



THE YOUTH IN WHOM HASHEM DELIGHTS

*Chovas Hatalmidim – Chapter Two of a new commentary by
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“Train the child according to his way; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Shlomo Hamelech wrote these words in Mishlei and they have become the byword for education for all generations ever since. Today read any newsletter from our mosdos, scan advertisements, listen to educators and after all is said and done, it is this passage that is seen as the one Ingredient that promises to bring us all nachas.

Yet, its true meaning seems to be elusive. What does this really mean? Where do we find the exact elements that make for an education that will guide us all throughout our lives?

In the opening pages of Chovas Hatalmidim the Rebbe ztl writes an introduction entitled “A discussion with Teachers and Parents.” Although the sefer was written as a text book for young souls, the Rebbe felt it extremely necessary to discuss with the parents and teachers what it was he was sharing with the young.

The Rebbe starts with Shlomo Hamelech’s holy statement and then elucidates:

“Herein lies the fundamental principle of education. The goal is not merely that a child should listen to and obey his father while he is still a child and under his father’s jurisdiction, but also that once the child has matured and is his own master, “he will not depart from it.”

In today’s parlance this could be understood as the Rebbe telling us that we can’t just ‘program’ our young; we must ignite their souls with the spark of their individuality and use this for their growth and connection with Hashem.

True education must open the child’s heart and offer him the vibrancy of a Torah life that is his proper inheritance. Otherwise, we are merely stamping our will into their minds without allowing for their uniqueness. Such teaching is not education,

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and often soul-destroying.

Chinuch, explains the Rebbe is about finding the uniqueness of a youngster and building on it. It is about finding the potential and actualising it. If not, it will remain concealed forever.

The Tzaddik continues:

“An educator who merely uses commands and conditioning doesn’t have to pay attention to the child or student, nor does he have to acquaint himself with their character or intellect. Since the teacher is the central authority figure, he can give a single order to an entire class and be done with it.”

Our times are brimming with potential. We don’t live in yesteryear’s poverty nor are we be-devilled by the fervent anti- Semitism that hounded our ancestors. We have large, well- lit classrooms, with food and clothing. Yet, Shlomo Hamelech’s words threaten to become a mere tagline with no real regard given to the infinite potential that lies within them. All we see is the growing debris of failed educational efforts.

The Rebbe spends much of this chapter depicting with clarity what real chinuch should be. I know we are facing huge challenges. The scale of numbers is enormous. Back in the Heim children went to work at a relatively young age. The lucky ones would find a shteibl to sit in at night after a day of backbreaking and tedious labour. Chasiddishe bochurim would sit together, sharing a few pieces of black bread and some herring. This would be their only meal, and yet, they would learn and daven together with a warmth that defied all odds. The key was someone along the way who opened their hearts, found their nekuda and bonded with them. It was this world of intimacy with Hashem that gave us the image of what we should aspire to today.

Despite all the material wealth of today, too many of our young remain hungry for what is real: Torah love and light. We can’t hark back to nostalgic thoughts of days painted in sepia tones of innocence. We have been tasked to live in this Golus, and we have been given the inherent tools to find our tikun in the here and now. We must delve beyond the straplines of our Mosdos and develop real programs for our unique generation. Saying the words of Shlomo Hamelech without actualising them is just making things worse.

Every child has his unique needs, every parent is challenged with finding them. We are actually living in extremely blessed times. So many programs are out there, so much offering us help. We need to open ourselves up for these tools, and most importantly we have to take responsibility for our children.

Their future as Yieden is in our remit as parents.

The Rebbe continues his special chapter to parents with a warning:

“Don’t blame our young, and see ourselves as innocent!”