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GET TO THE HEART

# The Chinuch Companion

## Tools for Relating to Students and Cultivating Connection

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**UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF**

Harav Reuven Feinstein, shlit"a
Harav Sholom Kaminetsky, shlit"a
Harav Aaron Lopiansky, shlit"a
Harav Shaya Cohen, shlit"a, Founder

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# Introduction

## About This Guidebook

This guidebook was created for you—the busy Rebbe or Morah to a classroom of lively teens or pre-teens. As they mature into adults, your talmidim or talmidos are starting to think more deeply, to make sense of the world and their place in it.

YOU can be the teacher who fuels a real and enduring commitment to Torah and Yiddishkeit at this pivotal stage. You can forge an authentic relationship with your students, and through that connection, lay a meaningful intellectual and emotional foundation for their life of Torah and mitzvos. You can help them understand the context of a Torah lifestyle so that they own and appreciate the emes they possess.

You went into chinuch to impact students for a lifetime by transmitting our mesorah and core values. But when their questions put you on the spot, it can be hard to find the right words to convey what you feel so innately. That's where the Chinuch Companion comes in.

## What You'll Find in This Book

**This guidebook will give you the confidence, techniques, and language to relate to your students, make their connection to Yiddishkeit more meaningful, and address their hashkafic questions—often before they ask them.**

We've kept the sections short (two- to four-minute reads) because your time is at a

premium. You can read this book cover-to-cover, or flip straight to the topics most relevant to you and your students. If you come across a topic you would like to explore in more depth, we've suggested additional resources for doing so.

We're not looking to add to your already-packed curriculum. The hashkafic concepts presented here are not meant to become standalone lessons, but instead should be woven into a regular Chumash, Halachah, or Mussar class.

## About Teach to Reach

Teach to Reach is an organization dedicated to providing resources that support mechanchim, mechanchos, and principals in building a strong foundation for the future of Klal Yisroel. It was launched by Harav Shaya Cohen at the recommendation of the **Posek Hador, Maran HaRav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l**. Run by Harav Shaya Cohen, Teach to Reach has worked in conjunction with Torah Umesorah and other organizations and is under the guidance of **Harav Reuven Feinstein**, **Harav Sholom Kaminetsky**, and **Harav Aaron Lopiansky, shlit"a**.

## About Harav Shaya Cohen

Harav Shaya Cohen, the Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh and Kollel Ner Yehoshua, has been trailblazing in the world of chinuch for close to 50 years. His deep-rooted mission to serve the Jewish community was ingrained in him during his 15 years of tutelage under Harav Henoch Leibowitz, zt"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim. Rabbi Cohen is a world-renowned speaker and a valued source of guidance to thousands of parents and teachers on critical chinuch issues of the day.

## Feedback on Rabbi Cohen's Workshops

***"As a member of the Teach to Reach [principals'] program, I gained the tools and language to give over so many of the fundamentals of Yiddishkeit to talmidim of various ages."***

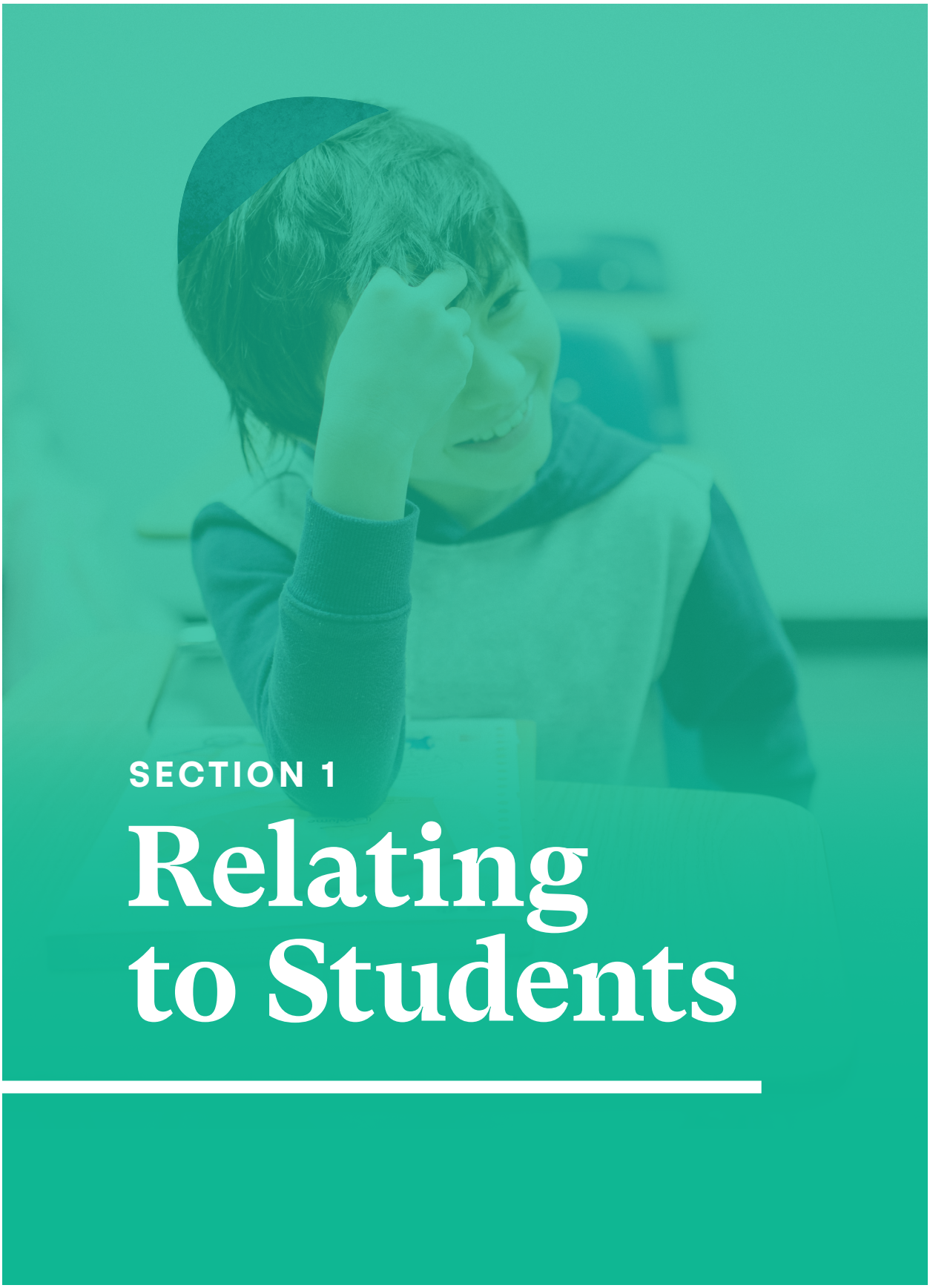
– Rabbi Gedalia Weinrib, Yeshiva Ohr Yehuda, Lakewood

***"Teach to Reach provided me with an excellent structure and format to discuss with my Talmidim real-life issues that they face in today's society."***

– Rabbi Nachum Zlotnick, Mesivta Tifereth Torah, Queens

***"Hearing the presentations made me more impassioned about my own bitachon, Emunah, tefilah, and relationship with Hashem, which will translate to my talmidim."***

– Rabbi Nosson Silbermintz, Clifton Cheder, Clifton



SECTION 1

# Relating to Students

# Tips for Connecting to Students

## LOVE THEM

*Love and friendship are two of the most powerful forces that exist*

**Love and friendship are two of the most powerful forces that exist**, and they are critical for effective teaching.

When Esav confronted Yaakov, he was burning with such intense hatred that his emotions solidified into a law of nature—"*halacha hi b'yadua, Esav soneh l'Yaakov.*" Yet, the Ralbag (*Toelios, Parshas Vayishlach*) teaches that when Yaakov offered the possibility of friendship, Esav's hate could have been dissolved. Such is the power of love. Esav must have been suspicious that Yaakov was, once again, trying to fool him—but even the possibility of friendship can be enough to melt the hardest heart.

## APPRECIATE THEM

*Few tools are as influential in shaping behavior as uplifting someone*

Making your talmidim **feel validated as people and respected for their positive qualities** is one of the most effective tools in a Rebbe's or Morah's arsenal. Wanting to feel worthy and appreciated is one of the most potent desires of every human being. The Hebrew word for happiness, *osher*, shares a root with the word *ishur*—validation. When a talmid feels respected and appreciated by a teacher, his entire being fills with happiness and confidence.

Being a successful educator requires an understanding of the key motivators of the human spirit. The Alter of Slabodka created a yeshiva that taught each of its talmidim to appreciate

his incredible value and discover his hidden strengths. This ideology of validation and encouragement is a central approach to chinuch. **Few tools are as influential in shaping behavior as uplifting someone** and giving them the respect due to a human being.

**Put It Into Practice**

What can you do today to make a student feel valued?

# How Can We Relate to Today's Generation of Students?

## HAVE CONVERSATIONS

This may sound obvious, but we need to **engage with our talmidim in order to build a relationship with them**. Do not sit in a proverbial "ivory tower," aloof and inaccessible. Instead, pay attention to your talmidim. Find time to talk to them about their progress. Speak to them with warmth, and let them feel that you enjoy their company.

*The most critical role you can take is that of an empathetic listener*

## JUST LISTEN

If something is bothering your talmid, sit down with him and tell him that you care about his success.

If a talmidah shares a struggle, be an empathetic listener and try to help lighten her load.

There are many different ways of communicating, but when your talmidim discuss their challenges, **the most critical role you can take is that of an empathetic listener**.

**Put It Into Practice**

What is a natural way for you to start a sincere conversation with a student today?

Do not rush to give advice. Instead, just listen and let them feel that you fully understand and feel their pain.

*For additional resources about connecting to students, please visit: weteachtoreach.com*

# Tips for Giving Criticism

## DON'T DWELL ON THE NEGATIVE

*Help your talmid formulate a plan for growth*

The appropriate way to respond to negative behavior is to quietly, calmly, and seriously sit down with your talmid in a private place and discuss his actions. Let your student know that you are aware of his wrongdoings, but **quickly turn the conversation towards the incredible power of teshuvah** and what he can learn from this slip-up. Make it clear that you understand that everyone makes mistakes. Most importantly, **help your talmid formulate a plan for growth** so that he's prepared the next time he is inclined to repeat the negative behavior.

Remember, being caught doing something wrong is traumatic, and your talmid probably feels embarrassed and humiliated. Aside from proper direction, **your talmid also needs assurance that you still respect him**. When reprimanding your talmid, it is critical to repeatedly stress that his actions do not affect how you look at him. Make sure you tell your student that you are confident he will grow from his mistakes. Make it clear that everyone makes mistakes, and nothing stands in the way of sincere teshuvah.

Your talmid will be grateful for your compassion, and this softer approach will engender incredible loyalty and lead to a lasting change in his behavior.

*For additional resources about giving criticism, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/tips-for-giving-criticism*

# Giving a Great Lesson

## MAKE IT INTERACTIVE

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "Tell me, and I forget, show me, and I remember, involve me, and I will understand." **The more interactive a lesson is, the better the talmidim understand and retain the material.**

When you ask a question, don't give your students the answer right away. Stop and ask for their thoughts. When you present a theory, listen to and discuss any questions they may have. **Let them verbally spar with you**; don't just deliver the material without interruption.

*The more interactive a lesson is, the better the talmidim understand and retain the material*

## WHY INVITE PARTICIPATION?

Here are some reasons why an interactive style of delivery is superior to a long-form lecture:

- When you ask your students for their thoughts, it challenges them and motivates them to think about the source material. **They create connections and focus on the issues at hand** rather than passively being fed information.
- Interacting with your talmidos **gives them a chance to refocus their attention**, which is more difficult when the teacher delivers an uninterrupted monologue.
- Getting your students to understand your thought process through dialogue is a handy pedagogical tool to **help them better understand the material**.
- Speaking up can be a bit intimidating. By encouraging your talmidos to express their thoughts in front of everyone,

**Put It Into Practice**

How can you structure your next lesson to encourage participation while still keeping the class on target?

you build their confidence and teach them **essential communication skills**.

- Engaging with talmidim creates a bond and a sense of camaraderie that won't exist if you merely lecture. By bringing the talmidim into your thought process and allowing them to express themselves, you create interactions that help **develop a Rebbe-talmid (or Morah-talmidah) relationship**. Students feel appreciated when you acknowledge their thought process, and they enjoy the stimulation that comes from an engaging dialogue.

*For additional resources about making your lessons engaging, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/advice-for-the-mechanech*

# Answering Hashkafic Questions

*If you present Yiddishkeit as a religion that does not allow questions, your attitude will send a damaging message to your talmidim*

## WELCOME THE INQUIRY

One of the most damaging things a teacher can do is to try to suppress a student's questions. "That question is treif" is a statement that should never leave a teacher's mouth.

**If you present Yiddishkeit as a religion that does not allow questions, your attitude will send a damaging message to your talmidim**. They may perceive your discomfort and irritation as an indication that you have something to hide.

## UNDERSTAND THE MOTIVATION

When your talmidah asks a hashkafic question, she typically

needs you to:

- Validate her for working toward a deeper understanding of Yiddishkeit
- Satisfy her genuine curiosity about the world

If your talmidah does not feel that her questions are being taken seriously, she will choke on them. Shutting down the discourse leaves your talmidah hurt and baffled by your attitude.

## GIVE AN ANSWER—OR FIND ONE

The correct approach is to **calmly and sincerely address your student's questions**. If you have an insight, share it with confidence. If you do not know the answer, tell your talmid, "That is an amazing question. I don't have an answer right now. I will think about it/ask someone and make sure you get a satisfactory answer."

**Refrain from offering a half-baked answer**. If you are unclear on a subject, there is nothing wrong with saying you don't know and will try to find out. Your student will sense if you are answering thoughtlessly and feel that something is wrong.

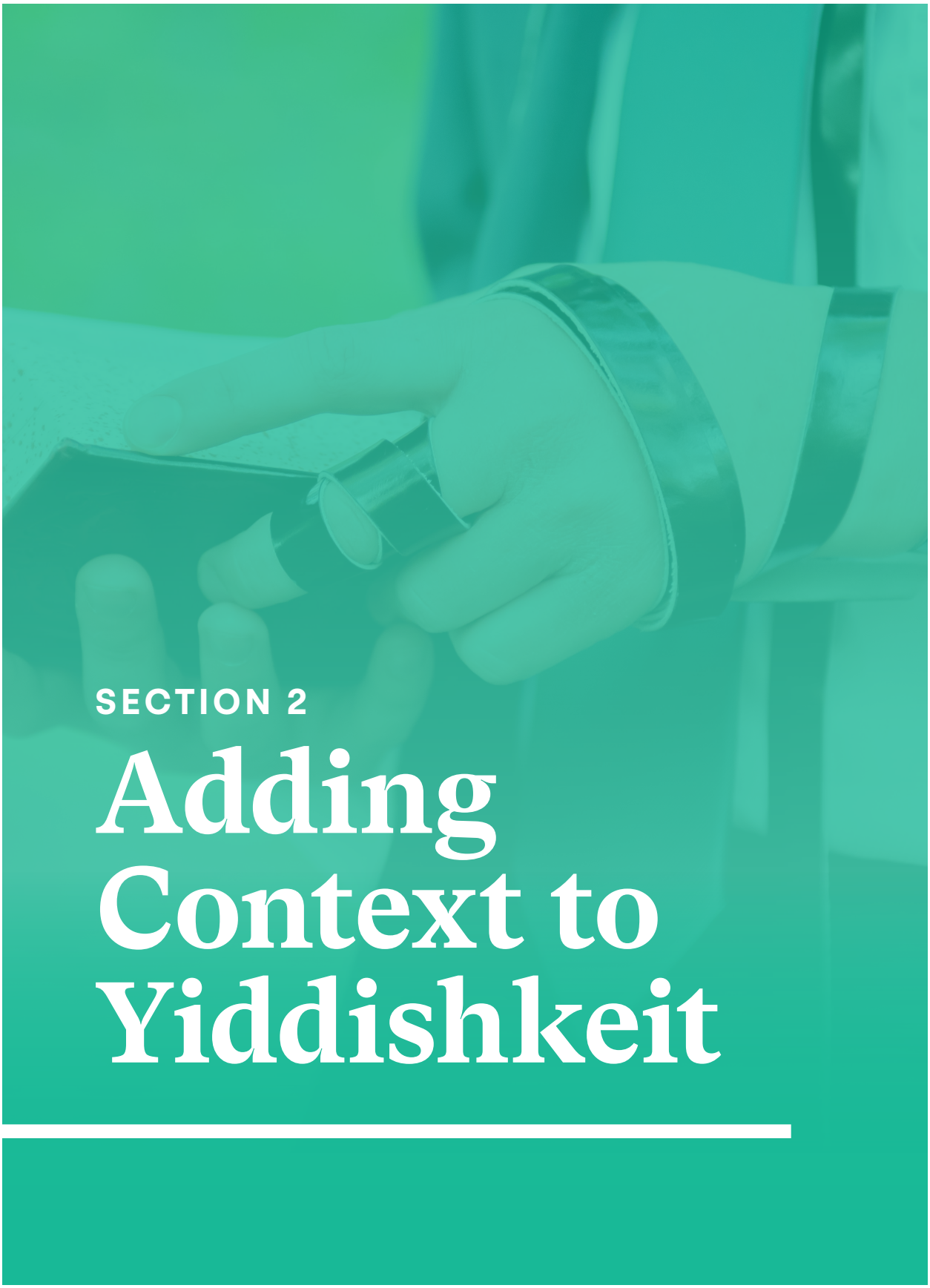
**Make your talmid feel good about asking the question**. It should be apparent to him that you value his insights. Encourage him to probe and explore as much as he wants.

*For additional resources about answering students' questions, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/series/questions-and-answers*

*Make your talmid feel good about asking the question*

### Put It Into Practice

**How will you respond the next time a student asks a pressing question, and you are unsure what to answer?**



SECTION 2

# Adding Context to Yiddishkeit

# Tips to Help Students Build a Relationship with Hashem

## FOCUS ON RACHAMIM

It is critical to help our children forge a loving, close relationship with Hashem. **This should be developed in the context of His endless chesed and rachamim**—His love for every one of us—and His constant Hashgachah Pratis.

The study of Shir Hashirim with Rashi reveals that even though the loving relationship between Klal Yisroel and Hashem may seem remote, it is very much alive and well. In truth, **throughout the galus, there has been profound love on both sides**.

It is equally vital that we help our talmidim develop an appreciation for the reasons and benefits of mitzvos, and specifically for **the benefits of learning Torah, davening, and forming a close relationship with Hashem**. This appreciation will **inspire greater commitment to these mitzvos** and prevent our children from feeling that they never made a conscious decision to live this lifestyle.

## SHARE WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM

The Ralbag says that if you wish to influence a loved one to do something difficult or unfamiliar, you should first tell him what he will gain. **Once he is strongly aware of the benefits, he will**

**Put It Into Practice**

What can you do today to help your students feel Hashem's love for them?

**be able to see past the challenges of attaining them**. We learn this approach from the way Hashem told Avraham Avinu about entering into a covenant (bris) with Him. Only after Hashem told Avraham the benefits did He disclose the operation involved. Even Avraham Avinu could have been affected by being asked to do something before being told what it would accomplish for him. If Hashem had first told him about the operation and only then shared the benefits, it would not have had the same effect.

*For additional resources about helping students build a relationship with Hashem: weteachtoreach.com/instilling-a-lasting-emunah-in-a-changing-generation*

# Making Davening Meaningful

## A CHANCE TO ASK

*We need to teach our talmidim that tefilah is their opportunity to ask Hashem for anything they want or need*

Today, even when parents provide children with all they need, there is always something they badly want. Even when a young man or woman has all the "stuff" they could desire, they know that many people suffer from sickness and tragedy. **We need to teach our talmidim that tefilah is their opportunity to ask Hashem for anything they want or need**.

The Chayei Adam writes in his tzava'ah (will) to his family members that **before they step back at the conclusion of Shemoneh Esrei, they should make sure to ask Hashem for something personal**. Children and teenagers should know that they can ask for anything—fancy headphones, a summer in sleepaway camp, or a refuah for someone. They can ask in any language.

## WHEN TEFILOS SEEM TO GO UNANSWERED

Often, Hashem grants these requests. But when He does not, students need to know that:

- Hashem knows what every person wants in their heart. It is possible that what the person requested is not what they really want—i.e., it is not truly good for them.
- The answer may not be an absolute "no," but instead "not now."

### A POWERFUL TOOL FOR CONNECTION

**Tefilah is an incredible way to connect with Hashem—and we get many of our wishes fulfilled in the process!** Without tefilah, connecting would be difficult: though our neshamah yearns for a relationship with Hashem, our body craves physical things. In His infinite wisdom, Hashem created a system where we connect to Him by asking Him to fill our physical needs and wants, whether with refuos, hatzlachah, or anything else we desire. With every tefilah we utter, with every word of praise or request, we deepen our relationship with Hashem—thus fulfilling our purpose in creation and achieving true, immediate happiness.

*For additional resources about helping students connect to tefilah, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/pray-with-all-your-heart*

**Put It Into Practice**

What can you do today to get your talmidim or talmidos excited about davening?

# Teaching Emunah

### TEACH THE WHOLE PERSON

The human being is composed of **body and soul, mind and heart**. As one observes the human condition, he can't help but realize that **all of these elements must be actively involved** and their needs satisfied for optimal motivation and functioning.

Addressing the needs of the body without meeting the needs of the soul leaves a person disturbed by a spiritual emptiness that frustrates and often depresses him. The opposite is also true. When the needs of the body are not fulfilled—even if a person is

*The human being is composed of body and soul, mind and heart. All of these elements must be actively involved*

spiritually connected—**physical needs and desires disturb the total human balance**.

The same applies to the mind and the heart. The two must work together for a person to fully accept, believe, and even properly carry out a directive emanating from one or the other. **Many people mistakenly believe that the mind has a "mind of its own."** They don't realize that the heart, the emotions, and through them, the body, often have an overwhelming influence on "intellectual decisions."

## FOCUS ON THE BENEFITS

This all means that our religious convictions are not based on intellectual understanding alone; they are strongly and often overwhelmingly influenced by the biases and desires of the body and the heart. Thus, if our goal is to inspire and teach belief, knowledge, and conviction, **we must use an approach that appeals at least as much to the body and heart as it does to the mind and soul**.

*We must use an approach that appeals at least as much to the body and heart as it does to the mind and soul*

**Even before a person begins to consider the truth of a religious claim, he must have some positive motivation for body and heart to want to recognize that reality**. If he does not, it likely will not penetrate intellectually. This does not detract from the crucial importance of intellectual arguments. Someone can be very passionate about his beliefs, but he will be lost without the intellectual element.

Therefore, to induce students to accept the truth of Torah MiSinai, a Rebbe or Morah does not only need a deep familiarity with the intellectually-compelling testimony and evidence. **They also need to inspire an appreciation for the beauty, relevance, benefits, pleasure, and true happiness that Torah and a life of Shemiras HaMitzvos provide**.

## EMUNAH POSES A CONSTANT CHALLENGE

It goes without saying that Chazal were keenly aware of this aspect of human psychology, as they were of everything in creation. In numerous ways, Torah and Chazal assured Klal

Yisroel that we are capable of overcoming the above obstacles, which **exist as challenges to allow us to earn the benefits of Torah living**. When Moshe Rabbeinu addressed Klal Yisroel before his passing, he told them, "V'yadata hayom v'hasheivosa el levavecha ki Hashem Hu HaElokim"—you should know today and return it to your heart that Hashem is G-d (according to the Targum's translation). **Why does Moshe Rabbeinu have to tell the generation that lived with constant miracles to return their knowledge to their hearts?** They just ate the monn for breakfast, and they were surrounded by Ananei HaKavod—how could they have lost it?!

The answer is that **the yetzer hara constantly contests the proper realizations of Hashem and His Torah**. Even spiritual giants need to review this knowledge again and again to maintain their levels of spiritual achievement.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, states that even in earlier generations when great tzaddikim walked the face of the earth, **people needed chizuk in emunah**. Certainly, our generation can benefit from learning these vital concepts. We can teach our struggling students that there is a Creator, and that there is a purpose to their lives. We need to love and validate our students, and show them the purpose inherent in life as a Torah Jew. **The conditions are now ripe for our talmidim and talmidos to succeed in forging a lasting commitment to Torah and mitzvos**.

### Put It Into Practice

What can you do today to reach your students' bodies and hearts, not just their minds and souls?

## Addressing Today's Challenges:
# Technology

### TORAH PROVIDES GUIDANCE FOR AVOIDING TEMPTATION

Much has been done to educate the community about the dangers of modern technology. Our collective efforts have led to

significant progress in implementing internet filters and monitors. However, it is clear that we are far from winning the battle, let alone the war. We must continue fighting on this front even more aggressively, and muster additional strategies based on the eternal directives of our Torah and Chazal.

The Torah charges us to develop safeguards for our kedushah, and Chazal have guided us with practical ways to protect ourselves from different types of temptations. In addition, **we must appreciate the benefits and fulfillment of a life of Torah and mitzvos**.

*We must appreciate the benefits and fulfillment of a life of Torah and mitzvos*

There is a story of two men—a secular Jew and an obviously religious Jew—approaching each other on the street. They crossed paths in front of a storefront display of extreme impropriety. In a quick motion, the religious man covered his eyes with his hand to avoid seeing the display. The secular person stopped, astonished, and asked, "Excuse me, but I must know: **what do you have in your life that is so meaningful and fulfilling** that you refuse to compromise it even for a moment of seeing something pleasurable?" When a person has real meaning, cheap thrills lose their power.

## WE MUST BUILD OURSELVES UP FROM WITHIN

A critical, additional path to greater success in combating this challenge is to **inspire in our entire community a more profound sense of inner fulfillment and meaning in Yiddishkeit** and our relationship with Hashem. This is far easier said than done; however, it may be the opportunity to use the internet challenge as a stepping stone towards a solution to one of our most significant difficulties.

*Cultural isolation or insulation is no longer an option in a world with internet access*

Complete **cultural isolation or insulation is no longer an option in a world with internet access**. The challenge of the internet is forcing us to address the shortcomings in our communities in the areas of spirituality, passion for learning Torah and doing mitzvos, and emphasis on the feelings that are the essence of Yiddishkeit.

It is the responsibility of every parent to their children, Rabbi to their congregation, teacher to their students, and leader to

their community **to build deep internal wellsprings of faith and happiness** in order to arm their people with the tools to survive the life challenges they will face as religious Jews. We cannot hide our heads in the sand and pretend we will not have to grapple with the internet's challenges, and we cannot rely solely on preventative measures of communal insulation or restriction to survive. We must stand together with a **commitment to emphasizing the beauty, relevance, and meaningfulness of Yahadus** and thereby create a strong, well-prepared, and impervious people who can overcome this new challenge. This emphasis has always been an essential part of Yiddishkeit, but it is even more critical today.

*For additional resources about combating challenges of technology, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/the-internet-the-ultimate-problem-provides-a-unique-opportunity*

**Put It Into Practice**

How can you give your students a sense of meaning that can withstand the challenges the outside world poses?

Addressing Today's Challenges:

# Dealing with Excessive Materialism

## PHYSICAL PLEASURES DO NOT MAKE US HAPPY

All humans are programmed to pursue happiness, but **happiness is an elusive experience**. A child's pursuit of toys and candy may seem silly, but adults do much the same thing, turning to new cars and expensive steaks to fulfill their never-ending quest for happiness.

At the end of the day, **all our trinkets and hedonistic experiences make us feel empty**. We look enviously at the rich and famous,

*All our trinkets and hedonistic experiences make us feel empty*

convinced that our lives would be perfect if only we could afford a fancier car, a bigger, more luxurious house, and more exotic vacations.

But reality contradicts our fantasies. **Few people are as unhappy as the rich and famous**. In a 500-page study by the Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy, researchers found that those with a net wealth of over $25 million were "[a] generally dissatisfied lot, whose money has contributed to deep anxieties involving love, work, and family. Indeed, they are frequently dissatisfied even with their sizable fortunes. Most of them still do not consider themselves financially secure; for that, they say, they would require on average one-quarter more wealth than they currently possess."

*Children born to wealthy families are far more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and substance abuse*

The children of the super-rich are also not spared the misery of wealth. In a multi-year study of over 1,400 children, researchers found that **children born to wealthy families are far more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and substance abuse** than those from less affluent families.

## PURPOSE & MEANING BRING TRUE HAPPINESS

Happiness does not come from the pleasure of material consumption. Attempting to pursue a life of endless physical pleasures is the surest route to a miserable existence. **Not only are physical sensations fleeting and illusory, but the pursuit of physical indulgences damages one's sense of self-worth**. The hedonist is trapped, forced to forever seek outside sources of stimulation to experience pleasure. It is impossible for a person in such a state to feel self-respect or confidence.

*True happiness comes from a sense of self-worth and validation*

**True happiness comes from a sense of self-worth and validation**. This can only be achieved if one feels that his life has a purpose, and this purpose imbues his actions with meaning. To have this sense of meaning, one must understand why he is in this world.

Chazal teach us that human beings are the crown jewel of creation; they are the only creations that Hashem imbued with free will and the ability to connect with Him. **Our ultimate purpose is to exercise our free will and refine our souls in order to gain a**

**permanent connection with the Ribono Shel Olam**. This is what will bring us true happiness—not just in the Next World, but in this world as well.

*For additional resources about dealing with excessive materialism, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/its-all-about-happiness*

**Put It Into Practice**

What can you do today to help your students experience meaning that leads to happiness?

# Why Do We Learn Torah?

## CAN YOUR STUDENTS EXPLAIN WHY THEY LEARN TORAH? CAN YOU?

If you are still trying to articulate an answer, you are not alone. **Many people do not know why we learn**. There was once a man, whose son had asked him why we learn. To his dismay, he didn't know how to respond. The man asked his father, the boy's grandfather, and he did not know the answer either. He asked his Rebbe, and even he could not answer. So he began asking everyone he knew.

Why do we learn? What is the benefit? What is the purpose?

Like any meaningful concept, this can be approached on various levels.

- **Learning in order to perform makes us more elevated people**. The Sefer HaChinuch says that our actions affect our inner being. "*Adam nif'al kefi peulosav*"—a person's actions can change who he is. When we hold back from speaking lashon hara, when we do chesed, when we do a mitzvah, we become innately greater people. We become more similar to Hashem.

  Psychologists have relatively recently discovered a similar idea. They now know that when a patient with OCD modifies

*Learning in order to perform makes us more elevated people*

his behavior, he can change his brain chemistry the same way medication does.

When a Yid learns hilchos gezeilah (the laws of stealing) al m'nas la'asos—in order to act upon what he learns and fulfill the mitzvah—it affects his actions not only in a tangible way by teaching him not to steal, but also in a spiritual way, by connecting him to Hashem. It changes the way he davens Shemoneh Esrei, and it affects him as a person, because he is osek in dvar Hashem in order to be able to fulfill His word.

- **Learning that is not l'ma'aseh builds skills for learning l'ma'aseh**. When we teach our students Torah, even if we are not teaching them the actual halachos of what we should be doing on a day-to-day basis, we are teaching them essential skills that will enable them to learn al m'nas la'asos their whole lives. These are invaluable tools.

- **Learning Torah gives us the opportunity to "get to know" Hashem**. The Torah is, so to speak, "Hashem's autobiography." Learning Hashem's Word gives us true insight into Hashem's "thought processes." As we get to know Hashem better, we can start to see the world from His vantage point.

*The more we refine our character, the more we become inspired to further emulate Hashem*

- **Learning Torah teaches and motivates us to become like Hashem**. As we begin to learn Torah and observe the mitzvos, we begin to think in the Torah way and our actions start to change. The more we refine our character, the more we become inspired to further emulate Hashem, leading to greater levels of human perfection.

- **Learning Torah is the ultimate way to connect with Hashem**. Through learning dvar Hashem, we can forge a real and deep relationship with Hashem. A person can only connect to something that they can find similarities to. The more a person becomes like Hashem in their thought process and middos, the more they will love Hashem. In this way, limud haTorah leads directly to ahavas Hashem.

*The more a person becomes like Hashem in their thought process and middos, the more they will love Hashem*

- **Learning Torah provides unusual pleasure**. Torah contains depth unlike any other area of learning. When students truly

delve into Torah and perceive its intricacy, they will enjoy their learning immensely. A word of caution: superficial learning for the sake of covering ground does not evoke this pleasure; to taste the true sweetness of Torah, one must learn deeply and thoroughly.

- **Learning Torah gives the opportunity to contribute chiddushim**. Once we learn the principles that govern Torah logic and become familiar with their usage, the world of chiddush opens up to us. We can discover the great pleasure and happiness that arises from the process of finding our own chiddushim, which are gifts from Hashem. By making Torah personal in this way, students will develop a long-term connection to Torah.

- **Learning Torah fosters increased sensitivity about right and wrong and inspires a lifelong pursuit of truth**. When we learn Torah and deliberate on the subtleties of right and wrong, we perceive the Torah's sensitivities and integrity. This process changes us, and gives us a greater sense of our responsibilities in life.

- **Learning Torah leads to an appreciation for Halachah**. When a student gets a glimpse of the complex, deliberate, and multi-faceted Halachic process, they gain a greater appreciation for the meticulousness and authority of Halachah.

- **Striving for clarity inspires tefilah**. When we confront a passage or question we cannot resolve, we are moved to ask Hashem for clarity. Doing so brings us closer to Hashem.

- **Torah learning inspires a lifelong pursuit of truth**. When a person is willing to spend hours learning and getting clarity on specific points that the Torah makes, he expands his appreciation for truth and commitment to truth.

*For additional resources about fostering an appreciation for learning Torah, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/making-our-learning-come-alive/*

*When students truly delve into Torah and perceive its intricacy, they will enjoy their learning immensely*

## Put It Into Practice

Choose one of these reasons for learning Torah. What can you do during class today to make students more aware of it?

# Why Do We Do Mitzvos?

## DO WE NEED A REASON?

The *Sefer HaChinuch*, in discussing the mitzvah of not bringing honey on the mizbe'ach in the Bais HaMikdash, states that it is difficult to perceive the reasoning behind this mitzvah. However, he feels compelled to venture an explanation for every mitzvah, because he fears that **otherwise, the Torah will seem opaque and irrelevant** to his son and his friends, and **this may cause them to reject Torah and mitzvos**.

*Not explaining the meaning of even one mitzvah—any mitzvah—could have a devastating effect*

This took place five hundred years ago, when the world was a much holier place. The Chinuch was addressing his sons, who grew up in the house of a Rishon. Furthermore, the Bais HaMikdash was no longer standing, so the mitzvah could not even be practiced! Yet, the Chinuch recognized that **not explaining the meaning of even one mitzvah—any mitzvah—could have a devastating effect**.

Of course, we must fulfill the mitzvos even if we do not know the ta'am, but Rav Gifter, zt"l, said that a ta'am, which also means taste, makes the mitzvah "taste" better.

## MITZVOS BRING US FULFILLMENT

Our students have to know the benefits of mitzvos. If they feel that everything we do has a benefit and a *hashpa'ah* (influence), and it is all part of a master plan that will bring us shleimus and happiness, even in this world, then **they can feel a true sense of purpose in all they do**.

Every Jew's relationship to mitzvos exists somewhere on a spectrum of meaning. On one end is the view of mitzvos as a long list of rules, devoid of any profound significance. On the other end of the spectrum is the view of mitzvos as **infinitely precious opportunities to connect to our Creator**. Rules dictate

children's entire lives, and they are conditioned to follow these rules regardless of whether they understand their function. Without guidance, it is natural for students to relate to mitzvos simply as more rules, rather than as **opportunities for growth**.

There are four keys to getting your talmidos to love and appreciate mitzvos:

1. **Teach the context of the mitzvos**.

   When students learn the reasons for specific mitzvos and the role mitzvos play in the life and mission of a Yid, they will gain a greater appreciation for performing them.

2. **Explain the benefits of mitzvos**.

   When students understand how mitzvos enrich their lives here and now, they will be much more motivated in their mitzvah observance.

3. **Show that you love mitzvos**.

   When your talmidos see that you, their role model, feel a real connection to the mitzvos, this will make a deep impression on them.

4. **Make mitzvos pleasurable**.

   An easy way to get students to love mitzvos is to make them enjoyable. Once students develop a positive association with mitzvos, this approach will continue to color their view, even for mitzvos they find difficult.

*For additional resources about cultivating an appreciation for doing mitzvos: weteachtoreach.com/finding-happiness-through-appreciation-of-mitzvos*

*Teach the context of the mitzvos*

*Explain the benefits of mitzvos*

*Show that you love mitzvos*

*Make mitzvos pleasurable*

**Put It Into Practice**

**Choose a mitzvah your students may find challenging. How can you help them appreciate it more by explaining its context or benefits?**

SECTION 3

# Answers to Common Hashkafic Questions

# How Do We Know Torah is Min HaShamayim?

## EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

Even after teaching our students that they have meaning and purpose and that pursuing this purpose will bring them happiness and fulfillment, we need to show them that **all they have learned is not just good, but also *emes*** (truth). We need to teach them the concept of mesorah, of the Torah being passed down from generation to generation, dating all the way back to Yetzias Mitzrayim and Ma'amad Har Sinai.

In Mitzrayim, we saw a clear revelation of Hashem's existence and control over the creation. We watched all the nissim that took place, from the ten makkos to Kriyas Yam Suf, the Mitzriyim's punishment. **There were millions of eyewitnesses to Hashem's existence and Hashgachah Pratis**.

*There were millions of eyewitnesses to Hashem's existence and Hashgachah Pratis*

All these miracles climaxed with the revelation at Har Sinai, when Hashem said, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*"—I am Hashem, your G-d. I am the One Who performed all these nissim and created the entire world. **The Creator Himself presented us with the Torah, a user's manual, at Har Sinai**.

*The Creator Himself presented us with the Torah, a user's manual, at Har Sinai*

In the Torah, the Aseres HaDibros are sandwiched between two critical pesukim: "*Atem re'isem asher asisi b'Mitzrayim*"—you have seen what I have done in Egypt—precedes the Aseres

*We as a nation actually witnessed these nissim, and we have passed that mesorah down from generation to generation*

HaDibros, and the pasuk "*Atem re'isem ki min hashamayim dibarti imachem*"—you have seen that I spoke to you from the heavens—follows the Aseres HaDibros. **Hashem performed these miracles publicly before the entire Jewish people**.

We see from the setup of the pesukim that we are not expected to blindly believe in the Torah; **we as a nation actually witnessed these nissim, and we have passed that mesorah down from generation to generation**.

In many cases, we can trace the path of the mesorah from Ma'amad Har Sinai to an individual living today. By passing the Torah on to their children, which says that they witnessed the event, the first generation testified that they didn't simply choose to believe—they were actual eyewitnesses to Matan Torah.

## AN UNBROKEN CHAIN

Despite those who have unfortunately drifted, countless links in the chain of our mesorah exist all around the world. The Torah has been transmitted faithfully from father to son, Rebbe to talmid. **Wherever you go in the world, Jews have been sitting down to the Pesach Seder for generations**. All Sifrei Torah throughout the world are identical! Our mesorah clearly stems from a single source.

## DIVINE PROMISES

In addition to the eyewitness aspect, **the Torah is full of evidence that only Hashem could have written it**.

For example, the Medrash promises that the Kosel HaMa'aravi will never be destroyed. How could a human being have promised such a thing? Over the years, Yerushalayim was destroyed nine times—but indeed, the Kosel is still standing. Between 1948 and 1967, 99 out of 100 shuls in Yerushalayim were destroyed, but all the Arabs could do at the Kosel was make a garbage dump next to it.

*For additional resources about demonstrating to your students that Torah is Min HaShamayim, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/torah-min-hashamayim*

### Put It Into Practice

Can you choose a lesson this week where you will naturally weave in evidence that Torah is Min HaShamayim?

# Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

## LAY A FOUNDATION OF EMUNAH

The world is full of suffering. Unfortunately, many of our students have likely experienced it in some form. A ma'amin might think—*If I believe that everything comes from Hashem, then this pain must come from Hashem. How can that be?*

**It is essential to preempt this train of thought by teaching our children all about the goodness of Hashem**, about how He watches over us with Hashgachah Pratis, and how He is constantly looking out for us and doing chesed for us.

*It is essential to preempt this train of thought by teaching our children all about the goodness of Hashem*

If we inculcate this belief in our children when they are young (though, of course, it is never too late), then this will be their baseline. When yissurim do occur, they will know there is an explanation.

**Even if they cannot understand the reason, they will already have a solid, deeply-rooted belief in Hashem and His chesed**, making it much easier to accept the difficulties.

*Even if they cannot understand the reason, they will already have a solid, deeply-rooted belief in Hashem and His chesed*

When **someone is sitting shivah, it's not a good time to start teaching them that Hashem is good and everything is for the best**.

However, if this concept is part of our children's chinuch, then even if they are not on the level of saying, like Dovid HaMelech, "*Chesed umishpat ashirah*," meaning "*al chesed v'al mishpat ashirah*"—I will sing both when Hashem bestows kindness and when He exercises His middah of judgement; at least they will be able to say and believe, "*Baruch Dayan Ha'Emes*"—blessed is the True Judge.

## TEACH AHAVAS HASHEM THROUGH HASHGACHA PRATIS

Regarding the mitzvah of "*V'ahavta eis Hashem Elokecha*"—and you shall love Hashem, your G-d—the Rambam states that **a person attains ahavas Hashem when they are *"misbonen b'peulosav"***—when they notice and contemplate His actions, behold the magnificence of creation, gaze up at the heavens and think about Who created everything in this complex and beautiful world. And they realize that **although Hashem's universe is vast beyond comprehension, He still has time to take care of each of us** and provide us with all our needs.

*Although Hashem's universe is vast beyond comprehension, He still has time to take care of each of us*

A beautiful mashal illustrates this point: There was an almanah who used to support her family by making bagels and selling them in the market every day. One day, she stood in the shuk the whole day, but she could not sell even one bagel. It was getting dark; it was time to go home to her children—but she had no money. On the way home, somebody stopped her and asked, "What do you have in the basket?" When she answered that she had bagels, he proceeded to buy them all.

As the almanah continued walking home, she said, "*Ribono Shel Olam, bist dach azoi farnumen mit dein gantze velt*—You are so busy with Your whole world. **Where do You find the time to look at what is going on in this little almanah's basket?**"

## HELP THEM BE OKAY WITH NOT UNDERSTANDING

If you need to give chizuk to your talmidim after a tragedy, lo aleinu, the time for preparation has passed. Here are some approaches you can take in that difficult conversation:

*Embrace uncertainty*

1. **Embrace uncertainty**. Share the classic mashal of a needlepoint. Seen from the back, it looks like an ugly mess of tangles, knots, and loose threads. The beautiful image becomes apparent only when it is viewed from the front. This mashal can help your talmidim internalize the concept that we don't see the whole picture. If you think this will go over well with your talmidim, you

can say, "I stopped asking Hashem why, because I don't want Him to call me upstairs to show me!"

2. **Allow students to struggle to find the answer**. *Sefer Iyov* is the textbook on suffering. Hashem allows Iyov to grapple with his suffering for 38 chapters before telling him that he can't possibly comprehend Hashem's calculations.

   From *Sefer Iyov*, we learn that talmidos often need to work through the issues on their own before they can listen to anything you have to say. Allow them to go through that process of asking and struggling, because only afterwards will they be receptive to the idea that there are things we can't understand.

3. **Inspire hope and optimism**. Before Hashem tells Iyov that he cannnot understand, He hints to Iyov that things will get better (according to Rashi). Iyov needed hope in order to listen to any explanations. In the face of suffering, your talmidim need to believe things can turn around. You can help them do this by:

   - Talking about other scenarios where bad turned to good.

   - Sharing that Hashem sometimes uses suffering to give us more good. The Tosfos Rid says that because of the pain we feel when we suffer, we become entitled to good that otherwise would never have come into our lives.

4. **Remind your talmidos that this world is not the end**. This world is simply a hallway into the next world. Remembering this can help us put suffering into perspective and be comforted with the good that is to come.

*For additional resources about teaching your students about suffering, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/tragedy-a-source-of-strength*

*Allow students to struggle to find the answer*

*Inspire hope and optimism*

*Remind your talmidos that this world is not the end*

**Put It Into Practice**

**How can you increase students' awareness of Hashgachah Pratis, so they develop an unshakable belief in Hashem's goodness?**

# Why Does Science Sometimes Seem to Contradict the Torah?

## CASE STUDY: THE GENDER OF AN EMBRYO

Science is constantly evolving and redefining its theories. Scientists frequently change their understanding of how the world works—unlike the Torah, which is an absolute truth given to us by Hashem.

*Chazal showed tremendous mastery over the field of embryology*

One area of science that **Chazal showed tremendous mastery over was the field of embryology**. The Talmud prohibits a person from praying for something that visibly violates the world's natural order. For example, one should not pray for a piece of wood to turn into gold, or for an empty cup to suddenly fill with water. Yet when it comes to praying for one's child to be of a specific gender, Chazal (Brachos 60a) indicate that:

**During the first forty days after conception, an expectant parent is allowed to pray that their child develops into a specific gender**. Yet, after forty days, the gender is established, and such a prayer is invalid.

This statement by Chazal may seem puzzling. It is generally understood by modern science that gender is determined at the moment of conception. On a genetic level, gender differences are based on whether a zygote possesses an XX chromosome, making it a girl, or an XY chromosome, making it a boy.

*A closer look reveals the wisdom of the sages*

**On the surface, this reality seems impossible to square with Chazal's statement. However, a closer look reveals the wisdom of the sages.**

As the cells in a developing embryo divide, the fetus begins

developing the essential features of human anatomy. For example, at 18 weeks, a fetus's ears develop, allowing it to hear sound for the first time. By six months, taste buds will form, allowing the fetus to experience the sensation of taste.

For approximately the first 40 to 41 days of development, the genitalia of an embryo are undifferentiated and are anatomically identical for both males and females. **Only after these 40 days** does the anatomical structure of an embryo begin a physiological cascade of events that results in establishing the gender differences between males and females.

Halacha forbids performing routine autopsies, and Chazal had no access to the advanced medical knowledge available to us. Nevertheless, they correctly identified exactly when physiological gender differences begin developing in an embryo. **Such knowledge hints at Divine wisdom.**

*For additional resources about teaching your students about the relationship between Torah and science, please visit: weteachtoreach.com/series/divine-fingerprints*

*Such knowledge hints at Divine wisdom*

**Put It Into Practice**

**How can you help students recognize the advanced scientific knowledge contained in the Torah?**

# Conclusion

This guidebook provides a brief overview of some of the topics Teach to Reach addresses. If you found this guide useful, please visit **weteachtoreach.com** for more in-depth articles and shiurim on these topics and more.

On our website, you will also find our popular **Divine Fingerprints** series of short videos you can show your class about the Torah's scientific wisdom and historical foreknowledge.

Stay tuned for our upcoming series on ta'amei hamitzvos, which will feature a new video each month! If you would like to invite a member of the Teach to Reach team to speak in your school or community, or join additional training courses, you can do so by visiting *weteachtoreach.com/contact*.

teach to reach

WETEACHTOREACH.COM
INFO@WETEACHTOREACH.COM
516.295.5700