

RESCUING THE LOST CHILD

A TALK BY RAV YOSEF HELLER SHLITA

in the aftermath of the recent tragedy in Boro Park

Written by one of the yungeleit

The recent tragedy in Boro Park leaves us in shock and despair. The Gemara (Shabbos 33:2) states, "At a time when there are Tzadikim in a generation, the Tzadikim suffer for the generation. If there are no Tzadikim, the children may suffer for the generation."

An event like this forces each and every one of us to learn and grow from it; as it says, "*V'hachay yiten el libo* – the living take it to heart."

The story begins with a young boy who gets lost in his neighborhood – a Jewish neighborhood. He was wandering in the streets and yet no one noticed. Imagine...a lost child on Kingston Avenue, and everyone ignores him...

Eventually, a search was started, and thousands joined in trying desperately to locate him. But it was already too late.

Lost Children

There is a general lesson to be learned from this:

There are tens of lost children (both *bgashmius* and *bruchnius*) wandering the streets, *r"l*.

Boruch Hashem, we are blessed with numerous institutions to help those who

have already gone totally off the path of Torah. These institutions are *mekarev* and encourage these people, and teach them the ways of Torah in a way that is relevant to them. This is tremendous – there is nothing greater!

However, there are many "lost" children who haven't wandered off the path entirely. In every Yeshiva, in every school, there are confused students who stand in perilous danger of leaving the world of Torah. Aside from this danger, the very fact they are so confused is a loss in its own right, and we have to invest all our strength into helping and guiding them. Every person deserves to succeed in learning and observing Torah and Mitzvos, and it is unfair to only search out those who have completely gone off.

Our job is to show these students the beauty - the "*geshmak*" - of Torah. There are those who behave perfectly, never doing anything wrong. However since they are not properly educated, and their true *ruchniusdike* needs are not properly addressed, they are in danger of "getting lost." It is our obligation to pay proper attention to them, and to assist them.

How do we prevent children from getting lost and confused?

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Lizchus
Avraham Ephrayim ben Shlomo
Dedicated by his brother

(1) Learning

Since every person is inherently different, we may never demand the same thing from any two individuals. Every person has their own *avoda*, and every person is able to fully succeed in both learning and *avoda* on the path intended for them.

It is imperative that we impart to each child what he needs to achieve success on his own level, and that the child feels that he is succeeding 100%.

However if a child feels like a failure (a “*lo yutzlach*”), there is a tremendous problem. “Why should I lose out?” he will think. If a child is not succeeding in this area, he will search for success in areas outside of Torah, *r”l*.

The truth is, it is practically impossible to expect our schools to adjust the expectations for each and every individual child. The responsibility therefore falls on the shoulders of the parents, neighbors and friends of the child to see to it that he is fulfilling his true potential.

Everyone – on their Level

Before the War, it was unheard of that every child learned in Yeshiva the entire day; it was only a selection of students. The remainder learned only part of the day, and spent the rest of their day working.

Today, however, there is a new ideal (that has no source in Torah): *everyone* has to learn Gemara, and someone who learns Mishnayos is considered a “loser.” (Oy, he’s learning Mishnayos? He must have a “*shvacher kop*”) Never in history was there such a phenomenon.

Throughout the generations, each person learned according to his level. While one may have learned Gemara *Pesachim*, yet another was learning *Mishnayos Taharos*, and the latter was in no way considered less of a *talmid chacham* than the former! Likewise, a third will have learned Chumash, and a fourth; Chumash with Rashi.

The same is true within the study of Gemara itself. One may learn the first *sugya* in *Pesachim*, while his friend learned *Arvei Pesachim*. Would that make him a lesser person than his friend?

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The primary goal of each student is to succeed. If a student feels he is reaching his potential, he will be satisfied – even without being the greatest genius. However if he is not learning something on his level, he will feel unfulfilled, and will become depressed by learning.

For instance: If you were to teach one Mishna a day to a student, using many stories and *meshalim* to explain it, he would feel he is wasting his time, for he knows he is able to complete an entire *perek* on his own in that time. He is not succeeding.

However this one Mishna a day may be the perfect amount for a second student, and in order for him to fully comprehend the Mishna, he requires all the anecdotes and explanations. Through understanding the Mishna fully today, and learning yet another tomorrow, and so forth, he will feel fulfilled and satisfied. He will have succeeded.

Method of Learning

Moreover, while learning, it is impossible that an entire class of 25 students should learn in the same way. Each student has their own style, and would not think in the same way as his classmate.

An example would be of three different students: one mathematically minded, the other philosophically, and the third, technically. Three sharp minds, though entirely different. Is any particular one less smart than the other? Of course not! Hashem created a world in which there are no two identical minds, and each person has their own individuality.

Imagine a class of 40 learning a Gemara featuring a *machlokes* between R’ Meir and

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R' Yehuda. The Gemara continues on saying that there is a further *machlokes* between Abaye and Rava over that *machlokes*. That leaves you with 4 opinions. Then the Gemara will provide an "*ika d'amri*" – an alternate version of the *machlokes*. Now you have 8 opinions. Add to that the *machlokes* between Rashi and Tosfos, and you have 16! Now throw in the fact that both the Ketzos and the Nesivos each have different methods of understanding the entire section, and you have a total of 32 opinions to remember.

On the test, the class will be asked to explain the difference between Rashi and Tosfos etc. A mathematically minded child may be able to, but how many others can keep track of so many opinions?

However, some of those very children who are unable to keep track of the opinions will be able to appreciate a complex question regarding a contradiction in the Gemara, and come up with an insightful answer. These are the philosophically minded students.

There are others who will learn about a concept, and figure out its modern day application. Say, "*toldos haor*" being a microwave or urn, etc. These are the technically minded students.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

The lesson from the above is that each institution requires divisions. For instance: in the same age group, there should be one class learning Gemara, a second learning Mishnayos at an advanced level and a third learning practical halachos. (It may be an entire *sugya*, a piece of Gemara on *tefillin*, and other sources. Ultimately, the student should receive a certificate proclaiming his mastering of *hilchos tefillin*.)

To be sure, an institution requires an organized system, it is impossible any other way. It is no less important, however, that a child has various options, and is able to choose a school and class which fits him best. Without such an option, you are practically forcing a philosophical child to think like a

mathematician. Each person should be learning in their way, and thus each person is succeeding and you no longer have "losers."

We need to open many such institutions, and there are many willing donors for such an idea, since they themselves suffered through these methods of teaching. We have to explain to people that we are dealing with matter of *pikuach nefesh*, and as such, if there aren't sufficient funds, we are required to sell all the Sifrei Torah, until each Shul remains with only one!

Baruch Hashem, there has been a recent inspiration for people to write Sifrei Torah. It seems that there is a Hachnosas Sefer Torah almost every month. Certainly, if people are willing to pay for these Torahs, they would be willing to fund such schools, which are simply more vital than new Sifrei Torah.

A woman once wrote the Rebbe stating her desire to have a Torah written in memory of a certain individual. The Rebbe answered (Igr"k vol 30, page 92) that if she were to support someone learning Torah, this would be a greater benefit to the *neschama*. How much more so in our case, when we are talking about saving lives!

Parents should realize that if their child is unable to succeed in his current place of learning -even with a little more effort, even if he is in middle of a semester, he should be moved immediately!

(2) Guidance

On Shabbos, I overheard two 13-15 year old *bochurim* learning a *sicha* on Parshas Pinchas regarding three levels of *mesirus nefesh*:

1) The *mesirus nefesh* of *yechida* – the way it is clothed within *nara"n*.

2) *Yechida* which is above being clothed within *nara"n*, however is still has classified by a *tziyur* –form; *mesirus nefesh* only when required by Shulchan Aruch.

3) *Yechida* the way it is in essence, above and beyond any sort of form or

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Bochurim of that age should be taught the *sicha* in a manner of “*orach chayim*,” that Chassidus speaks to them in a way that is relevant to their life.

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embodiment; the *mesirus nefesh* of Pinchas which was higher than all limitations.

Thus ended their learning, and off they went.

I know for myself that I did not understand a word, and certainly these *bochurim* didn't. They learned the *sicha*, either because of an upcoming test, *kabolas ol* or *hiskashrus*.

However, there is an inherent danger that teaching bochurim ideas which are beyond their comprehension will not only not strengthen their *hiskashrus*, but cause “*hisrachkus* – distancing,” *c”v*. Since they are unable to understand anything and they are discussing things to which they have no connection, and it does not benefit their day to day life at all, they feel like failures.

Bochurim of that age should be taught the *sicha* in a manner of “*orach chayim*,” that Chassidus speaks to them in a way that is relevant to their life and to fulfill the requirements of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch with dedication, devotion and excitement!

That way, when he gets older, he would never dream of breaking Shabbos. We would be able to save on all the lectures about *hiskashrus*; the bochurim would be living with the Rebbe.

Recently, a person complained that in Yeshiva he lost all desire to learn chassidus. He tremendously enjoyed Likutei Torah and the Frierdiker Rebbe's maamorim, however he was forced to learn Hemshech Samach Vov. This broke him. He told me, “The three levels of or *ein sof shelifnei hatzimtzum* are still swimming in my head. I had no connection to it – because of its depth and because it didn't speak to me. I needed to know how to put on *tefillin*.”

(3) Friends

There is a common mistake that people make: one is required to daven in the Shul closest to home. From time immemorial, every Yid had a group with whom he davened, learned, farbrenged, argued,

chatted, etc. Every person had a place they belonged.

Lately, many such Shabbos *minyanim* have opened. But this is not enough. These groups must exist during weekdays, too. People should have friends; people who care about them. Someone once told me that if he were to die, *r”l*, no one would even know! In such a group, each person would know the affairs of his friend would know his troubles and hardships, and would be able to assist him even before he was asked!

Each group should have, at least, one representative (similar to an “*eltere Chossid*”) who is able to rebuke someone without being offensive, (“such behavior *past nisht*” etc) and have a real impact. Such a person cannot be involved in politics of any sort. His sole purpose should be to sit, daven, learn and care for his friends and know each one individually. He should worry about their *ruchniusdike* situation; whether they set time for learning, set them up with a *chavrusa*, or if another is suitable for a shiur he can arrange, etc.

Similarly, he worries about their *gashmiusdike* situation. If one is struggling to make a *parnassa*, he tries to assist him with finding a job, a *gemach* or other help.

If someone begins to lower their level; whether it is their clothes that are changing, their language or attitude; he immediately recognizes this and interests himself in the problem. This group would also realize that this person cares, and would then be able to turn to him, and unburden themselves.

There should be at least 40 such Shuls in Crown Heights. Such a Shul helps fulfill the Rebbe's *mitvza* of *asei lecho rav*, and it is also *mitvza* Torah!