

only five and provide only a minimal amount of detail. The founders of the RJJ School felt it was sufficient that the secular department meet the standards set up by the New York City Board of Education, and left it at that.

The Curriculum

Limudei kodesh (religious studies) consisted of the material covered in Eastern European yeshivas at the time. The language of instruction was Yiddish.

There was emphasis on Talmud with the goal of producing Talmudic scholars. Beginners were taught to read the Rashit Da'at, the Siddur, and then began the study of the Bible. The Sedra or weekly Bible portion was studied in the upper grades together with the classical Rashi commentary. The Kitzur Shulhan Aruk was studied weekly.

Study of Gemara began in the sixth grade for boys who were 10 or 11 years old.

No formal attempt was made to teach Isaiah, Jeremiah, or any of the other important Prophets. Courses in Jewish history were not included in the curriculum. The attitude of both board members and faculty was that these subjects were relatively simple in comparison with Talmud and required no formal instruction. They felt that the student could master such subjects by himself after attaining proficiency in Talmud.

The secular curriculum was essentially the same as that given in the public schools, save that certain subjects that were considered "unnecessary" were not taught. All secular instruction was in English. Most of the secular teachers were young men who taught in the public schools until 3 p.m. Secular instruction took place between 4 and 7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday. Thus a total of 15 hours per week were set aside for instruction in secular subjects.

The first part of the school day, from 9 until about 3, was devoted to limudei kodesh and the rest of the day to acquiring basic skills in English language, history, mathematics, and science. The decision to devote the first part of the day to religious studies was motivated by the idea that the children were "at their best" during this time. In addition, the decision to put secular studies in the afternoon permitted the use of public school teachers as instructors.

During the 1920's the Religious department was divided into two sections -- a Hebrew and a Yiddish section. From interviews and talks with individuals, it would seem that gradually a demand developed on the part of younger parents to have their children learn more Hebrew. It is probable that Hebrew-taught classes started slowly and developed into a separate but parallel department through the elementary grades. The parents insisting on a Hebrew education for their children seem to have been more Zionist in outlook. By introducing Hebrew as a language of instruction, the school adapted some of the methods of the Heder Methukkan (the improved school). For this purpose, teachers with a thorough knowledge of Hebrew, language, grammar, and pedagogy were needed. This tendency was interpreted by some educators as the Haskalah (age of enlightenment) influence upon the Yeshiva curriculum. However, the teachers who were engaged were all orthodox men devoted to Torah and Mitzvot.

The curriculum of the yeshiva expanded rapidly and changed to fit the needs of the Jewish community. Every new term brought changes and modification. Often the school board and administration worked on a trial and error basis, for no guiding principles or precedents in Yeshiva education on the American scene were available to them.

A Successful Endeavor

The educational approach taken by the directors of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School met with considerable success. By 1910 there were 500 boys enrolled in the school. The great majority of pupils were immigrant children who previous to coming to America had received religious instruction in Russia and Poland.

Many of the students traveled a considerable distance to get to the Lower East Side, where the school was located. Carfare was provided for some of them. A "kitchen fund" was established by the Ladies Auxiliary associated with the school so that those in need were provided with breakfast and lunch.

Those daring men who pioneered this bold experiment in Jewish education felt that through a thorough grounding in Judaism supplemented by a good secular education, they would produce students who, while remaining true to Torah Judaism, would be able to function well in American society. Time has proven how right they were.

(Dr. Levine expresses his thanks to Ms. Elinor Grumet of the Stern College Library for providing him with the material from Irving Pinsky's thesis used in this article.)

[1] "Jewish Education in New York City" by Alexander M. Dushkin, *The Bureau of Jewish Education*, New York, 1918, page 75.

[1] "RABBI S.I. ANDRON DIES IN PALESTINE," *The New York Times*, February 27, 1930, page 18.

[1] "It is simply not accurate to say that all of the Judaic teachers were Orthodox men, etc. When I attended the yeshiva in the 1940s there were several who definitely fit into the Haskalah category." Personal communication from Dr. Marvin Schick, 11/26/07.

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