

Bar-Messimah: A psychological point of view

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Bar-messimah is a book for the children who are entering adolescence. It consists of five gates. The first gate deals with concepts related to adolescence. Through this gate, the growing child becomes familiar with abstract concepts related to growing up, such as commitment, faith, reliability and so fourth. The child is later asked to contemplate on the meaning of growing up and turning into an adult.

In the second gate, the child gets a chance to review his nourishment, physical and intellectual reality, and is encouraged to manipulate this reality in ways which are both beneficial and useful in practically implementing the concepts mentioned in the first gate, namely, responsibility, self control and independence. In the third gate, after having mastered (to the possible extent) some responsibility towards the self, the child is encouraged to further explore his/her social world, and to think and act in the social circles in which his/her life is taking place. Mainly, the child is engaging in thinking of his/her family, friends, school, community and country. In the fourth gate, the child is encouraged to think about his/her doubts regarding the process of Bar-Messimah, and in the fifth and final gate, the child determines the means by which his prior accomplishments will be presented and plans the graduation party.

The Bar-messimah experience provides a wonderful opportunity to harness psychological knowledge which accumulated over the years and use it in ways highly beneficial for the growing child.

Firstly, at the ages of 12-13, a significant change in a child's cognitive abilities occur, making him/her receptive and, more importantly, ready to engage in such actions as

reflection and pondering about such abstract concepts as mentioned above (i.e. responsibility, faith). It is at this age, that the human brain matures enough to be able to think hypothetically, to think about the future and to find a deeper understanding of others (Lerner, Easterbrooks & Mistry, 2003). These new abilities are being thoroughly used throughout the gates of Bar-messimah, and the book utilizes this timing in a manner congruent with the developmental universal timeline.

Secondly, Bar-messimah utilizes Wigodski's learning principles using a form of what is termed "scaffolding"(Lerner, Easterbrooks & Mistry, 2003). The term refers to a situation in which the learning child has a potential for achieving an intellectual milestone, yet he/she are unable to do so because they still need some partial assistance. This assistance is called scaffolding. However, the term can be broadened to include other means by which children can overcome intellectual challenges and progress using only partial aid. Bar-messimah offers the growing child numerous ways by which he/she can go through the journey of becoming a young adult. The book offers to use texts, photographs, digital media and other ways to complete the assignments, thus providing children who find it hard, for instance, in writing, to use other, more suitable means, thereby allowing them to fulfill their Bar-messimah potential. Furthermore, the Bar-messimah project is characterized by a lenient approach and the child can refrain from some of the tasks if he/she finds them too complex/difficult. This approach also contributes to a good learning and doing experience. And of course, the child's care givers are also encouraged to take part in this, a fact that other than promoting communication in the family, is also a form of – that's right – scaffolding.

Thirdly, the second and third gates offer a chance for developing what is called "self complexity". This term was coined by Linville (1985, 1987). Basically, it refers to the fact that people's self aspects are numerous and have different degrees of differentiation. A low number of self aspects which are not highly differentiated is considered less beneficial for coping with reality. This can be easily explained by using an example: let's say that Danny considers himself the best basketball player in his school. Other than that, he is also aware that he's quite strong relatively to his classmates. Had a new student arrived, stronger and better in basketball, winning Danny in both domains, Danny's self would suffer a serious blow. Now, let's assume that Danny is also well aware of being his younger brother's role model and of being a child who also likes to engage in astronomy (statistically unlikely, but that's the fun in examples). Then, when this new arrives and beats Danny, other self domains remain intact for Danny, leading to him being more able to cope with failure. Indeed, Linville (1985, 1987) had shown that among students, higher self complexity (more self aspects with higher differentiation) leads to better coping in light of adverse events. In other words, it is considered beneficial to have many "self eggs" and to place them in different "self baskets". Bar-Messimah offers a wonderful chance for the growing child to think of him/her self in multiple different contexts and to act in those contexts. For instance, the child can view him/her self as members of their community and act in that community by doing something for the community, the child may choose to pursue an intellectual domain such as science, story telling or cinema and that's a whole new self aspect. Bar-Messimah is truly filled with opportunities for developing a complex self, which, as described, can have true benefit in later years.

Finally, a potentially beneficial preventive aspect stems from the foundations of psychology. Freud's depiction of psychological disturbances views psychological problems as stemming from conflicts hidden from awareness. During therapy, the psychologist attempts to bring conflicts into awareness and have them being confronted by the individual. Conflict sources often lie in such matters as sexuality, intense emotions and other various domains. The Bar-Messimah project offers caregivers a unique opportunity to assist their child in engaging openly in thought about matters of emotion, sexuality, and many other subjects, and thus, provides a potentially preventive tool to help the child openly process those issues. Using Bar-Messimah to provide the child an opportunity to discuss these subjects while receiving assistance from adults can promote healthy psychological development.

Bibliography

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