

# COLLEGE

APPLYING THE REBBE'S  
POSITION TO THE  
REALITIES OF TODAY

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# Foreword

The Rebbe's statements about college are well known in Lubavitch circles. In the 1950's, the Rebbe led a consistent campaign against attending college (at one *farbrengen* the Rebbe had everyone exclaim out loud three times, "No college!"). At public *farbrengens*, and in private and public letters, the Rebbe strongly warned against the certain dangers that it entails.

As Chassidim, we know that the Rebbe's directives are sacred, and that, whether we understand them or not, following them is a channel for unlimited *brachos* in our lives.

At the same time, in a changing world, understanding how the Rebbe's position applies practically can be confusing. What would the Rebbe say today – sixty years later? Given the challenges of *parnassa* and the need for a degree for certain positions, would the Rebbe change his position? And what would the Rebbe say about Jewish colleges? What about online courses?

We can't speak for the Rebbe, but we can study the Rebbe's words. By understanding the Rebbe's concerns, we can ascertain where and when they are relevant. As chassidim, it is only right that we review the Rebbe's position carefully before making a decision.

This booklet is by no means an exhaustive exploration of the Rebbe's views on college and does not elaborate on the critical concerns relevant specifically to secular college campuses. The reader is referred to the article "How to Make a Living" in *Derher Magazine*, Sivan 5777 as well as the collection of letters on college printed in "Dem Rebben's Kinder" for more on those issues.

The unique purpose of this article, rather, is to help those seeking to live their lives in accordance with the Rebbe's *hashkofos* – as well as those advising them – apply them to the realities of today. It is an attempt to answer the often confusing and subtle questions that arise, especially in relation to Jewish or online colleges.

*The Editors*

# Overview

Throughout the many *sichos* and letters on the topic of college, the Rebbe raises a variety of concerns. These can be generally divided into three categories, each of which includes several distinct issues:

## The Environment

- The immodest and immoral lifestyle of college campuses.
- The anti-religious philosophies promoted in and out of the classroom.
- The respect one acquires for professors who do not live up to Torah standards.

## The Learning

- Learning ideas that oppose or are incompatible with Torah principles and values.
- The dangers of being immersed in secular studies.

## Purpose and Focus

- The lack of *bitachon* that Hashem will provide for one's *parnassa* without the individual needing a college degree.
- The irretrievable loss of time that could have been used to fulfill one's life mission.
- The Halachic problem of using time that could and should be used for Limmud HaTorah to learn secular subjects instead.

Most of the "environment" concerns can be avoided by attending an all-men's or all-women's *frum* program.<sup>1</sup>

Bittul Torah, also a serious Halachic matter, is relevant specifically to a male who could be learning Torah but chooses to attend college instead. Once a man assumes the obligation of *parnassa*, there are

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<sup>1</sup> It is self-understood that even in a college run by *frum* people, it is possible to encounter some of the concerns. It is important to consider all possible issues and ensure that the environment is indeed appropriate.

allowances if it is absolutely the only way for him to earn sufficient *parnassa*.

This article will only examine the remaining four topics, which are also subtler and more complex: **purpose, secular studies, conflicting teachings,** and **attitudes toward *parnassa*.**



# Purpose and Preoccupation

## Where are You Going?

One summer day, as they played outdoors, the sons of the Rebbe Maharash were discussing the difference between Jews and non-Jews. Did it lie in their ability to study Torah diligently? To *daven* with devotion? What then of the simple, unlearned Jew? What makes him special, they wondered.

When the Rebbe heard of their argument, he sent the young Sholom DovBer to summon Bentzion, a servant in the Rebbe's home.

Bentzion was a simple Jew who read Hebrew with many mispronunciations and barely understood the easy words of the *tefillos*. Every day he would recite the entire Sefer Tehillim and make sure to be present for the Ein Yaakov *shiur*.

When the servant arrived, the Rebbe asked him: "Bentzion, did you eat?"

Bentzion: "Yes".

The Rebbe: "Did you eat well?"

Bentzion: "What's well? Baruch Hashem, I was sated."

The Rebbe: "And why do you eat?"

Bentzion: "So that I may live"

The Rebbe: "But why live?"

Bentzion: "To be a Jew and do what Hashem wants." The servant sighed.

The Rebbe: "You may go. Send me Ivan the coachman."

Ivan was a gentile who had grown up among Jews from early childhood and spoke a perfect Yiddish. When the coachman arrived, the Rebbe asked him: "Did you eat today?"

"Yes"

"Did you eat well?"

"Yes"

"And why do you eat?"

"So that I may live"

"But why live?"

"To take a swig of vodka and have a bite to eat," replied the coachman.

"You may go," said the Rebbe.<sup>2</sup>

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Before discussing the potential problems that can present themselves in college, one who is considering pursuing a degree should ask himself or herself the question: Why do I want to go? What is my goal?

There are some individuals who are tempted to attend college in order to become more "educated."

Others are passionate about developing a particular career.

Many are concerned regarding future *parnassa* and want the security that a degree seems to afford.

And there are those who wish to plan for unknown possibilities.

At the same time, there is a space within every Yid that is above these considerations. Like the simple assistant Bentzion, we have an innate desire to "be a Yid and do what Hashem wants." Deeper than our need for material comforts is our need to be connected to our source. And more than we want to succeed in the world, we yearn to fulfill our indispensable role in making this world a Dira B'tachtonim.

To a Lubavitcher girl who wanted to attend college, the Rebbe wrote:

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<sup>2</sup> Translation from *Once Upon a Chassid*.

*"It is surely unnecessary to explain to you at length that every Jew and Jewess, young and old, has a purpose and task to accomplish in his or her life. The task, broadly speaking, is to illuminate the world with "נר מצוה ותורה אור" in everyday life... It is therefore more obvious than ever, that no Jew has a right to give of his time, and even more so of his heart and mind, to matters which not only do not help but are very likely to hinder in the fulfillment of his sacred task and purpose. One of these matters would be to spend several years in college... college will not help fulfill the true and inner desire of the Jew to carry out his above-mentioned task and purpose in life, so that even at best it would be an irretrievable loss of time and energy..."<sup>3</sup>*

One who is considering going to college because it seems like something good to do, or because it may come to use one day, should consider the precious value of a Yid's time. The many hours, over months or years, spent studying in college could have been put to better use fulfilling one's purpose in this world – in the area of Torah, *avodah*, or helping others *b'gashmiyus u'bruchinyus*. Time spent on something potentially unnecessary, is time wasted, (which for a man is also a question of *bittul Torah*, needless interruption from Torah).

What, then, if one wants to study for a specific degree to earn a *parnassa*?

One significant consideration is the timing:

### **Formative Years**

The Rebbe sees youth, and especially the years between the end of compulsory education and marriage as "formative years."

In a letter to one mother who wanted her daughter to attend college, the Rebbe writes:

*"We live in a time when each one of us requires special strengthening in spiritual matters, certainly the younger generation who have yet*

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<sup>3</sup> Letter of 28 Cheshvan, 5715 to Mrs. Bassie Garelik, online at Chabad.org/ 2391352. See also My Encounter on Living Torah Program 255. It is noteworthy that she planned to attend college only part-time and study in seminary in the mornings.



*to make their way in life. For them it is particularly important to take the right step and to continue along the right path, for every benefit during this period in their life will eventually be multiplied when they will reach full adulthood and set up their own home and raise their own family.*

*"I have often mentioned in this connection the well-known illustration from a young seedling which requires particular care and attention at that stage, and every extra effort will be amply rewarded when the seedling becomes a full-grown fruit-bearing tree."<sup>4</sup>*

Young adults are at a critical juncture in life; as they become independent, they begin solidifying their identities. Everything they learn and do will have significant impact on their future choices and the direction their lives will take: What kind of spouse will they choose? What line of work will they pursue? What type of home will they build? How will they raise their children?

The need for positive influence at this stage may be even more important for girls, as the Rebbe writes:

*"The answer to your letter should be self-evident, namely to do everything possible to provide the children with the maximum Jewish education, especially where it concerns a girl, and furthermore where, as you note in your letter, her education and upbringing will have a direct influence on the younger children."<sup>5</sup>*

And as the Rebbe writes in Hayom Yom:

*"All that is holy in the nation of the G-d of Avraham and is fundamental for the house of Israel ... was entrusted and endowed by the revered and awesome G-d to Jewish women to guard and to cultivate."<sup>6</sup>*

The Rebbe is saying that everything about the Jewish home – the financial priorities, the husband's involvement in Torah learning and

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Rabbi Michael Seligson for providing us with a copy of the letter.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> 26 Adar II, translation from *Tackling Life's Tasks*.

*hafatza*, how the children are dressed, the look of the home, the experience of Shabbos and Yom Tov, the standards of *kashrus*, *tznius* and *tahara*, and how the children feel about Yiddishkeit in general – all of these and so much more are dependent on the values and feelings of the wife and mother. As the heart of the home, it is her privilege and responsibility to instill warmth and enthusiasm for Yiddishkeit in her family.

Because of the formative nature of the years before marriage, the Rebbe encourages young men and women to spend them focused on *kodesh* as much as possible, so that they are prepared to establish a Yiddishe home from a place of inspiration and spiritual strength.

As the Rebbe expresses in his special *bracha* for *chassanim* and *kallos* upon their marriage:

*“...that you build an everlasting Jewish home based on the foundations of the Torah and Mitzvos, as they are illuminated with the inner light of the Torah, that is the teachings of Chassidus.”*

Detracting from this most-important focus to pursue a career is, at best, an “irretrievable loss of time and energy.” Worse, a college education can negatively affect one’s priorities, as will be explained. Even subtle influences on one’s perspective – especially before marriage – will impact one’s entire family in ways that are immeasurable.

The Rebbe’s concerns about the formative nature of youth extend beyond marriage as well. The fact that one is married may lend a certain stability, but is still no guarantee of immunity from negative influence. Regarding what would be considered young:

*“The studies in university take place at an age when the personality of a person is still not fully developed – generally before the age of thirty – and the exposure then is more dangerous.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> From a *yechidus* of 5715, published in Kfar Chabad Magazine Vol. 511 p. 22.

It is clear that even if a degree is deemed necessary, it should be delayed until the individual's personality and *hashkofos* are well established, and especially until after marriage<sup>8</sup>.

### **For the Sake of Parnassa**

But is it not irresponsible to leave job training for after marriage? Doesn't one need to plan for the future?

Regarding *bochurim*, the Rebbe says:

*"There are those students who argue that it is difficult for them to learn as they should, because they must first secure a livelihood for themselves. He is unable to learn tranquilly because the thought weighs on his mind: with what will he provide for the children that Hashem will give him after he reaches the time of Shidduchim, and he engages in the matter and finds his Shidduch, gets engaged and gets married, and then has children b'sha'a tova umutzlachs. As well, he worries what he will leave for them after 120 years. Thus, he goes out to the street – or at least his mind goes out to the street – and he thinks about the "tachlis" of parnassa...*

*"From where does such a feeling come to Yeshiva students? – from the atmosphere of the street... But it need not be this way... One's head does not need to be preoccupied with the thought of "How will I make a living?"; one needs to sit and learn without calculations."*<sup>9</sup>

Regarding girls, the Rebbe says that until marriage their responsibility is to prepare for their primary mission as Akeres Habayis. This includes learning Torah and surrounding themselves with Chassidish inspiration, as well as helping to take care of children and run a Jewish home. In the Rebbe's words:

*"This matter is relevant even to girls who are not yet of marriageable age – for they need to prepare to fulfill their primary role when the*

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<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Chana Gorovitz, Dean of Bais Rivkah Seminary, relates that in several unique situations where the Rebbe allowed individual young women to enter professions that required degrees, the Rebbe said to wait until after marriage.

<sup>9</sup> Likkutei Sichos Vol. 1 pg. 97.

*time comes that they will establish a Yiddishe home. At that time, each of them will be an Akeres Habayis and will need to educate her children in the spirit of Yiddishkeit. They need to begin these matters before marriage by helping and assisting their mothers...”<sup>10</sup>*

Girls who are not yet married should also take advantage of their available time and use it for activities to spread Yiddishkeit, as will be discussed below.

Concerns about *parnassa*, on the other hand, should not be a consideration at this time. Torah teaches us that *parnassa* comes from Hashem. Though one is obligated to make a material *keli* to receive it, this only applies when one has the halachic obligation to do so.

*Parnassa* is essentially not the obligation of a woman.<sup>11</sup> Although there is precedent in Torah for women working to allow their husbands to learn Torah, the Rebbe explains that this decision should be made after marriage.

*“When is this relevant? When a woman has already merited having children and when she has a husband who... wants to learn and she agrees to this – then there is room for her to devote herself to matters of parnassa...”<sup>12</sup>*

Before marriage, on the other hand, a girl has an *avoda* to do, and no Torah obligation in *parnassa* to override it. As the Rebbe says:

*“A girl cannot turn into an Akeres Habayis overnight. This is a serious and responsible role for which one needs to prepare appropriately... and as far as parnassa - ... it is clear and obvious and that Hashem, who sustains billions of people in the world, will sustain and provide also for those children with which He will bless that girl...”<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Toras Menachem 5745 Vol. 2 pg. 1350.

<sup>11</sup> After Cheit Etz Hadaas, Hashem cursed man to work the land, and cursed the woman to bear the pain of childbirth and childrearing. In the Kesuba, the husband obligates himself to provide for his wife.

<sup>12</sup> Toras Menachem 5745 Vol. 1 pg. 131 (Vov Tishrei)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

In practice, before marriage a Lubavitcher *bochur* or girl should not be concerned with *parnassa*, and instead should be immersed in *ruchmiyus* and focused on his or her purpose in this world. Is a degree relevant and appropriate in this context?

## **Who Are We?**

Besides the above-mentioned concerns, there is another very important factor to be considered before pursuing a career:

As chassidim, we have been chosen for the awesome privilege of igniting Yiddishe *neshamos* wherever we can find them. As the Rebbe Rashab taught, "א חסיד איז א לאמטערנטשיק" – a chossid is a lamplighter. Out of the more than seven billion inhabitants of our planet, only around 16 million are Yidden. Of them, the vast majority are unfortunately not yet *shomrei Torah umitzvah*. Each of the several tens of thousands of Lubavitcher chassidim should see themselves as indispensable to spreading the light of Torah and Chassidus and bringing Moshiach.

If one is indeed qualified to take a position in spreading Yiddishkeit, this should be the priority. As the Rebbe writes:

*"It is self-understood that the mission to illuminate has many ways... However, the primary, direct and simple path is through being involved in proper chinuch with money, body and soul... It is also self-understood that this mission has even more importance in an era where every moment is extremely precious since one has the opportunity to inspire many Yiddishe boys and girls, and the lack of action can endanger their future..."*

*"It is therefore my call and request of all Anash and especially the youth, that each and every one of them examine himself whether he is capable of working in chinuch of Yiddishe boys or girls. And because one is biased, and can err in his assessment, he should consult with the experts. Those who do have a talent should do all*

*that is necessary to become personally involved in chinuch, as teachers, counselors, principals and the like..."*<sup>14</sup>

Before considering the question of pursuing a degree, it is imperative that a Lubavitcher chossid address the fundamental question: Am I pursuing the right job for me? Could I be devoting my energies to spreading Yiddishkeit actively? Have I explored all possible opportunities for using my talents within the field of *chinuch*?

As the Rebbe writes in Hayom Yom:

*"Every individual is required to serve Hashem according to his nature and spiritual level. A person who can pierce pearls or polish gems, yet occupies himself with baking bread, is considered to have sinned, even though this too is a much-needed task. The parallels to this in our Divine service are obvious."*<sup>15</sup>

If I could be a lamplighter, why should I want to do anything else?

### **When a Degree is Needed**

After marriage, a man should consult his *mashpia* to determine whether he is suited for a job in *chinuch* or *hafatza*. If it is determined that he should pursue some other field, then whatever job he is advised to pursue is the ideal for him. If that job requires a degree, there is room for an exception by a qualified Rav or Mashpia **who is well-versed in the Rebbe's stance on college.**

Likewise, if, after marriage, the need arises for a woman to assist with *parnassa*, and the only option available to her is one that would require a degree, a qualified Rav or *mashpiah* should be consulted.

In situations such as these it is important to remember that efforts for *parnassa* must be entirely appropriate according to Torah:

*"It is written, 'Hashem will bentch you in all that you do.' A person only needs to make a vessel for his livelihood, and should make every effort that it be pure of any trace of deception, etc., so that **in every***

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<sup>14</sup> *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 16, pg. 174.

<sup>15</sup> 25 Nissan, translation from *Tackling Life's Tasks*.

*respect it accords with the laws of the Torah. It will then be a fit receptor for sublime blessings in two ways: his livelihood will be ample, and it will be directed toward the proper place.”<sup>16</sup>*

Thus, when advised to consider a degree, the following concerns about the studies should be explored.



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<sup>16</sup> Hayom Yom 27 Sivan, translation from *Tackling Life's Tasks*.

# Secular Studies

## The Battle of Perspectives

The overarching issue with college, in all situations, is that of secular studies. As the Rebbe says:

*“It is known that the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was very displeased with the learning of secular studies, which as the Alter Rebbe writes it “defiles the ChaBaD of the soul”, and therefore the [Frierdiker] Rebbe opposed it – for Jewish children in general, and for students of Tomchei Temimim in particular.”<sup>17</sup>*

The Rebbe is referring to Tanya *Perek Ches*, where the Alter Rebbe discusses the negative effects of engaging with *klipas nogah* – permissible matters not directly for the sake of Hashem. There he explains that the damage of learning secular studies is greater than that of other forms of *klipas nogah*.

Whenever we indulge in food for or spend leisure time reading the news, our sensitivity to *kedusha* is dulled, and we become more materialistic and selfish. However, secular studies taint our entire perspective on life.

The ultimate truth is of course that אין עוד מלבדו – there is no real existence other than Hashem. This is the reality we will experience when Moshiach will come, and is the essence of Chassidus, which was given to us to help us realize Hashem’s Oneness in our world and bring about the Geulah.

The journey toward Geulah is extremely challenging, for everything in our material world proclaims the very opposite of this truth. The world of falsehood declares, as Pharaoh did, "לי יאורי ואני עשיתי" – “I made myself.” The laws of nature seem to control the weather, medicine seems to determine health, and a degree apparently guarantees financial security. We must battle these perceptions on a daily basis by

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<sup>17</sup> Sicha of Chukas-Balak 5715.



studying Chassidus and connecting to the true reality, in which Hashem holds the key to rain, Hashem is the "רופא כל בשר", and Hashem determines one's *parnassa* on Rosh Hashana.

The study of secular subjects, which focus on the world and life from a purely material and natural perspective, makes this *avoda* all the more difficult. Not only does one see and experience the concealment of *Elokus* inherent in nature, but he becomes **intellectually convinced** that nature is a real existence. Secular perspectives come to replace Torah perspectives, *l'havdil*, and one's entire outlook becomes a worldly one.

When a person who is influenced by a worldly perception is faced with a challenge in *emunah* or *bitachon*, his or her defenses are down.

The mind is naturally the home of the *nefesh elokis*. Despite emotional temptation or physical hardship, a Yid who is connected to the Torah knows what is true and right, and has the power to let his mind rule his heart. But what happens when the mind itself has become aligned with the enemy?

### **When Chinuch is Tainted by Secularism**

This, the Rebbe writes, is one of the serious dangers of college:

*"One of the serious dangers that are inherent in college education has to do with its influence on the thought process of the college student. The college student is trained to think in secular terms and categories. In all courses (except theology) G-d is banished from the classroom.*

*"This often leads to the tendency of leaving G-d out of the Torah study as well. He may still admire the wisdom of the Torah, and may still derive pleasure from its study, but he will not be able to recapture the sense of awe and holiness with which he had once approached G-d's Torah.*

*"Hence if he had picked up some apparent discrepancies between secular science and the Torah, he is inclined to solve the difficulty by simply taking the words of the Torah or of Chazal out of their*

*meaning in order to harmonize them with the college textbooks, or even those used in High Schools or public schools. Unfortunately, this tendency has made inroads even among Talmidei Kolelim, who sit and study Torah at great personal "sacrifice", yet whose Hashkofo had been contaminated by the secular Hashkofo of the college."<sup>18</sup>*

Practically, this טמטום המזה והלב – dulling of the mind and heart, as the Rebbe says about secular studies – expresses itself as a dulled sensitivity to *ruchmiyus* and a skewed sense of priorities.

As the Rebbe once shared:

*"A woman came in to see me – a frum woman with a Shaitel and her husband with a beard – and her son goes to "high school." I asked her, what are their plans for when he finishes high school? She answered that he will go to college – after all, he has to be a 'mentch.'*

*"I asked her: 'And what will it hurt that he should be a Gaon, and will be fluent in Shas and Poskim?' She answered (here the Rebbe smiled): 'Indeed, he will be a Gaon, but he won't be a mentch; he won't know when Shakespeare and the like were born.'"<sup>19</sup>*

An early childhood teacher who has been schooled in modern educational philosophy will likely prioritize academic and practical skills over a holy *chinuch*, ("But you don't understand, the quality of the Jewish books can't compare to literary classics!"). A parent or teacher who has been influenced by secular studies will find it more important that a child be able to identify the stages of butterfly metamorphosis than identify the *keilim* of the Beis Hamikdosh. Correct grammar will take priority over fluency in *maamorei Chazal*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> From a letter written in the Rebbe's name to the editor of the Jewish Press. Thanks to Rabbi Michael Seligson for providing us with a copy of the letter.

<sup>19</sup> From remarks of 5 Adar II 5727 - Sichos Kodesh 5727 page 493.

<sup>20</sup> Even if there is nothing wrong with the practical skill or concept one teaches the child, the question is what the parent or teacher prioritizes and is more passionate about, a matter of values that the child absorbs.

Even the Torah that they do teach the children will be defined in terms of emotional, cognitive, motor and sensory development, rather than by Torah's goal, as described by the Rebbe: "*To reveal in the children the Nefesh Elohis within them, such that this recognition permeates their entire being, and all of their actions, speech and even thought are permeated with Kedusha.*"<sup>21</sup>

When considering what path to take in life, one influenced by secularism is more likely to think in terms of comfort, interest and material gain than about the *shlichus* for which his or her *neshama* was sent to this world. ("Go into *chinuch*? For no pay? When I can do so many other, more prestigious and better-paying jobs?") Facing challenges in parenting, a mother will naturally be more inclined to consult secular parenting books than a *mashpiah* who is well-versed in the perspectives of Torah and Chassidus ("What does Torah know about dealing with children's emotions?")

In instructions regarding the absorption of immigrants in Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe said that having them attend university in Eretz Yisroel was extremely dangerous, for various reasons, including:

*"4. It creates a huge gap separating the students from their parents and the Chachamim etc.*

*"5. It ingrains in the students the perspective that the true wisdom is found by the goyim, and Yidden must strive to be like them and stop being "batlanim," and whoever is more goyish – he is the one who is wiser and more complete etc.*

"And the fact that they don't say all of this openly, rather through indirect implications... greatly increases the danger. Especially since amongst those implying all of this are those who in their personal lives keep Torah and Mitzvos, and distort Torah to prove their points..."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Toras Menachem* 5745 Vol. 4, pg. 2301.

<sup>22</sup> From a handwritten answer of the Rebbe regarding the absorption of immigrants to Eretz Yisroel, printed in the Kfar Chabad Magazine Issue 783 in the column "Mibeis HaMalchus." Ibid footnote 7

Impressed by the seeming “sophistication” of secular wisdom, one may *chas v' sholom* come to view Torah’s perspectives as simplistic and old-fashioned. The holiness of Torah and the recognition that it is the only and ultimate truth can *R”L* be forgotten. The Rebbe’s perspectives, which should be one’s absolute guide to life, are at risk of becoming “nice ideas.”

The above examples are neither theoretical nor extreme. They are very real, and they are happening all around us – and possibly to ourselves as well.

For those in their formative years and especially before marriage, this concern of tainting one's outlook should be even more worrisome.



# Divergent Views

## Conflicting Teachings

Beyond the problem *with* secular studies, which are Klipas Nogah, college courses may involve the risk of a much more serious matter – studies that actually contradict Torah.

The Rambam writes in Hilchos Avodah Zara:<sup>23</sup>

*“We are warned **not to consider any thought which will cause us to uproot one of the fundamentals of the Torah.** We should not turn our minds to these matters, think about them, or be drawn after the thoughts of our hearts...*

*“The Torah has warned about this matter, saying<sup>24</sup> “Do not stray after your hearts and eyes, which have led you to immorality” - i.e., each one of you should not follow his limited powers of understanding and think that he has comprehended the truth. Our Sages [interpreted this warning]: “After your hearts,” this refers to heresy; “after your eyes,” this refers to immorality.”*

Based on this, the Alter Rebbe writes in Hilchos Talmud Torah:<sup>25</sup>

*“[Even a scholar] may not [read] the texts of minim, i.e. the works of the gentile philosophers who deny [G-d’s] providence and [His gift of] prophecy. It is utterly forbidden to read them or peruse them, even sporadically, even to derive from them an ethical concept or [inspiration toward] the fear of Heaven... With regard to such texts, our Sages declared<sup>26</sup> that “he who reads extraneous books has no share in the World to Come”.*

What are these ideas and texts that contradict the fundamentals of Torah?

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<sup>23</sup> Sefer HaMada, Hilchos Avodah Zara, 2:3.

<sup>24</sup> Bamidbar 15:39.

<sup>25</sup> Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deiah, Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:7.

<sup>26</sup> Sanhedrin 10:1.

Firstly, there are many theories and principles that negate *emunah* in Hashem. These include – but are not limited to – the study of other religions, philosophy, and certain scientific theories such as those regarding the age of the universe and evolution. More innocuous subjects, like history and sociology, may also include ideas negating the notion that the world is being led by Hashem.

Then there are concepts that conflict with specific Torah values and beliefs. These can be found within various subjects such as psychology, sociology, literature and history – just to mention a few. One example would be the normalization and promotion of immoral behavior.

Practically speaking, a student attending university – no matter in which field – will inevitably be exposed to many such topics. These non-Torah-compatible ideas may be found in a wide variety of courses and it is difficult if not impossible to avoid learning them, even if one were to be aware that they are problematic, which many students are not.

In addition to the Halachic issues involved, studying topics that are incompatible with Yiddishkeit poses a great danger to one's *emunah*. As the Rebbe explained:

“Learning does not mean the study of facts. It means exposing oneself to certain circles and activities that stand against the values and beliefs of the believer. It is like taking a person from hot surroundings and sending him into cold water, “shock treatment”, multiple times a day. How long can one endure this?!”<sup>27</sup>

What is of perhaps of greater concern is that this problem exists even in the “*frum* colleges” as well. Despite the best of intentions on the part of the administration of any institution, the details of what is actually taught are ultimately in the hands of the instructor. Even if the teacher is *frum*, that is unfortunately still not a guarantee that his *hashkofos* are entirely in line with Torah, or that she is aware of all potential conflicts between Torah and the material he is teaching.

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<sup>27</sup> From a *yechidus* of 5715, published in Kfar Chabad Magazine Vol. 511 p. 22

Case in point:

A *frum* history teacher in a “*frum* college” taught Christian views as part of a course. When a potential student inquired about it, the teacher defended her decision by bringing a “proof” from Torah:

The Ohr HaChayim asks why the wise idea to set up a system of courts needed to come from Yisro, a foreigner, rather than from amongst Bnei Yisroel. He explains that Hashem’s connection to the Yidden is not based on their intelligence; after all, there are wise non-Jews as well. Rather, Hashem chose us purely out of love for us that supersedes intellect.

However, the history teacher saw in this Ohr Hachayim a proof that we should pursue the intellect of the wise *goyim*!

In the Rebbe's own words:

*“The fact that they don’t say all of this [that secular scholars are wiser] openly, rather through indirect implications... **greatly increases the danger.** Especially since amongst those implying all of this are those who in their personal lives keep Torah and Mitzvos, and **distort Torah to prove their points...**”<sup>28</sup>*

### **Subtle Differences**

On a subtler level, there are many ideas taught in a variety of college subjects that are at odds with Torah’s perspectives. This doesn't mean they are absolutely wrong; rather it depends on how they are applied. But as with many areas of *kedusha*, truth lies in subtlety. If one does not have a strong Torah background and clarity in Yiddishe values, they can be led astray by contemporary theories, and be led to believe that they are compatible with Torah.

Some examples:

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<sup>28</sup> From a handwritten answer of the Rebbe regarding the absorption of immigrants to Eretz Yisroel, printed in the Kfar Chabad Magazine Issue 783 in the column “Mibeis HaMalchus.”

- **Educational Theories:**

Many modern educational theories focus on taking the child's lead and are almost exclusively about love.

The Rebbe expressed his opinion about the Montessori model of education, that although many of its techniques can be implemented, a school should not be based on its theories.<sup>29</sup> This is because the underlying premise of Montessori runs against the essential Torah value of instilling *kabolas ol* within children.

Similar issues present themselves with educational philosophies such as "Love and Logic" – guiding children to come to positive behaviors on their own, rather than laying down rules. Modern day secular wisdom teaches that the teacher should not be the absolute authority in the classroom. Is that in line with the Torah view of teachers? Should young students really be addressed as "friends"?

Some of these ideas could perhaps be applied in the context of a framework of *kabolas ol* and *kibud horim umorim*; but in their original form they are problematic.

- **Psychology:**

Many mainstream psychological theories conflict with the makeup of a Yid's psyche and personality, as laid out in Chassidus. Classic psychological models view a person as a more sophisticated animal, and they guide a person accordingly. Thus, the Rebbe often expressed concern with visiting psychologists who could influence the patient negatively. These fundamental differences of perspective affect one's approach to topics such as self-esteem, motivation, and depression, amongst many others.

For example:

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<sup>29</sup> Answer of the Rebbe to Mrs. Reba Sharfstein of Cincinnati, online at Chabad.org/1418738.



Contemporary secular wisdom approaches marriage from a self-centered perspective of two individuals who each want to achieve happiness, and the challenge is to satisfy each party's wants. In the Torah perspective, they are two halves of a *neshama* reuniting by giving to each other and bringing Hashem into their relationship. These fundamental attitudes will have significant repercussions on the practical advice a therapist will offer.

- **Liberalism:**

Contemporary secular wisdom promotes liberal philosophies on everything from gender roles to ethical issues. Truth is portrayed as relative, morality is seen from the perspective of personal choice, and one is to be open-minded about the many different "right ways" of doing things. It is obvious that these ideas stand in direct contrast to belief in the absolute truth of Torah.

Similarly, the liberal perspectives popular in academia today emphasize compassion and understanding for all, including those who commit evil. Regarding this type of misguided sympathy – which serves to encourage terrorist or criminal behavior – our Chachomim taught<sup>30</sup>, “One who is compassionate to the cruel, will ultimately be cruel to the compassionate.”

These are only a few examples of the potential areas of conflict, and there are many more. Are the teachers in the "*frum* colleges" well-versed in these issues? Do they understand which theories of psychology are compatible with Torah and which are not? Are they careful to filter and adapt the educational theories, approaching them from a Torah perspective?

The reality is that many teachers in the "*frum* colleges" are at best unaware of the conflicts, and at worst, they are promoting ideas that they know are considered problematic.

When a person is exposed to new ideas that conflict with what he has been taught based on Torah, it creates a sense of confusion and

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<sup>30</sup> Koheles Rabba 7:16.

cognitive dissonance. Even worse, one begins to convince oneself that the secular or self-centered values are actually Torah. The teacher who is enamored with the Montessori method of education may enthusiastically explain how this is the application of "הנורד לנער על פי דרכו" and how the trends of treating children as equals and referring to them as "friends" fit with "וואהבת לרעך כמוך". The student, whose mind has been influenced by all of these ideas, can come to believe that his pursuit of a degree is a holy endeavor, for it is a Torah obligation to make a *keli* for *parnassa*, or moreover, that this will enable her to go on *shlichus* one day...

### **Careers Vs. Trades**

In contrast to the Rebbe's opposition to college, the Rebbe encouraged the opening of trade schools "for those who cannot learn *limudei kodesh* all day long," and they should therefore train for a vocation.<sup>31</sup>

Though an extensive exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this article, the apparent difference between the two is this:

In the case of college, one studies secular subjects of an intellectual nature, which contain both direct and indirect assaults on the Torah way of thinking. For a vocation, however, one trains for a practical trade which does not involve theories, ideas or perspectives.

Practical occupations that involve hands-on work, as well as business, technology and finance, do not involve the risks inherent in secular studies. One who is exploring job options should discuss with a Rav or *mashpia* whether they should give priority to these trades instead of careers that require a degree.



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<sup>31</sup> See index of Igros Kodesh for the extensive correspondence from the Rebbe to the administration of Kfar Chabad on this topic.

# The Source of Income

## What about Parnassa?

Despite these issues, the temptation to pursue a degree is great.

One is afraid; how will he support his future family? The cost of living is rising, and most families seem to require two incomes. An entry-level job can hardly pay the basic expenses of a Jewish family – which the Rebbe encourages to be as large as possible. And that is before tuition and weddings enter the equation. What is one to do?

The Rebbe's consistent response to this question is clear: Hashem is the one who gives *parnassa*.

The Rebbe once remarked that some people are saying that the students' *gashmiyus* doesn't matter to the Rebbe, since he doesn't care if they won't earn a living. The Rebbe said that this is untrue:

*“Surely, I am concerned about all the gashmiyus of each individual student. But, one must not forget what Chazal say that a person's parnassa is designated from Rosh Hashana. Parnassa is not what a person himself does; it's what Hashem gives him. The nations of the world are ruled by nature, but Yidden are above nature. By Yidden (especially Chassidism and yeshivah students) the gashmiyus comes through Torah.”<sup>32</sup>*

And as the Rebbe explains:

*“In ruchniyus, legs represent emunah. A lame is one who limps in emunah, and therefore wants to learn secular studies. When one starts making calculations that in several years he will need parnassa and therefore he learns secular studies, meaning that this is how he will later support himself – this shows that he is meanwhile forgetting about Hashem who is the “Supporter and Sustainer or All”. A lame doesn't mean that, chas v'sholom, he has no legs at all; he has legs, but he limps on them. He believes in Hashem, after eating he bentches and says that Hashem is the “Sustainer and Supporter of all”, but he limps*

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<sup>32</sup> Toras Menachem, vol. 7 pg. 335.

*in this; he can't imagine that Hashem can provide for him in another way, rather only when he goes to college...*

*"Hashem has been running the world since He created it... even before the whole concept of college existed. But this person thinks that the one and only way that Hashem can give him parnassa is only by going to college, and Hashem cannot, chas v'shalom, give him the hundred dollars a week that he needs any other way! Secular studies which contaminate the ChaBaD of the Nefesh, a matter that is the opposite of Torah – are, in his opinion, the only vessel through which Hashem can give him Parnassa!*

*"And the concealment is so great, that not only is there no strength in emunah, but they are not looking even with physical eyes, even at things that are taking place in actuality and are can be seen tangibly: We see clearly, that from those who go to college, only a small percentage end up establishing themselves and earning their parnassa from their area of study. Those who administer the colleges – they themselves acknowledge that those who end up earning their parnassa from their studies are a minute minority, a very small percentage...!*

*"And on the other hand, one sees clearly, that the vast majority of those that continued learning in yeshiva, and didn't learn secular studies – Hashem gives them abundant parnassa!"<sup>33</sup>*

The Rebbe is saying that this is not simply a matter of blind faith; it is evident in observable reality. As the Rebbe writes in a letter:

*"Another point which is often the subject of misconception – the importance attached to a college degree from an economic point of view. Statistics show that the majority of college graduates eventually establish themselves in occupation and business not directly connected with their courses of study in college. The moral is obvious."<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> Shabbos Parshas Chukas-Balak 5715.

<sup>34</sup> Letter of 1 Adar 5722, online at: [Chabad.org/2391356](http://Chabad.org/2391356)

There are numerous well-paying jobs that don't require academic degrees (e.g. in the fields of commerce, real estate, technology, service, trades etc.).

It is also necessary to keep in mind that there is no such thing as financial security. Having training for a profession is no guarantee that one will actually find a steady job in that field. One who has a well-paying job is not ensured that he will never lose the job or be unable to work. In business and real estate, the income is obviously unpredictable. There are also any number of significant and unforeseen expenses that a person may encounter – medical situations *R”L*, necessary home repairs and so on – that may eat away at the salary one receives.

On the other hand, an individual without career training may be offered an opportunity to join a business or learn a trade straight out of *kolel*. In the field of technology, a creative idea can translate into financial success. Even one with a fixed salary can encounter blessings from Above in the form of tax breaks, odd jobs, gifts, a bargain on an expected expense, and any number of other interesting ways.

As the Rebbe writes in the Hayom Yom that when one is careful to make a vessel for Parnassa that is completely in line with Torah, *“his livelihood will be ample, and it will be directed toward the proper place.”*<sup>35</sup> – In other words, Hashem will make sure that his job generates sufficient income and that what he earns should not go to unfortunate expenses *R”L*.

Every Yiddishe family lives on miracles; the more one opens oneself to *bitachon* in Hashem, the more obvious those miracles will be.



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<sup>35</sup> See above, Hayom Yom 27 Sivan

# Conclusion

Before a Lubavitcher *chossid* considers pursuing a degree, he should make an honest *cheshbon nefesh* about what is right for him and his future family *b'ruchniyus*. After serious thought, several critical questions must be discussed with a **qualified Rav and mashpia**, who is well-versed in the pertinent issues:

1. Who am I? What is the Shlichus for which my *neshama* was sent to this world? What does it mean to me to be a *chossid* of the Rebbe?
2. Is now the appropriate time for me to be concerned with *parnassa*? Is it relevant? Is it necessary?
3. If *parnassa* is a current concern, what are the available options that do not involve a degree?
4. If a degree is deemed necessary, what are the options available that are the least problematic, both in the areas of environment and of the studies? Which institution? Which degree? Which courses?
5. Assuming there will remain concerns of טמטום המח והלב from the secular teachings no matter what, how can I minimize them? Can I counter the influence of secularism with a significant schedule of learning Chassidus and touching base regularly with the *mashpia*?

Unless absolutely necessary, college should be avoided until after the formative years (approximately age thirty), and especially until after marriage.

May our efforts to live our lives in accordance with the Rebbe's guidance result in abundant *brachos b'gashmiyus* and *b'ruchniyus*. May we all merit to raise *chassidische* children and fulfill our shlichus as "נרות" להאיר and bring *chassidische nachas* to the Rebbe. And may we finally be taken out of this dark *golus* to the light of *geulah* ממש ומיד תיכף ומיד!



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: I know mothers who need to study for degrees once they already have a family. Trying to balance mothering, housekeeping and work, in addition to the stress and workload of college courses is very stressful. If I might end up needing a degree one day, shouldn't I work toward it during my single years, when I have free time?**

A: See above about the role of a girl before marriage – to prepare to be an *akeres habayis*. There is no “free time”; the time an unmarried girl (or boy) has is time that is meant to be filled by matters that help her grow in *ruchniyus*. Eventually, it will be much more important for her family that she established her home with a Chassidishe mindset, even if she will be more preoccupied for a period of time, than if she comes to mothering with more money but tainted *hashkafos*.

As the Rebbe writes in Hayom Yom:

“Jewish wealth is not houses and money. Jewish wealth, which is eternal, is the observance of Torah and mitzvos, and bringing children and grandchildren into the world who will observe the Torah and its mitzvos.”<sup>36</sup>

**Q: Why is attending a *frum* college worse than studying secular studies in high school?**

A: There are two points: mandatory vs. choice, and minority vs. majority of focus.

In some elementary or high schools, secular studies may be **mandatory or necessary**<sup>37</sup> for whatever reason; but what a student continues learning afterward is his or her **choice**. It is never ideal for a Jewish child to engage in secular studies, but sometimes it is required. The Rebbe instructed many schools to offer a general studies curriculum

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<sup>36</sup> 9 Nissan, translation from Tackling Life's Tasks

<sup>37</sup> Igros Kodesh Vol. 9 pg. 188.

because that was the only way parents would enroll their children, and this would ensure that more children receive a proper *chinuch*.

This always was, and continues to be, a concession – perhaps necessary, but a compromise nevertheless. It is neither something to glorify, seek out nor advertise. As the Rebbe once said to school administrators at a *farbrengen*:

“Considering that it is imperative to teach these subjects for the sake of monetarily sustaining the Yeshivah or perhaps to encourage apprehensive parents to enroll their children, one must profess to be capable of defiling the child’s mind with secular studies...<sup>38</sup> Granted, if it appears to you that you have no alternative, fine. But at least go into your private quarters and melt in tears over why your Divinely dictated service has to be carried out by such means!”<sup>39</sup>

Yet, since these studies were offered in order to help the overall success of the school, the Rebbe gave his assurance that it would not harm the students.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, there is a difference in the influence on the student because of the context:

In elementary school or high school, secular studies are supposed to be a **minority** of what is learned, and of secondary importance. As per the Rebbe’s instructions to Lubavitch schools, secular studies, if necessary, are to be taught only in the afternoon hours – with the earlier, more significant hours devoted to *kodesh*<sup>41</sup> – and for less time than *limudei kodesh*.<sup>42</sup> In college, on the other hand, one is completely immersed in secular studies, which has a subliminal effect on the person.

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<sup>38</sup> I.e. advertise that the school offers secular studies.

<sup>39</sup> Purim 5722 – Toras Menachem Vol. 33 page 230.

<sup>40</sup> As told by Rabbi Nachman Sudak *a”h* at the Kinus HaShluchim 5771. In his situation, the Rebbe insisted that a secular studies curriculum be included for the sake of attracting more students and giving them a Yiddishe *chinuch*.

<sup>41</sup> Toras Menachem 5745 Vol. 5 pg. 3034, Toras Menachem 5747 Vol. 3 pg. 521, and more.

<sup>42</sup> Igros Kodesh Vol. 10 pg. 299, Igros Kodesh Vol. 9 pg. 115, and more.



It seems, once a student has finished his compulsory education, he should not voluntarily seek out more secular studies, especially when it isn't balanced by an equal measure of *limudei kodesh*.

**Q: Our own schools require degrees for teachers to get a job in the government preschool classrooms, and pay more for it. Isn't that sending a wrong message?**

A: Ideally, our schools should be paying our Limmudei Kodesh teachers as well as – and even better than – those who can satisfy the government requirements and earn government salaries. Yet the fact that our schools struggle to pay their teachers what they deserve cannot change the truth.

For prospective teachers: It is important to understand that schools that have government programs in place do so for sake of the school's financial viability, similar to the necessity to offer secular studies. It is a concession for the greater benefit of the *moisad*. At the same time, the fact that the school must hire some teachers who are certified does not mean that a girl should compromise on what is right for her.

For the schools: We must recognize that utilizing these government programs encourages Lubavitcher young women to make choices that are not in line with the Rebbe's directives, and has implications for the *chinuch* of the preschool children as well. Administrators should discuss with Rabbonim and Mashpiim how to satisfy their requirements without undermining the *chassidishe chinuch* they aim to impart. Perhaps only Chassidishe teachers who earned their degree at a later stage in life, in as least-problematic a way as possible, should be hired for these positions.

**Q: What is the difference between attending a frum college and receiving credit for classes in seminary?**

A: A seminary is a *moisad chinuch* where girls learn Nigleh and Chassidus, gain Chassidishe hashkafos and inspiration, and receive training in teaching. The fact that students can often earn credits for these classes is a fringe benefit, (as it can avoid the need for – or limit

the amount of – college for those students who do need to earn a degree later on).

A college – no matter how frum – is an institution devoted to earning a secular degree, and is primarily or entirely a program of secular studies, with all of the inherent issues discussed above.

**Q: This all sounds wonderful, but it is almost impossible to find a *shlichus* these days, and there are so many people who struggle with *parnassa*. Isn't it irresponsible and naïve to assume I won't need a degree?**

**A:** At the time of the writing of this article, we live in *galus*, and not always are the *brochos* easily apparent. We anticipate, *daven* for, and demand the Geulah Shleima.

At the same time, if we are looking to do what is responsible, the Rebbe writes in Hayom Yom<sup>43</sup>:

“It is written: *אם בחוקותי תלכו גו' וננתי גשמיכם בעתם* – “If you walk in the path of My statutes... I will grant your rains in their season.” The study of the Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos are the wedding ring with which the Holy One, blessed be He, consecrated the Jewish people, obligating Himself to provide them with their sustenance and livelihood.”

We need to remember that we have a marriage contract with Hashem: Our responsibility is to do our best to make a Dira B'tachtonim through our *avodas* Hashem. The burden of our *parnassa* was undertaken by Hashem.

And regarding leaving our affairs up to Hashem, the Rebbe writes<sup>44</sup>:

*“You are, without any doubt, a believer. So, the very first point of belief is that Hashem directs the world. And if He is capable of directing one-and-a-half billion<sup>45</sup> people, then your own affairs will certainly see the*

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<sup>43</sup> 28 Tishrei, translation from *Tackling Life's Tasks*

<sup>44</sup> *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 4, p. 255, Letter 984, translation from *In Good Hands*.

<sup>45</sup> At the time of the letter's writing

*fulfillment of the verse,<sup>2</sup> "I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and deliver you."*

*"Now, think this over. Hashem promises, "I will sustain and deliver you." So, think: Can a gentile from this or that land disturb Hashem from fulfilling His promise (chas vesholom)? Having thought that, now consider: Is Hashem really in need of your worry as to how He is going to run your affairs and solve your problems? Or will He succeed in finding good solutions even without your worrying?"*

In the merit of following the ways of the Torah, may we be blessed with abundant and revealed *brochos b'gashmius ub'ruchniyus*.



