

The Definition of Chinuch

Introduction

The topic of chinuch has been a focal point in the *frum* community for many years. Educators and schools face a multitude of challenges, such as discipline issues, lack of *Derech Eretz*, and students who have difficulties in basic *kodesh* skills like *kriyah*. Despite the wealth of books, workshops, and courses aiming to improve the educational landscape, the challenges persist. Why is this? The answer may lie in a fundamental question that lacks a universally accepted answer.

What is Chinuch According to the Torah?

Surprisingly, this basic question does not have a clear, widely accepted answer. If you were to survey various Rebbeim and Moros, you'd find a range of definitions, each focusing on different aspects of education. An eighth-grade rebbi might emphasize mastering Gemara, while a sixth-grade morah might focus on instilling the importance of *tznius*. These diverse perspectives, although well-intentioned, highlight a fundamental issue: the lack of a unified understanding of what chinuch means according to the Torah.

Why Does It Matter?

Understanding the Torah's definition of chinuch is not just a theoretical exercise; it has practical implications for how we educate our children. So many teachers and schools face serious challenges **because they are unaware of what chinuch is according to the Torah, and how to achieve that chinuch according to the Torah**. We can only give our children an amazing chinuch experience once we know what that experience is supposed to be! Aligning teaching methods with the Torah-based definition of chinuch is the key to resolving the vast majority of challenges that educators face.

What is Chinuch?

The Midrash tells us: “‘Like gardens beside a river’ – these are the teachers of children who take out from their hearts wisdom, understanding, knowledge and reason, and teach them to do the will of their Father in heaven.”¹

Rashi likewise says (Bava Basra 8b) that teachers of children are “matzdikei rabbim” because they guide children in the good path.²

Gedolim throughout the generations reinforce this definition of chinuch.

Rav Dessler writes that the main learning of *limudei kodesh* is *hashkafa*, *yiras Shomayim* and *avodas Hashem*:

*But the teacher has to give over the holiness and the fondness, which are what create the Yiras Shomayim and the love. And this is the main study that is unparalleled in all the other studies in the world. ...it is clear to us that the main learning in limudei kodesh is not learning the information, rather the learning of hashkafa, the learning of Yiras Shomayim and Avodas Hashem.*³

Rav Reuven Grozovsky says that the job of a *melamed* is to “return the hearts of the sons to their Father in heaven, and that the creatures should recognize their creator.”⁴

Rav Moshe Feinstein writes in *Igros Moshe*:

*And the **main priority in chinuch** is to educate him in emunah in Hashem Yisborach and His Torah, and that each thing he is given is a gift from Hashem Yisborach, as he will then acquire a love for Hashem...*⁵

And in a separate *Tshuva*:

*A melamed becomes the shaliach of Hakadosh Baruch Hu to give over the Torah similar to Moshe Rabbeinu a”h...And the job is to return the hearts of the sons to their Father in heaven, and that the creatures should recognize their creator...*⁶

Rav Nissim Karelitz in a letter to *mechanchim* wrote:

*...and the main thing is to instill in those being taught spirit to rise and strengthen themselves in Torah, Yirah and good middos...*⁷

Rav Shmuel Halevi Vosner said:

*There is no doubt whatsoever, that the main part of chinuch is not just the learning, rather the Yiras Shomayim which the mechanech imparts to his students. ...But the foundation of foundations of chinuch is to know that “anyone who says he only has Torah...doesn’t even have Torah”. And therefore the Torah that is taught to the children must be wrapped in Yiras Shomayim with purity and holiness – this is the foundation of foundations, as (Chazal) expounded the posuk “the fear of Hashem is pure, it stands forever”...*⁸

And Rabbi Chaim Friedlander wrote:

...it is possible and a requirement to speak with children on matters of emunah, Yiras Shomayim, love of Torah, good middos and derech erez... And it is (part of) our task to instill emunah and Yiras Shomayim in our students. It is incumbent upon us to sow Yiras Shomayim and emunah in the tender and pure hearts of our children...⁹

The message from Chazal and our leaders is clear: Chinuch is about more than imparting information and skills. Its overarching mission is to develop students' love for Hashem, Torah, mitzvos and Yiddishkeit.

This singular goal must guide every decision we make in chinuch.

The Chashivus and Reward of Teachers

In a previous article ("The Chashivus of Melamdei Tinokos") as well as in The Master Mechanech book, we discuss the tremendous importance and reward for *melamdei tinokos*. Having seen that the main goal of chinuch is to help our students go in the ways of Hashem, we understand why this is so. The Torah tells us: (דברים י"ד) בנים אתם לה' אלוקים. Each and every child sitting in our classrooms is no less than a child of the King of kings, Creator and Master of the universe.

And being the precious children of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, He loves them with a tremendous love, the magnitude of which we can't imagine. The Zohar (parshas Shmos) tells us:

Rabbi Yehuda said: if people knew the love that the Holy One Blessed be He has for Yisrael, they would roar like lions to chase after Him.

¹ "כגנות עלי נהר אלו מלמדי תינוקות שמוציאין מלבן חכמה ובינה ודעת והשכל ומלמדין אותן לעשות רצון אביהם שבשמים" - ילקוט שמעוני תשע"א

² "מלמדי תינוקות - מצדיקי רבים הן שמלמדין ומחנכין אותן בדרך טובה"

³ " אבל המלמד צריך למסור את הקדושה ואת החביבות שהם עושים את היראת שמים ואת האהבה וזהו עיקר הלימוד שאין כמוהו בכל הלימודים האחרים שבעולם... הנה גלוי לפנינו כי עיקר הלימוד בלמודי קודש איננו לימוד הידיעות אלא לימוד ההשקפה לימוד יר"ש ועבודת ה' - מכתב מאליהו חלק ג' שס"ב

⁴ "מלמד נעשה שלוחו של הקב"ה למסור התורה מעין משה רבינו ע"ה... והעבודה היא להשיב לב בנים לאביהם שבשמים ושהנבראים יכירו בוראם..." - ספר בעיות הזמן עמ' צ"ג-צ"ד

⁵ "ועיקר החינוך צריכים לחנכו באמונה בהשם יתברך ובתורתו ושכל דבר שנותנים לו הוא מתנה מהשי"ת שאז יקנה אהבה להשי"ת וכו"

Now imagine a human king. This king has a son whom he loves dearly. However, outside of the palace there are winds of rebellion. There are those who no longer wish to follow the king's rules, who prefer chaos and depravity. Even worse, there's a real concern that the prince may become enticed by their superficial, empty philosophies and attractions. So the king hires a special tutor for the prince. It is this tutor's job to make sure the prince, the apple of the king's eye, follows in his father's ways.

Can one imagine the king's anguish should the tutor not succeed, and the son ends up turning his back on his father and all he stands for? Conversely, should the tutor succeed, wouldn't his reward be almost beyond imagination? Wouldn't the king be willing to give anything to that tutor in gratitude?

The נמשל is clear. We are teaching the precious princes and princesses, the sons and daughters of Hashem, and the job the King is asking from us is to make sure that His children go in His ways. Of course the reward is so tremendous!

And this isn't just some nice mashal; it's how we must view our students in practice! Rav Eliyashiv was once asked how a teacher is supposed to treat students when there are different levels among them. He answered:

The mechanech has to look at each child as an only child of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and when one views the child with this perspective, one merits and sees success and Siyata DiShmaya in his growth.

Each one of our students is a beloved child of Hashem, whom He has entrusted to us for an entire year, to teach them to go in His ways. Of course the reward is tremendous!

⁶ "זה צריך כל מורה ומורה להשריש בלב ונפש התלמידים אמונה אמיתית ואהבה ומתיקות לתורה ומצותיה..."

⁷ "...והעיקר להכניס בהתלמידים רוח לעלות ולהתחזק בתורה ויראה ובמידות טובות..."

⁸ " אין כל ספק בזה שעיקר החינוך הוא לא רק הלימוד אלא יראת שמים שהמחנך מקנה לתלמידיו... אבל יסוד היסודות של החינוך הוא לדעת שכל האומר אין לו אלא תורה וכו' אפילו תורה אין לו (יבמות קט) ועל כן התורה"ק שמלמדים את הילדים צריכה להיות עטופה ביראת שמים בטרה ובקדושה זהו יסוד היסודות כמו שדרשו את הפס' תהלים ט"ו "יראת ה' טהורה עומדת לעד..."

⁹ "על כן, אפשרי וצריך לדבר עם ילדים על עניני אמונה, יראה, אהבת תורה, מדות טובות וכו'... ומתפקידנו להחדיר אמונה ויר"ש בקרב תלמידנו, עלינו לזרוע בלבבותיהם הרכים והטהורים של ילדינו יסודות אמונה ויראת שמים..."