

April 24, 1974

TO: Members of Judaic Studies Committee
FROM Rabbi Norman Lamm
RE: Position statement on educational output goals
for Yeshiva High School

I have found a certain number of glaring deficiencies in the training and background of Yeshiva High School students who have made their way to my Jewish philosophy classes in the course of the past decade and a half. The following very brief recommendations for standards are based upon this experience:

1. Students should have a rudimentary knowledge of the outline of Jewish history, i.e., the sequence of periods, and the knowledge of some of the great names attached to each.
2. Pirkei Avot. I find that fairly ignorant laymen who had the most elementary Jewish education in Europe, are familiar with Avot. Our own students, however, who are initiated into some of the profoundest complexities of Talmudic reasoning, haven't the faintest knowledge of what Pirkei Avot is all about. I would make the knowledge of Avot a pre-requisite for high school graduation.
3. Bible (Chumash). Chumash is taught in a very spotty fashion in our own high schools. Apparently, there is a feeling by certain members of the high school faculty that teaching Chumash is beneath their intellectual station (an attitude which, apparently, Moses did not share). Graduation requirements should list specific portions of the Chumash that a student must know thoroughly, including a limited number of famous passages from Rashi.
4. English. I suppose this complaint is just another cry in the wilderness, but I am distressed at the incredibly poor training of so many students in the simplest elements of English composition. Probably this is part of the spirit of the times, but I do think the high schools ought to emphasize English writing -- clarity, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary -- a great deal more than they do.