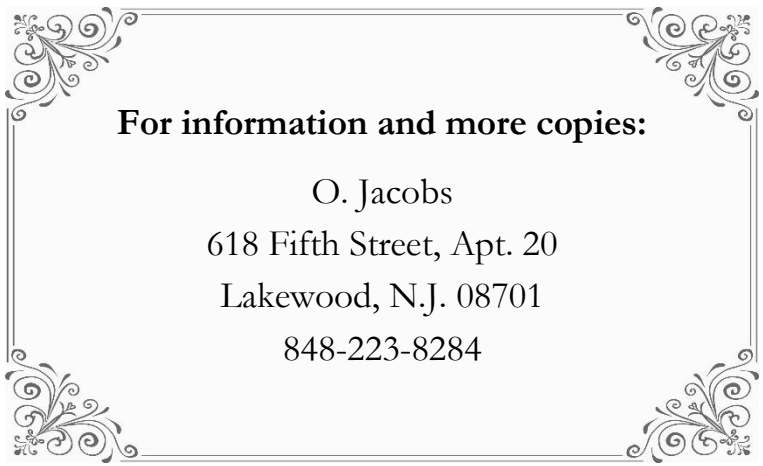
חינוך למחנך

Understanding *Your* CHILD



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Publisher's Note

This booklet is a compilation of several *shmuessen* on *chinuch habanim* delivered by **Rav Binyomin Jacobs** *shlita*. Rav Jacobs currently serves as the twelfth-grade *maggid shiur* at Yeshivas Keren Hatorah in Lakewood, N.J. He is also a son-in-law of the late *mashgiach* of Bais Medrash Govoha, Rav Mattisyahu Salomon *zt"l*. Rav Jacobs is a sought-after speaker and *baal eitzah*, who gives important guidance to parents of all ages. Readers of this booklet will benefit most from Rav Jacobs' valuable and foundational words by actively absorbing the material and reviewing it regularly.



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Part I

Chochmah and Middos

Anyone who has a *mishpachah*, sons or daughters, knows that *chinuch habanim* is not easy. What does a parent need to be *matzliach* in *chinuch habanim*?

First, *chochmah,* the ability to understand your child. Second, *middos tovos,* the patience and strength to do what you know is right.

A person may know exactly what his child needs, but as the years go on, the challenges of life can make it difficult to act on

that knowledge. The better a parent understands his child's nature, the easier it is to be *megadel* and *mechanech* him.

It's Just a Flat Tire

There is a great *mashal* that applies directly to *chinuch habanim*. A man owned a very expensive car, and it would not drive. He brought it to a mechanic, who told him, "For ten thousand dollars I can replace the engine, and there is a chance it will work." He paid the ten thousand dollars, but the car still did not drive. The mechanic suggested replacing a few more parts for another ten thousand dollars. Again, nothing helped. Finally, the man took the car to a different mechanic. After looking at it, the mechanic said, "Your car has a flat tire. For fifty dollars, I can fix it, and the car will drive like new."

Many times, parents say, "My son is such a *baal gaavah*. He is such a *kaasan*, such an *akshan*. I have no idea how to deal with him." What they do not realize is that their son may simply have a "flat tire." He has a challenge, but that does not mean there is something fundamentally wrong with him. Address the actual problem, and you may discover that he is perfectly fine.

He Is Into Himself

The Mishnah (*Avos* 3:2) says, "*Hevei mispallel bishlomah shel malchus, she'ilmalei mora'ah, ish es re'eihu chayim bala'o — Daven for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, a man would swallow his fellow alive.*"

Rav Yerucham Levovitz asks: Whom is the Mishnah describing? A person who swallows his fellow alive sounds like the ultimate *achzar*. Rav Yerucham explains that this is not necessarily the case. A person can be a genuinely good person and yet be so absorbed in himself that he can "swallow" someone else without even realizing what he is doing.

When a person is completely focused on himself, he may simply be blind to the needs of others.

Parents sometimes say, "My child is destroying the family. He is destroying his parents. What am I supposed to do with him?" We have to understand that children, especially young children, are naturally very focused on themselves. When they hurt their parents or disrupt the family, they may not even realize the extent of what they are doing.

They need this and they need that, and everything revolves around their needs. That does not necessarily mean they are *achzariyim*. It may simply be part of their immaturity and self-centeredness.

Reasons Why He's Unreasonable

One of the great *mechanchim* in Eretz Yisrael, Rav Dovid Levy, said the following: Take a forty-year-old six-footer and a ten-year-old boy, and ask which one is stronger. Obviously, the adult is physically stronger. But what happens when the child becomes angry? The adult may give him a *potch*, but the child, lacking the *seichel* and self-control of an adult, may respond by

doing something completely destructive. In that sense, the child can become the stronger of the two.

Bederech klal, children are not always *makir tov* for what their parents do for them. Parents give their children their entire lives, *k'pshuto*, yet children may feel little *hakaras hatov*. Why?

One reason is that children feel their parents are obligated to care for them. "My parents brought me into this world, so they are *mechuyav* to take care of me." They may not consciously think this way, but that can be the way they experience their parents' efforts.

There is another reason. The Gemara (*Berachos* 58a) says:

"Ore'ach tov mah hu omer? Kol mah shetarach baal habayis, lo tarach ela bishvili. Ore'ach ra mah hu omer? Kol mah shetarach, bishvil atzmo hu tarach."

"A good guest says, 'Everything the host did, he did for me.' A bad guest says, 'Everything the host did, he did for himself.'"

The question is obvious. Suppose I discover on Friday afternoon that I have nowhere to eat for Shabbos. I call someone and ask if I can join his meal, and he says, "Of course." I arrive and find forty other guests at the table. Am I supposed to convince myself that the entire meal was prepared for me? The *baal habayis* certainly did not add even a drop of salt because of me.

The *pshat* is as follows: The *ore'ach tov* knows perfectly well that the *baal habayis* did not prepare the meal specifically for him. But he makes a *cheshbon*: "I was on the street with nowhere

to eat. I benefited from this *seudah*, and therefore I owe the *baal habayis hakaras hatov*."

The *ore'ach ra* thinks differently: "There were already forty people at the table. *Kol mah shetarach baal habayis, bishvil atzmo tarach*. He would have done all this without me."

Children can sometimes view their parents in a similar way. "My parents wanted a *mishpachah*. They would have had this household anyway. I am simply part of it." They do not necessarily recognize how much their parents have done specifically for them.

The *ore'ach tov* would recognize that without his host, he would have been left without a meal. Similarly, a child needs to learn to recognize what he has received from his parents.

My Father Has an Agenda

Rav Dovid Levy once made another remarkable observation. There are children who think to themselves, *"Vos darf ich layden az mayn tatte vil hoben gutte kinder? — Why should I have to suffer because my father wants to have good children?"*

A father comes to shul on Shabbos morning and expects his children to sit like *malachim*. When it comes to *yeshivos* and *shidduchim*, he may want to make decisions in the way that makes him comfortable and proud, even when that may not be what is best for his son.

From the child's perspective, he may think, "*Ich darf layden vayl mayn tatte vil hoben gutte kinder?* Why should I have to suffer because my father wants good children?"

This is one reason a child who needs an *eitzah* about a *yeshivah* or another important matter may turn to a friend or to his friend's father rather than to his own father. His father may be the person everyone else turns to for advice, but the child feels, "My father has an agenda. He is not thinking only about what is best for me. He wants to have good children."

The child's perception may not be fair or even accurate. But if that is how he feels, it is something a parent needs to understand.

No Equality

The Gemara in *Maseches Makkos* (8a) discusses the importance of proper discipline in *chinuch* and brings the *pasuk* (Mishlei 13:24), *"Choseich shivto sonei beno — He who withholds his rod hates his son.*"

Rav Mattisyahu Salomon explains that a child who never needs to be disciplined because he is literally a *malach* can nevertheless begin to feel that his relationship with his father is *shaveh b'shaveh*, one of equality. He knows that his father is smarter than he is and a greater *talmid chacham*, yet he can begin to sense that it is simply "him and his father."

A parent therefore needs to maintain a certain *havdalah*, a distinction between parent and child. The father is not merely an

older and wiser friend. He is the father, and the child needs to recognize that distinction.

The *pasuk* (Mishlei 1:8) says, "*Shema beni mussar avicha — Listen, my son, to the mussar of your father*." For a father to be *mechanech* his child, there must be respect. If a son does not feel a measure of *mora*, of awe and respect, toward his father, the father's *chinuch* will lack *koach*.

A father can teach his son a great deal of *chochmah*, but *mussar* from a father is far more than one intelligent person passing information to someone less knowledgeable. For a father's *mussar* to have its proper *koach*, the relationship cannot be one of *shaveh b'shaveh*.

Rav Shimon Shkop makes a similar point regarding the relationship between a *rebbi* and his *talmidim*. The Gemara (*Yoma* 28b) says that Avraham Avinu was a *zakein v'yoshev b'yeshivah*, based on the *pasuk*, *"V'Avraham zakein ba bayamim"* (Bereishis 24:1). Rav Shimon Shkop asks: Where does the *pasuk* indicate that Avraham Avinu was a *zakein v'yoshev b'yeshivah*?

He explains based on the statement of Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 87a) that Avraham Avinu davened for *ziknah*. But why would Avraham daven for old age? Would it not have been better to remain young throughout his life? *Ziknah* weakens a person's physical strength, so what *maalah* is there in it?

For the *zakein* himself, Rav Shimon explains, *ziknah* is not necessarily a *maalah*. But if a person wants to be *maamid talmidim*, there is an important advantage to *ziknah*. A *talmid*

needs to be *mevatel* himself to his *rebbi*, to look up to him and to trust that when something the *rebbi* says does not make sense, the difficulty may lie in the *talmid's* own understanding.

For that, the *rebbi* needs to be a *zakein*. The *ziknah* of the *rebbi* helps the *talmid* develop the necessary *bitul*. Thus, when the *pasuk* says, *"V'Avraham zakein ba bayamim,"* we understand that Avraham Avinu had *talmidim*. *Ziknah* is a *maalah* in the context of transmitting Torah to *talmidim*.

A *rebbi* therefore carries a special *koach* to teach. He is not simply a *chavrusa* who happens to be older.

A father is similar. He does not merely know more than his son. He carries a distinct *koach* as his father and *mechanech*. That *koach* requires a measure of *mora* and respect.

Fit for Respect

The Rambam (*Hilchos Ishus* 15:20) writes that a woman should be *mechabed* her husband more than necessary and treat him with the respect due to a king. Many years ago, I heard a *drashah* from Rav Yehuda Jacobs in which he pointed out that the Rambam is teaching two things at once.

The first is obvious: a wife must be *mechabed* her husband like a king. But the second is what this demands of the husband. If, in a *Yiddishe* marriage, a wife is expected to respect her husband like a king, *"Oyb di man firt zich oys vi a kelev,"* if the man conducts himself like a dog, how can she possibly respect him like a king?

We are not speaking about simply going through the motions of respecting one's husband. We are speaking about genuine respect. The *halachah* therefore also teaches us something about the responsibility of the husband. He must conduct himself in a way that makes that respect possible.

The same is true in *chinuch habanim*. If we want a son to look up to his father and be *mekabel* what his father says even when he does not fully understand it, the father must conduct himself in a way that earns that respect. If a father does not behave in a way that deserves respect, we cannot simply expect his son to live up to *"Shema beni mussar avicha."*

One can take this a step further. Children can sometimes be altogether unreasonable. A child can recognize that his father is *mamash* an *adam gadol* and still find something to *passul* him so that he will not have to accept everything his father says. That may be unfair, but it is nevertheless our responsibility as parents to create an environment in which our children can respect us.

Respect Your Child

Parents, for their part, carry a serious obligation to respect their children. When you have an eight-year-old boy, you must respect him. That does not mean pretending he is nine. An eight-year-old can be respected as an eight-year-old.

The Mishnah (*Avos* 4:1) says, "*Eizehu mechubad? Hamchabed es habriyos — Who is honored? One who honors others.*" Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to say that anyone who imagines there is another route to being *mechubad* than the one stated in the

Mishnah is a *ta'ah bi'dvar Mishnah*. To be a *mechubad*, you must be *mechabed* others.

Rav Dovid Levy explains that this follows human nature. If I hold you in high regard and make you feel that you are a *chashuveh Yid*, you will naturally hold me in high regard as well. And it works the same way in reverse. If I degrade another person, the first person he will *passul* is me. As long as I remain an honorable person in his eyes, he cannot reconcile that with my telling him that he is worthless. Rejecting me becomes a way of protecting himself.

If we are *mashpil* (degrade) our children, the first person to truly be degraded is the one doing the degrading. You can give a child *mussar*, and you can even hit him, without being *mashpil* him. A father or *rebbi* who needs and wants the respect of his child — and that respect is one of the most important things a father or *rebbi* can have — must first teach himself how to give *mussar* while continuing to see the *bachur* as a *bachur* and the child as a child. He has *maalos*. He is good. He simply did something wrong right now.

Chinuch with Chochmah

How do we deliver *chinuch* in a way that leaves a child *tsufrieden* (receptive) to hearing it?

The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (41:2) says, "A*shrei maskil el dal, b'yom ra y'malteihu Hashem — Fortunate is the one who deals wisely with the poor; Hashem will save him on a bad day."* What does it mean to be a *maskil el dal*?

Imagine a poor person who does not have enough money even to buy food and desperately needs your help. What *chochmah* does it take to help him? You take a loaf of bread and give it to him. Why, then, does the *pasuk* describe the person who helps him as a *maskil*, someone who acts with understanding and wisdom?

When you walk up to a starving man and hand him a loaf of bread, of course he is relieved to have something to eat. But at that very moment, another painful realization can register: I am so poor that I cannot even provide myself with a slice of bread. That realization can be so difficult that a person may refuse to admit that he needs help. He may even prefer to go hungry and insist, "No, no, I'm fine. I have plenty to eat," rather than face what it means to admit that he is destitute.

That is the *chochmah* of a *maskil el dal*. He knows how to give the poor man the loaf of bread without making him feel small or broken. He finds a way to help him without making him feel the full humiliation of his situation.

Sometimes you have to be a *chochem* to figure out how to give *tzedakah* in a way that the poor person does not even feel that you have grasped how poor he is.

He's Really a Good Boy

The same is true when it comes to giving *chinuch* or *mussar* to your child.

Most children are happy to learn and happy to follow what they are told. But if you speak to them in a way that is *mashpil* them — telling them how *schlecht* they are or how *unfrum* they are — then even if you are right, and even if they know that you are right, they feel that they have to protect themselves. They need to be able to tell themselves that they are not so bad, that they are *ehrlich*. They will look for all kinds of *tachbulos* and *terutzim* to convince themselves that what they did is not as bad as you are making it out to be.

The *chochmah* of being *mechanech* a child is that even while telling him what he did wrong, you do not simultaneously tell him that he is *schlecht*. You must convey that he is a good boy, that in many other areas he is a very good boy, and that even in this particular area, people make mistakes. You have to find a way to say what needs to be said without making him feel like a *schlechter*.

The *nekudah* is how you come across when you tell a child what he is doing wrong: without *hashpalah*, without making him feel *schlecht*, and without breaking him. Let him come away feeling that he is good, and that he simply needs to do things differently. If you are not *mashpil* him, he will be more likely to be *mekabel* your *tochachah*.