

Would My Mother Be Proud?

By [Rabbi Jeremy Winaker](#)

May 9, 2014

I finally did it. I got into [Harvard](#)! Seriously. I have been selected to attend Harvard University's Graduate School of Education Principals' Center program "[Improving Schools: The Art of Leadership](#)" as part of [a cohort of Jewish day school leaders](#) who will have additional reflection and mentoring at Harvard with a year-long project afterward, fully-funded by the [AVI CHAI Foundation](#). My mother would be so proud!



Or would she? Yes, it is true that my teen summers in the Boston area led to the purchase of some Harvard gear, and that I fancied I might go to Harvard for college. I remember my mother encouraging my enthusiasm and exhibiting a quiet patience. I think she knew that I did not yet know myself well enough to choose the right college campus for me. In the end, I went to [Swarthmore College](#). My mother's charge to me as I left for Swarthmore was to take four years to learn how to think.

Now, I think she would *not* be proud of me getting into Harvard. She might be happy for me, but she would also wonder what going there would do for my soul. The name Harvard and even the promise of great learning would provoke a stale, "good for you" or "how exciting." To fire her up, I would need to give a deeper reason for the value of the program.

Thankfully, AVI CHAI is providing that deeper reason: I am going to Harvard "to enhance or advance the Judaic mission of" [Albert Einstein Academy](#) (AEA). The classes will give me tools for being a better principal; *and* the mentoring and reflection will push me to become a better person and thereby a better leader. I am going to Harvard not just to learn how to do but also to learn how to be. Of that, my mother would be proud.

This Sunday is [Mother's Day](#). I miss my mother dearly. In her absence, I have come to appreciate how mothers (not exclusively, yet still significantly) are the grounding presence in children's lives. Children learn from mothers that our origins, our history, our family, our roots, and our values are key to understanding who we are. We need this foundation and to recognize it.

One of the gifts of a Jewish day school education in the elementary years, like that of AEA, is precisely the time spent teaching those origins, history, family, roots, and values. A school is not a parent; it cannot be. A school can, however, teach more than tools; it can teach the soul paths towards flourishing. I am going to Harvard to advance that Judaic mission: teaching our students' souls to develop journeys that lead their whole being to thrive.

I thank my mother for getting me on that path. I thank all mothers for giving their children the groundwork for purpose. I hope your children make you proud, and I hope that AEA will help them do it.