

## **What are Our Expectations of Yeshiva's Medical School?**

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Question: Certain established circles within Orthodox Judaism are displeased by the founding and establishment of a medical school under the auspices of Yeshiva University. In their opinion, Yeshiva University's singular focus should be the training and development of rabbis. Why, they ask, must we (YU) extend into new uncharted areas by establishing secular graduate and professional schools that have no direct connection (with our main purpose of developing future generations of ) the Rabbinate?

Answer: The Halakha often differentiates between the principles of Lchatchila (the preferred approach, pre facto) and B'dieved (post facto), between an idea that is still being developed (and subject to influence) and a fact whose existence we can no longer deny and must accept in order to take advantage of the situation to the fullest degree possible. Indeed, the philosophical approach of Judaism to man is itself one of B'dieved, to be viewed from the standpoint of Achshav SheNivra. (It would have been preferable for man not to have been created, however now that he has been created he must live according to the laws of the Torah. In other words, we have to make the most of the situation that we have been presented.)

I do not know what my opinion would have been had I been consulted regarding the necessity and practicality of a medical school under the auspices of Yeshiva. However, my opinion was not sought during the opening stages of the project. As a result, I was not burdened with the obligation to ponder this question from a L'chatchila standpoint, either as it relates to the Halakhic issues and problems that are associated with the school or in terms of the connection with the practical-social aspects. Now that the medical school is a fact that we must recognize and concern ourselves with, we can approach it from one perspective only: that of B'dieved. It is from this B'dieved standpoint that my answer will consider the social-practical aspects of this colossal undertaking.

It is my opinion that the Medical School can accomplish much for the benefit of Orthodox Judaism in America, provided its leadership (I do not mean the technical/scientific leadership, rather the religious, spiritual leadership) remains under the control of the Yeshiva's administration, with Dr. Belkin at the helm.

In analyzing the socio-cultural life style and the specific mentality of American Jews, I have observed the following:

1. The medical curriculum is intensive, concentrated, requires that students participate in a hospital internship, and comprises a 6 day work week throughout the United States. It is quite evident that the official day of rest is Sunday, not Shabbat. One who wishes to study medicine is absolutely coerced to desecrate the Shabbat. And where faculties of other disciplines are often more tolerant towards the religious needs of their students, the medical school faculty does not show any such accommodation towards the religious requirements of its students.

This intolerance derives from a dual reason: 1) the administration of a medical school considers the admission of any student, even the most gifted and capable, an extraordinary privilege. Therefore it believes that the student must express his thanks and accept whatever rules and regulations the institution imposes and requires. Any student request for special dispensation regarding religious needs for Shabbat and Jewish Festivals, that engenders even the most minor of administrative complications, is considered an act of disrespect. 2) The small contingent of religious students in any medical school lacks sufficient clout to pressure the medical school to accommodate their needs. When an observant student presents a specific need, his request is considered as the capricious whim of an individual and not as a request for entitlement based on a religious principle. The school administration can always claim that the request can't be all that important since none of the other Jewish students are requesting similar dispensation.

The uncompromising stance of the medical school towards religious observance imparts a dangerous psychological influence on many of the Jewish students, forcing them to straddle the line between observance and desecration of the commandments. The students reason that attending medical school will ultimately require them to desecrate the Shabbat. This leads them to reject Shabbat observance while still attending college, as they no longer view Shabbat as a religious fundamental value. Such a standpoint permits them to rationalize and justify their subsequent conduct (regarding non-observance of Shabbat and Mitzvot).

The establishment of the (YU) Medical School obviates all the issues that make it practically impossible for an orthodox Jew to study medicine, and

renders moot all the concerns noted above. In YU's Medical School, no lectures will be presented on Shabbat. The laboratories will be closed on Shabbat. Shabbat will be the official day of rest. Of course the Yeshiva Medical School will have a kosher kitchen/cafeteria and a Beit Midrash. In clear refutation of arguments to the contrary, Yeshiva's Medical School will prove that the study of medicine does not and will contradict the observance of Mitzvot.

2. For decades, Jews have overlooked the agnostic attitude and irreligious approach (desecration of the Shabbat, non-kosher food) of physicians. Even in the small city or town, where the communal body would not tolerate any dilution of the traditional life style, the people would overlook the transgressions of the physician, or even the pharmacist. This is understandable from a psychological viewpoint. People depended on the services of the physician or pharmacist in times of emergency. Who concerns himself with the transgressions of those he depends on for aid in his time of need? Yet, even though the town physician was not observant, he recognized and understood the importance of religious observance to Jews. He therefore evinced an understanding and appreciation regarding health questions that were related to religious issues. The situation in the United States is quite different. Jewish American doctors have no respect for religious values. They are partially responsible for the anarchy regarding Kashrut that is rampant in Jewish hospitals and for providing the impetus that led many Jewish homes to become non-kosher. We know of situations where physicians influenced mothers to feed their children ham and eggs for breakfast, or leaven on Passover when they knew full well that in both cases acceptable alternatives were available for their patients. Today it is practically impossible for a Rabbi to discuss the issue of an ill person fasting on Yom Kippur with Jewish doctors. Their response is often cynical and vulgar. Their approach to people in general is built on a superficial, mechanical, positivistic approach. They seldom factor into their thought process the spiritual, metaphysical personality, that plays such a large role in human health and well being (even those that recognize psychosomatic illness, do not appreciate the contribution of a religious lifestyle to health and well being).

It is interesting to note that despite the great efforts of American Jewry to distinguish and disassociate themselves from the small Jewish town of yesteryear, they have not altered their attitude towards the physician. Because of this (i.e. the respect they are afforded), the negative attitude of

Jewish doctors to religious values is such a dangerous influence in many Jewish homes.

However the influence of the doctor need not always be dangerous for our religious interests. It can be embodied in a positive, constructive force. A physician who himself is an observant individual, or at a minimum demonstrates respect for the religious beliefs of another, can have a strong influence on people. In many case he can accomplish more than the most pious rabbi.

I am not so optimistic to expect that every Jewish graduate from the Yeshiva's Medical School will be an observant Jew. One thing I can predict: a significant portion of the doctors that graduate from Yeshiva's Medical School will consist of Torah scholars and observant Jews, and the remainder will hopefully have a different approach and attitude towards the Holies of Israel (the Jewish People) (and a greater appreciation and sympathy for the religious values and needs of the Orthodox community). As Y.L. Peretz wrote in *Between Two Mountains*, "They did not agree with each others point of view" - the Rabbi of Brisk (The Bais Halevi, Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik, great grandfather of the Rav) remained a Mitnaged as before, however his encounter with the Bialyer Rebbe left an impact on him: he no longer harassed the Chassidic Jew.

3) The Yeshiva is located in New York and not Kasrilevka. It is an American institution. I do not mean to imply that, because of this, the Yeshiva must study and interpret the Torah in a different way or compromise in the religious arena. Heaven forbid! The Oral Law, its explication and categorical/imperative character remain immutable in all areas and all times. What I want to say is something different. The Yeshiva should never forget that the American Jew is being progressively integrated into the general socio-economic structure of America. Jewish youth must be trained and educated in various scientific disciplines in order to assume appropriate and important positions in various endeavors and pursuits. Not all students who attend Yeshiva are capable of becoming rabbis. Not all students who attend Yeshiva desire to enter the rabbinate nor should they. By offering students that have spent several years in the Yeshiva environment and atmosphere and imbibed (some more, some less) the spirit of the Oral Law, an opportunity to study in an academic and professional school, the Yeshiva will always be able to attract a new and different sort of student, who absent such an opportunity would never have entertained the

notion of a Torah education. This will be a victory for us, for we must spread Torah, in its widest definition, among all the factions and spheres of the Jewish Community. Not only must the Yeshiva train great Torah scholars, it must also educate professionals and lay people that will remain erudite and highly principled Jews. The development of professional and graduate schools will help us attain this goal.

4) Today's Orthodox community, like the entire Jewish community, emphasizes and appreciates the respect of their opponents to a vastly greater degree than any love they may profess for them. The ability of the Orthodox community to influence others is commensurate with the respect they deserve. U'Vchen Ten Kavod Hashem Lamecha. Respect, in contrast to love, is not built on the good will or sympathy of another. Rather it is the result of a coerced recognition of specific acts and situations. The Orthodox community can win the respect of others by focusing on and excelling in three areas:

- 1) Living their personal lives on a higher ethical-religious level;
- 2) Defending their principles and ideals in a forthright and uncompromising manner;
- 3) Demonstrating to the world that the Torah Jew need not cower in a corner and gaze with sadness and resignation as life and the world pass him by. The Orthodox Jew must demonstrate that he navigates with pride the flow and currents of the modern world and participate in a life that is racing ever more rapidly towards new horizons and great accomplishments in the domains of science of technology. We must demonstrate that in all cultural, social and scientific situations a Jew can study Torah and live as a faithful Torah Jew. We must show the world that not only doesn't the Halakha restrain the intellectual and emotional capacities and worldly knowledge of the Jew, on the contrary, it deepens and broadens them greatly. Once and for all we must demonstrate the falsehood of the complaints of all the non-religious and pseudo-religious movements and organizations that proclaim that Halakha limits the individual and estranges him from the world around him. We should not respond to their claims with theoretical arguments. Instead we should present practical examples and deeds. If the Yeshiva will endeavor to produce a first class medical school, and thereby enable students to combine a Torah lifestyle with the medical profession, it will have accomplished a great deal to enhance the honor of Torah and the prestige of Orthodoxy.

I write this article from the viewpoint of U'Pachad V'Rachav L'vavecha (Isaiah 60:5). From one perspective I visualize with great joy this endeavor, an undertaking that will allow the Yeshiva to penetrate circles that were previously beyond her reach. From the other perspective however, my heart is filled with fear when I think of the extraordinary opposition of Jewish physicians to religious values and principles, and I am frightened that they will succeed in weakening the principles behind the founding of the medical school. However, in the final analysis, the feeling of joy nevertheless overcomes my fear, as I am confident that the Yeshiva will have full spiritual and religious control over the direction of the school and the administration of the Yeshiva will stand guard to ensure that no religious principle will be compromised. For example, not only must all the classrooms and laboratories be officially closed on the Sabbath, ad hoc desecration of the Sabbath must also not be condoned or permitted. Even during the last two years of their medical school training when students are required to participate in clinical rounds at the hospital, the Jewish students must be relieved of responsibilities to work on the Sabbath. Also, other Halakhic areas must be carefully observed not only in public, but in private as well. (The quality of the) Science (and their medical training) will not suffer because of the attention to Halakha. If the Medical School undermines or weakens its observance of Halakha, it will envelop the entire undertaking (of the establishment of the Medical School) in a desecration of the name of God and will have a catastrophic impact on the Yeshiva itself.

I hope that my optimistic expectations will not be proven false, and the Yeshiva will not allow itself to be led astray from its task by some philanthropist, director or medical school administrator who will surely attempt periodically to isolate the religious aspect of the school and erase its unique character without paying attention to the very unique and specific characteristic that is its source of strength. My optimism is based on the fact that till this point, the Yeshiva alone has been the embodiment of a unique and different approach, while openly demonstrating the ancient and traditional approach of Judaism that has always identified the idea of selection with the concept of separation. It is because of that uniqueness and differentiation that it has been selected for this undertaking.

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