From the Director: Question What Is. Imagine What Can Be.

Those of you who know me well know that I am always looking for opportunities to learn, both for myself and for HUC-JIR as an institution. So I was delighted by an incredible opportunity we had last year to work with Jonah Sachs, author of Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell (and Live) the Best Stories Will Rule the Future.

Jonah is Co-Founder and CEO of Free Range Studios, the creative firm engaged by the College-Institute to redesign the website. (Look for the unveiling of the new website soon.) As part of the Jim Joseph Foundation Education Initiative, we in the Schools of Education were able to work with Jonah and his team on developing a “brand story” to present who we are and what we do. Our team comprising faculty from the Rhea Hirsch and New York Schools of Education and professionals from the Departments of Recruitment and Admissions and Public Affairs worked for close to a year to develop and revise the story.

Jonah helped us remember the power of stories, which we already knew from our understanding of the Jewish textual tradition. His hiddush was to teach us that in telling the story of the Schools of Education, we should not be the hero of the story; prospective students and alumni are the heroes that will make the story compelling to future students (and donors).

Working with Jonah, we developed a story in which a prospective student is seeking to mend the brokenness he or she sees in the world: either that the system of Jewish education is not working; or that it is working for some (often including the prospective student,) but not for the vast majority of Jewish youth. The hero then sets out on a quest to fix the brokenness and turns to a mentor to develop the capacities he or she needs to bring about transformation in the world of Jewish education. Lo and behold, HUC-JIR’s Schools of Education are the mentors who can help the hero learn and grow into a professional who will make a difference.

What kind of a young person can become the hero of our story? Someone who is ready to question the status quo. Someone who can imagine possibilities for the future. And someone who can transform ideas into reality. That’s why we use the tagline “Question What Is. Imagine What Can Be.” to attract potential heroes.

One way we can attract new heroes is by telling stories about heroes who have come before. To do so, WE NEED YOUR STORY. Please send me a few paragraphs in which you describe some transformation you have brought about in your institution, and the role your learning at HUC-JIR played in preparing you to succeed in bringing about that change. We will then use your story to inspire a potential student who is considering a career in Jewish education.

Two challenges from the title of Jonah’s book still lay ahead for us, to tell the story and to live it. We have to find an audience to listen to the story. (As always, we need your help in identifying young adults who might be interested in hearing the story.) And we have to make sure we are living the story. In future issues of Tikshoret, I hope you will see ways that we are living the story of “Question What Is. Imagine What Can Be.”

B’shalom,

Michael
This Year’s Sara S. Lee Seminar

By Molly Plotkin, Rabbinical/Education student, RHSOE ’13

Someone once taught me the importance of reflection through the use of three simple questions. After an experience, one should ask, “So?” “So what?” and “So what now?” In other words, what happened, why does it matter, and how can you apply what you learned to the future? While we more commonly take the time to reflect on a program or curriculum, rarely do we take the time to thoughtfully give consideration to the entire structure of Jewish education. This is exactly what we had the opportunity to do for the Sara S. Lee Seminar last fall. Current RHSOE students and faculty spent two days last September with Jonathan Woocher; who patiently walked us through this process of reflection and gave us a new tool to think about implementing change.

“So?” We started by defining the differences between Jewish life in America 50 years ago and in the present, in eight areas including socio-demography, Jewish organizational life, American religious and cultural life, and technology. This exercise helped us define the components that influenced the development of the structure of Jewish education, and identify the gaps between Jewish life in America at that time and Jewish learners today.

“So what?” Woocher made a compelling argument for the need to accept the limitations of an outdated structure, and rethink what we teach and how we teach it. Many Jewish educators feel the need to rethink the structure of Jewish education, but are at a loss for how to do that successfully on a large scale.

“So what now?” This question can be both the most enervating and invigorating in the process of reflection. It is enervating because we are talking about changing an entire structure of Jewish education that has been in place for generations. It can feel overwhelming to think of the challenges inherent in changing an entire system. Yet it is invigorating because why would we go into this field if imagining the future of Jewish education did not excite us?

Implementing change is difficult, but first you have to imagine the change you want to see. Woocher led us through one process that educators can use to think about institutional change, called “Theory of Change.” Instead of beginning with the problem and ending with a solution, the theory of change model begins with the solution or “intended outcomes.” You start the process by defining the primary goals of Jewish education today. This opens the door wide for innovative thinking and creative ideas that do not necessarily rely on an existing structure. Once you identify your intended outcomes, you then work backwards to define what conditions, either pre-existing or not, are necessary in order to reach that outcome. In other words, you first imagine what can be, and then figure out how to get there.

This process is worthwhile for all Jewish educators to think about, even if you only get to the first step of articulating your goals, it can serve as a reminder of what inspired you to work in Jewish education in the first place.

* * *

In the fall of every other year, the students and faculty of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education gather for the Sara S. Lee Seminar, a 24-hour retreat held in Malibu. The faculty identifies a scholar with an area of expertise vital to the American Jewish community that is not part of the ongoing curriculum of the school. The “Sara Seminar” (which alternates with the “Cutter Colloquium”) provides an opportunity for students and faculty to forge a learning community that lasts throughout the year. This special program is funded by alumni through Sara S. Lee Clinical Education Fund.

Jonathan Woocher is JESNA’s Chief Ideas Officer and directs its Lippman Kanfer Institute: An Action-Oriented Think Tank for Innovation in Jewish Learning and Engagement. Jon served as JESNA’s chief professional officer for 20 years before assuming his new role.

Prior to coming to JESNA in 1986, Jon was an Associate Professor in the Benjamin S. Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University, where he taught courses in Jewish political studies and communal service and directed the program in Continuing Education for Jewish Leadership.

He received his BA from Yale University, summa cum laude, in Political Science and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Temple University in Religious Studies.

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Printed on recycled paper
Alumni Bookshelf:  
For Your Continuing  
Professional Learning  

By Joel Abramovitz (’11)  

Finding God by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B. Syme. I find that perhaps the hardest content area to breach is theology. As a middle school teacher, my students want to discuss God, but need to be taught the language(s) in which to speak. The primary texts of of Maimonides, Heschel, or even Tanakh can be too challenging for pre-teens; Finding God has helped give my students an access point to a wide spectrum of Jewish theology so they can begin to construct their own personal views of God, firmly based on our tradition.  

Reality is Broken by Jane McGonigal. Not a strictly education book, but a very compelling read that makes the case for why games (computer, video, phone/tablet app, card, etc.) will be a more integral, and necessary, part of 21st century life. Since reading it, I have been thinking about ways to make my teaching more “game-like” by building collaborative projects tailored to individual student needs, with the space for instant feedback on the students’ progress.  

Social World of the Hebrew Prophets by Victor H. Matthews. Introduced to this text in my HUC-JIR Prophets class, it has become an essential part of building a curriculum around Nevi’im. Matthews accessibly contextualizes each biblical prophecy within the socio-historical setting of each prophet. It is, surprisingly, a fun and fascinating read that gives new perspectives on the ancient words of the prophets and enables me to create an effective and meaningful historical and theological curriculum.  

Do you have pictures of RHSOE events or your time in school?  
We would love to share them. Please send them to Debbie with a brief description and try to identify everyone in the picture. <dniederman@huc.edu>
Technology Tools, Experiments and Recommendations from Fellow Alumni

Creating Positive Jewish Memories
Beth Young (’02)

I have done a lot of thinking, brainstorming, pondering, and experimenting related to the goal of religious education in our congregational program. Last year, I started preaching to my faculty (I have been known to have a soap box or two) that one of our goals was creating positive Jewish memories for our students. This must start with designing lessons so that students engage in meaningful experiences. But of increasing importance is documenting the experience to preserve it. With today’s technology, we have many tools — video, photo, scanned documents, the possibilities are endless.

This year I added a new mantra: that creating community among families was an obligation of our religious school program, not something that we added on if we had time, energy, or an interested parent volunteer. Again, technology offers a number of ways to connect people — social media, blogs, and more.

I was thrilled to be accepted into the Social Media Bootcamp for Educators for 2011-12 and benefited from being able to explore these questions with Lisa Colton. I was intrigued at how many ways these two goals intersected and overlapped. Once we are preserving memories through digital media, it is easy to use that same documentation to connect families.

Here are some examples of how technology is helping us accomplish these two goals:

- Teachers explored documenting the learning in their classroom through images. We had professional learning sessions where we analyzed photographs and talked about objective and subjective (inspired by the Jewish Lens program we were using in our 6th grade). We reviewed pictures of our program and selected good pictures and identified why.

- Using Picasa we have organized a database of the hundreds of photos we started to accumulate. (Helpful in using this is the Picasa starter add-on that allows multiple people and computers to access the database.) This database has allowed us to tag people and events for easy identification.

- The Temple Judea Religious School blog is now composed of entries with less text and more photos. We are working to highlight more programs and people, in addition to documenting what students did in class each day <judeagables.blogspot.com>.

- This year we launched a Facebook group for religious school families. This is a forum for highlighting the accomplishments of our students (in religious school and in life). Families have shared pictures of home celebrations. We share images of our programs and special events. This has also become a means to direct families to the religious school blog and that viewership is up.

- We are using Shutterfly to create photo books that are presented to students when they become Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Within the pages of the book are pictures, photos, writings, and more that document this child’s Jewish journey up to this point. In addition, there is a blank page at the end — emphasizing that this is not the end of the journey, but a milestone along the way.

There is more work to do…we are looking to increase the variety of “artifacts” we collect of students. We are trying to share the microphone on our blog and Facebook group to bring more voices in to the conversation. I look forward to seeing how new tools will allow us to strengthen our community in new and exciting ways!

Visual T’filah helps students see prayers in a new way!
Dan Medzein (’08)

It is truly a blessing for me to serve as the Publishing Technology Manager of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, getting to work on a team that combines our passion for liturgy, education, and technology to provide resources for the Reform Movement. Some of my most exciting work is creating apps, ebooks, and especially Visual T’filah (VT).

VT utilizes contemporary technology to display liturgy during services enhanced by visual imagery. The imagery acts as “Visual Iyyunim”, assisting pray-ers and students in finding new and deeper meaning in prayers. And while VT is a powerful way to pray, participating in the creation of VT is an even more impactful and educative experience. It engages students’ critical and creative thoughts around Jewish prayer, fosters project-based learning, and provides an authentic audience.

To make it as easy as possible for our colleagues to use VT...
to enhance and teach prayer, we have created the VT Templates. The Templates contain the complete Hebrew liturgy of a particular service in Mishkan T'filah (Friday Evening, Saturday Morning, or Weekday Morning), including translation and transliteration, pre-formatted to be appropriate for screens in almost any setting.

If you wish to experiment or incorporate the creation of VT into your prayer curricula, feel free to follow this basic outline, which can be taught as one class, a prayer unit, or an entire course.

**Part 1:** Study the Prayers — Individually or in small groups, students study a particular prayer, paying close attention to the themes, ideas, and concepts conveyed by the prayer.

**Part 2:** Visualize the Themes — Ask the students, “When you think of the themes/ideas/concepts from your prayer?”:
- What “concrete” images come to mind, such as objects or symbols?
- What “abstract” ideas come to mind, such as patterns, colors, or movement?

**Part 3:** Create the Images — Students find, create, or capture an image (or images) to serve as the “Visual Iyyun” for their prayer. Students can take photographs on their smartphones or draw, paint, sculpt, act, and more. Any non-digital work of art must simply be photographed to be included in the VT.

**Part 4:** Build the Slides — Starting with the VT Template, add the students' images to the appropriate prayer. (Guidance and a one-hour training session come complimentary with any VT Template purchase.)

**Part 5:** See the Prayers — Connect a projector, smart board, or a flat screen TV, to your computer or tablet. Pray. You may wish to have students explain the meaning or intention behind their image before each prayer or allow the prayerers to draw their own meanings during the service, and debrief afterwards.

Teaching prayer can be hard. Sometimes we focus excessively on decoding and have trouble finding engaging ways to help students really connect with the meaning of the prayers, when, in fact, these themes can be found and expressed in a multitude of venues and forms. Visual T’filah brings the prayers out of the siddur and the sanctuary into the world and into students' lives. Young students, seasoned educators, and everyone in between, love seeing their prayer images on the large screen and getting the opportunity to share their interpretation with their peers. Visual T’filah is an amazing teaching tool, and we are excited to be able to provide resources to help bring it to your classrooms and communities.

To find out more check out this site <http://ccarnet.org/ccar-press/visual-tfilah/> or contact Dan directly at <dmedwin@ccarnet.org>

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**From the Chair of the Alumni Association**

At this halfway point in our year, we are simultaneously looking back at the work we started in the fall and looking ahead to the new year that lies ahead of us. As you may know, this past November the Leadership Team of the Alumni Association gathered together in New York for a series of thoughtful and productive meetings. A primary focus of those meetings was devoted to expanding the ways in which we connect with more of our alumni across time and space. As a result, we are proposing to reach out to our newest alumni to choose a class representative to join the leadership team. In this role, the class rep would not only become an active member of the leadership of the alumni association but also serve as a liaison to their classmates. As we welcome new alumni into the field, we also introduce them to the alumni association and all it has to offer. In addition to reaching out specifically to new alumni, we are hoping to touch base personally with all of our alumni in the coming months. As our numbers grow so too does the diversity of our work and our contributions to the field of Jewish education. Therefore, we want to reach out and hear about your work, your professional goals, and your ideas about how the alumni association can serve you. Our goal is to turn these conversations with you into a database for you to utilize as you look to expand your network of colleagues and professionals who can be a resource to you.

And as we look ahead to the second half of the year, the leadership team is preparing to virtually reconvene in March. At this gathering we will pay special attention to the Kavod plank of our mission statement. In other words, we will explore how we can best promote and celebrate the work, achievements and milestones of the members of our alumni association in our own local communities and in the larger Jewish community. There is much to celebrate in the work that we do and we want to support our fellow alumni in recognition of their dedication and commitment to this field.

We very much look forward to talking with you in the near future and continuing to update you as we enrich and expand the reach of our alumni association. We welcome your input and your involvement. Tell us about your lives and your work through our Facebook group and we hope that 2013 is off to a good start! L’hitraot.

* B’kavod,
  Ellen Lefkowitz ’99
A View from the Field

Colleagues share their stories and expertise.
In this issue we hear from Maxine Handelman ('94) about Early Childhood Education.

Early childhood education is a greying profession, and it’s not bringing in the bucks the way it used to. But it is still one of our best ways to reach families with young children and engage them in Jewish life.

The economic downturn had serious consequences for Jewish early childhood centers. Enrollment is affected by families not moving, parents with changing job realities, and more families than ever requesting scholarships for preschool. In addition, free preschools offered by many states are difficult to compete with. Right or wrong, congregations often expect the early childhood center to bring in considerable budget dollars, but the era of the “cash cow” is past.

Many early childhood directors are nearing retirement, and new directors are not streaming into this low paying field. New programs such as JECEL (Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Initiative), a collaborative effort between HUC-JIR and JTS, funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation, are helping to prepare excellent new directors, but it is just a drop in the bucket.

Often, a teacher will step up to become the director, but the skill sets are very different, and the lack of experience can catch up quickly. A person taking on this challenge will benefit from mentoring from a colleague in the organization, such as the Education Director.

Today’s young families do not necessarily look to the synagogue or to the Jewish community when they are looking for community. These digital natives look to their friends — in a broadly defined social media way — to figure out what music class to take with their baby, which doctor to use, which preschool to send their child to. Schools and synagogues must work harder than ever, in new, more relevant ways, to reach this generation that does not commit easily.

Early childhood schools today, while always concerned with the education of both the child and the family, must now go above and beyond to connect with families who feel no great need to connect with Jewish life. Schools and synagogues can help new Jewish parents build relationships with other Jewish families, helping these families build a foundation of support with a Jewish context, which will help pave the way to future Jewish engagement.

Engaging young families is the new task of the Jewish early childhood center. Actually, it is the task of the entire synagogue. Lay leaders and synagogue professionals need to work together to insure that the congregation is authentically welcoming to young families. The education director must partner with the early childhood director to pave the path to ongoing Jewish life and education for families in the early childhood center.

Jewish early childhood centers must be excellent to attract today’s families, who have many choices. Best practices include a deep respect for the potential of all children, opportunities for children to investigate their world and collaborate with teachers and friends to make sense of it all, the inclusion of parents in the educational experience in authentic ways and with on-going communication, classrooms filled with natural materials and evidence of the children’s work, and integration of Jewish life and values throughout the curriculum in a seamless way.

Many schools have come a long way on the journey toward excellence. Others have not changed much in 30 years. Teachers in Jewish early childhood centers frequently come to the field with little or no Jewish education. Education directors can help address this need, working with early childhood directors to create on-going Jewish learning opportunities for teachers. Offering similar opportunities for parents is an excellent way to engage young parents in the life of the congregation.

The URJ is working to help synagogues engage young families and achieve excellence in their early childhood centers. To this end they launched several Communities of Practice in January of 2013, including: “Successfully Engaging Young Families” and “Pursuing Excellence through Your Early

Have you moved? We want to make sure you are still receiving our publications; if you have moved, please send Debbie <dniederman@huc.edu> or Joy <jwasserman@huc.edu> your updated information and we will make sure you don’t miss a thing!
Celebrating Our Colleagues, Sharing a Legacy

With over 300 alumni spanning over four decades, we now have a growing number of fellow alumni who have begun to retire from full careers in the field. This year we will celebrate those colleagues and share a piece of their legacy to the field of Jewish education. We continue with Janice Alper (’78).

“Education Is An Unfinished Symphony”
— Zalman Aranne

When I sat in the bowels and the windowless rooms of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion engaging in education projects and studying Jewish texts I had no idea what awaited me in the ‘outside’ world. As I reflect back on it, my life as a Jewish educator was fulfilling, challenging and very rewarding.

Becoming a Jewish educator was a professional career I pursued in the midst of raising four young children, extensive communal volunteer work and graduate work and practice in a totally different field. It was a journey that took me from education director in synagogue schools to Jewish communal work. I ended my career as Executive Director of the Union for Progressive Judaism, serving Australia, New Zealand and Asia.

Early on I learned to take advantage of opportunities presented to me. Involvement in CAJE provided me with a unique opportunity to interface with major Jewish educators and scholars from all over the world. I was always honored to facilitate sessions and, more importantly, I was excited to sit at the feet of such great scholars as Tikvah Frymer Kensky (z”l), Neil Gilman, and Pinchas Peli (z”l). Participation in the Mandel Foundation Lead Community Project provided additional avenues for broadening my experience and for a number of years I was a member of the Whizin Institute in Family Education at the University of Judaism (now American Jewish University). I was also part of programs sponsored by the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, notably in certification of Day School Management and the Wexner Foundation Program examining our roles as Jewish educators.

My initial motivation for entering HUC-JIR was to study Jewish texts, something I have accomplished. Since education for me is an unfinished symphony I continue to study in hevruta, tackling new and challenging texts with my study partner.

In my active retirement I have managed to pursue new avenues totally unrelated to my Jewish professional past; however, Shabbat is still a focal point. My husband and I participate in a lay-led minyan where I occasionally lead services, read Torah, drash, or teach. The coda of the unfinished symphony truly comes together for me in this way. I feel blessed to have engaged in the holy work of Jewish education on so many levels and in the process, as with all great journeys, I gained more than I gave.
Please mark your calendars now:
RHSOE Alumni Kallah
February 7th-9th, 2014
Brandeis-Bardin Campus of AJU in Simi Valley, CA

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Mazel Tov to April Akiva ('06) and her husband Daniel and daughter Adina, who welcomed baby Aaron in September, 2012.

Mazel Tov to Janice Alper ('78) and her husband Marv, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on December 15, the last night of Hanukkah.

Joy Merriman, administrative assistant to the RHSOE, became engaged on New Year’s Eve. Her wedding to Will Long will be in September, 2014.

Mazel Tov to Mara Braunfeld ('06) on the birth of her son, who came into the world on February 8, 2013 at 11:45 am, weighing 7lbs. 12oz.

Mazel Tov to Aviva Davids Levin ('95) and Jason Levin on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Zeke who celebrated atop Masada on December 31st.

Our deepest condolences are extended to Cheri Ellowitz ('82) and her family upon the death of Cheri’s mother, Grace Ellowitz, in January 2013.

Our deepest condolences are extended to Elliot and Eve Fein ('87) on the death of Elliot’s mother Jane, who died after a prolonged battle with Alzheimer’s disease and was buried in Seattle, on February 10th.

HUC-JIR mourns the death of Shirley Tartak, long-time supporter of the Reform movement and benefactor of the Tartak Learning Center on the Jack H. Skirball Campus in Los Angeles. The RHSOE created the Center in 1979 with an initial gift from Shirley and the estate of her husband Paul. Since then, Shirley's ongoing generosity has sustained the Tartak Learning Center and provided the funding for its directorship. Shirley had also been a member of the Board of Overseers of the Skirball campus.