

Subject: The Pittsburgh experience—a warning

Dear One and All, I hope that your Pesach has been as ful'filling' as mine. I have our grandson, Koby, with us. At not quite 2 and a half he captures the essence of honesty and simplicity. When do we lose that innocence? On a more serious note, we have people in our community who have direct experience and knowledge of the practical implosion of the Pittsburgh community, especially the education system. Their Vaad became the property of the right wing. Rabbi Irving Chinn, the head of the Vaad was asked by the Jewish newspaper to comment on the reestablishment of a coed day school. He was quoted as agreeing on wishing the new school good luck. When the article was published, he immediately denied the quote and wrote the following letter to the Pittsburgh Chronicle (It is available on line). This is the danger: the real agenda of people like him—that is why we must continue to insist on a Koby-like openness and honesty. His letter and a couple of replies are pasted below. David

I don't think the "new school" deserved a front-page, long article ("New Jewish day school may open here in fall," July 28). I never heard of announcing a bris before the baby was born.

Several weeks ago Associate Editor Susan Jacobs called me for my reaction. I said "I cannot give you a statement because, I had not heard of the school; the Vaad was never informed and the idea was new to me." I did tell her that she might quote one thing "The Vaad long ago approved anything that will improve Jewish education 'al pi halacha,' which was according to Jewish law." Personally, I added, according to what I heard, this idea would not be according to Jewish law and would not help Jewish education.

I thought the task of a school and a mechanech [Jewish educator] was to make better Jews.

Most upsetting to me personally is the article distorts my opinion, perhaps inadvertently. Someone quoted "they wish the new school good luck." To which Susan added, "Rabbi Chinn echoed his remarks." I made no statement, which warrants such an echo. I said to her then, I thought the idea was not according to

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halacha and now that I read the sad details (co-ed, etc.) I am sure it is not kosher. I trust it was an editing error and my friend Susan meant me no harm. But it did give me much grief. This will teach me to use a tape recorder when talking to a reporter or, better yet, not talking to them at all.

(Editor's note: The Chronicle stands by the accuracy of the quotes contained in the story, though we regret the use of the word "echo.")

Rabbi Irvin I. Chinn, White Oak

Different schools of thought

In response to Rabbi Irvin Chinn's letter ("There was no 'echo,' " Aug. 4), I must say that I have the highest respect for him. Nevertheless, I am curious on what source he is basing the specific prohibition of coeducational studies. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, on the other hand, was a proponent of this model. In the book "Community, Covenant, and Commitment" (p. 83) he states that coeducational studies are "an absolute imperative," and to have a separate curriculum would be "a regrettable oversight."

"This policy of discrimination between the sexes as to subject matter and method of instruction, which is still advocated by certain groups within our Orthodox community, has contributed greatly to the deterioration and downfall of traditional Judaism," Soloveitchik wrote. The school he founded and maintained for many years, the Maimonides School of Brookline, Mass., to this day maintains a coeducational curriculum in both secular and Judaic studies. Is this what Rabbi Chinn is calling "treif"? The Maimonides Academy of Pittsburgh will be run by legitimate schools of thought within our mesorah (tradition). We respect the right of others to follow other legitimate schools of thought within Judaism as well.

(Editor's note: The author is organizing The Maimonides Academy of Pittsburgh.)

Rabbi Sholom Sacks, Squirrel Hill

Coed schools are kosher

Rabbi Chinn's letter to The Chronicle has left me saddened and despairing. For the head of Pittsburgh's Va'ad Harabonim (Orthodox Rabbinical Council) to casually excommunicate the Maimonides Academy, a Modern Orthodox high school, for being "not according to halachah" (Jewish law) and "not kosher" is a rejection not only of an Orthodox school founded by an Orthodox rabbi, but a gratuitous slap at a huge segment of the Pittsburgh Orthodox community.

That Rabbi Chinn felt comfortable visiting this judgment without feeling the need to detail his reasons or reasoning beyond the "sad details" that the school will be "coed" is telling. In place of a disciplined methodology where the devout analyze multiple halachic positions to reach valid conclusions, Rabbi Chinn is bearing the standard of a monolithic Orthodoxy that only recognizes positions consonant with its proclivities. And that is not the process of halachah. It is the process of lifestyle validation.

Rabbi Chinn's letter summarily dispatches from Orthodoxy co-educational schools that have nurtured Orthodox youth for the better part of a century — schools like RaMAZ and the Yeshiva of Flatbush in New York or Maimonides in Boston (the model for Pittsburgh's Maimonides Academy). Can we please step away from this

grim new world of reflexive sectarian intolerance? Won't we all be served better by a community where Rabbi Chinn can take issue with Rabbi Sacks without dismissing him from Orthodoxy?

Yitzchak Francus, Squirrel Hill