

Devora Steinmetz and Rabbi David Silber

Educational Alliance

Devora Steinmetz and Rabbi David Silber have five kids and two institutions. And though they are sure to point out that Steinmetz's 4-year-old day school, Beit Rabban, and Silber's Drisha Institute are separate entities, functioning independently of each other, the common values and goals underlying both are hard to overlook.

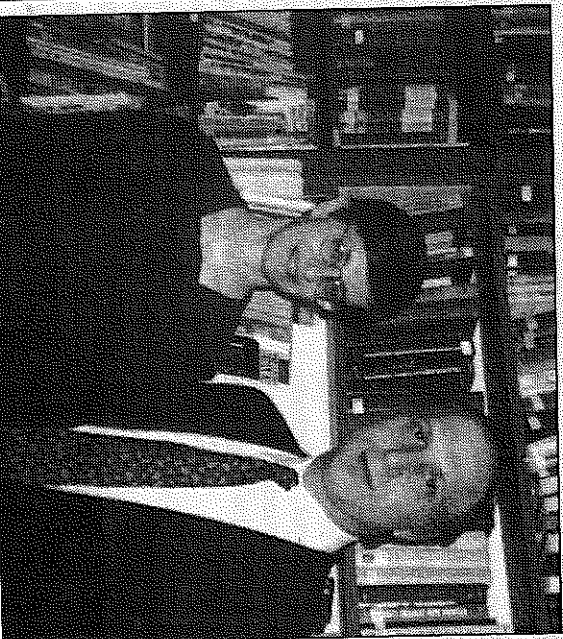
In fact, when they say things like "It's a tiny place of enormous significance," or "It's part of trying to transform Jewish life through educational models of excellence," it's easy to confuse which one each is talking about.

Steinmetz, a teacher of Jewish studies with a doctorate in comparative literature from Columbia, started Beit Rabban, a coed, tradition-based day school on the Upper West Side. The rigorous curriculum is designed to make the kids think — to give them a sound base in both Jewish and secular studies so they can be part of their own educational development through creativity and openness.

Drisha, started in 1979 by Rabbi Silber, is a place for women to pursue higher Jewish education with a seriousness and intensity offered only in a few other places in Israel. The programs strive to create "a critical mass of devoted and talented women recognized by the community," says Rabbi Silber, 46. "If you want people to be great, you have to have places for them to go."

Creating those places, with their blurred denominational lines and cutting-edge philosophies, requires both Steinmetz and Rabbi Silber to have a clarity of purpose and one other crucial element: "We don't care what people think of us," says Steinmetz, 34.

The two met, fittingly, at a class in Lincoln Square Synagogue, where Rabbi Silber was the teacher. And after 15 years of marriage, they are clearly proud of each other's accomplishments. "We've always believed that learning and education are the key to the quality of Jewish life."



Devora Steinmetz and Rabbi David Silber: Cutting-edge educators who met at a Lincoln Square Synagogue class.