

The Simcha Principle

Introduction

In a previous article (“The Definition of Chinuch”) as well as in the Master Mechanech book, we bring sources from Chazal and many Gedolim that the goal of chinuch is to help our students love Hashem, Torah and Yiddishkeit. In this article we take a look at the main way of accomplishing this.

Sechel and Regesh

Every action we take in this world is motivated by one of two factors: logic or feeling. No one goes to the dentist because it feels good. We go because logically we know it’s better for us. And no one eats a piece of cake because it makes logical sense to do so. We eat it because it feels good. And sometimes we do things that both feel good and make logical sense.

The *Baalei Mussar* call these two qualities *seichel* (intellect/logic) and *regesh* (feeling/emotion) and discuss how both of them can be applied to Avodas Hashem. A person can be brought closer to Hashem through logic and intellect, and a person can be brought closer to Hashem through feeling and emotion.

It is obvious, however, that a child is much more affected by feelings and emotions than by logic and intellect. And the younger the child, the more that *regesh* is a factor and *sechel* is not. This has led many gedolim to stress that the main way to be *mechanech* children, the main way to awaken love of Hashem, Torah and Yiddishkeit in their hearts, is by generating joy, enjoyment and excitement in *ruchnius*. This is the essential formula for success in chinuch, what we call “The Simcha Principle.”

The Simcha Principle

Rav Yechiel Yaakovson writes:¹

“This is the basis for our essential definition of chinuch towards Avodas Hashem. It is: The things that we do to cause our children to

- a) experience joy and pleasure in ruchniyus,*
- b) desire it, and*
- c) learn how to achieve it.*

This has to be the overall goal of our chinuch, and also the practical guide to every detail of our day-to-day chinuch.”

Rav Shimshon Pincus says the following: “This is essentially the main part of chinuch, **both for small children and for older ones**, to achieve the sweetness and delight which is in the Torah and tefillah.”²

Rav Mattisyahu Solomon takes the Principle a step further and makes clear that it is true even when that joy comes from an external source. While discussing incentives in chinuch, Rav Solomon says:

“But what if a person is not yet on the level of learning Torah lishmah?...The answer is that he should begin learning shelo lishmah. He should create an artificial simchah for his learning, a simchah that derives from an external source but nonetheless connects to the Torah he is learning. The result is that, in one way or another, he is learning the Torah with simchah, and when you learn Torah with simchah, it opens up for you, and you discover the genuine and profound simchah of the Torah itself. You arrive at the simchah of learning lishmah.

And it is the same with all the mitzvos in the Torah. As long as you do the mitzvah with simchah, even if it is an artificial, externally applied simchah, you will eventually connect with the inner essence of the mitzvah and from then on you will no longer need external motivations. The love of the mitzvah itself will be your greatest motivation.”³

The sefer Chovas Hatalmidim (in the introduction) goes so far as to say that without causing children to feel joy and excitement in Torah and mitzvos, we can achieve nothing in chinuch:

“And if we do not take the initiative ourselves to inspire his soul early on, that it should become excited about every mitzvah and be enthused by the Torah and Hashem’s light, we will have accomplished nothing, ch”v.”⁴

And this may be more important today than it ever has been in the past. Today’s children are surrounded by non-*ruchnius* excitement and fun which constantly and relentlessly compete for their attention. So it is crucial that we proactively ignite a holy passion in Torah and mitzvos in their hearts while they are still young. As the Chovas Hatalmidim there says:

“If we do not move quickly to grab onto his enthusiasm to subjugate it and activate it with the excitement of kedushah, it will become excited and impressed by the enthusiasm for foolishness and the disgraceful “beauty” of the world, to be

impressed by their ways and to desire their ugly mischief... We must penetrate his soul, to awaken and ignite it..."⁵

It is obvious, therefore, that simcha and excitement must be a major focus in our schools: to teach them with passion and enthusiasm, in a way that brings them joy in Torah. To do as many "acts of chinuch" as possible, whether in the classroom or outside of it, with incentives, events, programs and projects of all kinds, which generate in our students excitement and joy in Torah and Yiddishkeit. The more *geshmack* we give the students, the more we are truly being *mechanech* them.

Let's see some more sources for the Simcha Principle.

The Nesivos Shalom:

"The main work of the mechanech in our time has to be focused on this point: to instill in the students the sweetness of the Torah, and to radiate light in every topic they study..."⁶

Likewise, the Pnei Menachem wrote:

"Our duty... is to do everything we can so that words of Torah should be sweetened like honey in the mouths of tinokos shel beis rabbon, and they should be more pleasant to their palate than 'dripping honeycombs and every flavor'."⁷

Rabbi Berel Povarsky tells us that the Simcha principle applies to all subjects:

"A child has to feel that the most pleasant thing in the world is to study Torah, Alef Beis, and Chumash, Mishnayos, and Gemara... The main thing is to instill geshmack. This isn't an easy task, but this is the condition (for teaching), and it is for this that we daven each morning: 'Please sweeten, Hashem our G-d, the words of your Torah in our mouths...'

¹ Spare The Child p. 10. 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.

² "זהו בעצם עיקר החינוך בין לקטנים ובין לגדולים להשיג את המתקנות והעריבות שבתורה ובתפילה" - שיחות רבי שמשון דוד פינקוס זצ"ל - עניני חינוך עמ' כ"ה

³ "With Hearts Full of Love" p. 123.

⁴ "ואם לא נקדם אנו לעורר את נפשו שתרגש מכל מצוה ותתפעל מן התורה ואור ד', לא נפעל מאומה חס ושלום" - חובת התלמידים בהקדמה

⁵ אם לא נחיש אנו לאחז בהתלהבותו לשעבדה ולהפעילה בהתפעלות של קדשה, תתרגש ותתפעל בהתלהבות של שטות ויפי המגנה של העולם, להתפלאות מדרכיהם ולחמד את תעלוליהם המכערים... מכרחים לחדר אל נפשו לעוררה ולהלהיבה" - שם

We have to instill Ahavas HaTorah into the child... There are rebbes who give geshmack in every subject, geshmack in Alef Beis, geshmack in siddur... and when the child feels by the rebbi the taste of "sweeter than honey", he becomes attached to the Torah, and attached to the Ribono Shel Olam."⁸

It is clear from the sources that the Simcha Principle is not just another technique in chinuch, it is the very embodiment of true Torah chinuch. When learning is devoid of joy, we lose students' hearts. This underlies many of the maladaptive behaviors teachers strive so hard to correct. Only simcha can secure their love for Hashem and Torah.

Schools must therefore make instilling joy and passion a priority across the board. Educators should reflect deeply on how to bring more excitement and meaning to their classrooms. This may require reevaluating techniques and curricula. Are we showing enough heartfelt enthusiasm? Are lessons varied and engaging? What are we doing to make students enjoy Torah and mitzvos?

See the book "The Master Mechanech" for many more sources on this topic, as well as for sources from Chazal that it is **forbidden** to teach if the student does not enjoy it!

With *Daas Torah* as our compass, chinuch can yet achieve its ultimate purpose: developing generations of youth filled with love of their Creator, delight in His Torah, and embrace of Yiddishkeit. Klal Yisrael's future depends on it.

⁶ "עיקר פעולת המנחך בזמננו צריכה להתרכז בנקודה זו, להחדיר בתלמידים את מתיקות התורה, ולהקרין אור בכל ענין שלומדים... - נתיבי חינוך בהקדמה

⁷ "חובתנו... לעשות הכל בכדי שיהיו דברי תורה מתמתקים כדבש בפי תינוקות של בית רבן ויערבו לחיכם מנופת צוף וכל טעם" - ניב המורה - נד

⁸ "ילד צריך להרגיש שהדבר הנעים ביותר בעולם זה ללמוד תורה, א' ב', וחומש, משניות, וגמרא, העיקר להכניס את הגישמאק. זה תפקיד לא קל, אבל זה התנאי ועל זה מתפללים כל בוקר: "הערב נא ד' אלוקינו את דברי תורתך בפינו'."

צריכים להכניס לילד אהבת תורה... יש רב'ס שנותנים גישמאק בכל דבר, גישמאק בא' ב', גישמאק בסידור, וכשהילד מרגיש אצל הרב'ה את הטעם של מתוקים מדבש, הוא נעשה דבוק בתורה, ודבוק בריבונו של עולם."