

Seminary Part 1

When thinking of seminary in Israel, I have to ask myself a dramatic question: what kind of children are we raising?

Anyone who has had a daughter in 12th grade in a Bais Yaakov high school is probably familiar with the seminary craze. Going to seminary in Israel for a year after high school is *de riguer*. The principals, teachers, and mothers explain that seminary in Israel is a life changing experience.

The more adventurous girls are ready to go, and the girls who deep down are a little nervous swallow hard and gradually build their enthusiasm. The intense peer pressure that develops makes it even more clear to the girls that seminary in Israel is indeed a life changing experience.

And it probably is a life changing experience. But not just for the girl.

Even with government financial aid, the cost for a year of seminary is thousands of dollars. The expense is beyond the reach of many families, who resort to loans, credit card debt and some deft financial juggling to pay the piper.

One father of a high school daughter who spoke with me was close to tears. How could he send a daughter to Israel when he was not paying full tuition for his day school children? Steeped in our *mesorah* of following *daas torah*, he consulted his *Rav*. The *Rav* was in complete agreement, so he informed his daughter that she would not be going to Israel for seminary. I asked him why then the long face? His answer: the constant begging, pleading, whining, complaining and crying of his daughter. Her life would be irreparably damaged. All the other girls were going. When his wife fueled the fire by reminiscing about her great time in seminary, he simply give up. His view was that he will have a more miserable life, he will be going against halacha, he will be hounded by debt collectors, and he will be less able to fulfill his Torah mandated obligations -- but his daughter will be happy.

Take a trip to Israel today and observe the seminary girls in *Yerushalaim*. On their own most *Shabbosim*, the atmosphere is often one bordering on *hefkerus*. This is what the fathers are paying for from funds they do not have.

The scene with the distraught father plays out in various forms across the country. Some times the wife is just as against seminary in Israel as is the husband. Parents offer compromises, but to the daughters it is Israel or bust. The challenge is too great, leading almost every family who has this experience to describe it with the concluding sentence "we wanted her not to go, but she insisted."

Insisted? The 17 year old daughter insisted that she be allowed to go to Israel for a year at her parents expense? Insisted? I cannot get that word out of my mind. Insisted!

Has the school forgotten to teach *kibbud av v'eim* ? "Seminary is a good experience for the girls" may be true, but that does not make it a necessity. I know a woman who when she became engaged sat down with her parents to plan the wedding. The first thing she told them was that she only wanted whatever wedding they could afford. She would be happy if they were *b'simcha* at her *chasunah*.

The schools should be teaching that value, not a value of entitlement. What right do schools and daughters have to do this to parents? Are there not enough environment and financial challenges in raising children in America that we need to seek out even more challenges?

Ah, what about shiduchim you say! Fathers and sons rarely care about seminary experience. I have been to many *chasunahs*, and have never seen the *kallah* wear her report card around her neck or pinned to her dress. So at the risk of sounding like a father who simple does not "get it", let me say this. I only wish I could shout it from the rooftops: A principal, *shadchan*, or mother who considers what seminary a girl attended as a significant portion of their view of the girl is guilty of the most inappropriate stratification of *bnos yisroel*. I shudder to think the price they will pay when they have to answer for such an *aveira*. Where will they hide when the *bas kol* rings out everywhere with H' demanding to know who has belittled his *bnos yisroel* in such a way. *Kol kavudah bas melech pnima!*

Rabbanan are powerless it seems to fight the daughters and the schools. As one Rav explained to me candidly "one doesn't say something when one knows nobody will listen."

Schar limud is a mitzvah. *Kibbud av v'eim* is a mitzvah. Going to seminary is not. For those who can truly afford it, who pay full tuition for their other children and support local *mosdos*, who have in place a strong extended family to watch over the girl, and who do not mind the risk of their daughters being away from home for a year -- *kol hakavod*. Enjoy. For the rest of the daughters, remember this: the sad look on your father's face at the airport is not just from the idea of missing his baby girl.

Under the right circumstances, seminary can help a girl mature and grow up. Of that there is little doubt. But to all the high school graduates this year, I would suggest a better way to mature and grow up: open the *chumash* and learn a little about *kibbud av v'eim*. But don't learn it with a long face and a dramatic expression clearly showing that you really should be in seminary. Rather learn it like the *kallah* who wanted her parents to be happy. When you can do that, when you can have a *simcha* and think of others, you will be mature and grown up.