

# THE JERUSALEM POST



Photo by: REUTERS

## The freedom to choose

By RAFI FEUERSTEIN  
02/28/2015

The duty of a society that aims for perfection is to allow all its members to choose and shape their lives as they see fit; to dream and then fulfill those dreams; to live their lives freely.

Israeli society experienced a small victory this past week. We finally succeeded in a struggle begun by my father, the late Prof. Reuven Feuerstein.

This past week, the IDF leadership finally agreed to allow Israeli youngsters of Ethiopian origin who arrive at the IDF conscription centers to be tested using LPAD (Learning Propensity Assessment Device), a dynamic diagnostic program developed by Prof. Feuerstein.

The IDF has been using the LPAD diagnostic for nine years already and thousands of amazing soldiers have been accepted to prestigious courses as a result. But up until now, LPAD has only been used with soldiers who have already begun their service, and not as part of the routine screening process carried out during the high-school years.

From now on, the LPAD will be available from the moment young people take their first step into the IDF recruitment centers and as a result, many more Israelis of Ethiopian origin will be eligible for courses and positions that were closed to them in the past.



So, what in essence are the differences between the two different kinds of diagnostic tests? The psychometric exam measures a person's cognitive functioning through a battery of tests. The working assumption is that the results of the psychometric exam reflect a person's abilities. The test assumes that intelligence levels do not change over the years, and that we are born with certain capabilities that cannot be altered later in life.

Contrary to this belief, Prof. Feuerstein made a revolutionary conceptual breakthrough in the 1950s that is still affecting our understanding of the human learning process today. Feuerstein asserted that humans are perpetually changing.

Or as a journalist from Le Monde who interviewed him many years ago wrote, "For Feuerstein, chromosomes do not have the last word. Although chromosomes do exist and do have an extensive impact on our lives, they do not control the final outcome."

People do in fact change throughout their lives, because they are not purely a force of their genetics, but a product of the cultural surroundings they were born into and in which they grew up.

We learn values from our families and our communities and our schools teach us how to think and how to process our surroundings. In fact, everything we call "intelligence" comes to us from the cultural surroundings we grow up in. My first conclusion is that people who grew up in different environments will have different

thinking processes that are culturally adapted to their surroundings.

My second conclusion is that if people can learn their first culture, they can also learn a new culture. In other words, if people have learned how to learn, then they are also capable of learning new things.

AS A result of these findings, Prof. Feuerstein decided to create an alternative diagnostic test. He understood that it was not possible to measure people's intelligence with an exam that was not appropriate for their cultural background, since they would fail miserably even if they were incredibly intelligent.

The LPAD, therefore, evaluates (and doesn't measure!) people's learning capacity instead of measuring their existing skills. This dynamic diagnostic is a tool that can succeed in bridging the cultural gap since it can identify learning and thinking abilities that regular tests fail to find.

When Prof. Feuerstein founded his institute 60 years ago, his intention was to revolutionize society. He wanted to change the way society looked at people (and not just those of Ethiopian heritage) and make people realize that every single one of us has potential, that we shouldn't put people in boxes and give them labels before we get to know them.

And that is why the IDF acceptance of the LPAD is so significant.

The second sphere in which Prof.

Feuerstein wanted to make a change was in the army. IDF leaders understand that the legitimacy of the IDF and consensus surrounding the existence of the military cannot solely rely on the historical role it has played as the protector of the Jewish state. The IDF must continue to function as the army of the people; an army in which all sectors of society have ample representation. An army that comprises only soldiers from select segments of society would be a weak army and would not win the sympathy and empathy of the entire nation.

Due to IDF leaders' deep understanding of these ideas, they were willing and even passionate about initiating these incredible changes.

In effect, they are calling into question the absolute value of the psychometric tests, which has been a given all these years. The IDF's willingness to examine its structure and rules and to try new methods which would ensure that girls and boys from all parts of Israeli society will share equal rights as they serve their country is astonishing and should not be taken for granted.

The enormous task we have set out for ourselves is to take this revolution, which is still in its infancy, and to know how to replicate it in other communities and in other fields. Tens of thousands of young people dream about going to college, and yet this remains in the realm of fantasy for so many of them. Countless jobs remain out of reach for these individuals, and all because they were never given the chance to advance, to learn and take advantage of their skills and intelligence.

Fortunately, we've achieved a modicum of success in academia. We've broken through the barriers at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at Bar-Ilan University, both of which currently accept 20 students of Ethiopian origin based on their LPAD scores to faculties that require an extremely high score on the psychometric exam. Seven students of Ethiopian origin are currently studying medicine at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a number of other students are thriving in the faculties of economics, psychology, occupational therapy, law and social work. Statistically, fewer students of Ethiopian origin drop out of college than the Israeli average.

We have just recently received word that one young woman of Ethiopian origin who graduated from law school was offered an internship at the Supreme Court. Israeli society loses out on so much when we insist on using outdated methods. There is no limit to how much these young men and women suffer when they realize they have no chance for a bright future. The anger and bitterness is incredible.

The State of Israel was created in order to repair a historical injustice that was carried out against the Jewish people and also to fulfill the vision of the prophets.

There is nothing worse than stealing this freedom from certain individuals, or sadder than clipping the wings that God gave them. The duty of a society that aims for perfection is to allow all its members to choose and shape their lives as they see fit; to dream and then fulfill those dreams; to live their lives freely. There is a reason that according to Jewish law slaves were offered exit points, when they could choose to go free and

live their lives however they chose. When a person knows that he will never have the chance to taste freedom, it's as if his life has already come to an end.

The author is a rabbi and president of the Feuerstein Institute.

Translated by Hannah Hochner.



Print



[Back to original article](#)

---

JPost.com: [Arab-Israeli Conflict](#) | [Israel News](#) | [Diaspora](#) | [Middle East](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Premium](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Not Just News](#) | [Edition Francaise](#) | [Green Israel](#)

[About Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [RSS](#)

Copyright ©2014 Jpost Inc. All rights reserved • [Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Policy](#)