

EDUCATION from the Womb



לזכות
יהודית יפה תח'י
לרגל מלאת לה ח"י שנים
כ"ט טבת ה'תשפ"א

ולזכות אחותה
מנוחה תח'י
לרגל מלאת לה י"א שנים
ר"ח שבט ה'תשפ"א

לע"נ
ר' יהודה מרדכי
בן ר' ברוך ע"ה
נלב"ע כ"ט טבת ה'תש"י
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'
ולע"נ
הרה"ת ר' אריאל ע"ה
בן יבלחט"א ר' שאלתיאל זאב שליט"א
נלב"ע ח' שבט ה'תשע"ה
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'
נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' דובער זוזגנו מרת רחל
ומשפחתם שיחיו
מאטשניק

If you want to truly learn the Rebbe's approach to children, you have to do so from seeing his interactions with them in real-life, more than just reading about it in the sichos or listening to farbrengens. The "dollars" distributions where he affectionately waves dollars on their faces; the davenings as the Rebbe gives them coins; the rallies where he waves at them as his face has this special glow.

It might be said that a focal point of the Rebbe's nesius was a special emphasis on children and their central standing in Yiddishkeit and Chassidus. The Rebbe's personal interaction with children—which ranged from holding rallies to creating a special children's program (Tzivos Hashem) to testing children in yechidus—is unparalleled in any previous generation of the Rabbeim.

One particular area the Rebbe focuses on is early-childhood education, when the child is still an infant. The following is a short guide to, and sampling of, the Rebbe's insights and instructions, beginning well before birth and continuing into infancy.

During Pregnancy: Studying the Entire Torah

At this stage, the actions of the mother (and father) already affect the child, for whatever she eats and drinks is consumed by the child as well.¹

However, much of the child's education now is not yet in the parent's arena. The Gemara² teaches us that while an infant is in its mother's womb, "a candle shines over his head... and he is taught the entire Torah." (This refers to the *neshama* in *Atzilus*, which is above the limitations of creation. This is how it can study the entire Torah in such a remarkably short amount of time.³)

However, the *neshama* is not *born* knowing the entire Torah because as it enters the world, "a *malach* comes and slaps it on the lips," causing him to forget everything he learned.

The reason he must forget the Torah is simple: If a child were born knowing the entire Torah, he would have no free choice.⁴ At the same time, if he is going to forget it anyway, what is the point of teaching it to him in the first place?

Chassidus explains that a *roshem*, an effect of this Torah study, remains with the child, giving him a natural tendency and pull towards Torah and mitzvos.⁵ The Rebbe takes it a step further, explaining that the study of the entire Torah—given to the infant as he is above the limitation of creation, as above—causes everything the child will later study to be permeated with the infinite power of the entire Torah, so that even the "*kametz alef uh*" that the child recites contains the Torah in its entirety.⁶

The page features a vibrant, abstract background with large, colorful brushstrokes in shades of blue, yellow, orange, and purple. In the upper right, a small, clear plastic bag containing a Shema prayer card is shown, tied with a metal fastener. The card itself is yellow with Hebrew text and a decorative border. The main title is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

During Birth and Immediately Afterward: The Shir Hamaalos

As soon as a child is born—as close as possible to its study with the *malach*—the education begins.

For generations, Yidden have had the custom of hanging certain holy things in the delivery room (as a woman is giving birth) and surrounding the infant. This could include *Shir Hamaalos*, *mezuzos*, *kamei'os*, and so on (depending on the local *minhag*). These were a *segula* to ensure an easy delivery and to safeguard the infant.

But times have changed, the Rebbe said. In past generations, women would give birth at home, and these customs were followed. Nowadays, women give birth in the hospital. This is done based on the medical instruction of doctors—and thus must be followed, as with all doctors' instructions—but it has caused that these *minhagim* are (often) not followed until the woman returns home.

The Rebbe spoke at length about the importance of following this *minhag* immediately in the hospital. This is easy to arrange in any hospital, the Rebbe said, even in locations where this woman is the only Yid in the hospital—for any conscientious doctor knows that the most important element in birth is the woman's comfort, and he would be happy to accommodate whatever makes her comfortable, no matter his personal belief.

In addition to the *segulos* involved—ensuring an easy and healthy labor, and a healthy child—the Rebbe explained that it is essential for a child to be surrounded by holiness immediately upon birth. Although we do not know whether the child physically registers what he hears from the outside world, the *neshama* is certainly listening. These early impressions have long-lasting effects throughout its life, years and decades later.⁷

Holy Lullabies

This is also why it is so important to continue women's long-standing custom of rocking their babies to the tunes of holy lullabies (e.g. describing how Torah is the most precious commodity and so on).

Unlike those who believe that religion should be something given to children later on in life when they are old enough to make choices, but their early childhood should be spent like everyone else, so that the child could fit in with friends—the Rebbe pointed to the reality: The parents who followed that path ended up with children who strayed from their parents' way of life—and from their parents themselves.

The Rebbe said that science has confirmed the importance of early infant experiences as well—but it has only been “discovered” recently. For centuries, Yidden have been behaving this way based on *emunah*, in an era when conventional wisdom believed that it was nonsensical and that it made no difference at all. (The Rebbe once added, “Being that this is crucial to a child's education, how is it possible that Hashem—the source and essence of all good—allowed the world to remain in the dark for thousands of years on such an important issue, without explaining and revealing that one must be careful with a child's education from the first few weeks and months? It's a good *taineh*, but it was answered when He gave the Yidden the Torah, where He explained how to deal with children...”⁸) Whether one does it based on the *minhag* or the science, the Rebbe says—the main thing is to do it...

(Furthermore, the Rebbe said, when a child causes *Shir Hamaalos* to be brought to the hospital on his behalf, he is thereby



fulfilling his own *shlichus* of bringing *kedushah* there.⁹)

We see a fascinating example of this early effect regarding one of the *tannaim*: Pirkei Avos tells us that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai would list the special qualities that defined each of his five outstanding students: Rabbi Eliezer possessed an outstanding knowledge and memory, “a cistern that loses not a drop;” Rabbi Yossi Hakohen was a “Chossid;” and so on. When it came to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, he described him as “*Ashrei Yoladeto*,” fortunate is the mother who birthed him.

This does not seem to be describing a specific quality, but the *mefarshim*¹⁰ explain that this was actually referring to something very specific: When Rabbi Yehoshua was an infant, his mother would take his carriage to the *batei midrash* to soak in the sounds of Torah¹¹—and that was why he reached such great heights in Torah learning.

The Rebbe notes how powerful an effect this had on his life: Decades later, when he was a tremendous Torah scholar and his teacher was describing *his* specific quality—his defining attribute was “fortunate is the mother who birthed him”—the fact that his carriage hung around *batei midrash!*




Only Kosher Animals

Following this reasoning—that a child’s early observations have an inordinate effect on the rest of his life—the Rebbe campaigned that a child should only be shown holy and pure pictures and that all non-kosher animals should be removed from all children’s books and toys.¹²

Acknowledging that this constituted a shift from common practice, the Rebbe said that this was a simple oversight that could be easily changed (as long as people don’t make a “*natzchanus*” i.e. a “gotcha” issue out of it). The Rebbe said that this included all stages of children’s development: The toys hanging around the crib in infancy, the toys they play with, and the books that they read. (Interesting to note that the Rebbe provided two specific examples: a mouse that was commonly used, and a cat that might be featured in Alef Beis books.¹³)

(The Rebbe noted that there were some major exceptions, including: visiting a zoo to experience the wonders of Hashem’s creation; illustrations of Tanach and so on; drawings of lions that can be found in shuls.¹⁴)

On different occasions, the Rebbe also commended the *minhagim* of saying Modeh Ani with children, even before they can speak;¹⁵ and of kissing the mezuzah multiple times a day and before bed. The Rebbe also encouraged that every child’s room should be a holy place—a Beis Chabad—with its own tzedakah *pushka*, *siddur*, *haggadah*, and Tehillim.¹⁶ 



1. Hisvaaduyos 5745 vol. 1 p. 133. Igros Kodesh vol. 27 p. 229.
2. Nidah 30b.
3. Likkutei Sichos vol. 5 p. 14, see footnote 55, citing Likkutei Torah Shir Hashirim 8:4.
4. Likkutei Sichos vol. 20 p. 109.
5. See Likkutei Torah Shelach 44a.
6. Likkutei Sichos vol. 5 p. 13-14
7. Yud-Tes Kislev 5747; Hisvaaduyos 5747 p. 33.
8. Sichos Kodesh 5740 vol. 2 p. 582.
9. Hisvaaduyos 5750 vol. 2 p. 433.
10. Midrash Shmuel in the name of Rashi.
11. Yerushalmi Yevamos 1:5.
12. Likkutei Sichos vol 25 p. 309
13. Ibid. p. 309-310
14. Ibid. footnotes 1, 5, 7.
15. Toras Menachem 5749 vol. 2 p. 36
16. Shabbos Parshas Vayera 5752. Shabbos Parshas Vayigash 5747; Hisvaaduyos 5747 vol. 2, p. 212.
17. 18 Elul 5742.

The Merit of Kimchis

The Kimchis family was a respected family of Kohanim during the time of *Bayis Sheini*. The matriarch of the family, whose name was Kimchis, once explained why she merited that all her seven sons became Kohanim Gedolim: “The walls of my house never saw the hair on my head...”

The Rebbe pointed out that this illustrates just how much a child is affected by the behavior of his surroundings, even from a very young age. What caused this child to grow up and become a Kohen Gadol? The fact that decades earlier, his mother was so careful with *tznius*.¹⁷