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The TALI Schools

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THE TALMI SCHOOLS

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Beginnings

The idea of founding a school that would reflect a different approach to Jewish education than that which was available in the Israeli public school system was first conceived by a group of American *olim* and native Israelis following the 1973 Yom Kippur War. This was a time when many people searched for ways to make a contribution to Israeli society. Some considered returning to military service, others opted for politics or for various social and communal causes. Given the fact that many of us, as recent *olim*, had neither the requisite skills nor a particular proclivity in any of these directions, we decided to draw upon our backgrounds and experience in formal and informal Jewish education as an area in which to make our contribution.

It was clear that the growing rift between the religious (i.e., Orthodox) and secular elements of Israeli society was an issue that required urgent attention, and that one of its root causes and manifestations was the greatly divergent educational trends serving each of these sectors. The challenge was whether we could develop an alternative offering a serious Jewish education that would also be liberal and pluralistic; one that would cultivate tolerance yet instill a sense of identification and attachment, an openness together with a commitment toward Jewish tradition.

~~Openness and tolerance are not hallmarks of the religious stream in~~ Israel, nor is a comprehensive and integrative conception of what ought to constitute Jewish studies and culture. The approach to Jewish studies in these schools is narrowly defined, based almost exclusively on traditional commentaries, concepts, educational approaches, and texts in vogue during earlier generations. More modern approaches to the study of history, religion or Jewish sources are viewed with alarm, if not anathema. Comparative literature and history, a sophisticated and critical reading of Jewish history, or the issue of the cultural interaction of Jews with the sur-

rounding world are topics foreign to this school system and are consciously and systematically eschewed.

On the other hand, secular schools, while often excelling in general studies, see little if any value in introducing the serious study of rabbinical texts or religious thought, and fail to foster any deep sense of identification with the Jewish people, its history, traditions, customs or values. At best, these schools address select Zionist-Israeli issues, which in any case, are bereft of any serious Jewish content or substance. Given these alternatives, a number of us set out to try and establish a school that would combine the best of these two options — offering a serious Jewish and general education while avoiding the deficiencies of each.

While there was a wide circle of interested and committed "fellow travelers" who shared and supported our ideas, the core group consisted of a handful of people, including Ray Arzt, Immanuel Elkes, Zvi Gal-On, Reuven Hammer, Gerston Kravitz, Moshe Samet, Moshe Trauner, Joe Wernik, Yehzekel Wollman, and myself. At the outset, we held a series of informal meetings over a number of months in 1974 and 1975 to discuss these problems and to formulate our options and possible courses of action. Discussions were facilitated by the fact that most of us lived in the same area of Jerusalem, namely French Hill and Ramot Eshkol, and even attended the same synagogue, Ramot Zion, which oft-times provided the context for our conversations.

It is quite conceivable that our discussions would have remained theoretical for a long time had we not established contact with Yosef Gadish, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. Gadish had a well-deserved reputation as an effective, straight-talking, clear-thinking, and tireless worker in the municipality. In fact, he was regarded as the mayor's right-hand man, helping to formulate and implement many policies in crucial areas of city administration. In our meetings with Gadish over the summer and fall of 1975, he encouraged us to move quickly and decisively in order to establish such a school, promising us his full backing. Although not observant himself, Gadish saw the need for such a religious alternative, not only for the indigenous Israeli society, but also for helping to attract potential western olim to whom such an education was familiar and important. This, he felt, was something the municipality should and would promote and support. However, Gadish stated time and again

that he was really not interested in getting involved with one particular school, but rather envisioned a network of such institutions which would eventually become a viable educational alternative in Jerusalem, if not the norm.

During the months of preliminary organization in the fall of 1975 a number of basic decisions had to be made. First of all, should we establish an elementary school or a high school? On the one hand, the high school option was an area with which we all felt more comfortable in terms of our experience and background; it was also a framework in which we could deal with many of the issues in Jewish studies and Jewish identity on a sophisticated level. In short, it played to our strengths as well as allowed for the fullest expression of the nuanced approach to Jewish education that we hoped to achieve. The major drawback with this option, however, was that we would not be building an educational institution from the ground up, and the question was whether, after attending eight years in either a secular or religious framework, students would be interested in coming to a different type of school. And if they did, what would be the intellectual, cultural, and psychological baggage they would bring to it, and would it allow us to realize the kind of educational format that we hoped to achieve? Starting on the elementary school level, on the other hand, would mean setting out on the long road of building from the very beginning; however, it would be a more natural growth pattern and probably would be easier to carry out administratively and politically. It was after much discussion that we opted for the latter alternative.

The second decision to be made was whether the school would be public or private (which in the Israeli context could also receive a not insignificant amount of government funding). This option was indeed proposed to us at one point in order to mitigate opposition by Orthodox political parties to the founding of a non-Orthodox religious school in Jerusalem. Realizing our determination to move ahead despite opposition, an offer was floated to allow us to open a private school on French Hill with the proviso that we would not ask to open any others in the future. After exploring these options, we decided to move ahead within the public school framework, fully aware of the pros and cons of this decision. Working within the system would clearly limit the autonomy we would have in determining the school's policies, staff, and programs. We would be

placing ourselves squarely in the matrix of the city's and Ministry of Education's bureaucracies, with all the pitfalls, obstacles, and frustrations that would inevitably be encountered. On the other hand, by being part of the educational establishment we wished to insure the future growth not only of the first pilot school but of others that would hopefully follow; this would happen if we succeeded in convincing parents that ours was a meaningful and significant educational alternative for their children.

A third issue we had to deal with was the framework within the Israeli educational system in which we would establish our school — the religious, i.e., Orthodox, or the secular. Our first inclination was to turn to the religious school system, since we, too, were addressing Jewish education with a definite religious component. However, in speaking with a number of officials, ranging from local school principals to the municipally appointed in charge of religious education, we encountered a uniformly negative response. Only then did we turn to the general school system and received the support necessary to enable us to continue on to the next stage.

Moving into high gear by early 1976, with the hope of opening our school in September of that year, we began considering the location of such a school. The French Hill neighborhood in northern Jerusalem seemed to be the most obvious choice; most of the organizing group lived there and, being a new neighborhood (established only in 1971), we assumed many of its residents would be open to this kind of educational alternative. At this point, we divided into smaller groups, working simultaneously on a number of fronts. One committee explored the physical arrangements of where and how the school would exist; it became clear from our negotiations that we would have to begin as a branch of the existing secular public school on French Hill, with the intention of becoming an independent entity within a few years. The municipality had already slated two general schools for this neighborhood, hence our hope that we would eventually become the second school. The French Hill option became even more attractive since there were already a number of temporary structures in place that had been used by the existing school before its permanent building was completed. These could become available for our use. Thus, we would have the best of both possible worlds: being annexed to an existing school and yet being physically separate and thus having the facto autonomy.

A second committee began scouting for teachers for the three grades we proposed to start with, and began working with them on a curriculum that would reflect the uniqueness of our program.

A third group worked on recruiting other parents to register their children in this new framework for the coming school year. This last task proved to be more difficult than we anticipated. Many Israelis could not understand an approach that is "neither-nor" — neither Orthodox nor secular — but rather one that aspires to address Jewish studies and religious experiences seriously and nondogmatically, and is open to children of all backgrounds. We decided to hold a series of weekly sessions at various homes, hoping to bring together groups of parents for an in-depth presentation of the school. The first sessions were sparsely attended and we began to be concerned; we were convinced that parents should be interested, but not sure how we ought to reach out to them. It was only several weeks later, in February of 1976, that we received an unexpected boost. This came in the form of a virulent attack by the Orthodox rabbis of northern Jerusalem on our proposed school and the potential poisonous effect they claimed our kind of education would have on children's minds and hearts. Posters were plastered on neighborhood billboards, and leaflets were distributed in mailboxes. These rabbis accused the organizers of the school of being Conservative Jews who, having failed in America (and thus having caused assimilation and intermarriage!), were now trying to spread this cancer to Israel as well.

Much to our delight (and chagrin), these attacks created a serious wave of interest among parents of school-age children regarding the nature of our alternative Jewish education; as a result, our weekly evening sessions were suddenly flooded with parents. We had often joked about such a situation in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict — that if the Arabs felt that something was rejected by Israelis then it must be good for them, and vice versa. This, sadly, is precisely what happened here. Secular, traditional, and even liberal Orthodox Israelis, witnessing these vituperative attacks leveled by the rabbinical establishment, had their curiosity aroused, enough to explore what option it was that made these rabbis, for whom most had little respect, so hostile. This spurt of interest allowed us to reach scores of interested families, and by the end of March 1976 we had a list of parents of some two hundred children who had expressed an interest in the school.

By the spring of 1976 it seemed that we were in good shape to open our new school the following September. However, our optimism was premature. Having procured the support of the municipality regarding the physical facility that would house the school, having signed on more than enough parents, and having lined up a potential staff, we were (only!) missing the formal and official sanction of the Ministry of Education to, in effect, inaugurate our educational enterprise. One issue here was legal in nature. There was no precedent within the Israeli school system of a school being initiated by parents. It was only after spending much time in the Ministry, and particularly with its legal advisor, that the necessary legal underpinning was discovered. Decades earlier, a ruling had been made that seventy-five percent of the parents of a particular class or school could determine up to twenty-five percent of the curriculum. This, then, was the proviso invoked to provide the legal foundation for the establishment of our school.

A second issue was strictly political in nature. Would the Minister of Education, Aharon Yadin, who, we were told, was sympathetic towards this type of educational experiment, be willing to give us his political backing in the face of Orthodox opposition? These people viewed the creation of a religious school outside their framework as an anathema, particularly one which was non-Orthodox in its orientation? In a speech to the Knesset, Zevulun Hammer, then Minister of Social Welfare and member of the religious-Zionist party, was quoted as saying, "Over my dead body will such a school arise." This was in July 1976.

In light of this vigorous opposition, Mr. Yadin wavered. Time became a significant factor as the summer slowly passed. Most parents lost faith that the enterprise would get off the ground in September and proceeded to register their children in other schools. Throughout July and August we kept pressing for a decision, and also tried to maintain pressure on the government by mobilizing friends in the United States to lend their support. It was only one day before the beginning of the school year, i.e., August 31, that we finally received the green light. Our dream would now become a reality. At that time only thirty-three children remained registered in the first three grades, barely enough to justify opening the school; nevertheless, this is how the first TALJ school began.

I am using the name TALJ, for that has become the official name

for these schools over the years. In fact, in its initial stages the school was called "Masorti," i.e., "traditional." According to most polls conducted at that time (and it remains largely true today as well), some forty percent of Israelis defined themselves as *masorti* (as against Orthodox or secular). Thus, the name was selected precisely because of its positive connotation vis-à-vis religious tradition and customs among a large percentage of the population, and its disassociation with any part of the religious establishment that often repels large segments of the population. It was only some six years after we had launched our first school that the Ministry of Education insisted that the name be changed from "Masorti" to the more neutral "TALJ" (a Hebrew acronym for "Enrichment of Jewish Studies"). There was concern among some in the then Orthodox-controlled Ministry of Education lest these schools become associated in the public eye with the Conservative Movement in Israel, which by 1980 had adopted the name "Masorti."

History

The development of the TALJ schools over the last eighteen years can be divided into three stages. The years 1976-81 constituted the first stage. During these years the pioneering TALJ school on French Hill consolidated and grew dramatically in numbers from year to year, while developing unique programs and curricula for its various grade levels. An educational steering committee met monthly, papers and suggested curricula were discussed, and the interaction between parents, teachers, and principal was as remarkable as it was fruitful. In its first year the school was led by Rachel Leor; for the last seventeen years Barbara Levin has been its dynamic and creative principal. During these years other TALJ schools opened as a result of parental initiative and with the help and support of the founding committee members. Such was the case in Kfar Saba-Ihud Hasharon, Ramat Gan, and Beer Sheva. Many more schools might have opened had local parent groups possessed the requisite tenacity and resolve to be able to put together all the various elements needed for such a school to open, namely the cooperation of both the local city government, which is in charge of the physical plant, as well as the Ministry of Education, which has control of the educational budget.

Working with these two bureaucracies is a yeoman task and demands unflinching attention right up to the first day of the school year. Many parental groups either lacked the necessary determination to overcome opposition or were stymied at one point or another in their efforts.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the TALJ schools is their extensive parental involvement. Because each school began as a result of parental initiative, parental involvement in the growth and development of these schools was natural and often quite marked. In the first years this was evident — especially on French Hill and in Kfar Saba — in the fact that parents worked together with the principal and teachers on various aspects of programming, including the development of curricular materials and educational approaches to the teaching of holidays, Jewish texts, and other subjects. Parents volunteered to plan and organize extracurricular activities, such as trips and holiday celebrations. Moreover, given the unique approach of the school, parents were often involved in the selection of the principal and, at times, of teachers. Regarding the French Hill school, later renamed the Samuel and Jean Frankel School, this required ongoing negotiations with the Jerusalem authorities as well as the Ministry of Education. In these early years, there was a recognition on the part of these officials of the legitimacy of parental involvement in making these appointments owing to the unique approach of these schools.

On the local level, it is to the credit of the principal and staff of each school that they were not only open to this kind of parental participation but also welcomed and encouraged it. Needless to say, many discussions took place regarding the delicate line between parental involvement and intervention in school affairs. Both parents and staff were sensitive to this distinction, and all recognized the value of the former and the problematics of the latter. It was because of this sensitivity and the ongoing deliberations and communication on the subject that we were able to avoid any tension or confrontation. Parental involvement was a very prominent part of the development of the TALJ schools in their early stages and has continued to be an important dimension in the overall TALJ school policy. The extent of parental involvement will, of course, differ from school to school depending upon the stage of development at each school and the personalities involved. With the growth of these institutions and

their greater professionalization, some of the earlier parental planning has been superseded by professionals and, more recently, by other frameworks that were created to offer support to the TALJ schools (see below).

The second stage in the development of TALJ schools was between the years 1981 and 1986. This period began with great hopes and aspirations, although as time went on the growth in the number of schools slowed considerably, and there were some who even questioned their viability in the long run.

In 1981, Minister of Education Zevulun Hammer invited the founders of the French Hill school to a meeting at which he expressed his gratitude and appreciation for their initiatives, recognized the value of TALJ education, and indicated his willingness to aid and support this educational endeavor. According to him, this was the type of education that most Israeli children should have and would want to have. There will always be those who prefer a more Orthodox approach and, on the other end of the spectrum, those who prefer a strictly secular education. But for the vast majority (he used the number sixty percent) this type of education was the most appropriate. In fact, he claimed, this is precisely the kind of education that he would have wanted to initiate, although, given his party membership, any attempt by him to introduce such a program into the general public school system would have been opposed on the grounds of religious coercion. The Minister expressed a willingness to appoint someone who would promote TALJ education throughout the country, and he encouraged us to continue our involvement and to work together with the Ministry. As a measure of good will, he asked us to recommend someone who could fulfill the position of TALJ supervisor within the Ministry of Education.

His one request, however, was that the schools not be publicly identified — orally or in writing — by the Conservative Movement's leaders as Conservative schools. Such an association, while formally inaccurate, was easily understandable. Since most of the founders of these schools hailed from Conservative backgrounds, and the educational approach adopted was one which reflected a Conservative orientation, it was often claimed that the TALJ schools were indeed part of the Conservative Movement. As at that time no one was interested in starting a third "stream" within the Israeli school system,

denominational association was considered not only unjustified but also problematic. Hammer was particularly sensitive to this accusation by members of his own party, as well as to the pressure brought to bear from American Orthodox circles, which cautioned him against the introduction of Conservative religious ideology into the Israeli school system.

Following this upbeat meeting, the future of T'ALI education in Israel seemed most promising. However, to our chagrin, this momentum was largely reversed by the fact that one of Hammer's close advisors, himself less than enthusiastic about religious pluralism and promoting the T'ALI approach, was appointed head of the department that dealt with Jewish education in the general school system, the department in which the person responsible for the T'ALI schools was also placed. As a result of the lack of support in the department, the first person we had recommended to coordinate T'ALI left the job after three months, and the second lasted but nine months. It was clear to both these individuals that not only was there no support for the T'ALI approach, but, in fact, a wall of antagonism and hostility existed regarding the development of future T'ALI schools. Thereafter, in certain respects a state of limbo existed for a number of years, not only putting a damper on the development of the existing schools but also compounding the problems encountered by parental groups trying to inaugurate other T'ALI schools.

There were other problems as well. Many parental groups that wished to start such schools not only had to deal with the municipal and educational bureaucracies *per se*, but also with the ongoing opposition to their initiatives from officials to the right and the left. Orthodox officials, both within the municipality and the Ministry, opposed the school on religious grounds, while some of the more extreme secularists balked at the thought of having any kind of religious "indoctrination" introduced into the secular school system.

Despite these obstacles, this period witnessed several important developments. In the early eighties, ongoing meetings with city officials led to the granting of permission to T'ALI schools to use whatever curriculum they wished, be it from the general or Orthodox curricula. Until then a school officially had to follow one model or the other. Now T'ALI schools could choose from either, regarding both Jewish and general subjects, and could even create their own models. Moreover, during these years a committee comprised of

principals, school supervisors, educators, and Ministry officials developed a document defining the educational philosophy and norms of a T'ALI school.

By the mid-eighties, several new T'ALI schools opened in Haifa, Netanya, and in the Gilo neighborhood of Jerusalem. Of significance was the successful launching of a junior high and high school in Jerusalem. This was not an easy enterprise. For a number of years parents sought an appropriate framework for post-elementary school T'ALI education. For a time an attempt was made to introduce a T'ALI track within a larger high school, but this proved to be unworkable. It was only after several years of frustrating attempts — and a number of "lost" classes — that permission was granted to open a T'ALI school, which developed into a full-fledged junior and high school, today boasting some six hundred pupils under the leadership of Dr. Avi Lavsky. Together with the establishment of a series of T'ALI kindergartens at about this time (also achieved not without a sustained effort in overcoming bureaucratic and political obstacles), T'ALI education now covered all the school years, from preschool through twelfth grade.

A third stage in the development of the T'ALI schools began in 1987, and continues until today, with the establishment of a special foundation for the purpose of supporting, encouraging, and promoting T'ALI education within the Israeli school system. This step was motivated by the realization that certain elements in the Ministry of Education were largely indifferent, if not at times outright hostile to future T'ALI schools. It was clear that the whole enterprise would never progress if independent funding were not procured in order to deepen the education in existing schools and help parents create new ones. A number of foundations abroad were approached, and a positive response from the Bronfman Foundation as well as from the Jewish Agency enabled us to move forward. These monies were used to establish the T'ALI Education Fund (TEF). It was quickly realized that for such an educational foundation to be maximally effective it ought to be affiliated with a recognized academic institution. Thus, the TEF was brought under theegis of the Seminary of Jewish Studies, an academic-educational institution affiliated with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Masorti Movement. The TEF was to work closely with the Ministry of Education as well

as with parental groups and school principals in order to maximize the impact and effectiveness of TALJ education.

The work of the TEF over the last seven years has indeed been impressive. Under the able direction of Erit Saruk, and currently of Joseph Ben-Rahamim, the number of schools with TALJ tracks throughout the country has increased to thirty, serving over 9,500 pupils in some 260 classes from Kiryat Shmona in the north to Beer Sheva in the south, with concentrations in the Jerusalem and Tel Aviv areas. The TEF provides these schools with various educational materials, including a weekly Portion of the Week study sheet for both elementary and junior high school pupils and their families. A syllabus for grades one to nine has just been completed after several years of work by an academic-educational team headed by Avigdor Shiman, professor of Midrash and liturgy at the Hebrew University and the Seminary of Judaic Studies. In this curriculum, all Jewish subjects to be taught (Bible, Midrash, Talmud, Jewish customs and lifestyles, etc.) are closely coordinated for each grade level, as is a rational and logical progression in the development of skills and the level of knowledge from year to year. Earlier efforts had been made in curricular development under the direction of Professor David Zisenwine of Tel Aviv University, but never as comprehensive in scope as this undertaking. Moreover, together with the Ministry of Education, the TEF provides extensive teacher training via pedagogic supervisors who work with the teachers, and by an extensive program of in-service teacher training on local, regional, and national levels.

Moreover, the TEF gives considerable attention to other dimensions of the TALJ schools. Through the Seminary of Judaic Studies it conducts a program for training professionals in informal Jewish education, which has proven to be of invaluable assistance to the schools. Moreover, a great deal of effort has been expended in developing programs relating to the Sabbath, holiday celebrations, and other Jewish subjects for teachers, students, and parents alike.

Since the 1992 elections and the change of leadership in the Ministry of Education, the work of the TEF has been expanded significantly. A more open and supportive environment has been created by the Minister, Professor Annon Rubenstein, and others for implementing various educational initiatives. Many former Ministry officials who had serious ideological reservations about the liberal,

pluralistic, religious-educational approach of TALJ have been replaced by more sympathetic ones who are now in a position to make significant policy changes. As a result, the cooperation between the TEF and the Ministry of Education has improved immeasurably and is proving effective in promoting and enhancing the TALJ schools.

Ideology

TALJ's educational goals may be divided into four general components.

Intellectual-Cognitive Dimension

The TALJ approach to Jewish studies encompasses the entire range of Jewish civilization, including its intellectual, spiritual, and artistic expressions over the past three thousand years. A TALJ curriculum should therefore strive to teach Jewish history, Jewish thought, Jewish literature, Jewish art and song, alongside Bible, Talmud, and Jewish law. Moreover, TALJ education employs a wide variety of tools and approaches for the understanding of Jewish sources. Not only are traditional commentaries crucial for understanding the Bible, but so are modern approaches to these subjects, such as archaeology, literary analysis, comparative history, and comparative religion. For example, in order to understand the biblical account of the Creation, or the Noah story, there is no question that rabbinical midrash, as well as the medieval commentaries of Rashi and Ramban, are invaluable tools. However, TALJ education aims to also embrace the study of ancient Near Eastern epics dealing with the Creation (*Enuma Elish*) and the Flood (*Gilgamesh*) in order to ascertain what ancient Israelite society had in common with its neighbors, as well as how and where it differed. Viewing Jewish tradition, its texts, and thought in their historical context, highlighting the nature and extent of influence from the surrounding world on Jewish ideas, beliefs and values, together with the elements that make Judaism unique, is an approach singular to the TALJ framework. The critical-historical approach is part and parcel of the general school system, while the traditional approach is sorely lacking: in the Orthodox state schools

the opposite is the case. TALJ's contribution has been to integrate these two approaches.

Experiential Dimension

The affective component of Judaism is no less integral to Jewish tradition than the cognitive. Experiencing Jewish traditions and ceremonies is a dimension to which all Israeli children should be exposed as part of their Jewish education. As a result, TALJ schools require not only the study of the siddur (prayer book) but also the prayer experience itself.

Special attention is given to enhancing the knowledge and appreciation of Sabbath and holiday celebrations as religious and cultural experiences. Therefore, Sabbath customs, as well as observances of both home (the Passover seder, Sukkot, Hanukka) and synagogue (e.g., the High Holidays and Purim) are highlighted in the TALJ curriculum.

Religious ritual is problematic for most individuals, and especially for those coming from nonobservant backgrounds. It is sometimes assumed that prayer and ritual require a belief in God. But rather than viewing the problematics of faith as an obstacle blocking any attempt to come to grips with this affective dimension, TALJ education views these ritual frameworks as presenting an opportunity to discuss and to grapple with these theological-ideological issues. The basic assumption of TALJ education is that each child will eventually have to decide the nature and extent of his or her Jewish commitment. The least that we, as parents and educators, can and should provide for is that such a decision be made out of knowledge, first-hand experience, and some measure of positive identification, and not out of the indifference, alienation, and apathy which seem to be all too pervasive today.

Value Education

TALJ education also attempts to address in a sustained fashion the values embedded in what is being studied and experienced. A biblical or rabbinical text, or even a holiday celebration, is not only to be learned; it also affords an opportunity to discuss intrinsic values and

ideas, as well as ways in which they can be related to today. Indeed, implicit in all of TALJ education should be values which we hope will be retained and internalized by the pupils. Such values include: commitment to and identification with Jewish history and tradition (in whatever form that commitment might take), a recognition of the importance of pluralism in Jewish tradition and Israeli society, tolerance toward others who differ in their ideas and behavior, the recognition of the dynamic character of Jewish history and tradition, as well as an awareness of their constant and enduring elements. Moreover, recognition that contacts with the outside world are not only the result of persecution and discrimination, but no less due to frustrating and stimulating experiences which enrich every aspect of Jewish life, is an important lesson often absent or distorted in many circles within Israeli society.

The values embraced in TALJ education have an important Zionist component as well, and they, too, find expression in the school context. The importance of a national home and culture, of the opportunities and responsibilities of political sovereignty, as well as the recognition of similar aspirations among other peoples, are critical values for every young person growing up in Israel today to imbue.

An Integrative Approach

A final component of the TALJ educational approach is the totality and comprehensiveness of the educational experience it strives to attain. In addition to the desired integration in the particular areas outlined above (i.e., the cognitive and affective dimensions), we might mention the following:

- a. Cohesion and coordination between the formal and informal components of the school's program. A great deal of emphasis is placed on training an informed staff in the integration of Jewish content into informal educational activities, both in the classroom and in informal settings (e.g., field trips, seminars, etc.).
- b. TALJ education strives to integrate the Jewish and secular curricula. The study of Jewish texts should not be an insular experience. Issues raised in a Jewish studies context should be addressed in other frameworks as well. Thus, a theme discussed

- in a Bible class might also find expression in music, the arts, English, and civics classes. Similarly, the values highlighted in a general context (e.g., ecology, social and civic responsibility) can be carried over to studies as well.
- c. A dichotomy between what is conveyed at home and what is taught at school will surely weaken the effectiveness of any educational approach. The attempt to involve the parents as much as possible in what is being learned in school, and to create opportunities for pupils and parents to learn and experience together in family programming throughout the year is an important component in the TALI approach.
- d. TALI schools are encouraged to function not only as educational institutions serving their pupils, but also as a center in the life of the surrounding community and neighborhood. Activities are organized not only to reach out to the community (e.g., various service projects undertaken by pupils), but also to invite the community into the school to partake of recreational and cultural programs.

Toward the Future

What are some of the major issues facing TALI schools as we approach the third decade of their existence? In addressing this question, there is, of course, no end to the challenges at hand and to the resultant wish list that one might produce for the future of TALI schools. Clearly, those involved in TALI education would want to see more schools adopt the TALI program. If, by the end of this decade, there would be several hundred TALI schools, it would indeed constitute a significant achievement. Moreover, there is a recognized need to expand the amount of hours devoted to TALI's unique curriculum. As of now, each TALI school is allotted two hours per week by the Ministry of Education for enriched Jewish education; in some schools parents often pay for additional hours of extracurricular studies. However, were we to focus on a number of select issues of crucial importance to the future success of the TALI schools, we would suggest the following:

Teacher Training

There is no question that a key to the success of TALI education is the quality of its teachers, both in terms of their knowledge and their didactic skills, commitment, and enthusiasm for promoting the schools' approach. A basic decision was made many years ago to quickly and effectively train veteran teachers in each school in the Jewish subject matter so that their level of knowledge and commitment would foster a superior TALI education. Thus, a great deal of emphasis has been given to this training, both on an individual basis and in groups ranging from teachers in a given school, a defined geographical area, or nationwide. Moreover, the Seminary of Judaic Studies has established a special course for the training of master-teachers from TALI schools who would then take the lead in promoting a more intensive TALI educational experience in their institutions.

Curriculum Development

Even with the best teachers possible, the success of TALI education requires a well-coordinated, well-conceptualized curriculum for each grade. Such a curriculum must not only integrate the various subjects in any given grade but must present a carefully crafted developmental course of studies from year to year. As noted, a syllabus for such an overall curriculum has recently been completed; we now face the challenge of preparing teachers' manuals as well as workbooks for pupils for each level and subject. Such a task will require a number of years, but upon its completion TALI schools will have at their disposal an essential ingredient for a successful national educational program.

Parental Involvement

Once again, the ultimate success of TALI education is not only what the children learn in school, but how much support and understanding of this education they get at home. It is clear that most parents who send their children to TALI schools are interested in the type of education that is being offered, and we must capitalize on this

interest in order to involve the parents in ever-more extensive educational programs. They, too, must feel part of TALM education so that they may more fully identify with things Jewish (customs, texts, holidays) and might, as a result, even seek to incorporate some form of Jewish expression in their own family context.

The TALM School as an Educational Unit

The overall quality of education in each school must become more central to our concerns. TALM education is not only a matter of what is learned in the various classes, or what is experienced in a religious context, or in family education, or in informal education programs. The question has to be asked — how is each school to be viewed as an entire unit and how is the sum total of all its activities brought together and integrated in order to make it a unique and effective educational institution? In this sense, the success of the TALM schools is not merely the sum total of its various activities, but rather it is the degree to which an attractive, challenging, and educational ambience is created among teachers, pupils, and parents. Such a positive environment is crucial for effectively training the next generation of Jewish citizens in Israeli society.

TALM schools were created to answer a need, a need for the study of Judaism and the experiencing of Jewish practices in a framework that is positive though not coercive, supportive yet not dogmatic, and where there is a tolerant and pluralistic ambience for various Jewish expressions. The polarization of Israeli society must be eschewed. Commitment need not be associated with isolationism, xenophobia or fanaticism, nor modernity with a universalistic posture which takes a dim view of anything that smacks of Judaism and particularism. How to bridge that gap is no less crucial to the survival of our Jewish society than state-of-the-art curricula in math and science. Neither component is dispensable if we are to thrive as a modern Jewish state, as a national and cultural center of the Jewish people the world over, and as a full-fledged member of modern western democratic societies.

This, then, is TALM's challenge. All of those involved with TALM are convinced that these schools have the potential to provide an

approach that can make a significant contribution to Israeli education. The question is only whether we can find the means and support to offer this alternative at the pace and extent required. Years ago I participated in an educational seminar on modern Jewish values at an army base. After a day of sessions on Jewish history, tradition, and culture, one young soldier stood up, brandished his gun, and shouted in an agonized voice: "Why is it that only now you are teaching me *how* to use this gun and for twelve years no one has taught me *why*?"

TALM education is now beginning to provide an answer.

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