

Opinion/Commentary

Educator gets lofty insights at 35,000 feet

by *Ettie Zilber*

Airplane turbulence often affects me in a philosophical manner, and on this particular flight to the Geneva PTC course, I was highly moved by a few articles in, of all places, an in-flight magazine.

The first article celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. It made me reflect on this '94-'95 banner year for the many people celebrating or commemorating either an invasion, a victory, a defeat or a liberation. Just this past April, I was involved in helping my mother organize a celebration party for Jewish survivors of the concentration camps of Europe. Fifty years have passed since their liberation, and for this party we collected photographs and created a collage representative of their legacy - their grandchildren - because it wasn't solely a celebration of life or a memorial to the past; it was in essence a prayer for the future.

The next article was a short biography and interview with Sadoko Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Having been a refugee myself, I was taken by her lament,

"Why do some people have to go through so much misery just because of where they were born?" She said that in order to help overcome some of the world's anguish, the ordinary citizen can help by "helping others to help themselves." "It sounds so simple," I thought wistfully. How does one teach this skill?

The third article, as I was becoming more deeply enmeshed in philosophical musings, was by Andrej Szczypiorski, who is described as Poland's greatest living literary figure. He, too, survived the horrors of WWII and said that he believed the "contemporary world needs a conscience more than a new generation of computers." I believe that he is saying we must teach love, caring, empathy and morality because without this there can be no world worth living in. His final message thus indicated a prayer of optimism for the future: "The future has a greater chance than the past, if only because the future has yet to be fulfilled."

After landing on terra firma and packing up my Swissair Gazette, I proceeded to be trained in Curriculum Development. I was stuck by the relevance of what I had read to what we were studying at the PTC. I firmly believe that as international educators and

administrators, we have a great responsibility to our students, many of whom will become national leaders and influential agents of change. We are the ones who can impact the programs in our schools. I exhort my colleagues to include the development of "humanity" in the "new outcomes" of our curricula and school philosophies; this is truly worth teaching and learning. Just think of the implications for future performance-based assessment!

Ettie Zilber was a teacher at AIS Israel.