

The Day School Affordability/Community Torah Value Crisis

The Day School affordability crisis has not spared any community in the United States. This dilemma is one that community leadership has grappled with for years but which reached a higher pitch in urgency since the 2008 financial recession. This recent post explores the issues that parents and community members must consider when making this decision for financial commitment as it pertains to Jewish education.

The desire and belief that Jewish children should have a full-time Jewish education goes back two thousand years. Then, there was no tuition charged to the families. Families were focused on survival and trying to provide food for their family, and the community knew that if they wanted Jewish continuity, education was paramount.

However, in these times the communities across the country accept anywhere between 10 and 20% of the financial responsibility for the expense of having a Day School education available in the city. The balance is the responsibility of the parents and the board.

This shift in thinking and support is seemingly a natural extension of the belief that it is up to the individual choice for each family. It's clear that it's not working. This article challenges our thought process as parents and as a community.

David Maneger the founder and president of Kohelet Foundation writes, "As we have learned

time and again, we will always be Jewish in the eyes of others. But if we stop being Jewish to ourselves, if we stop learning and following Torah, we risk irrelevance and uselessness as a people, which is one step away from losing our freedom."

Read on for a provocative and persuasive article about the importance of Jewish education. I couldn't have said it better.

The (Day School Affordability) Community Torah Value Crisis Posted on November 28, 2012 by Kohelet Foundation

The following blog entry was written by David Magerman, President and Founder, Kohelet Foundation

The Jewish Day School world is flooded with conversation about The Affordability Crisis. Even the most committed families, the Orthodox and observant Conservative Jews, are questioning whether the system is sustainable.

The concerns about the unbearable cost of day school to parents are certainly real, but they are misdirected. The problem is not simply a matter of affordability. Affordability is the ability of the recipients (customers) of a product to afford to pay for it. The problem is that all of the recipients or beneficiaries of the product aren't paying their share.

Consider the following ludicrous proposal: Jewish children should be responsible for paying for their own education. To be fair,

let's start this program at kindergarten. Five- and six-year-olds should pool together their tooth fairy money and cash in the bonds they received at birth, scraping together whatever they can to pay for their first year of school. The resulting educational program would be, dare I say, inadequate.

So what's the logical flaw in this proposal? Many of the real recipients of the benefits of the education aren't paying for it. While the students may be getting the education, their parents are benefitting too, in countless ways. They are having their obligation to educate their children met by the school. Their kids are learning values that will make them productive, self-sufficient members of society and hopefully instill in them the sense of obligation to care for their parents as they age. Parents get significant value out of their children's education, so it makes sense for them to pay for it.

In the real world, of course, parents are paying for their children's education. But we are still living in the ludicrous land where the vast majority of the beneficiaries of day school education aren't paying for it. Who are the real beneficiaries of Jewish day school education? Let's look at this question more closely.

Consider the position of Jews in society. Why are we safe? Why aren't we being persecuted now, like we have been throughout history? Some would say it's because of the freedoms accorded to us by

virtue of being Americans. But to conclude that is to ignore history. We have been persecuted in America, as have other minorities, even though the U.S. Constitution has always suggested it should be otherwise. And we have had freedoms in other times and other lands.

We are free and safe because it is in the interests of the leaders of the lands we inhabit in Diaspora to afford us freedom and safety. Throughout history, Jews have been leaders in medicine, science, philosophy, and government, to the extent that we have been allowed to be. Even in lands where we have been reviled, our doctors have been welcomed into palaces to treat the royal and infirm.

So, we have to ask ourselves, why do the Jewish people survive, and frequently thrive, in almost every era and almost every country we have gone to in exile? The answer is the one constant that Jews have always had throughout time and everywhere we have gone: Torah. We thrive because we are the People of the Book. We teach our children Torah. We live our lives by Torah. And by that formula do we become, time and again, necessary to the lands we live in, regardless of whether we are loved or hated. Eventually, our success has bred jealousy and resentment, and we have been driven out. But first we are successful.

Sadly, we are now working hard to break this chain by con-



vincing ourselves that the reason for our success in America is freedom and assimilation. We tell ourselves that we came to America as nothing, with nothing, and America and freedom made us great. This is so terribly ignorant and misguided. It ignores history. It ignores the disproportionate number of Nobel Prizes awarded to Jews around the world. It ignores the backgrounds of the immigrants who came here around the turn of the 20th century and formed the backbone of the modern American Jewish community. Those immigrants grew up in Torah-observant communities, and even if they didn't observe Judaism in their American homes or even teach Torah explicitly to their children, the residue of their Torah-infused upbringings impacted their children and even their grandchildren.

All of the members of the Jewish community are beneficiaries of a Torah-educated Jewish people and all should bear its cost, each according to his or her ability to pay. The Jewish billionaires and

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