

An Inner Life: Your Child's Spirituality

BY MAUREEN SHERRY-KLINSKY

The New York child's life often seems to be full of tangibles: there are so many things to want and to buy, and there is little time for reflection in a schedule packed with academic pressures and extra-curricular activities. Where do the "intangibles" fit in? How and when do children begin to consider questions about God, about prayer, about the spiritual dimension of their lives? A panel of religious leaders and educators gathered on April 19th, 2004 to describe their own religious paths and their experiences working with young people, and to share thoughts on how parents might guide children towards a more spiritual, meaningful life.

"At some point in a child's life there is a transition from head knowledge to heart knowledge," said panelist R.J. Heijmen of FOCUS (Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools). The panelists all agreed that parents must be completely open and available to answer questions as honestly as possible, in order to help a child find his own spiritual voice.

As Reverend Forrest Church, senior minister of All Souls (Unitarian) Church put it, "Children see hypocrisy quickly. If you want your child to be religious, to follow your path, then watch your actions as much as, if not more than, your words." He cited, as an example, the parents who expect to drop off a child at Sunday School and go out to brunch instead of attending services themselves. "The parent is the most influential teacher in a child's spiritual life," he added. Offering unconditional love, and celebrating children for who they are, not what you want them to be, are ways that parents can provide a climate in which children feel free to share more of their questions and their passions.

Reverend Church emphasized that, though you can show children the way to God, religion cannot be forced. In his own close family, Reverend Church has four grown children—two are active in religious institutions, and two are not interested in organized religion. Increasingly today, many families are the product of interfaith marriages. The panel seemed united in their belief that this was a fertile chance to celebrate individual religious freedom. As Reverend Church said, "We need not think alike to love alike."

It is through song and music that Cantor Ida Rae Cahana from Central Synagogue created her own relationship with God, and with that gift she touches young people, nurturing their hunger for a more spiritual life. She believes that as children develop faith, they often have a better sense of themselves in the world. Her message to young people is: "You make the world better by working in partnership with God." To create that feeling of partnership, she advises bringing kids into situations where they feel they are doing something meaningful, and something that makes a difference.

A house of worship can provide a home away from home for children and young adults. This theme of identity and sense of belonging was an integral part of Debbie Almontaser's comments. Ms. Almontaser is a cultural diversity consultant for the Board of Education who works in school settings to resolve conflicts stemming from diverse beliefs or backgrounds. She is also an Islamic woman who works with young Muslims to help them find their own religious voices, and to explore current and controversial issues. "After 9/11, children came to our mosque's youth center, and spoke of feeling betrayed in the name of their faith. Children started to grasp how religion can be used to push political agendas." Her

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PRESIDENT'S Letter

2004–2005

Welcome back from summer vacation! This is NYC-Parents in Action's 26th year, and we are looking forward to providing you with many exciting programs. Last year was our most successful ever: we inaugurated the Lynn Manger Lecture Series, through which we presented eight seminars; we held more than 200 facilitated discussion groups in 40 schools; we sent three editions of our newsletter to 26,000 independent school families; and we got our website (www.parentsinaction.org) up and filled with information.

This year we are adding another dimension to the resources we provide. We are now associated with Partnership for a Drug-Free America (PDFA). As many of you are aware, PDFA does invaluable research on drug and alcohol use, and creates high-impact advertising to promote parent awareness and prevent teenage drug use. Our collaboration with PDFA will enhance the information we provide to you, with an additional page in our newsletter (beginning with the winter edition) devoted to PDFA news and a link from our website to the important data that PDFA gathers. In addition, experts from their staff will join our panels. The belief of NYC-Parents in Action is: "Effective parenting is substance abuse prevention." The association with PDFA will help support our mission.

Our theme this year is "The Price of Perfection: Are we losing the real child in the race for success?" It poses a question that parents will probably consider individually, but we hope to stimulate thought and discussion with our programs. For fall and winter, we will bring you:

- **October 14, 2004**, 8:30 to 10:00 am at the 92nd Street Y: "Looking for Relief: Stress and Its Fallout," a panel discussion featuring Dr. Stephen Rudin of Individual U, Dr. Ralph Lopez, Ginna Marston, founding member of PDFA, and Jeanette Friedman of the Caron Foundation.
- **October 19, 2004**, 6:00 to 7:30 pm at All Souls Church, co-sponsored with Resources for Children with Special Needs and Parents League: a lecture by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and Dr. Joshua Sparrow entitled "Touchpoints of Emotional Development: Foundations for Learning." Drs. Brazelton and Sparrow will discuss social and emotional development as it affects learning from early childhood through adolescence.
- **December 7, 2004**, 8:30 to 10:00 am at the 92nd Street Y, co-sponsored with KiDS of NYU Foundation, Inc.: "What's Normal? Is It a Problem, Your Child's Temperament, or Just a Phase?" Our panel will feature Dr. Alan Wachtel, Dr. Stanley Turecki, Dr. Roy Boorady and Dr. Matt Cruger.
- **February 7, 2005**, 6:00 to 7:30 pm, at Trinity School, co-sponsored with Parents League: Teen Scene XIX.

Please consult our calendar for details and look for flyers in your school mailings for information on how to reserve places at these seminars.

In addition to our seminars, this year we are opening up to the public, on a limited basis, three special lunchtime forums on topics related to our seminar theme. They will feature as speakers Stephen J. Pasierb, President and CEO of PDFA; Jean Mandelbaum, Ph.D., Head of All Souls School; Edes Gilbert, educational consultant and former Head of School at Spence; and Thomas Lickona, Ph.D., Professor of Education at the State University of New York at Cortland and author of *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*. Please check our website in October for details on how you might join us for this series.

NYC-Parents in Action is a not-for-profit organization, staffed by volunteers, and we raise money for

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VOLUNTEER AT NYC-PARENTS IN ACTION

The Webteam at NYC-PIA needs volunteers to help keep the website updated and information-packed. Volunteers do not need website experience, but should have good basic computer skills.

For more information, send us an e-mail at website@parentsinaction.org
Or call 212-987-9629

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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our services through individual contributions. Many in our community have been extraordinarily generous in donating to the Lynn Manger Lecture Series, in attending our benefit, or contributing through our newsletter. We are committed to continuing to provide all our services free of charge. If you find these resources valuable, please consider making a contribution this year to help us continue our work.

Remember that even if you cannot make it to our events, you can read about them in our newsletter and on our website. We welcome your thoughts and participation. Please email me at president@parentsinaction.org with your comments and ideas. I look forward to hearing from you and to our exciting year ahead.

— CELESTE RAULT

BOOK NOTES

Some inspirational reads for the new school year —

- LIFE'S GREATEST LESSONS: 20 THINGS THAT MATTER
by Hal Urban
- THE TROUBLE WITH PERFECT: HOW PARENTS CAN AVOID THE OVERACHIEVEMENT TRAP AND STILL RAISE SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN
by Elisabeth Guthrie M.D., Kathy Matthews
- WITH LOVE AND PRAYERS: A HEADMASTER SPEAKS TO THE NEXT GENERATION
by F. Washington Jarvis, Peter J. Gomes
- THE WORLD ACCORDING TO MR. ROGERS : IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER
by Fred Rogers

To purchase these and our other recommended readings please visit BOOK NOTES at www.parentsinaction.org.

School Representatives

Allen Stevenson School	Noreene Storrie
Berkeley Carroll School	Julie Riskin
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Gateway School	Heather Leeds
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Hewitt School	Laurie Gorfine, Barbara Loveless
Horace Mann Upper/Middle School.....	Lubna Farugi
Loyola.....	Mary Jane Haher
Marymount School	Robin Kelly, Maura Grossi
Nightingale-Bamford School.....	Laura Hong, Jennie Corbett, Elena Kissel
Packer Collegiate Institute	Tracy Brown, Lisa Bedell
Riverdale Country School.....	Carol Cohen Zelikovic
Riverdale Lower School.....	Maura Donovan
Rodeph Sholom School	Caryl Uzelac, Ruth Ades
Sacred Heart, Convent of the.....	Rebecca Lainovic, Cynthia Scrudato, Veronica DeBernardine
Saint David's.....	Devon Egdahmi

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Q&A WITH JEANETTE FRIEDMAN



Dealing with Drugs: Some Tips for Parents

BY EVA POMICE TIMERMAN

Parents are often blind-sided when it comes to drug use and their adolescents. They don't know what to look for, or how to react when they see it. By the time they realize their child has a dependency, parents can't cope with it alone. Jeanette Friedman, director of adolescent services at the New York office of the Caron Foundation, spoke with newsletter editor Eva Pomice Timerman about adolescent drug use. The Caron Foundation, of Wernersville, PA, is an inpatient facility that uses a twelve-step approach to helping adolescents conquer addiction.

Q NYC-PIA: Why are drugs especially dangerous to adolescents?

A FRIEDMAN: The brain of a teenager is like a construction site. Parts of it are not mature. The prefrontal cortex, the area over your forehead, is the last to develop in adolescents, and that's the area that controls judgment and impulses. Smoking pot, for instance, and even periodic alcohol use, compromise an adolescent's ability to develop judgment and self-control.

Q NYC-PIA: Is the damage done by adolescent drug abuse permanent?

A FRIEDMAN: That depends. For some, certainly. The problem is that drugs not only affect the brain but the whole personality. With kids who regularly use drugs, a developmental interruption occurs. Adolescence is the time to practice dealing with problems and finding solutions. It's a time when children develop self-control and good judgment. They learn social and coping skills. Drugs cushion adolescents from learning those lessons and prevent them from experiencing themselves. They don't get that back at twenty-five. They then feel humiliated because there's so much they haven't learned, compared to their peers.

Q NYC-PIA: Do drugs affect girls differently than boys?

A FRIEDMAN: Females are much more vulnerable to the effects of drug use for social, physical and hormonal reasons. Research shows that females addict faster, and it takes less of a substance to get to them in a shorter period of time. It also makes them vulnerable to sexual abuse. A lot of early sexual activity is alcohol-induced. Many girls say that the only way they could do what a boy wanted was to drink.

Q NYC-PIA: How has the drug scene changed over the last ten years?

A FRIEDMAN: Overall drug use among adolescents has lessened very slightly. But that doesn't change the reality that, for the kids who are most vulnerable, substance abuse rates are not lower. And drugs like marijuana are far more potent than they used to be.

Q NYC-PIA: What are the signs that your child may be abusing drugs?

A FRIEDMAN: Adolescents are going through so many changes that it's sometimes hard to tell what's normal from what's not. And many overt signs of substance abuse can also be signs of depression — sleep problems, mood swings, a change of friends. You need to be aware of changes and watch for signs that signal internal changes — dropping a beloved hobby, for instance. One symptom of possible drug abuse is that adolescents lose the ability to be self-aware. They get careless about their appearance and their behavior, they don't take showers, repeatedly forget their homework, that sort of thing.

Q NYC-PIA: Cigarette smoking seems to be a teen right of passage. Is it something parents should worry about?

A FRIEDMAN: Early cigarette smoking is a big tip-off for later problems, because kids are discovering how to get a mood change from a substance — nicotine is an anxiety reducer. This group of early smokers also socially self-selects. These are the same kids who try alcohol and drugs early. Depressed children are often drawn to cigarette-smoking.

Q NYC-PIA: Drugs seem to be everywhere. What role do parents play in trying to keep their children from using drugs?

A FRIEDMAN: There are two areas where parents have the most control: access and supervision. Kids who have access to substances and kids who are poorly-supervised are often the ones who develop a problem.

Q NYC-PIA: Should parents panic if they find out their child experimented with drugs?

A FRIEDMAN: It depends. Engage your child in a real conversation. If your child says "I know you don't want me to do drugs, and I won't try them again," you're off to a good start. The problem answer is: "Everybody does it. It's no big deal." And parents have to be very clear about not tolerating drug use. If they say "I understand you're going

NYC-Parents in Action Family Benefit

Sunday, April 17, 2005
at The New Victory Theater

Suited for families with children 3-12 years

to experiment, but don't go too far," adolescents will hear that as permission. There's no such thing as a mature child. Kids need to hear parents say "no," and set clear limits and consequences, before the child develops a dependency. Consequences aren't effective once a child is addicted.

Q NYC-PIA: Why do parents sometimes miss the obvious? They can be the last to know.

A FRIEDMAN: All parents want to do the right thing. But sometimes parents are not aware of what to look for, or they don't like what they see. If you are really worried, denial sets in. This can be especially true when you have people who are high-achieving and used to controlling their own environment. These parents can have problems with a child who is less than what they expected. They don't deal with it. And that goes not only for substance abuse, but for undiagnosed mental health problems as well. Those issues make children vulnerable to drug abuse, because undiagnosed children sometimes self-medicate.

Q NYC-PIA: Do teenage substance abusers fit a certain profile?

A FRIEDMAN: No. It happens with wealthy kids, poor kids, anxious kids, bored kids, really intelligent kids and kids who have learning issues. In psychological terms, the kids who are most vulnerable are vulnerable to everything. For someone who is socially anxious, smoking pot, for example, provides a ready-made social group and the illusion of relaxation and peace. Depressed teens self-medicate with drugs. But the slacker image is misleading. Kids who are getting all A's can develop a drug problem, but they won't keep getting A's. We worked with a girl who was a straight-A student, athletic, popular. She graduated from a private school in New York, went to an Ivy League college, met up with boy she knew from the city who dealt drugs, and became addicted to cocaine. Only when she failed a class did she seek help.

Q NYC-PIA: Is drug abuse prevalent in the independent school community?

A FRIEDMAN: Children from affluent, driven families are at high risk. We get back to access and supervision. In terms of access, this kid has money in his pocket. He can easily get \$100 to spend on drugs. There's also a certain kind of entitlement that goes with affluence, and a pseudo-

sophistication — the whipping out a credit card at Barney's kind of thing — that plays into it. And while there are parents out there who set strict limits, and are around to watch their children, many others are busy with work or social obligations and leave a housekeeper in charge of the kids. Many caretakers are in a subservient position to the child, and are not adequate supervisors for teenagers. Kids all look for the empty apartment. And you come across a lot of teens who aren't too worried about the consequences, because their parents are unable to set limits in the fear they will lose their child's affection.

Q NYC-PIA: You talked about access. Where do kids buy drugs?

A FRIEDMAN: Drug dealers in New York independent schools are often students themselves, or well-known people who hang out around the schools. They don't look scary, they look cool and fit in with the kids they are dealing to. Everyone knows who they are. It's amazing they don't get caught, but they often don't.

Q NYC-PIA: What about the problem posed by misuse of legal drugs?

A FRIEDMAN: Obviously, alcohol does the most damage, because it's the most available. Kids are also buying prescription drugs like Ritalin and Aderol from their friends who are medicated. Kids who aren't popular may give drugs away to make friends. Kids crush them up and snort them. Once they get that buzz, they start doing cocaine. By the way, there is widespread coke use among affluent, attractive private school females in New York, because it helps them lose weight.

Q NYC-PIA: How can parents control that access?

A FRIEDMAN: Properly prescribed, these medications will help kids avoid drug use, because a kid doesn't have to self-medicate with illegal drugs. But don't allow a teenager to walk around with his own bottle of pills. Give them to him, and watch him take them.

Parents need to keep their own medicines out of reach as well. Teenagers, and often their friends, raid their parents' medicine cabinets for Ambien, Xanax, or painkillers like Percoset. Adolescents mix them with alcohol to get high, and that can cause blackouts. To be safe, everything should be kept under lock and key.

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Q&A: DEALING WITH DRUGS

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Q NYC-PIA: Are there over-the-counter drugs that parents should watch out for?

A FRIEDMAN: Cold medicines like Coricidin can make adolescents high. They have a “speedy” effect. Kids will also take medicines like Nyquil, because they have a lot of alcohol.

Q NYC-PIA: What are the treatment options for a child with a drug problem?

A FRIEDMAN: First of all, parents can neither talk nor scare their kids out of the problem. Parents have to step in for the child, because kids who are rational don’t have a drug problem to begin with. There are inpatient and outpatient facilities. There are excellent wilderness therapy programs that children can do in three weeks or over the summer. There are also new schools developing that provide kids with a chance to continue their development in

a safe setting. Families no longer have to be stuck with only seeing a therapist once a week. The resources are out there, and treatment works. ●

WANTED:

Articulate and supportive men and women who are interested in learning how to facilitate NYC-Parents In Action discussion groups. You will be professionally trained in group dynamics in order to guide parents through meetings on a variety of parenting topics. Most meetings are held in Manhattan but we need facilitators who live in Brooklyn or are willing to travel to Brooklyn.

**Training sessions begin in September.
Please call 212 426-0240 for more information.**

YOUR CHILD’S SPIRITUALITY

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youth center is the perfect place to discuss these feelings openly and not be judged.

School groups can help foster spiritual growth. In several private schools there is a group called FOCUS, (Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools) a ministry whose purpose is to guide sixth through twelfth-graders on a more spiritual path. The regional director, R.J. Heijmen, feels that sixth grade is a point of demarcation, an age at which children begin to prefer learning from peers rather than parents. In small groups the children explore God’s unconditional love, and learn how it can transform lives.

Rabbi Daniel Alder, from The Brotherhood Synagogue, eloquently summarized why this is all so important. Describing the early questions children have, the “really” questions like “Did Noah ‘really’ gather all the animals in the ark?” he labeled them as the earliest signs of children’s interest in philosophy and theology. “We must pay attention to first questions and first answers, for they carry crucial consequences for spiritual growth,” he suggested. Questions about the bible

or about religion are really about the religious understanding of reality. Ultimately, children are asking: “What is the world really like? What can I trust? What in the world is truly important for my life?”

Rabbi Alder related an exercise suggested by a religious educator to answer the question “Where is God?” and described how a rabbi played this game with his young daughter. “He asked her to touch his arms, chest, and nose. She did. Then he asked her to touch his love for her. She tried to touch his arms again, but then realized that she couldn’t touch the feeling her father was describing.”

As our panelists had all discussed, and Rabbi Alder described, there are “things” in the world that are most real, things we really care about, that cannot be touched or located in space. “In the course of prayer and spiritual growth, many questions and answers will refer to nonmaterial qualities....Godliness, like love, is located not ‘in me’ or ‘in you’ but between us.... Parents create relationships and memories of those relationships, which in turn serve as the spiritual material out of which the idea of God is formed.” ●

NYC-PARENTS IN ACTION
CALENDAR OF SEMINARS AND LUNCHEONS

“The Price of Perfection: Are We Losing the Real Child in the Race for Success?”

FALL 2004

Thursday, October 14, 2004
92nd Street Y, 8:30-10:00 am

**“Looking for Relief:
Stress and Its Fallout”**

A panel with Dr. Stephen Rudin of Individual U, Dr. Ralph Lopez, Ginna Marston, Director of Program Development of Partnership for a Drug-Free America, and Jeanette Friedman of the Caron Foundation

Moderator: Lucy Martin-Gianino

Tuesday, October 19, 2004
All Souls Church, 6:00-7:30 pm

**“Touchpoints of Emotional
Development:
Foundations for Learning”**

A symposium co-sponsored with Resources for Children with Special Needs and Parents League, featuring Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and Dr. Joshua Sparrow

Monday, November 8, 2004
School Rep Luncheon at Temple Israel,
112 East 75th Street, 12:00-2:00 pm

A talk by Stephen J. Pasierb,
President and CEO of PDFA

Tuesday, December 7, 2004
92nd Street Y, 8:30-10:00 am

**“What’s Normal? Is It a Problem,
Your Child’s Temperament or
Just a Phase?”**

A panel co-sponsored with KiDS of NYU Foundation, Inc., featuring Dr. Alan Wachtel, Dr. Stanley Turecki, Matthew Cruger, M.A. and Dr. Roy Boorady

Moderator: Lucy Martin-Gianino

WINTER 2005

Monday, January 31, 2005
School Rep Luncheon at Temple Israel,
112 East 75th Street, 12:00-2:00 pm

**“Too Groomed for Success:
From Nursery School to College”**

Jean Mandelbaum, Head of All Souls School,
and Edes Gilbert, educational consultant

Monday, February 7, 2005
Trinity School, 6:00-7:30 pm

19th Annual Teen Scene

Co-sponsored with Parents League
Moderator: Lucy Martin-Gianino

SPRING 2005

Thursday, March 10, 2005
92nd Street Y, 8:30-11:00 am

Seminar with Dr. Mel Levine, Co-Chairman
and Founder, All Kinds of Minds,
a Nonprofit Institute for the Understanding
of Differences in Learning

Monday, May 2, 2005
School Rep Luncheon at Temple Israel,
112 East 75th Street, 12:00-2:00 pm

**“Academic Integrity and Character:
What Happened to Conscience?”**

Thomas Lickona, Ph.D., speaker, with
book sale and signing

SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

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Spence SchoolTessa Namuth, Simi Matera
St. Bernard's School.....Catherine Skobe, Anne Horner
Trevor Day Middle & Upper School.....Waltraud Tammen
Trinity School.....Nancy Scuderi
Winston Prep.....Wendy Sanders
York Preparatory School.....Elizabeth Lundqvist

List complete as of July 31, 2003. Please contact your school and/or NYC-PIA with any additions or changes.

NYC-Parents in Action, Inc. invites speakers to present their opinions and expertise on specific topics. Their opinions and comments are not necessarily those of NYC-PIA.

If you'd like to be in touch with NYC-Parents in Action, you can reach us at:

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FALL 2004 ISSUE