

Letters

SINAI shares nachas, thanks hosts

I would like to share some nachas by describing a recent event that highlights an important element of the SINAI School's educational model: Mainstreaming.

As you know, SINAI recently celebrated its 25th anniversary of commitment to excellence in Jewish special education. SINAI operates elementary and high schools within "host" schools throughout northern New Jersey. In addition, SINAI serves as a resource to the entire community, in that most or all of the Jewish day schools throughout the community refer children to SINAI and consult with us on special education matters, whether or not we are hosted within that particular school.

But our host schools in particular — which are Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy, Yavneh Academy, Torah Academy of Bergen County (TABC), Ma'ayanot, and Ra'ei Kushner Yeshiva High School — deserve special recognition for the service that they provide to the community. This is because of the "mainstreaming" opportunities provided by SINAI's host schools. Whether it's "academic mainstreaming" for the many SINAI children who, with our support, are able to participate in "regular" classes for academic subjects — or "social mainstreaming" with host schoolchildren at recess, lunch, prayers, gym or other settings — mainstreaming is a hallmark of the educational and life experience that we provide both for our children, as well as the children of the host schools who interact with our children.

Recently, the students of our high school at TABC participated in TABC's 11th and 12th grade Shabbaton. The Shabbaton was an exceptionally positive experience for both TABC's and SINAI's boys. SINAI has always been impressed, in general, with TABC's staff and students. The environment that TABC created at the Shabbaton was one of warmth, closeness, and spirituality. TABC's boys prayed beautifully, presented polished divrei Torah, and spontaneously began zemirot at each meal. The relationships between TABC's staff and students were remarkable. Students flocked to their teachers' tables to hear articulate, thoughtful words of Torah. Staff and students could be found conversing late at night and learning together early in the morning. Decorum throughout Shabbat was impressively maintained through a gentle, personal approach. It was truly beautiful.

The impact upon SINAI's boys was profound. TABC's students and faculty embraced SINAI's students in ways that

we could not have been staged more perfectly had I written the script myself. Rabbi Josh Kahn and Rabbi Steven Finkelstein of TABC brainstormed with our staff before the Shabbaton to develop ways to integrate SINAI's students — and hand-picked TABC "buddies" to learn with our boys at various points over Shabbos. TABC's boys included our boys in every aspect of the Shabbaton, even to the point of sharing kibudim (or honors) with them in shul. SINAI's boys really felt that they had made new friends and had been part of something great.

What happened last weekend at the TABC Shabbaton represents social mainstreaming at its best — because it was such a positive experience for both TABC's boys and SINAI's boys.

There are so many wonderful experiences that occur every day within each of our host schools. Perhaps we should write to you more frequently, not only as hakarat hatov to our host schools but also as a means of informing and educating our community. TABC's Shabbaton serves as a great example, and so we felt that it should be brought to the attention of the community.

Laurette Rothwachs
Dean
The SINAI School
Teaneck

'Thank you to American Jewry'

I live in Bergen County in the small town of Dumont. I came to the United States 15 years ago from Moscow, Russia. All these years I have been reading The Jewish Standard, and I like it a lot. In the Nov. 9 issue I read "A Kristallnacht lesson for our generation" by Benjamin Brafman. This article gave me an opportunity to write you and say thank you to American Jewry.

People like the Brafman brothers stood up for us and gave us the chance to live our lives in a free society, proudly practice our religion, and raise our children.

I am a Bukharian Jew; I was born and raised in Uzbekistan Muslim Republic of the former Soviet Union. More than 90 percent of my people emigrated, going to Israel and United States, during the last two decades. Fifty thousand Bukharian Jews live now in USA, most of them in Queens, N.Y.

Nina Yagudayev
Dumont, New Jersey

'Not the first,' but 'more important'

In his well-intentioned zeal to present the values of Judaism to mainstream non-Jewish culture (Nov. 16) Rabbi Shmuley Boteach asserts that Judaism is "the world's oldest monotheistic faith." But this frequently expressed notion outruns the evidence. Jews were not the first to speak of a single deity — the pharaoh Akhenaten in Egypt, influenced by even earlier ancient Near Eastern monotheistic traditions, instituted a belief in a single divine being. The Jewish belief system did introduce a radical innovation to the ancient world, though, in postulating and worshipping an abstract and nonrepresentational deity.

I would suggest that this was a more radical and more important innovation than monotheism itself. In contrast to earlier monotheistic forms of worship, such as Akhenaten's sun god Aten, the Jewish Bible is centered on a God that cannot be grasped by human perception or sculpted by human hands. Indeed, the very first directive of the Ten Commandments is that God cannot be perceived or represented in any shape, form, or manner other than in the abstract. This faith called for the ability to transcend the representational world and develop the sensitivity, acuity, and imagination to formulate abstract ideas. The propensity and penchant for abstract thinking served as the bedrock for an array of significant human endeavors such as science, jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and literature and stimulated a variety of innovative progressive movements not unlike that of "abstract expressionism" in the world of art.

Judaism's contribution, therefore, was significantly more important than the belief in one God, as it enhanced man's capacity to think and imagine beyond the real. Consequently, in order not to enfeeble the objectives of Rabbi Boteach's mission, the dissemination of accurate information is a sine qua non.

Zvi H. Szubin
Teaneck

The writer is Professor of Jewish Law and Comparative Legal Studies and chairman emeritus of the Classical Languages Department of the City University of New York.

Takes issue with letter

Irving Gall claims (Letters, Nov. 2), that "more Iraqi men, women, and children have died than Saddam Hussein had murdered during all his years as the dictator of Iraq." Readily available population figures show another side to this claim.

From the time of its nominal independence from Britain (1932) to the Baath Party takeover (1969, with Saddam as vice president), Iraq's population increased from 3,000,000 to 17,000,000, or about 370,000 per year (all numbers very approximate).

From 1969 to 1991, while Iraq was under the unfettered control of Saddam and the Baath Party, its population grew to 21,000,000, or about 180,000 per year, indicating a drop in growth of about 200,000 per year (with no pretense of precision) due solely to Saddam's policies.

From 1991 to 2003, the much-criticized "sanctions genocide" period, the population increased from 21,000,000 to 28,000,000, or over 400,000 per year. Readers will recall lurid tales from this period of a sanctions genocide, with Iraqis supposedly dying by the tens of thousands annually. Readers will recall this was also a period of widespread persecutions of Kurds and Shiites that killed tens of thousands if not much more. This was a period of widespread smuggling and corruption, with some of this country's most venomous critics — France, Russia, Switzerland, Germany, and the United Nations itself — thoroughly complicit. Despite these drags, the population growth increased by well over 200,000, due purely to the limitations put on Saddam's genocidal (to his own nation) policies.

As of this past spring, Iraq's population grew to 27,000,000 or 28,000,000, indicating an annual increase of somewhere between 250,000 and 500,000 and a mid-range estimate of 375,000. The mid-range estimate is about 200,000 above that achieved during Saddam's period of unfettered control.

Because this number, 200,000, is so constant, it is reasonable to believe that Saddam could have achieved similar gains had he pursued different policies. Thus, Saddam and the Baath Party are responsible for at least 4.5 million Iraqi deaths in 1969-91, and probably many more.

James Goldman
Paterson

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