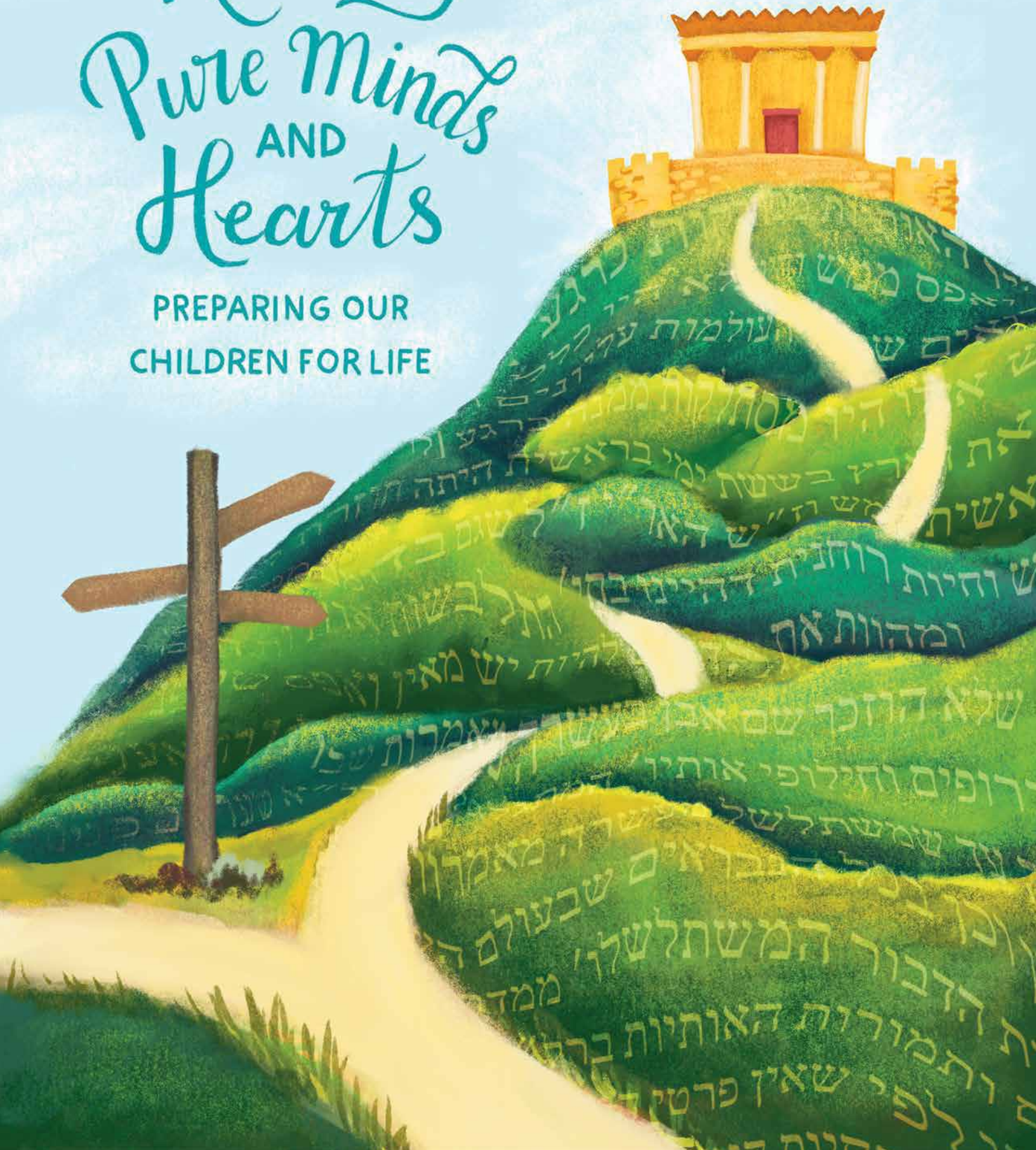


Raising Pure Minds AND Hearts

PREPARING OUR
CHILDREN FOR LIFE



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PREPARING OUR CHILDREN FOR LIFE

So much work goes into creating curriculum, planning lessons, and making our activities engaging, educational and adapted for different learning styles. Our morahs have arguably the most important job, forming our children like clay in the hands of a sculptor, setting foundations for life. How great a responsibility! We must pause to ask: What is our goal? What do we want to accomplish? What are the main values we hope to instill?

Any time we need guidance in life, the first thing a *chossid* does is turn to the Rebbe.

Here too, as always, our Rebbe has provided us with clear guidance.

Yiras Shamayim

[Regarding choosing a kindergarten for someone's child, the Rebbe wrote:]

The main thing in connection to the *chinuch* of children in general, and the beginning of *chinuch* in particular, is the matter of *yiras Shamayim*.

(Igros Kodesh, vol. 4, p. 447)

Great Impact

It is well-known that in a kindergarten the teachers permeate the soul of a child more than in school.

(Igros Kodesh, vol. 5, pp. 95-96)

Accustoming a child to kedusha

The true purpose of *chinuch* is not only for the child to learn. The purpose of *chinuch* is to accustom the child to *kedusha*, which connects his soul with *kedusha* and with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

(Likkutei Sichos, vol. 35, p. 12)

The foundation of chinuch: Yiras Hashem and Ahavas Hashem

... [*Chinuch* begins with] the general principle of 'ראשית חכמה יראת ה' ("The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem"), which includes *ahavas Hashem*. These are the foundations for the fulfillment of all areas of Torah and *mitzvos*. As is written at length elsewhere, although the *mitzvah* of *chinuch* does not have the status of an obligation, nor is it a *mitzvah* from the [written] Torah, it is nevertheless of the utmost necessity according to Torah, like a *הכשר מצוה* (preparation for a *mitzvah*), which is obvious and simple to understand.

(Hisvaaduyos 5749, vol. 3, p. 75)

Without compromise

One should not compromise on matters relating to *yiras Shamayim* and the like, especially in matters of *chinuch*, where every move and change affects the students, who will soon be building Jewish homes according to the way that they were taught.

(Igros Kodesh, vol. 17, p. 109)

A new channel

A new channel in *chinuch* has been revealed in our times. Through the proper *chinuch*, it is now possible to break through the boundaries of the nature of a Jewish child and accustom the child to yearn for *ruchniyus* (spirituality) to such an extent that the child's heart is deeply

permeated with an intense desire for Hashem to reveal Himself to him. When a Jewish child is not grieved over the lack of Hashem's revelation to him, this is not because he is unable to reach this level, but because his educators [parents and teachers] are not speaking to him about these matters sincerely, with words that emanate from the heart.

(Likkutei Sichos, vol. 15, p. 133)



There are different calculations in Torah. They don't have to learn it in an order as a separate subject.

Speaking only words of Torah

Parents need to strive toward the goal that their children live up to the *pasuk* לִדְבַר בָּם - וְלֹא בְדִבְרִים אֲחֵרִים (“You should speak words of Torah – and not of other [mundane] things”). Although sometimes there is talk of other things, it is מְלֵאכֶתֶךָ אֶרְעִי (temporary) and only a preparation for having a better understanding of Torah or to be able to speak words of Torah with more vitality.

This applies to sons and daughters equally. Although with respect to *limmud haTorah* there is a major difference between sons and daughters, the Alter Rebbe writes at length and in detail that in all areas related to *yiras Shamayim* there are no differences between a man and woman (see *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, end of Chapter 1).

(*Sichos Kodesh* 5728, vol. 2, p. 430)

What an incredible responsibility! As we see from the Rebbe, our main job is to connect a child to Hashem, teaching a child to turn to Torah as their lens through which they will face the world. *Ki hem chayeinu ve'orech yomainu*.

Okay. Connecting a child to Hashem and Torah is our goal and priority, but what about everything else? We need to prepare children for life, don't we?

Minimize secular learning

It would be correct for them to minimize secular learning and not be stuffed full of it until the known age [age nine or twelve]. “The street will already take care of it.” They should increase in *limmudei kodesh* (Torah study).

(*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 8, p. 24)

The Rebbe is saying the child will be able to pick up on these things easily when the time comes. Teaching a child to trust in Hashem despite challenges they face will not come as easily. Forming good *middos*, Torah values, *ahavas Hashem*, and *yiras Hashem* will take effort to ingrain, and the time to impress these is while the child is young, easily moldable, their character is being established.

Does this apply to boys and girls? Is it as much of a big deal if girls learn *limmudei chol*?

Girls

Rabbi Y. L. Zeitlin of blessed memory asked the Rebbe if there is a difference between boys and girls in connection with being careful about learning secular studies. The Rebbe answered: Even though there is a difference regarding the laws of Torah study, regarding the defilement of the mind with secular studies there is no difference between boys and girls.

(Printed in *Chinuch Al Tahras Hakoidesh for Boys and Girls* Publication of Beis Chaya Mushka, Crown Heights)

In 5715 after Simchas Torah, the Rebbe Shlita spoke about secular learning, saying that children should not pursue secular studies until the age of nine or ten or thirteen. He also said, “If I were not afraid I would say more” and I heard that the Rebbe also mentioned girls. Rabbi S. P. was not in New York on that Simchas Torah, and he was in doubt whether these things applied also to his city,

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Pittsburgh. Therefore, I asked the Rebbe *Shlita*: 1) If the above matters apply to Pittsburgh. 2) If they are also relevant to girls. The Rebbe answered that all claims to the contrary are the counsel of the evil inclination, and there is no difference between boys and girls, and between New York and Pittsburgh, etc.

(Notes from a yechidus of Rabbi Y. Altein, Printed in *Chinuch Al Tahras Hakoidesh for Boys and Girls Publication of Beis Chaya Mushka, Crown Heights*)

But what about math, science, and English? Don't children need to learn these things? Why shouldn't we give them a "well-rounded education"?

Mathematics is also considered secular learning

Regarding what is written in Tanya at the end of Chapter 8 about the wisdom of the nations of the world, you ask whether this applies only to philosophy or to other wisdom as well:

It seems that you wish to distinguish between them. You believe that philosophy would be prohibited as it deals with matters that go against religion, while in contrast, the wisdom of mathematics is not problematic. However, the Alter Rebbe is plainly referring to all wisdom (including mathematics)... for there he writes "*chochmos*" ("wisdoms," in the plural). Also, he states that the *tumah* (spiritual impurity) from learning these various *chochmos* comes from *kelipas nogah*, which means that he's not referring to the wisdom of heresy, which is an actual prohibition.

(*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 11, p. 403)

[The Rebbe is saying that all secular knowledge contaminates the mind spiritually, even if it's not technically forbidden to study, such as is philosophy.]

Science

This is the grave danger of studying secular wisdoms: Seemingly, [a debate in matters of astronomy which relate to secular wisdom, or



of matters relating to geometry] would be the same debate [whether it is being held by secular astronomers, an expert mathematician, or by a *Tana* or *Amora* who is learning [these concepts in] the laws of *Kiddush Hachodesh*, the laws of *Eirubin* and the like. However, in truth, the difference between them is like the difference between a pure and impure item. Although the debate is seemingly of the same content, one is of holiness and the other is of impurity.

The perspective of secular wisdom [i.e. the sciences] is that nature exists, and it has laws that cannot be changed, (and if changes periodically occur, it is because there is a law of nature which affects this change). Consequently there is no place for G-dly intervention – as it is not part of nature – and there's no place for miracles, no place for the giving of the Torah, no place for the revelation of Moshiach. However, when a person learns the laws of *Kiddush Hachodesh* in Torah, the knowledge that he requires in the field of astronomy will



child and contaminate (“make *tamei*”) his mind with “English,” “grammar,” and the like!

If only the adults, too, would not know these matters! How much more so the children should not study secular subjects until the age of nine years, or until twelve years, and I would say that it applies to the following years as well, if not for the fact that *תפסת מרובה לא תפסת* [“If you try to hold too much, you end up losing everything” – if one places too great a demand upon people, no one will listen].

This comes at the same time that Hakadosh Baruch Hu says that He needs neither *Gan Eden* nor the *Beis Hamikdash*; He wants nothing but “*veshachanti besocham*” (“I will dwell in their midst”). Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires to dwell specifically in the mind of a *Yiddishe* child – and this mind is taken and contaminated with secular knowledge.

The truth is that the parents want the child to study only secular subjects! It is only because there is some *zeideh* (grandparent) who demands that the child learn *Yiddishkeit*, or because they fear a *Yid* who sits in New York [i.e. the Rebbe], that they teach him Torah at all! They claim that after the child learns “English” and the like, he will be able to earn a *parnassah* (livelihood) and

also be studied in a way that he searches for how he can execute the commands of the Torah.

Now, since the study of secular wisdoms is based on the foundation of the laws of nature, “the laws of heaven and earth that I have placed” which cannot be changed, and on this is built all of its precepts and perspectives relating to the world, any debate that comes relating to these subjects, even if it is the same debate that a Torah learner would have [upon learning this subject in Torah], contains an inner foundation of impurity.

(*Toras Menachem* 5727, vol.3, p. 203-204)

*If one teaches
limmudei chol, a
connection should
always be made
to kedusha, but it
remains limmudei chol
and is still metameh
the mind.*

English

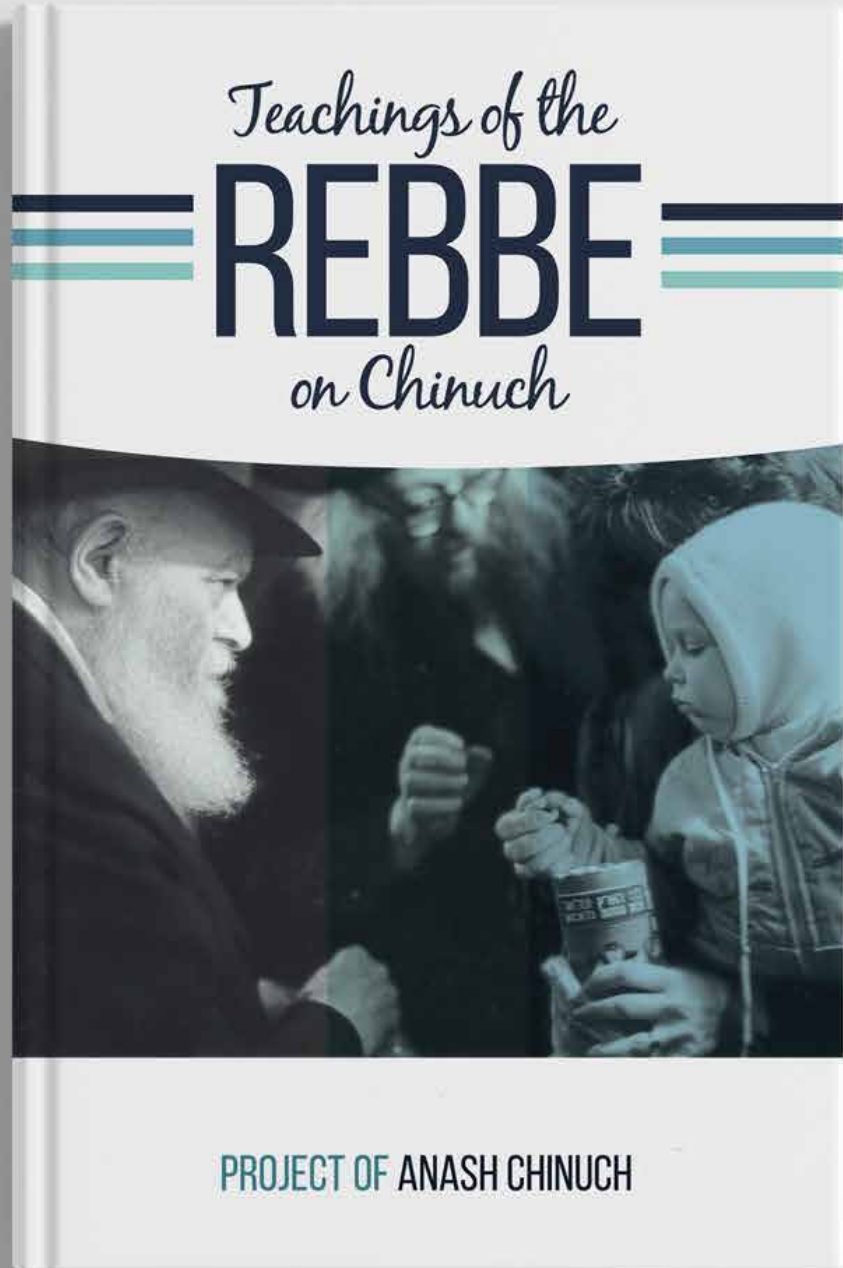
The first three years of age, which is when a child begins to learn, is the time that is the main foundation of his future success. Yet it is specifically during these years that people take their

he will be more “set” for life. This claim has no substance, since no one knows the future; all of one’s conduct should be according to Torah. Every single thing of value is written in the Torah. If

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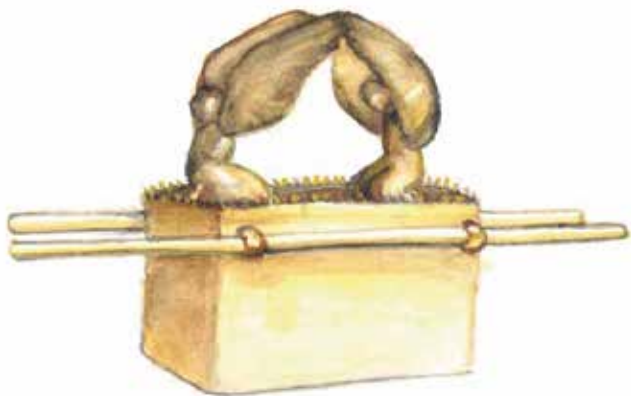
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there were some material benefit to be had from acquiring secular knowledge, there would be a law in the Torah commanding one to gain secular knowledge. Since no such law exists – and in fact, the Torah states explicitly that this study is forbidden because it contaminates the ChaBaD [*Chochmah, Binah, and Daas* – the intellectual faculties] of the soul – this means that there is no benefit in it materially! On the contrary! They think that they can outsmart Hakadosh Baruch Hu, such that they will pay no attention to the route that Hakadosh Baruch Hu sets forth in His Torah in order to succeed. Instead, they will search for their own



route, to learn “English,” and they decide that through this the child will be successful.

They should remember that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created the world five thousand, seven hundred, and fourteen years ago [from the time the Rebbe delivered this *sicha*], and since then He has been running it according to His will. From now on as well, the world will continue to be run according to His will: according to Torah.

...The parents come and steal the pure years from their children – they steal a portion of their children’s lives!

... By what right do the parents steal their days from their children?! Was it for this purpose that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave them children – for the parents to take their lives from them?!

(*Toras Menachem* 5715, vol. 1, pp. 73-75)

As we can see, the Rebbe uses very strong wording warning of the dangers of children learning *limmudei chol*. But wait, doesn’t *Talks and Tales* have

science and *niflaos Haboreh*? Didn’t the Rebbe strongly encourage the publication of *Talks and Tales*? What is the balance?

The first exposure our children get to these topics should be with a Torah lens. We can teach the children to look at the world around us with an awe for Hashem: these are Hashem’s wonders. Sometimes including a science lesson to help a child understand *parsha* for example might be exciting and interesting, and lead to a greater understanding of the *parsha*!

If something comes to better understand Torah, then it is not *chol*. It is Torah! A lesson on sink or float to understand *parshas Noach* is *kedusha*. Counting how many Avos we have, how many *Imahos*, this is Torah.

If one teaches *limmudei chol*, a connection should always be made to *kedusha*, but it remains *limmudei chol* and is still *metameh* the mind. Whereas the lesson on sink or float helps the child understand Torah, and therefore it is Torah, a science lesson on rain and condensation does not add to the children’s understanding of the *parsha*. It might even take a bit of the awe away of the great *neis* that occurred. Maybe there will be a more appropriate time for that lesson, for example when we discuss the Nilus in Mitzrayim.

Counting apples before Rosh Hashanah is *chol* – there is no *mitzva* to eat a certain number of apples; counting the number of *shvatim* is Torah. Our children can learn these skills as we go along, but we must be careful that our goal remains supplementing what background knowledge they need to learn Torah and do *mitzvos*, and that our efforts are concentrated where we need them most.

This is nice in theory, but can it be done? How can we ensure our children will be able to go out into the world and make a *parnassah* when the time comes? When will they learn important life skills?

Paroh Melech Mitzrayim

A “*Paroh Melech Mitzrayim*” exists even now: It is the control and conduct of the country that advocates sending the Jewish children into the river of the customs and norms of the country, drowning them in the river which, according to this opinion, brings *parnassah*.

...When the question of the *chinuch* of children

There is such a fear children will not pick up these “life skills” that “these life skills” have become the focus. It’s the opposite – kids will “pick up” the difference between sweet and sour but they won’t necessarily “pick up” how to crown Hashem as King or how to forgive someone else, etc.



arises, one should remember that it is forbidden to drown them in the “Nile” – the *avodah zarah* of that country. In America, that *avodah zarah* is searching for “*tachlis*” [i.e. a future career]. The only way to live is by giving the children a full *chinuch* as decided upon in our Torah – *Toras Chayim* (“the Torah of life”).

...One should know that Hashem sustains and provides for all, and if we do what He wants ... [in terms of Jewish education], He will do what we ask of Him – both for ourselves and for our children.

... In every single country, and especially in America, one should pay no attention to the pre-occupation of the country to make calculations regarding plans for earning *pamassah*. Children should be educated according to the way Hashem commanded, and Hashem will provide for the children, as well as for the parents. It is specifically by not reckoning with the decrees of Paroh [which pressure us to give up a proper Torah education] that we save our children, and this brings the *geulah* for the entire Jewish people through

Moshiach Tzidkeinu, in the very near future.

(Likkutei Sichos, vol. 1, pp. 112-113)

There is such a fear children will not pick up these “life skills” that “these life skills” have become the focus, and it comes at a price. It’s the opposite – kids will “pick up” the difference between sweet and sour but they won’t necessarily “pick up” how to crown Hashem as King or how to forgive someone else, etc.

Let’s look at the actual results of children who didn’t learn math as a subject in school. They learn it. They somehow pick it up. There are different calculations in Torah. They don’t have to learn it in an order as a separate subject. These children can go to a store and figure out how much change to get. The skills that they’ll need for life they will get. The Torah that they learn develops their brains in ways that non-Jews recognize with awe. After his schooling, if a young man decides he wants to become an architect, he’ll take classes and learn the trade (with the basics of math that he picked up and learned beforehand). And, If he doesn’t pick up these skills

easily at that point, you can be sure that many years of schooling in this area would not have made this his strong point, and this is not the area Hashem has chosen for him to go into for *parnassah*. Hashem gives each person talents in the areas they can make a difference in this world; Hashem directs our path.

There's a time and place for everything. For example, imagine a doctor says to his patient, "You might need surgery at age 50." The patient won't say, "Just do it now when I'm 20. Let me get it over with already." The same with education. At age 20, a person might decide to become an architect for *parnassah*. That doesn't mean that the whole two decades beforehand he needs to be busy preparing for that. Yes, that is how the nations of the world do it, but that does not make it necessary or even appropriate for us.

What do our children truly need to know for life? The foundations of *Yiddishkeit*, *ahavas Hashem*, *yiras Hashem*, the spiritual underpinnings of each *yom tov* as explained by *Chassidus*, the focus on *middos* development in learning *parsha*, etc. We need to give them a life of meaning, a purpose, an understanding that they are a *chelek Eloka mimaal mamesh!* They have a mission in this world, they have something to contribute that no one else can accomplish. They can transform everything in this world to *kedusha*, they can make this world into a *dirah betachtonim*. Our Torah is a guidebook of value that we must turn to at all times. These things take time to explain, effort to ingrain, and of course we must be a *dugmah chaya* for them. These values are actually a lifetime of work to instill in oneself. This is where our *koch* must be. Childhood is the foundation to build

We need to give them a life of meaning, a purpose, an understanding that they can transform everything in this world to *kedusha*, they can make a *dirah betachtonim*.

these values, and we want a wholesome and strong foundation. It will be much harder to instill the Torah values when the mind and heart have been contaminated *chas veshalom*.

Let's take a moment to make a sincere genuine accounting. Are we looking to give our children a lens to recognize Hashem in every detail of the world? Or are we searching for ways to incorporate as much *limmudei chol* as possible into our curriculum so our children will be "on par" with the secular world on these matters? Our true intentions will lead to very different results. We all want to give our children the tools they will need for life, but maybe we have



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been giving too much importance to the methodologies used by the secular world and not enough genuine openness to the ways in which our Moshe Rabbeinu has instructed us.

What if when searching for what to teach our children we spent less time researching STEM activities and would open a *Der Rebbe Redt Tzu Kinder*, *The Rebbe Speaks to Children*, and looked for ways to draw down those messages? Let's brainstorm together as educators on bringing down the beautiful and lofty concepts we learn in *Chas-*

sidus so they become real to our children.

Childhood is the time to focus and be absorbed completely in Hashem's Torah. The Torah that is learned in childhood will serve as the motivation, inspiration, and direction in all of his/her endeavors in adulthood. We want our children to have a pure heart and mind, and to be fully given over to their purpose in life. When they are tapped into their soul's purpose, they will lead happy and meaningful lives and thank you for giving them a true *chinuch al tahras hakodesh!* ❧

Practical Suggestions

- Children can be taught a *middah* of the week, or a few *middos* learned from the weekly *parsha*.
- There is a book called *Honorable Menschen* by Genendel Krohn which can be a great tool for teaching *middos* and *derech erez*. In each section there are comics. Instead of reading out the comics to the children, morahs can use the script for puppet shows or have children act out the scenarios practicing the good *middos*.
- Project Team is a curriculum developed for preschool children to develop emotional awareness, social skills, *middos* and *derech erez*: www.torahteam.com.
- *Der Rebbe Redt Tzu Kinder*, *The Rebbe Speaks to Children*, is a valuable resource for searching for messages to focus on when teaching children *parsha*, about *yomim tovim* and other times of the year.
- Each week children can learn a different story of *tzaddikim*.
- Each week children can learn a new *niggun*, as well as background information on that *niggun*, such as when it was introduced and what the Rebbe has taught us about that *niggun*. Hearing and singing a *niggun* connects a person with the *neshama* of the composer. *Niggunim* are a great way to strengthen the children's *neshama* connection with the Rebbeim.
- *Teachings of the Rebbe on Chinuch* has a chapter on instilling important values, as well as advice on how to do that.
- Chitas for Kids is a great resource for bringing down *Chassidus* in ways that can be explained to children.
- Teach the Twelve Pesukim in depth.
- Learn the beginning of Tanya by heart and explain for the kids to understand.
- Children can learn the names of all the *parshas* by heart to a song on the CD *Veshinantom Livanecha* by Surie Levillev.