

B”H

July 20, 2003 (originally written in May 2003 – see P.S. at bottom of last page)

Dear Rabbi Schochet,

It’s been a long while since we’ve spoken, as we moved from Toronto to Chicago over ten years ago. I’m sure you remember the Belkin family – at least our children! If I might remind you, from the time each of my children was able to come to *shul* on Shabbos, I made sure that they came up to wish you a “good Shabbos” after *davening*. I believe it is very important for everyone to have respect for the Rav of the *shul*, and I made sure to instill this in my kids.

My reason for writing after all this time is that I am in receipt of your letter, recently circulated in Chicago, explaining your stance with regard to Rabbi Moscovitz’s policy. Although I had heard that this policy had been “authorized” by you, until I saw something in writing I was hesitant to believe it. Having now read your letter, I find that must take issue with you for a number of reasons, which I will address shortly.

But first, I’d like you to know that three of my children are among the forty Lubavitch children who have been denied *Chabad chinuch* this year based on your *heter* to Rabbi Moscovitz.

Before you are deluged with misinformation concerning this, please let me tell you my own story. My eldest daughter was a graduate of LGHS under Mrs. Turen several years ago. Our experience with the education that she provides is marvelous. Most of those who have experienced what she has done will agree that there is no one in Lubavitch – worldwide – who compares to Mrs. Turen in terms of the values of *chassidishkeit* and level of learning that is imparted to high school girls. My second daughter, Menucha, attended her school last year, and we were equally thrilled with the results. Although very dismayed when Rabbi Moscovitz decided to fire her, we decided to send Menucha to school in Toronto this year in order to avoid a direct confrontation. Menucha came home for Chanukah and attended one day of Mrs. Turen’s school. When I picked her up she told me that she couldn’t go back – that she had learned more in one day than in the previous three months. *(Please note this is not to say anything negative about the Toronto school – just that once a girl has experienced Mrs. Turen’s teaching, there is no comparison to anything else. Numerous seminary graduates have admitted this.)*

When I was sixteen, had I been given a choice of schools to attend, I would have chosen based on where I could have the most freedom, the most fun, the best friends, or the most comforts. When my daughter asked to return to Mrs. Turen because *the level of education* was so far superior, how could I refuse?

As a parent, I believe that I have not only the right, but also a *Torah obligation* to select the best educational choice for each of my children. We struggled with the unfortunate reality of Rabbi Moscovitz’s policy, and came to a decision. We believe that the four years of a girl’s high school is probably the most important time in anyone’s life – for that girl in a few short years will be starting a family. Since the woman sets the tone for the family, the *Chassidische* values that she absorbs in these four years are *critical* to that future family, and probably generations to come. Our boys, on the other hand, will be

attending Yeshivas soon, thus beginning an entirely new phase of their education. Unfortunately I also have a girl in grade 5... As difficult as this decision was, we decided that we could not jeopardize our daughter's *Chassidische* development. We hoped that the Cheder would realize that to kick kids out of school is not proper, and that they would fight the policy. Of course, since Rabbi Yitzchok Wolf is one of the instigators of this conflict, our hopes proved to be unfounded. We were *warned* not to send our children to Cheder as of the day our daughter attended Bnos Rabbeinu (Mrs. Turen's school).

Rabbi Moscowitz states publicly his ludicrous claim that we "chose to withdraw our children from the Cheder" because we knew what the policy was and decided to ignore it. The reality is that these families "chose" to do what was best for their daughters, and hoped that Rabbi Moscowitz would truly represent the Rebbe's *Ahavas Yisroel* and not enforce a policy born of hatred, jealousy, and anger.

He and Rabbi Yitzchok Wolf are also quoted as saying that only two families (ourselves and one other family) were affected; that the "others" never applied to send their children to Cheder this past year. Again, this is a ridiculous claim – the parents of almost all of the **40 children** affected wished to send them to Cheder, but had been told in no uncertain terms that they would not be allowed in.

Enough history; let me now discuss your letter...

First, your statement that Mrs. Turen's high school was "established in opposition to the existing LGHS" is interesting. What exactly does that mean? Are you aware that her school does not claim to be an official "Lubavitch" or "Chabad" institution? Mrs. Turen received a *brocho* from the Rebbe to run a girls' high school in Chicago. She ran a school for thirteen years that the vast majority of the parents were thrilled with. A higher percentage of her graduates were accepted to the best Seminaries than from any other school. And although some will try to tell you otherwise, she worked very hard at trying to have the entire mess settled via a Bais Din – I know because I was one of the ad-hoc committee members who worked on this with the Turens. Finally, **before the school ever opened, she obtained permission to open the school, in writing, from a Lubavitch Rav.** Did they neglect to mention that? Later, during the school year, **she obtained yet another *psak* reinforcing her right to run the school – this time signed by three Rabbonim of the Bais Din of Crown Heights.** Since Bnos Rabbeinu is clearly a "legitimate" school in terms of *halacha*, and since it does not violate any copyrights or trademarks by using the words "Lubavitch" or "Chabad" in its name, it is no different than any of the other Jewish schools in Chicago. Yet families are free to send one child to any *other* school if that is what the child needs, without having their other children kicked out of Cheder!

You state that the "moral grounds" for refusing students from families who have a girl attending Bnos Rabbeinu is that such parents are "publicly questioning the integrity" of the head shliach, and that this somehow undermines his "decisions and authority." What authority is this? He decided and used his authority to fire Mrs. Turen – to many of us a very poor decision, but perhaps his to make. So Mrs. Turen is now one of Anash – when did the Rebbe give a shliach "authority" over individual members of Anash? So what "authority" are we undermining – his dictatorial edict on an entire community to conform to *his wishes*?

You further state that we “by extension”, also question the integrity of all the other shluchim, and even the teachers of the schools. This is not only ridiculous, but it is untrue. Some of the local shluchim disagree with Rabbi Moscovitz on this issue, but are unable to speak out freely or they will lose their jobs. Do you mean to say that every time a parent has a difference with a principal or administrator of a school, then “by extension” they have the same argument with the teachers? I know of many instances in which a teacher disagreed with the administrators!

Next, you call Lubavitch Chinuch “one organic entity”. I hope not! First, because the Torah clearly encourages competition in *Chinuch* institutions, and second, because how can you explain all of the competing ads in Chabad publications – for Yeshivas and Seminaries – all going after the same students? Even here in Chicago the schools are clearly separate entities – they have separate boards, bank accounts, and articles of incorporation. When families are hurting financially with children in different Lubavitch schools, they are told that no, the schools are not one, and therefore scholarships cannot be combined! It can’t be both ways, whichever suits their immediate purpose!

You then state that there are “opportunities for kosher *Chinuch* in town for these [expelled] children”. On whose authority do you make such a statement – Rabbi Moscovitz, or Rabbi Yitzchok Wolf? Firstly, did the Rebbe not – in the strongest possible manner – urge us to seek out Lubavitch *Chinuch* for our children? Are you, as a Lubavitch Rav, advocating sending the Rebbe’s kinder to *mitnagdishe* schools?

And even if we did cv’s choose to ignore that advice, then there is the matter of these *mitnagdishe* schools even accepting our children! From personal experience I can tell you that it is very difficult to get these schools to accept a single Lubavitch student – it would be out of the question for them to accept ten, twenty, or more! [To test this, we tried to gain acceptance for just our 6th grade daughter to Bais Yaakov, but we were turned down. Their excuse was that this is “internal Lubavitch politics, and we don’t want to get involved.”]

I won’t even try to enter into a discussion of the “precedents” you list in your letter. I’m certainly not a Torah scholar, or even very learned, but as I understand these two well-known stories, they both go on to prove exactly the opposite point to what you are using them for! Besides, in our case we are concerned with children who are pre-*bar* and *bas mitzvah* – clearly another very significant difference!

Finally, you end your letter expressing the fear that these children would be a bad influence on the other children in the Cheder. In reality, some of these very children were among the best behaved and least *chutzpedik* children in the Cheder! There are children in the Cheder today who regularly require discipline, and can be found in the principal’s office often. Yet no one suggests that they be removed from Cheder. In the case of the forty expelled children, they themselves have done absolutely nothing to cause them to be expelled! Your ruling to Rabbi Moscovitz seeks to legitimize the punishing of innocent children. *Please show me where the Rebbe agrees with such action!*

The latest approach, which you do not state in your letter but you have said to various callers, is that if anyone chooses not to use the services of one Chabad *mosad*, then they lose the right to use the services any *mosad*. I believe there are families in the Cheder and the Mesivta today who have a child in some other school, for various reasons. Why have they not been kicked out? Clearly that argument has no basis.

We are now a year after this horrific “policy” was implemented in Chicago. Let’s look at the results:

- The community still has two high schools serving Lubavitch girls
- Most of the forty children kicked out of Cheder Lubavitch attended a new struggling Cheder (TzemachTzedek School) started in desperation by the parents of these children. The local Chabad “establishment” attacked this school. Prospective teachers were intimidated and threatened, prospective landlords were threatened so as not to rent space to the new school, and Rabbi Moscovitz sent a letter to all the Rabbonim of the city (including non-Lubavitch) asking that they refrain from providing any help to this new school. Where is the *halachic* permission for this? (Did you give him this *heter* as well?)
- At one point Rabbi Moscovitz issued an edict that the girls attending Bnos Rabbeinu could not daven on Shabbos at FREE (the closest Lubavitch shul with sufficient space). This must be a first – a Lubavitch shul denying access on Shabbos to Jews – Lubavitch children no less! Is this permissible, *al pi halacha*? Thanks to a few brave souls in Anash, this edict was successfully ignored!
- Days after the Bnos Rabbeinu High School moved into a new location in Chicago, they were suddenly inspected for fire code violations, resulting in eviction – even though other schools, including LGHS, operate in buildings having the same violations. My own detailed investigation of this incident revealed that the action was the result of a “high level political favor”. My understanding is that such “informing” on Jews is contrary to *halacha* – do you agree?
- One child (my eighth-grade son) did not have anywhere to go. He sat home for six months. For the first several months his teacher, who had been regularly tutoring him before all this happened, was forbidden to continue tutoring him – even in private, on his own time! This not only prevented my son from learning, but also affected this teacher’s *parnossa*. Perhaps you can explain what *halacha* allows this?
- The community “split” has been considerably widened. Rather than just dealing with two high schools, we now have two Cheders, and a new shul is being formed because many no longer feel comfortable *davening* in the existing shuls. There have been incidents of verbal abuse, forgery, and physical violence – all perpetuated by the “official” side or their associates.
- The forty children have now become the only Jewish children in Chicago (probably in the world!) not accepted into the Gan Yisroel day camp! This camp will accept totally non-*frum* children, but not these innocent Lubavitch children! This shameful act has now fostered the establishment of a “competing” camp as well!
- The Cheder has lost significant funding by expelling these families. This has resulted in teachers being denied their usual salary increases.
- Many families – because of their work associations with local *mosdos*, or because they had other children in the local schools – felt compelled to send children to

out of town schools. This imposed a significant financial burden on them that they could not afford, and caused much emotional anguish as well.

- The *Chilul Hashem* and *Chilul Lubavitch* in this city have been horrendous! The “official” letters sent to all the shuls and Rabbonim did much to spread the word throughout Chicago. So did threatening calls to prevent organizations from renting space to the schools. Local non-Lubavitch Rabbonim have been astounded at the actions of Rabbi Moscovitz and his team. Sadly, these other Rabbonim have been our only local source of help over the past months.

I could go on and on, listing specific incidents that would make you cringe. This is the direct result of your directive to Rabbi Moscovitz allowing him to create his policy.

When the original conflict over the firing of Mrs. Turen began, Rabbi Moscovitz insisted that it was not a “Moshiach” issue. That was correct – it was an issue of power, money, authority, and ego. Today, after nothing else seemed to work, he goes about telling people that it is a “Moshiach” issue – that we are all part of a “cult”. This is nonsense; a position taken just to garner support from people who oppose the “Moshichistim.” There are many involved families who do not at all consider themselves big “moshichistim” or “*yechiniks*.” However, as the terrorist tactics of the establishment continue, more and more Anash are polarizing to the Moshichist side. When we see those on one side acting in ways that are so contrary to what the Rebbe taught us, we are led to understand that they do not represent the truth.

I must say that I am personally surprised and appalled that you should have had a major part in this. I believe that you were tricked into your position by not being told the truth. But even so, one thing hurts – you had to know that your decision was going to have a major effect on an entire community. Yet you made that decision without soliciting any input from the other side of the argument. I would think that a Rav has an obligation to obtain input from both sides before issuing a ruling that can do such widespread damage.

The postscript to your letter seems to leave a crack in the door with regard to the above. If so, then I hope that you will take the contents of my letter, the many phone calls you received, and the personal visits by Chicago Anash, to do the right thing and **withdraw your permission for Rabbi Moscovitz’ policy.** Whether he continues the policy without such permission, or seeks the endorsement of some other Rav, at least you need not be implicated. Although I may have spoken sharply in this letter due to the tremendous suffering in this community this year, I hope that our past relationship will allow you to understand that I would prefer if you removed yourself from this mess before it gets messier. Why align yourself with people who are repeatedly violating *halacha* and *beshmutzing* the Rebbe’s name? I would think that your reputation as a Rav is more important than taking sides in a political struggle. Please, I beg you to officially remove your name from this mess!

I await a response – the response that I am seeking. I will consider this letter to you as a private communication for one week. After that, if your decision still stands, I will release it as an open letter to you, so that others can see both my arguments and my sentiments. This is not a threat; I simply feel that I have no other options – especially now that your letter has been circulated to the entire community.

As a final plea – *and I ask this of anyone even remotely involved in this controversy* – please look in a mirror, into your own eyes, and say aloud that you believe the Rebbe would endorse this policy of denying Chabad education to innocent Lubavitch children. Regardless of the issues, and whom you consider right or wrong, I defy any Lubavitcher to be able to do that.

Looking forward to a positive and speedy resolution to this, and an even speedier final resolution with the coming of Moshiach.

Sincerely,

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P.S. I wrote this letter well over a month ago, then heard about your illness and held off sending it. I wish you a *refuah sheleima*, however I decided that the letter needed to be sent regardless. The community in Chicago is also ill and needs a *refuah*.