



A PUBLICATION  
OF THE MINNEAPOLIS  
JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

# kasher CONNECTION

קשר

## Immersed in the Minneapolis Community

Column by Dr. Ray Levi, Head of School

*How do we prepare our students for participation in the larger community?* This is a question that Abbe Payton and I are regularly asked when we meet with prospective parents. Inquiries about programs that focus on the diversity of the American society are also commonly raised at weekly “Breakfast with the Head” meetings. Our goal is for our students to *learn about* many cultures through the social studies and literature curricula. And our hope is that the children will *learn through experiences* as well, through service learning work and curriculum-based programs such as the third grade partnership with Parkvalley School. But, seldom is the goal achieved in as meaningful a way as happened on the second night of Hanukkah when the choir sang as part of the Holidazle Parade.

Needless to say, the level of excitement as the group assembled at the Hyatt Regency was phenomenally high. It was enhanced by the many choir parents and teachers who agreed to carry banners for the parade and appeared costumed as toy soldiers. Everyone was taking a role! We moved outside and each student waited patiently to be carefully placed on the float with “star collars” attached (literally plugged in.) For these second through fourth graders, this was indeed one of the bigger nights of their lives. They channeled their considerable energy by bouncing up and down—an excellent aerobic activity that would have exhausted even the most fit of the adults present!

I had an interesting perspective as I rode on the float seated below David Shaw and facing the students. I could look out at the crowds who lined Nicollet Mall, people who had come to downtown Minneapolis to shop and to enjoy this family entertainment on a warm (mid-thirties with no wind qualifies as warm in Minnesota at the end of December!) Saturday evening. Amidst the crowds that lined the ten block parade route, it was great to hear the shouts of encouragement from the MJDS community, pockets of familiar faces interspersed along the way. But it was also fascinating to hear the voices of encouragement and see the waves of people from all over the Twin Cities metro area. From where I sat, I was also able to watch the children whose faces were beaming with pride and who were singing their hearts out!

There we were, immersed in the life of Minneapolis, providing an unusual opportunity for our students to contribute to its cultural offerings. And we were doing so by sharing our identity, singing Hanukkah song after Hanukkah song with lots of Hebrew integrated into the offerings. We were being ourselves. It is this balance that I always tell prospective parents we hope to achieve: having a strong sense of our identity and being active, contributing members of the larger community.

My story could really end here, but there is one aside that I feel is worth sharing as it illustrates how even our younger children deal with their identity in the larger community. The Holidazle Parade may have had a Hanukkah focus on that Saturday night, but it was also several days before Christmas. As our students were bouncing up and down, waiting to climb aboard our float, the Santa who was to ride on the float in front of us approached. He was singing a mixed up rendition of *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*. “What do you think of my song?” he asked energetically. My radar was fully operational. I wondered what the children might say and if they’d need my assistance. They joked about the song and teased Santa about the obviously fake beard he was wearing.

They might have claimed that we don’t believe in Santa or even that we don’t celebrate Christmas. None of the students seemed threatened. They played along without compromising who they were. Santa was on the bus that took us from the end of the parade route back to the hotel. As he exited, he stopped to wish our students a “Happy Hanukkah.” Our songs, the full sequence of which he’d heard three times as he rode in front of us during the parade, had communicated who we were and why we were there.

