

Chinuch • Anash

INSTILLING COMPASSION & SENSITIVITY IN CHILDREN

THE SENSITIVITY OF THE REBBE

RASHAB AS A CHILD

Once, when the Rebbe Rashab was about four years old, a tailor brought a garment he had sewn for Rebbetzin Rivka. While they looked at what the tailor had sewn, the young Rebbe Rashab innocently took out a piece of the garment from the tailor's pocket. The tailor got embarrassed and excused himself that he had forgotten this piece of material that had remained by him.

When the tailor left, his mother, the Rebbetzin reprimanded him that he had caused the tailor embarrassment. Hearing this, he started to cry very bitterly.

A few weeks later, the Rebbe Rashab entered into his father, the Rebbe Rashab's [office], and asked how one could correct the sin of embarrassing someone. His father asked him why he is asking about this, and the child

child responded [simply] that he just wishes to know, without telling his father what happened. When his mother asked why he didn't want to tell his father the whole story he responded: "It's enough that I embarrassed someone, should I now go and say *lashon hara*?"

At first glance there was no serious embarrassment here, because, as is told, the Rebbe *nishmas eden* took out the garment "innocently", by accident. In addition, this was not done publically- only his mother, the Rebbetzin was there. Despite this, when he heard that the tailor had been embarrassed, he cared so much to the point of bitter tears.

This is to say, he didn't care so much that the embarrassment occurred through him, that he would be punished, but rather, he cared about the essence of the matter, that another Jew had been embarrassed.

Therefore he did not tell the story to his father, despite that his not responding to his father's question could be considered a possible violation of *kibbud av* etc. To relate the story would only be in order to correct the sin, [but he could not bring himself to do it because] he could not tolerate retelling something not positive about another *Yid*.

Since the story is told to us with an emphasis on the Rebbe being then four years old, this serves as proof that it is possible to raise every Jewish child, also at this age, in the same way.

(*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 134)

MISHNAYOS BE'AL PEH FOR GEMILUS CHASSADIM

When the Friediker Rebbe was only eleven years old, he had a fund for *gemilus chassadim*. When he would recite *mishnayos* by heart, he would receive money from his father. In this way he earned thirty rubles, which was a considerable amount of money even for an adult in those days. With this money he would do acts of chessed. The chessed he performed was with a warm countenance, not to embarrass the person *chas ve'shalom*.

(*Sichos Kodesh* 5741, vol. 4, p. 144)

INSTILLING THE ATTRIBUTE OF COMPASSION AND BITTUL

Instilling the attribute of compassion and bittul Teaching a boy or girl to donate of their own money to another, ([money] which could have been used to buy sustenance for their soul), and especially teaching [the child] to do acts of *gemilus chassadim* with his body [such as helping another out, giving of his time] engrains a child with the attributes of compassion and *bittul*...

(*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 626)

CLASSROOM BULLYING

In response to a teacher's question on how to avoid undesirable phrases that are heard in the class.

[The students] need to be explained that each and every person from *B'nei Yisrael* is...

(continued on page 2)

CHINUCH MASHPIA

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THANK YOU

Mrs. Beila Goldstein and Mrs. Nomi Freeman for tips in this month's issue

loved by Hashem *Yisborach* even more than parents who give birth to their only child towards their old age. The Baal Shem Tov taught that about Hashem *Yisborach* it is said, "הנוטע און הלא ישמע, אם יוצר עין הלא יביט" (He who implants the ear surely hears, He who formed the eye surely sees). Indeed, He sees, looks at and listens to our speech, its content and tone. From this can be understood the care one needs to take in order not to insult the King of Kings, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. How much more so would a person not dare to speak in such a way about the son of a king of flesh and blood while in the presence of the king etc. Surely it is possible to elaborate and emphasize what was said [above]. What would have even more of an impact is if on the wall where the learning takes place a slogan would be hung with the message: "Think about what you say, because there is an eye that sees and an ear that hears"... (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 20, p. 142)

SHALOM BAYIS INSTILLS GOOD MIDDOS

Family life that is good and *frum*, and the gentle way the man and the woman relate to each other... is indirectly also the best *chinuch* that influences children and ingrains them with the best possible *middos*.

Hashem *Yisborach* blessed the Jewish woman with a special understanding in *chinuch* and the foundations for running a home. Therefore the woman is called the "*akeres habayis*"... When the woman runs the home with *chochma* according to Torah, she has the greatest possible influence over her husband and children. Everything that she sees fit to carry out, she does in a quiet and peaceful manner, by influencing respectfully. This kind of conduct makes the whole family feel fulfilled and the atmosphere in the home brings *simcha* and *hatzlocha*. (*Igros Kodesh Admor HaRaayatz*, vol. 7, p. 53-54)

KASHRUS AFFECTS CHILDREN'S MIDDOS

In general, *hiddurim* with foods (as is brought in a few places) affects not only keeping that mitzvah [of *kashrus*], since each food becomes the flesh and blood of the body, and connects with the *neshamah*. The *kashrus* and refinement of the foods influences the personality and good *middos* of the person eating the food. Therefore each additional *hiddur*, refinement and cleanliness of a food needs to be considered as an addition in the form, refinement and *aidelkeit* of the personality and *middos*. If this is the way it is with adults, it is even more applicable regarding children, as their personality is developing. (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 18, p. 109-110)

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Children are naturally self-absorbed. For a feeling of sensitivity towards others to develop takes time. They need to be pointed out that there is someone outside of themselves to think about, otherwise children can be very oblivious. For example, "look he doesn't have any salad on his plate. You have salad. If you pass the bowl down he can also have salad.", "when you put the ball away so no one else trips it means you are thinking about them." These small things need to be brought to a child's attention so they realize that there is somebody else there to think about. This must of course be coupled with praise, the child needs to see that the sensitivity is appreciated; otherwise negative attention can be much more exciting.
- The best way to teach a child to be sensitive to the feelings of others is by modeling this in our own lives. When we are considerate to others, they learn from us. We cannot pass along a *middah* that we do not possess ourselves, so we must work to develop this.
- Opportunities to instill sensitivity and compassion are all around us:
 - Here is the money for your ice cream trip tomorrow. I'm giving you double so you can discretely pay for the new girl in your class.*
 - I think you told me her family just moved here and her parents are looking for a job. When your teacher takes you for ice cream tomorrow, tell her the ice cream is paid for.*
 - Tomorrow is the first day of school. There might be a new kid in your class. Make sure to talk to him and make him feel welcome. It's hard to come to a new place and not know anyone.*
 - We invited Mrs. W for Shabbos. She doesn't have grandchildren. Show her how happy you are that she came. That way you can be "borrowed" grand kids and make her feel loved.*
 - I'm very happy you have excellent marks. I know you worked hard and studied. Some of your classmates didn't manage to do so well. Please make sure not to show others your marks, so they won't feel bad.*
 - At dinner time: make sure there is salad left for Yossi. He's coming home late tonight.*
 - Your school bag is heavy. Let me carry it.*
 - I left my car keys in the bedroom. I will go out later. Tatty is resting and I don't want to disturb him.*
 - When you give the *tzedaka* to the man outside, make sure to smile and wish him a nice day.*
- A child will learn to be compassionate from our being sensitive to his needs, validating his feelings, treating him with respect and showing that we care about how he feels. Our being in-tune with our children makes them more receptive to being in-tune with others.

- Forcing a small child to say "I'm sorry" when he hits another child is not likely to make the child sincerely regret what they did or recognize the pain they caused the child. Similarly, to punish a child for hitting will rarely make a child introspect and come to care about the pain they caused another. A better approach would be to point out to the child the pain the other child is feeling. You may also want to also ask that the child who hurt the other to try do something to make him feel better.
- Parents will often say to a child things such as "if you act that way no one will want to be your friend", but this makes a child focused on their own best interest when really you want to take the opportunity to teach your child that they should care about another's feelings.
- Part of being compassionate and sensitive is being able to see the world from another person's perspective. When your child gets into an argument with a sibling, while validating the feelings of each child, ask the child to explain how the situation looks from the other person's viewpoint, encouraging him to see the situation from the other person's shoes.
- When a person is insensitive towards you, use the opportunity to show your child to view things from another person's perspective. The child will learn from your example and be more likely to give others the benefit of the doubt in her own life.
- We should increase in the amount of stories we tell about the subject. Tell stories about the Rebbe's sensitivity, a famous *chassid's* sensitivity, *tzaddikim* stories which emphasize good *middos*. This is a fundamental teaching method.

*Mrs. Nomi Freeman

TEACHING AND REACHING PURE HEARTS AND MINDS

- BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH R' ZVI HOMNICK

My father proclaimed at a farbrengen: Just as wearing tefillin every day is a mitzvah commanded by the Torah to every individual regardless of his standing in Torah, whether deeply learned or simple, so too is it an absolute duty for every person to spend a half hour every day thinking about the Torah-education of children, and to do everything in his power - and beyond his power - to inspire children to follow the path along which they are being guided.
(*Hayom Yom, 22nd of Teves*)

A HALF HOUR A DAY DEVOTED TO THINKING ABOUT CHINUCH

The most common questions asked about this statement include, "How does a person fulfill the *horaah* of spending half an hour a day thinking about *chinuch*? What is a person supposed to be thinking about?" So, either the Rebbe in the *HaYom Yom* didn't provide enough information or perhaps we are approaching the whole issue the wrong way. I assume that for most *chassidim* the first is not an option.

The Rebbe in *Likkutei Sichos* (volume 1, *Parshas Noach*) explains that one of the reasons that the Rebbe Rashab used the example of *tefillin* in association with thinking about *chinuch* is that *tefillin* is a unique *mitzvah* in that behind the action component, there's a spiritual component which is to subjugate the mind and the heart, as actually brought in *Shulchan Aruch* and also in *Tanya*. It's not just a physical *mitzvah*. This alludes to the idea that when you are involved in education, you can't just DO. You have to put your mind and heart into it. When you put your mind and heart into something it's not just that you are putting in another ingredient. You are not just "putting in a little heart." This is something you are completely invested in. That in itself is a bit of a clue as to what we are supposed to be doing in that half hour.

WHAT IS CHINUCH?

We are not just educating for behaviors. We are educating minds and hearts. That's what *chinuch* really is. That's the core - getting our child to absorb the messages and carry on in the long term. We need to be developing long term strategies rather than thinking about how to cope with short term issues. The *HaYom Yom* itself is about how to develop long term strategies. We have to invest our mind and heart to affect the child's mind and heart.

BEING ENGAGED

What happens is, because we're busy and distracted, our minds and hearts are not always focused and we are not always present. Whether we are distracted by technology, other obligations, or responsibilities, our minds and hearts could very well not be fully engaged in the process, so we become more mechanical in terms of what we put into our children. We say, "Do this! Do that! I said so! This is what you need to do!" and lose sight of the fact that we are meant to be investing OURSELVES and not just giving commands. It's about connecting to the child's inner world; their mind, their heart, where they are. It's a connection of heart and mind. If you're doing it out of a book - you are not speaking to THAT child's mind and to THAT child's heart.

The world of psychology has corrupted us. Their deterministic approach is - what are the universal buttons to push that apply to everyone equally. Then we write a book and say - if you want to get your child to do this or that, then say this or that. That's the exact opposite of what *chinuch* is - *chinuch* is educating your child according to his way. Why did G-d make everyone's face different? He did it so that everyone should realize that everyone's mind is different, their inner world is different. We need to be sensitive to that.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

One of the reasons why many adults remain immature in their older years is because children are not being educated towards emotional maturity, only behaviorally. People may have all sorts of psychological insight into and understanding of human relationships, but still lack emotional maturity. The popular method of teaching is making children memorize facts and then repeat the facts back to us. We haven't helped them grow up. Our children do not have anyone nurturing and guiding their minds and hearts - we need to move past what they have to do, what they have to say, and the rules they have to follow. We have to invest ourselves in the *chinuch* of our children. We need to ask ourselves what does it mean to be a *chassidic* Jew? To be a proper Jew on an emotional level, on an intellectual level, and of course on a behavioral level?

When we take in secular ideas and adapt it to our culture, which is what many Jewish parenting books are doing, it doesn't work. I can pretty much guarantee that any parent who does it 100% right, does exactly what the book is saying, without being invested, will not be effective. On the other hand, if you have someone who read the book and did everything wrong but is totally there and totally invested, they will be more successful with their child. Yes, I understand that we should translate principles in education into practical tools, but when we use these tools without being there with our heart and mind, we actually create a distance between us and the child. A hammer is a very useful tool but only if you understand the principles of carpentry. If not, you may know how to knock the nail in the right way but who knows the damage you might be causing.

People are saying we have a big crisis in today's world. We have teenagers, young adults, who are perfect Jews on the outside but are not interested or inspired on the inside. Too many people have passed through the system and are not inspired. It's not that they are lacking information about *Yiddishkeit*, young adults have a ton of information that they don't know what to do with. We're up against a flood of information without any soul, without any heart, without any mind. How are they meant to daven better with that information? *Chassidus* talks about changing your inner character... but they don't know how to use it. They don't know how to develop their heart and mind in a relationship with G-d, or their children, or their spouse, etc. They know a bunch of things that they are supposed to do but don't know how to bridge the gap. Their inner world just didn't grow up. To them Judaism is just "Say a *bracha*! Don't touch that, it's *muktza*!" because nobody put in the work. We should not be asking "Who's going to fix this problem?" or "Who's going to write the next book or teach the seminar" No! There is no short cut! We have to use our minds and hearts to connect to their minds and hearts. It's heart to heart. Mind to mind. That's where real education happens. We have to bring our hearts and minds into the equation. We have to connect on a personal level.

Sadly, it's gotten to the point where mothers today do not think that being physically and emotionally present is essential for their child's early development. It has unfortunately become normal practice for a new mother to drop off her child at a babysitter, then preschool, then school [this is not referring to mothers who unfortunately have no other choice*]. How did anyone manage to convince a Jewish mother that it's in her best interest to separate herself from her child during these years? How did this happen? How is it even possible that any *Yiddishe Mama* could be led to believe that it could be of any benefit to the child's needs?

There's a program, a secular program, where they are trying to get fathers more involved with their children. They commissioned studies which ended up showing that fathers want to spend time with their children but they just don't know what to say to them. How does a society get to that point? The child has become an object: "What does it need? Stability? Socializing? Stimulation? ... The one thing he doesn't need is to have me around. Actually, he needs to know how to get over separation anxiety."

No child should (optimally) ever be put into a position where they are forced to learn how to get over separation anxiety! This idea comes from the secular psychological world. It comes from the idea of objectifying the child.

If a mother is connected to the heart of her child, why would she willingly put her child into day care from 9-5? A mother shouldn't be able to survive that herself, let alone the child. Mothers have been programmed to have a disconnection between themselves and their children. It's not an accident that we have behavioral Jews that are not emotional or intellectually connecting. It's happening because the people who are the emotional and intellectual anchors and bedrocks in their lives are not present intellectually or emotionally. It's heartbreaking.

Our kids are pure and holy and innocent. They are clean slates. Tell it to them how it is! They don't need to be analyzed or experimented on, and all the stuff that adults are busy with. Be here. Be real. Show the child how *Yiddishkeit* is real, how *Chassidishkeit* is emotionally fulfilling... and intellectually correct... and challenging... and mind opening.

**Clarification: Some of the strong language above is in reaction to the attitudes that are seeping into our world and undermining our core values, as opposed to us teaching the world how to successfully transmit a tradition that is over three thousand years old along with a deep spiritual tradition that is over three hundred years old. It is not addressing the issue of mothers who due to circumstances beyond their control are forced to find child-care alternatives, although I firmly believe that we as a community have to treat it as the terrible b'dieved that it is and come up with better solutions.*

INSPIRATION FROM ANASH

"We are very particular about what children's books we give our children. I read each book from cover to cover before purchasing it. I look for books that have real *tochen*, will teach the child something valuable for avodas Hashem, or instill a good *middah*. Reading with a child is such a powerful teaching tool. Each book is read so many times the children learn the stories by heart. Why would I want to fill their minds with *shtus* or negative messages?"

– Anonymous

Please email us and share inspiring things done in your home so we can all learn from each other!