

Teaching Ahavas Hamitzvos Part 1

Introduction

In the article “The Definition of Chinuch” as well as in The Master Mechanech, we saw that one of the main goals of chinuch is to teach children to love Yiddishkeit. A major component of doing so is helping them appreciate and love mitzvos. Nowadays, more and more children (and unfortunately, even many adults) see mitzvos as a burden, as a bothersome, unending series of actions which have been forced upon them. Rabbi Shaya Cohen writes:¹

Every Jew’s relationship to mitzvos exists somewhere on a spectrum of meaning. On one end is the view of mitzvos as a long list of rules, devoid of any profound significance. On the other end of the spectrum is the view of mitzvos as infinitely precious opportunities to connect to our Creator. Children’s entire lives are circumscribed by rules. Without guidance, it is natural for children to relate to mitzvos as just more rules, rather than as opportunities for growth.

How do we counter this? How do we make sure our students don’t see mitzvos as nothing but a list of rules, and Yiddishkeit as a heavy load to bear? How do we help them love mitzvos and have *gishmack* in their Yiddishkeit?

The Teacher Principle: Talking About Mitzvos, Yiddishkeit, and Their Benefits.

The Teacher Principle (see the article “The Teacher Principle”) tells us that we wield a tremendous influence on our students, more than the vast majority of other people in their lives. So, when we consistently talk about the beauty, benefits, and importance of mitzvos with passion and feeling, our students absorb our words, internalize them, and gain a life-long appreciation for Yiddishkeit. As Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz said:

Therefore every mechanech has to instill many words of Yiras Shomayim, love of mitzvos and the holiness of Shabbos in the hearts of the students. And I mean that also in the middle of learning...etc.²

There are several aspects of the Teacher Principle, however, that are uniquely applicable to mitzvos, as we will now see.

Happiness in This World

Rabbi Lefkowitz there adds a very important point:

...as well as the beauty in a life of Torah and mitzvos, how happy a Jew is who keeps the mitzvos, that he is happy here in this world...³

Rabbi Lefkowitz stresses that we must constantly tell our students how amazing and beautiful mitzvos are in this world, and that they make a person happy in this world. Rav Yisrael Gans recounts how Rav Shach zt”l told him the same concept:

“Today, the yetzer hora is ‘eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ People want to live! To enjoy life! ...Our task, therefore, is to see and show them the beauty in the Torah; we need to know that we also have Olam Hazeih, not just Olam Haba. We have Olam Hazeih – we live with satisfaction!”

“Wherever you speak,” so he told me, “show the beauty of Torah, of Shabbos, of Yom Tov, of family, of middos.”⁴

See also the article “Incentives and Rewards” for a discussion of *lishma* and *shelo lishma* in chinuch.

Reward and Bliss in The Next World

The Midrash Rabbah tells us:

In this world, one who performs mitzvos does not know their reward, but in the world to come, when they will see the reward for mitzvos, they will be astounded, as the entire world cannot contain the reward.⁵

Likewise, the Mishna in Avos tells us:

And one moment of satisfaction in the world to come is more precious than all life in this world.⁶

Rav Dessler gives us an astonishing insight into this Mishna in the name of his rebbi, Rav Tzvi Hirsh Broyde:

The sages have said, “One moment of spiritual satisfaction in the World to Come is better than all life in this world”... The essence of “all life in this world” is, if we would gather into one moment all the hours and moments of happiness and satisfaction a person has throughout all the days of his life, and add to this all the happiness and satisfaction of all his friends and acquaintances throughout their lives, and also include this in that moment, and give all this to one person, is it possible to

imagine the level of happiness that this person would feel at that moment? Moreover, if we also added to this moment and give to this person all the happiness and satisfaction of all the people in the city throughout their lives, and even more, if we added to it all the happiness of all the inhabitants of all cities in the country, and in every country, that is, all the good in the world for a whole generation, and all this is condensed into one moment and given to one person, still this is not "all life in this world". Rather "all life in this world" is if we combine all the happiness of all the generations from the beginning of creation to the end of all generations, and truly all the good of this world without any exception, and yet, the satisfaction in the World to Come is greater than this.⁷

Rav Dessler tells us that a single moment of spiritual contentment in the World to Come is more enjoyable than all

of the happiness found in this world. This is true even if we combine every instance of joy and satisfaction experienced by every person throughout the entirety of human history. Despite this unimaginably immense accumulation of worldly pleasure, one hour of satisfaction experienced in the afterlife will be greater. Rav Dessler then adds that this is true for the reward of even the smallest mitzvah.

If we constantly stress this to our students, telling them with passion and conviction how immense the reward will be for every mitzvah we perform, the impact on their long-term commitment to mitzvos will be tremendous. And when combined with the points we make in Part 2 of this article, it becomes all the more powerful.

¹ Impassioned Chinuch p. 26. Rabbi Cohen is the founder of Priority-1 and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh and Kollel Ner Yehoshua.

² החובה עלינו להתחזק ולעמול על החינוך שיהיה חינוך ישר וטוב, ולהשריש בלב התלמידים יראת שמים ומידות טובות... לכן כל מחנך צריך להכניס הרבה דיבורים של יראת שמים ויפוי המצוות וקדושת שבת בלב התלמידים. וכוונתי שגם באמצע הלימוד.

³ וכן את היופי בחיי התורה והמצוות, כמה אושר יש לבן ישראל המקיים את המצוות שהוא מאושר כאן בעולם...

⁴ "היום היצה"ר הוא 'אכול ושתה כי מחר נמות'. רוצים לחיות! לעשות חיים!... העבודה שלנו היא, אפוא, לראות ולהראות את היופי שבתורה; צריך לדעת שלנו יש גם עוה"ז, לא רק עוה"ב. לנו יש עוה"ז - חיים עם סיפוק!"
"בכל מקום שאתה מדבר", כך אמר לי, "תראה את היופי של תורה, של שבת, של יום טוב, של משפחה, של מידות".

⁵ "בעולם הזה מי שהוא עושה מצות אינו יודע מתן שכר, אבל לעולם הבא, כשיראו מתן שכר של מצות הם תמהים, שאין העולם כולו יכול לקבל את השכר" - שמות רבה משפטים סוף פרשה ל

⁶ "ויפה שעה אחת של קורת רוח בעולם הבא, מכל חיי העולם הזה" - אבות פ"ד י"ז

⁷ אמרו ז"ל 'יפה שעה אחת של קורת רוח בעוה"ב מכל חיי העולם הזה'... כי ענין כל חיי עולם הזה הוא, אם נקבץ אל תוך רגע אחד את כל שעות וגם רגעים של אושר ונחת שיש לאדם במשך כל ימי חייו, ונצרף לזה את כל האושר והנחת שיש לכל חבריו ומיודעיו בכל ימי חייהם, וגם את זה נכניס אל אותו הרגע, וניתן הכל לאדם אחד, האם אפשר לשער את מדריגת האושר אשר ירגיש האדם ההוא ברגע ההוא. אכן זאת ועוד אחרת, כי נצרף אל תוך הרגע ההוא וניתן לאדם הזה את כל האושר והנחת שיש לאנשי כל העיר במשך כל ימי חייהם, ועוד יותר מזה כי נצרף עוד את כל האושר של כל דרי עיירות שבכל המדינה, ובכל מדינה ומדינה, היינו כל הטוב שבעולם במשך דור שלם, והכל נצרף אל תוך רגע אחד וניתן לאדם אחד, מ"מ עדיין אין זה 'כל חיי העולם הזה'. אבל 'כל חיי העולם הזה' הוא אם נצרף את כל האושר, שבכל הדורות מראשית הבריאה עד סוף כל הדורות, והכל ממש כל טוב העולם הזה בלי שום יוצא מן הכלל, ואעפ"כ קורת רוח בעולם הבא גדול הימנו - מכתב מאלוהיו ח"א עמ' 4