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Perspectives

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UNDER-AGE CHINUCH

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Gancz

CAN EVERYONE TEACH?

Rabbi Dovid Wichnin

ONE SIZE FITS ALL?

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TAKING A BYTE OF KNOWLEDGE

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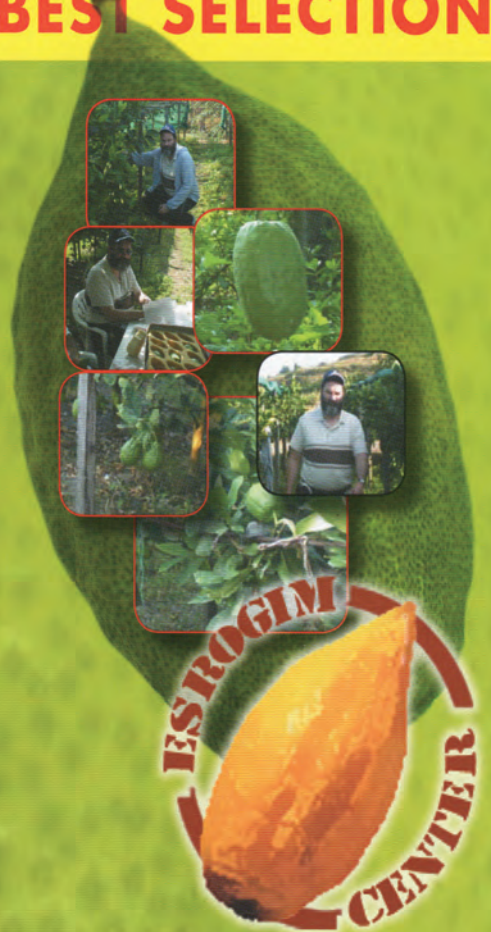
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The objective of this publication is to create a platform where the issues facing anash today can be addressed. In this publication, Rabbonim will be able to offer their guidance, mechanchim to share their experience and anash worldwide to voice their thoughts.

The bulk of this issue has been dedicated to Chinuch, particularly the subject of individualized education. We hope that this publication will offer you new insight and inspiration, and together we will reach new heights.

We encourage you to participate in this endeavor by sharing your perspective in an essay, short thought, or letter of response, which we will IYH include in the next issue.

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger



p: 347.471.1770
e: info@MerkazAnash.com
w: www.MerkazAnash.com
478 Albany Ave. Ste. 11
Brooklyn NY 11203

Rabbi Shimon Helinger - Director
Rabbi Eli Simon - Administrator
Rabbi Chaim Chazan - Content Editor
Rabbi Schneur Zalman Rabin - Narrator
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Rabbi Aharon Dovid Gancz

Under-Age Chinuch

A digest on the appropriateness of age in matters of Chinuch.

Adapted from a private talk to parents.

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Gancz serves as menahel ruchni and magid shiur in Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim of Morristown NJ. Rabbi Gancz has been involved in chinuch years previous, holding various positions in Elementary and Mesivta. He is a sought after lecturer and a shliach in Monsey NY.

■ CHINUCH FROM A YOUNG AGE ■

Chazal highly praised Yehoshua ben Gamla, a *kohen gadol* during the second *Beis Hamikdash* for revolutionizing the *chinuch* system. Before his time, serious Torah study for boys only began at the age of sixteen, when the *bochurim* would make the journey to Yerushalayim to learn from the *melamdim* there. At this age, they were not so submissive, and oftentimes when admonished by a *melamed*, the student would rebel and escape. With keen understanding of the children's nature, Yehoshua ben Gamla instituted that every town have its own *melamdim* and begin teaching the children from the young age of six or seven (Bava Basra 21a). Engaging them while still young and receptive would guarantee their future in *Yiddishkeit*.

This same approach is necessary when educating

our own children.

To guarantee their future adherence to *Yiddishkeit*, our children must be inculcated with its values and practices at a young age. That way, whatever we instill in them, whether by lesson or example, will become a part of them and remain with them for years to come.

Pushing it off, until they are older and "ready to understand," is likely to cause resentment and rebellion. Furthermore, even if they will go along with it, their learning will likely remain extraneous to their character.

■ AGE APPROPRIATE EDUCATION ■

Just as it is imperative that *chinuch* not begin belatedly, it is of equal importance that it not be initiated too early.

The Gemara quotes Rav: “Do not accept a child until the age of six, but from then on, you should feed him like an ox.” Tosfos addresses the seeming contradiction this has with the *mishna* in Avos, “*Ben chomesh shanim l’mikra*,” that learning begin at the age of five.

Tosfos explains that the *mishna* in Avos refers to an exceptional child, whereas our Gemara is speaking of the average one. Moreover, the Gemara does not cite one specific age, but sets it at “six or seven,” depending on the capabilities of the individual child.

The reasoning for this is can be easily understood:

A child must be capable of comprehending the education being imparted, and if feeding him too heavy of a dose, beyond his ability of digestion, will cause him more harm than good.

Parents and educators must evaluate each individual child. If found to be excelling in his progress, he will benefit from additional growth, but inundating him with what he is not yet ready for, can produce long term harm.

At times, the child himself may be unaware of his capabilities and may take too much upon himself, but we, the *parent/mechanech*, must recognize this and set him on the path which is appropriate for his level.

▪ GOOD TIMING ▪

The *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch (OC 343) concerning training children in *mitzvos* is clear: The obligation to be *mechanech* a child to fulfill a *mitzvas asei* is only once he can grasp the meaning of that particular *mitzvah* and is physically able to fulfill it.

The *mitzvah* to listen to *kiddush* and *havdala*

Just as it is imperative that chinuch not begin belatedly, it is of equal importance that it not be initiated too early.

should be taught to a child who can comprehend the concept of *Shabbos* as a day of rest. If he knows how to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* properly, he should do so, and the same applies to all *mitzvos asei d’rabonon*.

Even though the criterion is the child’s comprehension, nevertheless, his capabilities are very much taken into consideration. Therefore, there are some *mitzvos asei* from which he must abstain, though he may be able to fulfill them, such as fasting on Yom Kippur. It is forbidden to allow a young child to fast. Nowadays,

the *poskim* write, even an older child should be discouraged from fasting and only be introduced to it one hour at a time.

In this regard, concerning *Birkas Hamazon*, the Alter Rebbe writes (OC 187:4) that children under the age of eight should be introduced to it gradually, by slowly being taught portions of each *bracha* until they reach full mastery. At that age, the child can understand the need to thank Hashem for food but is not fully capable and ready to recite the entire *bracha*.

In a similar vein, the Alter Rebbe (OC 70:2) quotes an opinion that even children who have reached the age of *chinuch* are exempt from reciting *Krias Shma* in its proper time. Because the fathers, who train the children in the fulfillment of *mitzvos*, are not usually home during those hours, the children cannot be expected to perform this *mitzvah*. (While the Alter Rebbe recommends that one be *machmir* like a differing opinion, this *logic* is accepted by all opinions.)

Concerning *mitzvos lo saasei*, the Alter Rebbe writes (OC 343:2-3) that once a child can understand how certain behaviors are wrong and should not be done, the father is obligated to stop him from performing an *aveira d’oraisa* or *d’rabonon*. If as of yet, he still has difficulty grasping

that certain behaviors are not allowed (although he may jump back from the loud “NO”), the father need not train him in this regard. For example: A three year old child cannot comprehend what is wrong with carrying something in his pocket on Shabbos, and one need not object if the child carries something outside.

These examples all point to the fact that even in those *mitzvos* in which a child is obligated, his capabilities must be taken into account.

■ THE NATURE OF CHINUCH ■

Chinuch is a manifold process with diverse facets:

Chinuch for the Future: “*Chanoch l’naar al pi darko gam ki yazkin lo yosur mimenah*” – It is a training for the future, though as of now, the child is essentially exempt. Therefore, the process is gradual according to the child’s ability and understanding. Pushing too hard and overwhelming his system will not properly train him for the future.

Chinuch for the Present: However, *chinuch* also has an immediate benefit of *kedusha*, and when the child performs a *mitzvah*, his *neshama* is immediately affected. Similarly, there is a direct negative effect on the *neshama* when certain *aveiros* are committed, even by a child not yet obligated. Hence we find the stringency to protect a child from consuming non-*kosher* foods, even though he cannot yet understand this concept, because such food contaminates the mind and heart of the eater.

Halacha dictates that a nursing mother who must partake of non-*kosher* foods should not nurse her baby due to the harmful *ruchniyusdike* effect this will have on the child. How much more so with regard to the child himself, that he should not ingest

non-*kosher* foods (Rama YD 81:7; Sha”ch there). If such a situation arises, we should not merely stand on the side and educate the child, rather we must do whatever it takes to eliminate the non-*kosher* food. Though the father is not **commanded** to take away the non-*kosher* food from a young child, nevertheless he should do so because it is harmful (Sha”ch there; See Ktzos HaShulchan of R’ Chaim Na’eh 147:4 at length).

For this reason, the Rebbe spoke of protecting babies from seeing unholy images, including non-*kosher* animals. Though these children have no understanding of what they are seeing, it nevertheless immediately impacts the *kedusha* of their *neshama*.

[In light of the above, one could strongly question those mothers who bring their 3-4 year old son with them to the swimming pool. Though the child has no *yetzer hara* yet, it is very possible that the non-*tzniusdik* sights will harm his *neshama* immediately, just as a little stuffed rabbit would, if not worse.]

We behave this way with regard to *gashmiyus* concerns:

We protect our child regardless of the child’s comprehension. We lock closets, employing child safety gadgets, to ensure that the child will not reach detergents and medicines, regardless of the child’s awareness of the danger. If *ch”v*, a child does manage to break through our safety measures, we have the poison-control number handy. Because protection from poison is not about the future; it is an immediate danger.

However, when the danger is not immediate, we are not so forceful. We do not enforce the child’s saying “Thank You!” or his sharing with others, in the same way we protect him from danger. These behaviors are for the future and will be instilled

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Chinuch also has an immediate benefit of kedusha, and when the child performs a mitzvah, his neshama is immediately affected.

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■ EARLY CHINUCH ■

Because of the positive immediate effect *mitzvos* have, there are certain ones which are taught to even the very young, though they have not yet reached the age of *chinuch* and cannot understand the significance of the *mitzvah*.

Chazal say: “When a child learns to speak, his father should teach him ‘*Torah tziva lanu...*’” (Rashi Devarim 11:19) The Alter Rebbe writes in Shulchan Aruch (OC 124:10) that we should teach even a very young child to answer *Amen*, because from that moment, he earns a *chelek* in *Olam Haboh*. Though the child is very young and does not yet understand the meaning of what he is saying, nevertheless, words of Torah bring and instant benefit for his *neshama*.

In the letter to children having their *upsherin*, the Rebbe writes that at this age we begin training the child with the *mitzvos* of wearing *tzitzis*, reciting *brachos* in the morning, *Birkas Hamazon*, and *Krias Shma She’al Hamita*. The Rebbe does not mention *Amen*, *Amen yehei shmei rabba* and reciting *brachos* over food, for these should have been taught even before the age of three.

The same applies to wearing a *yarmulke*, about which the Alter Rebbe writes (Mahadura Basra 2:6) that even children should cover their head to instill *yiras shamayim*. He also mentions that some have the *minhag* to put it on prior to the age of three.

It is worth noting that although we do not officially expect proper performance of most *mitzvos* early on, we nevertheless introduce them. Accountability for *kiddush*, for example, only officially begins at a later age (see above), yet we still bring a toddler to

the *Shabbos* table to listen, and the same applies to many other areas. We engulf the child in *kedusha*, *mitzvos*, and *avodas Hashem* in a pure Yiddishe, chassidishe environment. However, being that as of yet, he is not an equal player, these *mitzvos* are not enforced, and in the illustration mentioned above, if the toddler is tired, we do not make him stay up for *kiddush*.

As Chazal tell us, the mother of Rebbi Yehoshua ben Chananya brought his cradle near the shul so that he absorb the sound of Torah even as a small baby. The Bartenura (Avos 2:8) points out that this was in fact the catalyst for his becoming a great *tanna*.

However, it is important to note that notwithstanding the importance of this early *kedusha*, it must all be done in a pleasant manner, which will draw the child to *Yiddishkeit* for years to come.

In conclusion:

The educational aspect of *chinuch* is formal, gradual, and according to the child’s understanding. Just as we do not teach Chumash to a child who cannot yet read, we do not expect of them certain behaviors that they are not yet ready for.

Together with this must be included the protection from *ruchniyušdike* harm, an imbuing of *kedusha* and teaching by osmosis in a *ruchniyušdike* ambiance of *mitzvos* and *maisim tovim*. This aspect of *chinuch* is paramount from the moment the child is born.

■

In Part 2 we will discuss the manner in which we should educate our children, and the proper balance of warmth and discipline.





Rabbi Dovid Wichnin



Can Everyone Teach?

Rabbi Dovid Wichnin was primarily known as the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Tiferes Bochurim in Morristown NJ and the Rov of the Tzemach Tzedek shul in Monsey NY. Earlier in his life he served as a school principal in Boston MA. He passed away in 5755.

Teaching, has more connoisseurs than adherents. Almost everyone has an opinion about this art and about the people who practice it. They usually begin “I am not a teacher nor an educator, but I do think this method is absolutely . . . “ or, “This teacher doesn’t know how to teach.” or, “Wow he’s a great educator!” etc.

Like religion, the subject of teaching inspires long, heated, usually open-ended, arguments. Among teachers too there exists lots of professional pride, mostly toward others. Teachers, as a group, usually consider themselves experts in their field. They feel they understand the child well, have first-hand knowledge of his strengths and his weaknesses, his aspirations and desperations. If something goes wrong in the classroom it is usually blamed on outside factors rather than their own shortcomings. This strong sense of self-esteem often prevents many a teacher from heeding the

advice and counsel of a colleague.

Ironically this sense of pride is only felt towards others, but not about one’s self. Teachers are not generally proud of their calling, especially the ones who teach younger grades, and even more especially from teachers. Perhaps the lack of self-esteem comes from the fact that teaching is something almost everyone is called upon to do at one time or another in various forms and contexts. Whether it be the parent, the boss at the plant, the rabbi of a shul, or the president of the country, all have to teach and educate those in their charge. If everybody is doing it, it’s naturally hard to feel proud and unique because the teacher is just doing more of the same.

Yet every generation is only as good as its teachers. One would therefore expect the ‘formal’ teachers—those trained for that purpose—to be people of

high standards and proper moral standing. Even that has been abandoned nowadays. Teachers are trained to be good technicians in the mechanics of information transfer and class management. Such intangibles as honesty, integrity, devotion, moral commitment and a sense of destiny are considered of secondary importance at best. Of course today's generation of teachers is a product of their predecessors so that we cannot blame only our contemporaries for this sorry state.

While the above is mainly applicable to teachers in general, it is also true of Torah teachers and educators who, in addition to lack of self respect, lack of adequate preparation, and universal criticism, have their unique joys and sorrows to contend with.

One can cite an avalanche of quotations from our holy sources showing how great and lofty are those who teach Torah to others, especially to children. They are compared to the highest, most noble beings, while their work is likened to G-d's own Work²—'Who teaches the Torah to the Jewish nation'. Halachacally we are (of course) urged to fear and respect our teachers (almost) as much as we fear G-d — Moro Rabcho Kmor Shomayim say our sages in Pirkei Avos. On the other hand the halacha is extremely demanding of teachers. It treats very strictly those who do not live up to the highest standards of performance and integrity in their work and dedication. In fact the Torah allows the usually prohibited act of ruthless competition to be used as a tool for the improvement of teaching. Teachers who renege on their duty are actually threatened with grave consequences.

In a way, teachers or mechanchim (Torah educators) are like other Jews, only more so, to paraphrase a well-known cliché, but because their contribution is so valuable and so revered, their

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iniquities are reprimanded in harsher ways. As is true about the general fateful history of our nation, we are chosen for greatness and great we must remain, or else... To become as careless and apathetic as other nations, to give up the ultimate rewards in order to avoid the risk of ultimate punishment is an alternative which is not open to us.

All this however, is acceptable when and if it comes from Heaven. True, a person usually becomes a teacher by choice; usually but not always. But what if after choosing teaching as a way of life, one suddenly (or gradually) realizes that it

is much too difficult or unsuitable an occupation? The mechanech is suddenly faced with powerful dissuasion and even outright restrictions about contemplating a change of occupation. Especially nowadays, when teaching is deemed a spiritual, life-giving activity within the Jewish community, a teacher considering change is made to feel as if he were a traitor to Jewish survival.

And here is the painful irony. On the one hand, a mechanech is made to feel that the future of every child in his charge as a Jew and as a mentch depends upon his, the teacher's, performance; that he must therefore be devoted every minute to every child. That lack of absolute dedication constitutes an act of cheating on the child's best chances for mental and spiritual development to which he is surely entitled, etc. That the teacher must always search for better, newer, and more effective methods to challenge and inspire the students. That endless lesson preparations, ways of assuring an exciting lesson delivery, working out interesting home assignments etc., are his duties.

As if that were not sufficient, the teacher is also expected to be in the proper mood when he faces the class no matter what kind of hardships he may be afflicted with in his own private life. For if he

upsets a child, he may have damaged that student's interest and excitement in Yiddishkeit for years to come. Surely that's a very heavy burden to carry. On simpler terms, if the teacher went to sleep late the night before, because he stayed up with a crying child or for any other reason, and lacks his usual vigor the next morning, he has already committed a moral and perhaps a legal misdemeanor.

In the light of the above, we should expect that the community in general and parents of students in particular would respect and admire the individual who has put himself in a position of such hazardous responsibility and hardship for their sake. We would think that the least the community of parents and other responsible individuals could do would be to treat the mechanech—melamed as graciously as possible in dignified honor, proper remuneration and gratitude. Let it be made clear that we are not referring here to the master teacher or expert educator of which there are very few, even less than in other less complex professions. (Even these outstanding mechanchim are regrettably considered to be on the lower rungs of the frum social ladder). We are talking here about the majority of teachers and mechanchim who are the mainstay of our educational apparatus. It's what happens to them that really matters.

And what really happens? They are not respected, neither are they valued. They are neither envied nor admired. The general assumption is that most of them became teachers because they couldn't do anything else for a living! In other words they, the mechanchim, are being equated with the shlemiels of the community, a kind of a necessary but unworthy bunch.

Here is a vicious cycle. Teachers are treated

disrespectfully. The students who of course knows exactly in what esteem his teacher is held, especially if he is blessed with the kind of zealous parents who never hesitate to criticize his teacher or other teachers in the child's presence, perhaps even using vivid negative terminology — that student naturally hopes to grow up and become anything but a teacher. When the time comes for him to choose an occupation he will surely avoid the teaching field unless . . . unless he really can't help it. Then of course he will be confirming the "traditional" assumption that those who become teachers cannot do anything else.

The ones who really make sure that their children won't be teachers are the teachers themselves. Just look and ask around and see how many teachers raised their children to follow in their professional footsteps. The few that did are the exceptions that validate the rule.

This undesirable situation will not change without some drastic remedies. It surely wont change by giving the teachers more mussar and sermons on the necessity to increase devotion and dedication and contemplate the great responsibility which is theirs. All this approach can accomplish is to further frustrate those who are already ridden with feelings of guilt and inadequacy and failure about their lack of perfection. (The ones who do not feel guilty will never be moved

by strong words of rebuke and moralizing in any way). All that harping on teachers' shortcomings will accomplish will be to scare away potential candidates, who will rightfully feel that teaching and chinuch is a job of enormous demands that offers very meager returns.

We must rather make teaching an attractive

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endeavor to the potential teacher while he or she is still a student in the yeshiva or seminary. An educational drive must be undertaken by those whose words are respected in the community to convince parents and others to relate to teachers with the utmost honor in shul, in the market place, and above all at home. There must be a steady and consistent demand by community leaders that teachers be well-paid and well-praised. Teachers and mechanchim should be regarded as our real heroes for the way they maintain a daily routine of discipline, hard work, and dedication, more than those whose occasional acts of valor for Jewish causes are usually given the highest admiration.

Furthermore, only those who really want to teach should be encouraged to do so. Student-candidates should be carefully selected on the basis of their innate ability and interest in teaching. In turn, they should be guided by the Yeshiva or Girls' Seminary administration in specially designed courses in the techniques of classroom management in all its ramifications. No one should be pressured into entering or remaining in chinuch if he or she does not feel completely comfortable there. A teacher should not have to feel that he is binding himself into a life-long commitment as soon as he accepts his first job.

Another important consideration is that teachers and mechanchim in general should be relieved from most other community activities. It has recently become fashionable for many a teacher to spend a lot of time and energy "working with" college students, neighbors, and pedestrians, but this is sometimes at the expense of their students. They have been persuaded to feel that these "outside" activities are the ones that really count, while teaching is just a lackluster, routine necessity but hardly a real accomplishment and the "right (real) thing". Someone in authority should raise his voice and announce that while everyone else must contribute generously to "outside" enlightenment, the teacher's main, first, and foremost responsibility is to the "inside segment" of Klal Yisroel which is sitting in the classroom and deserves all the time, talent, and energy that can be found for them lest they too decide to join the "outside" where the "action" is.

Strange and disturbing ideas are being heard lately from those who claim to be the teachers' best friends. They claim that a little work on the "outside" is worth more than lots of toil on the "inside". Their reasoning, though simplistic, is appealing and to a degree convincing: Teaching a child in Yeshiva until after high school costs huge sums of money and tens of thousands of teaching hours, yet when the student graduates, there is no guarantee about the kind of life he will lead nor the kind of home he will establish after marriage. In short, a Yeshiva education, so very costly in financial and human terms, is indeed a risky investment. In the case of those Yeshivos which offer only an elementary grade education the risk is of course much greater. The returns on the investment may be nil. On the other hand, these friends argue, a two-three year investment (or sometimes even less) in Jewish adults produces almost immediate results. In a relatively short while the new Baal Teshuva can be congratulated on the establishment of a new chassidic home. Which venture pays off better? Isn't the answer obvious?

This approach not only knocks the wind out of the teacher's sails, but it also has the harmful effect of making his contribution seem unimportant and worthless to most people, unless he is working with "haimishe" children.

The above argument is fallacious for a number of reasons. Firstly, teaching Torah is important and worthwhile for its own sake in its own time, and not just for what it will accomplish for the students' adult years. At every moment of the day or night the world exists because of the learning of Torah, especially that of children and youth. While the Baal Teshuva only holds a promise of a home where Torah will be taught to children, the students in the Yeshiva already claim the fulfillment of that promise, now.

Secondly, the years which a child spends in the Yeshiva are certainly pure and holy to a large extent. They are permeated with Torah, Tefila, Mitzvos and other Jewishly inspiring activities. In the case of the average Baal Teshuva, however, the youthful years are lost to the individual as well as to the nation. Sometimes those years are not just

empty, Jewishly speaking, but filled with acts and experiences which require many holy years and tears to rectify. (Often all this could have been avoided had a childhood teacher been the ideal kind with the proper knowledge, dedication, and parental cooperation). Who is to say which are the more important years in a life, the early years or the adult years?

Thirdly, this whole argument smacks of a dilution of all our traditional value system. For us in the Yeshiva community, and especially for those who are Lubavitcher chassidim, there is great pride in thoroughness. We cherish breadth, depth, and consistency, be it in Torah learning, practice of mitzvos, kind deeds, or human relations. We in fact disdain the momentary, the fleeting, and the superficial. These qualities are not easily achieved. There exists a kind of unwritten rule that whatever is too easily achieved is hardly worth that much. Such adherence to the authentic and the genuine in the human expression, which can only be achieved through arduous and long-lasting efforts, should make us more than a little suspicious of blitz-quick results. Hence, in-depth teaching, refinement of the child's character to make a real Yeshiva mentch out of him, is surely the preferred way, if only the opportunity is available. Naturally, in the case of straying adults, we don't have much choice but to act quickly and settle at least temporarily for superficial, haphazard results. When the fire is blazing, consuming everything in sight, there is no time to search for the purest water and the best container, etc.

To return to our original question: "Can everyone reach?", the answer is Yes! Everyone is obligated to share his material, mental, and spiritual blessings, no matter how meager, with others. There is always somebody who has much less, or even nothing at all, especially today, when ignorance rather than rebellion, misguidedness rather than atheism, are the prevalent evils. There are literally hundreds of thousands of Jews of all ages out there begging to be taught and guided. Even with those who seem

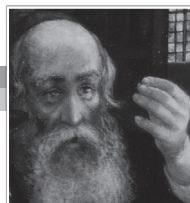
to resist, it is mostly a question of 'breaking the ice', after that it is pretty smooth sailing. It is just regrettable that this mammoth burden of lifesaving has been disproportionately assumed by a relatively small group of dedicated people while almost everyone else is occupying comfortable spectator seats with alternate reactions of praise, blame, or indifference.

The slightly different question, "Can everyone be a teacher?", has a resoundingly different answer: NO! Being a teacher means undertaking complete responsibility for the total spiritual and mental development of many individuals, building the future ranks of Am Yisroel and its leadership. This awesome task should be entrusted to chosen people only, people who should then be held in the highest esteem and admiration by parents and all others. These men and women will deserve our respect because they will be teaching not just by verbal instruction, but by serving as living examples of a proper life. The pupils will see before their eyes a person who is always punctual, thoroughly prepared in the subject matter, with definite plans how best to utilize every portion of class time in a creative manner. They will know well that their mechanech cherishes sincerity as well as performance, good character traits as well as good learning. They will know and feel that their teacher cares deeply for every one of them at all times. They will see that their teacher is a person who does not waste words, nor does he waste time in or out of class; they will never see him or her idling away precious hours—even in a shul. They will be proud of the fact that their mechanech respects others and is well respected in turn because of his high dedication to the lofty ideals of Torah. In short, the student will become imbued with the proper *midos*, the highest aspirations in learning and *yiras shomayim* (fear of heaven) by a living example rather than by sermons and words of rebuke. When we will produce and nourish teachers of this caliber, we will have the merit to see a generation which will surely deserve to greet Moshiach Tzidkeinu very very soon.





Rabbi Y. Mechanech



Transmitting the True Spirit of Yiddishkeit

Rabbi Y. Mechanech is one of the leading Roshei Yeshivah in Lubavitch today. He is known for his insight and understanding in the needs of his talmidim and today's children in general.

We have been entrusted with the education of our children, with the task of ensuring that the next generation of Yidden follow in the path of *Torah* and *mitzvos*, and retain a feeling for *Yiddishkeit*.

However, the question is often asked by parents: How can we impart the feeling and attitude of *Yiddishkeit* to our children? What can we do to raise children who care about *Yiddishkeit* in a real, tangible way?

■ FOLLOWING THE RECIPE ■

Suppose you are offered a sample of fresh cake, and after tasting a bit, you are dismayed to discover that its flavor is awfully different from the delectable taste you were expecting. With gentle prodding, you coax your friend to share with you

the cake's ingredients and are surprised to learn that the recipe had been taken from a prestigious cookbook. You are confused, having had used that recipe before to produce results which tasted quite scrumptious. Certainly, your friend had not followed the instructions properly, perhaps adding too much salt or improperly measuring the baking soda. You are definitely sure that there had not been nothing wrong with the recipe itself, for you **know** what that recipe should have produced.

Hashem has given us a "cookbook," the *Torah*, with clear instructions how to live our life, assuring us that it will bring "ways of pleasantness and peace," and create an enjoyable and satisfying lifestyle. This delicious product will, of course, only come about if we properly follow the recipe. If we vary from the instructions, we will produce a similar-looking but ill-tasting concoction.

Therefore, if we encounter an ill-tasting way of life which claims to be “following the instructions,” we can be certain that somewhere in the process there has been a diversion from the guidelines.

■ TRANSMITTING
YIDDISHKEIT ■

To successfully transmit Torah, it must be passed on in its proper form, without adding any ingredients or taking away some component, for doing so will prevent those we are educating from appreciating its true value.

Just as it would be foolish to expect an altered recipe to taste as the listed result, similarly, it is irrational to believe that Torah’s teachings can be changed and still produce Torah-true Yidden. Only when Torah is passed on in its pure, pristine form will children be properly affected.

Even the most comfortable garment will cause the wearer discomfort if it is too small or too large. If Torah, which promises to bring pleasantness and fortification, is dressed on our children ill-fittingly, it can cause the opposite, and the ‘*geshmak*’ and the beauty of *Yiddishkeit* will not be absorbed.

Moreover, by doing the contrary, the parent or teacher is deserting his primary role in showing his pupil the beauty of the Torah. For even if his efforts are successful, and his guidance is accepted, he has still wronged the children by not exposing them to the true Torah lifestyle.

■ TORAH LEARNING IN ITS TRUE
FORM ■

Throughout the ages, Yidden have allocated much time and energy to studying Torah. Learning was not limited to boys in Yeshivah or a select few, but rather it was the epicenter of life for

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■ ■ ■

each individual, his family and community at large.

One who has learned a bit of *nigleh* or *chassidus*, knows that the study of Torah is one of the fundamentals of *Yiddishkeit*. A Yid who truly conducts himself in accordance with Torah, has times set aside for involvement in learning.

Despite the multitude of scholarship levels, limited intellectual capacities in no way intonate a limited opportunity for Torah study. A proficient *talmid chochom* may focus on learning Gemara, analyzing

rishonim and *acharonim*, while a Yid of average skills may spend his time learning Mishnayos. The immense library of Torah contains something for everyone, and each person can occupy himself with a level of Torah that is accessible to him, and look forward to covering another *mesechta* or being proficient in another *halacha* of Shulchan Aruch.

Imagine an old time *chassidische shtetl*, where Torah learning was a life-long pursuit. In *shul*, people sat, passionately learning before *Shacharis* and afterwards as well. When the *balei-batim* rose to leave for their mundane obligations, they were avidly involved in a discussion of a *sugya* of Gemara or a *maamer* Chasidus. Even those who may have been considered simpler, lingered to discuss a *vort* or analyze a *shiur* that had just been delivered.

At home, the father seized any available moment to learn and the air was redolent with Torah discussions. The *seforim* appeared well-worn and the apparent admiration for Torah study was felt, for in such a household, Torah was not being learned to fulfill an obligation, but as an enjoyable pursuit.

A child growing up in such an environment, where Torah learning was real and practical, (not an abstract ideal), would naturally value Torah learning. Being raised in an atmosphere where

“Torah learning is our life,” and actually seeing those who he admired engrossed in learning Torah, would allow him to realize what a life of Torah learning is like. When seeing those dedicated to Torah study respected on account of their learning, the child came to respect them as well and see such a pursuit as an important and vital one.

When a child knows that when he tells over what he has learned in *yeshiva* it will illicit the interest of his family, he will feel that what he learns is significant. His father’s avid interest in the details of what he has learned and his mother’s excitement upon his conclusion of a *perek*, would cause him to intuitively sense that this is a worthwhile occupation, one of the fundamentals of Yiddishkeit.

However, if this very child would have been raised in another town where Torah learning is underappreciated, the child will not pay much significance to Torah study. He will pick up that Torah learning is merely an activity for *yeshiva* students who are not yet ready for real life, and seeing it as such, it would be quite understandable if he finds little value in learning it.

With a lack of the proper *chinuch*, this child would not understand what difference it makes whether the *pshat* in Gemara can be understood one way or the other, and he would conclude that his entire *yeshiva* experience is a waste of time. He would place no value to his involvement in learning ‘archaic’ Gemara and abstract Chassidus. Having been fed a dish which lacks the necessary ingredients, he would lose appreciation for the dish the way it should have been. His *Yiddishkeit* would have a bitter taste and not resonate with him, although through no fault of his own, for he had

not been exposed to any other approach.

■ MITZVAH OBSERVANCE IN ITS TRUE FORM ■

The various aspects of *Yiddishkeit* function as an organic whole. Following the Shulchan Aruch and faring oneself with good *middos* work hand in hand to create an atmosphere that will instill the supreme value of *Yiddishkeit* in a pleasant, warm fashion.

A Yid who truly lives according to Torah will be found in *shul* each morning *davening* with a *minyan*, his relationship with his family will be one of pleasantness, and in his business transactions he will be relied upon to deal honestly, even forgiving those who may have wronged him, in order to prevent *machlokes*.

As a *chossid*, these traits will be emphasized and fulfilled in a better way. His *davening* will be unhurried, with more thought and feeling, and he will go beyond what the *halacha* requires in his dealings with others.

Now, suppose the person who considers himself a *chossid* doesn’t live such a lifestyle, he would deprive the child of a positive warm association with *Yiddishkeit*. If this ‘*chossid*’ *davens* quickly, sometimes speaking in the middle, the last time he truly learned (not in order to prepare a speech) was in his early *yeshiva* days, and he is actively involved in *machlokes*, often resorting to *lashon harah*; would it be possible for him to transmit a feeling of joy for *Yiddishkeit*?

Being exposed to such a *Yiddishkeit* would no doubt leave a bad taste in a child’s mouth. He

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A Yid who truly lives according to Torah ... his relationship with his family will be one of pleasantness, and in his business transactions he will be relied upon to deal honestly.

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would recognize that such conduct is against the dictates of Shulchan Aruch and Chassidus, and would therefore assume that it is possible to be considered a great *chossid* without following the teachings of Chassidus.

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■ INDIVIDUALIZED GROWTH ■

Another vital aspect to ensure a child's positive association with *Yiddishkeit* is that children must be guided in the service of Hashem on an appropriate level for them. It would be absurd to assume that all children can be taught equally, for each child is a unique individual with a unique nature and set of talents. As Shlomo Hamelech had long spoken, "*Chanoch lena'ar al pi darko*", when a child will be taught in the manner appropriate for him, only then can we be assured "*gam ki yazkin lo yossur mimenah*", that when he develops he will continue on this path.

By way of comparison, there were certain demands the Rebbeim requested of all *chassidim*, while others which they may have spoken about extensively, but obviously did not expect to be performed by everyone.

For example, the Rebbeim spoke of the requirement to learn a *mesechta* of Gemara yearly or an *amud* daily. The Rebbe spoke about finishing *Likutei Torah* or *Torah Ohr* every week, and likewise instituted that *chassidim* learn three *perokim* of Rambam daily. Nonetheless, only the study of *Chitas* has been called "*shiur hashave lechol nefesh*," a syllabus that applies equally to all *chassidim*, and regarding this study, the Rebbe reiterated time and again this obligation applies to all. In a similar vein, though the Rebbe encouraged the study of three *perokim* of Rambam, he

also instituted the study of one *perek* daily or *Sefer Hamitzvos*.

This principle applies to all areas of *avodas Hashem*. Certain demands are made of everyone, without exception, while there are other areas which only pertain to advanced *chassidim*, and each person should fulfill the directives appropriate for his level.

Unfortunately, children are sometimes taught only about the great levels, being relegated with stories of holy *tzaddikim* and *chassidim*, but do not hear about the ordinary individual who adhered to *Shulchan Aruch* and lived an *ehrliche*, simple life. Such an education leaves the ordinary child without guidance on how *he* is supposed to lead *his* life.

A teacher who focuses on aspects of *avodah* beyond the level of his students, has not only failed to address the needs of his students, but has also lost the opportunity of inculcating a recognition in his students that educators and Rebbeim are the ones to whom to turn to for guidance in their daily life. His students will not sense that their *mechanech* understands them, feeling quite inferior in face of his lofty ideals, and hence, will not believe he can properly direct them.

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There were certain demands the Rebbeim requested of all chassidim, while other directives were not expected to be performed by everyone.

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This danger of this is twofold: Firstly, the fact that a Torah life has been described as some lofty way of living, a level to which the student is not up to, he will perceive such a life as a difficult one and have a negative attitude towards *Yiddishkeit*.

Secondly, because he is unable to fulfill what is expected of him, he himself will choose what areas he wants to involve himself and regarding which issues he has no interest of being bothered with. And while making this choice, he will not differentiate

between that which is a requirement of *Yiddishkeit* and that which is extra.

Additionally, once the youngster feels he is not following the directives he was taught, this feeling will generate a general rebellion toward anyone of stature (including Rabbonim) and choose whatever lifestyle he fancies.

■ TWO TYPES OF CHASSIDIM ■

During the days of early *chassidism*, there was a general differentiation between *chassidim*. There were those who were entirely disengaged from all physicality, fully involved in their *avodas Hashem*, and the *baalibatishe chassidim*, who took their *avodas Hashem* seriously, but recognized their inability to cut themselves off from the mundane of life. Taking their capabilities into account, they continued to involve themselves in the physical activities of the world, yet made sure to perform them according to the dictates of Torah.

Come Shabbos, and each *chossid* would spend the holy day as he saw fit. The *chossid* who was a *baal madreiga* would remain in *shul* the entire Shabbos, only coming home for a few short moments to eat a bit, after which he'd return to *shul* for learning. The ordinary *chossid*, on the other hand would make an effort to arrive somewhat early to *shul* to learn *chassidus* and then *daven* slowly with the *minyán*. Afterwards, he would head home and join his family for a scrumptious Shabbos *seuda*. The meal, laden with delicacies would be eaten in a refined manner, and between courses, words of Torah would be spoken and *chassidische niggunim* sung.

A *mechanech* who describes the special, lofty *chossid* to his pupils, transmitting the holiness that permeated his life, may well inspire them but will not affect their enthusiasm. The child listening will conclude to himself that such a life is entirely not for him. Not having been exposed to the lifestyle of the ordinary *chossid*, who may not have been as

great, but definitely someone to be aspired to, the child will choose the lifestyle other than the one of great *chassidim*. To him, a less than holy life will automatically define itself as sleeping in on Shabbos till twelve o'clock, waking up for a big breakfast, and then heading to *shul* to *daven* quickly. A hearty Shabbos lunch will follow, without *divrei Torah* or *niggunim*...

This perspective will reach all areas of life and affect the student's behavior as such. It is therefore vital to explain and transmit the lifestyle of a simple Yid, one to whom he can relate.

■ APPROPRIATE AVODAH ■

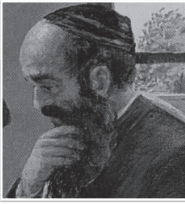
In a similar vein, the same is true about the father who tells his children that *Chol Hamoeid* is not for playing games or taking trips, but a time to be spent fully with *mitvoim*. His child, having been raised with this as the only option of an appropriate *Chol Hamoeid* activity, may decide one day that he is not on such a level, and does in fact need to take a trip. Having had no exposure to the way a *chossid* takes a trip (especially since he already considers himself a rebel), he will spend his time in inappropriate surroundings. He has no idea what is the *Yiddische* way of relaxation is.

We are promoting a lifestyle of elitism, and wondering why our children are opting out.

Of course, it is understood that not every child is mediocre, and that there do exist children who can live a loftier lifestyle, who should be prodded and encouraged to realize their potential. But alongside this, the ordinary children cannot be burdened with unsuitable expectations, but rather need to be educated how to be the best they can be.

Exposing our children to a wholesome *yiddishkeit* in a manner that is appropriate for them, will enrich their lives and enable them to appreciate the beauty of the *yiddische* lifestyle, resulting in adults with appreciation and feeling for Torah and Chassidus.





Ben Hei Hei



One Size Fits All?

The Torah Perspective on Individualized Education – Part 1

Reb Alexander Bin-Nun was the general supervisor of the network of Oholei Yosef Yitzchak schools in Eretz Yisroel. In his effort to guide the teachers in their holy work, he prepared a list of what he considered the ten foremost principles of education. During his next *yechidus*, he presented the list to their Rebbe. The Rebbe reviewed his list and told him, “It is missing a most important principle. The principle in chinuch is that there are no ‘general principles!’”

▪ MULTIPLE PATHS ▪

Chazal tell us¹ that just as no two people look exactly the same, so too, no two people think alike. People have different opinions, thought processes, approaches, feelings, emotional needs etc.

This is not only a variation in personal preference.

Chassidus explains² that each person has a unique neshama, with a unique *avodah* in this world. It is for this reason that the individual was given distinct qualities.

Obviously, concerning basic *mitzvah* observance, no one can excuse themselves saying that a particular mitzvah is unsuitable for them, as we are taught, “There is one Torah and one set of mitzvos for all of us”. However, when setting out on a path of *avodas Hashem*, each person must choose the path in *avodah* which is tailor-made for them.

Chassidus compares the body of *klal yisroel* to a human body³. Just as the heart is not the mind, and the hand serves a different function than the foot, so too each neshama has a special *shlichus* in this world. To assign the job of the foot for the hand or vice versa is destructive, for each body part is essential to complete the whole person.

1) See Brachos 58a, Sanhedrin 38a.

2) See Introduction to Tanya; Igeres Hakodesh Siman 7.

3) Likutei Torah Nitzavim 44a

In addition, throughout one's lifetime, varying circumstances call for varying behaviors; one cannot compare the *avodah* of a *bochur* in Yeshivah to the same individual as a husband and a father. Each person and situation must be assessed from a Torah perspective, to determine the correct behavior for that distinct state.

In the Friediker Rebbe's words⁴: "This [the need for individualized *avodah*] is axiomatic and requires no proof: a person's divine service *must be commensurate with his nature and capabilities*, as the saying, 'Many attempted to emulate the ways of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and were unsuccessful.'" And in his synopsis he affirms this clearly: "The ideal education or guidance *is possible only when tailored to a pupil's character*."

■ THE EDUCATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY ■

One of the foremost responsibilities of an educator is to recognize the nature of his student and guide him accordingly. To lead him on a path not designated for him, is significantly more harmful than teaching him information that he cannot understand.

Shlomo Hamelech spells this out in his instruction, "*Chanoch lena'ar al pi darko*", a child must be set on the path appropriate **for him**, then can we rest assured that "*gam ki yazkin lo yossur mimenah*", when he grows older he will not abandon it.

In fact, it is exactly this issue which comprises the majority of the Friediker Rebbe's *Klalei Hachinuch v'Hahadracha*. The Friediker Rebbe lists the various personality traits which a *mechanech* must ascertain about the *mechunach* before he begins to address him, including circumstantial details such as his social and financial status.

This perspective of chinuch is quite contrary to the current mass-production school system where children are educated in 'bulk'. While one may

justify the needs for such a system due to various constraints, we should not be misled to believe that it is the ideal educational framework.

While schools by their very nature are limited to a system, a parent or teacher with a thorough appreciation of the fine differences between individuals can do much to improve the education experience. Perhaps by implementing this principle, we could enhance the level of maturity, independent thinking and healthy idealism amongst the youth graduating the schooling system.

■ PRACTICAL EXAMPLES ■

While in theory most would agree to the concept explained above, when it comes to practice this principle is largely overlooked. I would like to highlight some areas where it would seem that "*al pi darko*" needs implementing.

There are three general areas that should be addressed: (1) **Age Appropriateness** – Educating children in a manner appropriate for their age. (2) **Life Shlichus** – Guiding children and adults towards the life mission designated for them. (3) **Men and Women** – Fully recognizing the true differences in the home, school and beyond.

(1) Age Appropriateness

In his article (in this magazine), Rabbi Gancz pointed out that the Torah clearly lines out the appropriate age for *chinuch*, and how just as belated *chinuch* is destructive for the child, the same is for a premature *chinuch* (and perhaps more so). While Rabbi Gancz addressed the need for proper assessment when introducing children to the observance of *mitzvos*, I will focus here on the assessment needed when imparting new ideas to the child.

[In the last year or so, there has been significant talk amongst *mechanchim* concerning the hasty process in teaching *Chumash*, *Mishna* and *Gemara*

4) *Klalei Hachinuch v'Hahadracha* ch. 7, translated as The

Principles of Education and Guidance, Kehos 2004 extra period

to boys. Having to satisfy the parents, and not fall short of competing *mosdos* and classes, *melamdim* are forced to begin a new level before the children have fully mastered the previous one.

Due to this, many regular children, with no particular 'learning disability', lag behind in *Kriah*, *Chumash*, *Mishna* and *Gemara*, sometimes *never* catching up to their more advanced peers. Some parents will opt for extra tutoring after hours, which is burdensome for the child, who needs time to be free, and his parents, who have to load additional strain on their tuition burden.

Suggestions have been made to delay the process a year or two, so that each subject can be fully mastered before moving forward. Some *melamdim* have actually begun implementing this to some degree, with much success.

What has yet to be addressed on a broad scale is the age appropriateness of the *yiddishkeit* which they are taught.]

Just as in academics there is time in the child's development when he is ready to learn *Gemara*, before which teaching it to him will be unsuccessful and largely futile. Similarly, when inculcating *yiddische* concepts there is a time when the child is ready to relate to them, before which it will only leave them confused⁵.

It must be noted that the loss sustained is not merely lost time, but a long term danger. As will be explained, a child raised with misconstrued values is likely to remain impaired and often discard those 'illogical values' entirely.

This is especially relevant to the teachings

of Chassidus, which are abstract and hard to comprehend to the underdeveloped mind. It is for this reason that the Rebbe instructed that formal learning of Chassidus not be taught to children less than twelve years of age⁶. Even an advanced child is likely to imagine the abstract concepts in physical terms, which may stay with him even after he matures.

▪ COMMON EXAMPLES ▪

Here is a widespread example: We are all familiar with the expression of the Tzemach Tzedek extolling the dedication of the Mittlerer Rebbe to Chassidus, to the point that "if one would cut his limbs were cut, blood would not emerge rather Chassidus⁷."

To an adult familiar with the nature of Torah in general and the inner dimension of Torah in particular, it is understood along the following lines: Chassidus was not merely something the Mittlerer Rebbe learned and taught, rather it was the essence of his life. Moreover, his physical body was 'elevated' and would not interfere with his connection to *elokus*⁷.

Yet the young schoolchildren who are taught this phrase are quite confused: Firstly, how did the Mittlerer Rebbe live without blood? Secondly, what does gushing Chassidus look like? And thirdly, why would someone cut the Mittlerer Rebbe's finger?

[One teacher wishing to depict the saying, actually gave the children to color a drawing of the Mittlerer Rebbe's cut finger with words of *Chassidus* pouring out!]

5) The Rebbe once addressed this issue in reference to the words of the common *yiddische* lullaby "*Torah iz di beste sechorah*" comparing Torah specifically to valuable merchandise, since a young child cannot appreciate the value of Torah being 'Hashem's own enjoyment' and the like. And yet, Dovid Hamelech, considering his stature, was punished for only appreciating Torah as the life of all the worlds (Sichos Kodesh 5737 vol. 1 p. 112).

6) *Igros Kodesh* vol. 18 p. 265. Moreover, even amongst Chassidim care was given not to introduce fine concepts of Chassidus to those who were not yet ready to comprehend them. When the

famous *mashpia* Reb Groinem was still a *yungerman* in Zhebin, he was excluded from the *farbrengens* of the elder Chassidim. When he and the future *mashpia* Reb Moshe "der chozer" scaled the wall and entered through a back door, the Chassidim waited until they left before continuing the *farbrengen*!

7) So it was explained by the *mashpia* in Lubavitch Reb Groinem in the name of his *mashpia* Reb Avremke Zhebiner (Lma'an Yeid'u p. 280). See also *Sichos Kodesh* 5736 vol. 2 p. 322 that the saying is to be understood "*b'pnimiyus ho'inyonim*".

Unable to understand the concepts taught to him, the child accustoms himself to a superficial way of understanding that which he is taught, instead of truly grasping its meaning. This leaves the student with a childlike, unsophisticated approach to matters of *Yiddishkeit*. However, those (worldly) ideals that he had begun to appreciate only as an adult will impress him more, which, in the best case scenario, will result in a surface *Yiddishkeit*⁸.

(This is not to be confused with telling children miracles stories which they can understand but

not fully comprehend⁹. In such a case they can understand the story, and they are taught to believe in the *cause* of the miracle, *HaShem* through the *tzaddikim*. Here we are referring to *abstract concepts* which the child does not truly comprehend at all.)

■ MISLEADING STATEMENTS ■

Another classic example:

We are taught in Chassidus, with particular

8) See *Klalei Hachinuch v'Hahadracha* chapter 7 (Sefer Hasichos 5703 p. 213) that teaching lofty conduct to one who is not ready, "can lead him entirely of the proper path".

For further reading on the dangers of teaching a lifestyle beyond the level of the child, see: *Igros Kodesh Rayatz* vol. 8 p. 193 (the Rebbe Rashab's warning that young bochorim be guided in *chassidische davening* suitable for their level, and not allow them to daven in a manner far beyond them); *Toras Menachem* vol. 11

p.157 (a child must be drawn to Torah with sweets and not only by telling him about the prominence of Torah).

9) See *Likutei Sichos* vol. 19 p. 91 that when the Rebbe Rashab discovered that the teacher of the Friediker Rebbe's young daughters was avoiding mention of anything miraculous, he was immediately fired. See there (note 20) a similar story about the *maskil* who visited the Alter Rebbe.



emphasis by our Rebbe, that the ultimate purpose of the creation is not the higher spiritual realms, but rather this physical world. The point is further made that in our *avoda*, we should not limit ourselves to service of Hashem through abstention from the physical, rather we must live within the world and elevate it.

Now, for an educated adult the message is quite clear:

The world in it of itself is trivial, the only truth being Hashem and his Torah. We mortals are infinitely lower than our source in the spiritual worlds, yet Hashem chose in His free will to have a dwelling place here in this lowly world. Though we would (and should) be inclined to escape to a loftier lifestyle, Hashem wants for us to elevate the lowest world. We elevate the physical through fulfilling *mitzvos* scrupulously (physical objects), learning, *davening* and working on our *middos* (human psyche), and influencing others (people more engrossed in the physical than ourselves) – all permeated with a yearning to connect with the sublime (“*rotzui v’shuv*”).

Yet the child who is told that “*ruchniyus* is not the purpose” and that we must “live in the world”, is likely to hear an entirely different message. He hears a message of realism and practicality, degrading ‘pointless asceticism’ and a general encouragement to ‘take life easy’. He therefore demeans the value of ‘pointless’ *Torah* learning, ‘excessive’ *davening*, and lacks admiration for those who partake in these activities¹⁰.

This point is highlighted in the following story: A *melamed* who wanted to go into business and went to seek the counsel of the Alter Rebbe and another great *tzaddik*. The Alter Rebbe advised him to remain a *melamed*, yet when he traveled to the other *tzaddik*, he was advised to go into

business. When the *melamed* informed the *tzaddik* of the Alter Rebbe’s advice, the *tzaddik* exclaimed: “Zalmen’yu (as the Alter Rebbe was called by the *talmidim* of the Mezritcher Maggid) knows not the true *kavana*; one must not behave in a manner of ‘no world’, rather while being (involved) ‘in world(ly matters)’ one must nevertheless stay ‘above the world’ (“*nit ‘nit velt’ nor ‘velt un ois velt*”).

When the *melamed* repeated this exchange to the Alter Rebbe, the Rebbe said: “This would have been true if you were a businessman and you wanted to become a *melamed*, for this would demonstrate that even “in world” (business) you recognize that there is “no world” (hence the desire to become a *melamed*). But,” the Alter Rebbe concluded, “In your case, you *want* to go into business...”¹¹

Today, unfortunately, it is no longer a distortion of one specific issue, rather an all pervasive distortion that affects all of our standards of *Yiddishe* practices.

To test the extent of this error, one twelfth grade teacher in a Lubavitch girls’ school recently asked her students to record where Lubavitch stands on the *frum* spectrum in contrast to *Chareidim* and Modern Orthodox. The vast majority responded that Lubavitch represents the “healthy middle”... Is it for this that the Alter Rebbe sat in prison?!

[One possible reason for this chasm is:

We adults have heard the Rebbe speak regularly, either in person or in print, and have seen devout *elters Chassidim*, who personified the ideals of *Chassidus*. We have heard the Rebbe’s passionate *sichos* on the overindulgence and interest in the fleeting gratification that are society’s primary pursuit.

Our familiarity with the Rebbe’s demands and with those who live up to them, has given us the

10) This misconception was already addressed by the Rebbe. When discussing the need for young married men to continue learning for 2-3 years after marriage (as set in Shulchan Aruch), the Rebbe added: "... the *yezter hara* is a 'professional,' so he comes and brings you a proof ... from *Chassidus*: since *Chassidus* demands that we engage with the world! If you want to listen to

the *yezter hara*—Nu, what can I do. *But why do you have to drag the Alter Rebbe and Chassidus into it?* It’s like the Tanya says, *he grabs the king’s head and pulls it down, burying his face....*” (Toras Menachem vol. 33 p. 88)

11) From the records of R’ Avrohom Ber Blesofsky.

context within which we understand the directive of *Chassidus* to function 'within the world'.

Most children, however, have had limited exposure to *eltere* Chassidim, and their image of the Rebbe is made up of bite-size clips of a specific style. They are therefore lacking the context in which to place this potent idea.]

■ PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ■

(1) The first step towards addressing the matter is recognizing the need to familiarize oneself with the various stages in the intellectual and emotional development of a child, by learning the sources (foremost the abovementioned *Klalei Hachinuch v'Hahadracha*) and listening to insightful educators on the topic.

(2) The second step is to assess the individual child, recognizing his unique nature and his current state of affairs. As with any other fine skill, it can take plenty of practice to sharpen one's perception to evaluate a child's inner character. Since the child's level is steadily progressing, constant evaluation and assessment is of prime importance.

Since accurate assessment can often be a challenge for the average parent, one should not hesitate to solicit the advice of experienced *mechanchim* in evaluating the individual child.

The Rebbe Rashab writes¹² that one should dedicate a half hour each day to contemplate the *chinuch* of his children. Now that we have recognized the nature of true *chinuch*, it is understandable why such a length of time is needed.

(3) The third step is to share the idea with the child in a child-friendly format. Even once determined that the idea is suitable for the child, it must be explained to him in terms which he can understand¹³. If it is related in advanced terms, the point of the message will most likely be lost or distorted.

When relating a thought or *chassidische* story it is crucial that we clearly spell out its interpretation, and not rely on the untrained mind of the child to figure it out. A child is likely to understand ideas at face value, or in some hazy manner. The educator is obligated to ensure accurate comprehension by listening to the child speak, and by asking the child thought-provoking questions that will ensure that he grasps the matter according to his level.

■ ■ ■

In the next article we will *iy"H* discuss "*al pi darko*" as it applies to general life *shlichus* of different types of people.

12) Hayom Yom for 22 Teves.

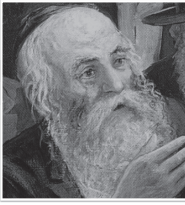
In a letter to his sister-in-law Sheindel who had just lost her husband R' Naftali Hirtz Dulitzky (Shvat 5673) the Rebbe Rashab advocates for "an hour" of contemplation. After comforting her for her loss, the Rebbe Rashab prepares her for new role in educating her children in place of her husband, and concludes (emphasis mine): "Leading and educating the family is a supreme matter ("*oimdim brumo shel olam*") and is the entire purpose of person in this world and the next. Few people truly comprehend it... I have always said that just as it is an obligation for one to

daven for an hour each day, so too one must dedicate an hour each day to consider one's own behavior and contemplate how to guide one's family, and then Hashem will help him succeed." (Igros Kodesh Rashab vol. 2 p. 660)

[Here is not the place to analyze the comparison to *davening*, aside from it simply being a daily *mitzvah* applicable to women (unlike the example of *tefillin* brought in Hayom Yom)].

13) As the Rebbe cautions to should teach young ones about the Frierdiker Rebbe "in terms appropriate for their age" (Igros Kodesh vol. 3 p. 397).





Y. Sholoms



To Celebrate Chassidim

At a farbrengen, stories of Chassidim are a favorite, appreciated at times even more than stories of the *Rabbeim*. While tales of *tzadikim* inspire, stories of Chassidim are meaningful.

Hearing fantastic stories about a *tzaddik* of old, surpassing nature and seeing the future, of superhuman love and fear of Hashem, may give some perspective on worldly nonsense. Indeed, they uplift and inspire.

But the talk of a *chossid*, a simple cobbler trudging through the snow on his way to his Rebbe, of a resolute youth dedicating himself solely to the study of Torah, or of a young woman educating her children despite the elements - that is meaningful.

When we hear of these real-life people, with struggles and weaknesses just like ours, and how they overcame them and grew from them, it is demanding and encouraging.

This is the unique quality of *Sipurei Chassidim*.

In our day and age, we are suffering from a problem; the stories of *Chassidim* have also become irrelevant and lofty. *Reb Hillel Paritcher* has become a saint of ancient history, and the *moshkeh* at the *kretchme* has lost his relevance. Even the more recent *Reb Itcha Der Masmid* and *Reb Chatche Faigin* are 'from back then in Russia'.

In essence their stories are great, and very little has changed aside for geographical and cultural trivialities. The facts on the ground however, say that there is a breach. Particularly our children feel that the conditions of Kremenchug and Samarkand are incomparable to those of New York and Toronto. It may be a mental block, but the kids feel that 'those people were different'.

Our own grandparents' life stories in America, and their *mesiras nefesh* for rebuilding *yiddishkeit* on these shores, are also failing to fill the void. Whether the generation gap is justified or not is irrelevant. They do not feel that "Bobbe Dvoshe's" greatness is meaningful to them.

In an age when the last year's cell phone model is today totally out of date, fifty years ago sounds like medieval history. Reb Mendel Futerfas, of not even twenty years ago, could be mistaken among the *Mitteler Rebbe's Chassidim* and have as much significance.

Sipurei Chassidim have somehow become *Sipurei Tzaddikim* too.

I would therefore dare to suggest that perhaps we have misunderstood the concept of *Sipurei Chassidim*:

The stories of Reb Shilem were not discovered after he passed away; they were told to his students, about their own current *mashpia*. The legends about *Reb Zalmen Dovid* were spun when he was

still a *bochur* in yeshivah. That is why they carried weight.

Perhaps the time has come for us to appreciate the *Chassidim* of our time. Is it not absurd to wait till a hundred and twenty, for them to become outdated, for us to tell their stories?

It is time we sit with our children and tell them of the awe-inspiring minute by minute *hasmada* of Harav Osdoba, and of tremendous care and compassion of Harav Shwei.

It does not have to be kept a secret that Reb Yoel Kahan, a human being from Montgomery Street, often sits for six consecutive hours thinking *Chassidus*. And that this man, aged eighty two, and having survived a heart bypass, delivers tens of



shiurim, farbrengens and articles a week, with the passion of a seventeen-year-old, out of sheer love for his Rebbe.

It won't hurt for them to be aware of Reb Yisroel Friedman's daily schedule, beginning with *mikvah* and *chassiduss* at five am, and continuing with sixteen hours of learning *Gemora* with his *bochurim* and by himself. A most colorful character of depth, humor and nonstop labor.

And is it fair not to treat our youngsters with a little insight on the classic *oived*, the picture of selflessness, the *mashpia* Reb Pinnye Korf? Why not provide our youth with the role models they deserve?

And what about the underrated *chassidishe ahavas Yisroel* of so many storekeepers, businessmen and *kolel yungerleit* of our community?

I believe it is high time we celebrate the Chassidim of today.

How about telling our kids a little about the *baal teshuvah* who sits at the next table in *shul*? Better yet, ask him to tell your son his life-story himself, about the sacrifices he made and of his passion for *Yiddishkeit*. There are hundreds of these unreal Chassidim walking the streets; why not cash in on them.

Perhaps the time has come for us to sit at the Shabbos table and tell stories of an uncle on the Rebbe's *shlichus*, and his unrelenting steadfastness

■ ■ ■

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■ ■ ■

for the *meshaleach's* principles. And let us not forget to wrap it up: that as a result of his commitment, he lost his biggest supporter, and that there is no happy ending. There is nothing like a contemporary story of people sticking to their guns for what is important.

An anecdote from *yeshivah* days, a story of a *chassidishe* friend would not hurt. Let us utilize every asset we've got, every *chossid* we know. The younger, the better.

It wouldn't be a bad idea to tell our children something about their own teachers, the people they spend most of their waking hours with. If we do not know their attributes, it shouldn't be that difficult to find out. It is the best gift we could give our children: genuine *Chassidim* to respect and relate to.

Of course, nothing can replace an old fashioned tale of past generations. The caliber of people, the quality of life, has no substitute in our day. Still, there is something powerful about stories of today's Chassidim.

Real life stories about real people, facing real challenges with real costs. Let us not deprive our youth of present-day Chassidim. It is only fair to them that they also appreciate the richness, the depth and the beauty of current chassidishe life.

We are sitting on a gold mine of Chassidim; let's start digging.





Mrs. Mina Gordon



Taking a Byte of Knowledge

Mrs. Mina Gordon is a shlucha of the Rebbe in Melbourne Australia.

I had the most vivid dream last night. Unlike most of my dreams which seem to evaporate as quickly as the morning fog touched by the rays of the warming sun, this one remained etched in my mind.

I was standing in a lush rain-forest. Young trees with verdant foliage glistened with recently fallen raindrops. Abundant ferns grew in the shade of the trees, and supple vines wound their way around the trunks and branches. At my feet was a colourful carpet of wildflowers, whose nectar drew hummingbirds and bumblebees. The sky above was a pristine blue, and shone with a light that made the sun seem pale in comparison. There was music in the air- not the piped in music so pervasive today- but a purer music from no instrument that I could recognize.

Beyond the trees, I caught a glimpse of a light-

filled plain. I moved to the side of an unusually large tree, until I could see it better. From my improved vantage point, I could see that it was indeed a large expanse of open grassland, populated by a diverse collection of animals, peacefully grazing side by side. I took a deep breath, enjoying the freshness of the air and the sweet fragrance of the flowers. I felt totally at peace, with myself, and with the world.

A small shadow of a worry wriggled, worm-like into my mind. Could such tranquillity last? Was there something that I was missing out on? I wanted to know something more. I can't exactly explain what it was that I felt was missing- I can only describe it as a desire to know.....something.

Then the doorbell rang.

No, I wasn't awake, I was still dreaming. A big oak door suddenly appeared in my dream, as if it

belonged there in the rain-forest. I took hold of the ornate handle and, without asking who's there, flung it open.

On the doorstep stood a young fellow with a clipboard in his hand and an ingratiating smile on his lips. He tapped the I.D. card pinned to his shirt. "N. Kadmoni- rep. For DAAS telecommunications".

"Hello, Ma'am. I'm here today to present an offer that you won't want to pass up. I'm sure you want to be up to date with the latest information, the broadest range of entertainment, the quickest means of communication, and the best shopping bargains all possible to access instantly from the comfort of your home. The price of our start-up plan is almost negligible, and if you sign up on the spot, you get an automatic 10% discount on your first bill. Of course, there's a thirty day no obligation, free trial period. If within thirty days you decide to cancel, there are no penalties. After that, of course, there is a 24 month lock-in, but I guarantee that you will not find a better deal with any other company."

"Look, I'm not really interested," I answered, a bit wary of his smooth talking. The fellow seemed a bit slimy to me.

"Don't you know what you're missing out on?"

This struck a chord.

"I'm offering you a whole new world beyond your narrow confines: a world of knowledge at your fingertips. How can you pass up the opportunity to know almost anything you want? In today's day and age it's crucial to be in the know. As they say, knowledge is power! Yes, an immense power right in the palm of your hand!"

■ ■ ■

On the doorstep stood a young fellow with a clipboard in his hand and an ingratiating smile on his lips. He tapped the I.D. card pinned to his shirt. "N. Kadmoni- rep. For DAAS telecommunications"

■ ■ ■

It was quite tempting. The little worm-like shadow of doubt bore its way deeper into my brain. "Well, there are some things I think that I'd rather not know about...Not all knowledge is appropriate for a home like ours..."

"Of course, of course. I should have explained in the first place. A proper filter is all you need to ensure that only the type of information that you feel is appropriate is accessible. You can rest assured that your family will be safe from inappropriate material. Only YOU will have the password to override the filter. What could be safer?"

I had to admit that the sales pitch made a lot of sense, although I didn't quite trust the salesman. He had a way of staring fixedly, almost like the hypnotizing eyes of a cobra. I figured that the only way to get rid of him would be by just agreeing and signing up. It was after all a 30 day free trial. I could even cancel as soon as I closed the door.

It took another ten minutes to sign and take care of the papers, and the practicalities involved in getting connected. When he finally left, I closed the door with a sigh of relief.

I turned to the large tree next to me. What had he called it? I couldn't remember if it was apple or blackberry or something else. Whatever it was, it had a screen in the middle of the trunk, and smaller screens hanging among the leaves, ready for picking. I chose a nice ripe one with a lovely ringing tone. I gingerly pressed a few buttons, not sure if it would really work, as I still didn't quite trust that salesman.

"Wow! It does work!" I cried, as the screen flashed and lit up. "Hey, there's a picture of my cousin, the one who's a big shot in the city government!" I said

to no one in particular. I read the story underneath, about some meeting in City Hall. I was so proud of my cousin. That is, until I read the comments. Most were nice, some were not. I went on to the next news item, about a new Jewish singing sensation. I activated the video, and was soon enthralled by the antics as much as by the music. It was fun, although I wondered what was Jewish about it aside from the lyrics and dress.

I continued to scroll through today's news, and then yesterday's, and the news from the day before. I didn't want to miss out on any knowledge as trivial as it may be. I didn't notice the passing of time until I my husband came home. He had spent a productive day, no doubt, guarding and working the King's garden. I was a bit embarrassed that I hadn't done MY work, but I reminded myself that I had just read an op-ed about whether or not women should stay home or go to work. Maybe my whole lifestyle needed changing. A little knowledge and a whole new perspective opens up!

"Come here," I said to my husband, "you must pick one of these! Once you get into it, you'll wonder how you ever managed without it!"

"What is it?" he asked innocently.

"It's something that will give you an edge on life! Knowledge at your fingertips- and knowledge is power, you know! Look at this for example- they've announced the winner of the Chessed group's Chinese auction."

"So what difference does it make if I know who won the Chinese auction?" asked my husband, unconvinced.

"It's always good to know more about everything- knowledge is power isn't it?" I countered. "Whoops, how did THAT photo

get on there?" I quickly changed pages.

"Always good to know more about everything?? Hmmmm.....Depends on what kind of knowledge you're being offered," mused my husband. "It looks like the good knowledge and the bad are closely intertwined here, creating a somewhat poisonous hybrid fruit. Is there some way to filter out the bad and remain with the good?"

"Filter? Filter? The salesman did say something about a filter."

So we got a filter, one that was highly recommended. We thought we had resolved a dangerous issue so cleverly, but the "Arum mikol" the "most cunning of all" was smarter than us.

As I checked out recipes, researched shopping tips, and renewed friendships with long lost acquaintances, I became more and more attached to the device that brought all of this knowledge to my fingertips. More than anything else, I found myself drawn to the Jewish news sites, avidly devouring everything. I'd start with the short listings for appetizers, fill up on the extended articles, and consume the comments for dessert. While waiting for new postings the follow up links would suffice for snacks.

I was growing fat on knowledge. Knowledge about everyone and everything. I read comments and opinions from a vast range of self-appointed experts. I was swallowing whole the words of those who had nothing better to do but sit at the keyboard all day and criticize anyone who actually did something worthwhile. How easy to point a finger at others when hiding behind a veil of anonymity.

My dream-self did not notice the effect that this poisonous menu was having on me, on my

■ ■ ■

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Knowledge
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■ ■ ■

family, on my home. Part of me, however, watched in helpless apprehension as the dream turned to nightmare.

The sky above the garden had turned a smoggy greyish brown. The meadows beyond the garden were brittle, dried up and yellow. The garden itself was silent; no birds chirped there anymore, for the trees had shed their fruit, poisoned by the noxious atmosphere. The velvety grass beneath my feet had long disappeared. In its place a stinking quagmire was slowly sucking me in.

I was oblivious to the deterioration around me and unaware of the danger I was in. I was too busy reading the latest breaking scandal, feeding my growing appetite for every opinionated commentary. How smart I felt as I typed in my own brilliant comments, all the while sinking deeper and deeper into the muck.

I must have been knee deep when the doorbell rang once again. I pulled myself away from the screen, and turned to the door, twisting my body around as my feet were quite stuck. I didn't pay much attention to my predicament, because here was that clever salesman again, with a new offer.

"Today is your lucky day, ma'am," he gushed. "Our company is running a one day promotion. You can upgrade to one of our cutting edge products for a minimal monthly fee. The iPhone, iPod or larger iPad has features that will make your blackberry look like a dinosaur. Of course there are the accessories to match. Best of all are the apps..."

■ ■ ■

*A searing
flash of stark
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wallowing in
the mud. Have
I become so self
absorbed?*

■ ■ ■

At this point, the tugging at my feet set off an equally insistent tugging on my brain. iPhone? iPod? What's with all of this I ...I...I...?

The sound of that enormously small word reverberated throughout the garden.

I....I.....I....I, ay, yay, yay, yay!

A searing flash of stark recognition, revealed my bloated 'I' wallowing in the mud. Have I become so self absorbed? All I had wanted was a bite of knowledge, but one

bite led to another. Like a boor at a smorgasbord, I had gorged myself indiscriminately from heaping plates with no nutritious value. Can I truly claim to have become a better person having consumed all of this information?

Ay, yay, yay...AYEKAH!

"Ayekah?! Where are you? Is it where you should be? Is it where you could be?"

The Divine call to Adam and all future descendants endowed with free choice echoed in my ears : "AYEHKAH! WHERE ARE YOU???" What are you doing in the garden? You were put here to cultivate it, not to destroy it!"

At that point I awoke. I shivered, glad that it was only a dream. The memory of it may fade, but its message will surely remain. Be wary of The Tree of Knowledge, for upon its branches both good and evil grow intertwined.

An abridged version of this essay appeared in Hamodia



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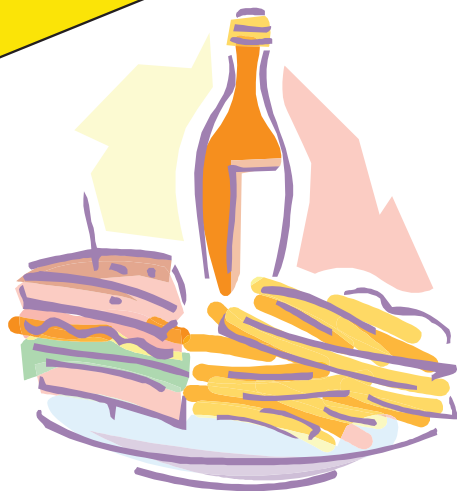
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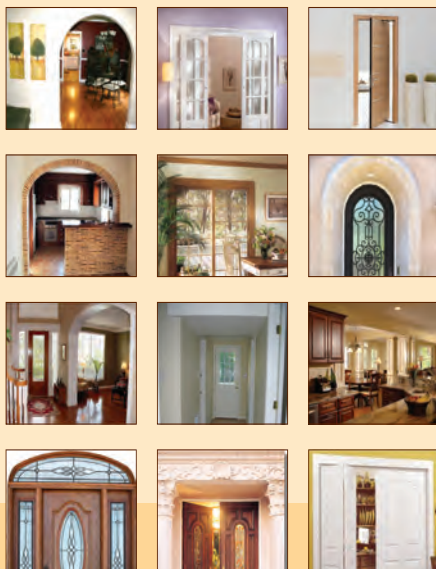
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