

I forgot. She remembered.

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"I" (i.e., me) is the person who has absolutely no recollection learning about Herzl's Zionism, Rashi's commentary, Maimonides' code, Halevi's poetry and all of the other basic data of Jewish law, lore and history.

"She" is Batsheva Frankel, author of *The Jewish Educator's Companion: Practical Tools and Inspirational Ideas* (Behrman House, 2017).

I forgot when I learned the vocabulary of my Jewish identity because I did not learn it. I absorbed it. My Jewish education was organic. Its knowledge pieces are part of who I am, not of what I know. It's this way for many who receive a yeshiva education. It's an atmosphere, not a classroom. A room full of people challenging each other, out loud; it's stopping mid-sentence, running to the bookcase or opening the computer to prove or disprove a source; it's bringing one's body, not just one's mind, into the educational process. It's an integration, not lists and data.

Batsheva Frankel remembered that most Jewish kids do not learn this way. They may never have been exposed to anything Jewish — never have had the opportunity. Or, they are uninterested or detached; or, to the contrary, very interested — but along with a slew of other interests, both curricular and extracurricular. They need to be motivated. Frankel's book is important not just for its excellent ideas but for its sensitivity to the obstacles to effective Jewish education.

The main obstacle is the "outsider" status of many Jewish kids. As a former "Hebrew school" kid, I remem-

ber how difficult it was for teachers to get students to focus and to take the subjects seriously.

The subtitle of this book, "practical tools and inspirational ideas," captures the methods that Frankel has devised over a long career to

esting photos on the table in front of us. He then asked us to each pick a photo that especially spoke to us and explain our choice.

"We learned many intriguing things about each other as everyone told an interesting story,

would always ask to borrow a student's watch. I needed to keep track of the time, I would say. Inevitably, a student in the first row would hand over his or her watch. I said, "Please remember to ask for your watch back at the end of the class, because I have a whole collection of watches at home."

This student and I established an initial bond, even as the rest of the class giggled.

Another admittedly odd technique always worked. I would look directly at one student and then call on another one, in a completely different row.

Both students paid close attention thereafter.

Anyway, the admirable, unstated premise of this book reflects a welcome development in many circles. This book reflects the techniques of a person who has made a career of Jewish teaching. It is based on trial and error over a long period, as well as the adaptation of techniques in general education to Jewish contexts. That is to say, there is such a thing as the profession of Jewish teaching.

This is relatively new and still far from universal. Just because one grew up in Israel and is fluent in Hebrew, or because one took a course of Judaica courses in college, or grew up as the child of a rabbi does not qualify one to be a Jewish educator. The fact that Frankel draws on decades of Jewish teaching implies that others have done so, too.

This, then, summarizes the fruit of Frankel's profession as a Jewish educator:

PART ONE. Developing Critical-Thinking Skills (three chapters).

STEM — Spirituality, Theology, Ethics and Maggid

prompted by the photo. This icebreaker's impact was immediate; we got to know each other in a lovely way very quickly.

Some of the people I connected with that day are still dear friends more than 20 years later.

"Since then I have recreated the same activity for my various Judaic studies and English classes, but with an eclectic assortment of my own photos (I am an avid amateur photographer).

"I enjoy getting to know the students through their explanations and stories.

"After the activity, I reveal to my students that I took all of the photos. As they look at the photos again with this new information, they begin to feel a connection to me, knowing that I took the photo they chose."

The rest of the chapter identifies other icebreakers. Examples: name rhymes, human bingo, Jewish genie.

The icebreakers I used when I taught at The Hebrew University engaged one student at a time, not the whole class. For example, at the beginning of the class, I

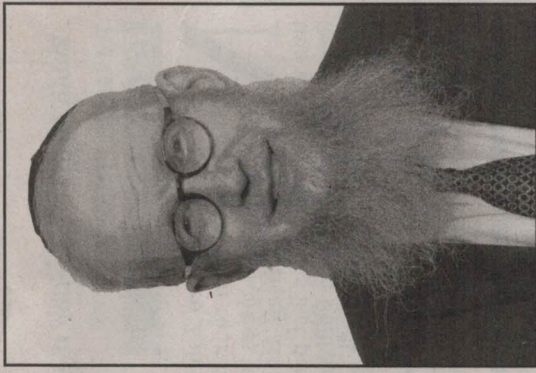
pierce the barriers, ranging from boredom to slight discomfort to eager yet uninformed embrace.

Notoriously, educators' handbooks are themselves boring. If the excitement that Frankel's book exudes indicates what kind of teacher she is, her students are fortunate, indeed.

For example, Frankel conveys the importance of storytelling, whether to pique interest, connect the students to the teacher or put some flesh and blood on the historical characters to be scrutinized.

Frankel practices what she preaches, beginning each chapter of *The Jewish Educator's Companion* with an autobiographical story. For example, here is the beginning of Chapter 13, "In the Beginning and Beyond: Icebreakers and Community Makers":

"After leaving my film career for a new beginning as a Jewish educator, I became a student again. I came to Israel to do some learning and enrolled in a program in which I didn't know anybody. At our first session, the rabbi put many beautiful and inter-



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PART TWO. Engaging with Jewish STEM — Spirituality, Theology, Ethics and Maggid (four chapters).

PART THREE. Finding What Works for You: Education Techniques and Approaches (five chapters).

PART FOUR. Putting It All Together: Teachers' Tools (four chapters).

PART FIVE. Shifting Paradigms: Directors and Principals Reimagining Jewish Education (two chapters).

A final word. I have been hearing about "reimagining" Jewish education since the days of what was grandiosely called "the Jewish Renaissance" back in graduate school in Boston in the early 1970s. (These were the days of Havurat Shalom Community Seminary in Somerville, anti-federation student demonstrations, the first CAJE conference, the fascination among college students with the Bostoner Rebbe, the beginning of Jewish professional career training at Brandeis and the heyday of Jewish studies at Harvard.)

Everybody was "reimagining" everything Jewish. The ultimate reimagining needs to capture the best part of a yeshiva education. It is organic, self-generating.

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