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**Sichos in English Classics 36**

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**Education,  
Intermarriage  
and Complacency**



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## IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

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At the Shloshim of R' Yonah Avtzon A"H, Director of Sichos in English, a resolution was taken to reprint the original weekly Sichos in English publications.

To fulfill this, a weekly booklet including a translation of a *farbrengen* as it was first published will be distributed. Our intention is to reprint the entire set in the near future.

Following the Sichos we will include an addendum with pictures, notes, and insights into the process of its publication.

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# EDUCATION, INTERMARRIAGE AND COMPLACENCY

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*It is an unfortunate fact that all too often, many problems, no matter how severe or obvious, are ignored precisely by those best equipped to deal with them. Complacency is a common fault, but in the face of two such vital concerns as Jewish education and intermarriage, it is deadly. In an address on Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha 5741 (1980) the Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlita spoke of this deplorable state of affairs, urging immediate action.*

## EDUCATION

Jewish education in the United States has long been in an abysmal state. Enrollment in Jewish schools has been steadily decreasing, with the situation deteriorating yearly. Recently released statistics for the past year indicate a problem of truly alarming proportions. Total enrollment, in all forms and types of Jewish educational institutions, is barely 25% of school-age children!

Even these statistics, disturbing as they are, understate the gravity of the situation, for they include *all* forms of Jewish education: including Sunday schools, afternoon schools, and Hebrew language classes. Of the 25%, those who receive their education at Yeshivah comprise only a very small proportion, perhaps not even one quarter.

As if the outlook were not bleak enough, consider the situation of those children still under school age. They too need appropriate care, the necessary preparation for their later formal schooling. Kosher food is essential in building proper character, and in avoiding the crassness and coarseness which results from the non-kosher. And yet, even

less concern is displayed in this matter than in formal schooling!

Instead of being inculcated in Jewish traditions and practices, children are roaming the streets, susceptible to all the undesirable influences rampant in the environment. This situation exists not only in remote far-flung communities, but also in heavily Jewish areas, where Judaism is otherwise flourishing. And the above quoted statistics are only for the United States, the country with the largest Jewish population in the world. Imagine then, the state of affairs in those countries whose Jewish infrastructure and educational apparatus are not nearly as solid as that of the United States.

### INTERMARRIAGE

Turning our attention to another of the most pressing problems of our time, intermarriage, we find little with which to console ourselves. Assimilation is rife, currently being at the astronomically high figure of 33%. And with the rate of intermarriage continuing to soar, there appears to be little prospect of future improvement. As with education, these statistics refer only to the U.S., with little doubt that in other countries the situation is drastically worse.

No one needs to be appraised of the catastrophe that is assimilation. The great Rogatchover Gaon spelled it out clearly. In general, a Jew always remains a Jew, no matter how he may have strayed — with one exception. When a Jew marries a non-Jewish girl, the resulting offspring have no Jewish status; a possible Jewish child has become a non-Jew.

### CONVENTIONS

When one seeks solutions, a wonderful opportunity leaps to mind. It is customary for Jewish organizations to hold conventions at this time, after Tishrei. Right now agendas are being drawn up, setting the topics for the conventions. Once the secretary has affixed his final seal to it, it is final,

immutable, not subject to change. Come what may, the subjects discussed at the convention will be those written in the agenda. Obviously then, it is imperative to assemble the right agenda. But when we look at past experience, we see that agendas are never changed, but remain exactly the same from year to year; topics are never different, the subjects discussed never alter. The date, the location, the speaker changes — but never the agenda.

Indeed, what *are* the topics on the agenda that are so important as to remain the same year after year? With two such pressing problems as education and assimilation, it would not be unreasonable to expect them to be the major focus of attention. But no! Not the slightest mention is made, no concern expressed. Instead the convention is turned into a panegyric forum for mutual admiration, with each speaker heaping lavish praises and honor on the other, certain that he will be duly requited. Public commendations for good deeds is indeed a fine, even laudatory thing; but it does not produce action. Jewish children remain uneducated, and Jews continue to intermarry.

These problems do not cause them any vexation, for their attention is wholly focused on such important issues as the war between Iran and Iraq. Of course, it would not do to speak of such issues at the convention. But when dressed up in the guise of affecting Israel's security, then, of course, it becomes perfectly permissible to speak of it. How senseless! Can your talk then change the situation? Is that then your *raison d'être*?

And afterwards? The conventioners depart happily self-satisfied, leaving the impression that all is well with Jewry. No real problems exist, nothing that can't be rectified with more money and more members. Certainly money is important, in that it facilitates Yeshivos to be supported and new students accepted. (Leaving aside the main point: financial considerations should not impede the acceptance of new students. Debts can always be paid. A Jewish child lost to Judaism is not always recovered.) Higher wages for

teachers alleviate financial worries and guarantee greater dedication; better living conditions for students induce greater application to studies. All fine and good. But meanwhile, one third of all Jewish weddings are intermarriages and 75% of Jewish children remain without any Jewish education whatsoever!

The very silence at conventions on these matters is the worst of all. At least recognize that there is a problem! The rosy picture of Jewry presented serves only to conceal the grim truth underneath, making it that much harder to combat.

“But,” they protest, “we have our own organizations to think of, to build up.” Very true, very laudable. But such excuses are of no help to the child in need of a Jewish education. And yet a further protest: Such talk will depress spirits, give rise to despondency; and a convention should be a happy affair. Once again, the excuse is invalid. Despondency is not being called for and pessimism is not the goal. Just tell the facts, and apprise people of the true situation.

Talk is not enough. Even scholarly reports and articles are insufficient for their audience is limited, and their lasting influence nil. Rather, raise a storm, a tumult, an uproar about the situation — and then act! The first place to start is at conventions. It is surely time to abandon the agenda used time and again throughout the succeeding years of conventions. This year it is imperative that plans and blueprints (of actions to be taken) be constructed to combat the ever worsening twin evils of assimilation and ignorance. Old problems to be sure, but of increasingly fresh severity.

The way to succeed in this battle is to be fearless, resolute, contemptuous of all mockery. Take a lesson from the opening words of the Shulchan Aruch — “do not quail before scoffers.” Discard the conventionalities of man and his limited intellect, and rise above them to act unashamedly. “Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion.” Forget dignity, forget rectitude; not always must

one be stoic and self-contained, smothering all emotion. Social niceties have no place when our children are being lost, and our young people swallowed up. At the convention, when speaking of the shocking situation, does it truly hurt, does it truly affect you? Then let the tears flow, cry for all the children estranged from their tradition, weep for the thousands of young folk torn from their people by assimilation!

A story, a true episode. It is Simchas Torah, Hakofos in Russia. The Rav of the city, Reb Levi Yitzchok Schneerson drinks l'chayim, and dances in the street together with a cobbler. Consternation! The Czarist authorities are ready to order him out of the city and the province. A Rabbi to dance with a cobbler? Unheard of! All attempts at explanation prove fruitless. They cannot comprehend how a Rabbi could even sit together with ordinary tradesman, let alone dance together; especially after drinking liquor, with a Sefer Torah. And this is no ordinary Rabbi, this is the Rav of the entire city. Finally, finally, they are convinced. The explanation? Jews are a strange people, and this episode is just one of their peculiar doings. Reb Levi Yitzchok is no different than other Rabbis who also conduct themselves in the same odd fashion. So too at the convention. Know and inscribe in the program that "I have set the L-rd before me always." There is no one before whom to be ashamed to speak openly of these most urgent of problems.

The bottom line is: A convention, with its attendant multitude of public spirited people, is an ideal forum to deal with the two overriding concerns of our time — Jewish education and Jewish assimilation: to talk, discuss, make decisions, plan. In short — act; and action begets success.

May it be G-d's will that we establish "armies of Hashem", young and old advancing to meet our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days.



**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*whose teachings and example are a  
never-ending source of life for all mankind.  
May we continue in his paths, and complete  
the mission with which he has charged us:  
to make the world conscious of the imminent Redemption  
and to prepare an environment  
in which this ideal can be realized.*



& In Memory of

**Chana bas Yehudah ה"ע Kimball**

On the occasion of her Yartzeit  
22nd Day of Cheshvan

&

**Bhira bas Yaakov ה"ע Kaiser**

On the occasion of her Yartzeit  
29th Day of Cheshvan

&

**Miriam bas Yaakov ה"ע Kimball**

On the occasion of her Yartzeit  
29th Day of Cheshvan



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