

## The Incredible Power of Ahavas Hatalmidim

### Introduction

As educators, we live in a confusing time. Never before has there been such a plethora of teaching advice available to mechanechim. There are a myriad of books, workshops, courses and other resources which aim to help teachers. Yet with all this available information, for many of us, the challenges don't seem to have diminished. Many teachers still struggle with class discipline. Many who don't still have difficulty getting their students invested and interested in the material.

Why is this? How is it that with all the available chinuch resources, things are still so difficult, so often?

Part of the answer is because there is so much information available. The ironic reality is that amidst the abundance of suggested techniques, approaches and systems, we can sometimes get confused about which ones are merely good advice, and which ones are truly crucial to successful chinuch. This is why it's so important to delve into the words of Chazal and the Gedolim throughout the ages regarding chinuch, so we should be able to differentiate between the two.

Nowhere is this more true than with the fundamental chinuch principle being discussed here, Ahavas Hatalmidim. What we will see is that not only does it make the teaching process easier and more effective according to the Torah, but it is also an obligation according to the Torah. And that it is, in fact, the most important and crucial foundation of successful chinuch.

Makes the teaching process easier? Is an obligation? The most important and crucial foundation of chinuch? One could be forgiven for thinking that these grandiose claims are naught but hyperbole. So let us take a look at the words of our Torah giants...

### Makes Teaching Easier

While talking about Ahavas Hatalmidim, Rav Gershon Edelstein said the following:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Talmud Torah Tashbar, 2002/תשס"ב

<sup>2</sup> "כשמחנכים באופן כזה, מתוך חביבות ואהבת התלמידים יש הצלחה גדולה! מלמד שאוהב את התלמיד, ומדבר אליו עם רגש של חביבות כמו שצריך, גם התלמיד מרגיש את זה וזה משפיע עליו, ההשפעה הכי גדולה שיכולה להיות היא כשיש הרגשה של חביבות בין התלמיד לרב, שאז

*And when we educate in this way, out of affection and love of the students, there is great success! A teacher who loves the student, and speaks to him with the required feeling of affection, the student also feels it and it has an influence on him. The greatest influence possible is when there is a feeling of affection between the student and the rebbi, because then the student accepts from the rebbi, **and there are absolutely no difficulties with discipline, and everything works out in the easiest way possible.** This is the power of affection.<sup>2</sup>*

Incredible! If we had to point to the one educational challenge which is the most prevalent, the one which is the most feared by experienced and new teachers alike, it would have to be discipline and classroom management. And yet, according to one of the most prominent Roshei Yeshiva in our generation, Ahavas Hatalmidim easily turns any class into the most well-behaved group of students!

Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman similarly says that loving students has an impact on their behavior:

*One of the main things in chinuch is to draw the students close with love, and the rule is that the more one brings them closer, the more likely the student is to be drawn to Torah... **and in this way the behavior of the student is different.**<sup>3</sup>*

Rabbi Avraham Erlanger in his sefer Birkas Avraham discusses the powerful influence which loving one's students has on them, and how it helps them with the learning itself and writes:

*For one cannot imagine the magnitude of the influence it has when the rebbi respects and loves his students...<sup>4</sup>*

### But Is It An Obligation?

Now, from these sources it would seem that loving students is indeed a worthy, helpful trait, but not necessarily more than that. The Rambam, however, considered the concept of a

התלמיד מקבל מהרב, ואין שום קשיים של משמעת, והכל מסתדר בצורה הקלה ביותר. זהו כוח החביבות."

<sup>3</sup> "מן הדברים העיקריים בחינוך הוא לקרב את התלמידים באהבה והכלל הוא כי מה שמקרבם יותר יש יותר סיכויים שהתלמיד יהא נמשך לתורה... ובדרך זו הנהגת התלמיד היא אחרת."

<sup>4</sup> "כי אין לשער גודל ההשפעה שיש לזה כשהרב מכבד ואוהב את תלמידיו..."

teacher loving his students as something that goes beyond just good advice and actually codified it into halacha. In the Mishneh Torah, he writes:<sup>5</sup>

*Just as students are obligated in the honor of the teacher, so too must the teacher honor his students and draw them close. So said the Sages in maseches Avos: "The honor of your students should be as dear to you as your own." And a person must be careful with his students and love them, as they are the sons who give him pleasure in this world and the next.*<sup>6</sup>

Several *Achronim* wonder what the source of the Rambam is. Where did he find that there is a *chiyuv* for teachers to love their students? In Rabbi Yisroel Eliyahu Weintraub's words:<sup>7</sup>

*For behold, there is no place in Rambam's entire Yad Hachazaka where he writes that a father is obligated to love his son. Rather, a father is obligated to love him just as he is obligated to love every Jew from the law of "ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocha." But there is no specific halacha regarding the love of a father to his son stemming from being his father... And it requires an explanation what is this unique obligation that a teacher is obligated to love his students, which seemingly goes beyond the framework of "ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocha" and establishes a name for itself "the love of a teacher to his student."*<sup>8</sup>

Rabbi Avraham Erlanger makes a similar point to Rabbi Weintraub:<sup>9</sup>

*And beyond honor, the Rambam warned (the teacher) to draw them close and to love them. This implies that in addition to the commandment of "ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocha", it is specifically mentioned here to inspire oneself to love of one's students...*<sup>10</sup>

Like Rabbi Weintraub, Rabbi Erlanger points out that there seems to be an additional *chiyuv* to love one's students besides "ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocha".

In the next articles in this series, we will discuss several answers found in the *Achronim*, all of which add crucial insight into what our responsibilities as *mechanchim* are.

<sup>5</sup> הל' תלמוד תורה פ"ה הל' י"ב

<sup>6</sup> כשם שהתלמידים חייבים בכבוד הרב כך הרב צריך לכבד את תלמידיו ולקרבתם כך אמרו חכמים במסכת אבות י"ה כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלך וצריך האדם להיזהר בתלמידיו ולא להבטח בהם הבנים המהנים לעוה"ז ולעוה"ב.

<sup>7</sup> ספר עיני ישראל עמ' כ"ז

<sup>8</sup> דהנה לא נמצא שום מקום ברמב"ם בכל יד החזקה שיכתוב שהאב מחויב לאהוב את בנו, אלא דהאב מחויב לאהבו כמו שמחויב לאהוב את כל אדם

מישראל מדין ואהבת לרעך כמוך. אבל אין הלכה מיוחדת של אהבת האב לבנו מדין שהוא אביו...וצ"ב מה החובה המיוחדת הזו שמחויב הרב לאהוב את תלמידיו, שלכא' זה יוצא ממסגרת של ואהבת לרעך כמוך והיא קובעת שם לעצמו אהבת הרב לתלמיד.

<sup>9</sup> ספר ברכת אברהם – מאמרים והדרכות עמ' ר"ט

<sup>10</sup> ויותר מכבוד הזהיר הרמב"ם לקרבם ולא להבטח ומשמע נוסף לציווי של ואהבת לרעך כמוך נאמר כאן במיוחד להתעורר לאהבת התלמידים