

**VALEDICTORY SPEECH**  
given at the King David High School in Liverpool  
July 1978

Mr. Chairman, Parents, Friends and Pupils

In his play "As You Like It," Shakespeare talks of the seven ages of man. Nearly 1,500 years before Shakespeare, the Rabbis in the Ethics of the Fathers also divided up the life of man. *Ben shlosh esrei lemitzvot* - 13 is the age when it becomes incumbent for a boy and 12 for a girl to observe all the Mitzvot in the Torah. Prior to this age, boys and girls are in training.

At the Barmitzvah ceremony, the father recites the Berachah, *Baruch sheptarani mayonsho shel ze*, Blessed be he who hath freed me from the responsibility for this child.

Unfortunately many parents take this Berachah too literally and Bar and Bat Mitzvah become the age when they lose all interest in their children's religious education. If we look at this more closely, however, we find that although a boy is fully obligated for Mitzvot at 13 and a girl at 12, it is only after the age of 20 that a person becomes *bar onshin*, liable for punishment for the non-observance of these Mitzvot. The fact that a teenager had not reached the age of punishment shows that he still requires parental guidance and interest in these informative years.

About three years ago, the Minister of Education set up a Committee under the Chairmanship of Councillor Taylor to review the arrangement for the management and government of primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, including the composition of the bodies of managers and governors. This committee was composed of people from all walks of life; Professors of education, Education Officers, Headmasters, Ministers of Religion, Directors of Industries and Parents. Two years later they submitted their report. In it they concluded that for a school's success, all parties should be brought together; namely, the local education authority, the staff, the parents and the local community. Significantly they called their report "A New Partnership for our Schools."

It is especially important for parents to be partners in the Religious Education of their children. Religion is the teaching of a way of life. A child is only at a Jewish day school for part of a day, 5 days a week, term time only. For the remaining time, he is under parental influence.

It therefore follows that parents need to take at least as much interest in their children's Jewish Studies as in their secular subjects. However we found that it was rare for a parent to ask for an appointment with a Jewish Studies' teacher at the Parents' Consultation Evenings. A few months ago, we initiated an experiment for holding a special consultation evening for Jewish Studies and Modern Hebrew for parents of pupils in years 1 and 2. Just over one third of the parents attended. This was certainly an improvement, but where were the other two thirds?

In order to try and strengthen this partnership and increase parental interest, we have made this Barmitzvah / Eshet Chayil presentation in the evening. This ceremony is a culmination of a two year course followed by an examination.

During this course, the boys learn to sing any unseen Haftarah and cover a detailed knowledge of Tephillin, Tzitzit and Reading the Torah. For the girls, the course covers Kashrut and the home and the preparation of a house for Shabbat and Yom-Tov. The practical aspects are stressed in these courses.

At the end of this 2 year course, there is an examination on this work. Naturally, the ability of pupils varies considerably and therefore in assessing who *passes* this examination, the ability of a particular pupil is taken into consideration. To obtain *distinction*, however, the pupils must reach a definite high standard, irrespective of their ability.

This year, our results are better than ever before. No fewer than *thirteen* boys and *eleven* girls have achieved *distinction*. In addition, a number of pupils came within a handful of marks of receiving a distinction.

We consider that this Barmitzvah / Eshet Chayil course is one of four ways in which this school leads all other Jewish schools in this country.

The second way is by our use of audio-visual aids. We have made a special study and then integrated the most up-to date filmstrips, slides, cassette tapes and models into our Jewish Studies courses, including this Barmitzvah / Eshet Chayil course. We are regularly consulted by other Jewish schools and institutions regarding the best audio-visual aids available.

The third way in which we lead other Jewish schools concerns the 4th and 5th years. Here we have written Jewish orientated syllabuses in Scripture Knowledge for both O-level and CSE which have been accepted by the respective external examination boards. We are the only school to have accomplished this and other Jewish schools and classes in Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Cardiff take our O-level syllabus. Were it not for the geographical boundaries imposed by the external examination boards, it is very probable that centres in London would also be taking the examination. Our results in these examinations have been steadily rising and last year 87% of *all* the Jewish pupils in the 5th year gained a pass in either O-level or CSE.

Finally, the fourth way involves the sixth forms. As we all well know, there has been a massive increase in the anti-Israel activity on the University campuses and to our regret we have found that our Jewish students are not equipped to counter this activity. We have therefore introduced for our sixth forms a course called "How to answer anti-Israel propaganda" and have written our own accompanying booklet. This course has now completed its second year, and pupils who left the school last year, have successfully defended anti-Israel motions on the campuses. We have also received requests from different parts of the country for copies of our booklet on this subject.

As you will observe, these four ways in which we lead other Jewish schools cover the entire spectrum of the school - from the first form to the sixth forms. Parents! Whatever form your child will be in, you have something in his Jewish Studies programme to take a special and we hope active interest in.

Next week this time, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, I will be on the plane to Israel with my family going on Aliyah (or knowing El-Al still in the departure lounge of Heathrow!). I would like to leave thinking that as a result of this evening's ceremony, you will take a greater interest in your child's Religious education right up the school.

