CHOSSID, YEREI SHAMAYIM, AND LAMDAN

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The Rebbe's *brachah* to the *bar mitzvah bachur* to become a *chossid, yerei Shamayim* (G-d-fearing), and *lamdan* (scholar), placing *lamdan* last, addresses today's education conundrum: How do we grab the average child's heart and mind in a modern world that competes for his imagination, promises success in business or social life through internet, and is so easily accessible?

The (frightening) consensus at a recent gathering of *menahalim* and *Roshei Yeshivos* was that up to 60% of our boys are either not being reached academically, not being inspired emotionally, or otherwise falling through the cracks of even the so-called "best yeshivos." The tragic reality is that for the most part, parents and educators continue working with "traditional" methods, hoping for different results, although we know that insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results (Albert Einstein).

The natural expectation is for the yeshiva to focus solely on learning; any other activities detract from the goal of becoming a *lamdan.* Only if a boy is not as successful as hoped is he then sent to an "alternative" yeshiva where healthy self-esteem (after becoming a *lamdan* was out of his reach for so many years), creativity, and future goal-planning are included in the curriculum.

The Rebbe's definition of success is presciently spelled out in this letter from 5711/1951:

> "[Whereas] in previous generations the main role of yeshivos was learning Torah and thriving in it, and the practical observance of *mitzvos* and *minhagei Yisroel* was a given for every child through *chinuch* provided at home and environment ... Today, times have changed and among the main roles of yeshivos is to make the *talmid*, first and foremost, into a *yerei Shamayim,* an observant Jew, and then into a *lamdan,* and—in the yeshivos of Chabad—into a *chossid*, as well... Yeshivos must arrange their matters so as to achieve first the main goal: *di talmidim zoln zein frume, erliche Yidden, vareme Yidden* (the students should be *frum,* sincere, warm Jews, *chassidishe* Yidden).
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> (*Igros Kodesh 4, pg. 214)*

Even in previous generations, not all boys continued through *cheder* to *beis medrash* for 14 years. In many cases in the *alter heim*, boys would have only a few years of education before going to work in the fields or the market, learning a skill or joining the family business.

Nowadays, we do expect our boys to follow through in formal schooling often until 20 years old and beyond.

I'm not suggesting changing the model the Rebbe has made clear; yeshiva is where our boys need to spend their formative years. However, ignoring the fact that too many of our *talmidim* are not flourishing—and consequently wasting years—aggravates the situation.

The results are well known.

The crux of the matter is how do we achieve the first term, *chossid*? How do we guide a student to become joyful, grateful that he is Jewish, and (most importantly) connected to the Rebbe? Of course, we teach him what the Rebbe taught. We expect him to emulate his scrupulous adherence to *minhag* and *halachah.*

But where does *he* fit in? How many *bachurim* today lament the perception of a *"bachur* factory"? This is where connection comes into the picture. We want our *talmidim* to feel connected, and this comes from them feeling fulfilled—in other words, being who they are, the best they can be.

A strong soldier is a proud soldier. His general, the Rebbe, uses each soldier's unique talent. This encourages his pride in his own talents and the mission follows.

Does your son have a talent in music or athletics, or does he show interest in computer coding or graphics? Does he enjoy the outdoors, or like to draw? Is he good with building and fixing things, or does he have a knack for cooking or writing? Is he good at fundraising and organizing events, is he a public speaker, or does he have other unique traits or abilities? What excites him? The school environment that cultivates these talents will build him into the successful person he is meant to be, using the gifts the Aibershter intended for him to utilize in his *shlichus* in life.

Conversely, does your otherwise bright child just find it difficult to sit in a *shiur* for extended periods of time? Does he struggle with one aspect of learning, but show intelligence in other areas? Did he grow up on *shlichus* and miss out on the skills for learning *Gemara*?

Offering today's *bachur* the opportunity to engage in programming and activities that build up his character and self-esteem will not detract from his growth as a *chossid, yerei Shamayim* and *lamdan*. On the contrary, it will place *him* in the picture.

It's time for an honest reevaluation regarding our children's needs, and the educational experience provided. Today, more than ever, the optimum educational environment is crucial to accomplish what we want for them; to be well-adjusted, G-d fearing Yidden who strongly identify as the Rebbe's soldier. *Di talmidim zoln zein frume, erliche Yidden, vareme Yidden!*

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