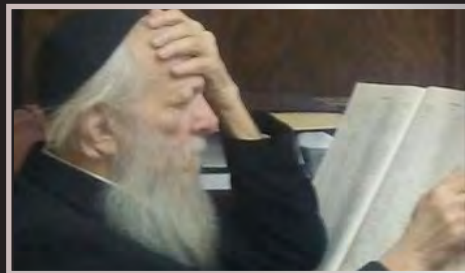


CHAYEINU



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Continuing the Mission



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Baruch Hashem, we are witnessing an incredible surge in the number of *yeshiva bachurim* today. This great *brachah* brings with it the risk of a *bachur* feeling that he is just following the crowd. How can we be *mechanech* today's *bachurim* to feel a sense of mission and idealism in their path, when everyone they know is doing the same?

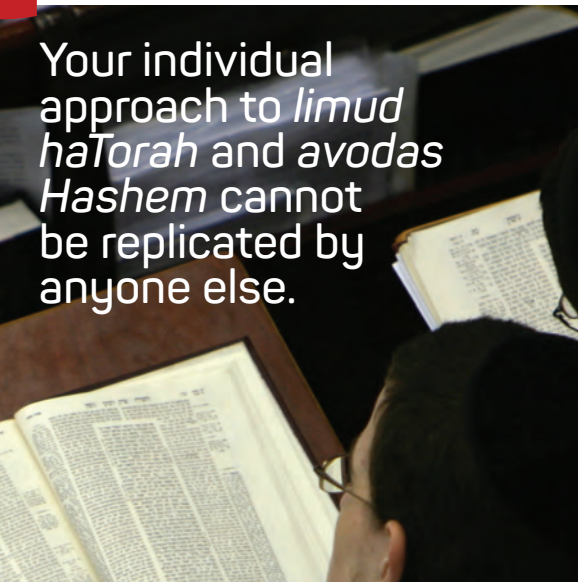
This issue is not a new one. The *Meshech Chochmah* addresses this very concern in *Parshas Bechukosai* and explains that it is an inherent challenge of *galus*. In a vivid description of the *galus* cycle, Rav Meir Simchah explains how, after a period of *churban*, Klal Yisrael is sent to a new land, where they invest tremendous effort to rebuild. That period of growth lasts until Klal Yisrael reaches a certain plateau of success. When the next generation feels that they have nothing to add, they are driven to search elsewhere for ways to express their power

of *chiddush*. This drive, explains Rav Meir Simchah, is what diverts Klal Yisrael from Torah and *mitzvos*, until there is no choice but for them to suffer *churban* once again, after which the drive for *chiddush* will once again be directed towards building Torah. And so the cycle continues.

This pattern can be seen today as well. After Churban Europa the *olam haTorah* invested tremendous effort in rebuilding and, with immense *siyatta diShmaya*, we are reaping the *peiros* of that investment. But at the same time, the tremendous success in restoring Torah to Am Yisrael can cause the new generation to feel that they have nothing to add. Rav Meir Simchah's words are an apt description of the challenge we are beginning to feel today, as implied in your question.

Interestingly, even though Rav Meir Simchah clearly identifies the gravity of this issue, he does not provide a clear-cut solution. We may posit that upon reaching such a critical point, it is time to be *mechadesh* new approaches in *Yiddishkeit*. But it is clear from the words of Rav Meir Simchah that this supposition is incorrect.

Your individual approach to *limud haTorah* and *avodas Hashem* cannot be replicated by anyone else.



We must remain unwavering in adherence to our *mesorah* of Torah and *avodas Hashem*, no matter what challenges we face. We need to continue along our timeworn path, while trying our best to be *mechanech* the next generation to continue in the same direction. Change is not the *eitzah*.

Another important point to keep in mind is that, though there will always be challenges, we cannot lose sight of the magnitude of the success we have achieved *davka* through dedication to our *mesorah*. The amount of *limud haTorah* that is going on in Klal Yisrael today is simply staggering. This is a phenomenon that was completely unimaginable just a few decades ago. And how did it come about? Many *gedolim* who tried planting Torah in America introduced changes to overcome the challenges encountered in the *Goldene Medinah*, but they were not very successful. It was Rav Aharon Kotler, as well as the *talmidim* of the Mirrer Yeshiva, who came with a mission to transplant the pure *derech* of the *olam hayeshivos* on American soil. They did it without swerving an iota from the *mesorah*, and were most successful. The *yeshivos* and *kollelim* we have today are testimony to the success of this approach.

It is ironic that the same people who wanted to make changes originally, because, they claimed, “In America it can’t work; nobody is going to do it,” now want to institute changes because “Everyone is doing it.” Success naturally breeds challenges, but by no means can they be resolved by undermining the very fundamentals which brought about the success in the first place.

We need to feel strongly and convey to our *bachurim* that

continuing in the direction of the *mesoras hayeshivos* is a great source of pride and *chizuk*, and they should not *chas v’shalom* feel that there is something wrong with the system and that we must adapt it. It is only through perpetuating this *heilige derech* that we will continue to merit *siyata d’Shmaya* and even further flourishing of *limud haTorah*.

Besides the issue of idealism, how can a *bachur* express his unique *kochos* when everyone seems to be doing the same thing?

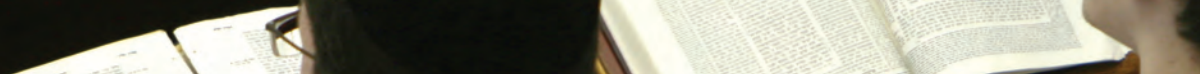
Individuality is not measured by actions alone. There is so much more that makes each person unique. Take the mitzvah of *tzitzis*, for example. The command to wear *tzitzis* was given to everyone equally; there is no individuality in the action of wearing a *beged* with *tzitzis*. But that doesn’t mean that when Reuven wears *tzitzis* and Shimon wears *tzitzis*, their mitzvah performance is identical. There is the *kavanah*, the *simchah*, the *dveikus*, the *yiras Shamayim* that are expressed when fulfilling a mitzvah, and in this regard, every person is different.

Additionally, every person is challenged with his own personal set of *nisyonos*. A *bachur* who is *matzliach* in *limud haTorah* is overcoming his own unique challenges in his battle with his personal *yetzer hara* and against the *hashpaah* of the street and technology. In that light, everyone is truly unique and different.

The same applies to *limud haTorah*; it’s a mistake to think, “If all my friends are learning, then there is nothing special about what I am doing.” There are many aspects of *limud haTorah* that are unique to each individual. Every person has his own level of *havanah*, *ameilus*, *hasmadah*, and so on. Just because all your friends are also sitting down to learn *Bava Metzia* doesn’t mean that there is nothing special about your learning. Your individual approach to *limud haTorah* and *avodas Hashem* cannot be replicated by anyone else. That is why we ask Hashem, “*V’sein chelkeinu b’sorasecha*” — we request our own unique *chelek* in learning. Each *lomed Torah* has his own personal portion of Torah, and this understanding should help a *bachur* feel that his learning is significant and special.

How is “*Chanoch lanaar al pi darko*” implemented in *chinuch* nowadays, when it seems that everyone is being taught the same way? Also, how can a *bachur* develop a connection to his *rebbe* when there are so many *talmidim* in a *shiur*?

“*Chanoch lanaar al pi darko*” is just the first half of the *pasuk*. It continues, “*Gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenu*.” The Chasam



Sofer explains that the Torah is giving us a promise. If we are *mechanech* our children properly, the Torah gives us a special *havtachah* that this *chinuch* will stay with him for the rest of his life. *Chinuch* is not a scientific method; it requires *siyatta diShmaya*, and if we do our part, Hashem promises us success.

People often interpret “*Chanoch lanaar al pi darko*” to mean that every child needs a custom-tailored *chinuch* approach, but that is not necessarily true. Consider two of the greatest *mashpi'im* on the *olam haTorah* in the last generation — Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the Alter of Slabodka, and Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the Mirrer Mashgiach. Neither of them delivered *shiurim*, nor did they teach the *bachurim* a specific *derech halimud*, yet they managed to mold the future leaders of Klal Yisrael, each in their own distinct *derech*.

How did they accomplish that? Through motivation. The *bachurim* felt that these luminaries really understood their strengths and weaknesses and had expectations of them. The *bachurim* didn't necessarily spend time speaking to the Alter or Rav Yerucham. Once they sensed their mentor's confidence in their capabilities, even small subtleties — like a smile or a frown — were enough to encourage and guide them. They didn't need a separate yeshiva for each *bachur*. The key was that the Alter, or the Mashgiach, recognized their potential and held them accountable to reach it. Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock told me that Rav Aharon Kotler said that the Alter would review in his mind where each *bachur* was holding every single day!

Rashi on the *pasuk* “*V'aviha yarok yarak lefaneha halo tikaleim*,” says that it doesn't mean that a father actually spits at his daughter, it means that he shows displeasure with a frown. The Maharal in *Gur Aryeh* explains that a father never spits at his daughter. A smile or a frown is surely enough to convey his feeling. *Chinuch* doesn't always need stark actions.

In the early 1960s, when the Bais Yisrael of Ger was rebuilding the Gerrer *chassidus*, his close Chassidim would try to recruit *litvishe bachurim* and bring them to Ger. Although I was not *chassidush*, I did spend some time in Ger, I noticed that although there were hundreds of Gerrer *bachurim* in the Gerrer Yeshiva, all of them felt close to the Rebbe and considered him their guiding force. He did not communicate with them in words; he barely spoke to the *bachurim*. Yet they felt his guidance simply from the way he looked at them when saying “*Gut Shabbos*,” from the way he smiled or frowned, or looked them up and down and just stared. He truly understood the *bachurim* and was therefore able to guide hundreds of *talmidim* without the need for long discussions.

I learned under Rav Binyomin Paler *zt"l*. He didn't speak much to us other than in learning. But when *bachurim* would tell him a *shtickel Torah*, each would get a different response. If a weak *bachur* would say a decent *chiddush*, he would get a smile. If it was a stronger *bachur*, Rav Paler would simply say, “*Nu, nu*.” From those nuances, we understood exactly how he felt and what he expected of each one of us.

In a famous letter that Rav Baruch Ber wrote to Rav Shlomo Heiman, he wrote that his mother's *chevlei leidah* were worthwhile to produce a *talmid* like Rav Shlomo. Rav Shlomo kept that letter in his *tallis* bag his entire life. One might think that he kept it there because it gave him *chizuk*. But that's not the truth. He kept it there because in those choice words, Rav Baruch Ber was giving his *talmid* a message of his great potential and empowering him to fulfill it. It was those indirect words that served as a motivating force for life for Rav Shlomo.

This was the success of Slabodka and Mir, and this is the correct approach to successful *chinuch* today. Having a connection to a *rebbe* doesn't necessarily mean that the *rebbe* learns with a *bachur* privately or spends hours speaking to him. It means that he is attuned to where the *talmidim* are holding, that he understands them and makes sure they realize that he has expectations from them. Once that connection is in place, a *rebbe* can teach all the *talmidim* the same way, yet guide each in his own path with subtle nuances.

Our *chinuch* system seems to mainly focus on *limud haTorah*. What about *middos*, *tefillah*, *bein adam lachaveiro*, and so on?

The *mesoras hayeshivos* that we have received, tracing all the way back to Rav Chaim Volozhin, is to focus on *dveikus baTorah* above all else. In *Nefesh Hachayim*, Rav Chaim clearly emphasizes that our primary *tafkid* is to focus on *limud haTorah* and this approach has been proven successful in all the realms mentioned (though an in-depth explanation is beyond the scope of this discussion). There are those who tried to create a balance, focusing partly on *limud haTorah* and partly on other aspects of *avodas Hashem*, and they are still struggling to achieve that balance. The goal of a yeshiva is to create an atmosphere entirely focused on Torah, and through *dveikus baTorah*, the *bachur* will attain all the other *maalos*. This doesn't mitigate the importance of the other areas. It is merely a question of where to put the focus, and what the starting point is that leads us to the others. 🕊