

Under the College Influence

By Abraham J. Twerski

Although we commemorate the miracle of the menorah on Chanukah, the real threat at the time was Hellenism: “When the wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and compel them to stray from the statutes of Your will” (*siddur*). The triumph of the Maccabees was really the victory of Torah Judaism over secularism.

Ever since, Jewish leaders have been vigilant about incursions of secular thought into traditional Judaism. Although Rambam is universally revered as a foremost Torah personality and a father of *halachah*, certain Torah authorities discouraged the study of his work *The Guide for the Perplexed* because some of the philosophical ideas he presents are at odds with Torah principles.

Similarly, the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) movement of the eighteenth century, which promoted secular wisdom, was vigorously opposed by the Torah leadership of the time. In Germany, however, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was able to reconcile secular and traditional wisdom with his *Torah im*

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Derech Eretz approach. Elsewhere the leading Torah authorities opposed secular studies. In many of today's *Chareidi* yeshivot, college is frowned upon, and even in their high schools, the study of secular subjects is limited.

The concern is that exposure to secular philosophy and ideas will result in some abandoning Torah. Of course, there are those who conjure up philo-

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sophical questions as a way to justify their desire for greater freedom. Rav Hayyim of Brisk probably summed it up best when someone came to him with heretical questions (*kashes* in Yiddish). Rav Hayyim said: “You don't have *kashes*, you have *terutzim* (Yiddish for both answers and excuses). What you really want is to do things that the Torah forbids. If you prove the Torah wrong in one matter or another, that would give you a *terutz* (excuse) to disqualify the Torah and allow you to satisfy all your desires.”

The primary problem with college education today is not ideological. The philosophy courses that once posed a threat to Judaism are no longer real concerns. Most college students are not interested in

philosophic issues; they're interested in developing a marketable skill.

The key problem on today's campuses is student behavior. On many campuses, drug use is as high as eighty percent, and sexual relationships are not considered immoral. The environmental influences that prevail on college campuses are antagonistic to Torah, and young people are at risk of succumbing to them. As Rav Hayyim explained, those interested in abandoning Torah will find the philosophical basis to do so. One should not minimize the danger of exposure to such an environment, and should not have a false sense of security and think that he will remain unaffected.

In 1954, when society in general was more wholesome than it is today, I sought guidance from the Steipler Gaon about going to medical school. He responded, “Inasmuch as you will be in a secular environment, I recommend taking precautionary measures to prevent being swept along with the tide: 1. An hour of Torah study, morning and night, is mandatory; 2. At least fifteen minutes daily study of *musar*; 3. Shabbos should be totally sacred, devoted to reading only Torah works. Nothing secular, not even a newspaper, may be read on Shabbos and 4. Every day, at the conclusion of the Amidah, add *tefillos* of your own asking for Hashem's help to remain true to Torah.”

If this was necessary in 1954, it is even more so now. **JA**

