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A STUDY OF A CHILD'S FORMAL INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION IN POLAND AND GERMANY: FROM THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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To Dr. Eugene Borowitz for his caring,
wisdom, guidance, and inspiration.

To Mr. Phil Miller for his gifts of humor,
resources, and books.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This paper is a study of a child's formal introduction to Jewish education. It focuses on Poland and the Germanic territories in the period immediately after the composition of the Shulchan Arukh and ending just prior to the First Partition of Poland and the outset of the Haskalah in Germany. It thus covers the two centuries from approximately 1570-1770.

This endeavor began as an attempt to synthesize my interests in early childhood education and the way in which halakhah (Jewish law) functions in the community. The post-Shulchan Arukh era provided me with a period in Jewish life when the rabbinic community had reached some degree of consensus about the authority of a special code of law. The publication of the Shulchan Arukh marked the first time in our legal history when a single corpus brought together both Sefardic and Ashkenazic halakhic opinion. As such, it inaugurated an era in which communities could base their own particular legislation and their adjudication of local issues on as normative a code of law as the Diaspora Jewish world ever had.

The period under question also was a time of relatively homogeneous historic circumstances for the Polish and Germanic Jewish communities. While certainly an era of persistent persecution, it was a time in Jewish history when Jewish communities, especially in Poland, were able to settle, consolidate, and create a substantial culture. In fact, Polish Jewry (upon whom most of this study is concentrated) reached its zenith of scholarly productivity in these centuries. It gave birth, and, in some cases, refuge, to rabbis: Moses Isserles (1525-1572), Isaiah b.

Abraham Hurwitz (1590?-1660?), and the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797).

To have gone beyond the indicated terminus ad quem of this investigation would have brought us to a period of disintegration in Poland (partitions in 1772 and 1795) and upheaval in the Germanic territories (the beginning of the Haskalah). Assuredly, it would have complicated the study greatly. Consequently, I arrived at the chronological and geographical limits of this paper.

Now, a few words about this thesis' informational confines. Secondary works on the history of Jewish education exist for every time and place. Likewise, the Shulchan Arukh, along with its commentaries, is accessible to any capable researcher. Amassing data became a considerable problem, however, when I turned to a search for primary sources of the post-Shulchan Arukh era; specifically, responsa and commentary on the halakhah dealing with a child's formal introduction to education. The only responsa material I uncovered were a responsum in the חות יאיר of Jair Hayyim Bacharach of Leipnik (1637-1702) and a responsum from שאגת אריה of Aaron Samuel b. Israel Kaidanover of Poland (1614-1676). Further, I consulted with the responsa bank of the Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, based in Chicago, Illinois, and my discovery was confirmed. They were not able to add any additional responsa relevant to my research.

I based my study, then, on Simcha Asaf's classic collection of educational historical sources, Mekorot L'Toldot Hahinuh B'Yisrael (vol. I). In addition to responsa, it included pedogogical treatises, ethical writings, biographies, annual records of Talmud Torah schools, commentaries to "Yoreh De'ah" of the Shulchan Arukh, and translations of the Bible into Judaeo-German. Although this volume appeared in 1925,

I could not uncover any subsequent compendium of primary sources which dealt with the subject of Jewish education. Each of my secondary sources, no matter how recent, relied on Asaf. Indeed, even a phone call to Dr. Elijah Bortniker, the author of a subsection of the Encyclopedia Judaica's article on "Education", entitled "Jewish Education--16th-18th Centuries", could not provide me with a more recent collection of primary sources. Isidore Fishman indicated, in 1944, that his book depended upon the research of Asaf and M. Gudemann (Quellenschriften zur Geschichte und der Erziehung bei den deutschen Juden, Berlin, 1891); these two works remain fundamental today.

My task, then, became one of gleaning from the commentaries to the Shulchan Arukh and from Asaf (Gudemann's work, written in German, was inaccessible to me) those sources which specifically related to a child's introduction to formal education. I used Asaf's index to subject matter to locate pertinent texts. It then became a matter of screening these texts to see if they contained material related to my inquiry, if they corresponded to my chronological limitations, and if they originated in the territories under study. The results of this effort appear in Chapter III of this study. Chapter II furnishes a brief background to the issue of Talmud Torah as it developed in the halakhic literature from the time of the Tannaim to the publication of the Shulchan Arukh. Chapter IV represents the conclusions I have reached as a result of my research on this topic. Generally, it responds to the primary question I posed as I directed my inquiry: What does practice indicate about the realities of a child's introduction to formal education, particularly as compared to the halakhic standard? I then also speculate on some other questions: Was the process of halakhic legislation at all

reflective of the particular needs of individual communities? How does one explain the lack of responsa dealing with this topic?

The remainder of this introduction presents the history of the Germanic and Polish Jewish communities.

Historical Background

As for the Germanic territories, the few centuries preceding the period of our study had brought severe and difficult changes for the Jews. Laws, regulations, and the like had circumscribed the entry of Jews into society, their length of stay in communities, and the number of marriages and children. As a result, an institutional organization had developed which enabled Jews to run their lives in such a restricting environment: the kahal. As the center of gravity, both in population and intellectual activity, began to shift steadily eastward in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, this form of communal organization, a propensity for exacting application of the Law, and a nascent Yiddish language found their ways into Poland.[2]

Germanic Jewry produced scholars like: Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1525-1609), Joseph Hahn of Frankfurt (1570-1637), and Jacob Emden (1696-1776). It is generally assumed that the school of Meir b. Baruch ha-Levi of Vienna (14th century), gave the Jewish world the custom of semikhah.[3] Certainly, the intense pietistic fervor engendered by the tradition of the Hasidei Ashkenaz made inroads into many European Jewish communities. Yet, the contributions to Diaspora Jewry notwithstanding, by the mid-sixteenth century the center of Jewish scholarship was found in Poland; while Jews in Germany were being expelled from most cities and harassed by a multitude of laws and restrictions.

There is evidence of Jews in Poland as early as the eleventh and

twelfth centuries.[4] Yet, is was not until the thirteenth century that the Polish kings encouraged Jewish immigration, especially from Germany, to Poland as a means of attracting a sorely needed middle class of tradesmen and craftsmen to an increasingly weakening economic structure.[5] Jews were sought by the Polish kings as a source of capital.

All classes in Poland formed separate estates.[6] So, it was only natural that the Jews, too, were classified as a separate estate. Prior to the formulation of any middle class, Polish society had been divided among the shlakhta (nobility),the peasantry, and the Church. Since 966 C.E., Poland had been officially Roman Catholic and the Church had come to be a power much in competition with the shlakhta. That the Jews were part of a separate estate served to distinquish them in Polish society somewhat, but the efforts of the Polish Church helped to segregate them even further: Church statutes forbade Christians from inviting Jews to share in meals and celebrations; the Synod of 1542 sought to limit the growth of the Jewish population.[7] Moreover, while the Jews did receive some manner of protection from the Polish kings, in exchange for their financial resources, the right to reside in the cities was controlled by the burghers.[8] The burghers, rivals of the Jews as merchants, shopkeepers, and tradesmen, limited Jewish residence in the cities; so, while no city ghetto existed de jure, it existed de facto. Consequently, the Jewish community was segregated from the rest of Polish society. Even so, Polish Jewry grew: in 1500, there were approximately 10-15,000 Jews in Poland, but, by 1648 (the eve of the Chmielnicki Massacres), they had grown to number 150,000, and constituted the largest Jewish community in the Diaspora.[9]

The life of Polish Jewry was regulated by the kahal[10]. The kahal,

an Ashkenazic import,[11] was wholly responsible for the actions of its members. Its leaders were accountable to the Polish authority to guarantee payment of the head tax on time and to collect from any delinquents.[12] Each community had its own kahal organization, which saw to the needs of its particular constituency. If large enough, a kahal had a staff of paid officials, including a rabbi.[13]

The constitution governing the life of the kahal was Jewish Law. Since 1551, the Jews exercised complete autonomy over internal affairs. Jewish Law, in this time and place, was Talmudic Law,[14] as understood and interpreted by the rabbinic leadership (often singular) of each community.

In general, Polish society was not influenced by the same kind of cross-cultural interchange as had occurred in Spain and Italy. This fact, combined with the isolated nature of the communities, made it difficult for any rays of secular learning to filter in. This meant that the daily life of the Jew was limited to the home, the school (if a child), the synagogue, and the ideals of the community. This fostered an intense Jewish consciousness and a primary interest in gaining access to the ordering principles of one's community. Vis a vis education, this meant that Jewish learning was closely related to Jewish life. The aim of education in this community was an outgrowth of the isolated position of the Jew and the need to prepare the children to live in a distinctly Jewish environment.

Despite its segregated status, the Jewish community was not untouched by changes in Poland. Since whatever protection they enjoyed issued from the royal house, the disintegration of that power spelled disaster for Polish Jewry. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Poland was experiencing terrible internal economic crises and menacing external

border dilemmas. Internally, the Jewish community reeled from increased taxation, which eventually drove the supreme Jewish organization, the Council of the Four Lands, into irrevocable debt.[15] Also, without adequate royal protection, the Jews fell prey to the massacres (1648-1649) of the same Ukrainian Cossacks who had been formed to guard the Polish borders from the Tatars and others.[16] Tens of thousands of Jews died in the Chmielnicki massacres. Communities were laid waste and the number of rabbis diminished. Many scholars fled to Germany, Austria, and French Alsace. Strongholds of Polish scholarship survived in only a few locales. Lithuania, however, survived the massacres and the subsequent economic depression better than did Poland.[17] By the outset of the eighteenth century, it had replaced Poland as a focus of intellectual Jewry.[18] Vilna soon became the rabbinic center, and scholars such as the Vilna Gaon (Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720-1797) taught there.

Polish Jewry, meanwhile, never really recovered. Despite attempts at reconstitution, the Council of the Four Lands was dissolved in 1764 and the yeshivot (academies of Jewish youth above the age of thirteen) never regained their brilliance.

The Polish state, itself, was in dire straits by the mid-eighteenth century. Finally, it too succumbed to a first partition in 1772 (with Prussia, Russia, and Austria each annexing a slice of Polish territory) and a final partition in 1795.

As depressed and chaotic as Polish and Germanic Jewry may have been, efforts were always made to maintain some provisions for the education of the children. It is with this thought in mind that we turn now to the issue of Talmud Torah in the halakhic literature as the background for our study.

Notes

1) Isidore Fishman, The History of Jewish Education in Central Europe: From the End of the Sixteenth to the End of the Eighteenth Century (London: Edward Goldston, 1944), p. 13.

2) Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), p. 474.

3) Fishman, pp. 29-30.

4) Seltzer, p. 474.

5) Emanuel Gamoran, Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924), p. 14.

6) Ibid., p. 21.

7) Ibid., pp. 18-19.

8) Ibid., p. 17.

9) Seltzer, p. 476.

10) Simon Dubnov, History of the Jews, trans. Moshe Spiegel, revised edition (New York: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1971), Vol. IV, p. 99.

11) Seltzer, p. 476.

12) Dubnov, p. 156.

13) Seltzer, p. 477.

14) Gamoran, p. 24.

15) Moses A. Shulvass, Between the Rhine and the Bosporus: Studies and Essays in European Jewish History (Chicago: The College of Jewish Studies Press, 1964), p. 49.

16) Dubnov, p. 27.

17) Seltzer, p. 483.

18) Ibid, p. 484.

CHAPTER II: THE OBLIGATION OF TALMUD TORAH: MEN AND WOMEN

Study is an ordained obligation. The details of its observance are spelled out in the great codifications of Medieval Jewry: namely, the Mishneh Torah and the Shulchan Arukh. Prior to these, we have teachings of the Tannaim and Amoraim, dealing with the content of study, the extent of women's obligation, and the duty of each and every adult male to study. The Bible contains several verses which became the foundations of general halakhic principles regarding education.

First, verses like Deuteronomy 7:6-7 and Psalm 119:97 were used by the rabbis of the Talmud as bases for their teachings about the importance of Torah study. "And these words, which I command you this day, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deut. 7:6-7). The Amoraim (Kiddushin 29a-b) interpreted these verses to mean that each male is obligated to study Torah so as to be able to teach it to his sons. Also, in Sifrei to the book of Deuteronomy (11:19), the Amoraim interpreted the word " בנ'ך " to mean " אלמ'ד ". The exegetical connection between " בנ'ך " and " אלמ'ד ", first forged here, established that in the construction of halakhah dealing with the study of Torah, obligations pertaining to students (אלמ'ד) were restricted to males (" זכ'ר") alone. This principle was important to the formulation of halakhah in later centuries.

Psalm 119:97, "Oh how I love your Torah! It is my meditation all the days," as well as Joshua 1:8, "The book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night" are two examples

of biblical verses which speak of the Torah as very important in the lives of the Jews. By the time of the Mishneh Torah, these verses were used as evidence substantiating the obligations of fixed daily study and lifetime Torah study (see page 11 of this chapter).

The Tannaim and Amoraim taught that neither poverty nor infirmity should deter one from study. R. Hillel served as an illustration of the dedicated student. Tractate Yoma, 35b, contains the details of Hillel's struggles to study despite his extreme poverty. So important was the study of Torah to Jewish life that poverty could not excuse one from his obligation. Moreover, R. Jose taught, "Qualify yourself for the study of Torah, since the knowledge of it is not an inheritance of yours" (Avot 2:12).

R. Eliezer, an example of the diligent student as well, did not allow illness to interfere with his study (Baba Mezia, 84b).

> Every evening they spread sixty sheets for him and every morning sixty basins of blood and discharge were removed from under him. Yet his wife did not permit him to go to the House of Study, lest the rabbis discomfort him.

Despite the extent of his malady, he would not shirk from his obligation. While in bed, every morning, he would exhort his sores, in personified form, "Get out of here, because you disturb my studies!"

Torah study was defined as the Written and Oral Laws as early as the days of the Mishnah. In Avot 5:21 we read that Judah b. Tema is reputed to have taught, "At five years old (one is fit) for Bible, at ten years for the Mishnah, at thirteen for (the fulfilling of) the commandments, at fifteen for the Talmud." Expounding on the words in Proverbs 24:27 ("Prepare your work without, and make it ready for you

in the field, and afterward build your house"), the Tannaim taught, " 'Prepare your work without'; that is Bible, 'and make it ready for you in the field', that is Mishnah; 'and afterward build your house,' that is Gemara.' " (Sotah 44a).

Women were exempted from studying and teaching Torah (Kiddushin 29b). The exegetical principle connecting males (בנים)alone to the obligation of Torah study was clearly established in the Sifrei to Deuteronomy (11:19). The role of women was to inspire their husbands and children to fulfill their obligations. In fact, Rabbi Akiba acknowledged the role his wife played in his scholarly achievements by saying to his disciples, "All that I am, and all that you are, is owing to her" (Nedarim 50a). Also, we read the Amoraic report that Rab said, "Whereby do women earn merit? By making their children go to the synagogue to learn Bible and their husbands to the House of Study to learn Mishnah" (Berachot 17a).

The prescriptions regarding the obligation to study are first found classified and detailed in the codes of the Middle Ages. The first great legal corpus of Medieval Jewry was Maimonides' Mishneh Torah (1180). Here, in the section Hilkhot Talmud Torah, Maimonides concentrated his decisions concerning Torah study.

> Every Israelite is obligated to study Torah, whether he is poor or rich, healthy or infirm, in the vigor of youth or very old and feeble. Even a man so poor that he is maintained by charity or goes begging from door to door, as also a man with a wife and children to support, are under obligation to set aside a definite period during the day and at night for the study of the Torah, as it is said, 'But you shall meditate on them day and night.' (משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה, פ"א, ה"ח)

Again, Torah study for adults included both the Written Law and the Oral Law. In fact,

> The time allotted to study should be divided into three parts. A third should be devoted to the Written Law; a third to the Oral Law; and the last third should be spent in reflection, deducing conclusions from premises, developing implications of statements, comparing decisions, studying the hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is interpreted, until one knows the essence of these principles, and how to deduce what is permitted and what is forbidden from what one has learned traditionally. This is termed Talmud.
> (משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה, פ"א, ס"ק ז')

Regarding women who studied Torah, the Mishneh Torah taught,

> A woman who studies Torah will be recompensed, but not in the same measure as a man, for study was not imposed on her as a duty, and one who performed a meritorious act which is not obligatory will not receive the same reward as one upon whom it is incumbent and who fulfills it as an obligation, rather a lesser reward. Even though she is recompensed, the sages have warned us that a man shall not teach his daughter Torah, since the majority of women are not inclined toward such study but, due to their limitations, turn the words of Torah into vanity. The sages said, 'He who teaches Torah to his daughter has done something tantamount to licentious behavior. (R. Eliezer, Sotah 21a) This all refers only to the Oral Law but, with regard to the Written Law, he ought not teach it to her from the outset; but if he has done so it is not regarded as licentious behavior.
> (משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה, פ"א ס"ק ג')

The sixteenth century code, the Shulchan Arukh, adds something

to this last issue. Moses Isserles, perhaps basing his decision on Moses of Coucy's (13th century) Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, ruled that women might be obligated to "learn the laws affecting women. She is not bound to teach her son Torah; but if she helps her son or her husband, enabling them to study Torah, she shares the reward with them." (שולחן ערוך, הלכות תלמוד תורה, ס"ק ו)

The Mishneh Torah (משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה, פ"ג, ס"ק ב) and Shulchan Arukh, both, established that men were obligated to provide for their sons' education as well as their own. Moreover, "just as it is a commandment to teach one's son, so it is a commandment to teach one's grandson, as it is written ' והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך '. Further, it is not only one's son that you are to teach but, rather, it is incumbent upon all sages of Israel to teach students, as they, too, are referred to as ' בנים '...." (שולחן ערוך, הלכות תלמוד תורה, ס"ק ה)

The issue of providing for the education of one's children is the central topic of this thesis. The texts about to be presented deal with the child's formal introduction to education and the order of instruction he follows in his first few years of study.

CHAPTER III: THE TEXTS

Introduction to Formal Education

"When does one begin to teach his son (Torah)? After he begins to speak, one begins to teach him " תורה צוה לנו יעקב " and the first verse of the Shema. Subsequent to this, one teaches him slowly, little by little, until he is six or seven years of age, when one leads him to an elementary school teacher." (שו"ע, הלכות תלמוד תורה ס"ק ה). Thus, according to this passage from the Shulchan Arukh, a child begins his formal study when he turns six or seven years old.

The Talmud (Baba Batra 21a) tells us that Joshua b. Gamala ordered that elementary schools be established in every town and district so that children may attend them when they become six or seven years old. Prior to this, explains this sugya, boys would enter schools at age sixteen or seventeen, and they would leave shortly thereafter if the teacher punished them.

The notion of beginning one's formal study around the age of six was introduced long before the Shulchan Arukh, or, even the Talmud, for that matter. In the Mishnah (Avot 5:21), Judah b. Tema taught: "At age five (one is fit) for (the study of) Bible; at ten (the study of) Mishnah; at thirteen (for the fulfilling of) the mitzvot; at fifteen for (the study of) Talmud."

Exceptions to these rules are expressed by Mishneh Torah and Shulchan Arukh. Maimonides wrote:

> When does a father become obligated to teach his son Torah? (He becomes obligated) once his child begins to speak (at which time) he teaches him " תורה צוה לנו משה " and

" שאר ישראל ." After that he teaches him slowly, only a few verses at a time, until he reaches age six or seven; all is determined by his health. (משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה, פ"ב, ס"ק ה)

The Shulchan Arukh perpetuates the opinion that the child "who is sickly" shall be "brought to study at six full years of age." (שולחן ערוך, הלכות תלמוד תורה, ס"ק ח)

While formal schooling begins around age six, a child is actually introduced to Torah much before then. Our texts have shown us already that once a child begins to speak, he should be introduced to Scripture. In his commentary to this section (הלכות תלמוד תורה, ס"ק ח) of the Shulchan Arukh, the Vilna Gaon (Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720-1797; הגר"א)paraphrases a discussion in Tanhuma ("Kedoshim", ק'). The Vilna Gaon records the particular section in which the rabbis played upon verses 23-25 of Leviticus 19 which, in context, refer to fruits forbidden during the first years of a tree. The rabbis teach each mention of the word " כי " as a reference to a child and, they teach us that, like a fruit, a child is initially ערלה and, then, is consecrated to a life of Torah and service to God. The Tanhuma text teaches that when the child is four years old he becomes " פרי קדש ", in the sense that his father consecrates him to the study of Torah; when he is five he begins reading Torah.

We shall see that the Acharonim included in this study issued prescriptions for pre-school education. as well as elementary education. Also, they reiterated the prescriptions contained in the Shulchan Arukh

and classical rabbinic texts: formal instruction to begin around age six and to proceed from Bible, to Mishnah, and finally to Talmud.

Judah Loew ben Bezalel of Prague (1525-1609) stated:

> And so, in these lands in earlier generations they established guidelines and set times so as to educate a child according to his abilities: at five years of age, Bible; at ten, Mishnah; at fifteen, Talmud. All this to give the child a burden he can bear, according to his development...[Asaf]. They limited a child according to his development: five years old, Bible. This a child assumed according to his readiness; it expanded his intellect. Thus, whatever he learned he retained with great staying power until he grew older. Then he began Mishnah, a thing which now is according to his ability, already having laid the foundation of his education through the fundamental laws with a certain amount of understanding, serving him as a foundation for Mishnah study. When he finished the sacred task of studying Mishnah, which is the great foundation and iron pillar of the whole Torah, and came to the study of Talmud, he would be able to build a tower whose top would reach the heavens.[1]

The m'lamed Moses b. Aaron of Moraftschik concurred with this traditional stance in his _____ (1635). He taught that "Our sages have fixed the order of one's instruction so that it should remain with him and it is possible that for this reason they set the pattern: at five, Bible, at ten, Mishnah, at fifteen, Talmud."[2] Jacob Emden (1697-1776) agreed.[3] Shabbethai (Sheftel) b. Isaiah Hurwitz (1590?-1660?) noted that in his travels he observed schools in Amsterdam in which the children pursued "the whole Tanakh, then the whole Mishnah, and when they grow older, they study Gemara... [mine] and I wept that they did not do so in our land...."[4] Ephraim b. Aaron of Lencziza (d. 1619) echoed these calls for the classically

prescribed order of instruction. "The correct order is to teach them Bible first with a linked explanation of the words from Bereshit to the end of Deuteronomy, not like the path of the teachers of this generation....After he has already learned all the Bible, he shall understand God's commandments. Then teach him mishnayot...[mine] after one announced all this to him one is able to teach him Talmud, as well. If he is not of the ability, teach him the twenty-four books, instead.[5]

While on the one hand expressing belief in the traditional wisdom, these sages were very critical of what they perceived to be contemporaneous perversions of that law and lore. In general, these criticisms dealt with inverting the order of study[6] and with rushing the children too quickly beyond Bible and Mishnah to Talmud.[7]

Again, in the writings of Judah Loew ben Bezalel of Prague we read: "... the Rishonim, the Tannaim, the Amoraim, the Geonim, and all the Acharonim began with an order which arranged the study first with Bible, then Mishnah, and then Talmud. In this generation, they begin with Talmud, educating the child at six or seven in Talmud and concluding with Mishnah...[mine]."[8] Likewise, Ephraim b. Aaron of Lencziza declared, "The correct order (of education) is to begin teaching them Bible along with an explanation of the words from Genesis to the end of Deuteronomy, not as the manner of the teachers of our generation...[Asaf] who are rigorous about nothing but their salaries...[mine]."[9]

Jacob b. Rav Abraham Ha Levi Hurvitz (second half of sixteenth century) decried the lack of ordered instruction as well as the superficial study of Bible:

> I will cast the strongest indictment of all; that is that they cast the study of Bible behind them and do not undertake it

> at all. They do not educate their youth and students according to the path of Bible study, in as much as we see that some of the sages are not expert in Bible and they fulfill this: 'say to Wisdom You are my sister.*'[10]

This thought echoes in the writings of Moses b. Aaron of Moraftschik:

> Secondly, another cause of the utter confusion is that he studies one portion of one sidra and then in the next week, in another sidra which is read at services. And so it goes throughout the year, so that before they begin a second (portion), he has forgotten the first. It is discovered that in the course of the year he does not know any verse of the whole Torah, nor any matter. [11]

Similar critiques are raised by Jacob Emden who said, "The Sefardim are better in this pursuit than are the Ashkenazim who invert the order of instruction and want the child to learn the whole Torah 'on one foot.' "[12] Joseph Atias (late 17th century) accused the teachers of becoming "immersed mainly in sharpness and divisiveness and ignore the foundation, which is the Written Law."[13] Finally, Jekuthiel Blitz (late 17th century) declared "they begin to teach the young according to an inverted order." [14]

Establishment of Public and Private Education Systems

The circumstances which permitted the growth of those practices lamented just above become clear through an understanding of the

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* This is a reference to the discussion in the Talmud (Kiddushin 30a-b) which comments on the phrase "... ושננתם לבניך "(Deuteronomy 6:7). "Our Rabbis taught: 'And you shall teach them diligently means that the words of the Torah shall be clear-cut in your mouth, so that if anyone asks you something, you should show no doubt and then answer him, but be able to answer him immediately, for it is said, 'say to Wisdom, You are my sister.' " Jacob b. Rav Abraham Halevi Hurwitz has used this Talmudic phrase as a tool of his sarcastic rebuke.

contemporary public and private school scene. The obligation to arrange for a system of formal instruction for one's community is a longstanding halakhic prescription.

The Shulchan Arukh expressed the obligation upon every man to "hire a teacher for his son" (הלכות מלמדים, ס"ק ב) and upon each and every community to "settle a teacher" in its midst (הלכות מלמדים, ס"ק ג). Parents paid for the education of their children and were subsidized by the community at least until the child turned thirteen years old.

The Shulchan Arukh is very specific in its details of a teacher's qualifications: he must be effective, industrious, upstanding and married (הלכות מלמדים, ס"ק ג, ד, ה). Yet, teachers were not protected from others who wished to incroach upon their territory (הלכות מלמדים, ס"ק כה). And, in fact, it was also the case that there was competition among teachers.

Isidore Fishman describes the world of the m'lamdim in his book, The History of Jewish Education in Central Europe: From the End of the Sixteenth to the End of the Eighteenth Century. According to Fishman, in some situations teachers pushed pupils to the study of Talmud prematurely, or flattered the parents in attempts to curry favor and maintain their employment.[15] Such practices were more easily controlled in the public sector than in the private.[16]

When the community had sufficient funds and enrollment to sustain a public school (Talmud Torah), it also exercised control over the nature of the curriculum and the hiring of teachers. Fishman includes records of the community statutes for the Talmud Torah of Cracow, of Zolkiev, and others.[17]

In those situations, however, where parents were wealthy enough, they might choose to send their children either to a private school (cheder), or to employ a private tutor, supplying him with salary, board, and lodging. It is also true that some communities possessed insufficient funds to establish even a Talmud Torah. The only prospect of education in these towns was through the private tutor. There, too, when parents were too poor to pay for a private tutor, they were assisted out of communal funds toward payment of these tutors.[18]

Fishman points out that in the Talmud Torah the community regulated the standards of teaching; in the private sector, this safeguard was not available. In the private sector, the selection of the tutor was up to the parents and not to a communal board. Parents were easily flattered by tutors who often were more interested in ingratiating themselves with the parents than with the education of the child. In order to retain their teaching positions, they often pushed students into the study of Talmud and Tosafot too quickly.[19]

In some rural districts, the dearth of teachers forced parents to appoint wandering students, the local chazzan or shamash, or even their own men servants.[20] Often, these tutors went from town to town and from home to home. Needless to say, they were not always men of great learning or any extensive teaching experience. In between the visits of these itinerant tutors, students were idle. When another teacher came as a replacement, he did not always pick up on the same lesson. Education became disrupted and inconsistent.[21] Often, as well, the paucity of teachers meant that as many pupils as possible were placed in the same class. The pupils, perhaps as many as twenty, were at different levels of study. As in the familiar American one-

room school house, the teacher had to circulate among many different study groups (e.g., Bible, Mishnah, Talmud), only able to work with one at a time. At times, students in more elementary groups were accelerated prematurely into more advanced groups so as to constitute a larger, more homogeneous group.[22]

Early Childhood Education

The obligation to educate children in each and every community was clearly established in the period under study. Indoctrination began very early in childhood, long before he ever stepped into a Talmud Torah. Our Tanhuma passage (parasha Kedoshim י"ד) drew the parallel between children and fruit. Proper growth depends upon proper nurturing of the seeds as well as appropriate tending of the vines. Each stage of development requires careful nourishment and supervision. Consequently, the sages and teachers of our period showed much concern for the means by which a child was prepared for his introduction into formal education.

Isaac b. Eliakim of Posen included these words of advice in his ethical treatise לב טוב (1620):

> Everyone shall rear his child in Torah and mitzvot and good deeds while still in his youth, teaching him according to his intellectual capacity, his age, and what he is able to accept. Prior to his beginning to talk, get him used to kissing books, thus training him to treat them with respect. When the child begins to speak, teach him "תורה צוה לנו משה" and the first verse of the Shema. As he grows older, teach him Torah. Then hire him a teacher to teach him Torah.[23]

Sefer Brantspienal (משה ב"ר בצלאל, ז"ל ירושלמי, 1564?-1633)

contains a section about the education of young children. It informs us that a child should learn reverence for the texts and for scholarship while very young. Parents were encouraged to endear the youngster to the value of study and the respect due those who were men of great learning. "Study well so that others will respect you,"[24] they instructed the young child. Likewise, Joseph Hahn of Frankfurt (יוסף אומץ , 1570-1637) told children "to kiss ths hands of his father, his mother, his teacher, and all the great and pious men."[25]

It is never too early to begin training the child in the performance of mitzvot. Just as the instruction of " תורה צוה לנו " provided early ideological indoctrination, so, too, lessons in rituals supplied early behavioral indoctrination. Isaac b. Eliakim's לב טוב reports that fathers were in the habit of taking their children to morning and evening services. They were to teach them about tzitzit and tefillin.[26]

Even the days and hours just before a child's first day in school were of special importance and required careful preparation. When the time came for the child to go to school, the parents rose very early in the morning and awakened their child. Perhaps, the child might be treated to wafers dipped in honey and words of encouragement like: "May God make the words of Torah like honey on your tongue and lips (שב"ל אמונה, ר' מאיר אלרבי , 12th century)."[27] The father himself, no matter what his status in the community, was responsible for walking the child to the school where he turned him over to the teacher's charge.[28]

Abraham b. Moddel of Oettingen (18th century) added:

> At times the child refuses to go to school out of fear. The father and mother have longings for the child because of this weeping. There is, though, a remedy for this: the teacher must go to the child's home, a number of days, and get close to him with pleasant words and sweet treats. He shall tell the child: if you come to my home then I will give you presents better than these; for there are children at my home. There they play together to their heart's content. Then surely the child will want to go to school, gladly. When he comes to the school, the teacher gets close to him with tender words, and he shall speak nothing about the instruction. The teacher restrains from hitting any child in front of this child. He sits him near children who play with him and gives him a double portion. After a few days pass the child sits near one who knows the letters of the alef-bet. [29]

Instruction in Hebrew

Even though Mishnah Avot 5:21 did not mention it, Hebrew was an obvious prequisite to "...five years old Bible, ten years old Mishnah,...fifteen years old Talmud....(Ibid)" The "holy tongue" had to be mastered before study of the classical texts might begin.

Primers did not exist.[30] Most often Hebrew was taught through the use of alef-bet charts and individual letters constructed and affixed to separate pieces of board or slate. "They bring in the tablets upon which all the letters of the alef-bet are written. Then the teacher reads: 'Alef, bet, gimmel, etc.' and then, 'tav, shin, sin, reysh,... mine ' Then the child repeats each of the letters after the teacher. Next, the teacher reads the verse ' תורה צוה לנו '."[31]

(Zebi b. Aaron Kaidonover, d. 1712, קב הישר)

Because no primers existed, other sources were used as teaching materials.

Prayerbooks were used, as was the Chumash.

> The teacher must, at all times, point out the sizes of the letters during worship; likewise with the vowels, until they are fluent... [mine] It is best to go word by word in combination, reading each letter with vowel properly and precisely; so, with the word 'ברוך' the child would say: Kamatz, bet, ba (קמץ, ב', בָּ); m'lafum (i.e., shuruq): resh, roo (מלאפום, ר', רוּ); oo-ch, together (ך, וּךְ); Ba-rooch (ברוך)....[32]

Likewise, "the teacher reads the verse ' תורה צוה לנו וכו' '. Afterwards, the first verse of Leviticus and the child repeats it word by word."[33]

Bible

"At five, Bible." The beginning of a child's lifetime involvement with texts was the study of Bible. In fact, the teacher's first obligation regarding the instruction of his pupil(s) was to complete a thorough study of Torah (שולחן ערוך הלכות מלמדים, ס"ק א). The leading scholars of the time endorsed the classically prescribed order of instruction in which Bible came first.

Isaiah Hurwitz wrote (1565?-1630, שני לוחות הברית),

> Teach your children according to this order: when the child begins to study Bible he shall not move on until he has thoroughly completed the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. He shall not skip from one weekly portion to another, rather he shall proceed one portion after the other. He shall not move on from any verses until he knows the explanation of the words....[34]

Joseph b. Meir Theomim of Lemberg (1727-1793) considered the study of Bible to include "the whole Tanakh."[35] Jechiam Tiam Weil (1727-1805),

in his biography of his father ספר כ'חוס, recalled that his father, Nathaniel ben Naphtali Zevi Weil (1687-1769),

> taught each of his sons the Early Prophets (נב'א'ם ראשונ'ם), Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, so that the child knew the order of history from Creation to the rebuilding of the Second Temple. 36

In his responsa, Jair Hayyim Bacharach of Leipnik (1637-1702) agreed, as well, that the children were to study "the whole Tanakh before beginning Mishnah."[37] Such was the opinion of David b. Samuel Ha-Levi as expressed in his commentary[38] to Hilchot M'lamdim (ט"ו ו).

Isaiah Hurwitz had taught in his halakhic work שן' עורוי הברי, that the proper study of Bible was thoroughly comprehensive: one portion after the other, with each and every verse completely understood.[39] Apparently, such was not the reality.

> The pillar of Torah in our generation totters greatly and stands on nothingness, for in all their pedagogical methods there is no soundness from the time one appreciates what is really happening* until he grows old. It is because prior to the child knowing the abhorence of evil and the opting for the good he is entrusted to a teacher who teaches him Bible, a few verses from portion Bereshit and then, in the following week, a few verses from portion Noah, and so on and so on. They do not teach him anything but the explanation of the words; not even an explanation of how verses connect one to the other. Even if he will teach him the whole portion he will not teach the connection of ideas. 40

Zeliq b. Isaac Margoliouth of Polotsk complained that children do not

*meaning of Hebrew uncertain; the thought conveyed is that of entering the educable age.

even know "the order of the creation of the world."[41]

Mishnah and Talmud

"At ten, Mishnah; at fifteen, Talmud." In this scheme of education, Mishnah was perceived as the basis of Talmud. Mishnah was "the iron pillar of the Torah, for in the Mishnah a man has a solid foundation on which to build Torah, which is Talmud and also Bible...."[42]

Curriculum, as revealed in this study, was most often agreed to be a progressive undertaking; much like building a home, one needed to establish a basic foundation and, then, proceed floor by floor and stage by stage to the top. Each stage was vital to the existence of succeeding stages. This notion obtained among the Tannaim and Amoraim, as it did among the Acharonim. Consequently, Bible had to be studied thoroughly, as did Mishnah, before one might undertake Talmud.

Many experts of the time called for a careful study of the entire Mishnaic corpus.[43] Likewise, Moses b. Aaron of Moraftschik added that a child not be advanced to Talmud until he had demonstrated the requisite aptitude: "Subsequent to that [Bible], he studies Mishnah thoroughly. In any event, however, he is not to study Gemara at all prior to ten years of age...." (Ibid.) Some were a bit more severe in the terms they used: "...afterwards, mishnayot, all of them from the six Mishnaic tractates, memorized completely."[44]

From the annual reports of the Talmud Torah in Lubov we learn that Mishnah qua Mishnah was not listed.[45] In the age group "7-10", the prescribed subjects were: "Chumash with Rashi, writing, punctuation, and an introduction to Talmud." Talmud and Commentaries were taught

in the "10-12" age group. Here in Lubov, Mishnah was not taught at all and Talmud could be studied as early as age ten.

There were those[46] who believed that the classical prescription for the order of instruction needed amending in this day and age. Aside from the community of Lubov, Jair Hayyim Bacharach wrote in his responsa that the notion that "one should not begin a very intelligent child in the study of Talmud until he has finished all six sedarim of Mishnah..." only applied "to those earlier generations when the Mishnah had not yet been printed, consequently, they needed a great deal of time to study Mishnah."[47] There was, then, no consensus on this matter in the teaching community. There were those who advocated a thorough study of the entire Mishnah as well as those who believed that some children might acquire the requisite skills and principles at an advanced rate and graduate to Talmud earlier than traditionally prescribed.

Perhaps, in its most restricted sense, this possibility of acceleration was only applied to those very few students who demonstrated unusual brilliance. The literature of this period, however, exposes a different situation. Moses b. Aaron of Moraftschik declared, "Before a child's knowing how to read, his father and mother begin teaching him Gemara, halakha, and Tosafot."[48] Similar complaints were raised by Judah Loew ben Bezalel,[49] Jekuthiel Blitz[50], and Jacob Emden[51], and they appear on pages 16 and 18 of this study, respectively.

In some cases, it happened that children reached age thirteen or fourteen showing no prospects of ever successfully studying Mishnah and Talmud. Because students remained in school until at least age thirteen, through either personal or public funding, other arrangements had to be made for children unable to cope with the prescribed material. Judah b.Low

of Pressburg, in his commentary on Yoreh De'ah, אורים ותומים (18th century), ruled that

> even if the father sees that his son's mind cannot bear the study of Gemara, he should go to his teacher until he is at least thirteen years old. The teacher will study Tanakh with Rashi with him, a few articles of Shulchan Arukh, decisions current in our day, or Eyn Ya'akov, the things which attract the young students.[52]

Joseph Hahn of Frankfurt (1510-1637) echoed these words:

> Don't despair of mercy until he is of Bar Mitzvah age and his mind still does not understand the sugyas of Abaya and Raba, then it is better that he be taken away from the study of Talmud...merely teach him Tanakh, since it is not necessary that he have so much intelligence and endear him to the fear of God; as well as the weekly portion with Rashi's exegesis, at least with the study aid. Also, instruct him in the daily conduct of an adult male; Shulchan Arukh up to the laws of Shabbat.[53]

Ephraim b. Aaron of Lencziza advised that "if he is not expert, they should teach him Tanakh instead. Also, each and every day, guide him through musar literature and in fear of God."[54]

Finally, for those children who had attained the minimum required age and who still showed no promise of studying Mishnah and Talmud, The Statutes of the Cracow Community (enacted 1595) contain alternative provisions. "If a child turns fourteen and is not capable of the study of Gemara, set him to work at some craft or apprenticeship."[55]

Lest it appear misleading, I should note that even those who left the system of formal education to pursue some vocation were obliged to continue their study. Recalling the text from Shulchan Arukh,

(הלכות תלמוד תורה, רמו), we know that all men, no matter what their station in life, were supposed to maintain fixed periods of study throughout their lives. The path of Torah, begun in childhood, was an unending ideal.

Notes

1) Simha Asaf, ed., *Mekorot L'Toldot Haninuh B'Yisrael (from the beginning of the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment)*, Vol. I, Tel Aviv: Devir, 1925, p. מו.

2) *Ibid.*, p. פג.

3) *Ibid.*, p. רי.

4) *Ibid.*, p. ע.

5) *Ibid.*, p. סה.

6) *Ibid.*, pp. ל, קיג, רי.

7) *Ibid.*, pp. מו, סב, קי, ג.

8) *Ibid.*, p. ל.

9) *Ibid.*, p. סה.

10) *Ibid.*, p. סג.

11) *Ibid.*, p. פג.

12) *Ibid.*, p. רי.

13) *Ibid.*, p. קיב.

14) *Ibid.*, p. קיג.

15) Isidore Fishman, *The History of Jewish Education in Central Europe* (London: Edward Goldston, 1944), p. 18.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 28.

17) *Ibid.*, p. 139.

18) *Ibid.*, p. 25.

19) _Ibid._, p. 18.

20) _Ibid._, p. 56.

21) _Ibid._, pp. 22-23.

22) _Ibid._, p. 72.

23) Asaf, p. עה.

24) _Ibid._, p. נח.

25) _Ibid._, p. פב.

26) _Ibid._, p. עה.

27) _Ibid._, p. נח.

28) _Ibid._, p. קסט.

29) _Ibid._, p. קג.

30) Fishman, p. 44.

31) Asaf, p. קסט.

32) _Ibid._, pp. קג-קג.

33) _Ibid._, p. קסט.

34) _Ibid._, p. סה.

35) _Ibid._, p. רי״ז.

36) _Ibid._, p. רי״ב.

37) _Ibid._, p. קכז.

38) His commentary on _Yoreh De'ah_ called "טורי זהב".

39) Asaf, p. סה.

40) _Ibid._, p. סא.

41) _Ibid._, p. קסט.

42) _Ibid._, p. ג.

43) Moses b. Aaron of Moraftschik and Jair Hayyim Bacharach, in Asaf, pp. קכו, ג.

44) Isaiah b. Abraham Hurwitz, in Asaf, p. סה.

45) Asaf, p. מאה.

46) Ibid., pp. כב-כג.

47) Ibid.

48) Ibid., p. 3.

49) Ibid., p. יא.

50) Ibid., p. כג.

51) Ibid., p. ז'.

52) Ibid., p. ה'.

53) Ibid., p. כד.

54) Ibid., p. כה.

55) Ibid., p. כו.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

It is time, now, to look at what the historical record reveals about a child's introduction to formal education. Specifically, we want to gauge the effect of halakhah on the Jewish communities studied. To accomplish this, let us investigate two questions: Is there evidence to suggest that people violated whatever halakhah existed on a child's introduction to formal education? Do the questions posed in the responsa literature indicate a concern for adherence to the halakhah, or, rather, for the emendation of the halakhah in line with local needs?

Effectively, the law prescribes four things regarding a child's introduction to formal education: 1) parents have an obligation to provide for the formal education of their sons (שולחן ערוך, הלכות תלמוד תורה פ"ח ב,ג); 2) all boys begin education about age five or six (שולחן ערוך, הלכות תלמוד תורה פ"ח ה,ח), unless sickly, when they may defer starting school to age seven (שולחן ערוך, הלכות תלמוד תורה פ"ח ח); 3) girls are exempt from the obligation to study and, by implication, from teaching (Kiddushin 29b); 4) the obligation of Talmud Torah begins formally with the study of the Written Law (משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה פ"א ה"ח). Though not included among these classical halakhic rulings, there seemed to be general consensus that each community guaranteed the education of its students at least to age thirteen (see page 19 of Chapter 3).

There is no evidence raised in this study to show that people violated these halakhic rulings. Any criticisms voiced by scholars of the period rebuked practices not included among the halakhic prescriptions. For example, recall that Judah Loew ben Bezalel decried the lack of order

in a child's education, with some children learning Talmud before Mishnah (see page 17). Jacob b. Rav Abraham Halevi Hurwitz indicted those who did not teach a thorough and comprehensive study of Bible (see page 17). Shabbethai (Sheftel) b. Isaiah Hurwitz lamented the fact that the schools of his time and region did not provide a complete study of the whole Tanakh, Mishnah, and Talmud, in that order (see page 16). These critiques addressed curricular content and the depth of study in the subject areas· issues untreated by the halakhah. These items devolved to local determination, and it was these local practices which evoked the ire of contemporary rabbis and pedagogues. None of the criticisms included in this study testify to the violation of the clearly established halakhah.

The lack of responsa on our topic makes it comparatively more difficult to respond to my second question. As mentioned in the Introduction, we have only a responsum of Jair Hayyim Bacharach (חות יאיר) and a responsum of Aaron Samuel b. Israel Kaidanover (שמואל בן ישראל). The fact is that Judah Loew ben Bezalel and the Vilna Gaon left no responsa material on this issue at all. As well, scholars like Moses b. Aaron of Moraftschik, Abraham b. Moddel of Oettingen, Jekuthiel Blitz, and Joseph Atias were not halakhists and did not write legal works. It is also true that some critiques of educational practice, included in this study, were actually ancillary comments to larger ethical issues which concerned themselves with the kind of upbringing children needed to become observant and participating members of the adult Jewish community (e.g., Isaac b. Eliakim of Posen, יין של פז). In general, the halakhic record shows that much was left to local practice where few questions generated the proliferation of case law.

To compensate for the dearth of responsa on our topic, I surveyed the material of those two men who are included in this thesis: Jair Hayyim Bacharach and Aaron Samuel b. Israel Kaidanover. If responsa literature, as Freehof wrote, "grew out of life and necessarily reflected life,"[1] then the questions posed to these respondants can help us determine if, generally, there was a concern for living in accordance with the halakhah, or, conversely, if there were attempts to refashion rulings to conform with contemporary practice. What follows are several questions which were directed to Bacharach and Kaidanover. After a thorough examination of both חות יאיר and שאלות יעבץ, these appeared typical of the other questions in that each shows a concern on the part of the questioner to live by the halakhic prescriptions.

In this first question (No. 126, חות יאיר), we read of a son's great desire to perpetuate the pious life-style of his father; a life-style which valued highly the halakhah:

> I have been asked by a learned and God-fearing man whether he is obligated to observe the pieties and fasts on Monday and Thursday which his father had observed, having vowed to do so all his life, especially on the 10th of Adar, on which day his father was accustomed to fast, and also to distribute charity on account of a miracle which happened to him, as implied in the account of the piety of the people of Bet-Shean (reference to Pes. 50b).

This next question to Bacharach reflects an instance in which the general populace of a town was more severe in its response to a matter of clear halakhic violation than was its rabbi.

> A question about one who took license in the matter of drinking Gentile wine and the community sought to punish him with a fine and denounce him. Their rabbi, dissuaded them saying that in this instance such

> punishment would increase his wanton behavior and he might eat prohibited things and apostasize; the iniquity of which would rest on the community which brought this about (No. 141, חות יאיר).

These next questions, posed to Kaidanover, show an unwillingness to get involved in questionable acts until their legality is determined. In the first (No. 2 אמונת שמואל) a woman was not allowed to remarry until it was decided whether or not the category of "a nursing mother" applied (it is forbidden to marry a nursing mother until the child reaches the age of twenty-four months)." Reuven married a young woman who brought to him a great sum. She became pregnant by him and during her pregnancy he died and went on to his world. The woman, mentioned above, gave birth after his death and never nursed the child, but, rather, hired someone to nurse it. Now, about twelve months after she gave birth, she wants to remarry...." The questioner wanted to know if these circumstances mitigated in her favor. Note, however, that as in each of these questions, halakhic solutions are desired. In this next question (No. 12 אמונת שמואל) at issue is whether a situation in which the proper halakhic categories were applied can be overturned. In any event, the decision which had been made was based upon clear halakhah.

> Reuven had a son who married a woman. His father said that he was younger than the thirteen years old and one day; and when they examined him they found only two hairs. Is his father reliable to be lenient and to say my son is a minor and so cannot marry and the signs are regarded as a general approximation, or not.

Finally, we return to the realm of education and find an example (No. 26, אמונת שמואל) of one who wished to hire a teacher

for his town despite lacking the requisite number of children (the halakhah requires that a teacher be hired where there is at least twenty-five students, (שולחן ערוך, הלכות מלמדים, ס"ק 16).

> There is a town, in which there are about six families who have about ten or thirteen children who need a teacher. They do not want to hire a teacher, but one of them does and summons them to court so that they will hire a teacher for their children to teach them six hours a day. The others do not want this, with whom is the judgement?

The texts in this study and this selection of responsa raise no evidence that the Jews of these communities were unconcerned about the halakhic standards. Variations in educational practice arose because the application of this great Jewish value was left virtually undetailed by the halakhah and case law. The lack of halakhic elaboration spawned the kinds of local practices portrayed in our texts.

Local practice reflected Jewish life. The segregated and restricted lives of Polish and German Jewries fostered an intense Jewish consciousness. It was the responsibility of parents and community leaders to make sure that their children were raised with the ideals and weltanschauung of Jewish tradition. Curricula have been and continue to be products of prioritized thinking. There is never enough time to teach all that one might learn, so educators always must decide what they believe are the most important matters that can be learned in the allotted years of formal schooling. The texts reveal a world which valued highly Talmud study and a knowledge of fundamental halakhah. These became the primary concerns of local curricula, and parents as well as m'lamdim sought to advance their children to Talmud study as quickly as possible.

Variations in practice arose because its regulation was far from standardized. Where concentrations of Jews were large enough to maintain public schools (Talmud Torah), communal boards supervised and regulated the education of their children. For sure, major centers of Jewish life like Cracow, Lubov, and Zolkiev possessed such schools and communal boards. Yet, many Jews did not live in cities. In the sixteenth century, the Jews were expelled from most German cities and they took to living in villages. As well, the Chmielnicki massacres (1648-9) resulted in the relocation of great numbers of Jews. Many large centers of Jewish life were destroyed and Jews scattered to rural districts, as well as to the Germanic territories and Holland. Consequently, the small Jewish communities often pooled their funds to hire one tutor for their children. Sometimes, the small Jewish communities in the more outlying areas had trouble attracting trained tutors, so they turned to the most educated among them as their tutors. As Fishman explained, this meant that chazzanim, shamashim, or servants might assume this role.[2] When children studied with private tutors, the order and depth of study was left up to the decisions of the parents and tutor. Given these circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine that individual communities deviated in practice, one from the other.

Last, we address the curious reality that such an unquestionably important Jewish value, Talmud Toran, generated very few rulings in the halakhah. Specifically, regarding the issue of a child's introduction to formal education and the early years of study, the halakhah prescribes only those few decisions mentioned at the outset of this chapter. Whole tractates in the Talmud are devoted to subjects like writing marriage and divorce certificates, settling damages, managing property, observing festivals

reciting benedictions and prayers. Yet no tractate deals with Talmud Torah. Even in the Mishneh Torah, which includes a separate section for Hilchot Talmud Torah, this comparatively small collection of rulings deals mostly with hiring teachers, the respect due scholars and Torah, the organization of schools, and the provision for the education of children and adults. It does not legislate syllabi nor standardized means of evaluation.

Those same items provided for by Jewish law have been remanded to state and local boards by Federal law and to each particular school board in the private sector. The United States Constitution delegated educational authority to the states. Federal law guarantees the right of all children to an education. State legislators and local boards prescribe the qualifications for teachers. States require their youth to attend school to a minimum age. As well, states establish required subject matter for those who attend public schools.

Note though, that how children are taught, how they are evaluated, the nature of the learning environment, and the order in which some subjects are studied, are still mostly unregulated by law. These are subject of local opinion and academic debate. They are concerns, as well, of what, today, is called educational theory.

Matters of theory are the "-ologies" of the modern world. Psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and the others are disciplines which reflect the epistemological categories of modern scientific-logical thought. The scholars included in this thesis were not pedagogues and theoreticians, in the modern sense. They were not involved in education as a discipline. In one way or another, they went about the business of "חינוך", training children in the mitzvot. They directed their efforts to producing

Jewish adults who would live pious and observant lives. Consequently, curriculum content was important in so far as it explained the obligations and duties of Jewish living; method was important in so far as it led to the most effective ways of producing Jews who lived according to the rules. Yet, just as the means by which one "איך נעשה חסיד" might have varied from place to place and person to person so, too, there is great diversity among the theoreticians of Learning Theory, Curriculum Development, Cognitive Development, and the like. These are matters untreated by law and, as such, are subject to individual speculation.

In summary, we find that law does not legislate many matters of educational theory. It should not be surprising that halakhah rarely ruled in matters which, today, are called theoretical. Additionally, in the extra-halakhic literature we did not uncover many works dedicated to education, per se. Issues which, today, we call educational, meaning that they deal with formal socialization and transmission of cultural data, were treated as part of the larger concerns of the halakhic and extra-halakhic literature.

Final Comments: Implications for Contemporary Jewish Education

Education has always been the major means by which a community socialized its children. That is true for us today, as well. In America, the public schools have served to expose our children to our ideals, our norms, and our world view. In our country, however, there is a sharp distinction drawn between "Church" and State. Consequently, the public schools have dealt in the realm of secular ideas and civic duties. Jewish education, as is true for sectarian religious education in general, is most often an additional and supplementary endeavor. As

well, American Jews are faced with a difficult task when it comes to prioritizing their goals for Jewish education.

This was not the case for our forebears, who lived in Poland and the Germanic territories during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. They experienced no dichotomy between Church and State; simply, the outside secular world was not easily accessible to them. The concerns they had for the socialization of their children were relatively restricted and focused. These were also immediately suggested by the nature of their lives in their communities. That is not the case for contemporary American Jewry. Parents, today, desire that their children grow up steeped in American ideals and prepared to become good American citizens. This has changed the role of Jewish education in the lives of all Jewish children in this country, especially for those liberal Jews who have long embraced the culture and ideals of the State and who have sought to fully integrate themselves and their families into the society at large. For these Jews, those who will comprise my future congregants and those who, according to recent impressions, will constitute an increasingly larger percentage of American Jewry, the goals of Jewish education are relatively less restricted and less immediately suggested by communal life.

This situation has directly contributed to a great variation in the content of curricula among the Jewish communities and to a lack of minimum standards for length of study and mastery of material.

I see a number of tasks which lie before us. First, it is time for Jewish communities to ascertain what constitutes a basic Jewish education. We have learned that curricula reflect communal needs but local modifications were limited, always, to depth of study and manner

of study; not to the basic prescribed texts. What are the basic texts, classical or modern, of Jewish education today? What means of communal support exist to assure that all Jewish children receive education at least until age thirteen?

Along with these questions, the texts raise an additional issue which pertains to us directly: that is, the subject of pre-school education. The texts teach that children were exposed to customs, rituals, and fundamental principles (i.e., "עורה בוא לנו אשה") early in their lives.

If, in fact, there is anything that contemporary research has demonstrated, it is that:

> Longitudinal evidence makes it very clear that the child does not come to the first grade of school as a tabula rasa on which teachers will indelibly imprint the educational values and competencies prized by the culture. Quite the contrary, the child enters first grade after having gone through perhaps the most rapid period of development which will take place throughout his life. [3]

Further, "the schools build on a foundation which has been largely developed in the home in the early years of life."[4] Classical Jewish education, unaware of scientific longitudinal studies, knew of the importance of early childhood education with respect to fostering an attitude of serious study and supplying the basic ordering principles of Jewish life.

Historically, Jewish education in the United States has concentrated its funds and efforts upon children aged five to thirteen. If fundamental attitudes toward Judaism and future Jewish study are developed prior to age five, it behooves us to devote considerably more funds and hours to establishing Jewish pre-school programs and to furnishing whatever resources

and personnel are needed to help restore the home as the primary scene of early childhood education.

It is time that we, too, become students. After all, Jewish tradition teaches that we remain students until the day we die. We have much to learn from prior generations. We have the advantage of looking back to glean all that might be helpful to our lives and the lives of our children. This study has raised three major issues which warrant further consideration: consistent standards for a minimum Jewish education; provisions for assuring that every Jewish child in a community receives whatever support is necessary to get at least the minimum (however it shall be defined) education; establishment of early childhood programs. Additional studies of this kind could raise other issues worthy of future application. The future is taking shape now.

Notes

1) Solomon B. Freehof, The Responsa Literature (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), p. 222.

2) Isidore Fishman, The History of Jewish Education in Central Europe: From the End of the Sixteenth to the End of the Eighteenth Century (London, Edward Goldston, 1944), p. 56.

3) Benjamin S. Bloom, All Our Children Learning (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981), p. 72.

4) Ibid.

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2) Bloom, Benjamin S. All our Children Learning. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981.

3) Dubnov, Simon. History of the Jews. 5 vols. trans. Moshe Spiegel. 4th revised edition. New York: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1971.

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7) Seltzer, Robert M. Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980.

8) Shulvass, Moses A. Between the Rhine and the Bosporus: Studies and Essays in European Jewish History. Chicago: The College of Jewish Studies Press, 1964.