

[Guest Blog: Is Learning the Only Thing: Yeshiva Year\(s\) and Beyond: by Mitch Morrison](#)

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A son returns from two years in yeshiva in Israel and informs his parents his desire to remain for a third year. The parents, mainstream Modern Orthodox, are a bit concerned but acquiesce. A year later, the son says he wants to stay in Kollel and is now, in sports vernacular, “questionable” about college.

A daughter returns from 1 ½ years of seminary in Israel and informs her parents she only wants to date a “masmid,” and that she’s prepared to be a mother, homemaker and breadwinner.

A man primed to attend a top-flight university hits the brakes when he meets a shaliach in Israel and is drawn to the yeshiva. After several years of learning, he works for a religious organization at a modest income for more than a decade. He is idealistic and accepts his financial challenges.

Suddenly, he falls victim to budget cuts. No transition, no parachute, no benefits. Several years later, and with a wife and family, the man scratches an income and rues not going college.

“My parents were furious when I chose to go on the derekh {religious path},” he recently shared with me. “But the rav I met told me that if I learn and become a serious yid and have siyata d’shmaya (God will help), that the money will come.

“Instead, I have shalom bayis issues, money issues, and I don’t see a clear path forward.”

For some readers, these 3 stories, playing out in real time, are not new. For others, it’s their first go round, echoing across too many homes in Modern and Centrist Orthodox communities.

What has changed over the past decade is that shana bet (learning a second year in Israel) is more the norm than the exception.

Also changed is the refrain. The plaint of the 1990s and early 2000s was “when my son/daughter came home they no longer considered us kosher enough.”

Today, it’s “my son doesn’t want to come home. He wants to stay in yeshiva and make learning his life.” And for the daughter, it’s she wants to marry only to a Kollel guy, and to support him.

Before offering some solutions, we must first express enormous gratitude for where we are as a religious community. We have more yeshivot than any time in Jewish history, and more people wanting to learn. That’s a blessing.

But blessings in excess can become a curse - אהבה מקלקלת את השורה (love sometimes causes a straight line to be crooked)- as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches in Bereisheet Rabba, Parshat Vayera)

The generation of both baalei teshuva and Modern Orthodox families whose children chose to

embrace a path of full-time learning with few job skills and no defined career path are hitting a serious roadblock. This isn't just my view. This is what rabbis, parents and Jewish professional are sharing with me.

SubHed: Changing the Narrative

צא מן התיבה

God instructs Noah and family that life is not intended to be spent in the ark.

It's time to flip the script, to extol the virtues of not only learning Torah but living it outside of the protective ark. Parents must impart this value as an halakhic ideal at the earliest stage possible, buttressed by Modern Orthodox schools from elementary school onward.

The Gemara in Kiddushin 29A is clear about a parent's role:

תנינא להא דתנו רבנן האב תייב בבנו למולו ולפדותו וללמדו ותוכה ולהשיאו אשה וללמדו אומנות ... [רב יהודה](#) אומר כל שאינו מלמד את בנו אומנות מלמדו ליסטות סלקא דעתך אלא כאילו מלמדו ליסטות

"A father is required to circumcise his son, redeem him (if he's a firstborn), teach him Torah, marry him to a woman and to teach him a trade. ... Rabbi Yehuda says anyone one who does not teach his son a trade is teaching him banditry."

Rambam, the epitome of Torah and worldly knowledge, is more direct in Hilchot Deot (5:11):
(translation is my own)

"It is the way of sensible people that a person should first establish for himself a profession to earn a livelihood, then he should acquire a house, and then he should marry a woman. ... But fools reverse it by taking a wife first, then after, if he be able, purchase a home, and after that, in his declining years, turning to find a vocation, or be supported on charity."

When I chose to go into journalism, I was met with naysayers. I went to my rav, Rabbi Yehuda Kelemer, tz'l, and he shared a fascinating insight from the Rav, Rav Soloveitchik. This is a paraphrase:

"The Rav strongly held that the Torah lives in every space and every corner. It wasn't intended just for doctors, lawyers and kollelim," he said. "There is a reason that Levi is just one tribe and not representative of the entire Bnai Yisroel. We need our learners and teachers, but we also need our doctors, scientists, social workers and, yes, even journalists."

Yet today, many of our children attending yeshivot in Israel are learning only about Levi. Many of these roshei yeshiva and rebbeim devalue professional work, failing to take into consideration the young man or woman's ability to make a living; nor do these rebbeim consult first with the parents.

I would like to offer a few strategies for consideration:

- Seek out yeshivot that value a liberal arts education and embrace a Torah u'Maddah or Torah im Derekh Eretz approach.
- If a Rosh Yeshiva or Rebbe encourages your child to stay in yeshiva longer than you had intended, immediately contact the yeshiva and arrange for a family conversation.

- If the yeshiva is pushing your child toward a “career” of full-time learning, request that the yeshiva then develop in writing a career path for your child that takes into account the high cost of religious living (kosher food, higher cost to live in a frum community, yeshiva tuition, etc). I personally would also push for the yeshiva to pay my child to stay past two years.
- If your child adopts this all-or-nothing approach, turn off the financial spigot by either requiring your son/daughter to accept responsibility for the entire tuition or, at least half of it. This is **not** a punishment but a welcoming to the real world.
- And lastly, remind them (sons) that the Talmud they are learning was composed almost exclusively by Sages who had paying professions.

In recent months, several people from their 30s to 50s have confided in me that they were “sold a bill of goods.” While they remain religious, they live with a bitterness that the promise of “God will provide as long as you focus only on your learning” was a lie.

How do we ensure our children don’t have to repeat this same painful lesson?

Our forefather Yaakov knows this lesson well. While his emunah in God was unshakeable, he learns quickly that God is not going to prevent missteps. Yaakov is going to have to learn on his own and recognize that his actions have consequences.

And maybe that is the lesson we have to instill in our children at a young age – decisions have consequences. If you don’t work, you don’t get paid. A life in yeshiva may be right for the few, but it is not the path for an entire people.

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