

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1, pages 236 - 237.

R. Israel did not lay down any universal, uniform program of study. His view was "that the manner of study was to be geared to the individual, to his own character and essential nature." [15] Nevertheless, he did introduce general guidelines in his Yeshivah. Everyone was to study with maximum sharpwittedness and intellectual keenness, but at the same time to strive to study Torah for its own sake, to discover its true intent. 76 He would reiterate time and again that "during the formative years, during one's youth, before the yoke of worldly cares is thrust down upon him, one must learn [to discover] the true intent of the Torah, and not allow oneself to be swayed in the slightest by his will. Otherwise when one reached the stage of issuing practical rulings, there would be no end to the intrusion of his own inclinations and of pitfalls. This was a most weighty and essential matter since all character traits are affected by it. He did, however, stipulate that in one respect one should study with an ulterior motive, "to become a great person." He gave concentrated attention to this matter; disciples are reputed to have related that he once performed an experiment in education. He dispatched them to the upper story of the Bet Midrash to "study Torah for its own sake." After they had been there a while, he came to see what they were doing. He found each sitting alone and straining his efforts to "study Torah for its own sake." He observed: "I see study for its own sake, but I don't see any Torah. My intention was that you should argue, propound the sharpest questions and answers - for this alone is Torah study — yet nevertheless the objective should be to study it for its own sake."

[15] According to his letter to his nephew, R. Leib Lipkin of Kretinga. Interestingly, R. Israel set up a program of study designed especially for this nephew. "He should undertake three courses; (a) Cursory study (even if the meaning is not always clear), the material to be reviewed several times (for him) to remember the fundamentals, perhaps in a plain Gemara having the text and Rashi's commentary only; (b) Gemara and Tosafot, where the straightforward meaning is to be mastered; (c) intensive study of some particular subject (even a Book of Responsa) or else a tractate the Gemara and Tosafot of which had been studied previously. What should form the main preoccupation will depend upon the time."