

# #youarenotyouratar

## School of thought



**JEREMY STOWE-LINDNER**

**A**S we approach the end of the year, schools nationwide have farewelled their year 12 students. For them, one chapter of their lives is closing and another is about to open.

But one thing stands in their way, or so many believe. On December 14, they will be receiving their VCE/HSC results.

In some minds, the lives of the class of 2015 have been leading to this point: when they open an envelope (or more likely log in to the secure system online) that will decide their futures. They have worked, studied, focused, collaborated and agonised for this moment. The magical ATAR, or Australian Tertiary Admission Rank, gives them a percentile score ranked against all other Australian students and is their entry ticket to tertiary courses, employment and self-worth.

Nonsense.

When year 12 students left the school where I have the privilege of being principal, as the vice-principal and I staffed the barbecue handing out sausages prior to their customary final march to the gate, through clapping years 2-11 students, we tweeted to the cohort #youarenotyouratar.

That is because they are not. No ATAR is written on gravestones or read out at funerals. On the day following the ATAR results, the piece of paper has the same status as this page in this newspaper: lining for the cat litter tray.

Rather than ATARs, what is read out in eulogies is impact, decency, communal activism, *menschlichkeit*, family and contribution.

Now please don't misunderstand me. ATARs are important and they help. But, once again, #youarenotyouratar.

A few weeks ago I reminded our class of 2015 of the saying, "Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the earth." This was not said by the great sages, the rabbis of the Talmud or the heroes or villains of the Torah. It was said by Archimedes, the Greek thinker best known for explaining hydrostatics – the fact that a body immersed in fluid loses weight equal to the weight of the amount of fluid it displaces.

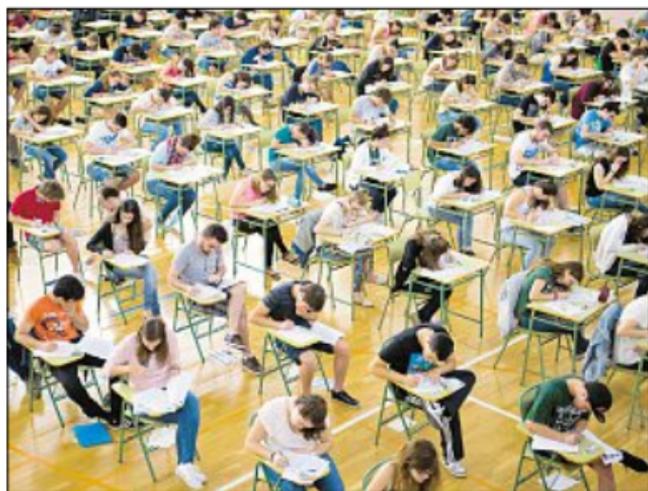


Photo: Enriquealvoal/Dreamstime.com

But when Archimedes said, "Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the earth," he was not referring to displacement – he was referring to the power of levers – how great weight can be borne by something through the use of levers and pulleys.

The students who graduate from schools, leave with a variety of ATARs. Regardless of the ATAR, many students will go on to "move the earth". They will impact positively on their families and communities, they will go about their lives as *menschen* who see sadness and bring about peace.

They are the young adults who have, to paraphrase Archimedes, "a place to stand on".

But what is that "place"? It is that all-elusive concept: balance.

Balance is what we strive for. Balance between being outdoors and indoors, between being in the classroom and study hall, and being on the sports field and stage. Having a range of friendships and engaging with people of difference. Balanced people follow the advice of the great sage Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I?"

And what is the source of this place? It is multifaceted. It is families – they are the anchor in times of trouble. They challenge and support, they sustain and nurture, and they give and reciprocate without expectation.

It is also community – be it shul or youth movement, youth club or sporting club, charity or interest. They connect us with people of difference, extend us out of our comfort zones and support our physical and spiritual selves.

And it is school. The right school ensures breadth and depth, choice

and voice, and opportunities for a struggle as well as opportunities for nurture. The Jewish school nourishes the soul, providing it with overt and covert values, beliefs and practices and help provide stability in the winds of change. It provides a friendship group that is second to none. Jewish school friendships are unique friendships and cannot be replicated. They are relationships that will always be intimate – there is no replicating the trust, understanding and support that is developed through shared times of joy and desperation, anger and celebration, tragedy and *simcha*.

So, as the class of 2015 stand on this cusp between one chapter and the next, they can reflect on a life well travelled in their childhood years, and a life well travelled to come. The full stop at the end of this chapter – their ATAR scores – will soon be forgotten as they continue through their journey.

Rabbi David Wolpe, in *To Grow A Soul*, wrote that "God does not tell Abraham his destination because the goal does not make sense to someone who has not yet experienced the journey. Arrival is not the essence. The lesson that Abraham will pass on to his descendants is that the essence of the journey is the journey."

Between us, between schools, shuls, youth groups, community groups and family, for the class of 2015 they can proclaim: "Give me a place to stand on and I will move the earth."

They have a place to stand on.

They now need to move the earth.

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