

The Undisclosed Educational Philosophy of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Dr. Aryeh Solomon

Disclaimer: Given the vastness of the Rebbe's educational corpus, the few sources cited below for the purpose of this textual study represent only an introductory sample of a much wider discourse comprising over 3000 educational texts.

Aryeh Solomon

Source 1: Educator's View of the Learner

By the Grace of G-d
22 Av, 5739
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. R. Wilkes, Asst. Program Director/
Chairman, Region II Council For Mental Retardation
Coney Island Hospital
2601 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11235

Greeting and Blessing:

This is in reply to your letter of Aug. 9, in which you ask for my views on "the care and education of Jewish retarded children," outlining some of the problems connected therewith and prevailing policies, etc.

I must, first of all, make one essential observation, namely, that while the above heading places all the retarded in one group, it would be a gross fallacy to come up with any rules to be applied to all of them as a group. For if any child requires an individual evaluation and approach in order to achieve the utmost in his, or her, development, how much more so in the case of the handicapped.

Since the above is so obvious, I assume that you have in mind the most general guidelines, with a wide range of flexibility allowing for the necessary individual approach in each case. All the more so, since, sad to say, our present society is poorly equipped in terms of manpower and financial resources to afford an adequate personal approach to each handicapped boy and girl. Even more regrettable is the fact that little attention (at any rate little in relation to the importance of the problem) is given to this situation, and consequently little is done to mobilize more adequate resources to deal with the problem.

Now, with regard to general guidelines, I would suggest the following:

(1) The social worker, or teacher, and anyone dealing with retarded individuals should start from the basic premise that the retardation is in each case only a temporary handicap, and that in due course it could certainly be improved, and even improved substantially. This approach should be taken regardless of the pronouncements or prognosis of specialists in the field. The reason for this approach is, first of all, that it is a precondition for greater success in dealing with the retarded. Besides, considering the enormous strides that have been made in medical science, human knowledge, methodology, and knowhow, there is no doubt that in this area, too, there will be far-reaching developments. Thus, the very confidence that such progress is in the realm of possibility will inspire greater enthusiasm in this work, and hopefully will also stimulate more intensive research.

(2) Just as the said approach is important from the viewpoint of the *individual*

worker and educator, so it is important that the trainees themselves should be encouraged - both by word and the manner of their training - to feel confident that they are not, G-d forbid, "cases," much less unfortunate or hopeless cases, but that their difficulty is considered, as above, only temporary, and that with a concerted effort of instructor and trainee the desired improvement could be speeded and enhanced.

(3) Needless to say, care should be taken not to exaggerate expectations through far-fetched promises, for false hopes inevitably result in deep disenchantment, loss of credibility and other undesirable effects. However, a way can surely be found to avoid raising false hopes, yet giving guarded encouragement.

(4) As part of the above approach which, as far as I know has not been used before, is to involve (some of) the trainees in some form of leadership, such as captains of teams, group leaders, and the like, without arousing the jealousy of the others. The latter could be avoided by making such selections on the basis of seniority, special achievement, exemplary conduct, etc.

(5) With regard to the efforts which have been made in recent years to create "group homes" for retarded individuals, which, as you say, has been a source of controversy - it is to be expected that, as in most things in our imperfect world, there are pros and cons. However, I believe that the approach should be the same as in the case of all pupils or students who spend part of their time in group environments - school, dormitory, summer camp, etc., and part of their time in the midst of their families, whether every day, or at weekends, etc. Only by individual approach and evaluation can it be determined which individual fits into which category.

(6) There is surely no need to emphasize at length that, as in all cases involving Jews, their specific Jewish needs must be taken into account. This is particularly true in the cases of retarded Jewish children, yet all too often disregarded. There is unfortunately a prevalent misconception that since you are dealing with retarded children, having more limited capabilities, they should not be "burdened" with Jewish education on top of their general education, so as not to overtax them. In my opinion this is a fallacious and detrimental attitude, especially in light of what has been said above about the need to avoid impressing the child with his handicap. Be it remembered that a child coming from a Jewish home probably has brothers and sisters, or cousins and friends, who receive a Jewish education and are exposed to Jewish observances. Even in the American society, where observant Jews are not in the majority, there is always some measure of Jewish experience, or Jewish angle, in the child's background. Now therefore, if the retarded child sees or feels that he has been singled out and removed from that experience, or when he will eventually find out that he is Jewish, yet deprived of his Jewish identity and heritage - it is very likely to cause irreparable damage to him.

On the other hand, if the child is involved is-involved in Jewish education and activities - and not in some general and peripheral way, but in a regular

and tangible way, such as in the actual performance of Mitzvos, customs and traditions - it would give him a sense of belonging and attachment, and a firm anchorage to hold on to, whether consciously or subconsciously. Eventually even a subconscious feeling of inner security would pass into the conscious state, especially if the teacher will endeavor to cultivate and fortify this feeling.

I am, of course, aware of the arguments that may be put forth in regard to this idea, namely, that it would require additional funding, qualified personnel, etc., not readily available at present. To be sure, these are arguments that have a basis in fact as things now stand. However, the real problem is not so much the lack of resources as the prevailing attitude that considers the Jewish angle as of secondary importance, or less; consequently the effort to remedy the situation is commensurate, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. The truth of the matter is that if the importance of it would be seen in its true light - that it is an essential factor in the development of the retarded Jewish child, in addition to our elementary obligation to all Jewish children without exception, the results would be quite different.

Perhaps all the aforesaid is not what you had in mind in soliciting my views on "group homes." Nevertheless, I was impelled to dwell on the subject at some length, not only because it had to be said, but also because it may serve as a basis for solving the controversy surrounding the creation of "group homes" for those children who are presently placed in an environment often quite distant from the individual's home and community - to paraphrase your statement.

Finally a concluding remark relating to your laudatory reference to the Lubavitch movement, "with its deep concern for every Jewish individual's welfare," etc.

Needless to say, such appreciation is very gratifying, but I must confess and emphasize that this is not an original Lubavitch idea, for it is basic to Torah Judaism. Thus, our Sages of old declared that ve'ohavto lre'acho komocho ("Love your fellow as yourself") is the Great Principle of our Torah, with the accent on "as yourself," since every person surely has a very special, personal approach to himself. To the credit of the Lubavitch emissaries: it may be said, however, that they are doing all they can to implement and live by this Golden Rule of the Torah, and doing it untiringly and enthusiastically.

May the Zechus Horabbim, the merit of the many who benefit from your sincere efforts to help them in their need, especially in your capacity as Regional Chairman of the Council For Mental Retardation, stand you in good stead to succeed in the fullest measure and stimulate your dedication for even greater achievements.

With esteem and blessing,

M. J. Schacter

Source 2: Aims of Education

Educational lessons to be learnt from a tree. Letter dated the 27th of Shvat (21st of February) 1954.

Likkutei Sichot Vol. VI, pages 307-8, free translation.

One who takes note of all that occurs around him, will increase his wisdom from each and every thing, [applying that wisdom] in conduct between man and G-d and between man and his fellow. This does not apply specifically to an unusual occurrence but even to extremely common events, like a tree that grows, from which one might understand many many lessons to be applied to human life.

Here I will draw attention to some of them, as follows:

Most plants, and especially trees, are compounded of the many parts, which are each included in three more general categories: the roots, the body of the tree (trunk, branches, leaves) and fruits (peel, the fruit itself, seeds).

The roots are hidden from the eye of the beholder, but the principle life of the tree is drawn through them (although also via the leaves the tree draws from the air substance that are requisite for it to live, and also absorb the heat from the sun's rays etc.), moreover it is specifically the roots upon which the tree stands, and with strong roots it need not fear being uprooted by all the powerful winds.

The body of the tree is its most substantive part, as time passes it grows in thickness of its branches and the number of its leaves, to the extent that via that growth – and especially via the tree's trunk – one can know the age of the tree.

However, the ultimate fulfillment of the tree is when it bears fruits, and especially when – via the seed from within the fruit – it sows seed to give growth to new trees, generation after generation.

It is written "man is a tree of the field," meaning that in many respects man is comparable to that which may be observed in a tree, even in regard to the components of one's spiritual life. These too can be divided into three:

The root is faith via which one is connected to the place and source of life – the creator blessed-be-he – and even when he has become great in wisdom, Torah knowledge and the fulfillment of the commandments one's life extends to him via his faith in G-d, his religion and his Torah.

The trunk and body of the tree is the study of Torah and the fulfillment of the commandments and good deeds, which must be the most substantive part and number of a person's deeds and activities, and in

accord with how many commandments one has fulfilled and how much Torah one has learnt the “age” of the individual is recognizable – that is, a life filled with wisdom and action.

Fruit – the ultimate fulfillment of man is achieved when, in addition to fulfilling that which is incumbent upon him as an individual, he also influences his fellows and the environment that they too shall be trees (human beings) with roots (the core elements of faith) a trunk and branches (Torah and good deeds) and bearing fruit (benefiting the wider public).

It arises from the above that the root of the individual and his most important part is pure faith; weakness in faith puts the spiritual life, even of a great person, in danger.

The individual’s most substantive quantitative investment and being are the good deeds that progress and increase from day to day.

However an individual’s ultimate fulfillment is to bear fruit, that is, to influence the public and enable them to fulfill their function and the purpose for which they were created. For then his actions bear fruit, and the fruit of that fruit [remains influential] generation after generation, and this merit is dependent upon him.

Source 3: Responsibility

Hitva’aduyot-5747, Vol. III, page 432. Free translation.

Concerning the *mitzvah* of *Chinuch* (Jewish Education), we encounter a perplexing phenomenon:

A Jew’s ability to fulfil *mitzvot* upon reaching the age when he or she becomes obligated to fulfill them, is contingent on the knowledge and *Chinuch* received prior to that point in time, when still a minor. At the same time there is no explicit obligation mandated by the Torah *per se*, to educate one’s sons and daughters in the fulfillment of *mitzvot* (and even regarding the Rabbinic obligation to educate there is debate and discussion in identifying the precise nature of this obligation with several opinions on the matter). This is quite astounding! Given that education is the foundation of all the *mitzvot* that one fulfills as an adult, how can it be that there is no Torah-based imperative to educate?

At first glance it would appear possible to answer:

Precisely the very opposite is the case! Being that education is of such vital necessity, people will naturally engage in this activity of their own initiative and any specific Torah obligation is therefore superfluous.

Just as we find that there is no Torah command to engage in the preparatory acts that facilitate the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* (for example, concerning the mitzvah of circumcision, there is no Torah command to procure the required surgical instrument, and regarding the mitzvah of Tefillin, there is no Torah command to take the animal hide and work it into parchment, and so too with many other mitzvot). This is because in all these cases the preparatory activity is an indispensable prerequisite for the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* and is self-understood that the existence of the *mitzvah* obligates the performer to engage in the necessary preparatory endeavors.

However, there is a fundamental and essential distinction to be drawn between *chinuch* and other preparatory *mitzvot*:

The Torah study of Jewish children, boys and girls, is not merely a preparation for their fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvot* upon reaching maturity. On the contrary, in certain ways, the Torah and *mitzvot* studies and fulfilled by children is superior of that of adults, as confirmed by many statements of our Sages concerning the exceptionally elevated status of “the breath of young infants engaged in Torah study”.

Given this elevated status, the question begs to be asked:

The absence of an obligation to engage in preparation for a specific mitzvah (such as circumcision or tefillin) is understood: they are merely stages of readiness requisite for the fulfillment of mitzvah and actualization of G-d’s will. However, concerning the Torah and mitzvot studied and performed by young children this explanation does not suffice; being that these are (not preparatory acts, but) in and of themselves an expression of G-d’s will, they should seemingly have the full status of a mitzvah. (The fact that an obligatory mandate cannot be applicable to minors in no way negates the necessity for a Torah imperative directed to adults, ensuring that those adults make every possible effort for their children to fulfill *mitzvot*)...

[The Rebbe concludes this discussion by citing numerous examples of obligations, which are so self-evident and utterly imperative that they need not be enforced with a legal mandate. Examples include, a parent’s obligation to provided physical sustenance and protection for a child, as well as other aspects of human conduct necessary for the preservation of society, not of all the details of which can be clearly explicated in the Torah.]

Source 4a: Total Demand on the Educator

From a talk delivered in December 1981.

Hitvadu'yot – 5742, Vol. II, page 522. Free translation.

The Talmud relates (*Bava Batra*, 8b): “Rav encountered Rabbi Shmuel bar Shilat standing in his garden. He said to him ‘Have you forsaken your profession? [You are accustomed to faithfully teach your students and to keep close watch over them (Rashi)]. He replied, ‘it is now thirteen years that I have not seen it [i.e. his pedagogical “profession”] and even now my mind is focused on them [the students (Rashi)]’” In other words, even when Rabbi Shmuel was not actually in close proximity to his students, his mind remained pre-occupied with them.

It is obviously understood, that if Rabbi Shmuel bar Shilat’s thoughts concerning his students would remain without practical outcome, they would be of no benefit whatsoever to his students (and would then fall under the category of “one who does the work of Heaven deceitfully” (see *Bava Batra*, 21b)). Therefore we must conclude that in thinking about his students he considered and actually arranged that even when they were not in his proximity, they would conduct themselves as they would when they were in his presence.

It was this ideal that Rav demanded of Rabbi Shmuel bar Shilat: “The very name “Rav” (meaning teacher) means a teacher to one’s students (for the Hebrew name of any particular item is indicative of its inner content). In the capacity of teacher to his students, Rav demanded of each and every individual who was involved in teaching students, that the teachers’ mind be constantly on one’s students...

This then is the teaching and directive for teachers and educators – that they must conduct themselves like Rav Shmuel, that at every moment their mind must be on their students, and obviously mindfulness and thought about one’s students brings about practical activity (because action is of primary importance); educating children in an appropriate way even during those hours that they are outside school.

Source 4b

Likkutei Sichot Vol. V, page 377. Free translation.

From here [i.e. the Talmudic story cited above] a lesson is learned as to the extent to which anyone involved in education must be devoted to their students. The arguments that one works many times

more than required according to one's salary, or that it is already after the hours for which one has been paid, or that they do not pay one's wage on time, etc. etc. do not comprise an answer.

Being that this is one's calling, even if one leaves it [only] once in thirteen years, and even if one's departure is connected to spiritual matters (as can certainly be said of Rabbi Shmuel ben Shilat who was a Talmudic sage, and obviously while standing in his garden his "mindfulness of G-d" was complete and a component of *his* [personal] mission of refinement [*birurim*]). Despite all of this, if one is not mindful of them, and in a way that the students will also gain, he is open to the criticism, "You have abandoned your profession."

Source 5: Educational Methodology

Extract from a talk describing three phases requisite to the cultivation of a pedagogical relationship.

Likkutei Sichot Vol. XVII, pages 72-4. Free translation.

3. The above can be understood by way of an analogy drawn from a teacher who teaches a student a new concept, which the student himself would not have been able to understand. For the student it is a new concept, and not because he did not hear it until now, but because the concept lies beyond the student's intellectual frame of reference. Such a pedagogic enterprise requires a three dimensional approach:

Firstly the student must attain an attitude of self-abnegation. As our sages say,¹ "a student who sits before his teacher" must attain an attitude of "his lips drip with bitterness," ("bitterness stemming from awe").²

For with his own capacities the student is unable to arrive at the innovative concept that is beyond his reach. Only self-abnegation, the suppression of ego, can create a fitting receptacle for such [an innovative idea], as exemplified by the statement of our sages, "an empty vessel can be filled."³

Afterwards, however, the student must invest effort to absorb the idea, and use his own intellect to do so.

¹ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 30b. Pesachim 117a.

² Rashi.

³ Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 40a

While specifically “an empty vessel can be filled” – that “vessel” must also be complete without any hole that would disable its [receptive] function. Therefore self-abnegation is not enough, there must also be a fitting preparation for the assimilation of the idea, via a receptacle that can receive and contain.

The purpose of study is that ultimately the student will reach a situation where “the individual arrives at the intention of the teacher.”⁴ Now the student does not yet have the ability to arrive “the intention of the teacher,” therefore the teacher must “contract” the concept in accord with the intellectual ability of the student (such that the depth of the idea is buried, concealed, within the simplified, “contracted,” idea). At the same time, the student must actively pursue a direction of freedom from his intellectual limitations, and the elevation of his own intellect to the level of his teacher’s intellect. By this means he will ultimately come to “arrive... at the intention of his teacher,” which is of an entirely different intellectual order.

4. Regarding this sequence, that first the student must attain an attitude of “lips dripping with bitterness” – self-abnegation, and only afterwards attempt to become a vessel, a [thinking] individual, one might ask:

The Talmud states that “Rabah, *before* beginning to teach the students would make a humorous remark, and the students would laugh. *Afterwards* they sat in awe and he began to teach.”⁵ This implies that first one must achieve a situation where “their hearts are opened,”⁶ the preparation of a vessel fit to understand the teaching, and only afterwards must they attain an attitude of “sitting in awe” (self-abnegation)?

The explanation of this is as follows: The concept of “a humorous remark” which must be “before he began to teach the students” is only a general preparation for study. It is not, however, a part of the study, the teaching process, itself.

In other words, the purpose of the “humorous remark” is not to make the student a fitting vessel to receive the intellectual concept, but rather to achieve that the student should want to receive, that the student’s intellect should be open and receptive.

However, the relationship between the teacher and the student that is connected with communication of the concept to the student is initially created when [the student] “sits in awe (and [only then does the Talmud say that] he began to teach).”

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zara 5b.

⁵ Babylonian Talmud cited in n. 1.

⁶ Rashi.

5. According to this explanation, we can also understand the sequence in the saying of our sages, “always shall the left [hand] push away, and the right [hand] draw near.”⁷ The implication being, that *first* “the left shall push away” and *afterwards* “the right shall draw near.”

(The emphasis here is that the “pushing away” shall be done specifically with “the left” – the weaker hand, on the “drawing near” with “the right.”)

One might ask (as above): How does this fit with the earlier saying, that “*before* he began to teach etc. he would make a humorous remark (a gesture of “drawing near”)... *afterwards* they sat in awe (an opposite gesture) etc.”?

Also: There is a general rule that the right precedes the left, while here the left precedes the right?

The question is further strengthened in light of the fact that the Talmud later specifically applies the statement “the left [hand] shall push away, and the right [hand] draw near,” to the relationship with a child. However, the [pedagogical] sequence for a child is, that first one must encourage him to learn “with things that are beloved to him relative to his youth... as in the verse ‘and I will give you nuts etc.’” (as Maimonides explains at length in his Commentary to the Mishnah⁸). From this it is understood that for a child the “right drawing near” must come before the “left pushing away” (as we see clearly – if a child is approached with the “left pushing away” this can completely alienate him from study).

However, in accord with the above (4.) this may be understood: The statement “always shall the left [hand] push away, and the right [hand] draw near” is only referring to the sequence to be applied in *actually influencing* the pupil (in which the order is that first the “left pushes away” and then the “right draws near” as explained above (3. & 4.)).

This statement is not, however, referring to the activities (of “the right drawing near”) that are a *requisite preparation* and an introduction that *precedes* education – as in a humorous remark for the students, or attracting the child [to study] by means of things that are beloved to him.

⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Sota 47a. Sanhedrin 107b.

⁸ Commentary to Sanhedren, Perek Chelek

Source 6: Content of Education

Excerpt from a letter written by the Rebbe in the summer of 1963 to Shalom Levine, an Israeli educator of international renown.

Igrot Kodesh (Letters of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn) Vol. XXII, pages 494-7, Letter #8664. Text courtesy of chabad.org.⁹

After the long interruption since our meeting, it will surely come as a surprise to you to receive a letter from me. Yet my hope is that just as our meeting, and the content of our discussion, remain in my memory, the same is true regarding yourself, especially since our discussion was on matters that concern the greater public, and is thus worthy of having a continuation.

My immediate reason for writing you now is the notice in the press that you have been elected chairman of the international teachers' association, IFTA. I would like to express my heartfelt wishes that you should optimally utilize the new opportunities that have been extended to you toward their ultimate purpose—the establishment of proper education in all countries of the globe, and in our Holy Land in particular. A new position always entails new responsibilities, and divine providence surely provides the ability to fulfill them.

As a continuation to our aforementioned discussion, allow me to speak of a certain matter which might seem inappropriate to the occasion because of its distressing element. But the verse has already said that “Every sadness should have an advantage”^[1]—the advantage being the lesson it contains. And it is the lesson that I have in mind...

Education has two basic purposes: a) to impart a quantity of knowledge to the student; b) to educate the student toward proper conduct in his future life. Each of these areas is obviously comprised of many fields; regarding the behavioral aspect of education, there is the field of interpersonal relations, and the field of the student's individual personality development—the manner in which he will regard his own drives and desires.

One who contemplates the results of the public school system in the United States and in a number of European countries, and, from what I am told, the situation is similar in the Land of Israel, reaches the conclusion that these schools have had considerable success in the area of education that concerns social relations—in reducing the divisions that separate people and bringing them closer to each other, and in training the student toward what is nowadays called “democratic” behavior (this, in addition to

⁹ Chabad.org/66725

their success in imparting knowledge). Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule—places where the schools have been utilized, maliciously or not, to the very opposite ends—but the above is generally true in the majority of cases.

However—and this is the distressing point—the same contemplation also brings the realization that the public schools have *not* succeeded in the area of the student's personality development, in training him to curb his desires. It is only thanks to the influence of the home and religious instruction that this generation's youth have not completely cast off the constraints of civilization and turned the world into a jungle.

The result of this is that in those places where parental influence has been weakened for whatever reason, one sees a disproportionate rise in juvenile delinquency in comparison with other places, though the quality of the schools is more or less the same.

I don't have the statistics to support this conclusion with numbers, but since you are an expert in this very field, there is no need to "prove" any of this to you.

The above should come as no surprise. Regarding the expansion of the student's knowledge, there are many ways to waken and encourage his will to advance and achieve, by explaining its usefulness to him now or in the near future. The same is true regarding his social and democratic sensibilities—indeed, the very fact that the student must interact with other boys and girls contributes much toward this end. Not so is the case regarding his moral self-discipline. This cannot come from within the person, as in the famous analogy that a person cannot raise himself by pulling upwards on the hairs of his head. Rather, it must come from a point outside of the person.

In our generation we have seen, to our great distress, the ineffectuality of relying on the sense of justice and righteousness imparted by the teacher, or on the influence of the student's elder brother, or even on his fear of the policeman. From year to year, the youth come up with new devices to circumvent the policeman and the judge, and the plague of criminality keeps on spreading. As for the civilizing influence of the "humanities," we have seen what has transpired in Germany, whose superiority in philosophy, and even "moral philosophy," was world-renowned, but in actuality, that country produced generations of beasts in the form of men.

It is clear that there exists no other way to implant in the hearts of children and youth a true and functional self-discipline except through the fear or love of a force greater than man. Only in this way can they be truly trained to exercise control over their will and desires. And this is something that

cannot be postponed until the child reaches the age of 18, or even the age of 13, while allowing him until then to follow his heart's vagaries, in the hope that the fear of human institutions will direct him along a good and righteous path.

One sees no other way than to instill in the hearts of the children, from their earliest years, a strong belief in Him Who created the world and continues to rule it and direct it. In the words of our sages, there is “an eye that sees, and ear that hears, and that all one's deeds are recorded in a book”^[2]—a book that cannot be forged, an eye and an ear that cannot be bribed or outsmarted by any schemes or deceptions.

According to our Torah, the law of life, belief in the Creator and Ruler of the world is binding upon all peoples of the world. Furthermore (and in certain circles, this must be the primary argument), it is a rational necessity.

So any school, if its program includes “education”—moral as well as social—must set as one of its foundations the above belief, not only as a subject for theoretical study, but as something that concerns day-to-day life... While there are schools that do not have the word “religious” in their name, it is obvious, based on the above, that the difference lies only in the amount of hours devoted to religious matters. But if the school is completely devoid of religiosity, G-d forbid, it lacks what, especially in our generation, is among the most primary functions of the school: to educate the student to be a human being worthy of his name—as distinguished from a mere beast. And the primary difference between man and beast is that the human being is not subservient to his natural instincts, desires and tendencies, and, at the very least, endeavors to restrain them and control them.

I remember your saying to me, in our conversation, that you are merely the secretary of the teachers' association in our Holy Land, so that the things [we discussed] are not in your jurisdiction. I believe that my reaction, back then, was that I am not addressing you in any official capacity, but appealing to you as one who has been given the opportunities and abilities to find ways to correct the existing situation, which, to our great sorrow, is not improving, but the contrary. In any case, now you are chairman, and of an international organization!

Perhaps it seems strange that I am addressing such a request to a person who is not a member of any religious party, and is actually a member of a Socialist party... But surely it requires no elaboration that the present circumstances in no way resemble the way things were during the formative years of Socialism, especially since, even then, there was no truth in the assumption that Socialism necessitates a conflict with religion.

My hope is that even if my appeal seems somewhat strange in your eyes after a first reading of this letter, that you nevertheless, out of consideration for the great importance of its subject, examine it again, without prejudice, point by point, in which case you will certainly discover many ways in which it might be implemented...

I would also like to take the opportunity to again express my thanks for your continuing to send me the publications by the teachers' association, and my hope that you will continue to do so in the future, for which I thank you in advance.[\[3\]](#)

[\[1\]](#). Proverbs 14:23.

[\[2\]](#). Ethics of the Fathers 2:1.

[\[3\]](#). Igrot Kodesh, vol. XXII, pp. 494-497.

Source 7: The Contemporary Educational Challenge

By the Grace of G-d

26th of Teves, 5742 [January 21, 1982]

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

This is my first opportunity to acknowledge receipt of your letter of Dec. 15, 1981. In it, after kindly paying tribute to the work of the Lubavitch movement, you express your reservations about the "Tzivos Hashem" Campaign, on the ground that it is based "on the glorification of the military and an aggrandizement of arms, wars and battlefields."

A letter is hardly the proper medium to explain fully the reasons that impelled us to introduce the establishment of the Tzivos Hashem organization, the purpose of which is to bring young Jewish children closer to Torah and Mitzvoth, as I am glad to note you fully recognize. Needless to say, it was done only after due deliberation, which I can only briefly outline in this letter.

To begin with, "Tzivos Hashem"—as you surely know—is not a "foreign" idea. It is first mentioned in the Torah in reference to 'G-d's Hosts' who were liberated from Egyptian bondage. The term is clearly not used in the military sense. Rather it indicates that the Hosts who had been enslaved to Pharaoh to serve him, were now G-d's Hosts, free to serve G-d, and G-d alone.

Of course, the Torah does not glorify militarism, war, and the like. On the contrary, "Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace." And, as our Sages declare, "the Torah was given to bring peace into the world," and "there is no greater Divine blessing than peace," and much more in this vein.

Parenthetically, with all the emphasis on pacifism, the Torah (from the root Hora'ah [teaching]) also provides guidance in situations where military action is necessary, and prescribes the laws of warfare, as you are, of course, aware. To be sure, Rabbi Akiva's fame rests on his spiritual contribution, but there was a time when he found it necessary to be Bar Kochba's "arms-bearer," as the Rambam [Maimonides] notes in his Code (Hil. M'lochim 11:2).

When the "Tzivos Hashem" was instituted recently, careful consideration was given to using a minimum of military trappings, and only such as would be consistent with the spirit of the Torah. For example, "spying missions," which you mention in your letter as one of your objections, was categorically excluded. Furthermore, the whole Campaign is limited to children of pre-Bar Mitzvah and pre-Bat Mitzvah age. The idea is that reaching that age, they become full-fledged Jews, and by then they will have had the benefit of the experience, and will realize that it had served its purpose for them.

The question is: Since the term "Tzivos Hashem" would seem to some people to "smack" of "militarism," what were the overriding reasons that outweighed such reservations as you expressed in your letter? Could not the same results be achieved through other means or other methods?

This brings us to the core of the problem.

As an educator, you know that children need motivation, but that is only one aspect of the problem. The most important aspect, in my opinion, in this day and age, is the lack of Kabbalas Ol [acceptance of the yoke], not only of Ol Malchus Shomayim [the yoke of the sovereignty of Heaven], but also general insubmission to authority, including the authority of parents at home and of teachers in school, and the authority of law and order in the street. There remains only the fear of punishment as a deterrent, but that fear has been reduced to a minimum because there has in recent years been what amounts to a breakdown of law enforcement, for reasons which need not be discussed here.

On the other hand, American children have been brought up on the spirit of independence and freedom, and on the glorification of personal prowess and smartness. It has cultivated a sense of cockiness and self-assurance to the extent that one who is bent on mischief or anti-social activity, feels that one can outsmart a cop on the beat, and even a judge on the bench; and, in any event, there is little to fear in the way of punishment.

As with every health problem, physical, mental or spiritual, the cure lies not in treating the symptoms, but in attacking the cause, although the former may sometimes be necessary for relief in acute cases.

Since, as mentioned, the root of the problem is the lack of *Kabolas Ol*, I thought long and hard about finding a way of inducing an American child to get used to the idea of subordination to a higher authority, despite all the influence to the contrary—in the school, in the street, and even at home, where parents'— not wishing to be bothered by their children—have all too often abdicated their authority, and left it to others to deal with truancy, juvenile delinquency, etc.

I came to the conclusion that there was no other way than trying to effect a basic change in the nature, through a system of discipline and obedience to rules which she/he can be induced to get accustomed to. Moreover, for this method to be effective, it would be necessary that it should be freely and readily accepted without coercion.

The idea itself is, of course, not a novel one. It has already been emphasized by the Rambam in the Introduction to his Commentary on *Mishnayot*, where he points out that although ideally good things should be done for their own sake (*lishmoh*), it is necessary to use inducements with young children until they are old enough to know better.

Thus, a "pilot" *Tzivos Hashem* was instituted. It immediately proved a great success in getting the children to do good things in keeping with the motto *V'Ohavto L'Reacho Komocho* (Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself), coupled with love and obedience to the "Commander-in-Chief" of *Tzivos Hashem*, namely Hashem Elokei *Tzivo'os* (the G-d of Hosts).

The *Tzivos Hashem* Campaign has a further reward, though not widely applicable to Jewish children attending Hebrew schools. This, too, has already been alluded to by our Sages, in their customary succinct way, by saying that a person born with a violent nature should become a (blood-letting) physician, or a *Shochet* [ritual slaughterer], or a *Mohel* [circumciser]—in order to give a positive outlet to his strong natural propensity (T.B. *Shabbos* 156a). Thus, children that might be inclined to

aggressiveness, and hence easy candidates for street gangs, and the like, would have a positive outlet by diverting their energy in the right direction.

This brings us to the point that although the ideal of peace is so prominent in the Torah, as mentioned, the fact is that G-d designed and created the world in a way that leaves man subject to an almost constant inner strife, having to wage relentless battle with the Yetzer Hora [evil inclination]. Indeed, the Zohar points out that the Hebrew term for bread—lechem—is derived from the same root that denotes "war," symbolizing the concept of the continuous struggle between the base and sublime natures in man, whether he eats his bread as a glutton, in a way an animal eats its food, or on a higher level—to keep the body healthy in order to be able to do what is good and right in accordance with the Will of the Creator.

This is the only kind of "battle" the Tzivos Hashem are called upon to wage. By the same token, the only "secret weapon" they are encouraged to use is strict Shabbos observance and other Mitzvoth which have been the secrets of Jewish strength throughout the ages.

Our experience with Tzivos Hashem—wherever the idea has been implemented, in the U.S.A. and Canada, Eretz Yisroel [Israel], and in many parts of the world—has completely convinced us of its most successful positive results, with no negative side-effects whatever. I can only hope that it would be adopted in other sectors, outside of Lubavitch, in growing numbers.

I trust that the above lines will not only put to rest all your apprehensions concerning Tzivos Hashem, but will also place you in the company of the many prominent educators and spiritual leaders who have enthusiastically acclaimed the Tzivos Hashem operation as uniquely successful in attaining its desirable goal.

With esteem and blessing,

M. Schneerson

Supplementary Material

Source 1: Torah Learning for Women

A Woman's Place in Torah: Answers to a Contemporary Issue from the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Courtesy of Sichos In English and chabad.org.¹⁰

1. When G-d told Moshe to prepare the Jews to receive the Torah, He commanded him, "This is what you shall say to the House of Yaakov and speak to the children of Israel."¹ Our Sages explain that the "House of Yaakov" refers to Jewish women, and "the children of Israel," to the men;² i.e., G-d told Moshe to approach the women first.

This order implies a sense of priority. For Torah to be perpetuated among the Jewish people, precedence must be given to Jewish women. Giving such prominence to women may appear questionable in view of several traditional attitudes. Those attitudes, however, are narrow and restrictive when judged by the objective standard of Torah law and certainly may be considered so within the context of the application of these standards to contemporary society.

Torah law requires a woman to study all the laws and concepts necessary to observe the commandments which she is obligated to fulfill.³ This encompasses a vast scope of knowledge, including the laws of Shabbat, keeping kosher and Family Purity, and many other areas of Jewish law. Indeed, many men would be happy if their Torah knowledge would be as complete.

2. Also, among the subjects which a woman must know is *Pnimiyus HaTorah*, Torah's mystic dimension. A woman is obligated to fulfill the commandment of knowing G-d, loving Him, fearing Him, and the like. Indeed, the obligation to fulfill these commandments is constant, incumbent upon us every moment of the day.⁴ The fulfillment of these commandments is dependent on the knowledge of spiritual concepts as implied by the verse, "Know the G-d of your fathers and serve Him with a full heart."⁵ The study of the inner dimension of Torah is necessary to achieve this knowledge.

Throughout the generations, we have seen women with immense Torah knowledge. The Talmud mentions Bruriah, the daughter of Rabbi Chaninah ben Tradyon and the wife of Rabbi Meir.⁶ Throughout the Middle Ages, we find records of many women who corrected their husbands' Torah texts.⁷ In his

¹⁰ Chabad.org/395067

memoirs, the Previous Rebbe describes how the Alter Rebbe's family put a special emphasis on women's Torah knowledge and the Previous Rebbe educated his own daughters in this spirit.

3. The last generations have witnessed an increase in Jewish women's Torah study and special schools and institutions were founded for this purpose. Previously, influenced by the principle, "All the glory of the king's daughter is within,"⁸ women would be educated by their parents and grandparents at home. As sociological conditions changed and girls left the home environment, schools were established for them.

A similar concept applies regarding the subject matter studied by women. Initially, on the whole, women were not exposed to those aspects of Torah study which were not related to their actual performance of the commandments. At present, however, the sphere of subjects women study has been expanded and includes even abstract concepts that have no immediate application.⁹

This is also a result of sociological influences. Within the context of our society, women are required to function on a more sophisticated level than ever before, occupying professional positions that require higher knowledge.¹⁰ To prepare themselves for such activities, they should develop their thinking processes in Torah, training themselves to think on an advanced level within the framework of Torah. This will set the tone for their behavior in the world at large.

4. Women are characterized by warmth and a tendency to give. It can be assumed that this will prompt them to share the new knowledge they attain with others, in particular, with the members of their families. The Book of Psalms¹¹ refers to a woman as *akeres habayis*, a term which can be interpreted, "the foundation of the home." The woman determines the nature of the home environment and the encouragement she gives is crucial in motivating her husband and children to study.

One of the most important dimensions of *chinuch* (education) is the development of a personal connection with the subject matter. This is stimulated by the love and positive feeling generated by the teacher. Women have greater natural gifts for this approach. Thus, though a father makes an important contribution to a child's education, his efforts lie primarily in testing the child's knowledge. In contrast, a mother discusses the subjects her children are learning with them and brings out the dimension which is relevant to their lives. Furthermore, women are at home with a child much more frequently and are more attuned to his day to day feelings. This makes them more capable of communicating the concept in terms which a child can relate to.

When relating the *mitzvah* to educate our children, our Sages¹² used the expression, *l'hazhir*, also related to word "shining." Through educating children, one's own knowledge increases to the point where one shines. Thus, the concepts mentioned above should stimulate a cycle of growth. The increase in women's Torah knowledge should bring about an increase in their efforts to educate others which, in turn, will bring about a greater increase in their own knowledge.

5. The Rabbis explain that just as it is a *mitzvah* to taste the food to be served on Shabbat on Friday,¹³ at present, in the era directly before the coming of the Mashiach, it is a *mitzvah* to enjoy a foretaste of the revelations of that age. The Messianic age will be characterized by an abundance of knowledge, "The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. The Jews will be great sages and know hidden matters."¹⁴ Therefore, the present age should also be characterized by increased knowledge.

In practice, women should add to their Torah study. In particular, they should focus their attention on the Aggadic aspects of Torah study as collected in the text *Ayn Yaakov*, since our Sages have noted the powerful impact this study has on one's spiritual emotions. Similarly, they should increase their activities to educate others.

These activities will bring about change in the world at large. "Due to the merit of righteous women, our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt."¹⁵ Similarly,, the merit of today's women who raise and educate a generation of children prepared to greet Mashiach will prepare the world for the age when, "the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed."¹⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. Shemos 19:3

2. Mechilta, quoted by Rashi in his commentary to the above verse.

3. Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:14.

4. See the introductory letter to Sefer HaChinuch.

5. I Chronicles 28:9.

6. Pesachim 62b.

7. Letters of the Previous Rebbe, Vol. 5, p. 336.

8. Psalms 45:14.

9. Sotah 20a relates that women should not study the oral law. As explained above, however, the change in a woman's place in society necessitates a change in this perspective as well. Women who are exposed to the sophistication of contemporary society should prepare themselves for such involvement by developing their thinking processes within Torah, studying not only the practical application, but also the motivating purposes, for keeping the commandments.

10. There is another positive dimension that results from these sociological changes. Since women are earning money themselves, they should also take a greater role in charitable activities, donating a tenth and preferably a fifth of their income to charity and inviting more guests to their homes.

11. 113:9.

12. Rashi, Emor 21:1.

13. Shulchan Aruch HaRav 250:8.

14. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Torah 12:5.

15. Sotah 11b.

16. Yeshayahu 11:9, See the conclusion of the Mishneh Torah.

A Letter to President Jimmy Carter¹² Shevat, 5739 (February 9, 1979)¹¹

Greeting and Blessing:

In light of your gracious letter of September 18, 1978, with reference to the resolution passed by Congress designating April 18, "Education Day - U.S.A." which you signed into law, it will come as no surprise to you, Mr. President, that your proposal to establish a Cabinet-level Department of Education has received my fullest endorsement and acclaim.

This was one of the main topics of my public address on the occasion of the annual observance of the Yahrzeit of my saintly predecessor on the 10th of Shevat.

¹¹ Courtesy of chabad.org/816546

At the same time I expressed my ardent hope that not only will the proposal be expeditiously acted upon by Congress, but that governments of other nations will emulate your example. For, although some countries already have a separate Department of Education, there are those that have not, and all those where education has still to be placed as a top national priority.

I am, of course, referring to education in a broader and deeper sense--not merely as a process of imparting knowledge and training for a "better living," but for a "better life," with due emphasis on character building and moral and ethical values.

Indeed, the U.S. government, and you Mr. President personally, are in a unique position of influence among the nations of the world, particularly those benefiting from U.S. economic, cultural and other forms of aid, to encourage them to follow your example and to share your "conviction that the noblest task of government is education"--to quote your statement (2/28/78)--a conviction which has been translated into bold, comprehensive action. I am confident that the response will be positive, and I venture to say that it would have a favorable feedback impact on those in this country who, for one reason or another, are not, as yet, enthusiastic about Congress legislation on the submitted project.

With prayerful wishes, and with esteem and blessing,

M. Schneerson

A Letter to Vice-President Walter F. Mondale 29 Shevat, 5739 (February 26, 1979)¹²

Dear Mr. Vice-President:

I read with profound interest your Remarks at Meeting of Ad Hoc Committee For a Cabinet Department of Education, Jan. 24, 1979. Needless to say, I fully endorse the substance and urgency of your message. Indeed, in light of the saying of our Sages, "Words coming from the heart penetrate the heart and are eventually effective," I am confident, Mr. Vice-President, that your words will find the proper response they deserve.

You will surely recall, Sir, the meeting at the Caucus Room of Congress, which you graciously chaired, in celebration of the H. J. Res. 770, authorizing and requesting the President to issue the Proclamation designating April 19, 1978, as "Education Day, U.S.A." I trust you also read some of my remarks in this connection that appeared in the Congressional Record, the thrust of which, permit me to reiterate, was:

¹² Courtesy of chabad.org/816546

Education, in general, should not be limited to the acquisition of knowledge and preparation for a career, or in common parlance. "to make a better living!" We must think in terms of a "better life," not only for the individual, but also for society as a whole. The educational system must, therefore, pay more attention, indeed, the main attention, to the building of character, with emphasis on moral and ethical values.

The above principle, which is surely indisputable, assumes added significance now that the Administration is making an all-out effort to promulgate the required legislation to implement the President's proposal for a Cabinet level Department of Education--for the following reason:

The skepticism on the part of those who, at present, oppose the Administration's educational program (of which you make mention in your Remarks) is, I believe, in large measure due to the shortcomings of the educational system in this country, which leaves much to be desired in the way of achieving its most basic objectives for a better society. In a country, such as ours, so richly blessed with democracy, freedom of opportunity, and material resources, one would expect that such anti-moral and anti-social phenomena as juvenile delinquency, vandalism, lack of respect for law and order, etc. would have been radically reduced, to the point of ceasing to be a problem. Hence, it is not surprising that many feel frustrated and apathetic.

I submit, therefore, that the Administration's resolve to restructure the Federal education role--long overdue--would be well served if it were coupled with greater emphasis on the objective of improving the quality of education in terms of moral and ethical values and character building that should be reflected in the actual everyday life of our young and growing generation.

I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of a brief memorandum on the subject, which I trust you will find of interest.

With prayerful wishes and blessings for success in your endeavors to upgrade the educational system, and in all your public and personal affairs,

I remain, Mr. Vice-President,

Cordially yours,

M. Schneerson

Letters to President Ronald Reagan ¹³

1. Lag B'Omer, 5747 (May 17, 1987)

Greeting and Blessing:

Once again, dear Mr. President, it is a genuine pleasure to acknowledge your kind felicitations on the occasion of my recent birthday.

I was impressed with your meaningful Proclamation of "Education Day, USA" in connection with the Joint Resolution of the United States Congress, and I sincerely appreciate your heading the roster of signatories to the "International Scroll of Honor" affiliated with it. Its mention of "the historical tradition of ethical values and principles, which have been the bedrock of society from the dawn of civilization when they were known as the Seven Noahide Laws, transmitted through G-d to Moses on Mount Sinai," is a clarion call vital to all mankind.

Furthermore, it is particularly gratifying that you use this occasion to bring to the attention of the Nation and of the International community the need of upgrading education in terms of moral values, without which no true education can be considered complete.

Consistent with your often declared position, that "no true education can leave out the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life and human striving," you, Mr. President, once again remind parents and teachers, in the opening paragraph of your Proclamation, that their sacred trust to children must include "wisdom, love, decency, moral courage and compassion, as part of everyone's education." Indeed, where these values are lacking, education is - to use a classical phrase - "like a body without a soul."

With the summer recess approaching, one cannot help wondering how many juveniles could be encouraged to use their free time productively, rather than getting into mischief - if they were mindful of - to quote your words - a Supreme Being and a Law higher than man's.

I take this opportunity of again acknowledging very gratefully your kind sentiments and good wishes.

With utmost esteem and blessing,

Cordially

M Schneerson

¹³ Courtesy of chabad.org/142535

2. 12th of Elul, 5747 (Sept. 6, 1987)

Greeting and Blessing:

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your very kind letter of August 25, 1987. Your thoughtful and warm sentiments are certainly most encouraging and stimulating.

I want you to know, dear Mr. President, that from the reports reaching me from our emissaries in most States of the Union and in many major centers and outposts in various parts of the world, it is particularly gratifying to note that your consistent, often courageous, leadership in areas of the traditional American and universal values is finding an increasingly receptive response. This is even more evident in the realm of education, as you rightly note in your letter.

Similarly, we have reason to believe that your forceful supportive stance to help upgrade the moral standards of human relationships on the basis of the so-called Seven Noahide Laws (with all their ramifications) as imperatives of a Supreme Being who monitors all human conduct, has made a great impact on the consciousness of the contemporary troubled generation of mankind.

I consider it particularly relevant to mention the above at this time, as we approach Rosh Hashanah (lit. the "head" of the year) in our Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah, as you surely know, is the anniversary of the creation of man, and thus also of the "Coronation" of the Creator as "King of the Universe." This Day is, therefore, a most auspicious occasion in Jewish tradition, the day when the Supreme King of Kings bestows His blessings on humankind, nations as well as individuals, graciously and generously.

In light of the above, your lasting contribution, through word and deed, to the advancement of all inhabitants in this blessed land and of humanity at large, will surely stand you in good stead for a goodly measure of Divine blessings.

Including, especially, the blessing of vigorous good health to continue from strength to strength in all your good endeavors.

With esteem and prayerful blessings

M. Schneerson

May I add, Mr. President, that the current year in the Jewish Calendar (5747) is a "Sabbatical Year" (Leviticus 25:1-7). One of the underlying purposes of this unique institution, which calls for rest from certain agricultural activities, is that it provides additional time which should be spent on more intensive study, and on activities dedicated to morally uplifting pursuits. This lesson has special significance in this

day and age, when, largely as a result of what you rightly call incomplete education, moral and ethical standards have not kept pace with technological advancement.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you, dear Mr. President, that I deeply appreciate your personal warm sentiments and good wishes, which I heartily reciprocate in the words of our Sages, "Whoever blesses others is blessed by G-d Himself," the Source of All Blessings, in a generous measure.

With prayerful wishes for your and the First Lady's good health and prosperity, and

With esteem and blessing,

M. Schneerson