

Yeshiva University Kollel Yom Rishon

A Gadol for All Seasons; The Teachings and Wisdom of the Sridei Eish

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who claim that if boys and girls become accustomed to one another from infancy they will not come to sin are in error, for that goes against reality.⁹⁰ It is appropriate to be strict in this matter as long as there is a possibility of establishing a separate school, and this applies to the youngest children, as well.⁹¹ Above age nine, we must certainly be strict under all circum-

90. Habit is not powerful enough to quell one's sexual drive, for its origins are deep within man. It is true that our sages recognized that habit has the power to lessen the effect of certain phenomena. Such is the explanation of *Levush* quoted above in section IX regarding men and women sitting in the same room at weddings, and so wrote *Maharam Shik, Even ha-Ezer* 53 in his own day, regarding returning a woman's greeting. Still, we should not deduce from this that through coeducation the sexual drive is neutralized. The facts of modern life speak for themselves.

There is evidence that both boys and girls are more open to the absorption of ideas and to profound thinking when they study separately. Even the great rabbis of our day who approved mixed youth movements in the context of modern life, did not advocate coeducational schooling, hence nothing can be derived from the former regarding the latter. Regarding Torah study there is even greater reason for maintaining separation than regarding other subjects: Notwithstanding modern conditions, it may not be wise to offer boys and girls an identical Torah curriculum. See *Serving the Creator*, chapter 13, "Perspectives," and footnotes 56 and 70.

91. Despite the fact that one authority is relating to educational conditions in the U.S., and the other to conditions in Israel, their views concur. According to both, there is no hard and fast prohibition regarding early childhood, yet the matter would not please our sages. Likewise, both agree that one may compromise only if it is impossible to establish two strong educational institutions, one for boys and the other for girls.

too. The Counselors, God-fearing, scrupulously observant individuals, accept responsibility that the boys and girls will not go on unsupervised outings together.⁹⁵

Objections have been raised against the organization's format, for it involves boys and girls in joint work efforts, and unites them into a single group. According to a prominent circle of *Haredim*,⁹⁶ this approach is not in keeping with the spirit of Judaism bequeathed to us by our ancestors and sages. Such objections surely have some basis, for as is explained in the Talmud⁹⁷ and *Poskim*,⁹⁸ men must be kept apart from women lest frivolity result. It was for this reason

95. This may well describe the practices of "Ezra" in the old German communities, but in a number of details it does not reflect the practices of religious youth movements in Israel. For example, in many places there is no insistence on separate seating, and there is even an attitude that it is inappropriate to make an issue of it.

In deciding whether comparison is appropriate, every detail must be judged on its own merits, both from a halakhic and an educational standpoint. Relevant issues include the general nature of the society, the atmosphere that holds sway there, the counselors' moral level, their professional and Torah qualifications, and their ability to prevent unacceptable behavior and to insist upon the laws described in the following chapters (such as those involving sexual arousal, immodest appearance, and males and females being alone together).

96. "*Haredim*" corresponds roughly to "ultra-orthodox." The source refers here to Hungarian and Polish refugees who arrived in France following the war.

97. *Succah* 51b, regarding the Water Drawing ceremony. See above, section I.

98. *Rambam, Hilkhhot Yom Tov* 6:21. See above, section VII.

stances, and whoever is lenient does not please our Sages.⁹²

S'ridei Esh, Vol. II, Chapter 8:

The "Yeshurun" organization, founded in France,⁹³ follows the educational system practiced in Germany⁹⁴ before the Holocaust. According to the description I have received, boys and girls sit in one room, but not on the same bench. At their summer and winter sleep-over camps, there are separate quarters for boys and girls, and they study Torah separately,

92. *Igrot Moshe* implies that starting at age nine, a concrete prohibition applies.

93. A Jewish youth movement aimed at children and teenagers from observant homes, as well as the newly religious, operating chiefly in the cities of Paris and Strasbourg. It was founded following the Second World War, and worked among those children, survivors of the Holocaust, whose parents had decided, for various reasons, to remain in Europe. These parents had formerly belonged to the communities of France, Alsace and Germany, or had arrived in France from Poland and Hungary. The vast majority of refugees, having fallen prey to the rising tide of assimilation, had begun to disappear quite rapidly among the gentiles, probably due to the radical change they had undergone during the war years.

This responsa is meant for those few families who still held fast to their faith and to the ways of their ancestors. R. Yehiel Weinberg understood the mentality of these refugees; he, too, was a survivor, and had himself undergone terrifying trials in wartime Germany and Poland. No date is inscribed on the responsa, but it was presumably written in the mid-fifties.

94. We find examples of observant communities in the cities of Frankfurt and Berlin, as well as devout circles in Hamburg, Wurzburg, Fulda and elsewhere. Reference is to the "Ezra" youth movement and others like it.

that Jewish communities always avoided establishing mixed organizations.

Even so, when those in charge of Yeshurun asked me about this, I instructed them to continue their activities as outlined by the great rabbis of Germany, saintly men⁹⁹ whose whole intent was to save the youth from the dangers of assimilation which had spread through Germany in their day. In this way they saved Jewish souls and succeeded in bringing them close to Torah and the fear of God.

The great rabbis of Germany were experts in the field of education. They therefore succeeded in establishing entire generations possessed both of the fear of God, and of secular learning as well. In this the great rabbis of Lithuania and Poland were unsuccessful, because they did not know how to adapt education to contemporary conditions.¹⁰⁰

R. Yisrael Salanter,¹⁰¹ on his return from Germany, where he saw R. Azriel Hildesheimer lecture to young women on *Tanakh* and Halakhah, is known to have said: "If a Lithuanian rabbi tried doing this with his congregation, he would surely be removed from his pulpit, and rightly so.¹⁰² All the same, I should only be so fortunate as to have my place in Heaven be with R. Hildesheimer, who fulfills, 'When it is time to act for God, violate the Torah'" (Psalms 119:126).¹⁰³

99. Rabbis and great leaders, such as R. Azriel Hildesheimer in Berlin, R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch in Frankfurt, and R. Yosef Carlebach in Hamburg.

100. R. Weinberg is referring to the education of those Jews outside of the Yeshiva world.

101. Father of the *Mussar* movement in nineteenth century Lithuania.

102. It would be fitting to do so because he had trespassed what was customary and accepted.

103. The sages of the Talmud relied on this verse in establishing a halakhic principle: It is best to turn a blind eye, and some-

The rabbis of Poland and Hungary whom fate has brought to France see the new customs and vigorously protest against them, since they run counter to explicit rulings in the

times even to permit a given prohibition, in order to protect mitzvah observance as a whole. See the *Mishnah* at the end of *Berakhot*, regarding the ordinance permitting one to invoke God's name in greetings; *Yoma* 69a, regarding Shimon ha-Tzaddik's wearing priestly garb outside the Temple for his meeting with Alexander the Great; *Gitin* 60a regarding the writing down of the Oral Law; *Kesef Mishneh, Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 3:11 regarding the legitimacy of those engaged in Torah study taking wages for it; *Mordekhai, Berakhot*, chapter 80, regarding Torah study in a study hall where it will be impossible to avoid hearing non-Jewish women sing.

Clearly, use of this subtle principle is the exclusive prerogative of outstanding *poskim*. It is important to note that later in this responsa (regarding women singing; see end of next chapter) R. Weinberg wrote:

"Certainly it is our sages' prerogative to decide when it is 'time to act,' and what may be violated. It is not something that just anyone can decide... Yet here, where there is no outright prohibition, we may ourselves rely upon precedent."

These words apply fully to our case. Were there an outright prohibition involved in the very existence of an integrated movement, it could not be made permissible through the verse quoted above. With this we have an irrefutable answer to those who say that it is possible to permit and organize forbidden activities, such as mixed dancing among Jewish youth, on the claim that it is better for the boys to dance with Jewish girls than with gentiles. This claim is absurd. We are not entitled to cause individuals to commit one sin in order to protect them from another, even if that second sin is more severe (see *Yabla Omer* Vol. 1, *Orah Hayyim* 30).

sure has caused havoc among them, causing them to abandon Torah and mitzvot. The old-fashioned Judaism of the elder generation is considered a life of abstinence and isolation. Study itself strikes them as a tiresome bore, and Judaism as some sort of medieval spiritual ghetto, from which they must flee with all their strength.¹⁰⁶ The results are well known. They are rapidly assimilating.

I extend my most heartfelt blessings to Yeshurun, which is fighting to defend the spirit of Israel and its Torah. It banishes the loneliness and lethargic despair of the young, allowing them to see that there is still hope. Its members encourage one another not to be embarrassed in the face of ridicule, and this alone is sufficient defence of this fine organization against its detractors.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, their group study with its attractive, modern format is a powerful educational factor not to be belittled.

The opportunity to make friends with the opposite sex in a modest Jewish framework, and chaste, dignified outings and diversions, hold a great power of attraction. They foster a pure Jewish environment, where the young can soak up a love for Torah and Jewishness. We do not live in a military dictatorship, after all, and we cannot coerce young people who are turning away from us.¹⁰⁸ Only one path to salvation remains:

106. Here is the generation gap, so rampant throughout the world. In this case, a generation educated in Poland faces a generation educated in France.
107. The youth movement thus provides what is lacking in the home — a focal point where the young person can identify with his ideals.
108. It is true that according to the Talmud (see, for example, *Hulin* 132b) the community has the power to force the individual to keep mitzvot, yet the matter depends upon the efficiency of the means of compulsion. In our generation, only educational means must therefore be used.

Talmud and *Poskim*. Yet, these rabbis do not appreciate the conditions in France, and they do not see the sad state of Judaism there. Quite the contrary, with their demands, they jeopardize the development of an organization that has already had much success in its educational programs.

We know how powerful is the flood of assimilation in France, and how numerous the mixed marriages. In contrast to other countries, where Judaism is rising from the depths to become increasingly stronger, in France assimilation is becoming worse and worse. French society is known for its frivolity, shallowness, and unrestrained pursuit of pleasure and of external lustre. These unique conditions spread the plague of assimilation, and many are its victims among the Russian and Polish immigrants.¹⁰⁴ Neglecting the proven Orthodox educational methods of the great German rabbis may spell final death for French Jewry. *When it is time to act for God, violate the Torah!*

Uniting boys and girls under the banner of Torah and tradition itself constitutes a great source of strength and encouragement for the young, who are prey to the unceasing influences of the Christian schools and the non-Jewish environment. The chief cause of the sad state in France is, in my opinion, a feeling of isolation which weighs heavily upon Jewish youth. The boy or girl has no spiritual niche in his parents' home, for it has become empty of the vibrant, living Jewish experience.¹⁰⁵ The pursuit of money and worldly plea-

104. Raised in a sheltered environment, they are not immune to these dangers.
105. Even in those homes that are still observant, there is ancestral tradition, but no living, vibrant Jewish experience. They too have been smitten with the plague of materialism, and they lack the yearning for ideals necessary to inspire and attract the young generation.

to endear Judaism to them, demonstrating its spiritual beauty in the framework of a Jewish fellowship that maintains its unique spiritual character with courage and pride.

While I partially understand those *Haredim* who see "Yeshurun" as deviating from practices to which they were accustomed in Poland and Hungary, I believe they are ignoring the situation in France. These Jews of the old school exert no influence over their environment.¹⁰⁹ Concentrated in their limited circle, the *Haredim* pay no attention to the assimilation that is leaving its mark upon all, themselves included. Even they themselves send their sons and daughters to non-Jewish schools, and they have no guarantee that they will be able to stem the tide. They trust in themselves, oblivious to their children's religious future.

The need of the hour is to create a core of religious youth, a movement with strong power of attraction, whose members, charged with contagious enthusiasm and rooted in our faith, will inject Judaism with new energy, — an excitement and vitality capable of conquering hearts and uplifting those weak souls whose yearning for a pristine, holy Jewish life has not yet been dimmed. Only Yeshurun can attract a youth that is otherwise unreachable, and only their trailblaz-

Words in this spirit were already expressed by *Hazon Ish* in his guidelines as to our relationship with our non-observant brethren: "At times of concealment [of Divine Providence], when the feeble-minded are cut off from faith, disciplinary acts increase licentiousness, they do not decrease it. We must bring back the people with love, setting them back on their feet with its lustre" (*Hazon Ish, Yoreh Deah* 2:16).

109. Refers to France and to the *Haredim* there, who likewise send their children to non-Jewish schools.

ing educational program offers our religion a fighting chance of flourishing anew.¹¹⁰

110. It is clear to whoever reads this responsa properly that R. Weinberg is not pointing to the mixed youth group as an ideal phenomenon. The activities of "Yeshurun" were essential to the education of the young generation in accordance with conditions that reigned in France in his last years (and that still reign there today. Now there is the added challenge of guarding the Jewishness of refugees who arrived in France from North Africa). If the organization truly cannot function outside a sexually mixed framework, we should resign ourselves to this, on condition that the movement vigilantly maintain moral standards consistent with the dictates of Halakhah.

May R. Weinberg's approval and encouragement be transferred to the youth movements operating today in Israel? Surely, the educational situation in Israel does not compare for severity to that of France, especially as regards assimilation and intermarriage. At the same time, even religious youth in Israel are prey to alien influences, some of them no less dangerous.

Israel has developed a chain of superb educational institutions intended for religious high school students. Yet Israel is an open society. The youth to which I refer will go on to serve in the Israeli armed forces, defending the Holy Land, and a sizable portion will seek professional training in institutions of higher learning.

Moreover, among those young people who have grown up in towns like Ashdod and Rosh ha-Ayin, some have difficulty "finding a spiritual niche in the homes of their parents," immigrants from Yemen or North Africa. They require a focal point for philosophical identification. Also, they need mutual encouragement whose source is in the shared longing to make lofty ideals a reality, in a "pure, Jewish environment where they can soak up a love for Torah and Jewishness."

Israel, like France, "is not a military dictatorship," in

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which we can compel the younger generation to accept Torah and mitzvot. Israel, too, faces the danger of "youth turning away," and must address the task of "endearing Judaism and demonstrating its spiritual beauty." It is probable, therefore, that in Israel, as well, we need "a framework of Jewish fellowship that maintains its spiritual character with courage and pride."

Furthermore, the distinction between *a priori* and *ex post facto* is artificial, and irrelevant in the social context of our day. Our youth lead inherently *ex post facto* lives. *A priori*, Jewish parents must find matches for their children when they approach "marriageable age" (as explained in our sages' guidelines quoted in chapter 4 of my work *Partners in Life*). Any deviation from this path leads, in one form or another, to those same compromises, concessions and frustrations described by our sages as *hirhur aveirah*, "impure thought" (*Kiddushin* 29b). Under such conditions, there is no guarantee that absolute separation will be any less flawed in human or halakhic terms than allowing the sexes to mix in a positive framework, striving scrupulously to maintain our sages' standards.

We are not talking here about Yeshiva students, for they are immune day and night to the temptations of the Evil Impulse: "If the *Yezer Hara* assails you, lead him to the *Beit Hamidrash*. If he be made of stone, he will melt, if of iron, it will break into fragments" (*Kiddushin* 30b). At issue here is the plight of young people whose daily activity forces them into contact with the population at large — be it through study, the work place or the army, and it is certain that they will come into contact with members of the opposite sex. It is fitting that their social lives be based on a framework which will lead them, when the time comes, to the right marriage partner. Hopefully, the match will be achieved via proper actions and a proper state of mind, in accordance with Torah values and the strict halakhic constraints described in the following chapters.

As for R. Weinberg's pronouncements regarding mixed singing, see the end of the next chapter.

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בפתח שער ספרי כפי פרושות לשמים בתפלת מודים להשי"ת אשר ברחמיו ובחסדיו הוציאני בעתו מגרמניא ארץ הדמים. ומעיר ברלין שהפכה בימי שלטון הרשע והזרזון להיות בירת הרשעות העולמית, ואף בהיותי בשביה, בגיטו חודשאי ובמתנת הריכוז בגרמניא הצילני ברחמיו הרבים מירי המרצחים, רוצחי עמנו ומשמדי רוב בנינה של יהדות הגולה, יהא שמו הגדול ומבורך אני הגבר ראה בעני שבט עברתו. עברתי כל מדורי החופת הנאצי ימיש והרבה תלאות ופודעניות מצאוני. שתיתי ומציתי את כוס התרעלה. כמו עיני ראיתי את מעשי הרצח תשוד והחמס של רשעי-עולם הארורים, מעשי אכזריות ותעלולי רשע ומרמה בתוך חומות הגיטו ומעשי תועבה ונול במחנות הריכוז וההסגר אשר לא נראו כמוהם מיום בראו ד' שמים וארץ. בגיטו נתגלתה חית-האדם הגרמנית בכל נולותה ורשעותה. ראינו בשפלותם של בני-אדם נטולי מצפון אנושי אשר אכזריותם עולה כמה מונים על זו של חיתו טרף. יסור יכרני ד' — לראות בעניים האיומים של מאות אלפי אחבי קודם שנגאלו מעגויהם עיי הכנסתם לכבשני האש ותאי הגו ונרצחו במיתות שריפה הרג וחנק! ולמות לא נתנניו רק מתי מספר ניצולו מהחופת הנאצי הזה בניסיונים.

בספרי כונסו אף מכתבים שאין בהם לא עקירת הרים ואפילו לא חידושים גדולים, אבל יש בהם משום זכר הימים, ימי שלות ופריחה וימי מצוקה ודכאון, שבהם זכיתי לשבת על כסא ההוראה של גדולי ישראל, ואולי ישמשו גם כעין ראי לשיקוף החיים הדתיים והצבוריים של קהלות ישראל כאשכנז, אשר ליגוננו הגדול נבחרו ועברו מן העולם. מהם יראו בני הדור הבא את המצב הרחוני של מנהיגי ישראל ורבניו בגרמניא אשר ביושר לבם ובדיאת ה' הקדושה שפעמה בנפשם אורו שארית כהם לשמור על גחלת היהדות שלא תכבה ח"ו בצוק העתים.

ורעיון-לאוי מפעם בלבי: תלמידי בית מדרשנו נתפזרו לכל רוח ולכל קצווי העולם, אולי ישמש להם ספרי זה מעין קשר ואיגוד מתוך זכרון הימים הראשונים שבהם הי קשורים והרוקים לבית מדרשנו והשראתו הרחנית היתה יקרה בעיניהם.

בית מדרשנו הגדול חרב בעויה, אבל זכרו הקדוש לא יסף מקרב לב תלמידיו. רבים מהם עלו לגדולה ומכהנים פאר בערים גדולות בכל רחבי העולם היהודי ומקדשים ומפארים שם ישראל ושם תורתנו ואמונתנו, ואחרים עלו לארצנו הקדושה ופועלים כרבנים כמורים ועומדים בראש החינוך הדתי, ואחרים עומדים בראש השלטון הממלכתי וכולם עושים חיזוק לתורת ישראל בארץ ישראל. יהא שמו הגדול ברוך ומבורך. יעמוד נא ספרי זה כמצבה צנועה לבית מקדש מעט שבמשך שמונים שנה הפיץ תורה ואורה לסוורי ישראל.