

An environment that inspires enthusiasm for learning while fostering creativity and openness is the ideal setting for establishing the desire to learn. Connecting an engaging learning environment with a positive learning experience leads to innovative educational approaches. Museums are often able to provide such engaging learning settings. By interacting with art and artifacts, museums extend the learning experience beyond the visual and auditory into the tactile and experiential. It is this open exploration through art that captivates audiences and creates the passion to continue learning.

Bridges of Understanding, a program of the Mizel Museum of Judaica, applies this educational philosophy to teaching cultural diversity. In this multicultural program visitors explore six cultures through interaction with art while surrounded by the colorful collection of international artifacts. In an open, fun, creative context this program encourages students to learn about themselves while exploring the world.

Ellen Rosenthal is the Jewish Education Coordinator at the Mizel Museum of Judaica in Denver, Colorado.

Informal education is the teaching and learning that takes place as we breathe, as our hearts beat. Judaism surrounds us like the air we breathe. Like the beating of our hearts, informal education takes this all-encompassing nature of Judaism into account.

Learning and teaching do not take place only within the classroom. In Deuteronomy 6:7 we read the words *v'shinantam l'vanecha*. Informal educators can learn a great deal from and maybe offer some advice to, parents who teach their children not in a classroom but at home. What is it we are commanded to teach our children? The Torah inscribed on our hearts.

The Torah words inscribed on our hearts should not remain private; if so, we are not teaching, we are not passing Torah from our lips to our students' hearts.

Bradley Solmsen, a recent graduate of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, is the newly appointed Director of Genesis at Brandeis University.

אין אדם לומד תורה אלא ממקום שלבו חפץ

A person will not / cannot learn Torah unless it begins at a place where his / her heart desires.

Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 19a

This amazing educational statement, penned some 1500 years ago, is the rabbinic formulation of a critical principle of education — that for a learner to assimilate knowledge and ideas, one must begin at the proper intellectual and emotional juncture of what is known and what is to be learned. It speaks to the importance of knowing your learners and how they will respond to various educational approaches. This is true of all learning — formal schooling or informal camping as well as youth work.

A second version of this statement (with only a minor change) appears on the very same page of the Talmud.

Ayn adam lomed Torah ella B'MAKOM she-lebo chafetz.

A person can / will not learn Torah except IN A PLACE that touches his or her heart.

This version is even more striking because it addresses the principle, the heart, of informal education. If the learner does not love the place, the context, the environment in which s/he is taught Torah, then it will not touch nor stay with her. This is why quality Jewish camping and youth work is so important and so effective. By definition camping and youth work begin with the heart and emotions of the learner and create environments of care and love that help a child grow as a person and as a Jew.

Truth be told, every Jewish formal educational setting should also learn this second lesson and apply it to the school environment. In the end, if the learner is to acquire Torah — its content and values — s/he must love it and it must touch the heart.

Dr. Sheldon Dorph is National Director of Camp Ramah.

After my own experiences in camps and youth groups, I always looked for the makom, the place where individuals are most likely to learn a core teaching. This was particularly challenging in the context of Panim el Panim, a D.C.-based high school program for students synthesizing Judaism and social/political activism. A generation of privileged and cynical teens can be a tough sell.

And then I met a rebbe named Jesse on the street. Jesse was a black homeless man who had gathered some 30-50 other homeless folk to sleep each night under the Federal Reserve building, providing one another with the comradery and security to survive the urban jungle. After meeting Jesse, I began to bring Panim teens onto the street to sit and talk with the homeless and encounter their humanity. We used the experience to teach the lesson that every human being deserves to be treated as if he or she were created in the image of God (b'tzelem Elohim). From that lesson flows much of the motivation for political and social activism. We call the experience "Street Torah" — Torah never as powerfully understood as in that makom.

Rabbi Sid Schwarz is the founder and president of the Washington Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values and creator of Panim el Panim: High School in Washington. He is the author of *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews can Transform the American Synagogue*.

*NiSh'ma is the Hebrew word for "let us hear."