

NCSY Torah
— *on One Foot Series*

CHINUCH

חנך לנער על פי דרכו



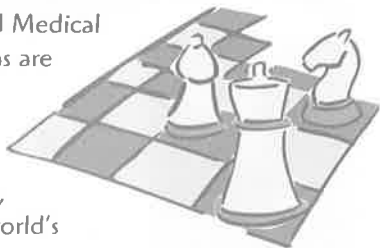
JEWISH EDUCATION

compiled by Rabbi Jack Abramowitz
designed by Renée Rosenfeld

DID YOU KNOW

that, in the 20th century, almost one-fifth of all Nobel Prize winners were Jewish? (Six were Israeli!) That's 18% of all Nobel Laureates, when Jews comprise a mere 1/24 of 1 percent of the world's population.

This Jewish overachievement is true in many areas. Approximately one-third of the faculty at Harvard Medical School is Jewish, as are 25% of ACM Turing Award winners for computer science, and 50% of the world's chess champions.



To what can we attribute this? International conspiracy? No. Inherent Jewish "smart gene?" No, again. Simply put, Jews have always stressed the importance of education. In pre-Gutenberg Europe, the average Jew could read and write, skills otherwise possessed only by the Christian clergy. And while Torah has always been the focal point of Jewish education, a Torah education



includes healthy doses of math and science. (Hey, the Rambam – Maimonides – was a doctor by trade!)

The Talmud (*Kiddushin* 29a) tells us a number of things a father must

teach his son. In addition to Torah, this includes an occupation. The sage Rav Yehuda comments that if a father doesn't teach his son a trade, he's teaching him to be a thief. So Jews have always stressed the importance of a good education, both in Torah and in secular studies.

TORAH THOUGHTS

- One of the questions a person will be asked when his life is over is whether he set aside time to study Torah. (*Shabbos* 31a)
- G-d cries if a person has the opportunity to learn Torah but doesn't. (*Chagigah* 5b)
- Studying Torah is the equivalent of all other *mitzvos* combined. (*Shabbos* 127a)
- G-d says, "I created the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) and I created the Torah as a remedy for it. If you study Torah, you will not be overcome by the *yetzer hara*." (*Kiddushin* 30b)
- The sage Rav once prayed for rain and was not answered, but another man was. Rav asked what he did. The man said, "I am a teacher. I teach poor students the same as wealthy ones. If they cannot afford to pay, I do not charge them." For this, he was answered. (*Taanis* 24a)

LISTEN TO YOUR FATHERS

The tractate of Mishna called *Avos* is often called "Ethics of the Fathers." Since education, particularly Torah education, is so important in Judaism, *Avos* has much to say on the importance of Torah study. Here is a small sampling:

- Do not say "when I have time, I will learn" because you might never have the time. (4:17)
- Reduce your business dealings in order to study Torah... if you neglect your Torah study, you will keep finding excuses to avoid it. But if you throw yourself into your studies, G-d has great rewards for you. (4:12)
- If you have learned a lot of Torah, don't give yourself too much credit because that's the reason you were created. (2:9)
- One who increases Torah, increases life. One who increases study, increases wisdom... One who has acquired a knowledge of Torah has acquired life in the World to Come. (2:8)



THREE PARTNERS

Successful education is the result of a combination of efforts on the part of three parties: the student, the teacher and the student's parents.

Teachers

What makes a successful teacher?

A teacher should be impartial (*Shabbos 10b*). He should be concise (*Pesachim 3b*). A teacher should admit when he is wrong (*Zevachim 101a*). He should not be sarcastic or embarrass his students (*Baba Metzia 58b*). An ill-tempered person will not be successful as a teacher (*Avos 2:6*). The words of a bad teacher can sting like a harsh rain, but a good teacher's words soothe like a gentle dew (*Taanis 7a*). A teacher should be willing to teach anyone who wants to learn (*Avos d'Rabbi Nosson 3*). If a student isn't successful, the teacher must be more encouraging (*Taanis 8a*).



Above all, a teacher must be patient. Rav Pereida would review each day's lesson with a particular student four hundred times. Once, Rav Pereida had someplace to go. However, he saw that his student did not master the lesson, even after his usual 400 repetitions. When he asked why, the student replied, "I was so afraid that you were going to leave early that I couldn't concentrate." Rav Pereida then reviewed that day's class an additional 400 times (*Eruvin 54b*).

Students

Of course, there can be no educational process without the student. The Talmud teaches us that the world only endures because of the children learning Torah (*Shabbos 119b*). So important is teaching children that it must not be interrupted even in order to rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*, the Holy Temple (*Rambam, Hilchos Talmud Torah 2:2*).

But don't think that only children are students. Every Jewish person should learn Torah! Our greatest sages included woodchoppers, water carriers and blind people. Every one of them studied Torah to the best of their abilities, even though they had "excuses" (*Rambam, Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:9*).

Students don't only learn, their questions and comments actually teach the teachers! Rabbi Chanina said that he learned much from his teachers and more from his peers, but that he learned the most from his students (*Taanis 7a*).



Parents

What about parents?

Every morning and every night we say, in the Shema, *v'shinontam l'vanecha*, that we must teach Torah to our children (*Deuteronomy 6:7*). In fact, the very first law of learning Torah is that we have to teach it to our children (*Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:1*). The Talmud says (*Yoma 86a*) that when a person is honest in business and pleasant to others, people praise his parents for teaching him Torah. It is even said that Hell has no power over a parent who leaves behind children who have learned Torah and to do good deeds for others (*Zohar Chadash Rus 50b*).

Of course, just like not every Jew has the skills to write a Torah scroll, not every parent has the ability to teach their children personally. It is perfectly acceptable for parents to hire a teacher for their children. The teacher operates *in loco parentis* – in the place of the parent – and, in some ways, a person's *rebbe* (Torah teacher) is considered another parent (*Sanhedrin 19b*).



JUST THE FACTS

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

A recent study has shown that, not only does teaching your kids Torah help keep the whole family Jewish, it's never too early to start. Parents of children enrolled in Jewish pre-schools are more likely to light

Shabbos candles, to celebrate Jewish holidays and to attend *shul* (synagogue). They are also more likely to take adult Torah-study classes.

Overall, they feel more connected to Judaism. Of parents of students in Jewish preschools:

- 70% have become more aware of the Jewish calendar
- 41% have started lighting Shabbos candles
- 51% are more aware of positive feelings towards their own Judaism
- 62% said that engaging in observances that include their children has become more of a priority
- 93% plan to send their children for more Jewish education.¹



In another study, nearly 70% of parents had an increased interest in their Judaism.² Students with an early Jewish education have a greater chance of remaining Jewish for life. More than 86% of students who attend Jewish pre-schools continue to attend Jewish day schools, Hebrew school or Jewish camps.³ If you want your grandkids to be Jewish, give your kids a Jewish education – the sooner, the better!

FRINGE BENEFITS

According to studies,* teens without religious education are up to four times more likely to smoke pot, three times likelier to drink and seven times likelier to use drugs. Teens with religious education are also less likely to smoke, to drop out of school or to have teenage pregnancies.

*American Psychological Association, et al.

JEWISH EDUCATION CLOBBERS ASSIMILATION

People who have almost any form of Jewish education as kids identify more Jewishly as adults. For example, only 33% of those with no Jewish schooling marry other Jews, as opposed to 42% of those who attended Sunday school and 76% of those who attended Hebrew school for 7 years.

Of course, the more Jewish education one has, the better equipped one is, Jewishly-speaking. For example, Jewish day school alumni generally identify more than Hebrew school alumni. Similarly, the more years of Jewish education one has, the more likely one is to later strongly identify Jewishly.

This is also true for informal Jewish education. Participants in Jewish youth groups are far more likely to have married someone Jewish (75% vs. 49%). Those who attended Jewish summer camps are three times more likely to feel strongly attached to Israel (41% vs. 14%). Those who traveled to Israel on peer group trips participate in more Jewish activities. And if you participate in more activities – youth groups, Jewish camps and Israel travel – they have a cumulative effect!⁴

No matter how you slice it, Jewish education in childhood and teen years affects one's Jewish identity as an adult.

¹Source: Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education of Central Philadelphia

²Source: Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership

³Source: National Jewish Population Survey

⁴Ibid.

WHO SAID IT?

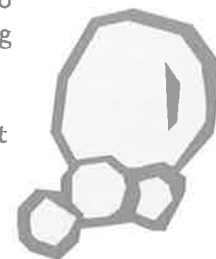
"If rabbis would put more emphasis on putting Jewish kids into Jewish schools, young Jews would never want to become Christians."

- Televangelist John Hagee, quoted in JTA, July 3, 2006



BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

While it's important for children to be taught Torah from an early age, it's never too late to start. Akiva ben Yosef was a simple shepherd, 40 years old, who never learned a word of Torah in his life. One day, he saw a hole that had been bored through a rock by dripping water. He thought, "If drops of water can gradually penetrate that hard rock, then surely Torah can still get into my head" and he decided to learn. He started by learning the alphabet, followed by Chumash and Mishna. His studies took many years, but you'd have to agree that they were successful – you may know him better as Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest scholars of the Talmud! (*Avos d'Rabbi Nosson* 6)



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Eleven Broadway, New York, NY 10004