

**Education and Life Skills Development and Violence  
Prevention**

**Begin in the Heart, with the Heart, through Wisdom of the  
Heart**

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Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D.

Leadership Team, Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning

Rutgers University

Department of Psychology and  
Center for the Study of Jewish Life

Fax: 732-445-0036

On the Web: [www.EQParenting.com](http://www.EQParenting.com)

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I do not have the words to explain to you my joy at returning to Israel, to share in the work that you are doing for children. The Wisdom of the Heart, Dr. Yossi Levi's creative, brilliant, and memorable way of capturing the idea of Emotional Intelligence and making it something distinct and special to Israel, is changing education. We now realize that we are all in the Learner's House, and it is a privilege to be in such a house. To help prepare children to inherit the mantle of our tradition is an awesome responsibility and a great privilege. Our tradition is one of great leaders. *Binat Halev* asks us all to be great leaders every day. It asks us to make the Learner's House special, and to fill it with Wisdom and *Shalom Bayit*.

When you met several months ago, I commented that in the schools, the cornerstone of a successful program in *Binat Halev* is the classroom teacher. This is because he or she has the most contact with students, sees them on a daily basis, knows their life situations and routines, and is in the best position to both instruct in the necessary skills and to create contexts of application and deeper learning during academic and other class periods.

What does a school look like in which the EQ and IQ are balanced? In my work with CASEL - the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning - and with Jonathan Cohen's Project in Social and Emotional Learning at Teacher's College, Columbia University, I have seen such schools. In them, the teacher is slower to refer students to counselors and school psychologists because the teacher has so many tools to impact on youngsters, to understand their needs, and to create opportunities in the usual classroom routines to build children's EQ skills. When they cannot do so, the first line of action is to call in the counselor as a consultant, not to send the child out.

The counselors play a primary role as consultants to the teachers, as well as to the principals for the way in which the program is carried out not only in the classrooms but in the school overall, as well as in linkages with parents and various community groups. The school psychologist has a special role in helping the most difficult students build EQ skills. These are students who need more than the basic lesson/curricular structure. They need additional training, usually in small groups, as well as individually, to build their skills.

Wisdom of the Heart is a way to get in touch with the most fundamental aspect of

children's character, to promote their sense of *menschlichkeit*. But it is not limited to students. I shared my vision of the senior counselor as working with groups outside the school, with community groups, with parents, with the leaders of towns and businesses, to build the EQ of the adults who come into contact with children and to see how adults in the community can be more supportive of what is going on in the schools. Much the same way, the senior school psychologist is ready to deal with difficult circumstances in the community, to work with and complement the counselor, so that more individuals and groups can be fit within the embrace of the EQ approach.

These re-definitions of role are going to be at first imprecise, but they are necessary. We are in a new era. And there is no turning back. The conditions in which our children live, conditions of the Information Age, an increasingly fast-paced, hectic life, parents working longer and harder, technology advancing in leaps and bounds, are not going to go back to earlier, calmer, less complicated times. The roles of teacher, school psychologist, and counselor therefore MUST both expand and become better coordinated. Some roles will be deepened. Some roles will be expanded, though perhaps not also deepened in all areas. Some roles might even be reduced in scope but expanded in intensity and focus. We cannot measure success by the amount we do; we must measure success by how our work fits together for the benefit of children, families, and communities. All roles matter, and working to define and redefine roles will be part of the pioneering task you face.

I would like to talk with you briefly about this new society, and about how EQ - Wisdom of the Heart - is so essential for the future. The society in which young people are growing up today bombards them with images of violence. The media suggests that violence is an okay way to resolve conflict, and that treating people with disrespect and ridicule is often quite funny. Yet, the National Institute of Mental Health has established the link between aggressive behavior and exposure to media portrayals of violence. Furthermore, the American Psychological Association reports that by the age of 18, the typical child in the United States will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence. Moreover, in most cases, the perpetrators were not punished.

The causes of violence extend beyond virtual violence-and include poverty, institutionalized and individual racism, intolerance of differences, abuse, lack of parental

supervision and guidance, and the breakdown of family structures. Many young people today, who experience or who are exposed to violence, don't think they will live past age 20. Their violence is fueled by a lack of hope, a dearth of positive connections to the American dream, and a sense that they have nothing to "risk."

Clearly, adults have abdicated their responsibility for providing positive direction, guidance and attention to the needs of children. The recent school shootings in the United States clearly represent loud cries for identity and recognition that went unheard. There is a crisis of identity in today's youth, in Israel as well as in the United States, in Europe as well as the Arab world. What will become of our youth? To what will they turn in their frustration? Can they fill their lives with MTV? Nike? Buying? Playing? Isn't there something more to life? Of course there is. Our Jewish traditions, sages, and writings have shown us that indeed, there are larger elements of life to which we must attend if we are to be and feel fulfilled as human beings. It is to this that *Binat Halev* is connected. It is the detachment of IQ from meaningful living, from being part of a *Kehillah Kedosha*, that has given rise to the EQ movement.

There are lessons for all of us to learn, in all democracies, to assure that others do not walk down the same tragic paths that too many of our youth are taking. There is no single, simple remedy to this problem. Our response to these complicated issues has to be a wide-ranging public response. When we think about solutions, our focus needs to be not on any one program or project, but rather include efforts involving the private sector, national and local governments, neighborhood organization, religious communities, law enforcement, mental health professionals, educators, researchers, and businesses. We must all mobilize our energies.

We need to question deeply what our vision of education is for our young people and what the role of schools is within that view. Schools are our society's primary formal institution for socializing children into their roles as concerned and responsible citizens in a democracy. This is a tremendous responsibility. It involves recognizing that our goals are not only to produce students with fabulous test scores, but students who become fabulous people. We want our children to become knowledgeable, of course, but also responsible and caring. We want our youth to have academic skills, but we also know that life success is based at least as much on emotional intelligence as on intellectual intelligence. We need academic standards to improve our students' skills in math, literacy, science and social studies, but we also need standards in life

skills so that we are effective in our interactions with others in the workplace, community, and family.

We live in a social world. Among the most important skills necessary to navigate it successfully are being able to engage in thoughtful decision making, understand signs of one's own and other s feelings, listen accurately, remember what we hear and learn, communicate effectively, respect differences. Such skills allow students to participate effectively in cooperative work groups, to appropriately express their emotions, to solve problems non-violently, to express empathy and to engage in self-directed behavior. "Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage and express the social and emotional aspects of one s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values to acquire social and emotional competence " (ASCD, 1997). These social and emotional learning skills, which make up much of what Daniel Goleman called "emotional intelligence" can be taught to all children and youth in coordinated, multi-year programs as part of the existing school curriculum. And the research is clear: violence is preventable We know that sustained long term teaching of these skills can help prevent many of the problems such as interpersonal violence that students experience today, as well as foster more caring, cooperative learning environments.

You, of course, know that what I am talking about is *Binat Halev*. And here, at this conference, we are going to learn about exciting innovations to bring this into all schools. Fortunately, there are scientifically based guidelines available that can help schools produce knowledgeable, responsible, caring students and communities. After reviewing the scientific literature, making site visits and interviewing practitioners throughout the country, and examining their own experiences over many years in the field, members of the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an international network of educators, scientists, and concerned citizens, compiled the book, Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators (ASCD, 1997), and presented a list of 39 guidelines for providing effective social and emotional education. Several that are relevant to fostering a safer, more caring school climate follow:

- " Build and reinforce skills in life skills and social competencies, health-promotion and problem-prevention skills, coping skills and social support for transitions and crises and positive contributory service.
- " Link efforts to build social and emotional skills to developmental milestones as well as to the need to help students cope with ongoing life events and local circumstances.
- " Emphasize the promotion of pro-social attitudes and values about self, others, and work.
- " Integrate SEL with traditional academics to enhance learning in both areas.
- " Build a caring, supportive, and challenging classroom and school climate to assure effective SEL teaching and learning.
- " Integrate and coordinate SEL programs and activities with the regular curriculum and life of the classroom and school.
- " Foster enduring and pervasive SEL effects through collaboration between home and school.

The focus on reform and renewal among educators, politicians and the public continues to miss the mark. To change a school's culture so ALL children can learn we must address the relationships that exist in that school. Adults and young people who develop skills to communicate with one another, problem solve together, believe in the richness of diversity and embrace conflict as an opportunity to grow, can and do contribute to the kind of school culture we search for in schools today. But we can't change a school's culture unless we are willing and able to reflect on our own capacities to accept and respond to change ourselves. The problem is not out there. It begins with each and every one of us.

More and more schools in Israel, the United States, and around the world are invested in promoting the kind of learning that will foster children's social and emotional learning. In such schools, pro-social values are visible everywhere in interactions among students and staff. Students constantly reflect on and discuss ways to live together peacefully, to deal with angry feelings appropriately, and to be assertive without being mean. In many schools student mediators, peer counselors and youth leaders earn the respect of their peers by helping to keep the peace.

The Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning, (CASEL) has identified research-based programs that address these issues. Among them are such widely acclaimed programs as the School Development Program, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, the Child Development Project, Social Decision Making and Problem Solving, Second Step, the Responsive Classroom and others that may be found at the CASEL web site ([www.CASEL.org](http://www.CASEL.org)).

And you are adding to the list right here, with your programs and innovations such as Ability and Time of Ability and Until the Last Child.

Let me return to our tradition, to make a connection that I mentioned earlier. In the Torah, *B'reishit* begins with the universal and ends with the particular. *B'reishit* begins with Creation, including the creation of humanity and ends with the formation of a number of nomadic tribes into a people with a shared faith, a collective memory and the beginnings of a shared tradition. But the book of *B'reishit* is also a very human book, a book of stories about relationships, between Adam and Even, Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, Joseph and his father, etc.

Just as Genesis is a book about important people, Exodus is a book about AN important people - "*ahm Israel*." The word "*ahm*", that is, people or nation, is applied to *b'nai yisrael*, the children of Israel (1:9). *Sh'mot* begins with a building project and ends with a building project. In the beginning, enslaved Israel builds the store cities of Pithom and Raamses for Pharaoh (1:11). By the end of the book, the entire people of Israel are at liberty in the wilderness engaged in building the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) (35:4 - 40:33).

Who is selected to build the *Mishkan*? Any of you old enough to remember first hand? No? Good!! Well, the biblical account of this first "national" project describes not only the materials that the people contributed, but also the work of their hands. The language of the verses that describe these sorts of contribution is worth noting. The Makers of the Marvelous *Mishkan*.... Who were these people? Like all of us, they were made in G-d's image, but when they had the chance to fashion the *Mishkan* that would contain and represent G-d's essential presence on earth-- another memory creator-- they found something special inside themselves.

They possessed something besides technical skills. They had "*chochmat lev*" and "*chacham lev*" -- not just "skill" as usually translated, but, what we call *Binat Halev*, "wisdom of

heart." We see this in our schools all the time, whenever children bring to their work special pride and meaning, and display this proudly for all to see and hear. More than just technical skills, it is done with the Wisdom of the Heart, with a sense of Jewish purpose. And let it be known that both women and men are explicitly so mentioned, Exodus 35:25-26 for women and 36:1-2 for men. This Wisdom of the Heart, is understood to be a special gift from G-d to help us act Jewishly. One Rabbi has said that it involves creativity, perspective, empathy, insight, a special kind of understanding that is not only technical but distinctly human. I quote, "This combination of both understanding and sensitivity strikes me as something that only G-d could put together."

As we grow as a people, without such things as the *Mishkan* and the Temple to remind us of G-d, we must look within us to learn the qualities needed to become the kind of people we need to be, and to provide direction for the education of our children. And what is that?

The *Pirke Avot* provides some guidance, saying that ...."**who is wise? He who learns from every person**, as it is said, "From all my teachers I grew wise (Psalms 119:99). **Who is strong? He who subdues his personal inclination**, as it is said: He who is slow to anger is better than the strong man, and a master of his passions is better than a conqueror of a city (Proverbs 16:32). **Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot**, as it is said: When you eat of the labor of your hands, you are praiseworthy and all is well with you (Psalms 128:2). You are praiseworthy- in this world; and all is well with you- in the world to come. **Who is honored? He who honors others**, as it is said: For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who scorn Me shall be degraded (I Samuel 2:30)"

We want our students to learn from every person, but especially from those who wish to teach them Jewishly. Ideally, this would strongly include the child's family, and we work to make it so. Meanwhile, we in education and in community life must serve as dugma.

We want our students to subdue their personal inclination, which we see as being fueled by a consumer-driven, individualistic, secular culture. We want our kids to not be automatons of that culture; when we bring *Tikkun Olam* and *Tzedakah* into our schools, as part of *Binat Halev*, we are instilling values too scarce in mass culture.

And we want our children to be happy with their lot. Their lot? They are Jewish. And they are praiseworthy and special. And the more they enact their Jewishness in their

relationships and work, the more they bring the Wisdom of the Heart with them every day, the more enriched they will be.

And we want them to honor others, which is what so many Mitzvot are about. You will be honored by honoring your parents, your teachers, your friends. The way to live is through a generous heart, we are told in *Pirke Avot*, not competitive individualism.

Education requires children to spend time in a *Kehillah Kedosha* because life is holy, living is a privilege. We are made in G-d image to act in that image. *Binat Halev*, once the possession only of those who could work on the *Mishkan*, is now something that all of our children must be raised to possess. For Israel is like the *Mishkan*, and it must be populated and led by those who possess that G-d-given ability, *Binat Halev*.

We know now with certainty that we need to actively teach our children the skills they need to enact the values and traditions that we cherish and want to transmit across the generations. Ideas alone-- the world of EQ-- are not enough. And good feelings alone are not enough. We need all of our students, all of our children, to be as knowledgeable, responsible, and caring as they can possibly be. For this to happen, the transformation, the revolution in education that we are seeing in Tel Aviv must become stronger here and then sweep the nation, and many nations. Skills, however, emerge in a context of relationships. That is why *Binat Halev* is a way of educating, not an isolated program. At the same time, it makes all of the programs in a school, including the academic programs, religious programs, and the various programs that SHEFI brings, all our efforts at Life Skills development and problem behavior prevention, to a higher level.

Malachi tells us what Elijah will do when he returns to prepare us for when the Messiah comes: "And he shall turn the heart of the parents to the children, and the heart of the children to their parents." (3:24). For this to happen, these hearts must be Wise in the way of Jewish values. Clearly, the work we are doing in the schools is to help pave way for Elijah, to produce a time of peace, of harmony, of cooperation, of mutual respect, empathy, and shared perspective. Let us now look at the specific accomplishments of the day in celebration, and then let us march from here with renewed commitment to bring the best of what we see and know into all of our schools.

*Shalom*, and *Todah Raba*. It is an honor to be here with you.