

Message from the Jewish Studies Director

How coincidental is it that we end 2007 this week at Rashi and in our weekly Torah reading it is the end of *Sefer Bereishit*, the Book of Genesis? The *parasha* (the weekly portion) tells of the deaths of Jacob, and later Joseph. This is the end of the familial stories of our ancestors. These stories of the lives of our patriarchs and matriarchs teach us how to live in the context of family and community. They lay out for us many of life's struggles and complications. We learn from the Book of Genesis that we need to be individuals and family members, with all of our issues, before we can become a real nation, a holy community. The actual birth of the Israelite nation will happen next, in *Sefer Shmot*, the Book of Exodus.

Similarly, each fall we watch individual students come together to form classroom communities. We work hard to focus on individual learning styles and individual hopes for the year. Each year I marvel at the Rashi students' ability to think individually to articulate their own thoughts. And yet, when these individuals join together something larger is created.

This past week our eighth graders said *I'hitraot* (see you soon) to their friends from the Leo Baeck School in Haifa. This is the first year that the students from Haifa visited during the winter as opposed to after our trip to Israel. There was an enormous amount of planning. There was a great deal of learning between the students in preparation for their experience. To be sure, there were thousands of emails between institutions, individual teachers, and ever more important, between our students and the students in Haifa, Israel. As we waited for the students' bus to arrive you could feel the tension in the building! However, after the initial *shalom* things settled down and our students began to really experience their *mifgash*- their meeting. This was the first year that the visit from the Israeli students was not only a Middle School event. The visitors from Haifa spent time in each of our classes and were an important part of our Hanukkah celebration. All of the Rashi students participated in discussions with our guests.

Our visitors and our eighth grade class participated in Shabbat in many different Boston area synagogues. They studied, danced, visited and talked. They shared a *tikkun olam* project and a family education program. And, of course, they shopped. There were individual students, adults and institutions. There were parts of the program that were a dream come true and parts of the program that need to be adjusted. But at the end, the individuals came together and what we had was a holy community of Israeli and American eighth graders sharing a most meaningful encounter. I am thankful to Dan Brosgol for his leadership on the program, to Stephanie and Marjorie for arranging Social Justice and Family Education programs, and to Joni and Marshall for their participation and guidance. The entire Middle School faculty, as always, was ready willing and able to help in whatever way was needed.

I wish you all a restful vacation and a happy beginning to 2008!

Shalomu'vracha,
Rabbi Ellen Pildis

Re-enrollment Packages Coming Soon

We will be mailing re-enrollment packages the first week of January.
 They will include financial aid information.

Coming Up

Dec. 21

Last day of classes in 2007

Jan. 2

Classes resume

Jan. 3

Pizza Thursday

Gr. 5 Science Fair Kick-Off 6:30-8 pm

Jan. 6

Admissions Open House 1:30-3:00 pm

Jan. 8

Rosh Hodesh Sh'vat

Gr. 1 Family Education: Freedom,
 Fairness and Civil Rights 8:15 am

Jan. 15

Yachad Teacher Appreciation lunch

Jan. 16

MLK Learn-in Day

Curious Minds Program 1:30 pm

Board Meeting 7 pm

Jan. 17

Pizza Thursday

MLK Assembly

Jan. 18

Middle School MLK Learn-in Day

Gr. 5 Spotlight on Activists

Jan. 21

Martin Luther King Day – no school

Martin Luther King Day Family

Service Celebration 1 pm

Please check the website for BB schedule

HAVE A GREAT VACATION!

Closing and Delays

Rashi bases its snow cancellations on many factors including the road conditions in the communities from which students and staff travel. In case of snow, Rashi School closings are announced on WHDH-TV Channel 7, WCVB-TV Channel 5, WBZ-TV Channel 4, Fox Channel 25, and through our parent email list. We do not operate a School-initiated phone chain for parents, although we may ask Yachad to contact room parents, and ask them to make telephone calls in case of an early closing.

Occasionally it is necessary to delay the opening of school. Please listen carefully to school announcements on the radio or television during inclement weather. Again, a notice will be posted over email if the opening of school is going to be delayed. We know that such delays are disruptive to everyone and request that you make every effort to bring your children at the announced time.

PLEASE DO NOT ASSUME THAT IF NEWTON SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED, HAVE A DELAYED OPENING, OR ARE CLOSING EARLY THAT RASHI WILL BE DOING THE SAME. The Rashi School will always appear as a separate listing in case of a change to the regular school day.

In the case of storms that develop during the day, we try to keep the School open and will only close under emergency circumstances. If this should occur, the School will contact parents via email and an announcement will be placed with the media outlets listed above. Extended Day may be canceled when weather conditions are poor. If this is the case, you will need to make arrangements to pick up your child at regular dismissal time (3 pm) in order to ensure the safety of the children and staff.

Jennifer Miller Comes to Rashi

The atmosphere in the Rashi auditorium was emotionally charged as Jennifer Miller, Head of Rashi from 1992-2001, returned to celebrate Hanukkah with former colleagues, parents, and alumni. Jennifer is now living with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) and can no longer physically walk or talk.

"I may be silenced, but never unheard," Jennifer reported. She is participating in a diaphragm pacing study that is improving her breathing, and is taking an experimental medication. She uses head movements and sophisticated technology to create messages.

"I have grown accustomed to my new life and make every day meaningful. Professionally, I continue on as a PEJE [Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education] coach and love the work. I am developing a virtual reality program to teach early literacy skills to preschool children and I am working collaboratively with two faculty members at Case Western Reserve University.

"In addition, I have filmed conversations with family members and friends during the various stages of my disease. A

documentary movie is being developed, which will be followed by a book."

Jennifer reported that she is "supported tonight and everyday by the love and dedication of my amazing family and friends" including her husband, children, extended family members, friends and caretakers. She thanked Doreen Soffer and Matt King of Rashi for facilitating the event at the school, which included a Hanukkah songfest led by Rabbi David Paskin, Rashi's Judaic Studies Coordinator during Jennifer's tenure.

"What a wonderful opportunity to be back home tonight," Jennifer noted in a prepared PowerPoint presentation. "The support I have felt from the Rashi community since my illness reinforced my feeling that *belonging is forever*. The strength I drew from the individual messages and hundreds of letters comforted me, and provided me with the inspiration, that together we have a message for the world.

"I find it highly significant to be lighting the seventh Hanukkah candle at the Rashi School. Just as the Miracle of Hanukkah is the limited oil that keeps on burning, so I find that to live with purpose, conviction, strong values, and support of community is the oil that keeps us and me burning strong."

"Other dreams are becoming realities including a new and permanent Rashi home. I plan to lend financial support and anything I can do. I look forward to being at the groundbreaking and celebrate the coming home."

Jennifer was delighted to see so many of her former students – from recent Rashi graduates to alums who have graduated from college – at the event. Noting that her voice machine does not work in crowds, she suggested: "Look into my eyes and tell me a little something about yourself. This will bring me great pleasure, and, if my facial expressions may look serious be reassured I am experiencing joy beyond your wildest imagination."

Please write to Jennifer at JenAnneMiller@aol.com.



Jennifer Miller with Rabbi Rim Meiorowitz, Rashi's first Head of School, and Rabbi Hank Zoob, Founding President of Rashi

Life Events

Our condolences to Andrea Goldberg (mother of Gabriel, Grade 6) and her family on the passing of her father.

Gr. 8 Social Justice & Family Ed.

Connection to Second Step Battered Women's Shelter

On December 10, the Rashi and Leo Baeck eighth graders worked together to bring warmth and cheer to children who have been forced to leave their homes and move into a shelter due to domestic violence. Students looked at a text from *Derech Eretz Rabbah*, a minor Talmudic tractate, about those who perform acts of *tzedakah*, and then we began our project.

Working in groups of 4-5, students cut fringes around the perimeter of double-sided blanket pieces of fleece fabric and within 45 minutes, they had completed 10 twin sized blankets of multiple colors and patterns. We walked with the blankets to the battered-women's shelter. The Children and Family Services Coordinator, Jessica, explained that the shelter can house eight families of mothers and their children. Most, she said, were from other states and some have even come from other countries – the laws in their home states or countries are inadequate to protect them and/or their partner is highly motivated to find them. Families can remain in the shelter for up to two years, which is unusual, but the three-tier case management system has as its goals the vocational training and placement for the mothers, resolution of all governmental and legal issues, and assurance that the children attend school. Jessica told the students that for every family they accept into the shelter, they turn 20-30 families away.

Surprisingly, Jessica told us was that the shelter has a complete kosher kitchen – the first indication to many of our students that domestic violence also affects the Jewish community. Our students listened intently to Jessica's description of her work and asked several thoughtful and poignant questions. The experience left many of the Rashi students counting their blessings.

Family Education: Leadership in the Bible

Eighth-graders and their parents joined together for Rashi's first international Family Education Program, to consider the qualities and experiences of four biblical characters, and to "elect" a leader. In separate groups, participants studied texts on Saul, Samuel, David and Jonathan, and wrestled with the circumstances of each man's leadership, his qualifications for the position and how he conducted himself while leader. Our Israeli guests read the texts in Hebrew and provide insight into the nuances of the Hebrew narratives.

Groups then worked together to prepare an election campaign, including the writing of slogans, the preparation of campaign posters, and the composition and delivery of campaign speeches. Students and parents listened intently to the presentations of other groups, and the completed ballots were placed into the *kalpiot* – ballot boxes. Jonathan emerged victorious, followed by David, then Samuel and Saul. The Rashi and Leo Baeck students worked beautifully together on the English and Hebrew for the posters and the campaign speeches. It was an enjoyable and community-building learning experience for all involved.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

The Rashi School Annual Dinner May 20, 2008

Congregation Mishkan Tefila, Chestnut Hill

Honoring Marjorie and Bert Paley Rashi Grandparents

Lots more exciting details to follow

Website Update

Now on the www.rashi.org website: the latest issue of Rashi's "On the Inside" newsletter. This newsletter is also being mailed to all Rashi parents, grandparents, alumni parents, and friends of the school. To see the online copy, go to News & Events, then the Rashi in the News page, and click on the link on the left under Related Info.

New web page: Rashi is very proud of its partnership with the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University. Rashi is involved with two important Mandel Center projects: the MAT-JDA/DeLeT Day school Leadership through Teaching initiative (we have DeLeT fellows teaching at the school) and the Induction Partnership, which supports new teachers at Jewish day schools. We now have a page on our website with more information about this partnership. Go to the Learning tab, and click on the link under Related Info on the Learning at Rashi page. There is also a link from the Faculty page in the About Rashi section. Click on the What is DeLeT link under the faculty photo in the middle of the page.

Capital Campaign News

Our First Alumni Gift!

Rashi alum Madeline (Maddie) Kriger, Class of 2007, has stepped forward and generously pledged \$365 of her own money (without her parents' prior knowledge) to support the Capital Campaign. We are thrilled that the lessons of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam* that are learned both at home and at Rashi continue to inspire our alumni to ensure that others can benefit from a Rashi education.

Parent Participation Is Essential!

Volunteers and staff have been working diligently to contact each and every parent about participation in the Capital Campaign. Parent donations – whether they be \$18, \$1,800 or \$18,000 – show the community-at-large that you support the move to Dedham and that will, in turn, help raise additional funds. We are still hoping for 100% participation by the end of the year so if you have yet to send in your pledge - please do so today. Check the website for the list of donors.

Athletics

Girls Middle School: The girls continue to play great team basketball. Their win over Lexington Waldorf was marked by aggressive defense that challenged every shot and led to many steals. Pinpoint passing, accurate shooting and strong rebounding helped the girls' pull away in the second half. The girls are growing into a strong team under the leadership of coaches Venus Corriveau and Renee Gaudette.

Boys 7/8: Playing their signature fast-paced brand of basketball, our boys jumped out to an early lead against Lexington Waldorf in a game with two evenly matched squads. A furious comeback by the opponent led to a nail-biting conclusion. Our boys kept their poise. They played inspired defense, crashed the boards and made the big shots. Leading by 2 with only 30 seconds left, Rashi coolly ran the clock out and enjoyed the first victory of the young season.

Grade 6 Boys: Defense was the key to the game as our boys held on for an impressive victory over a talented squad from Fessenden. Rashi jumped out to an early lead and then had to hold off the charge of their determined opponent. The score became close as the game reached its final minutes but strong rebounding, timely shooting and an aggressive and opportunistic defense helped secure the team's first win of the season.

Yachad

MANY, MANY thanks to our crew of volunteers – some room parents and some just really good friends – who managed to call the entire school body last Thursday to inform all the parents of the early school closing. This was truly a Herculean effort, and our hats are off to you!!

Are you one of those people who tends to find out last minute about school closings? Do you not have time to read your e-mail? Here is a sure fire way to ensure that we all get the news in a timely way. **You can sign up to have the announcement texted to your cell phone(s)!!**

Simply click on the link below and follow the prompts. You will need to know your cell service provider to be able to get the information as a text. We would like to encourage the entire school body to sign up for this free service to ensure the safety of all our children should we need to close early again.

<http://www.thebostonchannel.com/closings/index.html>

As always, a big thank you to all our Pizza and Challah volunteers. The children love seeing you all around the school. Your help makes our job so much easier and more fun.

We hope that you all have a warm, peaceful and restful winter break. Enjoy your time together as a family. We will look forward to seeing you in January.

Andie Insoft and Susan Altman

Community News

Rabbi David Paskin and Menachem Creditor in concert Tuesday, December 25 at 4:30 pm, at Temple Beth Abraham-Canton. Children/teens are free; \$5.00 per adult. A Kosher meat dinner (separate cost) will be available after the concert. For more information: 781 828-5250

Celebrate New Year's Eve with the Amir Milstein Ensemble at Boston's First Night Festival, December 31, 7:30 and 8:45 pm, Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston St., Boston. Amir Milstein is a former Rashi Hebrew teacher. His ensemble (Amir Milstein – Flute, Alon Yavnai – Piano, Eric Doob – Drums, Rafi Malkiel- Trombone, euphonium, Haggai Cohen Milo – Bass, and David Rumpler – Cavaquinho) will present a diverse program of music from around the world: Brazilian traditional sambas, Bulgarian folk tunes, Israeli songs and classical compositions along with original music, all specially arranged for the First Night concert. For additional information go to: <http://www.firstnight.org/FirstNight2008/Events/Search.aspx?id=130>