

**JEWISH EDUCATION IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Paper read at a Symposium  
arranged by the Zionist Federation Educational Trust  
on Thursday 19th December 1974  
at the Rosh Pinah Primary School, Edgware, Middlesex, England

by

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Kiryat Arba, Israel

Menachem Av 5755 - August 1995

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the programme of Jewish Education Week held in December 1974, the Zionist Federation Educational Trust arranged a symposium which took place on the evening of Thursday 19th December at the Rosh Pinah Primary School in Edgware. The late Mr. Levi Gertner was in the Chair.

The Rev. Reuben Turner, Director of the Jewish National Fund Youth and Education Department had invited me to be a member of the panel and I spoke on "Jewish Education in a Secondary School". At that time, I was the Director of Jewish Studies at the King David High School in Liverpool.

Recently, on going through some old papers of mine, I found a handwritten verbatim text of my paper at this symposium. On reading it through, I see that it seems to be just as relevant today as it was 20 years ago. I have therefore decided to publish it exactly as it appears in my papers.

Chaim Simons  
Nehemiah Institute  
Kiryat Arba, Israel

Av 5755 / August 1995

## JEWISH EDUCATION IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

We can best understand the importance of Jewish schools at secondary level by considering the situation if there were no Jewish schools.

The Jewish education of our children would then be limited to Hebrew classes which meet on Sunday mornings and maybe also on a couple of evenings during the week. One only has to look at the numbers attending such Hebrew classes, especially on weekday evenings, to realise the weakness of this system.

What is more serious, however, is that when boys reach the age of Barmitzvah, they so as to speak "graduate" and leave these Hebrew Classes, and, in the case of girls, they leave even earlier still. As a consequence, the number of teenagers to be found at Hebrew Classes is only a very small proportion of the total number.

We can now start to see the importance of Jewish schools at secondary level. Within the framework of the school day, one has the opportunity to give pupils in the age range of 11 to 18 a Jewish education programme, as distinct from them having to go to outside classes after school hours. But unless one utilises this opportunity, by giving Jewish subjects a proper allocation of time, one can seriously minimise the effect of a Jewish school.

The problems of time allocation usually start at the 4th form level, when the pupils are already starting to think about O-levels or CSE and an "exam mania" starts to set in. It is very easy for the school to say, "we must devote all our time to secular studies and allow Jewish Studies only a negligible amount of time." But is this reasoning correct? Will the exam results of the pupils suffer if the Jewish studies are given their proper allocation of time within the framework of the school day?

One only has to look at schools which devote a proper allocation of time to Jewish Studies and see their exam results. A few examples will suffice:

The Hasmonean Boys School has, in addition to its allocation of Jewish Studies periods within the school day, a voluntary Yeshivah stream which meets before and after each school day, and also on Sunday mornings. One only has to look through the GCE results of the boys in this Yeshivah stream to see lots of pupils who have gained 8, 9 or even 10 O-levels.

You all probably read, about a couple of months ago, in the Jewish press, how 5 pupils of the Manchester Jewish Grammar School for boys, gained the gold medal of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme - and this is at a school which devotes a large amount of time to Jewish Studies, and also produces excellent secular exam results!

These examples quite clearly show that the exam results will not suffer if the Jewish Studies is given its proper allocation of time. However, if the converse is done, and the Jewish Studies is reduced to a negligible time, one will have considerably minimised the effect of a Jewish school on this age of pupils.

The Jewishness of a Jewish school must not be limited to the Jewish Studies lessons and forgotten for the remainder of the day. Kipot should not automatically come off the heads of the pupils as they leave their Jewish Studies classrooms. In this connection, praise is due to the JFS, a school where the majority of pupils come from non-observant homes. Yet, when walking around this school, one sees that every male, from the humblest firstformer right up to the headmaster wear kipot throughout the school day. When entering such a school, one immediately knows that one is in a Jewish school.

On the walls and in display cabinets throughout the school should be pictures and objects connected with Judaism and Israel. One should not have to search for a Mezuzah discreetly

placed on the front door to know that one is in a Jewish institution - the Jewish character should be obvious so that the pupils should constantly be aware of the nature of their school.

There was the case of a State school in which the local education authority arranged for the staff to live in a different area of the town from the school. The reason for this was that the staff should not meet the pupils out of school and hence increase the familiarity. The opposite should be the case with a Jewish school! It is important for the Jewish staff to meet the pupils in Shul on Shabbat, to participate in Jewish youth groups, to celebrate the Chaggim together and so on.

In his report on his educational visit to Israel, Rabbi Roberg writes that in one school he visited, during the midmorning breaks, the teachers and pupils joined in a "rekida" (a dance) in the halls, and this served to bring a closer relationship between teacher and pupil.

In practical terms, it is only possible to set up Jewish schools in areas with a large Jewish population. Fortunately, however, most Jews live in concentrated areas where it would be possible to set up viable schools. However, there is a sizeable minority who live in places where this is not possible. The only effective solution for these pupils is the Jewish boarding school, or for Jewish Day schools to set up boarding arrangements for out of town pupils. This is only possible for pupils of secondary school or near secondary school age, since parents would be most reluctant to send to boarding school, children who were under about 9 years old.

Boarding school also has the advantage of having the pupils under one's supervision 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, which makes it more practical to teach pupils about Judaism and in particular about Shabbat.

For the Jewish Day School, one can organise seminars, in which the pupils go to stay in the country for a few days for a programme of study with recreation. I have just returned from such a seminar of my school, which we held in North Wales, for three days. In the morning we had a Jewish Studies programme and in the afternoon and evening a recreation programme. During the day we had services in a Shul we set up. Before meals, the pupils washed their hands (Netillat Yadayim) and after the meals Birchat Hamazon, which the pupils sang with great fervour! In this way, pupils lived in a "24 hour a day true Jewish atmosphere".

Now that we have looked at the ingredients for a Jewish secondary school, we must consider the material to be taught in such schools. The first observation in this respect is, just as secular programmes are planned by professional educationalists, so must the Jewish curricula. The late Rabbi Kopul Rosen, who was founder of Carmel College and also a leading Jewish educationalist, wrote on this subject: "In the Anglo-Jewish scene, and the same is true of other communities, men without any qualification other than the authority of being office holders, speak loudly about Jewish education. This could be tolerated with some amusement were it not that this invasion of the educational scene by communal ignoramuses is harmful."

It is convenient to divide up a High School into three divisions when considering the curricula: Years 1-3, age 11-14; Years 4-5, age 14-16; Year 6, age 16-18.

We shall begin by looking at Years 1-3. These years are most important, because if the Jewish Studies are not planned properly for this age of pupil, they will develop an anti-Jewish Studies attitude, which will be difficult, if not impossible, to correct at a later stage.

As an easier way out of curricula planning for this age group, a lot of teachers spend lesson after lesson on the translation of texts, to the virtual exclusion of other topics. Invariably, this is done in a parrot-wise manner. For the pupil, it is of little benefit, boring and causes a reaction against Jewish learning in general.

In order to maintain the interest of our pupils, we require techniques which will capture their enthusiasm, and, audio-visual aids, if correctly chosen and properly used can well serve this purpose. We are fortunate that in the last few years some excellent aids in Jewish Religious Knowledge have been produced. These can also be supplemented by simple demonstration



models which have been produced by the teachers. Time does not permit me to go into details on this subject, but I will be happy to supply anyone with further information and details on these aids.

Today we have a number of pupils in our schools who are from non-observant homes and will therefore, unfortunately, not see all the practices of Judaism carried out in their homes. For such pupils the school must act in loco parentis, and hence the teaching of Yiddishkeit will become an integral part of the teaching of Jewish Studies. Courses in practical Dinim will help to fill this void. Such courses, as the name indicates, should be taught in a practical manner. For example, boys will obtain a far greater appreciation for Tephillin, and stop thinking of them as "just black-boxes" if they were to see a filmstrip on how they were made, and to be shown the materials used for their writing and construction, and also to be able to "dissect" an old pair of Tephillin so that they can understand their construction.

Instead of just telling girls that meat and chicken must be kashered, it should be brought into the classroom and the girls themselves should practice kashering it. Naturally it is more difficult to kasher in a classroom than in a kitchen, but it can be done!

A number of Jewish schools will allocate European languages a good share of the timetable but will push Modern Hebrew into back place. Universities grant Modern Hebrew proper standing as a modern language and how much more so should our schools grant our language its proper place.

We must now move on to the 14 to 16 year age group. At this stage, pupils are already becoming "O-level conscious" and provided that the syllabuses are suitable, examinations in Jewish subjects, such as Scripture Knowledge, Classical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew, may act as an incentive to the pupils. However, the Jewish Studies should not all be devoted to preparation for examinations, otherwise it will become "just another subject"!

In the case of the Scripture Knowledge O-level examination, a serious problem may arise, since it is basically set for Christian pupils and will therefore require a study of the Bible with a critical and a Christological approach. In addition, the wording of the questions themselves in the examination may be objectionable to us. A few years ago, I made an approach to the Board on this question, but they were not prepared to accept that Jewish pupils who were intending to study this course should not be taught such critical methods. Instead they suggested that we write our own syllabus giving a Jewish approach to the Bible. I wrote such a syllabus which was accepted by the Board and last June, the first papers on this syllabus were set.

Finally we come to the Sixth forms. At this stage, one has a number of alternatives. Some pupils will study Classical Hebrew or Modern Hebrew to GCE Advanced Level - in the case of Scripture Knowledge, there is not as yet a syllabus that Jewish pupils can study at this level. One can also give a choice of nonexamination courses for which the pupils must register at the beginning of the year.

Even when the pupils reach the end of their school career, one can not abrogate further responsibility for them. On the contrary, we should try to direct them in paths which will intensify their attachment to Judaism.

For example, we should encourage suitable boys to spend a period studying at a Yeshivah in Israel or in this country. We could encourage pupils to continue their studies at an Israeli university. It is very possible that such pupils will remain in Israel.

In conclusion, we may sum up by saying that those responsible for administering and teaching in Jewish secondary schools have a grave responsibility for shaping the attitudes of our future generations towards Judaism. Let us hope that they will discharge this responsibility to the best of their ability.

קרן קיימת לישראל

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO  
BE ADDRESSED TO  
THE SECRETARY

# Jewish National Fund

FOR GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

## YOUTH AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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30th October 1974

Rabbi Dr. Chaim Simons,  
Director of Jewish Studies,  
King David Grammar School,  
Childwall Road,  
Liverpool 15.

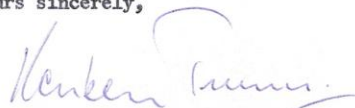
Dear Dr. Simons,

As part of the programme of Jewish Education Week, the Z.F. Educational Trust is arranging a symposium on Thursday 19th December in Edgware. You are invited to be a member of the panel and speak on "Jewish Education in a Grammar School" for a duration of 10-15 minutes.

I do hope that you will agree to participate and will contact you nearer the date regarding any other information that you may wish to have.

For your information the other members of the panel are:  
Mrs. Shoshana Eytan, Mrs. Rochelle Israel and Mrs. R. Kaley. Mr. Levi Gertner will be in the Chair.

Yours sincerely,



Rev. Reuben Turner  
Director

# THIS CONCERNS YOU! EDUCATION WEEK

SPONSORED BY THE J.N.F. YOUTH AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

## FRIDAY, 13th DECEMBER

Children's Competition . . . turn to the JUNIOR PAGE of this edition

## SHABBAT, 14th DECEMBER EDUCATION SHABBAT

8 p.m. MELAVA-MALKA AT KINGSTON SYNAGOGUE

33 Uxbridge Road, Kingston-On-Thames, Surrey.

Guest Speaker: Rev. Reuben Turner.

## SUNDAY, 15th DECEMBER

10.30 a.m. BBC Radio London: "YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE JEWISH"

3 p.m. CHILDREN'S CHANUCAH RALLY AT ODEON, HENDON

Parson Street, N.W.4. Tickets 50p (adults); 30p (children)

Tickets available from Box Office at 2 p.m.

## MONDAY, 16th DECEMBER

8.15 p.m. "CONFUSION OR CO-OPERATION?" PUBLIC MEETING

WITH FINCHLEY SYNAGOGUE

Bertha Tischler Hall, Kinloss Gardens, London, N.3. With Dr. E.

Conway, Mrs. Ruth Winston-Fox, J.P., John Izbicki.

Rev. Dr. I. Levy, O.B.E. Rev. Reuben Turner.

## TUESDAY, 17th DECEMBER

8.15 p.m. "CONFUSION OR CO-OPERATION?" PUBLIC MEETING

WITH KENTON SYNAGOGUE

Shaftesbury Avenue, Kenton, Middlesex. With Dr. I. Fishman,

Sidney Frosh, Alan Gold, Susy Goldstein, Rabbi Abraham Levy.

## WEDNESDAY, 18th DECEMBER

8.15 p.m. "CONFUSION OR CO-OPERATION?" PUBLIC MEETING

WITH ILFORD SYNAGOGUE

Mark Lewis Hall, Beehive Lane, Ilford, Essex. With Miss B. J. Bar-

well, Michael Cohen, Howard Jacobs, Raymond Rudie, Rev. R. Tur-

ner. 8 p.m. J. A. TORAH DEPT., AND JEWS' COLLEGE: "SPOTLIGHT

ON MIDRASHA" Brodie Institute, 1011 Finchley Road, N.W.11.

## THURSDAY, 19th DECEMBER

10 a.m. SCHOOLS' ASSEMBLY COUNCIL DAY SEMINAR

Hillel House, 1/2 Endsleigh Street, London. WC1H 0DS.

8.15 p.m. "JEWISH EDUCATION"—ROSH PINAH SCHOOL

Mowbray Rd., Edgware. In conjunction with Z. F. Educational Trust.

With Mr. H. Beckman, Mrs. S. Eytan, Mr. L. Gertner, Mrs. R. Kalev,

Mrs. M. Israel, Rabbi, Dr. C. Simons.

## SUNDAY, 22nd DECEMBER

10 a.m. TEACHERS' CONFERENCE organised by London Board of

Jewish Religious Education.

LAUNCHING OF J.N.F. YEDIAT HA'ARETZ Programme by the Chief

Rabbi, Woburn House, Upper Woburn Place, London. W.C.1.

For further details telephone 01-930 6181. Ext. 119/237 Rev. R. Turner (Director)

A. R. Gold (Education Officer).

Jewish Chronicle  
13 December 1974