

## CHOOSING A YESHIVA

I am looking for the right Yeshiva for my oldest son. Is it the opinion of the panel that it is better to select a Yeshiva that tracks the students according to their level, or should I opt for a Yeshiva that mixes the children, without dividing them into aleph and bais classes?

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I have always been of the opinion that it is better to have two parallel classes chosen in alphabetical order. It then becomes *Hashem's* choice. We were quite successful in having classes made up of children with different abilities and personalities in one setting. When there were extenuating circumstances, such as the need to break up undesirable cliques or the like, I would be forced into making some sort of adjustments and do some switching among the classes. Although there were others on staff who argued for a reshuffling of students every year, no staff member asked to have a smarter and a less progressive class. We even integrated, wherever possible, the educationally challenged students who were a part of our Special Education Department, into the regular classes.

I am quite aware that many schools have not only *Aleph* and *Bais* classes but also have *Gimmel* and *Daled* classes. Let us think for a moment of the following scenario. If my child had to go through school in a *Gimmel* or *Daled* class, and my child was properly diagnosed educationally for that particular level, what will happen to his self esteem, his initiative to grow, his will to accomplish? I think that his true abilities will be chopped down a foot or two aside from the negative damage mentioned.

*Hashem* created each of us differently and wants us to mesh together, to love each other, study and work together, learn to tolerate individuality despite our differences. That is the manner in which we should train our children. Aside from the home, the laboratory for this type of training, is the classroom, where one creates friendships and learns to live with each class member equally as well.

I am sure that some of you will say "I send my children to school in order to learn; school is not a social organization. I will send them to Pirchei/Bnos and camp for their social wellbeing". Well, it does not work that way. Don't we choose, among other criteria, a Yeshiva or Bais Yaakov according to the type of religious level of observance of the parent body? We do that because we know very well the effect that *chaverim* and *seviva* have on our children. How many times have we heard the comment "my son is not in a good class; that is why he acts this way", etc?

Some of us choose to use all manner of 'pull' and *protektsia* to have our sons accepted into a 'Yeshivah Lemetsuyanin' and don't realize that we may have misjudged the ability of our son and ultimately cause him more harm than good. Nor do we consider the possibility of harm that can come from elitism, plain old *gaiva*. I have also encountered lazy students who *davka* wanted to attend a less challenging class or school in order to coast along without working too hard. This sort of attitude may continue to foster the *mida* of *atzlus*, laziness in the student that will probably manifest itself in many ways throughout life.

I find that no matter how good a job the school administration does in categorizing and separating students, according to intelligence and acquired knowledge, a good teacher will always be required to reach and teach each student according to his abilities, not only to any one particular individual or group in the class. As “differential teaching” is a must in all classrooms, why not use it to teach the subject at hand to fit the individuality and special needs of every student.

I cannot leave this subject without reminding the educational community, and I am fortunate and thankful to *Hakodosh Bruch Hu* to be part of that illustrious community, that we must always keep in mind that the gifted student should be always challenged on his level, along with the student of lesser abilities, so that he does not fall between the cracks which often happens.

My advice to the parent is to choose a Yeshiva that mixes the children socially and academically and does not have classes which are set up by level and ability. It is important for your son to be able to learn in a ‘blended class’.