



Some years ago, I wrote a series of articles that was meant to serve as taster of the wisdom of the holy Aish Kodesh Ztl. In the years since the need for the rebbe's words are even more vital. Please learn these timeless lessons and offer our young some fresh vitality.

CHOVOS HATALMIDIM

A New Commentary by Harav Y. Reuven Rubin

"You, the Jewish youth are fortunate; fortunate is your share, for you have been given the privilege of learning Torah, which is the delight of Hashem, and have reached the elevated level of being one of His loved ones in whom He delights."

With these electrifying words the Aish Kodesh, Rebbe Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczna Ztl starts his monumental sefer Chovos Hatalmidim - The Students 'Obligation. The Rebbe decided in the early 1930s to write a book for adolescent boys who he felt were being lost in the educational system of those times. I am constantly astounded that a tzaddik of his stature, a Rebbe of thousands of devoted Chassidim would feel it incumbent upon himself to sit down and write a text book for Yeshiva kids.

After a very soul-stirring introduction wherein the Rebbe discusses educational challenges to teachers and parents, he turns to his main task, and does so with love and deep respect. He raises his young readers up, telling them how blessed they are to be given the opportunity to learn Hashem's Torah. He doesn't doubt the youngsters in the least, he raises them to a level wherein they are a "delight" to Hashem.

Our present times have been gifted with so very much, yet one would have to be blind not to be aware of the very real dangers our children are facing. I have studied the Rebbe's opening words with many youngsters and have learnt to read their reactions.

Some look astounded, "What, I am a delight to Hashem? You mean me?" Others just take the words as they do almost everything else they hear from us elders. It's just so much more information that old people tell us kids without anyone else believing or even hearing what they are saying. And then there are the blessed who perk up and their eyes shine with an illumination that tells you that they are alive and thirsting for Yiddishkeit.

בס"ד



Adass Aish Kodesh

Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita
36 Bury Old Road
Prestwich – Manchester
M25 0FT



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info@aishkodesh.co.uk



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The Rebbe continues: *“The heavens above and the earth below rejoice and honour you and even subjugate themselves to you; they ask each other: Who is this young man? When he learns Torah and davens, a fire of holiness emerges from his mouth! Hakodosh Boruch Hu is glorified and exults in him before His myriad angels and holy ones.”*

The Rebbe is awakening in the young reader a sense of the greatness that lies within every Jewish child. His poetic grace intertwines with the reader’s heart and offers hope. These wondrous truths are often forgotten when living in the daily maelstrom of our lives. The Rebbe sought to ignite these souls by prompting them to acknowledge their own uniqueness.

Tragically, there will be children who when hearing this will shrug their shoulders with boredom, and it is our job to change this and show them the reality of who they are. The Rebbe speaks of this dilemma and we will hopefully share his prescriptions to heal these souls in the near future.

The wonder of the Rebbe’s sefer is that it addresses contemporary issues. At the time it was published it instantly caught the imagination and interest of the whole Torah world. Today its truth and imagery have a relevance to our situation in so many ways and it offers our young a sense of the warmth that connects with our holy roots.

For all too many, we have cheapened ourselves on the altar of ever-growing materialism. Youngsters are fed a diet of superficial visions with no real meaning. Reality all too often is what is displayed on a small screen or some other cheap distraction. When offered sweet unabashed truths, many of the young can’t comprehend their meaning.

When the Rebbe authored this sefer the youth of his time were facing many of the same challenges. They may have been clothed in different garb but the source was the same: our age-old enemy: the Yetzer Hora. Thousands of homes were being destroyed by the poison of the enlightenment and other new-fangled “isms” that swept youngsters off their spiritual moorings.

The first step the Rebbe takes is to describe the wonder of what it is to be a *Yiddishe kind*. It is from this holiness that everything else can flow.

Today’s children deserve, in fact need, this same understanding. Yet how often do we offer it? Mosdos are large- so many children bli ayin hora- but too few resources, with kids getting lost in the shuffle.

We as parents have been given the gift of children, unique neshomas that are blessed with holiness. Our role as parents comes with great responsibilities. We are meant to nourish our young with a knowledge of who they truly are. The Rebbe speaks throughout all his works about how vital it is for each soul to be seen as individual and, given the tools accordingly, to connect with Hashem.

We often forget to speak to our children about what it is to be a Yied. The Rebbe reaches out to the young by telling them in the first few words that they are wondrous and a blessing to the whole world.

Parents must learn to have such conversations, if not with speech, then perhaps more importantly by actions. Children won’t become aware of their connection with Hashem if they live in an atmosphere where Hashem, isn’t the uppermost priority. Children need to know their holy worth in this materialistic world. We are fighting against difficult enemies; every day we hear of new casualties.

So, the Rebbe starts by telling the young they are wondrous. Later he will elaborate and show us how we should build on this foundation.

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