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A TORAH EDUCATION PROGRAMME

By Rabbi Dr. CHAIM SIMONS, B.Sc., Ph.D.

The recent expansion in Jewish Day Schools has enabled far more pupils from non-religious homes to attend Jewish schools with the consequent problem of having to arrange suitable curricula for this type of pupil.

When considering this problem, one must bear in mind that these pupils will, generally speaking, not witness at home the practices and observances of Judaism. Therefore the school must also act *in loco parentis*, and hence the teaching of Yiddishkeit will become an integral part of the teaching of Torah Studies.

We also have the problem that most Jewish Day Schools of the type these pupils attend devote very little time to Torah Studies — often no more than half-an-hour a day. One is therefore faced with the problem of fitting an effective programme into this very limited time.

Torah Studies is not a single subject, but a generic term for a wide range of subjects which include (to quote just a few), Chumash, Nach, Mishnah, Siddur, Religious Knowledge, Grammar and Jewish History. The

person responsible for the Torah Studies in such a school then has the invidious task of deciding which of these subjects to include and which to omit. One important point which he will have to decide is on the question of Hebrew Grammar. One could argue that the study of Grammar is not an end in itself but a means to understand Tenach, Mishnah etc. and with sufficient time available for Torah Studies this objective should be achieved. However, in schools where far too little time is allocated to Torah Studies, the pupils are unlikely to reach the standard where they are able to utilise this grammar to understand texts. Surely then, this grammar learned is of very minimal value (and also quickly forgotten) and the very limited amount of time available is better deployed in teaching a subject such as Religious Knowledge which will be of practical use to these pupils. (Is it not more important for these pupils to know the difference between Kiddush and Havdalah rather than the difference between a Hiphel and a Hophel?)

When writing the curricula one must decide which topics should be taught to these pupils and which techniques should be used to teach them. Conventional methods of teaching have placed a great stress on the translation of texts. Such a method (which, unfortunately is usually done in a parrot-wise manner and to the virtual exclusion of other topics) is, for this type of pupil, of little benefit, boring and can cause a reaction against Torah learning in general. We can therefore see that we require a different ap-

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growth in Torah learning for this type of pupil and I would like to make the following suggestions:

① Extensive use should be made of audio-visual aids including film-strips, tape-recordings, ceremonial objects and demonstration models. Materials are constantly coming on the market and in particular excellent material is produced by Torah Umesorah in New York.

② When teaching subjects such as Chumash, Rabbinics etc., the stress must be on the context rather than on the translation since for this type of pupil translation degenerates into "parrot-wise" repetition which as one knows is of very limited benefit to the pupils and causes the pupils to lose interest in the subject. Instead, the teacher should

develop various projects which involve the pupils in the looking up and study of a number of sources in the Torah etc. and for more advanced pupils these projects should also require a knowledge of Rashi and other commentators on the appropriate Pesukim.

To introduce the subject of משנה to the pupils, the book "Gateway to the Mishnah" by Dr. I. Fishman is excellent and great emphasis should be placed on the introduction and the foot-notes contained in this book.

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אמרה usually remains a completely closed subject to this type of pupil. However, the use of the *El-Am Talmud*, can serve as an excellent introduction. Very few pupils are able to recognise *Sifrei Kodesh* and a thorough study of the booklet "A page from..." published by the Education Department of the J.N.F. should prove rewarding.

③ In the teaching of Siddur the stress should be on the ability to find one's way around the Siddur and the contents of the services rather than on the "parrot-wise" translation of the prayers. These lessons should be enlivened by teaching the pupils tunes from the services — excellent records and tape-recordings are available. In this way the pupils will participate in the services when they attend Synagogue.

④ There is a Talmudic dictum that a man learns what he *likes* and one finds that pupils enjoy Jewish History, particularly of the post-Biblical to the present day period. Use the opportunity to introduce into these courses the Torah life and personalities appertaining to the various eras. Maps are important tools in the teaching of history and these should be used whenever possible. A number of filmstrips on Jewish History are also available.

⑤ Pupils from non-observant homes will unfortunately not see all the practices of

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Are you critical?

DID YOU DISAGREE WITH THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN AN ARTICLE?

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Judaism carried out in their homes. It is therefore necessary for the Torah Studies curriculum to fill this void, and a course on Practical Dinim is a must in the syllabus. Such a course, as the name indicates, should be taught in a practical manner. For example, when teaching about נטילת ידים demonstrate to the pupils the correct way to perform the Mitzvah; when teaching about Purim, show them the materials used in the writing of a Megillah (i.e. parchment, awl, quill, pen, gidim etc.). Before Pesach, one should try and arrange a visit to see Matzos being hand-baked and after Sukkos it is instructive to cut open an אטרונג in front of the class and explain its component parts.

⑥ אשת חיל and בר-מצוה courses should be introduced into the curricula. For boys it should include the ability to do any laining and הפטרה and also courses on תפילין, תפילין and the correct procedure when called up to the Torah. Once again the stress should be on the practical side of these subjects and the course on Tephillin (for example) should include the correct way to lay Tephillin, a showing and explaining of the תורה ומסורה filmstrip on "How Tephillin Are Made", letting the pupils see the materials used for the writing and construction of Tephillin, and the "dissection" of an old pair of Tephillin so that the pupils can understand the construction of a pair of Tephillin.

The Eshes Chayil course should include a practical study of the laws of Kashrus with the girls actually koshering meat themselves. Also a study of how to plan and prepare the house for Shabbos, Yom-Tov and Pesach should be included.

⑦ The various topics within the field of Torah Studies do not operate completely independently of one another and when planning curricula, link-ups should be arranged

between these topics. For example, whilst one is studying Purim in the Practical Dinim course, one could be studying Mishnayos on Megillah and Rashi on Parashas Amalek in the Rabbinics course.

⑧ A problem often facing schools is what to do towards the end of the Summer term when the examination period is over and the pupils are no longer in a "learning mood". As a solution, one could utilise the very good games which are produced by the J.C.M.B. and the pupils are sure to find them rewarding.

In conclusion, I would state that this article contains ideas and suggestions which present a novel approach to this problem and I would be interested to hear the views of other readers on this very important and pressing subject in Anglo-Jewish education.

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THE PROBLEM OF EXAMINATIONS

By Rabbi Dr. CHAIM SIMONS, B.Sc., Ph.D.

The great interest generated by the acceptance of the Syllabuses I had written for Religious Knowledge O-level (Joint Matriculation Board) and C.S.E. (North Western Secondary Schools Examination Board) has prompted me to write this article.

The ideal situation for our pupils in schools and Chadarim would be for them to learn תורה לשמה and not for an examination and certificate or prize at the end of the course. Failing this ideal, the next best thing is to have examinations set and marked by persons who are יראי שמים and we would all be happy if the *only* examinations taken by our children conformed to this standard. Unfortunately, however, we know too well that the majority of our teenage pupils are not interested in such an examination and are only prepared to work for 'O'-level (or CSE) passes, even if this means studying with a critical and a Christological approach to the Bible. It is within this frame of reference that one must analyse and consider this entire problem and try to find the best solution possible in the circumstances.

Until several years ago, the type of questions which tended to be asked in GCE examinations involving set books was "What did A say to B, what did B answer and what followed from this conversation?" Such a format which regularly used to be the entire question, has now become only *part* of a question and the remainder of such a question is often the type involving a critical analysis of the text. Educationally this change is a great improvement, since it prevents a

student from just churning out information, but instead requires thought and assessment by the pupil. In the case of a subject requiring secular texts (e.g. English Literature) such a change should present no special problems for the Jewish pupil. However, in the case of an examination using Biblical texts, great problems will arise since a non-Jewish examining body will demand an analysis and assessment of the text which is certain to be according to Christian and critical thought.

Such a situation has now arisen with the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB). Prior to 1973, amongst the various alternative syllabuses in Religious Knowledge, there was one which required only a knowledge of the text of selected historical portions of the "Old Testament" without requiring their theological interpretations. In accordance with the general educational trend of moving away from this type of syllabus, this alternative was abolished as from 1973. The only alternative which then remained which did not *directly* utilise set passages from the "New Testament" requires a critical and Christological approach to the Bible. In addition, a study of the questions set in previous years revealed several in which the wording of the question itself is objectionable to us. The Board were not prepared to accept that Jewish pupils studying this course should not be taught such critical methods. To quote from the official minutes of a meeting I had with the Board "The examiners could not be expected to accept for denominational or confessional reasons ignorance in the examination of various facts." Obviously a com-

pletely new syllabus suitable for Jewish candidates was required.

At this stage it is necessary to explain that, in addition to the normal syllabuses (mode 1) written by the Board, there are also mode 2 and mode 3 syllabuses.

(Mode 2 means that the syllabus is drawn up by an individual school but the question papers are set and marked in the normal way by the Board's examiners. In Mode 3, not only is the syllabus drawn up by an individual school, but also the papers are set and marked by the school and only the moderation is performed by the Board). In the notes issued by the JMB on the preparation of Modes 2 and 3 syllabuses it is stated that such a syllabus will be expected to constitute an approach to the subject not normally found in an existing Mode 1 syllabus. One therefore has an opportunity to prepare a syllabus in Religious Knowledge giving a Torah approach to the Bible instead of the critical and Christological approach required by the Board's Mode 1 syllabus.

It is unfortunately not so simple as it may seem to gain acceptance of such a syllabus and one has to argue one's case and carefully explain the aims of the proposed syllabus at a meeting with examiners of the Board. One finds that the attitude of the Board is that *their* syllabus does not give a Christian or critical approach to the Bible, but an objective approach (whatever that term may mean!). In this connection it is of interest to note that in the syllabus of the CSE examination in Religious Knowledge (set by the North Western Secondary School Examination Board) there are "Old Testament" passages which are *similar* to those in the JMB O-level examination. However, far from asserting that it provides an objective approach to the Bible, the CSE Board clearly

state that the aim of the syllabus is "to bring children into an encounter with Jesus Christ". So much for the JMB claim of objectivity!

Obviously it is better to try and gain acceptance of a Mode 3 syllabus, but due to various problems such as moderating the examination, it is very likely that the Board will only be prepared to accept a Mode 2. It is therefore important to specifically write into the syllabus and also stress in the meetings and correspondence with the Board that the required study of the Bible is according to *Rabbinic principles*.

After having publicised my syllabuses, I received an excellent suggestion from Mr. Chaim Rosenthal, Director of the Jewish Schools' Torah Council in which he suggested the inclusion of set passages from תורה שבעל פה. It is certainly well worth pursuing this line, but it is possible that the introduction of such passages would not be acceptable to the Board. In this connection I should mention that when writing these syllabuses, I used the opportunity to phrase both the introduction to the syllabus and the specimen questions (which must accompany a submitted syllabus) in such a way that the examination requires an implicit knowledge of תורה שבעל פה.

In conclusion, Torah examinations under the auspices of any non-Jewish organisation are far from ideal. However, it is imperative to remedy the situation in which our children are not only sitting examinations intended for non-Jewish pupils, but are also studying material which can have a lasting damaging effect on them. Under the prevailing conditions, the most practical solution seems to be the writing of alternative syllabuses which give a Torah approach to the Bible.