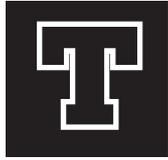


COLLEGE:

APPLYING THE REBBE'S
POSITION TO THE
REALITIES OF TODAY



PART 1



he Rebbe's statements about college are well known in Lubavitch circles. In the 1950s, 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 – 60 years later? Given the challenges of *parnassah* and the need for a degree for certain positions, would the Rebbe change his opinion? 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 three-part series 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 unique purpose of this series, rather, is to help those seeking to live their lives in accordance with the Rebbe's *hashkofos* – as well as those advising them – to 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.

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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 *parnassah* 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 *limud haTorah* to learn secular subjects instead.

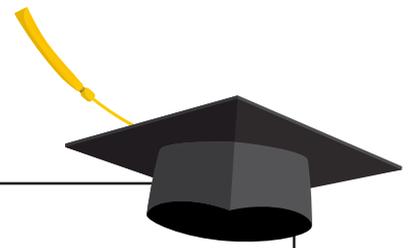
Most of the “environment” concerns can be avoided by attending an all-men's or all-women's *frum* program.¹

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 *parnassah*, there are allowances if it is absolutely the only way for him to earn sufficient *parnassah*.

This three-part series will only examine the remaining topics, which are also subtler and more complex: **purpose, secular studies, conflicting teachings,** and **attitudes toward *parnassah*.**

¹ 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.





PURPOSE AND PREOCCUPATION

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.²

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?

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 *parnassah* and want the security that they feel a degree affords.

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 *dirah b'tachtonim*.

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

"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 ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr 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

² From *Once Upon a Chassid* by Yanki Tauber.



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...”³

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’gashmius u’bruchinus*. 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 *parnassah*?

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 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.”⁴

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.”⁵

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.”⁶

The Rebbe is saying that everything about the Jewish home – the financial priorities, the husband’s involvement in Torah learning and *hafatzah*, how the children are dressed, the look of the home, the experience of Shabbos and Yom Tov, the standards of *kashrus*, *tznius* and *taharah*, 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.

³ 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.

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

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 26 Adar II, from *Tackling Life’s Tasks*.



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 *brachah* 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 30 – and the exposure then is more dangerous.”⁷

It is clear that even if a degree is deemed

necessary, it should be delayed until the individual’s personality and *hashkafos* are well established, and especially until after marriage⁸.

FOR THE SAKE OF PARNASSAH

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

Regarding *bachurim*, 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’ah tovah umutzlachas. As well, he

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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 parnassah...

“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.”⁹

Regarding girls, the Rebbe says that until

⁷ From a *yechidus* in 5715, published in *Kfar Chabad Magazine* Vol. 511 p. 22.

⁸ Mrs. Chana Gorovitz, Dean of Bais Rivkah Seminary, recalls that in several unique situations where the Rebbe allowed individual young women to enter professions that required degrees, the Rebbe advised them to wait until after marriage.

⁹ *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. 1 pg. 97



marriage their responsibility is to prepare for their primary mission as Akeres Habayis. This includes learning Torah and surrounding themselves with Chassidishe 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 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..."*¹⁰

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 *parnassah*, on the other hand, should not be a consideration at this time. Torah teaches us that *parnassah* 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.

Parnassah is essentially not the obligation of a woman.¹¹ 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 parnassah..."*¹²

Before marriage, on the other hand, a girl has an *avodah* to do, and no Torah obligation in *parnassah* 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 parnassah ... it is clear and obvious 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..."*¹³

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

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To receive the pamphlet prepared by the author titled

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¹⁰ *Toras Menachem* 5745 Vol. 2 pg. 1350.

¹¹ 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 *kesubah*, the husband obligates himself to provide for his wife.

¹² *Toras Menachem* 5745 Vol. 1 pg. 131 (Vov Tishrei)

¹³ *Ibid*