

Teaching Ahavas Hamitzvos Part 2

רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל

The Mishna tells us:

*Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says, "The Holy One Blessed is He wanted to confer merit upon Yisrael, therefore He gave them an abundance of Torah and mitzvos, as it is stated: 'Hashem desired for the sake of its (Yisrael's) righteousness, that the Torah be expanded and strengthened.'"*¹

Rabbi Yechiel Yaakovson² says that this Mishna is the gateway to chinuch today. He recounts how as a child, he once asked his rebbi why Hashem, if He wanted it to be good for us, didn't give us fewer mitzvos rather than more! As a response, the rebbi slapped him for asking such a chutzpadik question. Several weeks later, he had the opportunity to ask the same question to the Gadol Hador, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l. He expected to once again get a negative reaction. Instead, Reb Shlomo Zalman gave him one of his characteristic smiles and told him he asked a good question! He then answered with a concept which Rabbi Yaakovson frequently lectures about.

Reb Shlomo Zalman asked him whether he knows the halacha of how one is supposed to put on shoes. He replied that he does (one must first put on the right shoe, then the left, then tie the left shoe and then the right). Reb Shlomo Zalman then asked him whether in his opinion, non-Jewish people who put shoes on in the morning, do so by putting on one shoe at a time, or both shoes at the same time? Young Yechiel replied that they probably put one shoe on at a time. Reb Shlomo Zalman then asked him whether he thinks they tie both shoes at the same time, or one at a time? Obviously, he replied, one at a time! Reb Shlomo Zalman then said to him:

"Do you see the chessed of Hashem? My dear child, Hashem says to you: 'I love you so much, that under the ground³ I look for mitzvos for you. After all, throughout your life, you will put on one shoe at a time thousands of times anyway. Thousands of times you will tie one shoe at a time. I will tell you in which order to do it, you will get used to doing it that way, and throughout your life you will have thousands of mitzvos, without you having done anything...' I'll summarize (said Reb Shlomo Zalman), say a person puts his shoes on twice a day, that's seven hundred mitzvos a year! Seven thousand mitzvos

in a decade. Thirty years... I go on my way, and a train full of mitzvos is behind me, and I didn't do anything!

He continued: the posuk in Tehillim (62:13) says: 'ולך ה' חסד' (and to you, Hashem, is kindness, for you will repay man according to his deeds). If man is rewarded according to his deeds, then why does the verse call it kindness? The answer is that when we get to Olam Haba, we will see that we hardly did anything. All the exertion and difficulties we underwent for Torah and mitzvos, we would have had to undergo anyway! But because we were willing to undergo the difficulties in order to fulfill the will of the Creator, we will be rewarded for them! Therefore we will feel that the reward we receive is a kindness. Rav Shlomo Zalman concluded by saying:

"אנו נועלים והם נועלים, אנו נועלים ומקבלים שכר והם נועלים ואינם מקבלים שכר. אנו קושרים והם קושרים, אנו קושרים ומקבלים שכר והם קושרים ואינם מקבלים שכר."

Hashem, in His infinite love for us, gave us many mitzvos which take little to no effort, which constantly apply, and each of which will give us reward beyond our imagination.

Rabbi Yaakovson gives another example: how many times do we stop for a red light, whether while driving or walking? Well, if we have in mind while we do so that we want to fulfill the mitzvah of נפשותיכם מאד על נפשותיכם, then we are fulfilling it. Imagine that! Every time in your life that you stop for a red light, you can be מקיים מצוה דאורייתא!

In addition, when we take a careful look at the Taryag mitzvos, we find with many of them that as soon as you fulfill them, you automatically fulfill another one! Here are a few examples:

- There is a mitzvas Asei to love your fellow Jew – there is a mitzvas Lo Sasei to not hate your fellow Jew.
- There is a mitzvas Asei to rest from melacha on Shabbos – there is a mitzvas Lo Sasei to not do melacha on Shabbos.
- The same Asei and Lo Sasei of melacha is present for each Yom Tov!
- There is a mitzvas Asei to keep your neder – there is a mitzvas Lo Sasei to not break your neder.
- Leaving Leket, Shikcha and Pe'ah are all mitzvos Asei – and there is a mitzvas Lo Sasei to not collect each of those.

And there are many more like these!

Combining this concept with the point made regarding the immensity of the reward for each mitzvah in Part 1 of this article, and teaching and constantly reinforcing them to our students (and to ourselves and to our children!), can literally change their lives. It makes one see all of Yiddishkeit as an expression of love from the Borei Olam towards us. It has a long-life effect of increasing our students' love for Hashem and their appreciation and love for mitzvos.

The Simcha Principle: Programs and Events

The next crucial component in developing ahavas hamitzvos in our students is applying the Simcha Principle to mitzvos: having them experience joy and geshmack in mitzvos and Yiddishkeit. As we discuss in the article "The Simcha Principle", one of the main acts of chinuch is having students experience joy and pleasure in ruchnius.

One of the easiest and most powerful ways of doing this is with ongoing, exciting programs and events for the students that revolve around mitzvos. Let me give you a few examples of programs I ran in the past:

A multi-week model Sukkah contest: students were invited to make a model sukkah, using any materials their imagination and creativity spurred them to. The model sukkahs were prominently displayed at the entrance to the school as the students finished them. Each model sukkah was then featured in our weekly newsletter. For weeks, the students' excitement was palpable. They made sukkahs out of wood, Legos, candy, bottle caps, and in all different sizes. I remember one Friday night during the contest, walking home from shul. Behind me walked two boys who lived in the same area as I did. Their usual topic of discussion on these walks was sports. How this player was doing, why that team lost... That Friday night, however, during the entire walk back from shul, all they discussed was the Sukkah contest! What they were going to use as walls, what they were going to use as schach...

A multi-week shofar blowing contest: for several weeks before Rosh Hashana we had about 10 different shofaros, ranging from small to one huge one, presented prominently on a table at the entrance of the school. Any student could come to this table during one of the breaks, blow one of the shofaros,⁴ and record how long he managed to blow on a list on the table. Kindergartners, who were too young for this contest,

nevertheless were brought to see the shofar collection, and were then each given a small plastic shofar!

We held grand pre-Yom Tov events, and events on Pesach Sheni, Lag Baomer and Tu B'Shvat.

Here is what it boils down to: if you get a child excited about something, if it's something that gives him geshmack, he will not only remember it long-term, but it will also create positive associations. Imagine a child going through school for eight (or more) years, and those years are chock-filled with positive, happy experiences and memories, all connected to mitzvos and Yiddishkeit. This child will grow up thinking and feeling positively about mitzvos and Yiddishkeit. More than that: he will grow up loving mitzvos and Yiddishkeit.

Of course, to a large extent, school-wide programs and events like the ones mentioned here are more in the realm of the principal or program director. But nevertheless, every teacher has the ability to implement experiences like these in their own classroom.

Rabbi Shaya Cohen writes:⁵

From a practical standpoint as an educator, one should always try to incorporate as many levels of experiential interactions as possible. Mitzvos are not just rituals and learning is not just an intellectual exercise. Try to incorporate added enjoyable dimensions to your lessons as often as possible...

The more positive mitzvos and Yiddishkeit experiences we can give to our students, the more we are being mechanech them to mitzvos and Yiddishkeit.

Taryag Mitzvos Programs

Although we mostly stay away from specific curricula-related matters in these articles, we would like to make a recommendation which will help teachers and schools implement what we've spoken about in this chapter: a Taryag Mitzvos program. Having children learn and know the Taryag Mitzvos has many powerful benefits. Let's take as an example a program where students learn one or two new mitzvos each day. The program gives the teacher a daily opportunity to talk about the beauty and reward of the mitzvos - the Teacher Principle. It gives the students a stronger connection to mitzvos and Yiddishkeit. It gives them satisfaction when they learn and know a certain amount of mitzvos by heart. And it gives us the opportunity to make a big deal out of certain milestones, like having learned fifty or a hundred mitzvos. We can make a grand

siyum with good food and speakers and recognition of the students, thus implementing the Simcha Principle.

¹ רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר, רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות, שנאמר (ישעיה מב, כא) "ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר" - מכות פ"ג ואבות פ"ו

² Rabbi Yaakovson is the *mashgiach* of Yeshiva Ketana and Mesivta of Zichron Yaakov and author of the *chinuch* sefer "אל תחטאו בילד", translated into English under the title "Spare The Child". He is considered one of the foremost *chinuch* experts in Eretz Yisrael.

And of course, it causes the students to know the Taryag mitzvos!

³ In Hebrew "מתחת לאדמה" is an expression which is similar to "high and low" in English, i.e. I search high and low...

⁴ This was of course, pre-covid. Even so, each student had to wipe the shofar's mouthpiece with a disinfectant wipe.

⁵ Impassioned Chinuch, p. 31