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We are standing at the crossroads. Who is right, and who is not? Many of the arguments remain unanswered on both sides. Both schools of thought strive to do justice to their consciences and their deep-seated convictions. If there was ever a *machlokes lesheim shamayim* in our time, this is it. We are experiencing yet another aspect of that *hastaras panim* which so distinguishes this *galus* night from all other nights.

Certainly, a number of questions posed by one side could be answered by the other and vice versa. But those answers only provoke further questions ad infinitum.

In addition, both schools can quote any number of passages from our classic literature and from the sayings and utterances of early and latter-day authorities to substantiate their respective convictions.

As evidence for its concern with *gadlus*, the “Torah Only” school could cite *Rambam Hilchos Dayos Perek Gimmel*, where the educational ideal is formulated. The Rambam writes, “וישם אל לבו שיהיה לו בן אולי יהיה חכם וגדול בישראל.”

The emphasis on “greatness” is found by our Sages (*Berachos* 31b) in a phrase used by Channah in her prayer for *zera anashim*. According to the *Midrash Yalkut Samuel* (1:1), this request for the “seed of men” also connotes greatness and wisdom.

Nevertheless, the *Torah im derech erez* school can quote the same Talmudic passage (*Berachos* 31b) for the opposite view. It says there, “ורבנן אמרי זרע אנשים זרע שמובלע בין אנשים כי אתא רב דימי אמר, “לא ארוך ולא גוף... לא חכם ולא טפש” According to this, the ideal child is not the exceptional giant, but the normal and average child who dedicates his life to the service of G-d.

Then again, the “Torah Only” school could call attention to the fact that the Rambam in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (1:12) describes the proper professional man as one “who devotes only three hours to his vocation and nine hours to Torah study.” And even the time that is allotted to his mundane occupation should be curtailed to the bare minimum.

מי שנשאו לבו לקיים מצוה זו כראוי ולהיות מוכתר בכתר תורה לא יסיח דעתו” (3,6). “לדברים אחרים, ולא ישים על לבו שיקנה התורה עם העושר והכבוד כאחת” Here we find the exclusion of all other interests from the minds of those individuals who strive for perfection in Torah knowledge.

Conversely, the *Torah im derech erez* school could cite another paragraph in the same chapter as evidence for its position.

“כל המשים על לבו שיעסוק בתורה ולא יעשה מלאכה ויתפרנס מן הצדקה הרי זה” חלל את השם ובוזא את התורה” According to this, there is great religious significance to combining a gainful occupation with Torah study. In no uncertain terms, this also condemns a way of life which turns the Torah scholar into a recipient of charity.

And in addition to the famous quotation from Pirkei Avos, “יפה תלמד תורה עם דרך ארץ,” (*Perek 2*) the *Torah im derech erez* school can also quote, “אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה,” (*Perek 3*). They could call attention to the words, “דע מה שתשיב לאפיקורוס” (*Perek 2*) or to the *Mishnah*, “כל שישנו במקרא ובמשנה ובדרך ארץ לא במהרה הוא חוטא” (*Kiddushin* 40), as well as to many similar sayings of our sages.

However, the “Torah Only” school could easily substantiate

its philosophy by quoting the following statements from the same *Pirkei Avos*:

"התורה נקנית... במעוט דרך ארץ" (*Perek 6*)

"הוזה ממעט בעסק ועסק בתורה" (*Perek 4*)

"ולא כל המרבה בסחורה מחכים" (*Perek 2*)

"כל המקבל עליו עול תורה מעבירין ממנו... ועול דרך ארץ" (*Perek 3*)

All these postulate the reduction of *derech erez*, rather than the pursuit of it as an ideal.

And now that we have examined the issue, we are left with the question: Is the Torah scholar allowed or advised to include the "outer wisdoms" in his studies?

There is no final answer. "כי היא המחלוקת ישנה בין הראשונים והאחרונים." (*Teshuvot Harama, Siman Yud*)

No doubt, we are dealing with a question that must await its final answer when *Mashiach* comes. He may give the badge of honor to one of the schools, or he may come forth with the verdict, "These and those are the words of the living G-d."

Over sixty years ago, the satanic forces unleashed by the Germans loudly proclaimed the total bankruptcy of Western *Kultur* and Humanism. The Nazi devilry left only one recourse for its shattered survivors: "Go my people into your chambers, close your doors behind you, and withdraw for awhile until the storm is over." (*Yeshayahu 26:20*) At that time, the only option was to go back to the historic ghetto, back to the "Torah Only" existence. The *derech erez* we had known and befriended seemed dead forever.

How could we have known then that the ghetto would go up in flames as well? How could we envisage that our *galus* path through the "desert of nations" would lead us into the very strongholds of Western civilization?

Surely, we had no idea that the same kind of Western European *galus* would come back again, only more so. Today, all our pre-Nazi problems have come back, and our old *galus* sickness of

mutual distrust and intolerance has returned. Only this time, it has come with greater fury, more vehemence and with more severe penalties for our inability to cope with them.

Everything in our Jewish world has become more poignant and more pronounced. Eastern and Western Europe are thrown into the same melting pot. Vilna, Warsaw and Frankfurt are housed together in the same street block. And each segment of our people seems to have become the other's bad conscience.

There is an unhealthy absence of self-criticism, which is responsible for our conspicuous mediocrity and for our sorry self-righteousness. Today, the timeless problems outlined in the above dialogues beg for a timely solution, but in these times, we do not have a universally recognized authority that can give forth an authentic and binding verdict.

Therefore, why don't we attempt to form a workable synthesis of the differing viewpoints? Why can we not support both schools? Why should we not emphasize what binds us together rather than what rends us apart? Why can't each respect the other's idealism? And why can we not support each other's efforts, alleviate each other's needs and rejoice in each other's blessings?

For in reality, one school cannot function without the other. Both should complement each other, rather than compete with one another to reach a goal which will be forced to remain one-sided.

We must realize that giving freely to each other does not mean giving in to each other. Both schools of thought could only benefit from such harmony without yielding their basic principles and their traditional philosophies. Why doesn't each group encourage the other to remain true to its heritage, to enhance its values and correct its shortcomings? Why can't each one learn from the other without yielding one inch of its own ground?

Torah im derech erez and "Torah Only" need each other for their mutual interests. Both systems belong to Klal Yisrael, each filling in the very gap that the other leaves open.

Like two drops of mercury, the everlasting values which can contribute to the advancement of Torah life will eventually merge together into the Divinely willed unity of G-d's people.

Still, after hearing both sides of the issue, we are left with the practical question with which we began: What should today's Jewish youth do? Which way should they go?

For those who are privileged to be heirs of a definite tradition, the answer is not difficult, for their road is clearly outlined. It is to follow the path of their fathers, for *minhag avoseihem beyadeihem*. If still in doubt, follow the *daas Torah* of our *gedolei hador*!

However, for others, this question requires serious soul searching. Each person must ask himself seriously, am I just imitating and jumping on a bandwagon? Am I merely riding on the crest of a wave which may go downward as suddenly as it went up? Or do I honestly and sincerely seek to live up to what my Creator expects of me? Am I really prepared to give all my youthful zeal and passionate devotion to the school to which I belong? Am I really aware of the consequences, the risks and the sacrifices?

After considering all these issues, the choice can be made. And if the decision is truly *leshaim shamayim*, G-d will be on your side, no matter which road you travel.

"בכל דרכיך דעהו והוא יישר ארחתיך" (*Mishlei* 3:6).