B”H

**Four Chinuch Principles I Learned from the Rebbe**

Contributor: Rabbi Zalmen Leib Markowitz, Monsey, New York

Written by Mrs. Elky Raitport

*Rabbi Markowitz entered the field of chinuch as per the Rebbe’s directive and now serves as an educational consultant on behalf of Merkos L’Inyonei Chinuch, providing chinuch support and advice to shluchim and Anash families around the world. We reached out to Rabbi Markowitz to hear how his observations of the Rebbe have influenced his outlook on chinuch.*

A child’s chinuch is less about the messages directed towards him and more about his passive observations. A large part of a child’s makeup--how he acts, thinks and feels--is unwittingly absorbed into him through observation of those around him. The things he sees and hears from people become his definition of who he is and how he perceives his world. As parents and educators, we must be exceedingly mindful with the world we create through our words and actions.

We have subconsciously developed our own way of being from our environment, from our childhood until today. As adults, we have the ability and achrayus to choose our influences and actions and, as such, the messages that come as a result of these choices. But where do we get our lessons from? After whom should we model our actions and conduct? Looking to the way the Rebbe conducted himself, we can be inspired to follow his horaos and to emulate his “style” when educating our own children.

1. Generate Excitement; the Desired Actions Will Automatically Follow

*What I observed*

The Rebbe began almost every farbrengen by speaking of the greatness of that particular day. The Rebbe would elaborate in great detail on the maalos to be appreciated and the opportunities to be maximized from that day. The Rebbe would then conclude with horaos b’maseh b’poel. This generated a deep desire to take advantage of the power to be found in the remaining hours of the day and use it to its fullest.

In addition, at every opportunity, the Rebbe stressed the preciousness of the neshoma of a Yid. He emphasized that the neshoma is a chelek Eloka mima’al mamosh. The Rebbe highlighted the great zechus a Jew possesses simply by being a part of Am Yisroel, the nation that HaKodosh Boruch Hu chose for Himself.[[1]](#footnote-2) This in itself opened the minds and the hearts of the people to be connected and automatically brought about the desired results.

*How we can apply it*

Many parents spend much of their time giving their children instructions. I learned from the Rebbe that prior to the instruction, the teacher or parent must create an enthusiasm within himself that will spill over to the children, building, as a result, an environment where the instructions will be well received.

For example, on Shabbos, our primary focus needs to be on the excitement and appreciation of Shabbos Kodesh. This can be transmitted to each child, depending on his age, in various ways. A young child will enjoy a Shabbos party, a nice seuda, and stories about Shabbos. With older children, we share our excitement by connecting and learning about the kedusha of Shabbos. Now the child is ready to learn and will be excited to follow instructions.

2. Tailor Your Message to Fit Its Recipient

*What I observed*

It is inspiring to watch the Rebbe as he distributed dollars, kuntreisim, and kos shel brocha to individual people, as well as the varying manner in which the Rebbe spoke at communal gatherings, such as at the N’shei Chabad convention, children’s rallies, and farbrengens. The Rebbe’s expectations of people were according to who they were and what their capacities were. In addition, the way the Rebbe tailored his tone of voice and expressions to fit each person and group is quite remarkable. Though often the message being relayed to each of them was the same, the manner in which it was delivered was unquestionably customized for the recipients. Similarly, the variety of ways through which the Rebbe chose to communicate with individual people during farbrengens, such as by a hint of the eyes or a gesture of the hand, was also personalized.

*How we can apply it*

The Rebbe’s sensitivity to the specific needs of each person encourages us to be more attentive to each particular student and his circumstances, making sure to understand the capacity of each child. In addition, even the tone of voice used when greeting students with a “good morning” might have to be different based on the emotional needs of the particular child at that time.[[2]](#footnote-3)

3. Seeing Everyone as A+

*What I observed*

Regardless of who came to the Rebbe, whether someone from the Torah world or from the business world or someone in the category of none of the above, the Rebbe always pointed out that person’s special qualities and unique kochos, encouraging him to make the most of them. The Rebbe would often give an extra dollar to a person who presented him with a sefer that he had just written, urging him to write a second one. The Rebbe would also give an extra dollar to a community activist, encouraging him to continue his activities, and to an artist to continue with his artwork.

Furthermore, there are known stories where the Rebbe masterfully capitalized on the seemingly less positive qualities a person possessed and directed the person to transform them into tools for positivity. Not only that, but the Rebbe showed these people that they, in fact, are always making impressions upon those around them and that by doing good, they will influence others to do the same.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Similarly, whenever the Rebbe spoke, he highlighted what is unique about that particular day and, even more so, how that day is mashpia for the rest of the year, as well.[[4]](#footnote-5) When speaking of a specific location, the Rebbe consistently framed it by its benefits. When discussing Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe’s words were replete with pesukim and maamorei Chazal that highlight its kedusha; when mentioning chutz la’aretz, the Rebbe emphasized its maalos, such as the fact that we celebrate an extra day of yom tov. When speaking of New York, the Rebbe referenced the fact that the Frierdiker Rebbe chose it as the place to settle.

*How we can apply it*

The majority of students in the average classroom can easily consider themselves to be second class at best; only a small percentage of students earn A’s. The Rebbe taught us that every student is an A+ person with plenty of qualities to rightfully earn him top-notch status. It is merely a matter of how we choose to look at that particular student and how much we will put ourselves out to bring his specific A+ to the foreground.

Additionally, if we reach out in the right manner to a student who is misbehaving, not only are we able to help him direct his energies to good outcomes, but we can even help him turn himself into a leader for good.

4. See the Cup as Completely Full

*What I observed*

The Rebbe consistently emphasized the positive elements in our world. The Rebbe frequently translated the phrase אכשור דרא,--“do the generations improve?”(in most cases used sarcastically)--in its literal sense, highlighting the areas where elements in this world have positively improved. Furthermore the Rebbe consistently extracted the positive from the seemingly most extremely negative situations, such as the amazing sicha regarding the story of Miriam bas Bilga.[[5]](#footnote-6)

One memorable example was during the famous sicha the Rebbe delivered on motzoei Simchas Torah 5738, the night after he’d suffered a heart attack. The Rebbe remarked that it was hashgocha protis that the farbrengen was taking place after yom tov, enabling a live hookup to be broadcast worldwide! Chanukah Live is another example of this, where the Rebbe harnessed technological advancement perceived by others to be antithetical to Yiddishkeit for hafotzas hamaayonos.

*How we can apply it*

Parents and educators may wish to speak to their children or students about the negativity going on in the world today as a means to dissuade them from wishing to pursue those avenues. (The Alter Rebbe explains in the first perek of Tanya that a person considering himself (or, for that matter, the world around him) as a rosha is likely to enter a state of atzvus and that if he chooses not to care about this, he may bring himself to kalus rosh, chas vesholom.) The Rebbe has taught us that highlighting the *positive* growth in the world around us, such as the extraordinary amount of Torah study, tefila, and gemilus chassodim taking place in Jewish communities and remote corners of the world alike, is far more effective.

1. Shabbos Vayikra 5750. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Klolei Chinuch V’Hadrocha, prokim 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Igros Kodesh volume 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Pesach Sheni 5744. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. 6 Tishrei, 5735. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)