

COLLEGE:

APPLYING THE REBBE'S
POSITION TO THE
REALITIES OF TODAY

PART 3



L'ILUY NISHMAS REB YONAH BEN REB MEIR

In loving memory of my dear father, Rabbi Yonah Avtzon,
whose *emunah* in the Rebbe's words and commitment to
fulfilling the Rebbe's mission never wavered.

-Mrs. Chanie Wolf

SUMMARY OF PARTS I & II



s Yidden, and especially as *chassidim*, our life decisions are directed by the questions that lies at our core: “What does Hashem want from me?”

Thus, the question of attending college is not only a matter of what is “wrong” with it; rather, at its essence, the issue begs us to confront our purpose in this world and ask ourselves honestly: “Will this choice support or, *chas v’shalom*, detract from my mission in life?”

Although this remains true at every age and stage, it is an even more significant concern before marriage, when one’s values are being formed, and one’s choices will have a lasting impact on the direction of one’s future family.

Practically, one considering college for any reason should be aware of the various issues the Rebbe raises. It is natural to think specifically about the concern of being in an environment that is immodest or anti-religious. However, the overarching issue of college, which applies in all forms and situations, is that of secular studies.

At best, the focus and mindset of secular studies are likely to detract from one’s clarity in and passion for Torah and Yiddishe values. At worst, the values they promote can undermine or contradict the perspectives of Torah.



Purpose

WHO ARE WE?

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

As *chassidim*, we have been chosen for the awesome privilege of igniting Yiddishe *neshamos* wherever we can find them. As the Rebbe Rashab taught, 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 umitzvos*. Each of the several tens of thousands of Lubavitcher *chassidim* should see himself or herself 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...”¹

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*?

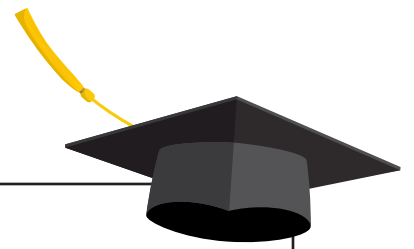
As the Rebbe writes in Hayom Yom:

“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

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

¹ *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 16, pg. 174.





this in our Divine service are obvious.”²

If I could be a lamplighter, why should I want to be 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 *hafatzah*. 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 exception³ 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 *parnassah*, and the only option available to her is one that would require a degree, a qualified Rav or *mashpia* should be consulted.

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

*“It is written, ‘Hashem will bentsh 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 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.”⁴*

Thus, when advised to consider a degree, the concerns discussed in the previous installment about the studies, as well as any concerns about the environment, should be carefully explored.

THE SOURCE OF INCOME

Despite the various 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 – and the Rebbe encourages us to have families that are 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 *parnassah*.

The Rebbe once remarked that some people are saying that the students’ *gashmius* 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 gashmius of each individual student. But, one must not forget what Chazal say, that a person’s parnassah is designated from Rosh Hashanah. Parnassah 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 chassidim and yeshiva students) the gashmius comes through Torah.”⁵

And as the Rebbe explains:

“In ruchnius, legs represent emunah. A lame person 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 parnassah and therefore he learns secular studies, meaning

² 25 Nissan, translation from *Tackling Life’s Tasks*.

³ Despite the Rebbe’s clear public stance against college education, there were unique exceptions where individuals were instructed or permitted by the Rebbe to pursue or complete a college degree.

⁴ *Hayom Yom* 27 Sivan, translation from *Tackling Life’s Tasks*.

⁵ *Toras Menachem*, vol. 7 pg. 335.



that this is how he will later support himself – this shows that he is meanwhile forgetting about Hashem who is the “Supporter and Sustainer of all.” If a person is lame it doesn’t mean that, *chas v’shalom*, he has no legs at all; he has legs, but he limps. He believes in Hashem, after eating he *bentches* and says that Hashem is the “Sustainer and Supporter of all,” but he limps in this; he can’t imagine that Hashem can provide for him in another way, without him going 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 *parnassah* is by going to college, and Hashem cannot, *chas v’shalom*, give him the [number of] 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 *parnassah*!

“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 can be seen tangibly: We see clearly that of those who go to college, only a small percentage end up establishing themselves and earning their *parnassah* from their area of study. Those who administer the colleges –they themselves acknowledge that those who end up earning their *parnassah* 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 *parnassah*!”⁶

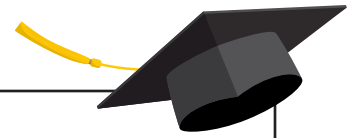
The Rebbe is saying that this is not simply a matter of blind faith; it is evident in observable reality. As the Rebbe writes in a letter:

“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 occupations and businesses not directly connected with their courses of study in college. The moral is obvious.”⁷

“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 *parnassah* is only by going to college...”

⁶ Shabbos Parshas Chukas-Balak 5715.

⁷ Letter of 1 Adar 5722, online at: 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 assured 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.

The Rebbe writes in *Hayom Yom* that when one is careful to make a vessel for *parnassah* that is completely in line with Torah, “his livelihood will be ample, and it will be directed toward the proper place.”⁸ – 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.

Conclusion

Before a Lubavitcher *chossid* considers pursuing a degree, he should make an honest *cheshbon nefesh* about what is right for him and

⁸ See above, *Hayom Yom* 27 Sivan

his future family *b'ruchnius*. After serious thought, several critical questions must be discussed with a **qualified Rav and mashpia**, who is well versed in the pertinent issues:

Who am I? What is the *shlichus* for which my *neshamah* was sent to this world? What does it mean to me to be a *chossid* of the Rebbe?

Is now the appropriate time for me to be concerned with *parnassah*? Is it relevant? Is it necessary?

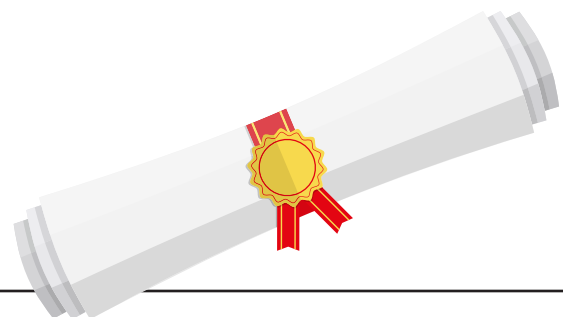
If *parnassah* is a current concern, what are the available options that do not involve a degree?

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 themselves? Which institution? Which degree? Which courses?

Assuming there will remain concerns of *timtum halev v'hamoach* 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 my *mashpia*?

Unless absolutely necessary, college should be avoided until after the formative years (approximately age 30), and certainly until after marriage.

May our efforts to live our lives in accordance with the Rebbe's guidance result in abundant *brachos b'gashmius* and *b'ruchnius*. May we all merit to raise *chassidishe* children and fulfill our *shlichus* as lamplighters and bring *chassidishe nachas* to the Rebbe. And may we finally be taken out of this dark *galus* to the light of *Geulah, teikef umiyad mamash!*





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: I know of several individuals who received a brachah from the Rebbe to attend college. Does that not indicate that the issue is not black-and-white?

A: In Torah in general, and in the Rebbe's teachings in particular, there are always the rule and the exception. When speaking publicly, the Rebbe's position on college was always consistent and unequivocal: "No College." The Rebbe passionately implored *chassidim* to avoid the many challenges a college education presents to one's service of Hashem.

There were, indeed, various individuals who received personal guidance from the Rebbe allowing or even encouraging them to attend college, or to complete a degree that they had already begun. Yet individual instructions or *heterim* are exactly that – for individuals. (See above, "When a Degree Is Needed," for more on the matter of exceptions.)

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 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 Part I of this series about the role of a woman before marriage—to prepare to be an *akeres habayis*. There is no "free time"; the time an unmarried woman (or man) has is time that is meant to be filled with matters that help her grow in *ruchnius*. Eventually, it will be much more important for her family that she established her home with a *chassidische* 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."*⁹

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 necessary¹⁰ 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 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 not something to glorify, seek out or advertise. As the Rebbe once said to school administrators at a *farbrengen*:

"Considering that it is imperative to teach these

⁹ Nissan, translation from *Tackling Life's Tasks*

¹⁰ *Igros Kodesh* Vol. 9 pg. 188.

subjects for the sake of monetarily sustaining the yeshiva 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...¹¹ Granted, if it appears to you that you have no alternative, fine. But at least go into your private quarters and cry your heart out that your Divinely dictated service has to be carried out by such means!"¹²

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.¹³

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*¹⁴ – and for less time than *limudei kodesh*.¹⁵ In college, on the other hand, one is completely immersed in secular studies, which has a strong effect on the person, both consciously and on a subliminal level.

It seems from this that 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 or greater measure of *limudei kodesh*.

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

¹¹ I.e. advertise that the school offers secular studies.

¹² Purim 5722 – *Toras Menachem* Vol. 33 page 230.

¹³ 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*.

¹⁴ *Toras Menachem* 5745 Vol. 5 pg. 3034, *Toras Menachem* 5747 Vol. 3 pg. 521, and more.

¹⁵ *Igros Kodesh* Vol. 10 pg. 299, *Igros Kodesh* Vol. 9 pg. 115, and more.

A: Ideally, our schools should be paying our *limudei 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 the 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 *mosad*. 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 Rabbanim and *mashpiim* how to satisfy 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 a way that is as non-problematic 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 *mosad chinuch* where girls learn *nigleh* and Chassidus, gain *chassidishe hashkofos* 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 *parnassah*. 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 *brachos* easily apparent. We anticipate, *daven* for, and demand the *Geulah Shleimah*.

At the same time, if we are looking to do what is responsible, the Rebbe writes in *Hayom Yom*¹⁶:

אם בחוקותי תלכו גו' ונתתי 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 *dirah b'tachtonim* through our *avodas Hashem*. The burden of our *parnassah* was undertaken by Hashem.

And regarding leaving our affairs up to Hashem, the Rebbe writes¹⁷:

“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 billion¹⁸ people, then your own affairs

will certainly see the fulfillment of the verse, “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 v'shalom*? 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 *brachos b'gashmius ub'ruchnius*.

Written by: Mrs. Chanie Wolf

To read Parts I and II of this three-part series, which were published in the Shvat 5779 and the Nissan 5779 N'shei Chabad Newsletters, please visit nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives/college.

To receive the pamphlet prepared by the author titled “College: Applying the Rebbe's Position to the Realities of Today” from which this series was taken, email collegebooklet@gmail.com.

The pamphlet was reviewed by: Harav Ezra Schochet, Harav Shmuel Bluming, Harav Levi Yitzchok Raskin, Harav Yosef Braun, Harav Akiva Wagner, Harav Levi Jacobson, and Rabbi Nochum Kaplan.

Appreciation is extended to the following individuals for their invaluable assistance in preparing the pamphlet: Harav Yehuda Leib Schapiro, Rabbi Shmuly Avtzon, Rabbi Mendel Blau, Rabbi Shimon Hellinger, Mrs. Chana Gorovitz, Mrs. Chanie Brand, Mrs. Sara Morozow, and Mrs. Faigy Yusewitz.

16 28 Tishrei, translation from *Tackling Life's Tasks*

17 *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 4, p. 255, Letter 984, translation from *In Good Hands*.

18 At the time of the writing of this letter