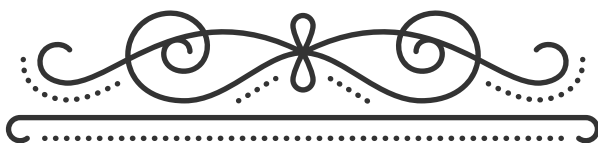


ב"ה



EDUCATION AND SHARING DAY



Sparks of Wisdom on Education
from the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson



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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

*Rabbi Levi Greenberg
El Paso, TX*

*Rabbi Mendy Greenberg
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Chicago, IL*



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INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe” or simply as “the Rebbe,” was born in Nikolaev, Ukraine, on the 11th of Nisan, 5662 (April 18, 1902). When World War II erupted, he made his way to America, settling in Brooklyn, New York.

A towering spiritual leader of the twentieth century, the Rebbe inspired and guided people from across all walks of life to live a kinder and more purpose-oriented life.

In his hundreds of addresses and thousands of writings, there is hardly another subject the Rebbe discussed as frequently and passionately as education. His contributions have been recognized by leaders within the field of education, as well as by leaders of the civic, religious, and political spheres. Indeed, every U.S. president since Jimmy Carter has paid tribute to the Rebbe by declaring Education and Sharing Day USA each year on his birthday. The U.S. Congress and many state and local governments have issued similar declarations as well.

Society is woefully mistaken, the Rebbe insisted, to view education as the pursuit of knowledge as a step stool to a career. Rather, an educator must prepare a child for life in its entirety—a life of purpose, benevolence, justice, and morality. It is not what we know, but who we are and how we act that counts. No, education is more than how to earn a living; it is teaching how to live.

The Rebbe encouraged the widespread adoption of a moment of silence in our schools. This would prompt children to ask their parents what they ought to think about during this moment of reflection. Parents who previously may not have had the time or courage will now want to talk to their children about faith. They will impress upon their children to think at the beginning of each school day that the world in which they live is not a jungle, that each person is created for a specific purpose, and that the Creator cares about each of our choices.

Parents who do not want to convey these messages can still find benefit in the moment of silence. They can instruct their children to utilize this brief island of time to reflect on family, peace, the importance of being considerate, or what it means to maintain one's integrity. These are sources of meaning that can sustain a young boy or girl beyond the worksheets and popularity contests. These are the values that make everything else matter.

The Rebbe breathes hope into education. If we cannot fix everything, we should put all of our efforts into fixing something. Every effort will bear fruit. Feed a child hope. Help the child to believe in and empower himself or herself.

To the Rebbe, education stretches beyond dismissal and into extracurricular activities; beyond classrooms, into the streets; beyond feeding information, into concern for overall well-being; and beyond the now, into the future.

In the pages that follow, we offer a few nuggets of his wisdom on education.



SEEDS OF LIFE

The Torah compares humans to trees. An alteration—however slight—inflicted upon a seed will have a radical influence on the entirety of the tree that sprouts from that seed. The same is true of a child’s education. It is worth investing tremendous effort into producing even the slightest improvements to a child’s education, especially if the status quo requires repair in important areas that will influence a child for the rest of his or her life. We can be assured that every such effort done in good faith will bear fruit.



A LABOR OF LOVE

Education must be implemented with love and affection. We readily observe that education flowing from noticeable love is more effective and successful than education imposed via fear and intimidation. As a rule, it is inadvisable to cause children anxiety, for this inhibits their ability to live with tranquility, serenity, and joy—all necessary ingredients to maximize their potential.



THE PARADOX

The role of education is to provide solid foundations that do not change with time or location, upon which children construct their entire lives. We therefore teach justice, morality, and faith—for these are unchanging. When children express a will or desire to the contrary, we explain that these foundations are not subject to exceptions.

At the same time, we educate children to never remain static. Rather than say, “You reached the objective, so you need not return to school tomorrow,” we insist that, “Because you retained all that you mastered until now, you must advance further tomorrow.” Life is growth; just as the child’s body grows continuously, so must they unceasingly advance as a person, progressing in character, qualities, activities, and insight.

The foundations must remain unchanging, while allowing the edifice built upon that framework to never stop rising.



THE GIFT OF RESTRAINT

Modern entertainment leaves children with an unfortunate message: pursue whatever your heart desires, and if you are smart enough, you will succeed in satisfying your desires. This ultimately leads to immoral activity, for it is human nature to be unsatisfied with what one has and to incessantly desire more. If we teach children to obtain their every whim, the result will be citizens who are even willing to steal to satisfy their desires. To raise a generation of thieves, one need not teach children to steal. Merely teaching them to be self-centered can be a direct cause of criminal activity.

We do not need to give children everything they want. We must explain that it is in their interest not to pursue or obtain every whim. Children can relate to this message: when a doctor tells a child to avoid certain foods because they are dangerous or even life-threatening, the child obeys these instructions even if the foods are tempting and sugar-coated. They may not understand the medical reality, but they are happy to trust the doctor who invested years studying medicine. We must convey the same message to our children regarding their desires, in order to ensure the well-being of their character.



NARCISSISTIC KNOWLEDGE

The modern secular educational system is premised on the notion that it is sufficient for children to accumulate knowledge about numerous disciplines. However, it often fails to teach that the purpose in accumulating all this knowledge is to bring goodness to others, which is also true goodness for oneself. Instead, it convinces students that the goal of their studies is to pursue their own careers and display their own prowess, leading to self-centeredness and narcissism.

This reality is due to the assumption that we may not interfere with children's lives, but must allow them to develop autonomously. Although humans are born with negative impulses, many assume that adults have no responsibility to change this but should allow children to develop as they see fit.

Children are legally required to attend school, but modern schools operate as though their sole task is to provide children with knowledge. In reality, a real education means to teach students how to be a mentsh and decent citizen, how to develop virtuous character traits, and that the primary objective of all study is to promote goodness in one's surroundings.



EXTRACURRICULAR

Students are in school only part of their day, where they should be educated in good character and behavior. Outside of school, however, they may be surrounded by negative environments that uproot some of the good they are taught.

It is imperative to positively influence the students beyond school hours as well. Teachers may be too busy preparing lessons to take on this challenge, but it is, nevertheless, certainly the duty and privilege of school administrators to be proactive in this matter.

One approach is to wait until the child absorbs negative influences, and then seek to rectify the problem. But the correct approach is to proactively hold frequent events outside of school hours, offering healthy activities for the children as viable and attractive alternatives to negative pursuits. A further suggestion is to organize good deed competitions, with rewards and incentives, whereby students regularly register positive activities they have engaged in outside of school.



CULTIVATING KINDNESS

The most important thing is to promote action. Therefore, we should educate children, even the very young, about giving charity.

All children should be encouraged to have their very own charity box, with their names written on it, into which they will give charity from time to time. And when their box is full, they should be encouraged to call a charitable organization and arrange for the funds to be delivered.

This will teach children from a very young age about the need to have empathy for others. It will impress upon them that when they see someone else in need, adult or child, it is their responsibility to help—even by giving away hard-earned money—and to do so happily, knowing that G-d takes great satisfaction when one overcomes a sense of apathy to help another.



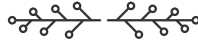
UPLIFT AND EMPOWER

When admonishing children, a teacher or parent must be careful not to evoke a sense of helplessness and despondency on the part of the child. In other words, the child should not get the impression that he is good-for-nothing, that all is lost and, therefore, he may as well continue acting as he wishes. On the contrary, the child should always be encouraged in the feeling that he is capable of overcoming his difficulties and that it is only a matter of will and determination.



DO AS I DO

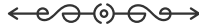
Parents must be living examples of appropriate conduct for their children. If they preach one thing but act in a contrary way, their preaching will have no effect on their children, who cannot comprehend the dichotomy. By contrast, if, in addition to being skilled at teaching, parents are also adept at doing what's right, they can expect results—provided that they speak from the heart, with full sincerity, so that their message and personal example penetrates the hearts of their children, inspiring them to live accordingly not only while at school, but also at home, in the street, and so forth.



TREATING THE CAUSE, NOT THE SYMPTOM

The acknowledgment of a Divine authority is absolutely necessary in order to impress upon the minds of our growing-up generation that the world in which they live is not a jungle, where brute force, cunning, and unbridled passion rule supreme. Rather, we must emphasize that this world has a Master Who is not an abstraction, but a personal God; and that this Supreme Being takes a personal interest in the affairs of each individual, and everyone is accountable to Him for their daily conduct.

Juvenile delinquency, the tragic symptom of the disillusionment, insecurity, and confusion of the young generation, has not abated; rather, the reverse is the case. Obviously, it is hard to believe that the police and law-enforcement agencies will succeed in deterring delinquency and crime, not to mention completely eliminating them at the root, even if there were enough police officers to keep an eye on every recalcitrant child. The remedy lies in removing the cause, not in merely treating the symptoms. It will not suffice to tell the juvenile delinquent that crime does not pay and that he will eventually land in jail. Nor will he be particularly impressed if he is admonished that law-breaking is an offense against society. It is necessary to engrave upon the child's mind the idea that any wrongdoing is an offense against the Divine authority and order.



A MOMENT OF SILENCE

It is imperative to base school education on the recognition of a Supreme Being. It is such a basic element in education that it should be done before all other lessons. A law should therefore be passed establishing that the school day open with a moment of silence, in which students will think about the Creator and Ruler of the world.

Why a moment of silence, specifically? Because when fulfilling G-d's will, one must keep in mind that G-d wants it done pleasantly and peacefully, not with quarrels and strife, especially when it can be easily avoided.

This is different from proposing a spoken acknowledgment of G-d in school, which immediately leads to arguments about interference with an individual's religious beliefs, etc. Even with full provisions for non-coercion and neutrality concerning any particular religion, nothing can assure that the teacher or principal would not exert some pressure on the students concerning a particular religious belief. For it is extremely difficult for teachers or principals to talk to students day after day about matters of faith, and simultaneously not mention anything about their own particular beliefs.

A moment of silence, by contrast, consists of thinking instead of speaking. Students can think freely without any external pressure, and thus the goal of acknowledging G-d is achieved pleasantly and peacefully.

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