



Teacher Training and Continued Education: **Powerful Weapons to Protect Our Youth**

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Rabbi Elias Schwartz, legendary Menahel of **Yeshiva Toras Emes** for over five decades, tells a remarkable story that underscores just how much a student's success depends on the outlook of the educator.

During an end-of-year staff meeting, one rebbi was discussing the outstanding performance of one of his students. "Not that I'm surprised," the rebbi remarked. "He's got an IQ of 124." Another rebbi was incredulous. "124? Impossible! Last year, he was my weakest student." The first rebbi was steadfast. "I'm telling you, he's the brightest kid in my class. I saw it in his record."

Checking the record, the rebbi discovered that the 124, used at the beginning of the year to form an opinion about this student, wasn't the boy's IQ. He had misread the page. 124 was the boy's locker number. Treated as someone with superior intelligence, this student rose to the occasion.

Certainly, the message we take from this story is that yeshiva educators must never give up on students; they must strive to always seek greatness and harvest potential. Nice idea. But, alas, easier said than done. The reality is, these concepts are difficult to understand and even harder to execute.

In fact, Chazal take pains to illustrate this point through the story of Hillel climbing to the roof of the Bais Medrash, how he wound up covered with snow and nearly frozen to death for the sake of learning Torah. "Hillel obligates us," Chazal say, "to live up to our potential."

The obvious question is, "The fact that Hillel could do this is what made him Hillel—whereas, we don't have the potential of Hillel. How does this obligate us?" The answer, Chazal say, is that when we see greatness, it awakens our innate potential to follow suit. If we believe in ourselves, and if we are led to believe in ourselves, we can all maximize our potential.

Taking this idea one step further, is the sobering reminder to yeshiva educators that regardless of how estranged or rebellious a child may appear, one must always struggle to seek potential. Particularly when dealing with a child who is at risk, when having the skills to identify and harvest potential can become a matter of life and death.

No one will deny that educators have an awesome responsibility. Which is why it is so vital they seek the training and continuing education to remain at the forefront of what is best for their students. The **Ner Yehoshua Priority Teaching Institute**, one of the most vibrant components of Priority-1, provides this invaluable training to an ever-growing number of yeshiva educators.

Named for the beloved and dedicated *Rebbi*, **Rabbi Yehoshua Silbermintz, zt"l**, the Ner Yehoshua Priority Teaching Institute, among other things, exists to provide invaluable resources and training to teachers and *mechanchim*—bolstering them as they navigate the challenging landscape of yeshiva education today.

The premise of the Priority Teaching Institute is to fortify Klal Yisroel's first line of defense for our children: our *rebbeim* and teachers. After all, it is they who sit with our youth, day after day, becoming experts on the behavior norms of young people. They are especially keen to the first sign of irregular behavior, possessing the ability to differentiate between one youth striving to express his or her individuality, or another who is genuinely in distress. It is here that they learn what to do when a child is crying out for help.

Years ago, it seemed that yeshiva educators only had two diagnoses to contend with: no *zitsfleisch* (can't sit still), and chutzpah. In reality, these were just the two most prevalent symptoms of a host of problems that most likely have been plaguing children from time immemorial. Today, we have the ability to discern the causes of these symptoms (dyslexia, hyperactivity, ADD, ADHD, chronic depression, family trauma, etc.). And, we have the unfortunate experience of knowing what may happen if these problems aren't addressed in time. Combining the two, we have an important justification for why every educator must learn more about the difficulties their students may face, and methods and strategies to recognize and correct issues as they occur.

An important idea teachers learn is that they don't need to be a diagnostician. Their role as a first-aid responder is important enough. In other words—as the person who recognizes there is an issue, they begin the process to stem the problem. Perhaps a student seems depressed. The cause may be an illness in the family, abuse, or another personal issue. Then again, the child may have a medical issue—depression or other behavioral changes often indicate a chemical imbalance. All are correctable when addressed. If the *rebbei* or teacher understands what they are seeing, they can take action.

A great example is the story of a boy who consistently scored twenties on *Chumash* quizzes. The *rebbei* observed that the boy did seem to understand the classroom lessons. So, the *rebbei*, taking a cue from his training, suggested that the boy answer questions orally. Starting from the very next quiz, the boy began scoring ninety and above—leading the *rebbei* to immediately recommend the boy for testing. Indeed, it was revealed that the boy had problems writing, to the detriment of his academic and emotional well-being.

By recognizing the problem, and intervening appropriately, this *rebbei* salvaged this student's self-esteem before his difficulty led to greater devastation. Incidentally, many youths who are described as being at-risk, are suffering the long-term effects of learning difficulties, and the subsequent anguish learning issues provoke.

By learning how to identify problems, and how to articulate the symptoms to qualified professionals, an educator can provide the essential first step in stemming the slippery slope of problem behavior, anger, disillusionment, estrangement, and addiction.

Rebbeim and teachers are welcome to contact the Priority-1 at 516-295-5700 for information on our resources and training programs. By getting the right information, a positive shift can be made in one's outlook as an educator. The result can mean a positive shift in the academic and personal success of every student.