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Dor L'Dor v' Yeladim L'Yeladim **Generation to Generation and Children to Children**

by Nechama Retting and Tobey Greenberg

Jewish customs, traditions, and knowledge always have been passed on from generation to generation, *Dor L'Dor*. In our hectic society, however, less and less of our traditions are being passed down and fewer rituals are being observed. Those customs that once had so much meaning to us seem to have fallen by the wayside and have little or no meaning for some of our younger generations. How can we as Jewish educators change this path?

We can begin in the Early Childhood classrooms by creating a multitude of opportunities to create connections to *Torah*, to Israel, and to Judaism and also extending those connections to our families at home. In our busy world today, parents don't always have the time, or often the knowledge, to teach and share our traditions with our younger generations. In some instances, the **children are teaching their parents** what they have learned in their *Gan*, which is the reverse of what our grandparents did. We need to create a bridge between school and home, not only educating the children, but also their families.



Educators need to create exciting opportunities for our students to experience *Torah*, holidays, and Jewish traditions that will create a sense of responsibility to themselves, their families, and to future generations.

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Teaching *Torah* should take place in our EC classrooms weekly. Children should have opportunities to "LIVE" the *Torah* and to incorporate it into their everyday lives. We must provide the time to hear the stories and even to be able to act out and "be a part" of our living *Torah*. We must create multi-sensory experiences so we can build connections between the biblical stories of the past and today. The important thing is to help students build that bridge that connects their knowledge to their own lives, to their families, and to the future generations.

In our *Gan*, we experience *Torah* weekly by coming together as a school community to learn about the weekly *Torah* portion. We gather in a special place, invite our families to join us, and, together with our Rabbi, we hear the stories and relive the *Torah* portion through drama, songs, and dance. In our end-of-week newsletters, we include a summary of the *Torah* portion with discussion questions to prompt family *Torah* learning at home. In this way, our children can share their knowledge and, in many cases, teach their parents as well.

During our *Tefillot* time, when we say the *Shema* and *V'ahavta*, we remind our children that it is their **responsibility** (as it says in the prayer) to teach **their** children (younger siblings or anyone in their family) the *Shema* and about our Jewish values and traditions. This helps to **create a feeling of empowerment in our youngest learners that will last a lifetime.**

Children also are teaching other children. This can be a very powerful teaching method and one that gives the children a feeling of accomplishment and pride. Inspired by the teachings of Orly Kenneth (Washington, DC's former Israeli *Shlichah*), our *Gan* has begun having the oldest classes announce to the younger classes when a holiday is coming. The 4 year old students feel a sense of responsibility when they go tell the 3's class that it is *Rosh Chodesh* or another holiday. We explain to the children, "How else will the 3 year old class know it's *Rosh Chodesh*, if **you** don't tell them? **It's your job to tell them!**" You can see the pride on the children's faces as they plan what to say to the other classes. Then it is the job of the 3 year old classes to tell the 2 year old classes. There is also a sense of accountability as well, as the children teach other children.

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Celebrating Lag B'Omer

We also create a special holiday book for each child with photos of the child or of the class participating in each holiday. We glue the photos onto paper and ask the children to tell us what they like best about the holiday. We also include a sentence or two describing each holiday. For some of our students, their time at school is their only experience with the holidays. It is especially meaningful to see how the children progress with their answers as the year goes on. We start the year with statements like: "I like round *challah* for *Rosh Hashanah*" and end the year with statements like "I like learning about *Shavuot*. God gave us the 10 Commandments and all of us were there on Mt Sinai! We eat ice cream and dairy foods because Israel is the land flowing with milk and honey." At the end of the year, the children take their holiday books home to share with their families. It is so wonderful to hear the positive feedback, and we also create another way to teach families that can be shared and enjoyed over and over again.

Connections to Israel can be created by putting together an "Israel Bag." The bag can contain various items such as books in Hebrew, pictures of Israel, games, *shekelim*, CDs with Israeli music, etc. The bag is sent home with the children to share with their families.

In conclusion, we see that educators must try and create meaningful experiences that can be shared at home, that help children to feel a sense of responsibility to help future generations to learn, and that help to guide parents thereby creating a strong bridge to the future of Judaism and to our future generations.

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