



SHOULDN'T I JUST CHOOSE THE "BEST" SCHOOL?

CHANA KORNFELD

Dear Esther,

I'm struggling with making a decision regarding my daughter's education. We live in a Chabad community that has its own Chabad day school. It is not the most professional school nor is the education exceptional and there is another *frum* school in the area that is more established and well run. We are being pressured to send our daughter to the Lubavitcher school by family and friends who advise us to be loyal to our own institutions. We are proud Lubavitchers and we want to be loyal to our *mosdos*, but we want to be loyal to our children as well. How far does loyalty to our community extend? Do we compromise our children's education in the name of loyalty? Should our children be subjected to a subpar education just because they are Lubavitchers?

Signed,

Recoiling From Never-Ending Loyalizing

Dear Recoiling,

I bet there is a gentile school in your area that boasts the most professional and well-run school your city has to offer, yet you wouldn't dream of sending your child there because you are a Jew, and a Jew will pay money to send her child to a hole-in-the-wall *cheder* with no playground and limited resources instead of a free

and luxurious public school. You are willing to "compromise" your child's education for the truth of Yiddishkeit, understanding that it is no compromise at all. You cannot logically explain to someone how your child won't be compromised with a "subpar" Jewish education, with no opportunities for music club and art club and advanced science and coding classes, yet you fully

trust that Hashem, Who desires that Jewish children learn Torah, will protect them, bless them, and help them prosper.

The Rebbe's position on a Chabad *chinuch* in his institutions is clear (see sidebar) and you can trust the Rebbe that this education is best for your child, even when another type of education is looking more attractive. But even from a logical and psychological perspective (let's leave *kabbalas ol* aside), a Lubavitcher education is best for a Lubavitcher child of proud Lubavitcher parents.

Here's why.

You are puzzled over loyalty. I wonder, is it possible to be loyal to our children at the expense of our community? I don't think loyalty can be divided, because divided loyalties are by definition disloyal. Loyalty begins with having integrity and being true to yourself. When a person is faithful and has integrity, he is not conflicted. All decisions flow from that place of integrity and when decisions come from a place

of inner integrity, they cannot be disloyal to anyone or anything.

Because loyalty is born from faithfulness and allegiance, it is closely intertwined with our identities. Our children's identities are shaped by their families and their schools. Generally, parents will choose a school for their children that aligns with the family's values and where the child will feel the strongest sense of belonging. As a proud Lubavitcher, your child would probably feel most secure and at ease in a Lubavitcher school; sending your child to another school could shake his core identity, causing an identity crisis that may be battled well into adulthood.

I know many people who bounced their children from school to school, as they attempted to upgrade "subpar" educations for "exceptional" ones and were left with children who didn't know who they were, what they wanted, or where they were going in life.

Which leads me to my final point.

My wise friend says, "Schools are like husbands. They look perfect from a distance."

When we are Lubavitchers, and certainly when we are proud and loyal Lubavitchers, we know our schools intimately. The good, the bad, and the ugly. The *frum* school down the road looks so much better, but that's just because we're not married to that school, so we don't know its inner workings. And as a proud Lubavitcher, you never will be married to that other school.

You'll drop your kid off, pick her up, and maintain an effortless and easy boundary with a school and community you are not really part of, and will never intimately know.

The reason we see so many flaws in the Lubavitcher schools is because we are Lubavitchers. We are in the "in crowd" in our own schools. Don't allow your familiarity to breed

In response to your letter from Rosh Chodesh Elul, in

which you mention your birthday, as well as your place of study, [noting] that it is not [name of place], because your opinion is that the educational institute in [name of place] is of unequal standards. This comes as a wonder and a surprise to me, particularly because I am familiar with the type of home you were raised in—a *chassidische* home—and that you received this type of education. As such, it must be clear and certain to you that a school's high standard is determined by it being an institution under the auspices of the Rebbe, my father-in-law. This means that simply gaining knowledge is not the primary goal; rather the outcome is that it be useful to

[fulfill] a person's purpose in the world; as *Chazal* have said:

"I was created only to serve my Creator."

The extent to which one is able to fulfill this purpose depends on the level of *yiras Shamayim* of the education received, as well as assistance from on High—*siyata d'Shmaya*. Being

that, as you write, you are starting a new year—and "the passage of years increases one's wisdom"—may you be directed to the path of truth, that "the foremost element in wisdom is fear of Hashem;" that you be educated in a *chassidische* environment, in the *daled amos* [environment] of the Rebbe, my father-in-law. Through this, there will surely also be an increase in Divine mercy regarding other matters...

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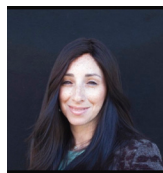
(excerpted from a section in *Likutei Sichos* titled "Mosdos Chabad")

This comes as a wonder and a surprise to me, particularly because I am familiar with the type of home you were raised in—a *chassidische* home—and that you received this type of education.

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contempt, and then choose to not be familiar by running to an unfamiliar school. They have their own problems, and you’re only trading one set of problems for another plus compromising your child’s identity and security. Instead, like in a marriage, recognize that the privilege of intimacy removes all filters and you are seeing the unmarketed and raw reality. And like all raw realities, facing them, embracing them, and improving them strengthens our integrity and secures our identity.

Signed,
Esther



Chana Kornfeld, the creator and writer of Esther Etiquette (arguably our most popular column since its inception in 2011), lives in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, but was raised in Atlanta, Georgia, below the Mason-Dixon line, where good manners are taken as seriously as fried food. Chana was raised by parents and grandparents who taught her that derech erez kadmah laTorah: First, be a mensch.



Oholei Torah boys learning in Yiddish and Lashon Kodesh, the same as their zaides did.