

## Success in Chinuch is Impossible Without Ahavas Hatalmidim

### Introduction

In the previous article on Ahavas Talmidim we quoted the Rambam who says it's an obligation for teachers to love their students. We also brought several Achronim who ask what the source is for such an obligation.

### Chinuch can't be successful without it

The Rav Nissim Karelitz ties the obligation to love one's students to the fact that success in chinuch is not possible without it. In his words:

...חייב הוא לאוהבן ולהראות להן אהבתו, כי הוא הכרחי להצלחת התלמידים.

... he is required to love them and show them his love, for this is essential for the success of the students.

The Nesivos Shalom in Nesivei Chinuch (p. 25) likewise states that loving students is an absolute prerequisite for success in education:

...ולכן רק כאשר המנחך אוהב את חניכיו אהבת נפש יכול להצליח. ורגיל אני לשאול מחנכים אם אוהבים הם את תלמידיהם וע"ז יודע אני מדת הצלחתם.

...therefore, it is only when the teacher loves his students "ahavas nefesh" that he can succeed. And I am accustomed to ask teachers whether they love their students, and through this I know the measure of their success.

Although there is no doubt that these gedolim were sharing what they saw and experienced during their many decades in the chinuch world, there is also a Mishna that serves as a source for this principle that chinuch cannot be successful without Ahavas Hatalmidim. At a gathering of mechanechim in Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz shared the following:

פעם כשהתלוויתי למרן החזון איש זצ"ל [זה היה בחזרתו מלבקראת אמו ע"ה שהיתה גרה בבני ברק והוא היה מבקרה מידי יום] אמר לי את דברי התנא באבות "אוהב את הבריות ומקרבת לתורה", וביאר מרן זצ"ל שאם רוצים להצליח עם תלמידים היסוד צריך להיות אוהב את הבריות ועל ידי זה אפשר לקרב לתורה. אם חסר אהבה לתלמידים לא יועילו כל מיני עצות ודרכים, לא יועילו בזה צעקות וגערות.

Once, when I accompanied Maran the Chazon Ish zt"l (he was returning from visiting his mother a"h who lived in Bnei Brak,

and he used to visit her every day), he repeated to me the words of the Tanna in Avos (1:12) "loving the people and drawing them close to Torah," and Maran zt"l explained the meaning that if one wants to succeed with students, the foundation has to be "loving the people," and through that, it is possible to draw them close to Torah. If there is a lack of love for the students, all kinds of advice and methods won't help. Shouts and rebukes won't help...

It is not just the opinion of contemporary gedolim that success with students depends on loving them. The Chazon Ish tells us it is a mefurash Mishna! Rav Gershon Edelstein also understands the pshat in the Mishna this way:

נזכיר דבר אחד שחשוב מאד לדעת ומן הסתם רוב המחנכים יודעים מזה, ששנינו באבות א"ב "הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן וכו' אוהב את הבריות ומקרבת לתורה" ומבואר כי הסדר הוא שצריך תחילה להיות "אוהב את הבריות" ורק אחר כך "ומקרבת לתורה" ולא שייך לקרב ולהשפיע אהבת תורה בלי שתקדם לזה אהבת הבריות.

וכאשר עוסקים בחינוך ובהרבצת התורה מתוך אהבה לתלמידים זה מסלק ומוריד את כל הקשיים שכל דבר שאדם אוהב אינו מרגיש שום קושי בזה, ואז המנחך וגם התלמיד שניהם נהנים כך היא המציאות.

Let us mention one thing that is very important to know and most educators probably know this, that we learned in Avos 1:12, "Be from the disciples of Aharon, etc., loving the people and drawing them close to Torah," and we see that the order is that one must first "love the people" and only then "and drawing them close to Torah," and it is impossible to be mekarev and to influence a love of Torah without there first being "love of the people."

And when one is engaged in chinuch and harbotzas Torah out of love for the students, it eliminates and removes all the difficulties, because everything a person loves he does not feel any difficulty in it, and then the mechanech and the student both enjoy. This is the reality.

### Why is it crucial for success?

The Gemara in Avodah Zara 19a provides an important insight into why success in chinuch is only possible when a teacher loves their students. The Gemara there quotes both Rebbi and Rav as saying:

אין אדם לומד תורה אלא ממקום שלבו חפץ שנאמר (תהלים א, ב) "כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו"

*A person only learns Torah from a place that his heart desires, as it says, "But only in Hashem's Torah is his desire."*

Rashi there explains that if a person is taught a part of Torah which he doesn't desire to learn, it won't last. The Gemara then quotes Rava as saying:

לעולם ילמוד אדם תורה במקום שלבו חפץ שנאמר "כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו"

*A person should always learn Torah in a place that his heart desires, as it says, "But only in Hashem's Torah is his desire."*

Several mefarshim ask why Rava seems to be repeating what Rav and Rabbi already said. The Maharsha answers as follows:

כבר אמר רבי לעיל ממקום שלבו חפץ דהיינו מאיזה מסכת וספר כדמסיק אבל הכא אמר במקום בב"ת היינו אצל איזה רב שלבו חפץ וכן הוא בילקוט בדברי רבא ממי שלבו חפץ ויהיה המכוון דחפצו לרבי על המקום ולרבא על הרב וק"ל:

*Rebbi already said earlier, "from a place that his heart desires," meaning from which masechta or sefer...but here he said, "in the place" with a "ב", meaning by which rebbi his heart desires. And so does the Yalkut quote Rava: "From whom his heart desires." And so the intent of "his desire" according to Rebbi is on the place and according to Rava on the rebbi, and it is easy to understand.*

Rava is telling us that a person can only learn Torah from someone he desires to learn from! This gives us a contemporary problem. In most cases, our children throughout their years of school can't choose who to learn Torah from! So how can we make sure we are the teacher who is חפץ (from whom the heart desires) for the students? Rabbi Erlanger (ספר ברכת אברהם – מאמרים והדרכות) gives us the answer. After noting that there seems to be a separate obligation for a teacher to love their students, he goes on to elaborate:

...שהם קרובים אליו מאד ונזקקים לאהבתו לצורך לימודם כי ע"ז מתקשרים לרבם כמים הפנים אל פנים וזבה יאהבו לשמוע ולקבל ולהדבק ברבם וכן יצמחו ויגדלו להיות תלמידי חכמים וצדיקים.

*...for they are very close to him and need his love for the sake of their learning. Because through this, they bond with their rebbi "as the face reflects a face in water," and this way they will love to listen and accept and cling to their rebbi, and so they will flourish and grow to be talmidei chachomim and tzaddikim.*

Rabbi Erlanger is referring to a posuk in Mishlei (27:19) which states:

כמים הפנים לפנים כן לב האדם לאדם

As water reflects a face back to a face, so does the heart of man reflect back to man.

The mefarshim explain that when a person feels a certain way about another, that other person automatically starts feeling the same way about them. This is so, even if the second person has no idea how the first feels about them! If he loves the other person, the other person will love him back. If he hates the other person, the other person will hate him back!

Rabbi Erlanger tells us that by loving our students, we will cause them to love us back, and this will cause them to want to listen to us. In effect, we cause ourselves to be the one that is "ממי שלבו חפץ."

The Nesivos Sholom in Nesivei Chinuch (partially quoted earlier) likewise applies this concept in the context of chinuch:

כי זה סוד הצלחת החנוך כאשר בן חברו אצלו הוא ילדו, ובאופן זה צריכה להיות המסירות והנאמנות האהבה והאימון בתפקיד. על המחנך לעורר בלבו הרגשה זו לכל תלמיד. הילדים היקרים חנן אותם ה' בחושים עילאיים מפותחים מאוד, וראשית כל מרגישים מי אוהבם, שאותו יאהבו וירצו לקבל מפיו תורה וחינוך. ולכן רק כאשר המחנך אוהב את חניכיו אהבת נפש יכול להצליח... רק כאשר הולכים בדרך הזאת אפשר להשכיל ולהצליח.

*For this is the secret to success in chinuch: when a friend's child is to him like his own child, and in this way must be the dedication and loyalty, the love and guidance in his work. It is upon the mechanech to arouse this feeling in his heart for every student. Hashem has graced the precious children with highly developed, supreme senses, and first of all they feel who loves them, and that person they will love and will want to receive from him Torah and chinuch. Therefore it is only when the teacher loves his students "ahavas nefesh" that he can succeed. Only when one follows this path can one thrive and be successful.*

Loving our talmidim causes them to love us, and that causes them to want to listen to us.

## It's also crucial for Ahavas HaTorah

Rav Shimshon Pincus adds another insight into why it's important for students to love their teachers:

אם כך, הרי כאשר תלמיד אינו אוהב את המלמד שלו, שהוא בעצם ה'מתנוק' בין השי"ת לבין הילד, קשה מאוד ללמדו תורה. ובאופן

מעשי כמדומני שאין אפשרות שילד יאהב את החומש אם הוא לא אוהב את המלמד שלו. ואם חלילה הילד אינו חש שהוא אוהב באמת את החומש, אין לו כל כך חשק ללמוד, אף אם יצא מה'חידר' עם ידע עצום, הפסדנו את המטרה שלשמה נכנסנו לכיתה.

*If so, when a student does not love his melamed, who is essentially the mediator between Hashem Yisborach and the child, it is very difficult to teach him Torah. And in practice it seems to me that there is no possibility that a child will love the Chumash if he does not love his melamed. And if, chalila, the child does not feel that he really loves the Chumash, then he doesn't have so much desire to learn, (and) even if he will leave the "cheder" with immense knowledge, we will have lost the objective for which we entered the classroom.*

Rav Pincus teaches us that even if a child has ידע עצום (immense knowledge) upon graduation, if he does not love the Torah, the objective of his chinuch has not been achieved, and his chinuch cannot be considered successful. And Rav Pincus emphasizes that a student cannot come to love the Torah unless he loves his teacher.

In "The Master Mechanech" we discuss the important principle that a teacher is required to be עושה מלאכתו באמונה, which is defined as doing absolutely everything necessary to ensure the successful chinuch of the students, and that not doing so falls under the category of רמיה ה' עושה מלאכת ה'.

Being that, as we saw from various sources, the success of chinuch depends on loving one's students, then this, in and of itself, creates a chiyuv to love them.

This point was clearly made by Rav Nissim Karelitz, quoted above:

"...he is required to love them and show them his love, for this is essential for the success of the students."

May we all merit to develop the crucial trait of Ahavas Hatalmidim.