



Unlocking The Keys To Parnassah

As families, communities, and bills keep growing, are solid *parnassah* options growing apace?

Addressing the Barriers

With the major roadblocks identified, a new generation stands a fighting chance of splitting the sea

Pesach is a time to remember and relive our collective experiences as Jews in Egypt and subsequently, the desert. As much as most of us would still like to be receiving our direct daily sustenance from Heaven, we in the Jewish community today must find ways to earn a decent livelihood. *Parnassah* requires serious *hishtadlus*, and as the cost of kosher food, yeshivah tuition, and housing continue to rise, the need to earn a decent living becomes paramount. We beseech Hashem for *parnassah* so that we may do more than simply satisfy our physical needs; we need it so that we may fulfill our religious obligations, as well.

And yet, *parnassah* has always been as difficult as splitting the sea. In my view, the major roadblocks to our communal success are a lack of advance planning, unrealistic expectations, and a dearth of accurate career information.

The good news is there are some fairly simple ways we can begin to address the above barriers. Here are some first steps:

- We should begin planning for career readiness as early as high school. In particular, I believe that basic written and oral communications must be taught seriously. In order to succeed in any field, people must possess good communication skills, but our young people are often lacking in this area. Independent of college or any other vocational training, we would be remiss if we did not redouble our emphasis on communication. I have encountered many students entering college without appropriate communication skills.

- To serve those adolescents who did not graduate high school, we should launch GED preparation programs. Without a diploma or GED, students cannot qualify for federal financial aid, which helps defray tuition costs. These students are often stuck in a vicious cycle. Because they didn't finish high school, they cannot enter college and may therefore be shut out of future opportunities. We can break the cycle. By offering high school dropouts a chance to earn a GED at an early stage, we can give them the key to success at a later stage, if they wish to turn it.

- We can and should organize formal *parnassah* panels or career seminars several times a year in various Jewish communities. These panels would feature workshops and sessions presented by people employed in a variety of fields. Current and realistic information

on the aptitude and education required to be successful in a given field could be offered, as well as job market landscape, available opportunities, and salary level. Perhaps most important would be the chance to establish relationships with future mentors.

- We should also offer 12–15-week courses on entrepreneurship and e-commerce. Young people often tell me they plan to go into “business.” We must provide realistic, nuts-and-bolts information on the fundamentals of starting a business — creating a business plan, securing funding, assessing risk, managing employees, setting goals, determining earning potential, and more. If we offer such courses, we can help ensure that those who do decide to move ahead will have the tools necessary to succeed.

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We should also keep in mind that while health sciences, accounting, and information technology are strong *parnassah* options, degree programs are not the only ticket to a decent livelihood.

For those who do not have the interest or aptitude to pursue a college degree, vocational training should be explored. Tradesmen such as plumbers and electricians are always in demand. These fields can generate a good living, especially if one chooses to run his own business.

As we celebrate Pesach with our families, I urge individuals and community members to implement the aforementioned strategies so the next generation can truly become independent, successful, and free to spend extra time in pursuit of Torah and *avodas Hashem*.