

My senior year was the first year in this building - I was in the inaugural graduating class of what was then the Denver Campus for Jewish Education at Herzl/RMHA - and in the sixteen years since I walked these halls I've spent a fair amount of time wondering if we all really do peak in high school.

I don't mean socially - I feel confident that I'm at a peak social stage right now: my toddler and I like to watch Daniel Tiger, drink chocolate milk and go to bed by 8 on a Saturday night. (I see you all, you're jealous...)

My high school experience, however, continues to set the standard for my understanding of balance, something I have yet to master in my adult life. In this place, I was simultaneously given roots and wings, I was safe but gained independence. I was supported and yet asked to try on my own. There was a healthy distribution to the way I spent my time - and there was a steady interplay between growth and patience, individuality and community, between fear and courage, confidence and self-discovery, between commitment and experimentation.

I'm not sure any of us live in this kind of utopia anymore but we all seek this equilibrium - and I wonder, what would it be like to return to the *balance* of these halls? Is it even possible?

I think first, we'd need to better understand the idea of balance. As the daughter of a judge and a law professor, when I think of balance, I picture the scales of justice. As a toddler mom, I think of a see-saw. Both of these visuals imply that balance is EXACT - that somewhere, if you are slow enough and careful enough and intentional enough - with just the right amount of weight on each side, there is a split second of absolute perfection and if we can just reach it, the scales will be *exactly* and effortlessly balanced - and, if we do reach that perfect balance: we'd better not move, or breathe, or blink - or the entire structure crumbles.

Seems like we're setting ourselves up for disappointment. But perhaps these halls can teach us a different model. The modern Hebrew term for balance is *izun*. There are two other words that are related to *izun* that are going to teach us what balance actually means. The first is *ozen* - or EAR and the second is *l'ha'azin*: which means to listen. All three of these words: *ozen*, *izun* and *l'ha'azin*, come from the same root - and how interesting is the idea that our ears - and how we listen - come from balance?

How? Let me explain. Let's start with *izun* and *ozen* - It seems that even as far back as the Bible, it was well-known that the ears played a crucial role in the body's regulation of balance and equilibrium. And while the science behind the relationship between ears and balance isn't my strength (sorry Mrs. Knowles) I do know that the tiny hairs and fluid tubes in the inner ear canals completely control our sense of balance.

But it is the third word - *l'ha'azin* - which really helps us understand. *L'ha'azin* is a different kind of listening. It does NOT mean "to listen to what is said EXPLICITLY." For that, we would use the word *Shema*, which also means to listen. *Shema* is the word used in all the metaphors in the Talmud that speak to our explicit learning, our understanding of information, we think of *Ta Shema* - come and learn. Or *Ka Mashma Lan* - it teaches us this. Or *Shema Mina* - we learn from this. They all use the word *Shema*. **We hear it, so we understand it and then we know it.**

But *l'ha'azin* is a different kind of listening. Rabbi Eliezer of Worms teaches that this is not the kind of listening from which we learn that Talmud or biology or math - where a fact is taught and then we know the fact. *L'ha'azin* refers to the process of listening to the world around us and then inferring from it the grounding information that allows us to find balance. It is what we learn **implicitly** from existing in a place that nurtures us.

Let me be clear - the **explicit** lessons that we learn in our lives - and that the students learn here at Denver Jewish Day School are real and important. The intense and intentional dual curriculum that grounds our students in both Judaic and secular learning, the information imparted in these hallowed halls by beloved teachers and faculty, the rigorous academic standards to which our students are held - all of these help them find acceptance to prestigious universities and post-high school programs all over the world and give them tools for success.

And yet, I would venture to say that it is not the explicit lessons that are the most powerful for our students. It is the gift of *l'ha'azin* and implicit listening that makes Denver Jewish Day School so special.

When you just heard Josh Lake tell you about all of those students who overcome obstacles and fears to find their strengths, what he didn't tell you was the hours of time he and the other faculty spend coaching and supporting and believing in those students.

When you heard Izzy Barter (who will, I believe, be the one to invent the way to survive a black hole) talk about his secret invention society, what he didn't say was that there are seven kids who are given the space and the resources and the freedom to engage, every day, in incredibly powerful moments of imagination.

When you heard Alyssa Kaufmann tell you about Mia grabbing her by the hand and dragging her to the front row, what she didn't articulate is the confidence - and acceptance - she gained from that first moment of inter-grade and intergenerational friendship and mentorship - or that it is one moment of many that will continue to ground her throughout high school.

And when you heard Jori tell you about a hug in the parking lot on her first day, what she didn't say - and what she doesn't have to - is how that hug must have quieted an unimaginable anxiety.

And that's just it. In a world where our kids are navigating high pressure, high stress, high anxiety lives, they have only to *ozen, izun, l'ha'azin* to stop, and use their natural capacity for balance to listen. And through the homework and the color wars and the Tiger's basketball and planting in the farmette and the Shabbatons, they can hear the *implicit* lesson that **they belong here**. That they are a part of something bigger, part of a community that loves them and wants them and values them. And when life gets hard - and it will - that balance grows in them a powerful resilience so that they not only survive the hard, they grow through it.

And when we hear what is not said, but what is implied through the actions of our teachers and these students and this community - we use our ears - not only for the listening but for the **balance** we seek.

And that is the magic of this place. It is the marriage of the explicit - our curriculum and academic experience - with the implicit - our community and its powerful gift of belonging and acceptance - that creates in our students the balance we so desperately seek. While we ourselves may indeed have peaked in high school and cannot return to this magical place of self-discovery and identity building - we can learn from it - and we can help to grow it for the next generation.

So today, join me in supporting an institution which has, for generations, taught its students to be great listeners. Help them hear - through our explicit words and our implicit actions, the power of their own worthiness. Help them hear the possibilities in their own imagination. Help them hear the ongoing development of their own identities. Help them hear the unwavering commitment of their teachers and administration and board and alumni and community. And help them hear the resilience - the courage - and the balance - that they will find in the power of belonging.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks teaches us that "Crowds are moved by good speakers, but lives are changed by great listeners."