



REBBE RESPONSA

The Rebbe's English Letters

The Rebbe's Vision for
the Department of Education

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A Word from the Publishers

Dear Readers,

We present **Issue 87** of *Rebbe Responsa*, a compilation of letters originally authored by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in English, themed **“A Department of Education”**.

In connection with recent current events, as well as the various themes of Chinuch in this week’s Parsha, in this booklet we explore **the Rebbe's vision for the Federal Department of Education**.

Here we see not just the Rebbe's clearly outlined vision for such a department, but also understand the immense and tremendously important impact it can have. In addition, we observe the efforts of the Rebbe in actually lobbying for this cause, corresponding with key people of influence, at various levels of federal government.

More details and background information are provided in the Introduction.

* * *

The Rebbe’s English letters contain a wealth of guidance and insight on a vast array of topics written in a style relatable to Jews from all walks of life. For access to over 5,000 of these letters, we encourage you to download the Rebbe Responsa app.

May we merit the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, speedily in our days.

The Rebbe Responsa Team

All Titles, Summaries, and Footnotes were added by the publisher unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

A New Era of Education

The late 1970s in America saw a new era of focus on education, led by then President Jimmy Carter, culminating in the establishment of the Federal Department of Education, founded on October 17, 1979 (Tishrei 5740). M

The Rebbe's involvement in the establishment of this department was extensive, from suggesting to explaining and finally lobbying, prompting Secretary of Education (Clinton administration) Richard Riley to remark about the Rebbe's support for the department's creation, "I owe my job to him."

Following is a brief outline of the events pertaining to this topic.

Beginnings

The Year 5736 was proclaimed by the Rebbe as "A year of Education", and a strong focus on activities of education continued in the subsequent few years.

In¹ 1978, U.S. Congress passed a resolution proclaiming 11 Nissan, the Rebbe's birthday, as "Education Day U.S.A."

President Carter signed a proclamation shortly afterwards, asking all Americans to observe Education Day (from that year and on, every U.S. President has joined in doing the same).

At the farbrengen on Yud-Alef Nissan, the Rebbe spoke at length on the subject, and urged the U.S. government to become a national and global leader in moral and ethical education. The Rebbe's remarks were published in a full-page ad in the Washington Post.

On September 18, 1978, the President wrote a warm letter to the Rebbe, saying "I read with great interest the full-page ad... your response to the resolution passed by Congress designating... 'Education Day - U.S.A.' I admire the thoughts which you expressed—and am grateful for your support and prayers... I would like to take this opportunity of extending to you my personal best wishes for many more years of good health and fruitful work".

¹ For a more complete overview on this subject, see Derher, Nissan 5778, "Education Day USA".

Federal Involvement

From its founding, the United States kept education under state and local control, with minimal federal involvement or funding. As of 1978, education remained consolidated under the Department of HEW (Health, Education, and Welfare), reducing its national priority. Despite many attempts to establish a separate Education Department, opposition was fierce. Critics worried about government expansion, religious schools' autonomy, and states' rights infringement.

In late January 1979 (Teves 5739), President Carter declared the idea to finally make the change, in his State of the Union address.

At the Farbrengen marking Yud Shevat, the Rebbe spoke of this momentous development and the tremendous national and global benefit furthering education will achieve (see the officially published *Sicha* below).

The Rebbe subsequently sent letters of support, where he also outlined his position on the importance of the idea, to President Carter, Vice President Walter Mondale, as well as senators and congressmen, a selection of which we present in this booklet.

Eventually, the Department was successfully founded on 26 Tishrei 5740.

Excerpts from the Rebbe's Sichá *10 Shevat, 5739²*

Endorsement of the President's Education Program

...Since last year, when the U.S. Congress passed the J.H. Res. 770, authorizing and requesting the President to proclaim 18th of April, 1978 (11 Nissan, 5738) as "EDUCATION DAY, U.S.A.," we have witnessed a growing awareness of the importance of Education as one of the highest priorities of the nation. Nowhere has this awareness been more evident than in Congress and, especially, in the Executive Branch of the government.

² Official release published in *Report on "Education Day - U.S.A." Legislation* (Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, 1979).

President Carter, in his State of the Union message at the beginning of this year, 1979, gave forceful expression to the urgent need of education reform. He has proposed an imaginative and sweeping program of restructuring the Federal stand on education through the creation of a Cabinet-level Department of Education, at the same time requesting Congress to approve a significant increase in federal aid to education. That he has done this at a time when cutting federal expenditure-even in this vital area-would have been more popular in certain sectors, bespeaks his courage and conviction that upgrading the educational system is "the noblest task of government," and in the nation's most vital interests.

The President's proposal is a very real and practical step in the Nation's bicentennial history to give new direction and dimension to its educational system. I hope and pray that his conviction and concern will be shared by the vast majority of Americans of all walks of life.

I urge everyone to let their representatives in Congress know that they wholeheartedly support the President's proposal, with a view to securing the earliest possible enactment of legislation implementing the said program.

Basic Objectives of Education

In my remarks on the subject of Education in connection with the aforementioned J.H. Res. 770, I pointed out that what we need most is the upgrading of the quality of education in terms of values and character building. To reiterate.

Education, in general, should not be limited to the acquisition of knowledge and preparation for a career or in common parlance, "to make a better living." We must think in terms of a "better life," not only for the individual, but also for society as a whole. The educational system must, therefore, pay more attention, indeed the main attention, to the building of character, with emphasis on moral and ethical values.

I am sure that no one can disagree with the above principle. But a principle, however worthy, is good only if it is actually implemented in the everyday life and conduct. The President's proposal offers hope that more effective education help of the Federal government will provide the framework and means for upgrading the quality of education in the above sense... I firmly believe, and urge, that the Administration should accentuate this

aspect – and not merely on its own merits, but also because it will inspire new confidence in education and help overcome the discouragement and disappointment that many feel as a result of the shortcomings of the education system up until now, which, in turn, will help expedite the legislative process in Congress.

A Light to Other Nations

Our Sages declared, "Everybody is indebted to the wheat-giver."

Divine Providence has richly blessed this nation and land to be the "bread basket" for many nations, rich and poor. The U.S.A. has been, and will continue to be, an international benefactor on a vast scale, through generous economic and other forms of aid. And, of course, it is only right and proper to share one's blessings with the less fortunate.

By the same token, this Nation has a moral obligation to share its spiritual blessings with others.

The new direction in education which this Nation is about to embark upon provides an excellent opportunity of setting an example to other nations. But more than an example is needed; a conscious effort is called for to influence other nations, particularly developing countries and beneficiaries of American aid, to upgrade their educational systems with emphasis on those eternal moral and ethical values which are the very foundation of a civilized society... in a concerted effort to make the world a better and safer place for all...

To be sure, aid including "wheat aid" material aid, is to be given and is more welcome when it is given freely, unconditionally. But for a human being the material and spiritual must go hand-in-hand together... Many a discreet way can be found to encourage other nations to follow the way of placing education at the top of national priorities, to the extent of investing a consistently growing share of the national resources in education, even while cutting down on military and similar expenditures.

And the sooner all the nations of the world begin to divert their resources from implements of war to implements of peace, beginning by inner peace and harmony of the individual as well as living in peace and harmony with one's neighbors, the sooner we will see the realization of the Prophetic vision: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation." Only through real and proper education can this be achieved, G-d willing.

1

Mr. President, Lead the Way!

*Full endorsement and acclaim to Proposal of Cabinet-level DOE;
Hope that governments of other nations will emulate; The unique
position of influence of the U S. government*

By the Grace of G-d
12 Shevat, 5739
February 9, 1979
Brooklyn, N. Y.

President Jimmy Carter³
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Greeting and Blessing:

In light of your gracious letter⁴ of September 18, 1978, with reference to the resolution passed by Congress designating April 18, "Education Day - U.S.A." which you signed into law,⁵ it will come as no surprise to you, Mr. President, that your proposal to establish a Cabinet-level Department of Education has received my fullest endorsement and acclaim.

This was one of the main topics of my public address on the occasion of the annual observance of the Yahrzeit of my saintly predecessor on the 10th of Shevat.⁶

At the same time I expressed my ardent hope that not only will the proposal be expeditiously acted upon by Congress, but that governments of other nations will emulate your example. For, although some countries already have a separate Department of

Source: Photocopy of original.

³ For additional correspondence with **President Carter** see letters dated 29 Tishrei 5738, 29 Elul 5738 and 13 Shevat 5740, on the Rebbe Responsa App.

⁴ See letter as quoted in **Introduction**. It is due to note that the Rebbe responded in a letter dated Erev Rosh Hashana 5739, and here is only making mention of the letter.

⁵ See **Introduction**.

⁶ See **Introduction**, and the full Sicha printed above.

Education, there are those that have not, and all those where education has still to be placed as a top national priority.

I am, of course, referring to education in a broader and deeper sense - not merely as a process of imparting knowledge and training for a "better living," but for a "better life," with due emphasis on character building and moral and ethical values.

Indeed,⁷ the U.S. government, and you Mr. President personally, are in a unique position of influence among the nations of the world, particularly those benefiting from U.S. economic, cultural and other forms of aid, to encourage them to follow your example and to share your "conviction that the noblest task of government is education" - to quote your statement (2/28/78) a conviction which has been translated into bold, comprehensive action. I am confident that the response will be positive, and I venture to say that it would have a favorable feedback impact on those in this country who, for one reason or another, are not, as yet, enthusiastic about Congress legislation on the submitted project.

With prayerful wishes, and with esteem and blessing,

M. Schneerson

⁷ In the above quoted Sicha, the Rebbe elaborates along these lines; see Sicha printed above.

2

Lobbying the Senator

*Appreciation for role in Education Day; hope for fullest support in
DOE proposal*

By the Grace of G-d
15th of Shevat, 5739
(February 12, 1979)
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
U. S. Senate
Room 2241, Dirksen Office Bldg.
Washington, D. C. 20510

Greeting and Blessing:

In view of your prominent role in connection with the adoption of J.H. Res. 770, designating April 18, 1978 as "EDUCATION DAY, U.S.A.," -

And I take this opportunity of reiterating also in writing my most sincere appreciation, -

You will, I hope, be interested to read the enclosed memo⁸ briefly outlining my response to President Carter's proposal to create a Cabinet level Department of Education.

I trust you will agree with the views expressed therein, and will give your fullest support to the required legislation, while giving expression, in the way you know best, also to the other two pertinent points.

With prayerful wishes for success in all your endeavors, and

With esteem and blessing.

M. Schneerson

Source: Photocopy of original.

⁸ We assume that the reference is to the officially published Sichah of Yud Shevat, printed above.

3

What Is Our Educational System Lacking?

Letter to the Vice President: Interest in remarks at DOE committee meeting; Educational System must be restructured to focus on the main goal of morality and ethics; Recognition of such will help gain support for the initiative

By the Grace of G-d
29 Shevat, 5739
February 26, 1979

The Honorable Walter F. Mondale
Vice-President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Vice-President:

I read with profound interest your Remarks at Meeting of Ad Hoc Committee For a Cabinet Department of Education, Jan. 24, 1979. Needless to say, I fully endorse the substance and urgency of your message. Indeed, in light of the saying of our Sages, "Words coming from the heart penetrate the heart and are eventually effective," I am confident, Mr. Vice-President, that your words will find the proper response they deserve.

You will surely recall, Sir, the meeting at the Caucus Room of Congress, which you graciously chaired, in celebration of the H.J. Res. 770, authorizing and requesting the President to issue the Proclamation designating April 18, 1978 as "Education Day, U.S.A." I trust you also read some of my remarks in this connection that appeared in the Congressional Record, the thrust of which, permit me to reiterate, was:

Education, in general, should not be limited to the acquisition of knowledge and preparation for a career, or in common parlance "to make a better living." We must think in terms of a "better life," not only for the individual, but also for society as a whole. The educational system must, therefore, pay more attention, indeed, the

main attention, to the building of character, with emphasis on moral and ethical values,

The above principle, which is surely indisputable, assumes added significance now that the Administration is making an all-out effort to promulgate the required legislation to implement the President's proposal for a Cabinet-level Department of Education - for the following reason:

The skepticism on the part of those who, at present, oppose the Administration's educational program (of which you make mention in your Remarks) is, I believe, in large measure due to the shortcomings of the educational system in this country, which leaves much to be desired in the way of achieving its most basic objectives for a better society. In a country, such as ours, so richly blessed with democracy, freedom of opportunity, and material resources, one would expect that such anti-moral and anti-social phenomena as juvenile delinquency, vandalism, lack of respect for law and order, etc., would have been radically reduced, to the point of ceasing to be a problem. Hence, it is not surprising that many feel frustrated and apathetic.

I submit, therefore, that the Administration's resolve to restructure the Federal education role - long overdue - would be well served if it were coupled with greater emphasis on the objective of improving the quality of education in terms of moral and ethical values and character building that should be reflected in the actual everyday life of our young and growing generation.

I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of a brief memorandum on the subject, which I trust you will find of interest.

With prayerful wishes and blessings for success in your endeavors to upgrade the educational system, and in all your public and personal affairs,

I remain, Mr. Vice-President,

Cordially yours,

4

How To Get Everyone on Board

Letter to a congressman: Need for improvement in national education, only possible through Federal government; the various and compelling reasons for supporting a federal effort (which does not interfere with local)

By the Grace of G-d
16th of Adar, 5739
(March 15, 1979)
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The Honorable Benjamin S. Rosenthal
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Greeting and Blessing:

Thank you for your letter of March 8 and enclosures. I appreciate your thoughtful acknowledgment of my letter and memo on the proposed creation of a separate Department of Education, and letting me know your views on the matter.

Since, in the interest of brevity, my memo apparently has not adequately clarified my position, permit me to restate some of my main points on the subject under discussion.

I am certain that you will agree that the state of education in this country (as in many others) leaves much to be desired; that the status quo (as reflected in juvenile delinquency, etc.) is far from satisfactory, and, what is worse, has been steadily eroding; and that some determined nation-wide effort is called for to upgrade the quality of public education in this resourceful country.

I trust you will also agree that such an enormous effort, which is surely in the highest national interest, can come only from the Federal government with the fullest cooperation of State, City, and County.

In my view, a separate, adequately funded Cabinet-level Department of Education, subject to legislative safeguards to

ensure that the traditional primacy of States and localities in education affairs would not be jeopardized, could well meet the challenge.

The main reasons why I support the said proposal are as follows:

1. The creation of a distinct Cabinet-level Department of Education would have a salutary impact on all who are involved in education, particularly parents, teachers, and students. The very innovation of upgrading the status of Education from that of an adjunct to, or division of, another national agency, would pointedly underscore its proper place among the Nation's highest priorities.

2. The workshops of child education are the school and the home. For various reasons, which need not be discussed here, contemporary parents in this country, as in many others, have virtually abdicated their educational responsibility, leaving the school and the street as the primary, almost exclusive, factors in the child's education. Insofar as the street is concerned there is precious little that can be done as things now stand. More can be done, and needs to be done, to get parents more involved in the education of their children. But in the final analysis it is the public school where the greatest improvement can and must be achieved.

3. Among the factors that lie at the roots of the shortcomings of public education, two – in my opinion – command primary attention: One has to do with the general curriculum, which should place much greater emphasis on character building and moral and ethical values. The other has to do with the quality of teaching - by qualified, dedicated and motivated teachers. The latter point requires the upgrading of teachers' salaries on par with comparable professions in other fields of science and relieving them, as far as possible, of other frustrations and stresses.⁹

4. The upgrading of the Nation's educational system will, of course, require considerable Federal spending. But this is one area where spending has built-in returns, not only in the long term, but also in almost immediate gains, in terms of diminishing expenditures in the penal system, crime prevention, reduction in vandalism, drug abuse, etc. In the longer term it would also bring

⁹ Regarding teacher's salaries see also letter dated 15 Kislev, 5724 on the Rebbe Responsa app.

savings in expenditure on health and welfare, and – one may venture to say - even in the defense budget, since a morally healthy, strong and united nation is in itself a strong deterrent against any enemy.

5. The creation of a separate Cabinet-level Department of Education, as I understand it, has been conceived not for the purpose of merely improving administrative efficiency, nor merely as coordinator of existing programs, or of similar technical reason. The main purpose is to breathe new life into the whole educational system of this Nation, and to involve the whole Nation, through its Federal government, in this massive and concerted effort. As such – I am convinced – it deserves everyone's support.

With esteem and blessing,

M. Schneerson

* * *

The same day, the Rebbe wrote an additional letter to congressman Rosenthal on the matter:

With further reference to your letter of March 8 and enclosures, I have, of course, noted your particular objection to inclusion within a separate Department of Education of the operations and functions of Department of Defense dependent schools.

However, for obvious reasons I have not referred to this particular issue in my accompanying letter, since my main concern is with the basic proposal of the creation of a separate Department of Education, which I consider in the best interests of the nation, as outlined in my other letter.

Hence I am not taking any position on the inclusion of this, or any other particular operation or function within the proposed Department of Education, especially as it is not in my domain to evaluate such an issue, nor does such an issue affect the basic premise of a separate Department of Education. Moreover, I am confident that all side-issue can be satisfactorily resolved and safeguarded, without deflecting attention from the main purpose at hand.



18 Tammuz, 5702



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