

Rabbi's Reflections: Learning and Life

Two reflections on education and Jews: Jews consistently rank among the highest of all groups in attending and finishing college, so we are highly educated; an ever increasing number of college-age Jews have taken at least one course in Judaic studies. The former we figure results from our emphasis on learning; the latter makes sense considering that not too long ago few colleges offered courses on Judaism whereas now most major universities teach them.

Besides education including studying Judaism, these two reflections also have a strange relationship. Children typically have a higher academic knowledge of Judaism than their parents (as a result of opportunity), but their parents often have more personal experiences of Judaism than their children because they did not pass those experiences on to their children. Traditionally, Jews were both highly Jewishly educated (especially compared to non-Jews both in "secular" learning and religious learning) and Jewishly observant (though not necessarily *halakhically*, legally, observant—i.e. they followed the rules because they had to go out of their way to break them). The consequences of losing the traditional perspective plays a major role in many of the problems oft cited by families and experts alike.

Both problems can easily be rectified. Take advantage of what we offer, and if you want something more, or different, in all likelihood we will find a way to offer it. Jewish studies cannot be limited to college any more than Judaic studies can be limited to Religious School. Judaism as a subject is fascinating, but it is more, as Shavuot reminds us. To truly have meaning, it must be lived. Studies prepare for a career; Judaism for a way of life. Judaism frames our life and actions. What we do has meaning and purpose because of our Judaism. Who we are has significance because of our religion. Judaism provides our values and our ideas, where our thoughts turn into our values as we live out our ideals. In Judaism, scholarship leads to responsibility, and both form and enhance our spiritual dimension.

We inherited a living system, not an archaeological relic of by-gone ages. For it to continue to live, we must pass it on to the next generation. Not the stuffiness and restrictiveness that we see in the past (with a jaundiced eye), but the Judaism that combines the scholarly and the spiritual, learning and living. In an age of specialization and triviality, we need to anchor ourselves firmly in life. Judaism has always done that and been that. To fail to use our intellect and life to continue the relevance of Judaism, which has been so for nearly four thousand years and always adapted and accommodated, is to leave behind a treasure in a world where senses are numb, values sick, and virtue old-fashioned.

I conclude with two observations: "If the Christians educate their sons, they do so not for God but for gain....A Jew, however poor, if he had ten sons would put them all to letters, not for gain, as the Christians do, but the understanding of God's law, and not only his sons, but his daughters" (A Christian student of Pierre Abélard (=Peter Abelard), 1079-1142, French teacher, philosopher, theologian). Janusc Korczak, the great Jewish-

Polish educator who died in a Nazi camp, once told this anecdote about life in the military (another all-encompassing life and life-style): "A university student when recruited in the army was told by the corporal, 'My dear student, this is not a university. One must think here.'"

Israel Trip: A colleague in Ohio is planning a congregational trip to Israel, March 5-14, 2007 The cost will be approximately \$3,000 per person, double occupancy. People could join us in NY or in Israel if it would not be convenient to come to Ohio. He will send an itinerary to interested people. There is some time urgency, since his numbers are borderline, and, if he doesn't get a few more people he may have to cancel. Let me know ASAP if you know anyone interested.