

TORAH THOUGHTS – IN PRAISE OF TEACHERS

During the *Al Het* confessional on Yom Kippur, we pray, “We have sinned against You by scorning parents and teachers.” Consider these passages from a poem written by Lisa Lauritzen.

*I am a New York City public high school teacher
Do not look surprised.
Do not feel sorry for me ...
Do not ask me if I receive combat pay
Or wear a bulletproof vest.
Do not ask me when I plan to get a real job,
Apply to law school,
Or what my first career choice was ...
Do not suggest that I join the Peace Corps.
Do not ask if my parents were teachers.
Do not ask if my parents were hippies.
Do not assume that I am a saint, naive, innocent,
Searching for my childhood,
Living for summers off ...
Or would rather teach in the suburbs where I could really teach.*

*I am a New York City public high school teacher
Ask me why I chose to be a teacher.
Ask me if my students have books, supplies, and chairs.
Ask me my opinion of the Superintendent, the Mayor, and the Governor.
Reminisce with me about your favorite teachers,
Share with me the qualities that made them admirable.
Tell me about your favorite projects and trips.
Ask me what my students are working on now ...
Cry with me about Marc sleeping in the subway,
Simone losing her father,
Maria thinking she's pregnant,
And Rick dropping out of school ...
Marvel with me over my students' intelligence
Achievements, diligence, creativity, and strength.
Cheer with me as they write their college essays and take their S.A.T.'s.
Soar with me as they get their college acceptance letters.
Ask me how to create a scholarship,
Ask me how to volunteer,
Ask me about the qualities needed to become
A New York City public high school teacher.*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. In what ways does the author suggest that we scorn teachers? Do you agree? If so, what do you think we should do in order to counter this negativity?
2. Who was your favorite high school teacher? What qualities made her or him special?
3. The liturgy pairs teachers with parents. How are they similar? Different?
4. Two thoughtful biblical verses on education.

- a. Hear, my son, the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of thy mother. (Proverbs 1:8)
- b. Educate a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

I hope that all New Jersey teachers enjoy a few vacation days!!

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont