

Educating our Children to Love Hashem

Based on the Rebbe's Sicha
Lekutei Sichos

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BH

INTRODUCTION

Presented here is a teacher's personal diary, step-by-step guide, how he successfully implemented the Rebbe's new-revolutionary approach to Chinuch of the children in our generation.

The Rambam writes (intro to Pirush hamishnayos) that the way to get a child to learn Torah is by bribing him with things which he loves (candies, prizes etc.).

The Rebbe Rashab, however, "Paved" a new path, so that even a very young child would want to learn Torah JUST for Hashem. His best prize is the learning Torah itself.

Yes! this revolutionary approach works without the need of bribing children with prizes for good behavior, and/or punishments for the opposite.

The Rebbe says, that the children of our generation are all ready for that. It is only up to the Rebbi.

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Before embarking on a journey, one must clearly know what is the destination, so that he prepares himself accordingly.

Namely: the right vehicle, supplies, food for the way, knowledge of what to watch out for, spare tire, first aid kit, and most importantly – directions (GPS).

When it comes to Chinuch, the above conditions are even more crucial. For if we do not set our goals properly and we don't use the correct tools/vehicles and supplies etc. we stand a very small chance in reaching our goal.

And as the Frierdiker rebbe writes in K'lalei HaChinuch V'Hahadracha, באם אינו מתקן, בהכרח שיקלקל. In matters of chinuch, there is no "in-between". One either "fixes" or destroys, C"V.

Thanks to Hashem, we are so fortunate to have at our disposal, an incredible wealth of resources for chinuch. mainly in the Sichos Kodesh and Igros Kodesh of our Rebbeim.

However, as the saying goes "You can lead the horse to the water, but you can't make it drink." This, the horse must do on his own. Likewise in regard to chinuch, having at one's disposal all the resources is worthless if one does not make use of it. Namely, learning and studying them and most importantly, of course, applying the Hora'os into practice.

So, what is the goal of chinuch?

Obviously, there isn't just one answer. There are numerous goals, but we have to start somewhere.

The Alter Rebbe has already taught us what is the FIRST and FOREMOST goal in chinuch.

We find this in the following story:

The Alter Rebbe once summoned a young Talmid of the Maggid and said to him in his customary chant: I have the mitzva of "ושננתם לבניך" ("teach torah to your children"), You have the mitzva of sustaining and providing for your family. Let us make an exchange. I will give you what you need to fulfill *your* mitzva and you will teach my son (who was later the Mittlerer Rebbe)."

Then the Rebbe explained to the teacher the method of instruction:

The first thing is to teach the child are the letters, Alef, Beis and so on.

What is [the shape of] an alef? A dot ("a Yud") above, a dot below and a line in between, this is an alef. A child must know that the Alef of Torah is composed of "a Yud above, a Yud below, and a line of Emunah in between that joins them."

Another version: A Yud above - this is the Neshama; a Yid (Jew) below - this is the body; a line of Yir'as Shamayim in the middle."

The goal is clear: **The Alef-Beis of chinuch is to connect, (reveal) the "Neshama" within the body, Through the kav (line) of Emunah and Yiras Shamayim. In other words – to inplant and saturate the Kinderlach with Emunas Hashem and Yiras Shomayim.**

We find similar words in the Rebbe's letter:

The main goal of a Yeshiva is to train the students into Yiras Hashem and Ahavas Hashem and to teach them Hashem's Torah and Mitzvos.

So, then how do we accomplish this task?

The answer:

In many letters to Mosdos Chinuch, based on the well-known possuk¹: סוף דבר הכל נשמע, את-ה'א-לקים ירא ואת-מצותיו שמור, כי-זה כל-האדם

("The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind") the Rebbe stresses the utmost importance in educating the children in such a manner, that they grow up to be "Erliche Yidden" (pious) who are not only "knowledgeable" in Torah, but mainly, to know all the halachos pertaining to their daily life, so that they can live as **"Shulchan Aruch-Yidden"**.

The Rebbe writes: If I had the strength, I'd institute in each and every mosad chinuch, beginning from KG through the highest grade, that the primary and foremost subject to be learned is Halacha Le'Maase (practical halacha), whereas the mere "knowledge" of Torah should be secondary.

It is mainly the מעשה המצוות (versus merely the "knowledge" of Torah) that brings out Yiras Shamayim!

It follows, that this should be reflected in the day-to-day behavior of the child. The teacher must train his talmidim to be careful with the mitzvos, i.e. that his tzitzis are kosher, that he says a bracha clearly, washes netilas yadayim properly, etc.

¹ קהלת, יב, יג.

Especially in our times, says the Rebbe, when unfortunately many children DO NOT get this kind of chinuch of Yiras Shamayim at home.

Shaim Shamayim

Another invaluable tool with which to imbue the kinderlach with Yiras Shamayim, is by mentioning “**Hashem**” as often as possible.

In order to train the kinderlach into having “Yiras Shamayim”, the Rebbe must constantly talk about Hashem. This makes them realize that “Hashem” is REAL!

Examples of what I say in class:

“We are davening to Hashem.”

“Hashem is listening to the words that you daven.”

“You are sending up “diamonds” to Hashem’s crown.”

“We are sooo lucky to learn the Torah of Hashem”.

“Hashem is saying the same words of Chumash TOGETHER WITH YOU!”

“Hashem is so proud of you.”

Then, obviously, actions speak louder than words. In a holy manuscript from the Rebbe² he writes, (free translation): **When one wants to influence others,**

וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאֶה אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵינוּ
עַל דְּמִיּוֹת דְּאֵלֵינוּ עֲלֵינוּ שִׁיחָה קו
בְּדַבָּר - שֶׁלֹּא יִשְׁכַּח
חֵי אֱמֶת וְקִדְשׁ דְּהַעֲלֵי דְהַיְיִו
אֵלָּה.
אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו

- particularly children – regarding any matter, that we want them to acquire properly, then, the Mashpia [parent/teacher] must be a living example, of one who is behaving in that matter meticulously. This is easy to understand.

The kinderlach must see how their Rebbe lives and conducts himself with Yiras Shamayim. For example, when the Rebbe eats or drinks something, he says the Bracha loud and clear, so that the Kinderlach may answer ברוך הוא and וברוך שמו, as a result, the children will emulate their teacher; The Rebbe's Tztizis are white and have **eight** complete strings on each corner; The Rebbe kisses the Mezuzah each time he passes through the doorway³; After using the bathroom, the Rebbe washes his hands with a and says the קווארט⁴ bracha אשר יצר loud and clear etc., etc.

³ It once happened, that a scholarly yeshiva student, came to the Chasam Sofer (Pressburg, 1762–1839) to get tested for Semicha, as it was customary for many students of the yeshiva. The Chasam Sofer tested him and was extremely impressed. He passed the exam with flying colors. Yet, the Chasam Sofer did not give him the Semicha right there and then. He told him to return the next day. The bochur left, wondering why the Chasam Sofer refused to give the Semicha immediately, as he would usually do for all his friends.

When he came back the following morning, to get his Semicha, the Chasam Sofer said to him, "I am sorry, I am not giving you Semicha." "why not?!" Stammered the bochur. "Have I failed? What have I answered incorrectly?"

The Chasam Sofer looked earnestly into his eyes, with compassion, with a face that displayed pain, and said: "In order to be a Rov, it's not enough to merely study the material, but, rather, to show a living example of a Yiray-Shamayim. Thus, when you entered my office last night to get tested, I noticed that you walked in without kissing the Mezuzah, which is a Minhag-Yisrael. I was melamed-zchus, that you were very nervous about the upcoming test. So you inadvertently missed kissing the Mezuzah. Yet, I was hoping that on your way out, since you're less nervous, you WILL kiss the Mezuzah, and then I'll be able to give you Semicha. But, sadly, you left my room without kissing the Mezuzah. I decided then, to give you a third chance, namely, if you come in the morning, after having slept and relaxed, and kiss the Mezuzah, I would be satisfied. But, then again, you have not kissed the mezuzah this morning. I cannot give Semicha to someone who does not cherish and is not careful about minhogei-yisroel.

⁴ קצות השלחן, סימן ב' הערה כט. מסגרת השלחן סק"ז בשם זכור לאברהם.

A Very New Channel for Chinuch

Geulah'dike Chinuch

At the farbrengen of Simchas Torah 5752, the Rebbe spoke about our kinderlach, and said as follows:

“Our Chachomim interpret the words: “אל תגעו במשיחי” (Do not touch My “**Moshiach**” - anointed ones)” as referring to school-children.

One of the explanations to this interpretation is as follows:

The Chinuch of children must go so far as to permeate and infuse them with the concept of Mashiach, to the extent that when one looks at these children, what does he see? – he sees **Moshiach!**”.

Question: How do we actualize this seemingly lofty concept?

The answer was already given to us by the Rebbe, in the abovementioned Sichas of Parshas Vayera, that nowadays we are able to teach and train our children to serve Hashem, just for Hashem's sake, doing what's right only because it is right, and not for the sake of reward.

This sort of chinuch is indeed Geula'dik.

For, in the time of Geulah, we will all be serving Hashem in this manner. Just for the sake of Hashem, with no ulterior motives.

Are the children Keilim (vessels, i.e. receptive) to such a level of chinuch?

Of course! They are like “sponges” and will take to it with the greatest enthusiasm.

We see this in the following Sichas of the Rebbe:

The Rebbe quotes the famous story about the Rebbe Rashab, as told by the Frierdiker Rebbe:

"When my father was four or five years old, he went to his grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek, on Shabbos Vayeira, and began to cry as he asked, "Why did Hashem show Himself to Avraham Avinu - but He does not show Himself to us?" The Tzemach Tzedek answered him: "When a tzadik decides at the age of ninety-nine years that he should have a Bris, he deserves that Hashem appear to him."

The Rebbe asks: Why did the Frierdiker Rebbe emphasize that the story happened with his father when he was only four or five years old?

The Rebbe answered: In order to teach us a fundamental lesson in regard to the chinuch of (even) very young children:

The Rambam writes (in his introduction to his commentary to Mishnayos) that in order to get a child to learn Torah, we need to "bribe" him, by promising him prizes (nuts, shoes, honor etc.); basically, things that he loves (דברים (האהובים אצלו).

So, is it possible to train a young child that "Elokus" (G-dliness) should be דברים האהובים אצלו? In other words, to learn לשמה, just for Hashem's sake? Without prizes etc.? Is this at all possible?!

The Rebbe says YES!

In fact, this is, indeed, the reason why the Frierdiker Rebbe emphasized that his father was only four or five years old when the story took place. In order to teach us, that a **NEW CHANNEL** (צינור) in chinuch has been opened. namely, **that a child of merely four or five years old can be educated in a way, that**

all he wants is Ruchnius and Elokus (G-dliness), to the point that he yearns (and cries) for Hashem to reveal Himself to him.

And once the Rebbe Rashab “paved” this NEW path, ANY child can reach this level.

That means, that eve a child of four or five years old, does not need to be “bribed” to learn Torah (through offering him prizes etc.), but he can learn Torah just because he wants Elokus; It became דברים האהובים אצלו.

The Rebbe emphasizes that specifically NOW, a new channel has been opened, and it is possible to accomplish this by every child.

That means, that through a proper approach, we can “breach” the nature of children, and train them to want Ruchniyus. To desire nothing else but Elokus.

The Rebbe concludes by saying, that if the teacher is not successful with his students in this matter, it is simply because the teacher has not spoken דברים היוצאים מן הלב (words that come from the heart). If the teacher would speak **from his heart**, he would surely succeeded.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

At this point, I’d like to bring my own experience in regard to this matter.

I have been blessed by Hashem Who has given the great opportunity to teach 6–7-year-old kinderlach for several decades. In the past, I have been accustomed, to follow the Rambam’s advice about bribing children to learn, daven, behave properly etc. by giving them points, tickets, prizes and so on, in order to get them to learn, daven, behave etc.

I attended a shiur on chinuch given by Rabbi Zvi שי״י Homnick, in which he discussed the above mentioned Sichah of the Rebbe about the NEW channel in

chinuch introduced by the Rebbe Rashab. Rabbi Homnick demanded strongly, “Why aren’t we following the Rebbe’s Hora’ah in this Sichah⁵!” “Why are teachers still “bribing” their students, when we have a clear guarantee from the Rebbe that we can be mechanech our kinderlach to learn and daven because they want Elokus?!”

Naturally, I felt guilty and thought of changing, but it didn’t materialize. Simply because I didn’t think it would work. I also thought “They’re not ready,” “The Rebbe doesn’t really mean that,” etc. I was obviously lacking the confidence that it takes, to accomplish this lofty goal with my talmidim.

So, I (finally) decided to GO FOR IT!

Practical application of the Rebbe’s Hora’ah

With a strong Determination to carry out the Rebbe’s hora’a, here is what I did:

I Based myself on the following Hayom Yom: “With three instruments of service – אהבת השם, אהבת התורה, אהבת ישראל (Love of Hashem, Love of Torah and Love of every Yid) — must the young students of Torah approach their avoda in the vineyard of צבאות ה’, to bring the hearts of their brothers closer to observing practical mitzvos . . . and there is a “Promise” regarding effort and labor — that they shall never be *fruitless*.”

My strategy was now clear:

⁵ I also attended a seminar, given by Rabbi Binyomin 'שיי' Ginsburg. One of the topics was, Setting our goal, to train children to LEARN TORAH FOR THE SAKE OF LEARNING TORAH (versus for prizes etc.) - exactly what the Rebbe has instructed us to do in the Sichah of Vayera!

On the very first day of the schoolyear, as the kinderlach entered the classroom. After giving each of them a personal warm welcome, and instructed them to take a seat.

Then, I asked the following question: “Please, raise your hand if you can tell me why are you here today?” “Why have you come to Yeshiva?”

Believe it or not, only a few hands went up. That means that most of the kinderlach were either shy, or, had no clue what they’re doing in Yeshiva. And for sure, no clue of what’s their “GOAL”.

Actually, the few boys who raised their hands didn’t help much either. One answered “My Mommy sent me”, another answered, “To find out in which class I am going to be”. Yet another, “to play” or similar responses. Only one boy, did say “to learn Torah”. Ahh!

Then it was MY turn.

I pointed to the writing board and asked the Kinderlach “What does it say here?”

They read the three lines:

אַהֲבַת הַשֵּׁם
אַהֲבַת הַתּוֹרָה
אַהֲבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל

(Love of Hashem, Love of the Torah, and Love of Every Yid)

I then explained to them in detail, with stories and meshalim, what these three things mean. I concluded by saying:

“THIS is why you are here in Yeshiva. Yes, we will have fun, we will play, but the main reason is, because we are going to learn about , אַהֲבַת הַשֵּׁם אַהֲבַת הַתּוֹרָה, and אַהֲבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל.” Whatever we are going to learn, and whatever we’re

going to do here, will IY”H be in order that we learn how to love Hashem, love the Torah and love every single Yid.

I then repeated my original question:

“Kinderlach! Please raise your hand if you can tell me why you have come to Yeshiva today!”

ALL hands went up B”H as they all called out the three AHAVOS.

From time to time (in the beginning of the year, three times a day, and then only once a day and eventually just once in a while) I would repeat the same question to the entire class, only to hear them enthusiastically respond with the correct answer.

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As mentioned earlier, mentioning Hashem’s name often, gives the child the feeling that Hashem is REALLY involved with everything he does.

For example, when we learn Chumash, I emphasize very often that the Torah is Hashem’s most precious treasure – We are soooo lucky to be able to learn *Di Heilige* Torah.

From time to time, I touch upon Perek 5 of Tanya, that when we learn Torah, we are doing THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD! We become ONE and UNITED with Hashem!

I also taught them the Niggun that my father, Uncle Yossi, A”H, used to sing with us, when we were very young, while driving us to Yeshiva. The words:

“קינדער קינדער לערנט תורה, תורה איז די בעסטע סחורה”

(“Children! Children! Study Torah, for Torah is the Best merchandise”⁶)

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⁶ T.T.T.O. “Yankel Yankel” – Avraham Fried

After “saturating” the Kinderlach with many, many stories and lessons that bring out the point, that Torah is worth more than all the money in the world, I finally “dropped the bomb”.

I asked the Kinderlach:

“Kinderlach! So what’s the best thing in the world?”

Naturally, they answered: “THE TORAH!”

I continued: “Then, I have a question for you. If I offered to give someone a gift of a million dollars. and he answers me: “I will accept the million Dollars only on one condition, that you also give me a Penny”. what do you think of him?

They all began laughing. I asked them what’s so funny. They said, “If he’s getting a MILLION DOLLARS why does he need a penny too?!”

I continued: “How about if instead of a penny, he would ask for a drop of dust, what would you say then?”

They laughed even louder.

I then concluded: “We know that the Torah “Iz di beste s’choira,” so if someone teaches you Torah, that’s like he’s giving you more than a million Dollars. Right?!”

So, does it make sense, that a child should say, “Yes, I will learn Torah, only if you give me a piece of dust, or a lollipop?!”

It’s not worth it! They all called out.

So, then what would be the best reward?

After a moment of thought, they all called out in unison: “More Torah!”.

From that moment and on, I never again needed to give any tickets, points, prizes or anything ever again for learning or davening.

In fact, if I were to say: “Listen Kinderlach! Whoever will learn the Chumash well, will get a prize from me,” the kinderlach’s response would be: “No thanks, Rebbi, we don’t need prizes for learning. The best prize is to learn another possuk Chumash.” “We learn Torah because we love the Torah”.

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How did this happen? Not by a Miracle.

It happened simply because I was finally determined to follow the Rebbe’s Horaah.

I must add:

- a) It doesn’t happen all of a sudden. It takes time and patience. And lots of farbrenging and stories.
- b) It is not that I never give them treats or prizes. I definitely do. But, **not as a result** or in connection with their learning, it’s rather RANDEME, and spontaneously. From time to time I would treat them to a snack (a cookie, lollypop or so; as well as prizes too).

It has happened (more than once), that, out of habit, I would say, after finishing a lesson: “Kinderlach! Here is a treat”. And they would answer “Rebbi, better not now. Because we have just finished learning Chumash and we don’t want it to be connected to our learning Chumash!”

I must say, that the kinderlach took to it with so much enthusiasm, much more than I have anticipated. If I ever mistakenly (or “purposely”) tried to bribe them – they would adamantly refuse.

Indeed, now it was MY TURN to work on myself, and get used to “running the show” without bribes!

True, it is sometimes a bit more challenging on my part, but it is worth it!

This trains the children into doing the right thing JUST L'shaim Shamayim!

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Now, you may ask:

Does this method always work with all children?

Well, ideally, "Yes", of course. But, I must admit that there was one exception in my class.

One boy, let's call him Shmuly, did not take to it. I tried again and again, but I was not successful in getting him "on board". Shmuly happened to, otherwise, been going through some emotional struggles, and has actually not participated in almost any class activities. Namely, Davening, Learning etc.

I tried moving his seat very close to my desk. I also spoke with him a lot etc. but got nowhere yet.

I knew that we first have to get him "on board". To become "part of the class" in regard to the other activities. Then we can go to the next step.

His parents suggested that I DO promise him a tangible reward. Maybe that would work. I didn't get too far with that either.

In the meantime, precious time was passing.

We finally came up with a solution that shmuly liked.

The deal was: That he would get to "go out" with Mommy for a special trip, if he brings home a good report from school. The good report would consist of a number of points that he must "earn" for good participation.

The deal was as follows: For each Possuk that he says together with the class he would get 100 (!) points. (Yes, it is worth it, just to get him to begin joining the class).

All he had to do was to learn only one possuk a day. At the end of the week, he would earn 600 points – that was the whole amount that he needed to earn the trip with Mommy.

Thus, the following morning, as entered the class, he handed me a chart to be filled out, as he gained his points. He was convinced that all he had to do was to say ONE POSSUK with the class. As we began learning Chumash, I looked at Shmuly and discreetly showed him the chart, thereby reminding him of “our deal”. He whispered to me, with a BIG smile, “Rebbi, only one possuk!” To which I smilingly responded “Sure!”

For the first time in many weeks, Shmuly opened his Chumash, asked me for the place, and got ready to begin. After finishing the first possuk, I showed him how I am writing down the number 100 on his chart. He was all smiles!

As I got ready to shift my attention to the rest of the class and begin the next possuk, I turned to Shmuly and with my eyes wide open and with a BIG BIG smile, I raised two fingers with an inquisitive look, as if to say, “Shmuly, do you want to go for TWO HUNDRED points?”. He smiled back and nodded with his head “YES!”

You can guess what happened after the second possuk. Yes, he wanted more and more. From that day and on, he would beg me (sometimes even during recess time) to learn more pesukim. This continued throughout the year B”H.

You are surely wondering whether shmuly succeeded too, as the rest of the class, in learning Torah and davening just for Hashem’s sake.

The answer is YES!

At a certain point, Shmuly was offered a prize by the principal for good behavior and participation in class. He responded: “No thanks. I don’t need any prizes”.

Pleasantly Surprized!

Every child, without exception, is “ready” for this kind of chinuch, as we see in the following few events:

a) Yanky told me that he finished the entire tehillim on shabbos mevarchim. He added, that when his uncle offered him a prize for saying so much tehillim, he said: “No thanks, I don’t want a prize. I said the tehillim for “shabbos mevarchim!” and not for a prize.

b) After teaching about the importance of Pidyon Shvuim, and telling the children that they can help a Yid get out of jail by bringing some money, I added on the Homework sheet the words “**\$Pidyon Shevuim**”. The following day several boys brought in money. One of them, yossi, brought in \$30 with a note from his mother, saying that **it was all from his own money!**

I was very impressed.

So I told them the story about the צפתיער איד with אלי הנביא, how he refused to tell אלי הנביא what special thing he has done on the day of his Bar Mitzva (for which he deserved to get to see אלי הנביא). אלי הנביא said to him, that he will not reveal to him the torah-secrets he intended to tell him.

Thr Yid nevertheless refused, saying that “whatever I did was only for Hashem”.

This caused a great tumult in shamayim, and it was decided that this Yid’s neshama will again come down to this world, in order to illuminate the world with torah-secrets. That was the Neshama of the Baal-Shem-Tov.

I concluded by asking both boys, yankel and yossi, “If אלי הנביא comes to you now and will say to you that he will reveal to you torah-secrets, on the condition that you tell him about the good things you’ve done (refusing a prize

for saying Tehillim, and giving your own \$ for pidyon shevuim), will you tell him? They both answered “No”.

guess what happened next:

it's Yudy's turn to surprise me.

Let me first introduce to you Yudi:

Yudi is a boy in class, who was a “project” for me to figure out:

He was going through a difficult time at home, as well as in school, and sought lots of negative attention in class, which I obviously did not give.

It once happened, during a Hachnasa L'cheder, the class sang “Kinder kinder lernt torah, torah iz di beste s'choira”. The child's zaide (who was there) then asked the class if they want doughnuts for learning torah? Naturally, they loudly and proudly answered “NO!”.

“How about Pizza?” asked the zaide. They all answered “NO!”.

Except for Yudi, who brazenly screamed out, “Yes! I do want Pizza!”

I was naturally very upset, but chose to ignore it again, so as not to “reward” his negative behavior with any attention. But made a mental note in my mind, that “who knows? Maybe he does need physical rewards.”.

One morning, I “caught him” saying along a few words of davenning with the class. I commented: “Wow! Yudi is davenning sooooo nice”. “Keep it up, Yudi”.

Naturally, he began davenning even better, and did well for a good portion of the davening, which was quite unusual for him.

After davening, I called him quietly to my desk, and - referring to my mental note (that he might still need prizes) – I “slipped” a chocolate coated wafer into

his hand, and said: “Yudi, this is for davening so nicely”. “you don’t need to tell anyone about the wafer”.

Smilingly, he took the wafer, hid it under his shirt and slowly walked to his seat.

I then thought to myself “there you see, that not necessarily are ALL boys able to operate on that high lofty level, of davening only for Hashem”.

But, I was proven otherwise. For about 10-15 minutes later, Yudi walked over to me and quietly, with a serious but half-smiling face, returned the wafer, saying. “No thanks, Rebbi, I don’t want the wafer for davening, I davened for Hashem”.

I was so pleasantly surprized, I gave him a BIG Yasher-koyach in front of the class and told the class what had just happened, I said “I gave Yudi a wafer for davening nicely, and he returned it to me. Because he davened only for Hashem”.

Another boy spontaneously turned to me and said with a radiant face: “Rebbi, Just imagine what a tumult is NOW happening in Shamayim!”

The True Goal

The Corridor or the Palace?

For a deeper understanding of the advantage in training a child in this way:

Let us imagine a corridor that leads to a beautiful palace. Everyone understands that the corridor is only a “means” by which one can reach the main goal – the “palace”.

So, when I tell a child that, if he learns a possuk Chumash or davens nicely, he will get a prize (a lollypop, a bicycle or so), we are giving him a clear message (subconsciously), that the possuk chumash is only the “**Corridor**”, which leads him to the “**Palace**” - the prize.

In other words: when I say to a child, “if you say this possuk, daven or help your mommy, you’ll get a lollypop,”

I am actually “selling” the possuk of chumash for so cheap! Meaning: Selling Torah FOR A MEASLEY lollypop!!

This is the “message” that I’m implanting into his heart, consciously or subconsciously. And the child “won’t buy that”!! because, the child inherently knows and feels the truth, that Torah iz di beste schoira.

Therefore, by engraving into the heart of the child Avahas Hashem, and that “Torah Iz Di Beste S’choira” (Torah is the best merchandise), this will become his reality. He will remember for the rest of his life that the “Palace” is the Torah.

The Rebbe places only one condition, however, for this to succeed, that the teacher must speak from his heart, that “Torah Iz Di Beste S’choira”.

Consequently - learning Torah, Davening to Hashem and doing Mitzvos in general, is a privilege and not a “burden” Chas vesholom.

A mother once told me, that she would bribe her 5-year-old son to daven by promising him prizes, because for her davening was a “burden” and “boring”. So, she “projected” her negative view about davening on to her child and assumed that the **only way** to get him to do “the boring thing” is by promising him a prize.

Remember, words that leave the heart enter the heart⁷.

The Test

A child who learns for the sake of Hashem, will have more Yiras Shomayim.

⁷ Here's A thought inspired by Rabbi Yanky 'ש Goldstein

Two questions – one answer:

- a) How come, there are many yidden, who went on mesiras nefesh for torah and mitzvos in Russia back in the day, and when they arrived in a free country, they seem to act differently?
- b) How come there are children in cheder, who seem to be doing very well, when they are young, and when they grow up, they seem to act differently?

One answer (adapted from Maamor V'Ata Tetzave 5741):

The Yid in Russia, whose yiddishkite was threatened by the KGB, (punishment of prison, Siberia etc) was aroused by his "Yechidah-Shebenefesh" (Di pintele Yid).

Which "shuts-down" his sechel and midos completely, so that he is ready to go on mesiras nefesh. Irrationally

This revelation of yechida, however, did NOT transform his sechel or midos at all, it rather "pushed them aside" (it "numbed" them) and enabled him to be ready to jump into fire for Hashem.

But, coming to a free land, he now only has a "raw" set of sechel and midos. Raw material, which he has not yet worked on and been refined. With the lack of the revelation of the Yechida (since he's in a free land, with no oppression), he's now challenged to face the new tests from scratch.

Likewise, a cheder-boy, who let's say, is not yet interested in davening, learning Torah, behaving etc, and is manipulated (coerced into it) by stuffing him with prizes, tickets, etc etc, or threatening him with punishment for not obeying, will not learn to appreciate Torah and mitzvos for its "inherent" value.

The prizes and punishments simply don't work on his sechel and midos, to refine them, they rather "put them to sleep" by an "anesthetic" called prizes or fear of punishment.

So, no wonder, that when he "wakes up" from the anesthetic, either because he's not offered prizes or he has "better" prizes that he found in life, R"L, then what?

Here is where the Rebbe's revolutionary approach to chinuch (Lekutei sichos vol 15 sichas 20 cheshvon) comes into play.

Namely, teaching and training children to learn Torah and do mitzvos, because they love Hashem. And not for prizes/fear of punishment

By training them, in a loving way, to have "Chavivus Hamitzvos" and "Chibas HaTorah", as the Rebbe guarantees in that sicha, they will have an opportunity to "work" on their sechel and midos, and then, B'ezeras Hashem, as Shlomo Hamelech guarantees us "Chanoch L'Naar al pi Darko, Gan Ki Yazkin Lo Yosur Mimena".

As chassidus puts it: while learning the torah we must remember the “Noisayn Hatorah” (the One Who gives us the Torah).

This will ultimately lead the child to action, namely, to behave properly, even in a situation when THE ONLY ONE THERE, IS HASHEM.

Here is an actual example:

In my classroom there exists a CCTV camera mounted on the ceiling.

Although it is no longer operable. However, the kinderlach still think that it is connected to the principal’s office, and the principal can see, at any given moment, what’s going on in the class.

So that if I ever leave the room for a moment, they won’t get out of their seat, simply because they “know” that “someone’s watching.”

I was bothered by the fact that they behaved only because of the “camera”. I asked myself “what’s about YIRAS SHAMAYIM?!”

So, it’s time to tell them a story.

By the way:

The Rebbe underlines in a Sichah⁸ the importance of storytelling to children.

The Rebbe explains: “When a teacher begins a lesson, a child might be fearful, thinking that the lesson will be too difficult for him to understand.

In order to dispel this fear, the teacher should give the lesson in the form of a story. For then, on the contrary, the children will pay attention with much more interest. They will even ask for more and more. A lesson is much better absorbed in the child’s heart when it is presented in a story form.”

⁸ תורת מנחם תשמ”ה ח”ד, ע’ 2302

So, I told them the famous story⁹ of “The King Is Watching!” and then I said to the kinderlach “You know what Hashem wants you to do, when your Rebbi leaves the room. remain quietly in your seats or misbehave?”

They obviously answered “Remain quietly in our seats”.

“If so”, I continued, “Do we really need the “camera” to watch you? Isn’t it enough that Hashem is watching you?, And since Hashem is watching you, do you think it is ok for me to cover the camera? And then, you will behave nicely only because Hashem is watching you and not because of the camera!”

They all answered, “Yes, Rebbi, please cover the camera”.

I said “OK”.

I then left the room. When I walked back in, guess what I saw? **ALL THE KINDERLACH WERE SITTING QUIETLY IN THEIR SEATS!!**

The Great Benefits!

⁹ A coachman was struggling to control his urge to steal some fruit from the king's royal orchards. Reb Yitzchok, a passenger in his coach, pleads with the coachman not to steal, but his words fall on deaf ears. Reb Yitzchok came up with a clever trick which saved the coachman from stealing. As soon as the coachman reached out for the fruit, Reb Yitzchok shouted “The King is watching”!. The coachman stopped what he was doing and sped away. When the coachman later asked Reb Yitzchok “What is king doing out by the orchards?” Reb Yitzchok answered, “I meant the King of all kings, Hashem, He is watching”.

By training our children in the above manner, namely, as our chachamim say in Avoth (chap. 4 mishna 2) “S’char Mitzva Mitzva, Us’char aveira aveira”, The reward for a Mitzva is the Mitzva itself. That means, that the greatest reward for doing a Mitzva, is the very fact that we have an opportunity **to do the mitzvah**, and connect with Hashem.

A parable to tell children:

Let’s say, you are standing in front of 770, and the Rebbe’s secretary asks you to help the Rebbe in his office.

would you make a condition, that you will do it ONLY if the Rebbe gives you something for it. Or, are you ready to do it, JUST because serving the Rebbe itself **IS THE GREATEST REWARD!!**

All the more so, to serve Hashem!!! Our greatest reward is the fact that we are able to serve Hashem and make Him happy.

Conversely, the biggest “punishment” for committing an aveira is **the aveira itself**, realizing the fact that we have transgressed and been disconnected (to a certain extent) from Hashem.

By teaching/training a child into the concept that doing good is itself the greatest reward, then, instead of the child refraining from sin because of fear of punishment, he will fear sin just because he is so connected to Hashem that he doesn’t want to go against Hashem, C”V.

Consequently, the child has ingrained in his mind and heart, that the worst thing about doing something wrong is the very fact that it is wrong in the eyes of Hashem!

In other words: In order to be good servants of Hashem, we do what's right BECAUSE IT'S RIGHT; and refrain from that which is wrong BECAUSE IT'S WRONG - **regardless of any reward or punishment.**

Practically speaking, in a class setting, when a boy has done something wrong, which must call for my reaction/response, I do the following:

I call him over to my desk (or walk over to him and crouch down to see him eye-to-eye), and softly and calmly say to him: "Moishele Tzadik'l, did Hashem want you to do so-and-so, or not".

Hopefully, Moishele answers appropriately.

I continue: "So, what you have done must have been a mistake. I know that you can do better than that, and I'm sure you will be more careful next time".

Moshele nods his head in the affirmative.

The condition is however, that **my tone of voice** and dignified approach to the child is gentle. Free from anger.

Showing trust and confidence in his ability to behave properly goes a long way, in encouraging him to actually improve.

This also helps in many other instances. For example, if Moishele is not sitting straight, the first thing I do: IGNORE IT.

If for some reason, however it is absolutely necessary to get him to sit straight (ex. He's disturbing the boy next to him), although I would still ignore it, I nevertheless do try to get him to sit straight in an indirect way.

Example: "Wow! Hashem has so much nachas from the way the boys are sitting so straight."

Or, say (with a smile) to moishele: “I really love the way you were sitting so straight this morning”

Watch what happens? Moishele sits up straight.

No More Punishments?!

Can this approach eliminate the need of punishments altogether?

Absolutely!

At fist, a vort from the Besht:

The Besht was once asked, what is the advantage of the Derech of chassidus over the previous Derech, taught in sifrei mussar, such as Raishis-Chochmah, Shaloh, etc. who are also based on Kabala.

The Besht answered, with a parable: when a thief comes to steal, there are two ways how one can protect himself.

- A) You scream at the thief so that he gets frightened and runs away. But he can possibly come back again to steal.
- B) You catch the thief and speak with him gently, and convince him to stop stealing.

This (second) Derech is the accomplishment of chassidus over the previous Derech¹⁰.

The lesson here is as follows:

¹⁰ תורת מנחם תשט"ז ח"ב, אחשי"פ ע' 234

There are basically four goals intended when punishments are given to a student, one less favorable than the other.

- a. Giving a relatively minor punishment, with the goal in mind, that the student should “learn his lesson” that there is accountability for everything one does (It’s not a “Hefker-Velt”).
- b. Giving a learning assignment to the child, to learn the lesson on his own or with a friend, so that he makes up the lesson that he missed.
- c. Giving a relatively harsh punishment. So that the student should feel some pain. The teacher hopes, that the student will regret his actions and not repeat it, due to fear of punishment/pain.
- d. A more severe punishment, with the intention to “get even” with the student, who had the “chutzpa” not to pay attention to the lesson, or even more so, disturb the class. For this, he will lose recess or get an assignment to write 500 times, or some other punishment.

What are the results of these punishments?

Experience has clearly shown that **just the opposite happens!**.
punishments are in nearly always **counterproductive!**

Not only does the child not resolve to improve himself in the future. Instead, he immediately makes plans on how not to get caught next time. He also becomes resentful to his Rebbi and makes plans how “to get even” with the Rebbi¹¹.

¹¹ Back in the day, in Russia, there was a teacher who had a boy Yossele in his class, who was super-hyper. The Rebbi was patient with the boy. The boy even climbed out of the window on to a tree with was right near the window, so the Rebbi said to him, “Yossele, that okay, just take your Gemara with you onto the branch. The Rebbi would all so often call out to him “Yossele, are you following? Do you understand the Gemara’s question? And the answer?”

The reason is as follows:

If we focus on the past, namely, on the negative, the student picks up one message: “I did something ‘bad’. So I must be a ‘bad boy!’” – Regardless of the good intentions of the teacher.

The result: the student feels belittled, low self-esteem and ultimately “gives up hope”.

Likewise, even if the teacher does not actually punish the child, but speaks to him in a harsh manner, it leads to similar negative results. As the Frierdiker Rebbe explains in Klalei HaChinuch VebaHadracha (chapter 5):

“Words of scorn, when coming from the mouth of his teacher, make a bad impression on a student and diminish the teacher’s stature in the student’s eyes.

Many educators mistaken to think that an outburst from their part will help them achieve their goal. Among them are teachers who attack their students with extremely harsh and angry words, insulting and berating them.

Truly, even if the student becomes temporarily aroused and moved from the flaming words of the teacher, his heart shrinking within him in pain, and at times he cries bitterly, nevertheless, this type of

This boy, Yossele grew up to be the famous Ragotchover Gaon (Reb Yosef Rosen of Dvinsk), and it was he, the Gaon himself, who has told this story, praising his Rebbe for his tolerance and patience.

On the other hand, there was another Rebbe, who had a boy Leible. More-or-less the same problem. But this Rebbe had no patience for him and kicked him out. He went out to the streets, joined a group of Goyim, befriended Lenin and eventually became the infamous founder of Communism, Leible Trotzky!

When this Rebbe came to see the Chafaitz Chaim, the Chafaitz Chaim refused to let him in, and said some very harsh words regarding this Rebbe.

education yields no lasting benefit whatsoever. Any temporary positive effects vanish like a fleeting dream.

The benefits of education can be realized only when the education and guidance are accompanied by composure, politeness, and pleasant speech — with befitting expressions.”

I have personally witnessed the following 2 episodes:

A) Yehudah's parents were at a loss what to do with their 10-year-old son, who would not daven “שמונה עשרה”, under no circumstances. Countless speeches, rewards or punishments were all to no avail.

Then one day, Yehuda blurted out: “**I hate שמונה עשרה!**”.

Mommy responded, “You seem to be very upset about aying שמונה עשרה”.

“Yes!”, said Yehuda, “and it’s all Rabbi so-and-so’s fault!”.

Yehuda then told his mother, how he got punished several months earlier by Rabbi so-and-so, for not davening properly, and got an assignment to write the entire שמונה עשרה, word for word.

Yehuda concluded by saying: “Ever since then, I hate שמונה עשרה!”

B) In a Beis-midrash, I once opened a Tanya to the Shaar-blatt (title-page), and read the following message written with a pencil.

THIS IS THE TANYA WHICH I USED TO WRITE MY TANYA-קנס (assignment).
THE LESSON I’VE LEARNED IS THAT NEXT TIME I SHOULD MAKE SURE
NOT TO GET CAUGHT!

The common lesson we learn from these two stories is clear:

- a) Punishments have NO educational value. They do not prevent future misbehavior. As mentioned earlier, chassidus **gently** “teaches” the thief to be honest, but NOT through punishment.
- b) One shall never use a Kedusha-object as a punishing-rod.

Examples: writing part of davening; writing a Mishna with its English translation, writing a particular Rashi three times because the child was not paying attention; Studying lines of Tanya by heart for some other misbehavior or so.

By giving such punishments/assignments, it sub-consciously transmits a strong message to the child (especially to a young student) that tefila or Tanya, are “objects” that cause pain. Or, that they are meant for punishing “bad boys”¹²

Due to his present state of mind, the child doesn’t “suspect” that his teacher is “rewarding” him with “Di Beste Schoira” (writing Tanya, Rashi, etc.) for doing something wrong!

All he feels now, is one thing: that he’s getting punished with something that hurts him!. - Regardless of the teacher’s good and positive intentions.

What’s the result?

¹² We find this idea in Torah. A) in shemos, parshas Beshalach, Hashem said to Moishe, take your staff which you used to strike the Nile, and hit the Rock to bring forth water. Says Rashi, that until then, the Yidden associated Moishe’s Rod with “Punishment”, and thought of it as a “tool” to bring פורענות (Punishment). B) in Bamidbar Parshas Korach, Rashi says that until the Ketoress was used to save the Yidden from the plague, the Yidden associated it with punishment, death of Nadav and Avihu.

On the hand, the Rebbe explains the reason of throwing candies and licking honey by Hachnasa L’cheder, it’s in order that the child associates Torah learning with “sweetness”!

I don't believe that any teacher thinks, that the punished child (or a child sent to his room for "time-out") is now contemplating "How am I going to be a better boy from now and on".

Rabbi Berl futerfas שליט"א told me once - "A teacher must remember, that as long as the child loves the teacher, he will also love Hashem (Whom the teacher is representing). And if the child hates the teacher, then the child will feel the same towards

Here are now a few tough questions to ask ourselves, honestly:

How Does a child who gets a punishment feel a) about himself? b) about his Rabbi? c) about resolving to improve his ways?

The contrary is true, in most cases, the child develops a negative feeling towards the educator, as well as towards those "objects" of Kedusha which were used as a "Rod of Punishment", instead of appreciating them as "Di Beste Schoira".

It's actually common sense, let's ask ourselves: "How can writing shmoin esray suddenly improve the child's lack of appreciation for davening? What sort of "education" is being accomplished? was it the "writing" of shmoin esray that Yehuda was previously lacking and therefore did not daven properly?"

The same is regarding similar punishments, such as assignments of studying Tanya by heart. How is that supposed to "educate" the child? What is the "connection" between studying a perek Tanya by-heart and "Punishments"?! how is writing a painful assignment supposed to "improve" the child's character? Besides arousing anger and resentment to the educator.

A Rabbi punished his student by giving him an assignment to study Tanya by heart, and the student was to remain out of school until he's done. So the student actually remained home for two weeks (!!).

Isn't it obvious, that a child, who is misbehaving or doing something wrong, is simply lacking a proper understanding and appreciation of what is right and wrong in this matter?

Therefore, just like when a child is not feeling well, he doesn't get punished for it, but rather gets medical treatment by a doctor who determines which vitamin (or so) the child is lacking, and prescribes that particular vitamin for the child.

The same thing is regarding a child who is not behaving well, he is surely lacking some "Chinuch-vitamins", namely, proper understanding of the matter. The solution is not by punishing the child, but rather by "educating" him, regarding that matter, in a pleasant and peaceful way, so that he is capable of "absorbing" the lesson and understanding it properly.

Thus, the teacher's reaction to a child's misdeed should be, to educate the child in the area that he is lacking. If it is in Derech Eretz, he should be taught that subject. Gently, of course. But NOT in the way of a Punishment, like "DON'T COME BACK TO CLASS UNTILL YOU LEARN HILCHOS DERECH ERTETZ!!" or likewise, if a student is lacking education in any other area.

But not through punishment, rather as a lesson, whether in class or in some other appropriate setting.

And, the best and most successful way to teach these concepts and lessons, is as the Rebbe taught us (see footnote 7), it is through storytelling, of tzadikim and people who struggled but also succeeded in passing their tests.

TO SUM IT UP

As long as the teacher sets his goal to imbue his talmidim with the love for Hashem. With a love for davening and learning torah, by explaining how lucky we are to daven, to get to speak to the King of kings: Hashem! Then, the focus is (not on the teacher's own Kovid, (**"He didn't listen to me"**!!) but rather) on Hashem's Kovid. Thus, the teacher will make sure to react (not impulsively, but) in a way that is most beneficial for the child's sake and for Hashem!

By focusing on a positive future, the child will feel empowered and encouraged to improve himself.

Children are Hashem's Treasure

כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלך (אבות ד, יב.)

Nowhere do we find a "heter" for a Rebbe to humiliate a child. A child is not the "property" of the teacher, they are HASHEM'S children¹³!

Even when it is absolutely necessary to comment or reprimand a child for a certain negative behavior, it must be done with respect and in a way that allows him to "save face".

We can learn this lesson from the following episode in the Torah:

¹³ The Rebbe said to Rabbi Shmuel "שיח" Lew, "Your children are actually NOT YOUR'S. They are Hashem's Children!"

When Moishe Rabeinu came down from the Mountain, and saw that Aharon has assisted the Yidden in making the golden calf, we don't find that Moishe thundered at Aharon, "What have you done?!"

The Torah tells us what Moishe has said instead:

”מָה-עָשָׂה לָךְ הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי-הֵבֵאתָ עָלֵיו חַטָּאת גְּדוֹלָה.”

“What has this nation done to you, that you have brought a great sin upon it?” (Shemos 32, 21.)

(Rashi: They must have tortured you so badly, that you brought the sin upon them).

From this, we learn how to rebuke someone (even for a sin as terrible as the Golden Calf):

Moishe offered to Aharon an excuse and a Limud Zechus for what he has done, namely, that the people must have tortured him so badly, that it has resulted in such a terrible sin.

Let us translate this into a practical example:

Shloimy misbehaved on the school bus this morning. Rabbi hears many complaints from the children about him.

Shloimy hears the complaints pouring in and is naturally upset, angry and feels worthless.

Perhaps, this is what the Rabbi should say:

Rabbi (softly): Shloimy, I know that you usually behave well, but, it seems like you are not feeling well this morning. Is it perhaps because you had a bad

sleep (which might really be the case), or something went on at home that's really bothering you. It seems like somehow you "let it out" on the bus. Right?

Shloimy will really appreciate the fact that his Rebbi is not blaming him for being a "bad boy," but rather, pointing out that Rebbi believes in Shloimy, that he is really a good boy, who has just "made a mistake" due to uncomfortable feelings, and will be better NEXT time.

The result: Shloimy will either "open up" and express the feelings that brought him to do it, or, he walks away feeling relieved and encouraged "reset", and make the day a good one.

The key to remember is, that our Talmidim are pure and holy, they are ready and eager to serve Hashem FOR HASHEM'S SAKE, and are seeking the EMES.

Whatever we say or do – should be with one goal in mind: to show them our trust and belief in them, that we expect and feel reassured that they know to do the right thing, to be Hashem's faithful servants.

Healthy Self Esteem (Despite One's Mistakes)

By training a child to serve Hashem, not for the sake of honor, prizes or so, but only for Hashem, the child will also know how to better handle his own mistakes. Because, once a child is trained to serve Hashem for Hashem's sake, then, if he makes a mistake, **it will not harm his self esteem**. On the contrary, he can "rise above" his own shame and regard the matter in the proper perspective. He will feel strong enough to admit that he made a mistake and will seek to correct it

Sounds very lofty? too abstract?

Well, the following episode took place in my class in the beginning of the year:

Baruch was reading from the Siddur. At a certain point, he read a word incorrectly. I gently brought it to his attention, so that he will repeat the word correctly.

But he denied the fact that he made a mistake.

I kept quiet.

A few moments later, it happened again and he denied it again. But this time he got emotional and began to cry.

So let's try to understand, what's going on in his mind?

Answer: he was obviously not ready to handle the fact that **he has made a mistake**. Apparently, in his mind, a mistake is a “bad” thing and reflects badly on him, so that his self-esteem is shattered!

(This happens when the focus is only on one's self, versus Hashem, so he needs to “defend” himself.)

So, it was time for me to get to work. Obviously not right now¹⁴, but at the first ripe opportunity.

At the first suitable moment, I began:

¹⁴ lecturing or “fixing” on the heat of the moment NEVER-EVER works.

“No one likes to make mistakes. So why do we make mistakes?”

“We do not make mistakes “on purpose”. Right?! So, it is surely from Hashem. It is b’hashgacha protis.”

“Why should Hashem “allow” us to make a mistake?. After all, since we really did not WANT to make that mistake, why didn’t Hashem prevent us from making it?”

“The answer is, there is a special kavana (reason, purpose) in it. It is “YERIDA L’TZOIRECH ALIYAH”, it is only in order that we should be more careful next time.”

“Do mistakes make us into a bad person? - Absolutely not!”

Just the opposite; it turns us into a better person, **as long as we learn a lesson from it how to be more careful next time.**”

“We must remember that ly HASHEM is perfect. And we are human. We try our best to do things right, but we must understand that we can make mistakes and then correct them.

It is almost as if you can say “**IT IS ALLRIGHT FOR US TO MAKE A MISTAKE**”. If we admit it and resolve to try better next time.

“So, if a boy recites the Chumash and he makes a mistake, instead of getting embarrassed and feeling hurt, he should say to himself, “Oh well, *nisht geferlich*, I will try better next time.”

After all, we are doing this only for Hashem. And Hashem accepts our mistakes.”

In order to demonstrate this more vividly, I practiced what I have just preached. I began reciting a Possuk and purposely made a mistake in the reading. I stopped, the kinderlach looked up at me in surprise, I smiled, and, with a chuckle, I said: “Oops, I made a mistake!

OK! I will be more careful next time”.

I then read it correctly.

In the beginning it was hard for Baruch to get used to it. But, after a few instances and reassurance from me that “it is OK”, he accepted the fact of making mistakes. He no longer “fell apart” and had a “melt-down” by his mistakes.

The next time Baruch read incorrectly, I stopped him and said (smilingly): “Baruch, do you know why you made this mistake?”

He smiled back and proudly said, “Yes! In order that I should be more careful next time.”

Admit to Hashem!

In the same vein, children who keep their focus on Hashem, will be ready to admit their mistake even without needing their Rebbe to point it out.

As we see in the following episode:

A couple of weeks into the year, I received a note from one of the parents, with a complaint, that her son has been bringing snacks to class, but when it came time to eat them, they were missing!

In order not to make a fuss about something negative, I did not take any action right away.

However, I did make a mental note that my next “Farbrengen-time” was going to be on this topic.

By the way, although I place a tremendous emphasis on midos tovos (character training), and I have a comprehensive curriculum that I follow, going through midda after midda, - my curriculum is however very flexible. That is, as soon as I’ve notice a certain undesirable behavior of a child, I make that my top priority as my next theme to talk and learn about.

Even when I do speak about it, I don’t point out “who did it”, so not to embarrass the child, but rather I “farbreng”, or tell a “story” about “someone else, far far away” who did such and such, and how it was dealt with.¹⁵

Here is what I did:

After recess, as we sat down to learn Chumash I put on a serious face and said in a low voice:

“Before we begin learning Hashem’s heilige Torah, I uld like talk about honesty.

¹⁵ I once asked Rabbi Chodakov A”H, if it’s ok for me to “make-up” stories, in order to teach yiras shamayim amd good middos (like Berl and shmerl went to the park...). He answered: it’s ok as long as the message is TRUE.

“Some snacks were missing lately from some briefcases. I don’t know who took them. I am sure that whoever took them did it by mistake, not realizing that stealing is such a big Aveira.

“On the other hand, Hashem wants to see that whoever made the mistake, should admit it, do teshuva and be more careful next time. Once he does teshuva, **Hashem erases the sin, as if it has never happened!**

I continued: “It is possible that the snacks were taken by a boy from another class, but, just in case it was a boy from our class, Hashem wants him admit it and say I’m sorry and replace it tomorrow.”.

So, it’s up to that boy to do what he has to do. He may do it privately, so that no one sees or knows about it. Only Hashem would know.

“I am leaving up to the boy, to do the right thing.”

As soon as I finished speaking, two boys got up simultaneously from their seats, walked over to my desk and admitted to have “taken” the snacks.

How did I react?

I gave them each A high-five, telling them how proud I am to have such an honest student, who is ready to admit that he made a mistake and is doing Teshuva.

I said to them: “You are such a Yirei Shamayim. You know what to do and you have done it – Teshuva!”

The goal is not for the Rebbe to tell the child what to do (admit, teshuva), but, rather, set the stage and feed the necessary information so that the child on his own draws the correct conclusion.

Another similar episode:

One morning, as I walked into class, Mendy ran over to me saying, “Rebbi, Rebbi! Dovid made fun of me. He also called me a bad name”. I said: “Thanks for sharing it with me, I will take care of it IY”H.”

As we sat down to daven, I said to the class:

“Why do we begin davening with “Hareini mekabel olai mitzvas asay shel v’ahavta leray’acha kamocha.”?

They, naturally, did not know. I had not told them yet.

I proceeded to tell them the story of the Frierdiker Rebbe, which brings out, that when Hashem our father sees how we, his children, are united together as one, so He accepts our tefilla.

I concluded: “We have a problem. A boy said something not nice to another boy. We know that this is not ahavas yisroel. So, we must take care of it, before davening”.

Suddenly, Dovid turned to Mendy and said. “I’m sorry”.

Again, the point is, to feed the child the information and let HIM “process” it on his own. We must trust the children and believe in them. Once they were properly taught, they will draw their own conclusion and make the right decision.

And yet, one more episode:

One afternoon, I announced to the class: “Kinderlach, everyone can come to my desk to get a Crembo as a treat.”

They all came at once in a great commotion.

I realized that I had to react somehow – but correctly.

I had two choices:

- a) To tell them how wrong it was of them to come running in that manner and send them back to their seats and have them come back like a mentch!
- b) To ask them to go back to their seats and call them again, WITHOUT pointing out what they did wrong and how they are expected to walk to my desk. And see if they can “figure it out”.

I chose the latter.

I calmly told them to sit down. Once they were all seated, I repeated the same announcement: “Kinderlach, everyone can come to my desk to get a Crembo as a treat.”

I specifically did not say how I expect them to walk up to my desk.

They all gently got up from their seats and walked nicely over to my desk to get their Crembo.

Yes, they knew and were “taught” enough times how to walk to my desk. But they just needed a “reminder” to stop and think about that which they already knew.

On the same token:

It is praiseworthy to choose opportunities, as often as possible, to demonstrate to the child our trust and confidence in him that he will do the right thing in the right time. This will work as a vicious cycle, the more we show him confidence and trust, all the more will he live up to it.

For example:

The policy of our class in regard to going to the toilet (or getting a drink) in the middle of class is as follows:

Since the Rambam and the Shulchan-Aruch deem it dangerous and against Halacha for one to refrain from using the toilet when necessary, I therefore, in the beginning of the year, let the children know the following rules:

a) The time to go for a drink or use the toilet is before we begin learning or during recess;

b) If a boy has an “emergency” during class (for, who knows what is really “going on” in his stomach?!) And must leave the classroom during class, he may leave without asking me for permission. But under the following 5 conditions:

- 1) Only one boy at a time may go;
- 2) He should not waste time or talk;

3) When he returns, after washing hands and saying Asher Yatzar, he should sit down quietly;

4) Only one “emergency” allowed each day (or session).

5) If the “emergency” happens too often – he loses this privilege, unless he brings a doctor’s note.

(This policy avoids the need of interrupting the lesson just to answer a child who needs to go to the toilet)

Fact: Most of the children have hardly taken advantage of this privilege. Those who did use the privilege have not abused it.

Children feel proud to be trusted and will live up to it.

Praise Hashem

In Derech Mitzvosecha, Mitzvas Hallel, the Tzemach Tzedek asks the following question: Why is it a mitzvah to praise Hashem? Does Hashem really need our praises?

The answer is, that since Hashem gives His flow of Hashpa’ah to the world through the Sefiros, therefore, by calling Hashem “Kind” or “Merciful”, we cause a flow from Hashem, so to speak, to pass through that particular Sefira, thereby bring down to this world a G-dly flow for Refuah, Parnasah, or the like.

In the same way, when we praise a Yid for a particular good Midda that he possesses, that causes the good midda to be revealed.

From this we can learn a tremendous lesson in chinuch: To praise a child for the midda that you want to reveal in him.

The Rebbe writes similarly in a letter, that when the Frierdiker Rebbe addressed a Yid, as “Ish Yiray Elokim” (G-d fearing man) although it may have not yet been so in reality, this is nevertheless, not an exaggeration, but rather the truth. Because every Yid possesses the fear of Hashem naturally, it only has to be revealed.

The Rebbe also wrote to someone¹⁶: “The proverb of our Rebbeim “Tracht gut vet zine gut” (think good and everything will be good) applies to chinuch too. When we look at our child with a good eye, namely, visualize him, in your mind, as if he IS the tzaddik that you want him to be, he will then become so and conduct himself in the proper manner. How much more so, when we speak to him in a positive way..”

Emphasize the “Good” And Build a Good Self-Esteem

Even when a child has done something wrong, but, if in some (even farfetched) way it can be “translated” as a good act, we must “seize the opportunity” and emphasize the good.

¹⁶ Igros vol 16, page 49.

Here is an example, which has happened: We were in the middle of davening and Moishele raised his hand and asked, “Rebbi, where are we up to?”

On one hand, one might impulsively scold the child, “Now you wake up to ask?!” “Why haven’t you been davening until now?” “Now, go find it yourself!”

Instead, I used the opportunity to praise him: “Wow! Moishele is such a tzaddikl. He cares soooo much about davening. He really wants to know where we’re up to, because he too wants to send “diamonds” up to Hashem’s crown by saying the heilige words of davening.”

Another actual example: While Yanky was eating his snack, he stuffed quite a large bite into his mouth. Shimmy commented to his friend Mendy: “Look at Yanky! He’s eating like a ...”

Mendy in turn repeated to me what Shimmy had said to him, while most of the class were watching on.

So, I have 3 boys, who need to learn a lesson in midos tovos. Yanky: to eat nicely. Shimmy: to use a nice language. Mendy: not to repeat L’shon Hara about someone else.

So, first I called Shimmy over, gently placed my hand on his shoulder and said to the class: “Look Kinderlach, Shimmy is sooo aidel (refined) that he loves to see how people eat in an aidele (gentle) manner. He just cannot stand to see someone eating otherwise.”

I then quietly said to Shimmy: “Next time, try to notice the good things in others. Also, try to find a more aidele way of expressing yourself.”

Then, I called over Mendy and said to him (with the class listening): “I see that you love clean language, and you could not stand hearing such words from Shimmy. It bothered you so much! Hashem is sooo proud of you. But, in the future, please be more careful to speak Lashon tov.”

Yes, in both cases, I pointed out the “positive” aspect of their action.
To yanky: next time, you will surely eat nicely.

Then I turned to the entire class and reminded them the rule: “If someone bothers you, and you cannot work it out between yourselves, the you should tell your Rebbe. This is not considered lashon hara. Lashon hara is only when you repeat something which one boy does to another.”

And...How am I?

In the Klalei hachinuch vehahadracha the Rebbe underscores the utmost importance of the teacher’s own introspection. To examine himself and make sure he conducts himself ethically and working on his own betterment. For only he who “works on himself” and is constantly “educating” himself, can take upon himself the holy task of being a Mechanech to others.

However, says the Rebbe, if one is not fit to be a mechanech (educator) and takes for himself the cloak, not only will we not bring any benefit to the child, but he will, chas veshalom, harm the child!

I heard the following story from my father (“Uncle Yossi”) A”H.

A Yid once came to the Frierdiker Rebbe for Yechidus and the Rebbe asked him what is his occupation.

He answered that he tried to make a living by doing A, B and C. But, nothing worked out, so, as a last resort, he became a Melamed (teacher). Although he was not “cut out” for this position at all.

Whe the Frierdiker Rebbe heard this, his holy face suddenly became very serious as he sternly looked at the Yid and said: “Besser zol zine nor broit un zaltz oif dine tish aider avek-hargenen Yiddishe Neshomos”! (it would far better if you have only bread and salt on your table, rather than “murdering” Yiddishe Neshamos).

On the other hand, the Rebbeim have promised us, that whoever rightfully takes upon himself the holy task and privilege of educating Yiddishe kinderlach in the ways of Hashem, he will be rewarded from Hashem with lots of Yiddishe-chassidishe nachas from his own children.

Thus, we will prepare the Army of Hashem to greet Moshiach Tzidkeinu, as the Rebbe has said, that we are now at the threshold of Geulah, and therefore, all the Mitzvos and good deeds must be with the one and only goal, to lead us to geulah, Bekarov Mamosh. Amen.!

A story that sums it up

By: Rabbi Shlomo Usher Tauber

As far as I can remember, I cannot recall even one instant when my dear father Rabbi Ezriel Tauber¹⁷ ZT”L would tell me to Daven or say Tehilim or to sing Zemirots etc.

As a young child, when he took me to Shul with him, he would ask my mother to prepare for me a big package of goodies so that I will have what to do while sitting... But never asked me to Daven. I remember

¹⁷ כ' כסליו תרצ"ט - י"ג בניסן תשע"ט היה מגיד מישורים, מרצה, ואיש עסקים חסידי, ייסד את ארגון ושננתם, והיה ממייסדי ארגון 'שלהבת'.

seeing other fathers forcing their children to Daven and wondering to myself why am I so lucky? Until...

Once, at a lecture to a group of parents on the topic of Chinuch, my father z"l told over the following story.

When he was a young boy and would misbehave his father would punish him that he has to say a certain amount of Tehilm. The amount of Tehilim was depended on the severity of the sin., and he told the group of parents that as he grew older and understood that he indeed deserved a punish, but since the punishment was the Tehilim, he developed a hatred in saying Tehilim.. and just couldn't bring himself to say it.

And he told the group of parents to never use anything holy or a Mitzva as a method of punishing...

Then I finally understood why My father z"l would never force me to Daven etc. since he didn't want me to develop a rejection to Davening.

About 8 years ago I was once with my Father z"l at a Shalheves Seminar in England, and early Shabbos morning I saw him saying Tehilim.. so I told him with a smile that I see that he B"H recovered from the trauma... that he can say Tehilim..

he smiled back and said: Yes, but it took close to 60 years and a lot of hard work!!

I asked him then if I can remind him of something that happened over 40 years ago? He said sure.

So, I told him that I remember when I was a young boy of around 10 and it was a hot summer Shaboos afternoon after the Seuda, Mincha was a long 7 hours away, my father wanted us to use some of the time in a productive way, so he told me and my younger brother that if we can memorize the entire prayer we say when the Torah is taken out of the ark, "Brich Shemay" then he will reward us with a nice gift.

I remember sitting a good few hours going over it again and again... until I was successful, and before Mincha my father listened as I said the whole piece without failure and during the following week he bought me a beautiful set of Machzorim and I was so so happy...

But all of sudden I noticed that when the Torah is taken out, I have a very hard time saying it... I was so surprised since I wasn't punished on it, just the opposite, I was rewarded on it, and my father didn't even force me to earn it, it was totally my own choice... but I was still triggered by it...

So I turned to my father z"l and told him that his teaching me of the concept of developing a hatred towards something by being "punished" by it goes even deeper. That its possible to develop a hatred towards something by being "rewarded" for it...

He was so overtaken by it and asked me that I should please tell this story in my next talk at the seminar... I told him that it's too hard for me to say it while he is sitting there... so he said that its ok... he understands me...

During his next talk he told over himself the whole story to the parents...

p.s. when he told his father about his story with the Tehilim, his father asked him to use it in public, since its not an embarrassment to him... since he meant well and that was the norm in those times...