

*From the desk of Rabbi Stern*

In *Ethics of the Fathers*, we read: “If we learn from others one chapter, one *halachah*, one verse, one saying or even one letter, we are obliged to show honor to them.”

As I prepare to leave my position as Education Director of the Primary School, I realize, that in fact, I owe each and every one of you honor, because everyone with whom I have interacted these past 9 (!) years has had an impact on me. I have relished working with an incredible faculty, whose creativity and passion for Judaism and wisdom I see every day. I have learned from my students, each of whom has helped shape my understanding of what true Jewish study can be when “deeds exceed the learning.” You have lived what we have taught you, and therefore make me hopeful that one day, you too will be teachers of Torah: to your own children, to students who come to you for wisdom and to leaders of your future communities who will need your counsel to succeed. I have learned from our lay leaders who accepted responsibility as committee chairs and members, donating hours upon hours to make difficult decisions in the name of quality Jewish education.

I have learned from our staff, who have nurtured me and prodded me and guided me and shared both joys and sorrows with me: I am definitely the product of all their efforts as I am the beneficiary of their advice, support and fresh ideas.

And I am most grateful for those of you nine years ago who offered me this job as interim educator until you found another to take my place. Thank you for delaying this departure as long as you have!

I stood on the shoulders of the dreamers and shapers of this congregation, and on the body of work that Edna Coleman amassed in the 29 years she led our school. Her passion for teaching Torah continues to today, as she shares with me all the reasons and insights she has gleaned over the years.

Whenever I “stick my neck out”, in Edna’s words, to introduce something new in school, I think of Edna and smile, as did she when I talked about following the lead of students with new ways to repair the world. Who would have thought that we’d jump up and down for seven minutes to replicate the plight of children affected by neurological disease or visit a Magic Castle bringing bags of goodies for children at the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Or learn from two beautiful horses that give comfort and joy to children and adults with severe medical issues. Or make villages out of Legos that reflected the desire for peace between Jews and Muslims, with a mosque and a temple and a Garden of Abraham in between. Or create *yads* of silver to use when they become *b’nei mitzvah*. Or recreate the art of famous Jewish painters and sculptors. Or navigate the hallways of TRT with wheelchairs and walkers and canes and dark glasses and ear plugs to better understand what our fellows/ sisters who live with physical challenges must go through every day. Actually, my experience has been that all the “ors” have really been “ands,” because new visioning is a result of using not just our eyes but the result of using our hearts.

*Nediv libo* - offerings of the heart, like the ones we made in the desert of Sinai to fashion the Ark of the Covenant. Moses only accepted those gifts freely and lovingly given. The gifts you and I have shared have been so much more than a single letter, a saying, a verse or a *halachah*: they have fed my strengths and my growing edges and I will carry them with me always.

I will still be here, attending or leading services, *minyans*, Bar/Bat Mitzvah services, weddings and funerals as needed. I will continue our Bereavement Group and our Bridges: Sisterhood of Muslims and Jews. I will do pastoral care and counseling at TRT. So don’t be strangers; and do join me in welcoming our new Education Director, David Gronlund-Jacob. We wish him many years of joy and learning and success and inspiration.

Rabbi Shira Stern

