

BETH EL - KESER ISRAEL SCHOOL

85 HARRISON STREET

NEW HAVEN, CONN. 06515

a handbook for parents

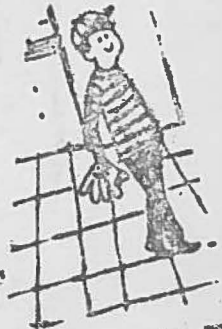
Spring 1970-5730

FUNDAMENTALS OF JUDAISM

CURRICULUM ADVANCES

THE CHALLENGE OF ISRAEL

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

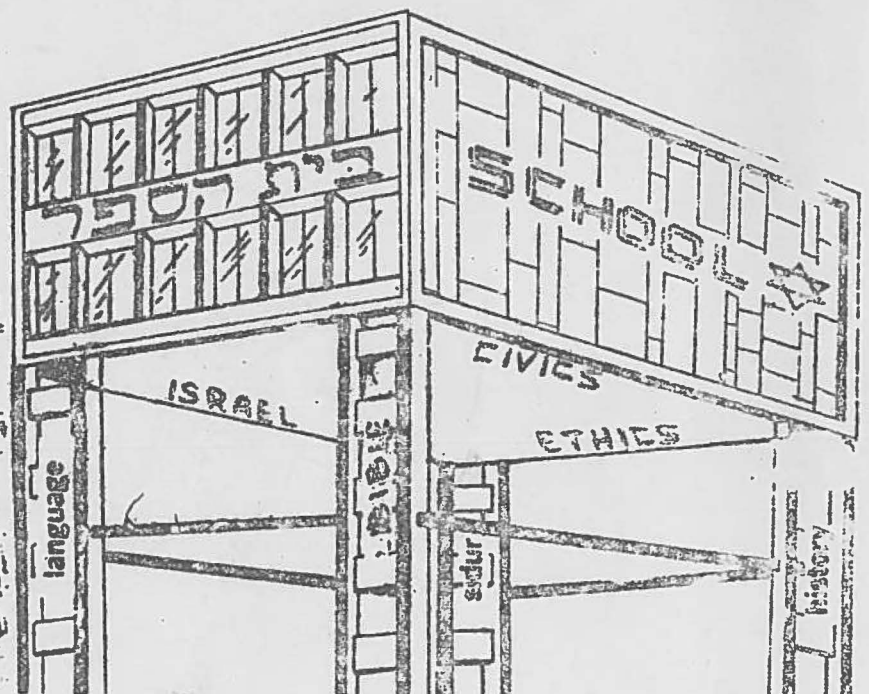
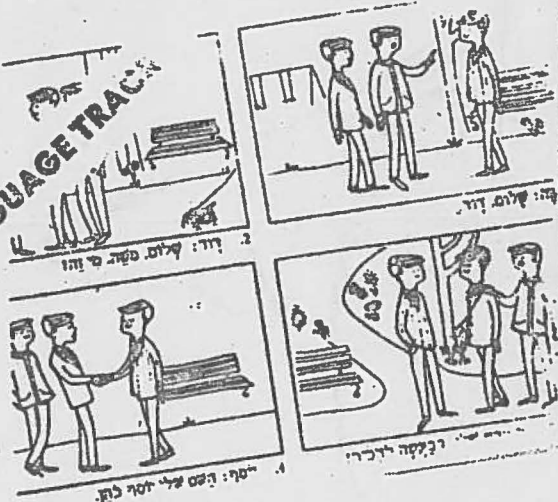


מה נשם
TO LIVE AS A JEW



אנא ואורי בבית-הפנסה.

LANGUAGE TRACK



PREFACE

The Education Committee of Beth El-Keser Israel has recently formulated a statement of the philosophy and objectives of our Religious School. I present these brief views for your consideration, not as the final word on the subject, but as the opening words on the subject. In writing, these expressions are tangible matters for us to discuss. Obviously, the Education Committee intends to represent the members of the Congregation and to carry out the will of these members. If you find any of the views expressed herinafter contrary to your own preferences, please feel free to discuss those with members of the Education Committee or the Educational Director.

I think the following headings are self-explanatory:

HEBREW.....We want the student to develop a familiarity with and an appreciation of the Hebrew Language as the source of Jewish culture and spiritual growth. As a minimum we want him to be able to participate in Hebrew ritual and prayer with understanding and feeling.

BIBLE.....We want the student to have a modern understanding of the Bible as interpreted liberally in the Conservative movement, and are resigned to the fact that he probably cannot gain this by studying the Bible in Hebrew, considering the circumstances of the three-day-per-week afternoon school.

HISTORY...We want the student to gain a meaningful understanding of the important milestones in Jewish history, realize the significance of various periods in our history, and in the course of his studies cover the span from Biblical to contemporary.

ETHICS....We want the student to come to realize that the morals and ethics of western civilization, which are so much a part of but civil and social life, are basically of Jewish origin. But even more important, the fine points, the subtleties of Jewish law, ethics, morals are still distinct, relevant, and important to the life of a Jew. Studies in this area should lead the student to grow up with a feeling of responsibility toward the Jewish community and toward the secular community as well.

CUSTOMS AND CEREMONIES.....The American Jewish Community is very much centered around the Synagogue and the religion. In the case of a synagogue school, one commitment is clearly to "train" the student to participate meaningfully in the traditional rituals associated with that synagogue and the home. We would like to offer the child creative opportunities to feel the significance and pleasure of prayer and other ceremonies.

ISRAEL.....We want the student to understand the relationship of the Jewish people to Israel, the Zionist movement, recent history, and modern Israel, and to develop love and responsibility toward Israel.

AESTHETICS..We want to expose the child to that which will be meaningful to him in Jewish literature, music and the arts.

CIVICS.....Life of the American Community and Communities throughout the world.

There are a number of less tangible objectives which should nonetheless be mentioned. We want to develop within the child a feeling of being "at home" in his Jewish religion, feeling the meaning of being part of the Jewish People in relation to all mankind. We want the child to know and love his own philosophy as he matures, within this framework.

After you have given some thought to these expressions and considered where you agree and disagree, turn your attention to two questions which are indeed quite apart from the above. How are we trying to achieve these goals? and How well are our efforts succeeding?

Mr. Giskan, The Educational Director of our school, has prefaced the bulk of this Parents Handbook to give you some insight into how we are trying to match the program to the goals. I urge you to give careful thought to the following pages, again as a first draft if you will, and feel free to discuss any aspects with us.

Respectfully yours,

Samuel I. Trotz
Chairman, Educational
Committee

Dear Parent:

This Handbook has been prepared for you, both as a vehicle of information as to what is being done for your child in our school, and as a measure of our awareness of your concern for a Jewish Education.

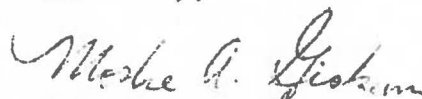
The pages of this Handbook, and especially the section entitled "The Philosophy and Goals of Our Religious School," attest to the careful rethinking and change that characterize education in America today. More than ever before we are concerned with the nature of the educational process, with the goals of a Jewish education, with the impact of change in our world--and, besides, with the techniques and devices that can be used in improving the educational enterprise. There has been much inventiveness. New curricula have been devised. Films, text books, "teaching machines"--all have come under close scrutiny in the effort to hasten and deepen the learning process. Indeed to you, the parent, it all must seem at times quite bewildering. That is why this Parent's Handbook has been prepared--to take you into our confidence, to help make your child's education comprehensible.

What characterizes this period is a change both in the conception of the educational enterprises, and in our view of the learning process. With respect to the enterprise--or the educational establishment--there is a quickened recognition that the educational profession must be far broader in scope than previously conceived. Rote teaching of "Alef-Bet," or "Bible Tales" is no longer adequate. This broader scope is symbolized in the Melton Research Institute which is developing approaches to the teaching of the Bible--already in use in our school--which not only integrate modern science and archeology into the learning process, but primarily focus on the ethical teachings of the Bible as

they apply to the daily life of the student living in modern America. Coupled with this is the increased awareness of the innate intelligence and ability of the average child. The capacity for independent thinking and concern if properly approached and stimulated.

It is our hope that, with your cooperation, our constantly improving school will prove adequate to the challenge of our times and the needs of a new bright Jewish generation. Then will we be able to stimulate our children to a deeper awareness of, and pride in their Jewish heritage.

Sincerely,



Moshe A. Giskin
Educational Director

MAG/dab

A WORD TO PARENTS

We have prepared this handbook for parents, to keep you informed of our goals and objectives, to keep you abreast of the changes made in the instructional material used at each grade level, and of our changing methods and techniques.

You are our partners in the task of educating our children. Parents are the most important people in the life of a child. No one has a greater influence over the child in his formative years than his parents. Many of the strongest influences for nobility in Jewish living come to the youngster through the precepts parents taught them.

We believe that the most effective way of making Jewish education meaningful to our children is to engage YOU, parents, as our active partners. Our goals are the same: a desire to develop in our children a devotion of Judaism to the Jewish people and a consecration to the ideals of peace, righteousness, truth and mercy. We believe that these ideals can be brought into fruition through the joint enterprise of home and school. They can be translated into actual practice through more conscious involvement on your part.

Acquaint yourselves with our program of study, particularly with the curricular outlines of your children's grades. Examine and discuss the instructional material with your children. Children will learn better and develop a greater reverence for the religious school if they can sense that these matters are important to you.

What else can you do to involve yourselves as active partners?

It may not be possible for you to attend Sabbath services every week; but you could - and you should - attend synagogue services

several times a year, in the company of your children. Prayer is the bridge between man and his Maker, but it also serves as a bridge between one Jew and another.

Jewish education must be highly important to you; otherwise, you would not go through the trouble of shuttling your children back and forth, nor would you submit yourselves to the other inconveniences involved. Are you, then, proving to your child that Jewish education is extremely important? How long has it been since you have attended a formal class? Register in an adult education class, refresh and replenish your own Jewish knowledge. It will yield profitable dividends to you as an individual, and it will establish a bond between you and your children. They will come to the realization that Jewish education is not only a preparation for a Bar-Mitzvah or Bat-Mitzvah. They will come to understand that these ceremonies do not mean termination of study, but that Jewish learning continues as long as life itself.

What else can you do to make Jewish learning more meaningful? Enrich your home with Jewish ceremonial objects, Jewish books, and records; but above all, provide a Jewish environment. Home observance of the Sabbath and festivals is vital. Our sages have emphasized the fact that "study is important when it leads to action." By creating a Jewish climate in the home, you will enhance the work of the religious school, leading to an interrelation between Jewish knowledge and Jewish practice. Your aim and our aim is one; we desire to bring up our children as wholesome Jews with a reverence for life and for the Giver of Life, to infuse in them the desire to serve man, and to make them aware that God lives in the open mind.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF OUR RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

The Beth El-Keser Israel School is an integral part of our synagogue, a religious institution. Our congregation is a member of the United Synagogue, and thus a part of the Conservative movement. Therefore, the ideology, orientation, and curriculum of the school are to a large extent, expressions of the viewpoints of Conservative Judaism.

The largest single fact affecting the Jewish child of today is that of freedom of choice. With the external pressures to be a Jew fast vanishing, one can safely predict that our children will remain Jews, in any meaningful sense of that term, upon growing up, only to the extent that they choose consciously to do so.

For our children to make a conscious choice to be Jewish upon maturity, with the various degrees of sacrifice that such a choice will entail, will require a good reason for doing so. Thus, the first, foremost, and over-riding goal of Jewish education must be to give our children a good reason for being Jews when they grow up. If we accomplish this, we have succeeded brilliantly. If we fail in achieving this goal, no matter what else we may have succeeded in accomplishing, we have nonetheless failed totally.

When we use the term religion, we are using it on several different levels. But fundamental to all of our thinking with relation to this term is the conviction that, at its root, religion is an attempt to answer certain fundamental problems and questions of human existence. What is the meaning of life, or has it any meaning? What am I to do with my life? What is right and what is wrong? What is good and what is bad? On what basis shall I make my decision, etc.

We start with a conviction that the fundamental answers that Judaism gives to the questions we have posed are as valid and meaningful today as they were ever, for the fundamental human situation never changes, and thus, the fundamental Jewish approach to the "human situation" remains eternally valid. It is for this reason that we feel that Judaism and its message are relevant to the present day individual; the Tradition is relevant to the life, the problems, and the needs of the Twentieth Century American Jewish child. It is in this light that Judaism is to be presented to the child, on his own level.

Our curriculum is ideationally oriented. It places God and His relationship with the Jewish people at the center. It insists on the relevance of the Tradition to the problems and needs of modern man. It sees ritual and mechanical proficiency in the externals of Judaism as means to the end of creating knowledgeable and committed Jews. It places the highest priority upon trying to convey to the child:

- A. WHAT JUDAISM STANDS FOR
- B. RELATING THE ABOVE TO THE INDIVIDUAL
- C. MOTIVATING THE INDIVIDUAL TO INTERNALIZE THE IDEALS OF OUR FAITHS AND PEOPLEHOOD SO AS TO MAKE THEM A PART OF THE STRUCTURE OF HIS PERSONALITY

It is our faith that if we are able in some measure to achieve the above, we will have at least made Judaism a real and living option for our children when they grow up. This will not insure their choosing Judaism. But we feel that we will very much increase the probability of their making an active choice and commitment in favor of Judaism.

METHODOLOGY

Unless the full implications of the fact that an afternoon school is rigidly limited in time are completely appreciated, it is impossible to even begin the process of developing an adequate and workable curriculum. A child who attends our religious school from age 6 through age 15 gets as many hours of formal instruction as he would receive in 2 years of Public School.

The implications to be drawn from the severe limitations of available time are as follows:

1. The goals of our educational system must be limited.
2. All methodology must be rigidly tailored to achieve the limited goals decided upon.
3. Time must be utilized to the maximum.
4. Subject matter must be integrated to achieve maximum effect within the available time.
5. Extra-curricular activities must supplement, and be integrated into, the over-all curriculum.

Primary Division

These are first and second grade children. First graders are in Prep Class and second graders are in Primary Class. They attend once a week for three hours. The purposes of the Primary Division are to accustom the children to attendance at our Religious School; to create a positive attitude toward the Religious School, and thus to Jewish Studies and Judaism in general; to teach certain fundamentals of Jewish holidays; practices and observances; and to prepare for Hebrew language readiness by teaching limited Hebrew vocabulary.

ELEMENTARY

Lower (Hebrew grades 1 and 2)

These children begin three day per week attendance. These are the grades in which basic skills are learned, including language, prayer, and basic knowledge of Judaism.

Upper (Grades 3, 4 and 5)

This is a transition period when Hebrew becomes a tool in the academic classes and remains a subject matter in the linguistic classes. At this time, our instructional program takes into account individual needs and differences. It has been found that while some children are linguistically oriented, others find that ideational approach to be more beneficial. With this in mind, we have a system of two classes at each grade level, each emphasizing the approach most suited to the class members.

Subject matter begins to include history, a study of the community of American Judaism to the problems of life.

Confirmation

This division of the School has, as its primary aim, the implementation of the basic aims and goals of the School, namely, the developing of a mature approach to Judaism (built upon the foundation laid in the Elementary division) and an attempt to give the children a rationale of being Jewish on a mature level. We are in the process of creating an enriched section in our Confirmation program. The enriched section will have added courses and an increased study which will culminate with a summer study-tour of the state of Israel.

STANDARDS FOR PROMOTION OF STUDENTS

A uniform set of standards is a prerequisite of a well run school. These ground rules must be accepted by pupils, parents and teachers alike. Without them, an efficient, productive and orderly learning process is impossible. The educational program of a religious school will be effective to the extent that standards are maintained in attendance, effort and achievement, and to the extent that standards are established for promotion of pupils from grade to grade.

The standards serve as a yardstick against which the growth of our children can be measured. They provide the criteria necessary to determine whether or not a pupil is ready to be advanced from one grade level to another.

STANDARDS

1. Attendance: Prompt and regular attendance is essential in any effective school. To be promoted to the next grade, a pupil must maintain good attendance and punctuality. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, 15% absences represents the maximum number permissible in any school year. Absences in excess of this number will result in the student's receiving an incomplete.

2. Attitude: Respect for teachers, subject matter, and Synagogue represent three "musts". A student whose attitude is detrimental to the running of the school, after counseling with the Director of Education and his parents, is expected to conform to our standards. Refusal to adhere to school standards will result in a suspension. After a third warning, parents will be requested to withdraw the student from school not as a punishment but rather to safeguard the decorum of the school.

3. Effort: Pupils will be expected to evidence effort in all areas of school work. Serious participation in class studies, school functions, participation in religious services, and homework assignments are expected of all students. Failure to produce a satisfactory effort will result in an "incomplete". A pupil who is habitually unprepared will not be promoted.

4. Conduct: We expect proper behavior in the classroom, orderly conduct in assemblies, and on Synagogue property. A pupil who is disruptive of class activities, after due warning, and in consultation with parents will be suspended in accordance with above rules.

5. Achievement: The curriculum calls for an integrated coverage of material of each grade level. Our pupils, within their own limits, are expected to master the assigned work. Progress and learning in each of the grades will be measured subjectively through evaluation of the pupil's behavior patterns in class and in the various activities of the school and objectively, by means of a periodic testing program. Satisfactory performance on these tests is expected of all pupils for promotion. Pupils who fail to cover the assigned material will receive a grade of "incomplete". Pupils who fail the objective tests will receive a grade of unsatisfactory.

6. Incomplete, Unsatisfactory and Failure: When a pupil, because of problems concerning attendance, achievement, conduct or attitude, has received a grade of "incomplete" or "unsatisfactory", a specific assignment of make-up-work will be given. Satisfactory completion of this assignment prior to the opening of the next school year is mandatory. Failure to complete the assignment will result in holding the pupil at the prior grade level.

7. Trial Promotion: A student who has made up an incomplete or unsatisfactory will be placed in the next grade on a trial basis. His progress will be followed by the teacher and principal. A second successive incomplete or unsatisfactory will be regarded as a failure requiring repetition of the grade in which the failure was incurred.

8. Junior Congregation: Students are urged to attend at least 20 Junior Congregation Services per year. Attendance with parent or parents at Main Sabbath Service will be considered in lieu of Junior Congregation attendance. Attendance at Sabbath morning service at another Synagogue will be considered on the same basis. Failure to attend 20 services per year could result in the loss of 'all around honor student' status.

9. Extenuating Circumstances: When extenuating circumstances exist for failure to meet the requirements for promotion, the parent will be required to communicate with the Director of Education stating the conditions which deserve special consideration. These circumstances will be referred to a committee composed of the Education Director, Chairman of the Education Committee and two designates of the Chairman of the Education Committee for their consideration.

