ministry. Throughout the years and different partnerships, the goal of UnitEd has stayed the same – to strengthen Jewish identity, connection to Jewish communities and the state of Israel through empowering Jewish Day Schools.

This work is done in many different ways: Educator training, content and curriculum development, holistic school processes, teacher placement and more. Most importantly perhaps, all of UnitEd's projects are carried out in partnership with local organizations – the schools, networks and educators on the ground. The relationships that are fostered in this way, along with our global perch (UnitEd works across the Jewish world), allows us to promote strategic projects, working across regions and even internationally.

In the wake of October 7th and the Global Jewish Educators Leadership Mission, we have identified four key areas of focus for UnitEd in the coming years. Below, we briefly highlight some of the components within these areas.

## **1 | Cultivating Knowledge, Connection, and Meaningful Commitment to Israel among Our Students**

The events of October 7th have underscored Israel's central role in Jewish identity and its profound impact on Jews around the world. Educators must navigate these complex topics with purpose and conviction, fostering open dialogue while addressing Israel's history and present realities.

Teaching about Israel now requires a fresh approach that fosters personal commitment and ongoing engagement.

Students in Jewish schools must develop a deep understanding and appreciation of Israel, including its historical, cultural, and contemporary significance. They should recognize Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people and its central role in shaping Jewish identity and collective memory. It is crucial that students understand the historical context of the Zionist movement, the founding of the State in 1948, and the commitment to establishing Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. They must also grasp the complexities of Israel's relationships with its neighbors and the ongoing challenges of maintaining statehood. Within this framework, Israel's adherence to the highest moral standards should be highlighted, along with an in-depth discussion of the current war and its impact.

These topics should be presented with depth and care, encouraging a nuanced understanding of Israel's role in Jewish identity. Through thoughtful discussions and opportunities for reflection, educators can help students cultivate a deeper appreciation for Israel as a unifying force in Jewish life, promoting both a sense of peoplehood and a responsibility toward the local Jewish community.

Culturally, students should be exposed to Israel's rich heritage, spanning millennia of Jewish history intertwined with diverse influences from around the world. They should engage with Israeli literature, music, art, and cuisine, fostering a sense of connection to the vibrant tapestry of Israeli society. Students should be aware, even if only broadly, of Israel's diverse society, attitudes and opinions, and how these play out in the public sphere.

Culturally, students should explore Israel's rich heritage, which spans millennia of Jewish history and reflects diverse global influences. Exposure to Israeli literature, music, art, and cuisine can help students feel connected to Israel's vibrant society. Students should also gain a broad awareness of Israel's diverse population, attitudes, and opinions, and how these play out in the public sphere.

The current war has sparked a wealth of cultural expressions, including art, music, poetry, and more. Integrating these works into Israel education can provide students with a profound understanding and appreciation of the evolving social, historical, national, and religious aspects. By exploring these cultural pieces, students gain insights into the

complexities of Israeli society, fostering empathy and a more nuanced understanding of the country's rich cultural life. . This approach will not only enrich students' understanding of Israel but will also encourage them to engage deeply with its multifaceted identity, promoting dialogue and connection within the broader community.

Ultimately, students should feel a deep sense of pride and responsibility toward Israel, understanding their role as stakeholders in its ongoing journey. They should be empowered to contribute positively to Israel's future, whether through advocacy, philanthropy, cultural exchange, or active participation in its growth and development. Above all, they should cultivate a love for Israel that is both informed and compassionate, rooted in a commitment to its flourishing as a Jewish and democratic state.

To achieve these goals, we must better equip our educators—not only with knowledge but also with the skills and tools needed to cultivate genuine connections with Israel in their students.

## **2 | Creating a global network of leading Jewish educators**

A global network for Jewish educators is indispensable for preserving heritage and fostering understanding. At its core, it fosters a sense of interconnectedness among educators, transcending geographical boundaries to create a cohesive community dedicated to the transmission of Jewish values, culture, and identity. In his piece in this volume, Dr. Gil Graff accurately captures the importance of the global Mission in the following way: “The Global Education Convening was a reminder of the value of interaction among and between Jews living in diverse communities.”

This network facilitates the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices, allowing educators to draw upon a rich tapestry of ideas and experiences. By sharing innovative teaching methodologies and curriculum designs, educators can adapt to diverse learning environments and cater to the evolving needs of their students.

Furthermore, a global network provides invaluable opportunities for collaboration and professional development. Educators can engage in meaningful dialogue, collaborate on research projects, and participate in training workshops to enhance their pedagogical skills and deepen their understanding of Jewish history, texts, and traditions.

UnitEd, situated in Israel, is poised to spearhead the creation and nurturing of a global network for Jewish educators. With a network spanning 40 countries and partnering with over 650 Jewish day schools, UnitEd bridges geographic, denominational, and ideological divides. Its mission is to collaborate closely with local Jewish educational institutions, equipping them with innovative tools and strategies for impactful Jewish education.



By fostering connections and sharing achievements and challenges, UnitEd aims to cultivate a robust global network essential for reinforcing Jewish identity and continuity. This network empowers educators to instill pride and belonging in students, fostering active engagement in Jewish life. Thus, beyond educational excellence, UnitEd's network serves as a catalyst for building resilient and vibrant Jewish communities worldwide.

In essence, a global network for Jewish educators is not only a vehicle for educational excellence but also a catalyst for building resilient and vibrant Jewish communities across the globe.

### **3 | Preparing Educational Leaders to Confront the Emerging Challenges**

In the wake of October 7th, Jewish educational institutions have undergone a period of introspection and adaptation, recognizing the need for a new approach to preparing educational leaders. This pivotal moment has highlighted the importance of equipping leaders with the skills and knowledge to navigate complex issues, foster unity, and cultivate a sense of belonging within the Jewish community, centered around a shared appreciation of Israel's significance. Leaders should receive training in cultivating a positive Jewish identity, embracing pluralism, and implementing community-building strategies to ensure their schools provide welcoming and supportive environments for both students and the broader community.

As Rabbi Craig Kacev poignantly argues in this volume, "The uncertainty in the wake of October 7th, much like the COVID pandemic, caught leaders in a situation they could not plan for and unfolding situations full of uncertainty and risk. It is in these situations that humble heroes stepped forward, exuding confidence, as was witnessed when we met with school leaders in Ofakim, while working in teams, remaining open to suggestions from colleagues." To achieve this, educational leaders must receive comprehensive training in crisis management and conflict resolution. The events of October 7th serve as a stark reminder of the potential for internal and external challenges to disrupt the educational environment. Leaders must be skilled at addressing sensitive topics, facilitating open dialogue, and fostering healing and reconciliation within their schools,

Additionally, educational leaders must be prepared to engage students in meaningful conversations about commitment, Jewish practices, and social justice. The events of October 7th have sparked renewed interest in exploring Jewish identity and connection to Israel, alongside broader questions of social responsibility and ethical leadership. Leaders should be trained to facilitate discussions on these topics, drawing from Jewish values and teachings to inspire students to contribute positively to their communities and the world at large.

Lastly, educational leaders must embrace innovation and adaptability in response

to changing circumstances and emerging challenges. October 7th has highlighted the need for schools to be agile and responsive in their approach to education, whether through the adoption of new technologies, the development of interdisciplinary curriculum, or the implementation of experiential learning opportunities. Leaders should be encouraged to think creatively and collaboratively, seeking out new strategies and best practices to ensure the continued success and vitality of Jewish education in the years to come.

#### **4 | Transforming the Jewish School into a Community**

As Alex Pomson points out in this volume, the ability of schools to engage with their communities beyond strictly "school activities" had a positive effect on new families transferring during Covid, and while there is yet no hard data on school transfers following October 7th, we can assume that would be true in this case as well.

This data point brings to the fore the importance and opportunity for Jewish Day Schools to step beyond "classic" school roles and functions, both internally and outwardly, in thinking of themselves more as communities than only educational institutions.

During Covid and its aftermath, emotional wellbeing became a global issue in education. Following October 7th, this issue became even more prominent for Jewish day schools around the world, which felt they had to address these issues on many levels –teachers and faculty, students and their families. The ability of schools to think of themselves as communities and act together towards shared goals is a stronger foundation for individual members to build their emotional wellbeing on, whatever their specific role may be,

Methodologically speaking – we should acknowledge the importance of "informal" or experiential education in strengthening Jewish identity, communal bonds and emotional wellbeing. While formal educational systems are geared towards more information-centered teaching, we should be utilizing other aspects of Jewish civilization and incorporate them into the daily life of the school, thus creating a robust Jewish environment for our students. schools can and should be more than the sum of their educational parts.

With the ongoing support of the Ministry for Diaspora affairs and combatting Antisemitism, and with our partners around the globe, we believe that, working in these areas, we will be able to make a positive and meaningful impact on the field of Jewish education after October 7th.

## ***Jewish Education Following October 7***

Avi Cohen-Skali, Hagai Elitzur, Yom Tou Reanan

*Director General and Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, Senior Deputy Director General for Strategy operations and Budget, Deputy Director General for Diaspora Affairs*



**"For every tragedy there is the promise of redemption. Every nightmare is succeeded by hope. We were never paralysed by our past, because we lived toward the future. That is why the Jewish response to catastrophe was to have children and build schools and create a Jewish future"**

- Rabbi Sacks, "Studies in Renewal – The Secret of Continuity"

Critical and transformative events often challenge our core perceptions and assumptions about reality. Such events can provoke profound shifts in our internal beliefs or offer moments of clarity that highlight what is truly important—both personally and nationally. While these events may not alter our foundational assumptions, they help refine and reinforce our values and worldviews.

On Simchat Torah, October 7, 2023, following the heinous attack on Israel by its enemies and the subsequent reactions from parts of the global community, Jews in Israel and the diaspora faced circumstances that compel a reevaluation of fundamental beliefs.

In those days of turmoil, we witnessed both our vulnerabilities and our extraordinary resilience, rooted in our shared history, culture, and identity. Jewish civilization, the shared

belonging to the Jewish people, and our collective future and destiny all came into sharp focus. **The Jewish people stand at the forefront of a global battle between good and evil—a fate and mission we cannot escape.** The sense of mutual responsibility that arose within Jewish communities worldwide, and between Israel and the diaspora, has been a source of great strength. Acts of volunteerism, contributions, and the deep sense of shared destiny strengthened Jewish individuals and communities everywhere, underscoring the importance of unity and mutual responsibility, particularly in times of crisis and uncertainty.

The UnitEd Project, a joint initiative between the Government of Israel and Jewish communities around the world, was born out of a deep sense of shared responsibility for the future of the Jewish people. This initiative supports Jewish schools globally in their crucial mission of fostering Jewish identity and education, based on principles established thousands of years ago by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Gamla: schools are the foundation of Jewish continuity. At a time when Jewish identity is under pressure and facing complex challenges, formal Jewish education serves as both an engine of identity and a compass for Jewish youth worldwide. The UnitEd Project plays a central role in this mission.

## **Jewish Education: A Foundation for Identity and Hope**

The war we are currently waging has compelled us to reconsider the foundational pillars of our lives. In the ongoing struggle for Jewish survival and identity—both in Israel and the diaspora—Jewish education and educators play an indispensable role:

### **Strengthening Jewish Identity**

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As Rabbi Sacks wrote in “The Home We Built Together”., those with a strong sense of identity are equipped to withstand both internal and external challenges. A robust Jewish identity, deeply connected to heritage and the broader Jewish community, is essential in ensuring the future, survival, and thriving of the Jewish people for generations to come. Such an identity is cultivated through education that emphasizes Jewish values, history, and the unique qualities of each individual. This is the key to ensuring the future and continuity of the Jewish people. In the fight against antisemitism, strengthening Jewish identity is particularly critical. Battling evil includes confronting antisemitism, which requires more than direct opposition; it demands fostering a deep internal identity. Education, which reinforces Jewish values and heritage, builds confidence and resilience in the face of hatred.

## Moral Clarity Regarding Israel

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Israel is now at the forefront of the global struggle between good and evil. Although some sectors of the global community may not recognize this, it is essential that we, as Jews, maintain moral clarity about the challenges the state of Israel faces. This requires deep knowledge and a strong connection to both Jewish history and the present reality. There is moral truth and the Jewish people carry its banner. Jewish education is the primary channel for ensuring that every young Jew understands their heritage and the truths underlying Israel's struggle. Jewish education is irreplaceable, recent events reinforce the inextricable connection between Israel and Jewish identity, just as Zionism is integral to Judaism. The artificial separation between Zionism and Judaism, or between Israel and the Jewish people, is false. While Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel involves complexities—ranging from questions of security to economic and social dilemmas—these issues must be addressed in the classroom with moral clarity and an understanding of the distinction between good and evil, especially in light of the events of October 7.

## The Educator as a Leader

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The role of the educator is especially pronounced in times of crisis, as seen during the events of the past year. In such times, educators are not just teachers, but bearers of hope and meaning. In an era of growing identity and cultural challenges, educators have a deep responsibility to shape the spirit of their students—not only by imparting knowledge, but by instilling values of resilience, a strong sense of identity, optimism, and active engagement with the world.

True educational leaders stand at the forefront when darkness looms. In such moments, they are called upon to provide their students with the tools needed to navigate life's complexities, from questions of identity to confronting rising antisemitism. Educators create a space where students feel connected to Jewish values their heritage, to Israel, and gain a deep sense of belonging to the broader Jewish community.

## Schools as Engines of Community

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One of the unique strengths of the Jewish people is the existence of strong communities. Individuals and families are not isolated entities, but part of ever-expanding circles of belonging. In times of conflict and war, on one hand, and an individualistic culture on the other, Jewish culture offers a powerful message of community. Community is the heart of

mutual responsibility. Jewish education, and the schools that lead it, must serve as engines of communal responsibility.

The role of the educator is not only to develop the individual, but also to foster meaningful dynamics between students. Educators guide discussions so that each student finds their voice and listens to others. A genuine sense of community arises from these interpersonal connections, as students learn from one another and build their collective identity together. In this environment, unity is formed from the multitude of voices, and the sense of belonging is cultivated not only through the teacher, but also through peer interactions.

## **The Partnership Between Israel and the Diaspora**

In his 1957 essay "Israel and the Diaspora," David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, wrote:

“Just as the future of Judaism in the diaspora now depends on the existence of Israel, so too does the future of the state—its very existence, security, peace, and, above all, the fulfillment of its historical mission—depend on world Jewry.”

The partnership between Israel and the diaspora is central to Jewish existence in this era. Our Jewish identity and future are rooted in this connection. The mutual responsibility displayed during the recent conflict—through various acts and avenues—is part of this essential partnership. This collaboration has been the cornerstone of UnitEd from its inception and will continue to drive its mission in the future.

As the Jewish people, in Israel and the Diaspora, confront existential challenges, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Antisemitism remain committed to investing in Jewish education, together with the Jewish communities and organizations, in order to ensure that future generations are deeply connected to their history, understand the significance of their Jewish identity, and embrace the values that guide us. Despite the difficulties we face, by uniting forces and engaging in continuous dialogue and collaboration, we can build a more secure future and remain part of the illustrious Jewish story.

**"The Glory of Israel will not lie or repent."**

- 1 Samuel 15

