For the 2003-04 academic year ATID invited three of our alumni to return as staff members, working on an intensive policy analysis and proposal for Jewish schools. Dr. Yovel Finkelman, updates us on the work he, Aliza Segal and Chaviva Speter have undertaken...

School reform is a long and difficult process. For the most part, change is reactive, responding to immediate problems that require resolution, rather than pro-active determining how such a vision could be formulated, and then to "work backwards" in charting a path for making that happen.

We have responded to that challenge by arguing that education can harness the energy and motivation which teens exhibit for many things, though often not for school. Adopting aspects of a traditional Beit Midrash, combined with theories and pedagogies from general educational that emphasize student choice and academic independence, we believe that it may be possible to radically improve students' motivation, academic achievement, and ultimately, identity with Torah and its values.

As we began our work we divided our attention in three primary directions. First, we have been visiting and observing schools, both in Israel and the United States, and speaking with leading educators about student independence and the use of the Beit Midrash. Second, we have been examining the professional literature about academic independence, from both Jewish and general perspectives. Finally, we have been mapping out several models of new schools which could work to encourage student independence and motivation, without losing track of the good elements in the existing system.

With the ongoing assistance of the rest of the ATID faculty we are beginning to formulate a policy statement that will include an ideological statement about the place of independent learning in Torah education, a vision of the ideal school which could be created, and suggestions for implementation by existing schools under concrete and often limited conditions. This policy statement will help jar some of the existing status quo in Orthodox education, beginning a conversation that can help enrich both the theory and practice of Torah learning for contemporary Jewish youth.

Starting in September 2004 we will be implementing an experimental version of our program in one of Jerusalem's leading high schools, which will be a laboratory site in which we can evaluate our proposals, and serve as a model of innovation for other schools.

Joining Finkelman, Segal and Speter is Rabbi Yair Kahn, a veteran ATID mentor, and longtime faculty member of Talmud Torah Har Etzion: “ATID deals with the challenges of Torah education, which are of paramount significance since Talmud Torah is not only to prepare for life, but reflects the Jewish way of life itself. It has been exciting to try to meet these challenges together with talented young educators, who can be refreshingly novel in their approach while being totally committed to tradition.” Rabbi Kahn serves as a resource to the project, and will be contributing a section on the particular challenges of contemporary Talmud study and teaching.

To inaugurate a series of planned initiatives on the topic of the arts in Torah education, ATID sponsored its first New York conference, Creative Spirituality: Jewish Education and the Arts. Convened by ATID President, Rabbi Chaim Brovender, the November 2003 event was co-sponsored by the Yeshiva University Museum, and drew over 150 Jewish educators and artists for a daylong program to discuss, debate, and collaborate on issues related to the place and use of the creative arts in Jewish education.

"Often, art in the Jewish day school has been limited to narrow purposes," explained Rabbi Brovender. "ATID is interested in addressing the question of what are the values and ideas inherent in the visual and creative arts that makes them compelling, and how can they be used to reinvigorate the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvot—practices that have tragically become, for many students, devoid of mystery and wonder, and what do these ideas and values mean for our work in schools?"

Three conference sessions examined the challenges and possibilities—from the perspective of the rabbinic tradition, from the artist's studio, and finally the view from the schools house: Among the conference highlights was the hands-on workshop with artists, in which the participants were asked to draw, “as a way of exploring the potential of the act of creating as a model and trigger for the ‘slowing-down’ process, which might be the same as the need to enter fully,” explained workshop leader, Artist Ophir Agassi.

Yet, introducing art—both actual creativity as well as harnessed an appreciation for beauty and wonder—to day school education remains a challenge. “ATID’s dedication to exploring the possibilities and launching initiatives in this area will be among the many ways we are working to improve the state of contemporary Torah education,” explained Rabbi Jeffrey Saks, ATID’s director.

Rabbi Brovender compared the unique quality of beauty found in nature or created artworks to the uniqueness found in the truth embedded in Torah. “Paradoxically, neither is ever totally satisfying—we always feel a need to experience more beauty and truth!” A parallel conference to be held in Jerusalem will take place in the late Spring 2004.

To join ATID’s e-mail discussion forum “ATID ART,” and join concerned colleagues in the virtual debate and dialogue on ways to incorporate the arts into our teaching—send e-mail to atidart@atid.org.
"WISDOM" ON YOUR SHELF

ATID’s first book-length publication has recently appeared. Edited by ATID director, Rabbi Jeffrey Saks, and Prof. Susan Handelman, *Wisdom From All My Teachers* contains twenty original essays by leading teachers of Torah from around the globe. Containing reflections on the challenges, methods, and goals of teaching Torah by leading Jewish educators from Israel and the Diaspora, the volume features writings by leading figures such as Rabbi Norman Lamm, Aharon Lichtenstein, Shalom Carmy, and Drs. Beverly Gribetz and Joel B. Wolowelsky. Visit www.atid.org to view Table of Contents, author bios, and a “look inside” to sample chapters. The volume is available through all fine bookstores, and through our website. These essays will stimulate all who feel strongly about the future of Torah teaching.

“NOTES FROM ATID”

ATID has continued to produce trend-setting and insightful monographs in its “Notes From ATID” series. Most recently, we published *Havruta Study: History, Benefits, and Enhancements* by ATID Senior Fellow Aliza Segal. Examining the history of be-havruta, Segal describes the benefits, and evaluates whether two models from the world of general education—cooperative learning and the cognitive approach—may enhance the havruta system in Day Schools.

Another new title in the series is Rabbi Shalom Carmy’s *Letter to a Philosopical Dropout From Orthodoxy*—offering insight into what it means to be religiously alive, and philosophically engaged by one’s Judaism, in the form of a letter to a questioning student. Teachers, rabbis, counselors, and parents entrusted with guiding children, young adults, and all seekers of religious truth, will find value in the disputation of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude which too often limits Orthodox Judaism to a set of demonstrable normative acts, evacuating the inner meaning, depth, and force of a philosophically engaged, multi-dimensional Jewish life.

The “Notes From ATID” series has been distributed to North American yeshiva high schools through a partnership with the Association of Modern Orthodox Day Schools (AMODS).

FOCUS: ATID ALUMNI

In this issue we feature the work of three alumni of the ATID Fellows program.

ADINA EIBER was admitted to the Israeli bar as a lawyer before making the career-switch to being a teacher. Following her work in the military, Mrs. Eiber taught in a variety of high schools, from urban to ultra-Orthodox. Her efforts to make her students’ learning experience more engaging have resulted in an award for innovative teaching, and in her role as curriculum advisor at the Mir Yeshiva.

MOSHE (KINLEY) TUR-PAZ is a teacher in Jerusalem’s Pelekh School and Chairman of Ne’emanei Torah va-Avodah. As a first-year teacher and 9th grade enosh (home-room teacher with primary responsibility for the class) at Ulpanat Amit Noga in Beit Shemesh, my responsibility of running a class of 23 is a challenging one. I find that the daily tasks of preparing lesson plans for my 8th graders, managing classes, as well as teaching care of students’ individual needs and attending meetings, consumes much of my energy and does not enable me to invest the time I would like in thinking about my teaching and the relationship between what I am doing and the greater goals of Jewish education. I am grateful to have had the time and place to think about these essential issues while I was an ATID fellow. The skills and approach I gained influence the way I view my role as an educator. The research project I worked on during my years at ATID focused on middot and character education (especially for young women, like those I teach), as well as the way school leadership works to bring vision and goals into the hard work of schooling. That work, as well as the relationships I formed with the other fellows and my mentor, continues to spare me much frustration and misunderstanding which I might have experienced as a new teacher in a new, developing school.

MICHELLE BERKOWITZ, taught in a variety of settings, from nursery school to high school, before founding an educational consultancy firm. She received her bachelors in Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, and her Ph.D. in Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1999. Since then, Michelle has been involved in a number of educational projects, including working as an ATID Fellow.

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SUPPORT US

Join ATID in its mission to effect positive change in the world of Jewish education through training outstanding educational leadership, working with teachers and schools, and producing sophisticated teaching and resource materials. Various initiatives and publications are available for dedication. ATID is a 501C3 charity in the United States via its American funding body, Torah Education in Israel (TEI). Please contact our office to discuss ways that your gift will help make a difference for Jewish education.

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ATID is an independent institution fostering new and significant thought and strategies for the crucial issues facing Jewish education, both in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbi Chaim Brovender, President, ATID
Rabbi Jeffrey Saks, Director

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